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**RACIALIZED BODIES: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF BLACK
IDENTITIES IN POPULAR CINEMA**

by

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**A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for degree of Master of Arts
Department of Sociology and Education in Equity Studies
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto**

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Racialized Bodies: The Social Construct of Black Identities in Popular Cinema.

Masters of Arts, 1999

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Abstract

This thesis is a qualitative study of the social construction of black identities in contemporary popular cinema, specifically the hood genre. Through the use of content analysis, this project critical interrogates representations of blackness in the hood genre as an essentialized construct. Within the master narrative of this genre, the inner city, drugs, gang culture, maleness and compulsive heterosexuality are the defining signifiers of blackness. This thesis implicates the hood genre as a pedagogical, discursive and ideological site where racialized identities are reproduced and regulated. Furthermore, this project crisscrosses a wide range of theoretical disciplines and critical pedagogical practices, which includes Sociology, Cultural Studies, Integrative Anti-racism, Feminist, Queer studies and Post Modernism. At the same time it is also interested in transformation, through critical pedagogy. By exploring issues and questions of representation and re-representation within the genre of third/ independent cinema, this project attempts to rupture common-sensical notions of blackness through the production of counter narratives.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
List of Tables	iv
1. Introduction: Racializing Black Bodies	
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Situating Myself.....	2
1.3 The problem; Race Talk.....	6
1.4 Research Methodology and Objectives.....	10
1.5 Significance and Limitations.....	12
1:6 Overview Of the Chapters.....	14
2. Literature review: Writing Race	
2.1 Introduction.....	16
2.2 Post Colonial Criticism and Race.....	17
2.3 Theorizing Race as a Social construct.....	28
2.4 Emerging Theories: Representing Race in Popular Culture.....	36
2.5 Towards a Theoretical Framework.....	42
2:5 Conclusion.....	44
4. Representing The Real: The Narrative Structure of the Hood Genre	
3.1 Introduction.....	46
3.2 Plots Summaries: Black Bodies\ White Imagination.....	46
3:3 Master Narrative Structure: The Real What?.....	61
3:4 Locating Blackness in the Urban.....	63
3:5 Violence and Nihilism.....	66
3:6 Blackness/Maleness.....	68
3:7 The Queer Body.....	71
3:8 Conclusion.....	74
4 Producing Racialized knowledges	
4.1 Introduction.....	75
4.2 Popular Culture as Pedagogy.....	76
4. 3 The Hood Genre as a Discursive site.....	78
4.4 Ideological Implications.....	81
4:5 Conclusion.....	86

5 Third Cinema: Disrupting Hegemonic Discourses	
5.1 Introduction.....	87
5.2 Third Cinema: Producing Culture on the Margins.....	88
5.3 Reading Daughters of the Dust.....	91
5.4 Watermelon Woman: Race, Sex, and Living In-Between.....	96
5.5 Re-negotiating Black Masculinity.....	100
5:6 Conclusion.....	102
6 Conclusion: Where do we go From Here?.....	103
References.....	107

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Racializing Black Bodies

Our bodies function as sign posts on which means are mapped and given currency. They are encoded with meanings through specific signifiers which speak to their historic moments. These constructs sometimes serves to validate our understanding of the norm. For it is within the context of normalizing discourses that racialized identities are given meaning and legitimacy. It is precisely through the apparent “naturalness” of these constructs that racism can reproduce itself as stable knowledge. In particular, specific meanings have been attached and reproduced regarding blackness within western discursive practices such as science, ethnography, literature and various forms of popular culture including art, magazines, films and photography.

For the purpose of my thesis I will focus specifically on the presentation of racialized bodies within the discourse of popular cinema. The first point of significance is to recognize that popular cinema functions as a discursive and pedagogical site where racial stereotypes are ideologically reproduced, reinforced and integrated into our daily lived experiences. Popular cinema, assumes a pedagogical in role in our lives. It is primary through popular culture, especially cinema, that most Americans are informed about issues pertaining to minoritize communities (Dijk 1993, hooks 1996). However, this gaze is highly controlled and structured. Black bodies are only allowed to occupy specific spaces and narratives that serves as signifiers through which specific racialized meanings are articulated and understood. Within the imagistic landscapes, black bodies are invested with meanings through racial signifiers such as drugs, violence, dysfunctional families.

Given the primacy of popular culture in our every day lives, the main purpose of this thesis is to examine the social construction of black identities in popular black cinema. This project is not intended to be a linear history of racial stereotypes within popular Hollywood cinema. Rather, I will focus specifically on the social construction of black identities in the contemporary, within popular black cinema. This project works with a definition of popular black cinema as a genre which draws on the work of film critic Donald Cripps. The term 'popular black cinema' refers to the production of films within the dominant structures that are marketed as 'black' for a number of reasons which include the racial identity of the director, actors/actresses, or the subject matter of the narrative (Cripps 1978: 3). According to Donald Cripps, "black film must be seen as a genre, then, for what it says and how it is said" (Cripps 1978: 3). Hence, there exist the need to critically interrogate the representation of black bodies within the genre of black cinema.

This project will focus primarily on the hood genre (urban gangstar films) as a sub genre of popular black cinema. This popular genre of film is marked by its claim to provide a depiction of the 'real' black experiences in the inner city. The conventional narrative structure of the hood genre can be best characterized by its black nationalism political stance, violence, drugs, the inner city and hyper black masculinity (Wiawara 1998: Walcott 1997). In this context, by focusing on issues of representation in the hood genre, my intent is to provide a snap shot of racialized tropes deployed in the social construction of racialized identities in the contemporary. This project will attempt to interrogate and rupture common-sensical notions of black identities by critiquing the ways in which black bodies are represented in popular black cinema and the ideological implication of these mode significations.

Another aim in writing this thesis is to stimulate discussion about resistance and agency. This project is not only interested in the ideological and political relations which serve to construct the dominant narratives in relation to black identities but also the production of counter hegemonic narratives which seeks disrupt stable knowledges. Sometimes by focusing only on the impact of dominant hegemonic discourses, there is the danger of taking away agency from ourselves as subjects. One can easily slide into the discourse of victimology by not recognizing the ways in which black communities have resisted oppression both historically and contemporary through individual and group agency. Hence, this project is interested in the ways in which members of different black communities have produced their own discourses about themselves to resist dominant narratives. In particular, the ways in which visual mediums such as photography and film plays a central role in the production of counter-hegemonic narratives in representation of black identities in the diaspora. Hence, apart from the dominant representations of blackness within hood genre, I will focus specifically on the representation of blackness in independent/ third cinema. By exploring issues of resistance through the production of counter-hegemonic narratives, my attempt is to draw attention to the production of images of blackness in the diaspora that is liberatory.

This project is guided by six primary research objectives: (1) to critically examine the narrative structure of selected films within popular black cinema and identify ways in which racial identities are given meaning and articulated through cultural markers; (2) to implicate the role of human agencies in the production of racialized knowledge within its historical and sociopolitical specificity; (3) to critically interrogate the role of popular cinema as a discursive, pedagogical, and ideological site in the production of racialized knowledge; (4) to take up black identities in the diaspora, not as a static and essential category fixed in a historical past, but

rather, as an unfixed and fluid process with multiple histories; (5) to propose re-representational strategies that will not only disrupt the existing modes of representations, but are inclusive to the multiple points of political identification that black subjects occupy; (6) lastly, by drawing attention to issues of gender, class sexuality and race I hope I can add to the on going formation of an integrative anti-racist discursive canon.

1:2 Situating Myself

Although my thesis is essentially a theoretical focus, examining the way black bodies are represented and given meaning in popular black cinema, it is important to draw attention to the interplay of theory and personal experiences. As a young black man, writing within academia, I am writing and speaking from a subject location which determines my relationship to knowledge production. Knowledge is not produced in a social vacuum outside the influence of human agencies. As Stuart Hall reminds us, “we all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific” (Hall 1990: 222). This thesis is a reflection and testimony of my experiences. Like many other racialized bodies living in Toronto, racism is not an abstract construct, rather it is real in the ways in which it regulates my daily lived experiences. It determined the classes that I was encouraged to take in high school, the services I received or did not receive at stores, restaurants, and the fear of being stopped by the police while driving or walking home late at night. What I write is inseparable from who I am. In this context the politics of subject location not only informs what I write but, in essence defines my relation to the subject. At times I find myself in a peculiar position having to defend and, at times critiquing the contradictions inherent in black popular culture, while simultaneously being an integral part of it.

For example, although I frequently criticize hip-hop for its sometimes misogynist and homophobic lyrics, at the same time it is an integral part of my identity. I do not stand outside of black popular culture; I am very much implicated. I still remember wanting to drive to Buffalo, New York with friends to see the popular hood film *Menace II Society* (to be discussed in chapter three) because it was not released in theaters in Canada and the United States at the same time.

Situating myself within this project is a way of testifying to ways in which race as a construct serves to regulate the experiences of racialized bodies. In the like manner, gender violence, gay and lesbian violence regulates the lives of women, lesbians and gay men, racism serves to regulate the lives of people of colour. As a 'raced' body I do not have the luxury of entering spaces as a 'race neutral' body. My body carries certain signifiers such as the drug dealer, car jacker, rapist, and sexual promiscuity. For example, while working as a Youth Counselor, on two different occasions I was misidentified as a drug dealer at a high school and at a prominent downtown hospital while visiting clients. As a result of being followed and harassed at certain clothing stores, I have become highly selective of which stores I go into and with whom. In this context, my personalized narratives point to the important role racialized identities play in structuring and determining our daily experiences and future experiences.

I became interested in this topic while working as a Youth Counselor at a group home where a high percentage of the white youths commonly engaged in the practice of performing blackness. These youths who can be easily located within 'wigger culture' (white kids performing black culture). These youths performance of blackness were informed by popular black films such as *New Jersey Drive* and *Strapped* along with rap music videos. It was explained to me by a sixteen year-old resident that the film *New Jersey Drive* (this film will discussed in chapter three) was his Bible. This youth's style of dress, speech and personal demeanor mirrored that of the

New Jersey Drive character Tiny Dime (Donald Adeosun Faison) a young car jacker. In phone conversations, this youth would tell his friends that he grew up in the projects in Rexdale (low incoming housing); began stealing cars at a young age, his mother is on welfare, his father is a player (someone with more than one sexual partner at any given time). In the process of performing blackness this youth drew upon the traditional tropes of criminality, deviance, the dysfunctional family, drugs, and unsafe sexual practices to inform his definition of blackness.

This project is meant to be read as connection with my personal narrative and the larger socio-political world which I occupy. The experiences discussed are not unique, other men of colour that I speak to or read about in the newspaper have similar experiences. Sociologist C. Wright Mills used the term sociological imagination to describe, “a quality of mind that will help [people] to use information and develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and what may be happening within themselves” (Mills 1959: 5). In this context, a parallel connections between the private and public spheres within my personal narrative. Lastly, this project should not be read merely as an academic excise, it is political project. Academia are not separate of politics, the production of stable knowledge is political. In the like manner the under taking of an any Anti-racist project is politically motivated.

1:3 The Problem: Race Talk

As illustrated in my personal narrative, race as a categorical system is deeply interwoven into the social fabric of North American culture. As social theorist Michael Omi and Howard Winant point out, “the first thing that we notice about people when we meet them (along with their sex) is their race. We utilize race to provide clues about who a person is” (Omi and Winant

1994: 59). Racialized identities are so pervasive, that it "dominates our personal lives. Race serves as a signifier of trust, academic abilities, athletics, work ethics. It manifests itself in our speech, dance, neighbors, and friends. Race determines our economic prospects" (Lopez 1995: 192). For our experiences are organized and regulated through racialized social structures and expectations.

Although race as a category is central to our daily experiences, most of us continue to struggle with the concept of race. Central to identity politics is the idea that racial identities are biological or innate bearing minimal traces of human intervention. This position continues to inform common-sensical definition of racial identities. Biological determinism is the belief that stems from the theory of Social Darwinism and later the Eugenics movement. The thrust of the determinism argument is that "all human society is governed by a chain of determinants that runs from the gene to the individual to the sum of the behaviors of all individuals" (Rose, Lewontin, gamin 1984: 6). The construct of racialized identities as an essentialized construct predetermined by nature has its origins in colonial discursive practices. During colonial expansion "European representation of the other became interpreted as a difference embodied in 'race', that is, as a primarily biological and natural difference which was inherent and unalterable" (Miles 1989: 31). The general assumption of biological determinism is that the behavioral characteristics of a certain group of people are directly correlated with their phenotype or physical characteristics.

The most recent examples of the obsessive need to revisit the construct of race as a natural and fixed category is illustrated in the work of Philippe Rushton (1988), Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray (1994). Their work can be best defined as socio-scientific racism, for it "places great value on the genetic tie, as it understands racial variation as a biological distinction that determines superiority and inferiority" (Roberts 1997: 186). In particular,

Herrnstein and Charles Murray's (1994) book *The Bell Curve*, which sold over 400,000 copies, provided a free zone for 'race talk', within public discourses such as radio and television talk shows. (Giroux 1997:198). Toni Morrison defines 'race talk' as, "the insertion into every day life of racial signs and symbols that have no meaning other than pressing African Americans to the lowest level of the racial hierarchy" (Giroux 1997: 192). The main premise of *The Bell Curve* is that there is a correlation between intelligence and race as a biologically inherited and measurable trait. As Herrnstein and Murray pointed out in relation to IQ, "the average white person tests higher than about 80 percent of blacks and the average black person test higher than about 16 percent of the population of whites" (Herrnstein & Murray 1994: 269). The correlation between race and IQ scores determines racialized identities and life chances. For Herrnstein & Murray, social issues such as crime, welfare dependency, poverty, unemployment and teenage pregnancy can be determined by belonging to specific racial category rather than social inequalities. According to Herrnstein and Murray, "welfare mothers come mainly from the lower reaches of the distribution of the cognitive ability" (Herrnstein & Murray 1994: 269). This translates into meaning that blacks are more likely to depend on welfare as a result of their low IQ scores, rather than as a result of social inequalities. In this context, IQ is used to maintain and add currency to the racialized construct of the welfare queen that is prevalent within dominant regimes of representation.

The work of Herrnstein & Murray as a form of 'race talk' points to the new language of racism. Interestingly enough in this postmodern world of difference, 'race' is signified through cultural markers such as a low intelligence, degeneracy, crime, and the inner city. Within this new language 'race' is subsumed and appears to be irrelevant. Popular discussions about race and identity politics usually take place within the context and language of modern racism. Biological

determinism is not forgotten rather it is encoded in multiple cultural forms through the language of cultural inferiority rather than biology (Razack 1998: 19). This does not mean that biological determinism has disappeared from the discursive language of racism, rather, it is now subsumed within a language of cultural markers. In the post biological era, “we talk about the inner-city poor and the underclass, welfare mothers, the illiterate and marginal, the disposed and the alienated, and mean those who are different” (Mirza 1998:123). When these racialized markers are utilized they frequently tap into an established and easily recognized reservoir of meanings. For example, when the media talks about youth gangs they don not need to identify a a specific racial group. The audience already knows who they are talking about and the social pathologies are associated with these bodies. Through the language of post-biological determinism and the language of culture it becomes possible to use a vocabulary which talks about race without any overt mention of race.

Although, these discourses have been decentered, their main premise is continuously reproduced and revisited within other established and legitimated canons. As H. S. Mirza has reminded us, “ideas about innate, genetic, scientifically provable difference are still at the heart of our thinking about race...biological racism has not been exorcised from our vocabulary, and from our mental maps” (Mirza 1998:122). In the era of post biological determinism, many scholars and students write “as though the biological basis for racial distinctions has been banished by intervention of social theory” (Grandy Jr, 1998: 37). As Grandy Jr. warns, this is a dangerous position to take in the current political climate of colour blindness discourse and neo-conservatism.

Within this context, my thesis is interested in the ways in which race as a system of categorization is constructed and reproduced with the new language of racism that speaks of

cultural markers rather than biological and phenotypical attributes. I am writing from the position that recognizes racialized identities are not fixed predetermined categories outside the influence of human agencies. Rather, racialized identities are an acquired and unfixed process, negotiated within relations of power (Hall 1990, Gilroy 1993, Lopez 1995 & Reid 1997). Teun A. Van Dijk (1993) in his work *Elite Discourse and Racism* focused on the multiple sites such as political, academic, corporate and media institutions through which racism and racialized identities are reproduced and given currency. His general argument is that racialized identities are socially constructed and reproduced at multiple ideological sites. Using Van Dijk's work as a point of entry I will focus specifically on the construction of black identities through the use of popular cinema as discursive, pedagogical and ideological site in the production of racialized identities. Within the theoretical context outlined, I am going to examine how the narrative structures of the hood genre operate to construct and define blackness in contemporary North American culture.

1:3 Research Methodology and Objectives

This study is concerned with the imagistic tropes through which black bodies are represented within discourse of popular black cinema in the contemporary. In gathering information for this thesis, I have used archival data in the form of electronic media (films). I have viewed the films in 35 mm format in the theater upon their release and on VHS for the purpose of analysis. I drew upon films produced and released by North American film makers who were financed by established film studios. The primary films discussed are: *Boys N the Hood* (1991), *Menace II Society* (1993), *Clockers* (1995), *New Jersey Drive* (1995) and *Rude* (1995).

These films were selected based on the criteria that they were all made in the nineteen nineties which speaks historical specificity of this project. Most important, the films selected all fits into Donald Cripp's definition of 'black film as a genre'. All of the films were directed by black film makers with a predominately black cast. Also, these films were selected based on the similarity of their narrative structure and the way in which they were marketed to the public. These films were marketed as urban realism. Although there were several other films with all black cast, they did not fit into the narrative structure and the marketing strategies of the films selected. Lastly, all of the film selected were produced and financed by large established film studios. As a result, all of the films were release in major theaters, appealing to a broad audience.

In terms of methodology, this project works with content analysis as the primary methodological tool in identifying and illustrating how the individual narrative structure of the film fit into a larger master narrative. Content analysis can be best characterized as the method of inquiry into the symbolic meaning of messages. Specifically, this project works with genre theory as a form of content analysis. As the word genre implies, works of literature, television program, music, art, and film can be categorized based on their relationship to a class of related works. There are multiple genres and sub-genres in film such as westerns, screwball comedies, melodrama, musicals and horrors. The rules of a genre function to regulate difference by structuring the difference within a given narrative into a circumscribed structure of similarity. For instance, most western films appears to be different yet their differences are structured and organized within a grammar (language) established through conventional usage which includes geographic location, camera angles, who can and cannot be the villains and who is deemed the protagonist.

Genre can be best characterized as an overarching structure which serves to inform the production of individuals works while policing its boundaries. According to Jane Feuer “a film genre is more like a grammar (language), that is, a system for conventional usage” (Feuer 1992: 143) In the like manner, there are rules of grammar for speaking a given language, there is a ‘visual grammar’ that serves to structure the content of a given genre. An established “genre depends on the use of a particular ‘code’ or meaning system which can draw on some consensus about meaning among users of the code (whether encoders or decoders) in a given culture” (McQuail 1994: 264). In this context “we can speak of a genre where coding and decoding are very close and where meaning is consequently relatively unambiguous, in the sense of being received much as it is sent” (McQuail 1994: 264). The codes are always consistent in policing the narrative structure of a given genre. For the purpose of this project, genre theory will be used to identify and critically examine the master narrative which characterizes films within the hood genre. Once the master narrative is identified the pedagogical and the ideological implication of these modes significations will be taken up.

1:4 Significance and Limitations

This Project works with race as a meaningful category in study of film and the formation of identity politics. In the process, my aim is to add to the ongoing discussions and debates with regards to the formation of black identities in diaspora. Rather than focusing primarily on institutions, this project seeks to implicate ourselves as active participants in the production and consumption of racialized knowledge. By focusing on films, I hope to draw attention to politicized popular culture as a pedagogical and ideological site. A tremendous amount of work

has been done on early representations of blacks in popular American cinema and more recently in the blaxploitation genre. However, critical discussions on the new wave of popular black cinema and the emergence of the hood genre are limited. This project deviates from other academic works on black film. These films are usually analyzed and interrogated on their individual narrative structure rather than as genre. By working with these film as a genre, the aim is show the similarity between these films and their socio-political implications.

At the same time, I am aware of the limitations of my thesis as a result of the scope of the project. The arguments presented in this project are by no means conclusive. Cinema is a large and broad category with multiple genres. I do realize that by focusing on one genre in a specific time period that I am limiting myself and this project. Also, there are multiple interpretations of a given film that at times undermined the dominant reading. However, my primary concern is the dominant reading of these films. Although there might be an alternative reading of these films, we still have to be aware of the dominant reading. Such a position can be used to invalidate the presence of a dominant reading, which can be read as political and academic complacency. This approach or criticism is dangerous.

Furthermore, writing on blackness and being physically located in Canada while relying solely on American cinema is another dilemma that I had to struggle with in my writings. Popular black cinema in Canada is still in its infancy. In the last decade there have only being two noticeable entries *Soul Survivor* and *Rude* (I will discuss *Rude* details in chapter three). One way in which I have chosen to deal with this dilemma is by focusing on the practice of boarder crossing through popular culture between the United States and Canada. However, my intent is not to collapse black identities in Canada by suggesting it is similar to that of the United States.

1:5 Overview Of The Chapters

The chapters of this work each take up a specific issue in relation to representation and construction of racialized identities in 'popular black cinema' specifically the hood genre. In chapter one, I set the context by situating myself within the topic of study. It also provides background information on the ways racialized identities are taken up within popular discourses. This chapter outlines my research and methodological approach along with my aims and limitations

Chapter two provides a literature review which serve to locate the issue at hand within its historical and theoretical context. This review is done in three parts. The first section addresses and interrogates western epistemological construction of the colonial "other" and how these constructs influence the representations of racialized identities in the contemporary. The second section focuses on the ways in which race as a concept is theorized shifting from biological determinism to race formation theory. Thirdly, the focus shifts to emerging theories on racialized identities which moves beyond essentialism to locating and discussing the multiple points of political identification that racialized bodies occupies. Chapter three crosses a wide range of theoretical disciplines which serves to inform the theoretical approach of this project.

With a historical and theoretical context firmly in place, chapter three focuses specifically on the narrative structure of five films within the hood genre. Chapter three explores questions of racialized identities in popular culture through practices of representations by locating and discussing the markers of blackness in contemporary North America. This chapter takes up the major tropes used in construction of black identities such as criminality, the inner city, and compulsive heterosexuality.

Chapter four critically interrogates the pedagogical and ideological significance of the hood genre in social construction of racialized identities. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate how racialized discourses are constructed and given currency through daily lived experiences. Chapter four uses the narrative structure of these films to illustrate how they function as a pedagogical site, through which learning takes place. In addition, this chapter argues that these films serves as a discursive site which regulate and structure the production of racialized knowledge. It is within this context that the ideological implications of these knowledge in organizing the experience of its subjects are taken up. For racialized identities are not sliding without real consequences. They are produced, sustained and transformed within relations of power.

At the same time, agency of the individual subject cannot be overlooked. Chapter five focuses on the ways that black folks have represented themselves through visual mediums such as photography and film. The focus is on independent/third cinema, and the production of counter hegemonic narratives. This chapter focuses specifically on the cinematic works of Julie Dash and Cheryl Dunye. Lastly, chapter six the concluding chapter, not only attempts to reiterate the main points raised it will also looks at the possibilities in the representation of blackness along with the pedagogical implication of this text.

Chapter Two Literature Review: Writing Race

2.1 Introduction

This project criss-crosses a wide range of disciplines and critical pedagogical practices, which include Sociology, Media Studies, Cultural Studies, Integrative Anti-racism, Feminist, Queer Studies, Post Colonial Studies and Post Modernism. By exploring a wide range of literature I plan to draw attention to multiple ways in which race and representational practices are taken up and discussed both historically and contemporarily. By crossing wide combinations of disciplines I am engaging myself in critical dialogue with theorists from diverse points of entries and subject locations. My intention is to draw from these various areas of study to produce an integrative anti-racism approach focusing on representation practices of race and the multiple points of political identification that black subjects occupy.

There are countless books and journal articles on various and specific forms of discursive and representational practices in the production of racialized identities such as literature, ethnography, anthropology, and law. However, I have chosen to focus specifically on literature that takes up the construction of identity in popular culture which includes art and literature. I have divided the relevant literature into three categories which focus on the historical location of race during colonial expansion, theorizing race as a social construct, and lastly, focusing on the multiple points of political identification that serves to constitute black identities in the diaspora.

2.2 Post Colonial Criticism and Race

Post colonial studies will be used as a point of entry in the discussion of the social construction of black identities in the diaspora. This prevalent and important body of literature critically examines and integrates the various links between colonial expansion, racism and the production of knowledge within western discursive fields such as science, literature, art, medicine, and the social sciences. As a critical analytical tool it unmasks dominant narratives in relation to both the colonial subject and the colonizer by exploring the archaeology of this knowledge along with their material and symbolic consequences. In this context, "the critical gaze that these studies direct at the archaeology of knowledge enshrined in the west arises from the fact that most of them are written in the first world academy" (Prakash 1995: 88). Post colonial studies are frequently called up to critically interrogate and unshroud ways in which colonial discursive fields have functioned to construct the identities of its colonial subjects as the other while simultaneously constructing the Western self.

David Theo Goldberg (1993) in his book *Racist Culture: Philosophy* provides an excellent overview of the production of racialized identities prior to and during colonial expansion. Goldberg looks at the representation of races prior to colonial expansion as an introduction into his analysis of construction of the western self and the colonized other. In his text, Goldberg's argues that genealogy of race can be traced to the pre-colonial/ pre-modern era.

In the pre-modern era there was a process of dialectic imaging through which the self was constructed in opposition to the other based on perceived physical difference. According to Goldberg, "there is considerable evidence of ethnocentric and xenophobic discrimination in Greek text, of claims to cultural superiority" (Goldberg 1993: 21). The construction of the other

occurred primarily through the discourse of religion and mythology. The most common construct in which the other was relegated was that of the barbarian or the savage man who lacked the superior language and culture of the self. Prior to colonial expansion whiteness was already invested with positive connotations in contrast to blackness which was associated with negative imageries, such as death and a conception of the underworld. In this context, Goldberg is pointing to the incremental growth of racism prior to colonial expansion.

Goldberg later argues that a shift in representation of the Other occurred during the period of colonial expansion and empire building. For Goldberg and many post colonial scholars this point in history presents a crucial point in the history of colonial subjects. This shift was the most significant because it occurred at a point in history of empire building, the conquest for land, and the demand for a cheap labor source. Consequently, European colonization and empire building resulting in the representational shift of the Other.

For Goldberg, the shift to modernity is central to the understanding of race as a construct. Goldberg defines modernity as the period "emerging from the sixteenth century in the historical formation of what only relatively recently has come to be called the west" (Goldberg 1993: 3). It is within the historical period, marked by colonial expansion that the discursive practices emerged. As Goldberg points out "racialized discourse emerged with modernity and comes to colonized modernity's continually reinvented common sense" (Goldberg 1993: 43). Within this shift to modernity "science displaced religion as the grounds of intellectual authority and truth claims: the multiplicity of vernacular languages edged out the primacy of a singular 'sacred' language as the medium of epistemological veracity" (Goldberg 1993: 44). The shift from medieval pre-modernity to the era of modernity characterized by rationality were crucial in the construction of race.

With this shift to modernity, science became the primary racialized discursive field providing the rules which determined how racialized identities were organized and regulated. The formation of modernity and the emergence of scientific epistemology grounded in the regime of rationality and detached subjectivity were central to the representational practices of race. Science was able to legitimize itself as an objective discipline outside of the influence of human agency. Within the era of modernity the hegemony of racialized identity was mediated through the dogmatic authorization of biological science, such as Environmentalism, Phrenology, and Social Darwinism . “The emergence of independent scientific domains of anthropology and biology in the enlightenment defined a order of racial groupings” (Goldberg 1993: 29). The practice of classifying according to established criteria based on race was commonly reinforced among the sciences of the day. Goldberg writes “this view claimed initial corroboration from the natural history of the day: in the cranial comparisons and facial measurements of Dutch anatomist Pieter Camper, in the physiognomy or ‘science of reading the human skull’ of Johann Lavater, and in the phrenological plotting of skull shape, brain organs, and human character by the German Gall and Spurzheim” (Goldberg 1993: 65).

These pseudo-scientific discursive fields severed to construct the understanding of race as a biological and measurable trait. The discourse of evolutionism dominated the sciences of the day; it also served to further legitimate the biological origins of race. The notion of social evolutionism in relation to human beings, was appropriated from social Darwinism. This theory put forth the notion that human beings evolved in different stages from savagery to barbarism and civilization.

As Goldberg explains.

enlightenment thinkers were concerned to map the physical and cultural transformations from the prehistorical savagery in the state of nature to their present state of civilization of which they took themselves to be the highest representatives (Goldberg 1993: 29).

It was not coincidental that Europeans were placed at the top of this evolutionary hierarchy, while Other cultures that were colonized occupied the lower strata in the evolutionary scheme.

Within this scientific gaze grounded in biological determinism the bodies of the Other was embedded with meaning. These practices of representations carried "a new way at looking at bodies and new modes about speaking about other" (Goldberg 1993 : 56). Within this context the body of the Other was not only constructed as the primitive, but also, as biologically inferior. Once objectified these bodies could be analyzed, categorized, classified and ordered with the cold gaze of scientific distance" (Goldberg 1993: 50). The cloak of rationality and objectifying distantiation of the rational of scientist created the theoretical space for a view to develop subjectless bodies. The use of social Darwinism, in the categorization of racialized bodies worked with the idea of survival of the fittest as a natural rule of nature. In turn, this provided the justification for the displacement and genocide of Aboriginal and African peoples. Moreover, the shift toward science created a scientific discourse of race which is still inherent in the common-sensical definition of race.

It is within this sociopolitical context of empire building that the production and organization of knowledge about racialized identities can be located and critically interrogated. Western discursive fields such as travel literature and science created and managed bodies of knowledge which served to justify empire building and the subjugation of the colonized. The production of knowledge does not occur in a social vacuum. Rather, western epistemologies

constructed and regulated a conceptual world view in regards to the colonized "Other". In this context the knowledge produced cannot be separated from its social, political, temporal, economic and historical specificity.

The use of Theo Goldberg's work as a point of entry in this discussion serves to primary reason. First, Goldberg's argument shifts away from the sometimes dangerous and reductionist argument that locates race and racism as a direct consequences of the rise of capitalism (Callincious 1993, Eric Williams, Cashmore 1996). The underlying assumption within this popular argument is that racism would have not existed without the rise in capitalism. Focusing on notions of racism prior to modernity allows us to see "the transformations from one kind of racism to the other are closely entwined" (Goldberg 1993: 61). In this context racial formation is articulated as an accumulative process, which played a central role in colonial expansion and the rise of modern capitalism.

Secondly and most importantly, Goldberg work serves to establish the historical, socio-political context in which race were mediated. It is only by establishing the historical context, that this project can critically take up and implicate the production of popular culture in the construction of race during that time period. Popular culture was not produced separate of science, they were produced within the same hegemonic and ideological environment. In this context, Goldberg's works serves as a point of entry in the discussion on the production of popular culture during colonial expansion.

Apart from the sciences of the day, cultural production played a central role in the production and organization of racialized knowledge. One of the most telling text in post colonial studies in relation to production of culture is Edward Said's (1978) classic work *Orientalism*. This text is central to understanding the power of cultural production as pedagogical and

discursive site in the production of racialized knowledge. Edward Said undertakes a Foucauldian analysis in deconstructing the ways in which the "Orient" was constructed through colonial discursive fields, specifically literary texts. Said's Foucauldian influence is most evident when he writes:

in a sense orientalism was a library or archive of information commonly and, in some of its aspects, unanimously held. What bound the archive together was a family of ideas and a unifying set of values proven in various ways to be effective. These ideas explained the behavior of Orientals; they supplied Orientals with a mentality, a genealogy, an atmosphere; most important, they allow Europeans to deal with and event to see Orientals as a phenomenon possessing regular characteristics (Said 19978: 41-42).

For Edward Said, his focus on Orientalism and western representations of the Other rests on a theory of dominant western imperial power and agency. In this context Said denotes the practices of orientalists as being inseparable from the political power of western political and economic institutions.

In this text, Edward Said argues that the creation of the Orient were mediated through a complex set of representations practices within western epistemological orders which includes science, cultural productions and literary works. The production of knowledge with this disciplines lead to the formation of Orientalism as a discursive field. As Said explains,

my contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage- and even produce the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-enlightenment period (Said 1978: 3).

In this context power is directly implicated in the formation and legitimization of Orientalism as a discursive field.

In addition, Said argues that discursive field of Orientalism and its hegemony, created and sustained a vast dimension of understanding about the Orient as the Other while simultaneously giving meaning to western self. Within this system of dialectic imaging both the self and the Other are constructed within a dichotomized relationship in which the self becomes an embodiment of what the Other is not. These colonial discursive practices served not only to construct the colonial other or the "orient" but to simultaneously construct the western self. As Said explains "Europeans culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient" (Said 1978: 35). Within this dialectic relation bodies were embedded with meaning and currency. The construct of the superior western marked by culture and social progress gained its value by being placed in opposition to the inferior and culturally backward Orient. Through dialectic imaging, fantasy and imaginative writing colonial discursive practices were able to construct bodies of knowledge not only about the colonized other, but, most importantly the western self.

It is with this paradigm as outlined by Said, which implicates the theory of discourse as strategies of power, inclusion and exclusion in relation to the production and legitimization of racialized knowledges that I will locate and discuss the selected writings from the text "*Race, Writing, And Difference*," edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1986). This text speaks to the construction of black identities within colonial cultural production which includes art and literature. Rather than choosing to focus on this collection in its totality, I am going to discuss two works that speak specially to the construction of black identities.

The first of which is Patrick Brantlinger's essay (1986) *Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent*, which focuses specifically on travel, missionary and exploratory (novels published by explorers) literature. In Brantlinger's essay the myth of

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24

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battles slave traders and savages with cannibalistic tendencies in their quest to bring light to the 'dark continent'. For example, the popular adventure novel by R.M Ballantyne *Black Ivory: A Tale of Adventure Among the Slavers of East Africa*, the main character deals with the atrocities of slavery in Africa. In this text Africans are portrayed as simple, laughable, childish and irrational in their thinking and behavior. In the like manner, Sir Harry Johnston's adventure novel *History of a Slave* (1889), which is much much more graphic in comparison to Ballantyne's novel, uses the same racialized tropes. In this text violence, irrationality and cannibalism function as the primary markers of Africaness. At one point in the narrative Johnston writes, "when...the men of our town killed someone and roasted the flesh for a feast....the bones were laid around the base of a tree" (Brantlinger 1986: 209).

Within these text "raced" bodies are give meaning through markers such as, savagery, irrationality, violence, cannibalism and sexual promiscuity. Most important, these signifiers of blackness are still prevalent in the contemporary. At the end of this piece, Brantlinger makes an important connection by focusing on the ways these images continue to inform the way black bodies and issues in relation to Africa are represented and taken up in contemporary discussions.

The second essay within this collection that I would like to discuss is Sander L. Gilman's (1986) *Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine and Literature*. In this piece, Gilman centers and implicates art and medicine literature as crucial discursive and pedagogical sites that functioned to construct, organize and inscribe meanings on the bodies of back woman during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. As Gilman explains, "these realities manifest as icons representing perceived attributes of the class in which the individual has been placed" (Gilman 19986: 223). In this context, Gilman is referring to "icons" as widely recognizable and acceptable signs which serve to

categorize all members of a specific group.

Gilman uses four classic paintings from the nineteenth century, Edouard Monet's, *Olympia* (1863) E. Monet's *Nana* (1877), William Hogarth's *A Harlot's Progress* (1731) and Franz Von Bayros *The Servant* (1890) as points of entry in her critical interrogation of representational practices of the black female body. For Gilman, the production of art as a medium is central to how a culture within a specific historical moment creates meaning and understanding of their immediate world. In all of the paintings outlined black women are depicted as servants. However, their sexuality was always highlighted. Within these paintings the bodies of black women functioned to sexualize the culture in which she was found (Gilman 1986: 228). For example in Hogarth's painting *A Harlot's Progress*, the presence of the black female body served as a maker of illicit sexual activities.

Gilman later shifts her attention to the depiction of the bodies of black women in medical literature through the use of the Hottentot as a marker of black women sexual deviance and abnormality. Gilman critically interrogates the public display of the body of Saartjie (Sarah) Bartman also called the "The Hottentot Venus" in London. The display of Sarah Bartmann's body was structured in such a way that sexual parts were made hyper visible and detached from the rest of her body. In the process, "her genitalia and her buttocks, served as the central image of the black female throughout the nineteenth century" (Gilman 1986: 235). According to Gilman, "the physical appearance of the Hottentot is, indeed the central nineteenth-century icon for physical difference between the European and the black" (Gilman 1986: 231). In the process, a discourse was constructed with regards to the bodies of black women.

During the Victorian era the bodies of black women not only served as a marker of abnormality and deviance. but also as a point of reference in discussions regarding sexual deviance

among white women. Discussions around prostitution were structured in such a way that the bodies of black women were further pathologized in the process. The body of the prostitute became synonymous with iconography of the black female body. As Gilman pointed out, this was made evident in “a series of case studies on steatopygia in prostitutes in which he perceives the prostitute as being, quite literally, the Hottentot figure” (Gilman 1986: 248). Markers such as larger buttocks and disease were used to construct the white prostitute. In this context the body of the black female did not “merely represent the sexualized female, they also represented the female as a source of corruption and disease” (Gilman 1986: 250). This also added currency to the construct of the Hottentot figure in European cultural production.

Moreover, the bodies of black women were symbolically amputated through the structured gaze of the colonizer specifically within the discourse of art and medical literature. The hyper-visibility of black women's buttocks and genitalia transformed them into icons of sexualized, deviant and abnormal bodies. The physical abnormalities of the black female body were encoded with meanings which served to represent not only the sexualized body but, simultaneously the deviant and abnormal body.

The work of Sandra Gilman's points to the intersectionalities of race, gender, class and sexuality. These colonial discourses constructed as specific body of knowledge which served to justify the lived experiences of black women. These images continues to inform the ways in which black women are represented in the contemporary cultural production. This is quite evident in the roles in which black women are cast in dominate North American cinema.

The use of Post Colonial Studies as a point of entry, serves to historically locate the genealogy of racialized knowledge and the ways in which these knowledge have structured the construction of racialized identities. It is important to work within a historical prospective to

avoid the potential danger of taking up 'race' as an arbitrary or natural construct. How we have come to know race in the contemporary is very much dependent on colonial discursive practices. As Homi Bhabha reminds us, "colonial power produces the colonized as a Other fixed reality which is at once an "other" yet entirely knowable and visible" (Bhabha 1992: 76). The tropes through which race is frequently represented are not ahistorical outside the realms of human agency. Rather, these racialized markers have history influenced by human agency.

At the same time Post Colonial Studies as an analytic tool is frequently critique from both inside and outside of discourse. First, as the name signifies there is the suggestion that colonialism is a past era in our histories. At times Post Colonial studies do not take into account the new structures of colonialism in the form of multinational expansion. Secondly, Post colonial Studies work with essentialist notions of identities through the use of grand narratives, it avoids the fragmentation of difference and multiplicities. At the same time, we have to be aware of the political consequences involved in the criticism of Post Colonial Studies. It is important to identify who are making these criticisms and their political project. At times we, as scholars of colour, in our criticism of Post Colonial Studies are guilty of reproducing the discourse of the conservative dominant regime who would like to dismiss Post Colonial Studies and its place in academia. Post Colonial Studies as a discipline is political; it ruptures stable knowledge by offering a reading of historical and subjective knowledge of local peoples and their recourse to agency and resistance.

2.3 Theorizing Race as a Social Construct

The second phase of my literature review will focus on theoretical conceptualization of

race as a social construct. This body of literature works with the social construction theory which rejects racialized categories as natural, bearing no traces of human intervention. Rather, it places an emphasis on specific historical and sociopolitical moments which mediate the construction of racialized identities. Social construction theory works by identifying the components and processes of the construction of racialized categories.

Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1986, 1994) *Racial Formation in The United States* remains one of the most insightful text in its theoretical analysis of the formation of racialized identities a social construct. Omi and Winant critically discussed the three dominant paradigms in which racialized identities are traditionally formulated and discussed. They later presents a model of their own.

The first paradigm outlined in Omi and Winant's work is the ethnicity model. It came about as a direct challenge to the existing biological determinist model which equate racialized identities with distinct hereditary characteristics such as intelligence and sexuality (Omi & Winant 1994: 15). The ethnicity model worked from the assumption of race as a social category. Within this paradigm, "ethnicity itself was understood as the result of a group formation process based on culture and descent" (Omi & Winant 1994: 15). Within this model, Omi & Winant worked with race as a social category produced through social practices such as religion and culture.

Although, the ethnicity model was critical in its challenge of the biological determinism model, it pathologized cultural norms and practices. The most publicized example of this practice is the famous Moynihan Report. This report pathologized the inner city and black women for the problems that blacks were experiencing in the United States as a consequence of racism. Within this model, "every thing is mediated through "norms" internal to the group" (Omi &

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30

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identities that locate it in an essentialized, distorted and mythical past. However, this is an unfair criticism, for it dismissed the importance of political movements such as Pan-Africanism and Garveyism.

For Omi and Winant all of the three perspectives in which racialized identities have been traditionally theorized are inadequate. All three paradigms neglected “the specificity of race as an autonomous field of social conflict, political organization, and cultural/ideological meaning” (Omi & Winant 1994: 28). Consequently none of the three paradigms cannot stand on their own without overlapping on each other.

As a result their dissatisfaction with the three dominant paradigms in which race has been traditionally discussed, they developed an alternative perspective which borrows from the three dominant perspectives outlined. For Omi and Winant race is not an essentialist construct outside of human agencies, rather it is socially constructed within specific socio-political and historical context. As Omi and Winant explain, “race has no fixed meaning, but is constructed and transformed socio-historical through competing political projects” (Omi & Winant 1994: 71). Race as a system of categorization is not an essentialized identity determined by biology, but rather, it is a fluid and dynamic process that is always changing. As a result, “the effort must be made to understand race as an unstable and ‘decentered’ complex of social meaning constantly being transformed by political struggle” (Omi & Winant 1994: 55). Racialized identities are always in the process of change to adopt to their temporal and socio-political specificity.

Omi and Winant’s main argument is that human agencies are directly implicated within the process of racial formation in which meaning is attached to specific bodies. Hence, if one were to trace the genealogy of racialized identities, what would be visible is the different and sometimes contradictory meanings that it has acquired at different points in history. In this

context. Omi and Winant reaffirm the importance of implicating colonial discourses in the construction of race formation.

For Omi and Winant the process of racial formation is constituted through multiple sites. The most popular site through which the process of racial formation occurs is through everyday experiences. It is within the realm of everyday experiences that racialized identities are normalized and given currency. As Omi and Winant points out, "to see racial projects operating at the level of everyday life, we have only to examine the many ways in which, often unconsciously, we "notice" race" (Omi & Winant 1994: 71). For example, race apart from gender is the most salient descriptive characteristics that we notice about someone. Within everyday experiences we make use of "expected differences in skin colour or other racially coded characteristics to explain difference" (Omi & Winant 1994: 60). Most importantly we act on these racially coded meanings in determining characteristics such as perceived trust, athleticism, which function to maintain their legitimacy. In this context, "race becomes a 'common sense' way of comprehending, explaining and acting in the world" (Omi & Winant 1994: 60).

Secondly, Omi and Winant implicates the state as a dominant site through with racialized identities are constructed and maintained. In the United States, "throughout the 19th century, many state and federal legal arrangements recognized three racial categories "white," "Negro," and "Indian." (Omi & Winant 1994: 82). However, as time progressed the labels used to identify racially defined groups changed. For example, "the racial categories used in census enumeration have varied widely from decade to decade. Groups such as Japanese Americans have moved from categories such as "non-white", Oriental or simple other" (Omi & Winant 1994: 82). Through legislative policies the state not only constructs racialized subjects, but also polices the boundaries of racialized identities.

Influenced by Omi and Winant, critical legal scholar, Ian Haney Lopez (1995) undertakes a similar approach in his essay *The Social Construction of Race*. In this essay Lopez focused specifically on legal processes and popular literature as specific discursive sites where racialized identities are mediated. Lopez traces the transformation of "Mexicans" from a nationality to a race through human agencies. According to Lopez,

race must be understood as a social phenomenon in which contested systems of meaning serve as the connections between physical features, faces, and personal characteristics. Race is neither an essence nor an illusion but, rather an ongoing, contradiction, self-reinforcing, plastic process subjected to the macro forces of social and political struggle and the micro effects of daily decisions (Lopez 1995: 193).

In this piece Lopez also attempts to dismantle common-sensical notions of race as a biologically inherited trait. According to Lopez,

there is no gene or cluster of genes common to all whites but to non-whites. One's race is not determined by a single gene or gene cluster, as is, for example, sickle cell anemia. Nor are races marked by the important differences in gene frequencies (Lopez 1995: 194).

Racialized identities are not biologically determined, rather the construction of racialized identities has to be located within their historical and social specificity in relation to power, and human agency. As Haney Lopez explains: "it is humans rather, than abstract force that produces races and they are constructed relational, against one another, rather than in isolation" (Lopez 1995: 196). Many of the categories that we have come to consider "natural", and hence, immutable, can be viewed as the product of processes that are embedded in human actions and choices. Most importantly, Lopez reminds us that although race as category is socially constructed, its meanings are not fixed and unalterable once they are formed.

Omi and Winant's chain of influence remains unbroken in the work of Grandy Jr. (1998) *Communication and Race: Structural Prospective*, in which he takes up racialized identities in the Americas as a social construct. Grady Jr. adds to this ongoing discussion and theorization of race as a social construct by focusing on the leaky and messy practice of locating bodies into predetermined racialized categories. For Grandy Jr., the classification of racialized bodies have to be located within their historical and socio-political specificity. The guidelines for making such determination are not static or predetermined by nature. Rather, "the guidelines for making such determination have varied across time and space, and they continue to change as the discourse about race is transformed by politics, commerce and culture" (Grandy Jr. 1998: 41). Grandy Jr provides a strong case in his argument that racial classification is not outside of human agency as a result of migration, miscegenation, and trans-racial reproduction. This in turn adds to the messiness of attempting to place bodies in racial categories. He used the 'one drop rule' to illustrated the messy terrain of racial classification. Reflecting on the work of Ian Lopez (1996) Grandy explains. "the examination of court document revealed considerable confusion about which criteria were to be used in determining a person's race: 'by skin colour, facial features, national origins, language, culture, ancestry'" (Grandy Jr. 1998: 44).

Grandy works from the premise that racial classification plays a central role in determining privileges and access to both material and symbolic resources. Consequently, as a result of the colour line in determining the allocation of access privilege, many (light skin) blacks with phenotypical features that were associated with whites, frequently engaged in the practice of passing. This practice not only illustrates the social construction of racial classification but also draws attention to per formative aspect of racial identities.

In his text, Grandy Jr. most salient contribution is his work on ideology and its role in the production and maintenance of racialized identities. Working with Teun Van Dijk's notion of ideology Grandy Jr. defines racial ideology as "a system of beliefs that is incorporated into a range of discourses in ways that reinforces and reproduce beliefs and assumptions about individuals because of their identification with a particular social group" (Grandy Jr. 1998: 81). Grandy sites the mass media as one of the most important sites in the production and dissemination of racial ideology. It is within this context that racial stereotypes are given currency and legitimacy.

In his work Grandy Jr. makes a distinctive split between the practice of racial classification and racial identities. He defines racial classification as, "a form of knowledge creation that has been associated by Foucault and others with development and maintenance of systems of power" (Grandy Jr. 1998: 48). Through the power of discursive practices bodies are assigned and regulated in racial groups and categories. Although a given body might be frequently read within the dominant perception, it does not mean that they do not have their ways of conceptualizing their own identities. "In part, this means that identities are emergent, and continually being elaborated through social practices" (Grandy Jr. 1998: 49). However, there is a problem, both operational and conceptual, in the separation of racial classification from identities. For example certain groups have adopted certain elements of racial classifications both voluntarily and involuntarily as part of their identity. How do we tell where racial classification ends and identities begins.

It is important to locate race as a social construct within and not outside of human agency. Social construction theory as an analytical tool displaces the apparent naturalness of race by drawing our attention to the historic, geographic and socio-political forces in which it is

mediated. It opens up the possibilities for both individual and societal transformation by exposing the genealogy of race as social construct.

2.4 Emerging Theories: Representing Race in Popular Culture

Lastly, in this section of my literature review I would like to shift my attention to theoretical writings focusing on race and identity politics within emerging paradigms such as a Culture studies and (Black) Post modernism. In particular, a vast amount of work is being done on the role of cultural production as a pedagogical and political site where identities are both produced and contested.

At the center of this body of work is British Cultural Studies' theorist Stuart Hall. Specifically, his contribution to the theorizing of the complexity of identity politics can be found in his essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990), in which he examines the politics of visually representing black identities as post colonial subjects in the diaspora (Caribbean). In this piece Hall works with the concept of identity as an unfixed, fluid and hybrid category in relation to black identities in the diaspora. Stuart Hall's writes;

Identity is not as transparent or as unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead think of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside of representation (Hall 1990: 222).

Rather, racialized identities as socially produced categories are continuously invested with new, sometimes contradictory, meanings.

In this piece Stuart Hall outlines the two different theoretical paths that can be taken

when conceptualizing the production of cultural identities. "The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves' (Hall 1990: 222). In this context, the cultural identity of Caribbean peoples, "reflects the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provides us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning (Hall 1990: 223). It is predominately within this imagistic paradigm that the identities of black folks are locked.

The second paradigm in which cultural identities can be located, works with the complexity and nuances of identity. This position, "recognizes that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are' (Hall 1990: 223). We cannot conceptualize identities as a straight and interrupted path. We have to recognize the twist and turns due to pressures of historical transformation. As Stuart Hall points out in regards to identities; "it is far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subjected to the continuous play of history, culture and power" (Hall 1990: 225). At the same time identities are free floating constructs. Rather, our identity, "is something-not a mere trick of the imagination, it has its history-and histories have their real material and symbolic effects. (Hall 1990: 226). There are consequences as well as privileges attached to identities.

Moreover, for Stuart Hall, it is through the process of representation that identities are actively produced both within and outside the dominant regimes of representations. Working with a Foucaudian conception of power/knowledge, Hall writes: "every regime of representation is a regime of power formed, as Foucault reminds us, by the fatal couplet, 'power/knowledge'. But this kind of knowledge is internal not external" (Hall 1990: 226). It is through this co-dependent relation of power/knowledge that racialized subjective are produced and normalized.

The influence of Stuart Hall and British Cultural Studies remains unbroken in the work of American cultural theorist Mark Reid (1997), in particular in the text *PostNegritude Visual and Literary Culture*. In this text Mark Reid works with Stuart Hall's definition of identity as a fluid and unfixed process that is always changing to reflect its historical and sociopolitical specificity. Reid deploys Hall's definition of identities to challenge essentialist and static presentations of blackness by both members of the black communities and the dominant group.

Mark Reid's main argument is that although black communities in the diaspora have a shared history of racism, the identities of black diasporic black communities are multiple and dynamic. As Mark Reid explains, "racial hostile experiences is what unites people of African Ancestry. Yet still, the experiences of class, ethnicity, sexuality, and religion constitute additional factors in the self-esteem of black folk" (Reid 1997: 2). Like Stuart Hall, Mark Reid works with the complexities and nuances of identity politics in the diaspora. Black identities are taken up in such a way that the multiple points of political identification that serves to defined black identities are acknowledged. Reid works with a definition of black identities that are inclusive to other constructs such as gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation and their points of intersectionalities.

In this text, Reid speaks to multiple positions that black subjects can occupy. For Reid our points of differences have to be acknowledged before we can talk about our similarities. As Reid explains, "all people of colour are not equal. We do not have the same experiences. Thus we must avoid universalizing race, class, and post colonial subjectivity, and acknowledge our particularities as we learn to speak of our similarities" (Reid 1997: 16). Reid confronts and disrupts the ways in which blackness has been defined within black communities and by the dominant group. His definition of racialized identities acknowledges the similarities as well

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39

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in the production of counter narratives.

Lastly, I would like to turn my attention to Rinaldo Walcott's text (1997) *Black Like Who*, which speaks specifically to the representation and contestation of black identities within the Canadian context. With hip hop, film, literature, sports and electronic media as his focus, Walcott looks at how black identities are articulated and lived out in the Canadian context.

Like Mark Reid, Rinaldo Walcott also works with Stuart Hall's definition of identity as a multiple and fluid process shaped by the constraints of its historical context. As Walcott explains, "for me, black post modernity is an unsentimental approach to addressing the complex and varied histories of diasporic black peoples" (Walcott 1997: 59). However, Walcott simultaneously warns of the danger of not grounding black identities when he writes, "the sliding signifier of blackness intends to continue to slide and remain out of bounds. And that is a good thing. Yet to read blackness as merely 'playful' is to fall into the willful denial of what it means to live black" (Walcott 1997: xi). In this context Walcott is pointing to the complexity and the ambiguity that one has to be careful of when theorizing. Identities are not free floating, rather our identities are very much grounded with material and symbolic consequences.

Walcott, tackles the difficulty of writing and representing blackness in the Canadian context, by focusing on the politics of space and place in nationhood. To write and represent black identities in the Canada one has to first deal with the displacement of black identities from the nationhood. As Walcott points out, "the national narratives render these racial geographies invisible, and many continue to believe that any presence in Canada is a recent and urban one" (Walcott 1997: 36). It is within the trope of the urban or the Canadian version of inner city that blackness is frequently located and represented. The urban and immigration have become synonymous with blackness in the Canadian context. Blackness is displaced from the history of

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41

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mark their bodies, by producing their own discourses about their bodies. In various ways black folks “mark their bodies as sites for the expression of joy, pleasure, pain, lack and desire” (Walcott 1997: 55). Walcott’s work stands out as one of the most important Cultural Studies theorists writing about the representational politics of black identities within the Canadian context.

Emerging theories grounded in the discourse of post modernism is quite useful in the ways in which they take up identities. It allows us to work with a non-essentialized definition identities. In this context, through the use of post modernism I am able to draw attention to the multiple points of political identification that black subjects occupy. At the same time we have to be aware of the dangers of post modernism. As Rinaldo Walcott warns, “to read blackness as merely ‘playful’ is to fall into a willful denial of what it means to live ‘black’”. (Walcott 1997: xi). Blackness as a lived experience is very much grounded.

2.5 Towards a Theoretical Framework

The three different theoretical paradigms outlined within the literature review are central to the theoretical path of this project. It is within these bodies of literature reviewed that my theoretical position is informed. First and most importantly, this project works with a definition of race and cultural identity as a socially acquired and unfixed process rather than a biological construct. Race is mediated and contested within the realms of human agencies. Secondly, race as a social construct has to be located within its historical specificity due to the dynamic nature of racialized identities. We cannot talk about racialized identities without historicizing and tracing its genealogy. For example, some of the tropes through which racialized identities were mediated

during colonial expansion continues to inform the ways in which racialized identities are articulated in the contemporary. Our identities are not ahistorical, rather they are grounded in a historical past. As Stuart Hall reminds us, "identities are the name that we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves in, the narratives of the past" (Gates Jr. 1992: 77). Blackness, as a construct, has taken on different meanings and signifying markers at different points in history. This project works with a definition of racialized identities that is inclusive to the multiple points of political identifications that black subjects occupy. In this context, I am referring to socially constructed variables which include race, socioeconomic class, gender, sexuality and disability which are deeply intertwined and co-dependant on each other.

Interestingly enough, these categories are frequently taken up as mutually exclusive constructs. Audre Lorde testifies to this practices when she writes; "As a Black lesbian feminist comfortable with the many different ingredients of my identities and as a woman committed to racial and sexual freedom from oppression, I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of my self" (Lorde 1990: 285). Monocausal theoretical frame works are unlikely to provide a complete understanding of all the narratives present within a given social issue. According to Kimberle Crenshaw, "discursive and political practices that separate race from gender and gender from race create complex problems of exclusion and distortion" (Crenshaw 1993: 122). For example, the experiences of black gays and lesbians are erased when race and sexual politics are taken up as mutual exclusive categories. The critical integration of the production of racialized identities has to be taken up in such a way that is inclusive to the social points of political identification that serves to organize the lives and experiences of black communities in the diaspora.

The theoretical position in which this projected is located, can be best defined as the theory of inter-locking system of oppression of intersectionality. The fundamental intention of this theoretical approach is its attempt to disrupt the tendencies to conceptualize race, class and gender as exclusive or separate categories. As Sherene Razack points out, "Interlocking systems need one another, and in tracing the complex ways in which they help to secure one another" (Razack 1998: 13). There is a need to, "understand the dialectical relationship of race, class, gender and sexuality and how these issues are experienced as interlocking systems of oppression" (Dei 1993: 42). As racialized bodies we do not experience the world in a linear and compartmentalized way. As Patricia Monture points out, "it is not solely my gender through which I first experience the world... It is very difficult for me to separate what happens to me because of my gender and what happens to me because of my race and culture" (Monture 1995: 177). Categories of race, gender and class do not function in isolation rather they are co-dependent on each other. As Kimberle Crenshaw points out intersectionality is, "a transitional concept that links current concepts with their political consequences, and real world politics with postmodern insights" (Crenshaw 1993: 114). Patterns of capitalist development, gender oppression, heteronormativity, and racism and their points of intersection determines the production of popular culture. By taking up race, class, gender and sexuality in the context of each, the theoretical aim is to add to the ongoing dialogue on the mediation of black diasporic identities in popular culture.

2. 6 Conclusion

This chapter documents and provides historical and theoretical insights in the construction of race. The first section of this chapter provided a historical prospective, by

critically interrogating the role of western epistemologies in the construction of the Other during colonial expansion. Secondly, this chapter directly implicated human agencies in social construction of race. Lastly, the multiple points of political identification that racialized bodies occupy are discussed in relation to identity politics. It is within these theoretical disciplines, that the theoretical path of this projects is mapped out. With the historical and theoretical context in place, chapter will serve as a point of entry into the critical analysis of the production of racialize knowledge. The next chapter takes up the social construction of black identities in the popular black cinema, specifically the hood genre. The purpose of this chapter is built on the the theoretical works outlined in the literature review.

CHAPTER THREE

Representing The Real: The Narrative Structure of The Hood Genre

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores contemporary representations of black bodies through the use of racialized signifiers, within popular cinema. Specifically, the successful release of John Singleton's film *Boyz N the Hood*, established a genre of films. This genre of film, frequently referred to as the hood genre, is structured by a master narrative that determines how racialized bodies are depicted. In the like manner that "blaxploitation" genre dominated the seventies, the hood genre has dominated and defined popular black cinema in the nineties. The following films, *Boyz N the Hood* (1991) directed by John Singleton, *Menace to Society* (1993) by Albert and Allen Hughes, *Clockers* (1995) by Spike Lee, *New Jersey Drive* (1995) by Nick Gomez, and lastly, the Canadian film *Rude* (1995) by Clement's Virgo, will be used as a focal point in this discussion.

3.2 Plots Summaries: Black Bodies\ White Imagination

The film *Boyz N the hood* (1991), written and directed by John Singleton, is frequently credited as the film responsible for the popularity of the hood genre in mainstream cinema as a result of its box office success. The basic plot of *Boyz N the Hood*, features Tre (Cuba Gooding Jr.), a young boy sent to live with his father Furious (Larry Fishburne) by his reluctant mother

(Angela Bassett) in a gang infested neighborhood in South Central Los Angeles. The film documents the friendship that develops between Tre and two other youths in the neighborhood, Doughboy (Ice Cube) and his brother Ricky (Morris Chestnut). We are introduced to these characters as children and the violence that they experience living in the inner city. In the opening sequence of the film, the inner city is established as a violent space, the screen fades into black, the audience hears multiple gun shots, followed by a car speeding off, and a young boy screaming "they shot my brother". A young Tre then appears on the screen with a group of children on their way to school in South Central Los Angeles. Tre and his classmates walk past a homicide scene where the evidence of blood is still visible on the pavement. At school Tre gets involved in a fight with another student who refused to believe that he is originally from Africa and not his neighborhood gang the Crenshaw Mafia. As a result, Tre is sent to live with his father by a reluctant mother with the hopes that his father will teach him to be a responsible young man. Tre's mother gives him a lecture about not wanting to see him dead or standing in front of a liquor store. Tre's mother then disappears from the narrative plot of the film with the exception of phone calls.

In the next screen we are introduced to Tre's young friends Ricky and his younger brother Dough Boy. Both boys live with their single mother who is absent from the plot of the film for the majority of the film. Again, the audience is introduced to the senseless violence that these kids experience in their daily lives. On their way to visit a dead body they discovered in another neighborhood they are hassled by a group of young men who attempt to steal Ricky's football, given to him by his absent father. Returning from a fishing trip with his father Furious, Tre witnesses Doughboy being arrested by the police for stealing from the neighborhood convenient store. Tre's father explains to him that his friends across the street do not have any one to teach

them to be responsible. Turning to Tre, Furious warns both Tre and the audience; “watch and you will see how they will turn out”. At this point in the film their separate and individual paths are established, it is clear that Doughboy is on his way into a life of crime. Unlike his brother, Ricky is interested in becoming a football player, while Tre’s future lies in academics and a male patriarch similar to his father.

Once the characters are established the film flashes forward seven years to the late teens of the three characters. They are reintroduced to the audience at a BBQ which celebrates Doughboy’s release from prison. At that point we see that each character has indeed grown up to be very different individuals. Doughboy has become an unambitious drug dealer and his brother Ricky a teenage father and high school football star. We are introduced to Tre as clean cut young man on his way to college due to the stern upbringing of his father.

At this point in the film, the audience is shown the daily lived experiences of both Ricky and Doughboy through the eyes of Tre. Ricky struggles with his role as a teenage parent and the pursuit of his dreams to be a football player. He is scouted by a college recruiter from USC (University of Southern California) who visits him at home to discuss his future both in academics and sports. In contrast, his brother Doug Boy is a small time drug dealer who frequently goes in and out of jail. He spends most of his time drinking malt liquor (40 ounces) with his friend Chris. His casual conversation with friends usually centers around sex, degrading women by calling them ‘bitches’, drugs and drive by shootings. Doughboy’s close friend Chris is in a wheel chair apparently because of a drive-by shooting.

Unlike his friends, Tre is on his way to college based on his academic abilities rather than a sports scholarship. His father teaches him to be a responsible man, which entails having protected sex, not being afraid of anyone, and working within his community. In a speech at a

street corner in Compton, another gang infested neighborhood, he explains to Tre, Ricky and rival neighborhood gang members that they need to keep their neighborhood black, by setting up their own businesses.

Also a relationship between Tre and Brandi (Nina Long) the girl next door develops. However, she refuses to have premarital sex with Tre which creates friction between the two of them. Like the other female characters in the film Brandi is absent from the film for the most part. Both Brandi and Tre believes that academic achievement is the only path out of the their city neighborhood.

The main plot of *Boyz N the Hood* becomes tragic after Tre, Dough Boy and Ricky get into a confrontation while out on Crenshaw Blvd. with rival gang members. As a result of being outnumbered, members of the rival gang fired their guns discriminately creating mass panic. They waited for the right moment to get their revenge. Ricky is tragically killed in a drive-by shooting on his way from the store accompanied by Tre. The death of Ricky ended his hope of attending college and ultimately moving his family away from the ghetto. At this point in the film Tre fights the ultimate battle against himself, to resist the urge to take revenge and risk death or going to jail. At the last minute Tre decides to get out of the car as Doughboy and his friends revenge his brother's death. The film ended with a didactic telling us that Doughboy was murdered two weeks after Ricky's funeral and Tre and Brandi went off to college at Morehouse and Spelman in pursuit of their middle class dreams.

The next film that I will discuss as part of the hood genre is *Menace II Society* (1993), directed by Allen and Albert Hughes. In the like manner, *Menace II Society* is another coming of age film which borrows many of the narrative conventions of John Singleton's *Boyz N the Hood*. This film chronicles several days in the life of Caine Lawson (Tyryn Turner) and O-Dog (Lorenzo

Tate) following their high school graduation and their violent existence in the projects of Watts, California. The story is told from the perspective of Caine through the use of voice-over narration to convey his point of view as events unfold. This technique is frequently used in traditional Hollywood narratives in which identification with the protagonist becomes unified and absolute. Except in the case of *Menace II Society*, this technique is subverted. Caine is actually the villain in the plot who repeatedly questions his own actions.

Similar to *Boyz N the Hood*, in a shocking opening sequence, the film quickly establishes the inner city as a violent space occupied by violent bodies. In the opening scene, O-Dog shot and robbed the neighborhood grocery store owners as Caine looks on. O-dog then steals the video from the surveillance camera in the store. The black and white images of O-Dog shooting the grocery store owner is played and replayed for the entertainment of O-Dog, Caine and their friends.

In the next scene we are presented with the open credits which are placed over the images from the 1965 riots in Watts. However, the film fails to make any connection between structural racism and how it organized the daily experiences of the inner cities in America. The film then flashes back to a young Caine. At that point the audience finds that Caine's father, Ted (Samuel L. Jackson) was a drug dealer and his mother was a heroin addict. Both the audience and Caine witness his father shooting a man who owed him money. This event initiated Caine into a life of crime. Caine's father is later murdered. Unable to cope with her drug abuse Caine's mother sends him to temporarily live with his religious grandparents. However, this arrangement became permanent after his mother dies as a result of a drug dose. After the death of his father, Pernell (Glenn Plummer) served as Caine's criminal mentor and his surrogate father until a life in prison curtailed his influence on Caine.

Once Caine's childhood history is established the film moved forward to nineteen ninety three in Watts. We are reintroduced to Caine as a teenager. In a voice over he tells the audience he is about to graduate, however, he learned very little in school. Instead, he spent half of his time selling drugs. The next scene follows Caine and his cousin to a party with O-Dog and some of his other friends. Caine, in his narrative voice-over, tells us that, "O-Dog was America's nightmare". "Young, black and didn't give a fuck". On their way home from the party, his cousin is car jacked and shot dead while Caine is shot in the shoulder. Caine is taken to the hospital, where he is hospitalized for a lengthy period of time. After he recovers, with the help of O-Dog, he retaliates by killing the car jackers who shot him and his cousin. Unlike Tre in *Boyz N the Hood* he retaliates his cousin's death which proves to his friends and the audience that he is 'hard', which a signifier of black masculinity in the hood genre.

Caine neither accept his grandfather's religious teaching beliefs nor respond to his grandfather when he asked Caine the very important question, "don't you care whether you live or die". At this point, Caine appeared to be confused. Realizing that Caine is slipping away he attempts to set him straight. Caine refuses to listen to his grandfather's advice. Consequently, he is asked by his grandfather to leave home.

Moreover, the violent encounters which marks the existence of both Caine and O-Dog paints a disturbing picture characterized by a sense of nihilism. Both Caine and O-Dog shows no visible signs of remorse for their actions. In a disturbing scene, O-Dog shoots a man addicted to crack. who offered to perform oral sex in exchange for crack. After shooting this man O-Dog picks up the hamburger the man was carrying and jokingly asked his friends, "do you want a hamburger". The violence in *Menace II Society* unfolds in real time, which adds a sense of realism to the film. Close ups and point of view camera shots are used to allow to audience to become

part of the violence experienced by the main characters.

Caine's former teacher, Mr. Bulter (Charles S. Dutton) and the father of Shatill (one of Caine's friend) also attempts to intervene suggesting that Caine get out of the hood before he gets himself into anymore trouble. He suggests that Caine should think about moving to Kansas with Shatill away from the problems of the hood. Like the character Furious in John Singleton's film *Boyz N the Hood*, Mr. Bulter occupies the role of the black masculine patriarchal figure. Like Furious, his subject position is informed by the politics of black nationalism.

Similar to *Boyz N the Hood*, women as central characters are excluded from the story line of *Menace II Society*. For example Caine's grandmother rarely speaks in the film, we know very little about her. The only exception of a central female character is Ronnie (Jeda Pinkett), the girl friend of Pernell and mother of his son Tony. Ronnie occupies the role of mother figure representing Caine's only hope for survival. Ronnie and her house become Caine's only refuge. It is only within this space that he is protected from his lived reality of violence. After a visit to the penitentiary with Ronnie the imprisoned Pernell gives Caine his blessing, to move to Atlanta with Ronnie. Mediated through the plexiglass and telephones, Pernell hopes that Caine will accomplish what he failed to do as a good patriarch. It is at this point in the film that Caine comes of age, accepting responsibility for his actions, for Ronnie, Tony and himself.

The only other women in the film is Lena (Erin Leshawn) who is highly sexualized in contrast to Ronnie. After having sexual intercourse with Caine she becomes pregnant. Caine refuses to take any responsibility for his actions. The relationship between Caine and Lena is mediated through a violent exchange between Caine and her cousin which Caine's grandfather witnesses. In this context, Lena sexuality become a source of conflict for Caine which ultimately leads to his demise.

As Ronnie and Caine pack their rented mini-van for their move to Atlanta with the help of O-Dog and Shatill who is about to move to Kansas, it appears that there is hope for Caine. However, in a twist of faith both Caine and Shatill are gunned down by Lena's cousin in a drive-by shooting revenging Caine's assault on him and the abandoning of his unborn child. Ronnie's young son Tony witnesses Caine repeatedly being shot as he attempts to shield him from the gun shots. As scenes from his life flash on the screen signifying his death, Caine comes to the realization that he doesn't care if he live or die. The screen then fades to black.

In like manner, Nick Gomez (1995) film, *New Jersey Drive* draws on the same narrative conventions of its predecessors which include criminality, the inner city, and dysfunctional families. The film *New Jersey Drive* is quite similar to Gomez's (1992) debut film *Laws of Gravity*, except the anti-heroes in *New Jersey Drive* are black and not white Brooklyn teenagers. Interestingly enough, Nick Gomez had more success with this film than his previous film *Laws of Gravity*. One of the primary reason being young black men as car thieves is more a convincing depiction of reality. For example *New Jersey Drive* received two thumbs up from movie critics Siskel and Ebert in their weekly movie reviews.

The film *New Jersey Drive* is described as an urban action thriller documenting the culture of car jacking (car stealing) in Newark, New Jersey and the risk of violence that is involved. Similar to *Menace II Society*, this film follows a group of young male teenagers which includes the central characters Jason Petty (Sharon Corley), his friends Midget (Gaberial Casseus), and Tiny Dime (Donald Adeosun Faison), budding car thieves. Like *Menace II Society* through the use of voice over narration, this film is narrated through the perspective of the main character Jason Petty.

We are introduced to Jason as he is escorted down the hallway of a youth detention center. It is at this point in the film that Jason begins to narrate his story by taking the audience back to events that lead to him being in the juvenile detention center. We are introduced to Roscoe (Saul Stein), a racist cop who ambushes and shoots the driver of a stolen car which belongs to him. Jason, who is a passenger in the car, witnesses the incident. As a result he becomes a threat to Roscoe who is going to be investigated by a grand jury. Roscoe used threats and physical violence to intimidate Jason and prevent him from testifying against him.

In between the high speed car chases there are small and brief moments when the audience is given information about the main characters. We find out that Jason lives with his mother (Gwen Mc Gee), sister Jackee (Samantha Brown), and his mother's new boy friend (Devin Esslceston). Their mother's new relationship is a source of tension. Both Jason and Jackee fear that he will marry their mother.

Jason's mother tries to give him advice, which he refuses to listen to. After an argument with his mother, Jason moves in with his friend Midget. Through Jason the audience is given a glimpse of Midget's home life. We find out that Midget's brothers are frequently in and out of jail. Midget's parents are absent, he lives with his aging grandmother, who he cares for. Absent from Midget's life is parental supervision in the form a male patriarchal figure. The film tell us very little about Richie and Tiney Dimes. They appear to have no interest other than stealing cars, smoking marijuana, and drinking 40 ouncers.

The plot of the movie is simple. It follows Jason and his friend as they attempt to evade Roscoe and the rest of the police department in stolen cars. The film takes the audience on a series of high speed chases through the streets of Newark. Consequently, in a fatalist scene, Tiney Dimes dies in his attempt to outrun the police in a high speed car chase. The stolen car he

is driving is deliberately hit from the side by a police officer. The police officers are extremely brutal and antagonistic, especially to Roscoe. In one scene, Midget expresses his anger and frustration towards the police by warning his friends, "its open season on black men". Jason and his friends deliberately provoke and challenge the authority of the police which is compared to an occupying army. In an interesting moment in the film, the boys steal a police car and use the loud speaker to scare a jeep full of hard drinking white teenagers. The film draws attention to the terror experienced by young black men who are repeatedly stopped by the police through the use of role reversal.

Like other films discussed within this genre, women are absent as central characters in the narrative structure of *New Jersey Drive*. Jason's mother makes brief appearances as a single mother who just got involved in a new relationship which creates conflicts with her children. The other identifiable female in the film is Jason's sister Jackee whom the mother is very protective of. In a moment of rebellion Jackee gets into a stolen car with three other teenagers. Jason taking on the role of the patriarchal figure pulls her out of the car and demands that she go home. The other female teenager in the film is Jason's girl friend (Cholris), who makes two brief appearances in the film. The audience knows very little about her. The other females in the script are allocated to the background without any voices or opinions.

Jason's narration of the event to the audience also allows him to reflect on his life. It is through the process of remembrance that Jason comes of age and accepts responsibilities for his actions. Once this transformation occurred, the film then flashes back into the present. He testifies against Roscoe before the grand jury. Consequently, he is indicted on criminal charges. Jason is then released from the detention center and is set on correcting his ways. In an ironic twist while sitting in his girl friend's parent's car they both get car jacked. Midget offers him the

chance to get revenge, however. Jason finally stands up to Midget. Rather than being a follower he tells him no. Midget and his friends drives away in a stolen mini-van which ends up in a deadly crash after a police chase and shoot out. Jason moves back home with his mother and attends school. The film ends with Jason sitting in the class room. As it turns out the scenario in the film is based on some facts of an investigation done by Michael Marriott, a *New York Times* reporter who investigated the Newark police department.

Similarly, Spike Lee's (1995) *Clockers*, an adaptation of Richard Price's novel, draws on the familiar tropes which characterizes the hood genre. As the title of the film signifies, clocker is a slang for the lowest level drug dealer. A clocker is a twenty four hour drug dealer that can be found in public spaces such as the street corner or park. Like the other films within the genre, this film is set in an inner city housing complex in Brooklyn.

One of the main plots of the film *Clockers* revolves around the neighborhood drug dealer, Rodney Little (Delroy Lindo) who owns the neighborhood candy store. Rodney offers the young men in the neighborhood employment as "clockers" by creating a false sense of success. In one of his candy store lectures as the patriarchal figure, he tells some of his freshly recruited "clockers" that if they do it right they can buy their mothers houses outside of the ghetto. He offers these young men a sense of false hope of escaping the poverty of the inner city.

In the beginning of the film Rodney tells his protege Ronald Dunham a.k.a Strike (Mekhi Phifer) one of his hardest working clocker. nineteen year old crack dealer that he would like to see a nearby fast food manger eliminated. This fast food manger is a dishonest employee of Rodney who is supposed to be dealing crack from the restaurant in which he is employed. In the next scene the fast food manger is found dead in the parking lot.

The death of the restaurant employee sets up the major plot of the film along with the introduction of the other major characters. The film follows the interaction between Strike and a New York city detective Rocco Klien (Havey Keitel) who is investigating a homicide. Strike's hard working brother, married with two children, confessed to the crime. Racco's partner Larry Mazilli (John Turturro) accepts the confession from Victor and is ready to close the case. However, Racco refuses to believe Victor and attempts to trick Strike into confessing to the murder. After minimal progress, Racco starts pressuring Strike into revealing the truth. The interactions between Strike and Racco leads Rodney into becoming suspicious of Strike. As a result of Racco's investigation Rodney is arrested. While in jail Rodney orders his drug addicted mentor Errol to kill Strike who is now under police protection.

An important sub-plot in the film revolves around the relationship between Strike and a young boy name Shorty (Pee Wee Love). He buys him expensive toys that his single mother cannot afford. Strike takes the young boy to his house to show him his hobby train set where he discovers Strike's hand gun. The young boy's mother is reluctant of her son's friendship with Strike. In one scene she frantically yells at Strike and his friend while attempting to hit him. She accuses him of selling death to his people.

Ironically, this potentially good young boy intervenes and shoots Errol as he was about to shoot Strike. At the end of the film Racco molds the confession of the young boy in an attempt to keep him out of jail. Strike escapes the inner city on train without any destination in mind. At the end of the film Rodney is released from jail and returns to his neighborhood candy store where he continues to deal drugs. Victor gets out of jail and is reunited with his wife, children and mother.

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58

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in the staircase of an inner city housing complex. Both the audience and General witnesses his brother Reese (Clark Jackson) intimidating and terrorizing a young man addicted to heroin who is unable to pay for the drugs that he has credited. In this context we are introduced to violence and drugs as a marker of blackness and the inner city.

Fresh out of prison without any source of income, General is faced with a number of dilemmas. The first of which involves his girlfriend Jessica (Melonie Nicholls-King), the mother of his son Johnny (Ashely Brown). While in prison Jessica became a police officer to support herself and their son. By returning to his old life as a drug dealer he not only jeopardizes his relationship with Jessica but, also her position as a police officer. His second dilemma involves him providing his son the material things as his concept of a good patriarch figure should be able to do. With Jessica as the primary wage earner in the family his role as the patriarch is threatened, which creates inner turmoil for General. In one moment in the film his shame as a result of his inability to provide his son with material goods is most visible when he asked him for an ice cream which he is unable to pay for.

Unable to provide for his son, he succumbs to the temptation of working as a drug dealer for Yankee (Stephen Shellen), a white, racist drug dealer, who controls the drug trade in that part of the inner city. Yankee offers him a position as the head of his drug operation while he is outside of Canada, border crossing back into the United States. General realize that he does not want to return to his past life as a drug dealer and finally stands up to Yankee. Consequently, Yankee refuses to let him walk away from his past life by using Johnny as a hostage. At this point Jessica walks into the scene with an enraged Yankee threatening both General and Johnny at gun point. Witnessing Yankee with his gun to her son's head she immediately shoots him. Jessica's action reclaimed both General and the foreseen grip of Yankee on her son later on in life.

The second story involves a young boxer, Jordan (Richard Chevolleau) a talented boxer that lives a double life as a gay man in the traditionally hyper heterosexual space of the boxing gym. Jordan reluctantly engages in the physical assault of a black gay man in the park in order not to draw attention to the homophobic gaze of his friends at the boxing gym. Jordan participated in the assault and robbery in the park. However, as the film progresses, his role as a spectator and participant in the 'gay bashing' becomes a source of inner conflict. Jordan is forced to come to terms with his own sexuality and desire for other men. At one moment in the film, unable to suppress himself, he kisses his close friend and sparring partner Curtis (Junior Williams) in the gym. His other friends in the gym begin to suspect him of being gay. Jordan seeks redemption by sitting on the same bench in the park on which he and his friends assaulted the gay man. He himself is physically assaulted as punishment for his actions.

The third story, the weakest of the three, involves Maxine (Rachel Crawford) a successful window dresser whose hard-fought decision to abort her pregnancy plunges her relationship into crisis with Andre (Andrew Moodie). We witness the spirit of Maxine's aborted child (Ramiah Hylton) reappearing in her room which she is unable to see. The only time the child reveals herself to Maxine is after an outburst of rage in which she smashed all of the mannequins in her room. The spirit of her unborn child walks up to Maxine and stretches her hands out to Maxine. It is at that point in the film that Maxine comes to terms with her decision to abort her child.

The three stories are told parallel to each other, they do not cross each other at any point. The closeted boxer dealing with his identity and his friend's homophobia never come into contact with the ex-drug dealer trying to get his life in order or the young woman struggling with her break up who never leaves her apartment. Clement's Virgo attempted to weave these tales together through Rude (Sharon M. Lewis), a mysterious young woman who operates a pirate

radio channel (illegal radio channel) which infiltrates the lives of each character in the film. Rude is not really a character, but her words, her always shadowed face and the listeners that phone into the radio station set the tone for the stories. Also the use of the pirate radio channel speaks to the structural racism that have prevented black communities in Toronto from obtaining licensing for a radio station. However, unlike Julien Isaac in *Young Soul Rebel* or Spike Lee in *Do The Right Thing*, Virgo fails to tie the community or the stories through the voice of the disc jockey. Rather we are left with a narrative where the drug story becomes the centerpiece, inevitable violence and gunplay provides the film with its climax as well as its improbable image of rebirth. The tropes which characterizes the hood genre became the focal point in *Rude*.

3:3 Master Narrative Structure: The Real What?

All of the films discussed share a similar narrative structure in which race is signified through comparable tropes. All of the films taken up are unquestionably part of the urban hood genre. What makes all of these films similar is that their individual narrative structure is organized through a master narrative. The narrative pattern of all of the films discussed are “structured by the usual suspects of the hood film genre: the police, familial break own or tension, jail, drug and criminal activity” (Walcott 1997: 58). These are the salient characteristics of the films discussed. Although they may appear to different in some ways, their differences are structured by the rules which regulate the narrative style of the genre. The master narrative which serves to organize and structure films within this genre also functions to regulate and police the boundaries of the genre. For example, films with all black cast such as *Soul Food* (1997) and *Love Jones* (1997) were not placed or marketed as part of this genre because their narrative structure did not conform to the

master narrative which structures the hood genre. The main plot of these films did not center around violence, the inner city or drugs.

One of the central defining characteristic of master narrative of the hood genre is its ability to legitimize itself as a depiction of the 'real'. The trope of realism is frequently used as a marketing tool for films within the hood genre. The claim to black authenticity is the most salient marker of the hood genre. In this context, "the desire for 'authentic' representations which depict life 'as it really is' is strong and it is a desire encouraged by the continued use of those forms of realism which purport to be a 'window into the real world'" (Young: 1996: 8). As Rinaldo Walcott explains, " what makes many of these 'hood' films appear to be 'authentic' representations of blackness are the ways in which cultural practices are imported into them as occasions for evoking identification. From confrontations with the police, to hair style, to proverbs, these films are packed with numerous elements of 'black' everyday living" (Walcott 1997: 129). The hood genre is frequent referred to as urban realism and consequently, a stand in for the 'real'. There is an inherent danger within such a position. As Wahneema Lubiano warns, "despite the weight of a will to counter "lies," a marginalized group needs to be wary of the seductive power of realism, of accepting all that a realistic representation implies because of its inclusion of some "fact" (Lubiano 1998: 183). We can run the risk of reproducing and legitimating the very same dominant images that we are attempting to dismantle.

Interestingly enough within the narrative structure of the hood genre black specificity is literally displaced. The hood genre works with blackness as an essentialized construct. Within its narrative structure blackness as a monolithic category is situated within notions of maleness, hetero-normativity, violence and the urban ghetto. These markers function as the dominant tropes through which blackness as a racialized identity is signified. The boundaries of racialized identities

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63

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and fear. The use of established visual tropes, which includes hanging out in the hood, gang violence, drugs, sex with multiple partners, drinking forty ounces (malt liquor), and dysfunctional families serve as markers of the inner city. These visual tropes become the common signifiers through which blackness is articulated and imagined. As Valerie Smith points out, "the idea of the urban has become virtually synonymous with notions of blackness and blight in public discourse;" (Smith 1997:2). In this context, the inner city as a racially defined space serves as a marker of blackness.

Moreover, master narratives of the hood genre perpetuate the notion of the inner city as the epitome of blackness and authenticity. The inner city becomes the measuring stick by which blackness is authenticated and given its currency. Thus, an individual's proximity and knowledge of the inner city or the hood determines their relationship to blackness. In black popular culture "the city is hip, it's the locale of the cool. In order to be 'with it' you must be in the city" (Jeffries 1992: 158). Members of the black communities who reside outside of the inner city are constructed as being unauthentic or 'not really black'. This is signified through their lack of knowledge of black urban vernacular, clothing and hair style.

There is an interesting moment in *Boyz N the Hood* when a black college recruiter from USC borders crosses into the inner city to meet with scholarship hopeful Ricky. The college recruiter is constructed not only as middle class but also as an 'e-raced' body who is out of touch with the inner city. According to Kimberle Crenshaw one becomes an 'e-raced' body when, "one crosses from blackness into 'neutrality' as one becomes acceptable to, familiar with, and embraced by whites" (Crenshaw 1997: 111). In the film the college recruiter is constructed as an 'e-raced' through his conservative style of dress, lack of the 'authentic' black vocabulary, and affiliation to a prestigious academic institution. In this scene the identity of the college recruiter is

called into question. As Wahneema Lubiano explained, “being different within such a narrative economy, then is read as ‘white’ or middle class or whatever the current sign being used not to signified not black” (Lubiano 1998: 189). Also, by presenting the USC recruiter as an “e-raced” body serves to reinforce the assumption that equates scholarly success with white bodies. This also reinforces the association of blackness with low academic achievement.

The authentication of blackness through the inner city is most visible in Clement's Virgo's film *Rude*. Although the inner city in Toronto is different in comparison to the United States, *Rude* drew on the tropes which are frequently deployed in the construct of the American inner city. Tropes that are used to mark the inner city such as graffiti, violence, drugs are made hyper visible in the opening sequences of *Rude*. In this context the use of the inner city serves to legitimize the narrative content of *Rude* as being authentic black narrative.

Within the hood American inner cities have become naturalized and unchallenged signifiers of blackness. The need to authentic black identities through the inner city speaks to the ways in which the language of racism is structured. As David Goldberg has pointed out, "racism becomes institutionally normalized in and through spatial configuration, just as social space is made to seem natural, a given, by being conceived and defined in racial terms" (Goldberg 1993: 185). Within popular culture the inner city becomes a naturalized signifier of blackness. Within the hood genre the significance of physical space of the inner city and its presumed association of authenticity as a signifier of blackness is reinforced and legitimized. Also, the coupling of blackness and the inner city functions to regulate the spaces that black bodies can occupy and consequently the policing of black bodies.

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66

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scenes. In the like manner in the opening sequence of *Rude*, a young man and woman addicted to heroin who are unable to pay are terrorized by their dealer. Similarly, in the film *Menace II Society* the very first scene depicts this unsympathetic attitude towards violence, exemplified through Canine and O-Dog's fetal arm robbery of a Korean market. The opening sequences of the film succeeded in painting a disturbing picture of violence, through the characters' lack of remorse.

Within the narrative structure of the hood genre there is a racial coding of violence. The coupling of blackness and violence is presented as a natural and an inescapable part of urban life. Films within this genre "depicts a culture of nihilism that is rooted directly in violence, urban warfare, cultural suicide, and social decay" (Giroux 1996: 40). Consequently, this construct serves to reinforce the assumption that violence, crime, and blackness are synonymous. These films, "feeds the racist national obsessions that black men and their community are the central locus of the American scene of violence" (Giroux 1996: 42). In this context, popular black cinema provides the aesthetic proof in which black communities are presented as natural sites of violence, crime, and moral decay. The films taken failed to challenge dominant coding of blackness within drugs, crime and violence narratives. Blackness is framed "through a narrow representation that fail to challenge and in effect reiterate the dominant neoconservative image of blackness as menace and 'other'" (Giroux 1997: 45). These films reinforces and gives currency to the construct of blackness as a signifier of crime and violence.

The general assumption within these narratives is that blackness operates within a daily regime of oppression. However, there is no link made between the oppression experienced in the daily lives of the on screen characters and larger socio-political context in which they live. These film takes up the violence in such away that socio-political institutions remains intact and

unchallenged. Instead of providing an analysis of how the dual oppressions of racism and poverty serve to organize the experiences of people living in the inner city, we are presented with violence that exist between different elements of black crime fraternities. Within the narrative conventions of these films there exist a sense of complicity in one's oppression.

3:6 Blackness/Maleness

The master narrative of the hood genre places heterosexual male characters at the center of the plot while female characters are either absent or occupying periphery roles. Black women are "entirely peripheral to the lives of the male protagonist and usually completely ineffectual as wives, mothers and partners" within the plot of the films discussed. (Ross 1996: 74) The exclusion of women from the narrative is a primary structuring theme of hood films. As Michele Wallace insightfully points out, "as usual, it is the people who control the guns (and the phalluses) who hog the limelight" (Wallace 1992: 124). In all of the films discussed the male protagonist occupies the center. For example in the film *Boyz N the Hood* "the audience never finds out what Tre's mother does for a living, whether or not Doughboy's mother is on welfare, or has been married in the past, or anything whatsoever about the single black mother whose babies run in the street" (Wallace 1992: 123). In the like manner, in Spike Lee's film *Clockers* we know very little about Strike's mother, we know nothing about Victor's wife or Shorty's mother. Like Doughboy's mother we do not know what they do for a living or their likes or dislikes. In the like manner, in the film *Menace II Society* the audience knew very little about Caine's grandmother, who played a major role in his life. Like the grandmother, the character Ilena, the mother of Caine's unborn child is physically absent from the main narrative plot of the film even

at the moments she functions so centrally. Rather, her relations with Caine is mediated through a series of violent encounters between Caine and her cousin, which ultimately leads to the death of Caine.

Although Clement's *Virgo* attempted to present a female protagonist Maxine in his film *Rude*, her story was over shadowed by the story revolving around the heterosexual male protagonist (General). General's male centered narrative was made more attractive and given more attention because it contained all the markers of the hood genre. When women do make brief appearances onto the screen they are depicted either as sex objects, or on welfare and/or crack addicted mothers who are single and unable to parent their children.

Within the hood genre the representation of blackness operates with a discourse that couples the social problems in black communities with the lack of strong patriarchal figures. The focus of the disarming black male as the patriarchal figure within communities and family echoes a modernized version of the legendary Moynihan report of the sixties. The Moynihan report located the poor conditions of life experienced by black folks in the United States in the inner city on families headed by single women rather than racism and its intersectionalities with class and gender. In the like manner, within the hood genre there is an emphasis on the importance of black patriarchy. In all of the films taken up, the only boys that are successful are those with a strong male role model in their life. According to Michele Wallace, "the formula is simple and straightforward. The boys who don't have fathers fail. The boys who do have fathers succeed" (Wallace 1992: 125). Commenting on *Boyz N the Hood*, Ed Guerrero argues that, "Boyz tends to deliver its message in binary terms by offsetting the image of the "good" single parent father with a number of images of "bad" single parent mothers" (Guerrero 1993: 186). In film *Boyz n the Hood* Doughboy's failure and life of crime is directly attributed to his mother's poor parenting

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The narrative structure of these films do not allow the possibility that one of the central characters could even be perceived as being gay. The absence of the queer body within this genre signifies the displacement of bodies not only from communities but also the policing of the boundaries of racialized identities. The general assumption is "real" black folks cannot be gay or lesbian. In this context I am referring to the "hetero normative logic that conditions the ascription of "authentic" black identity on the repudiation of gay or lesbian identity. The jargon of racial identity insists as the gangsta-rapper Ice Cube has put, that "true niggers ain't gay" (Thomas 1998: 59). In this context sexuality becomes a marker of black authenticity. As Kendall Thomas reminds us "the jargon of racial authenticity is alive and well in African American sexual politics. Indeed, recent events suggest that this jargon has gained new force" (Thomas 1998: 61). The hood genre function as one specific site where the sexual politics of racial authenticity is reproduced.

The general assumption is that queerness is a deviation from blackness. For the queer body and the black body can not be that of the same. As a result, representations of black gays and lesbians are absent from the narrative structure of the hood genre. The only film with the exception of *Rude* in which sexuality was explicitly referenced was in *Menace to Society*. In one scene a man addicted to crack offered to perform oral sex on the character O-Dog in return for drugs. O-Dog immediately shot him. Black gays and lesbians are not only physically placed outside of the black community within this genre, they are also pathologized. The message is clear cut. This black man was only willing to engage in a homosexual act in order to sustain his drug habit. The general assumption is that drugs leads to degeneracy such as homosexuality. This man became a threat, not to O-dog's (Lorenzo Tate) sexuality but rather to own sense of blackness.

The only film within this genre that attempted to break from the dominant narrative and offer a site for examining the possibilities of an oppositional and subversive reading is Clement's Virgo film *Rude*. Clement explores the issues of sexuality and its intersection with race through the character Jordan. The character Jordan is a closeted gay black man who occupies the traditionally hyper-masculinized space of boxing. This character is reminiscent of the "tragic mulatto" who tries to pass as white but is consequentially victimized. In the film *Rude*, Richard takes on the role of the "tragic queer" who is consequently victimized when his identity is discovered. *Rude* failed in its attempt to represent the intersection of blackness and sexuality. The film quickly slides into the traditional signifiers of representing gay bodies. Jordan is forced to remain silent when homophobic remarks are made and consequently pressured into gay bashing. The gay man in the park is assaulted and robbed because he is gay; we know nothing else about this character. As Walcott points out, "Rudes' narrative asks the queer body to inhabit only the space of the victim" (Walcott 1997:65). In his attempt to break from the master narrative, the tropes through which black bodies are frequently represented are strengthened. Walcott asks a very important question when he writes; "why not ask the queer body to inhabit the site of pleasure, of joy, or the site that constitute a 'normal' position in the film" (Walcott 1997: 65). The idea of two black men or two black women in love with each other without some sort of fatalistic consequences is inconceivable within this genre.

Moreover, blackness as a form of hyper-masculinity is constructed at the expense of black women and the feminization of gay men. Black men who attempt to contest or deviate from this form of hyper-masculinity are frequently called "bitches" within the narrative structure of the genre. This creates a dichotomy of the hard black male vs the soft black male who is always suspected of being queer. The narratives of the hood films are preoccupied with (re) gaining

manhood for black men (Walcott 1997: 127). The image of the 'soft black man' is done through the feminization of the black men. For 'real' men know themselves "by the virtue of their comparison to the 'other'-gay men" (Lubiano 1998 :194). These films work with the assumption that men know themselves by virtue of their comparisons to "other" which includes gay men and women.

The master narratives of homophobia and misogyny are appropriated in the construction of racial authenticity. Interestingly enough, "in the retreat to a hetro sexist conception of black identity, the jargon of racial authenticity does not repudiate but instead relies on the very racist from which it purports to declare its independence which it transposes into a darker, homophobic key" (Thomas 1998: 61). Hence, with the narrative economy of the hood genre, black gay and lesbian bodies are placed outside of the imagined boundaries that define and regulate blackness. The hood genre exemplifies the co-dependant and inter connective relationship between race, sexuality and gender.

3: 8 Conclusion

It is primarily through the trope of the urban, violence, maleness and hetro-normativity that black identities are articulated in the contemporary. Through the process of representation an esthetics of blackness is being constructed. With the narrative structure of the hood genre the black bodies becomes the symbols of menace, fear, promiscuity, crime and social degeneracy. At the same time these images are not merely the production of popular culture without any real consequences. As a result the next chapter will focus on the discursive, pedagogical, and ideological implication of these modes of signification.

Chapter Four Producing Racialized Knowledge

4.1 Introduction

In North American culture, the mass media, in its intricate ways, is interwoven into our everyday lives. It functions as one of the primary means through which information is configured, distributed and consumed. More specifically, it is through the mass media that most members of the dominant culture are informed about issues pertaining minoritized communities. However, this gaze that is refracted through the lens of the mass media is highly structured and controlled. Racialized bodies are only allowed to occupy specific spaces and narratives such as criminality, drugs, illegal immigrants, welfare queens, the victim of overt racism, the immigrant Other, and sport heroes. The production of information is organized in such a way that it makes use of preestablished codes and narratives which serves to reinforce their legitimacy. The mass media organizes and structures the ways in which racialized bodies are recognized and discussed outside of the media within everyday discursive practices. The aim of this chapter is to explore the pedagogical, discursive and ideological implications of the mass media in producing racialized knowledges. For the purpose of this analysis, the film discussed as part of the hood genre will be taken up within a Foucauldian paradigm based on the theory of discourse and its co-dependant relationship to power in the legitimization of knowledge production.

4.2 Popular Culture as Pedagogy

The mass media is pivotal in the production, organization and maintenance of perception among its audiences. As an elite institution, “the media plays a central role in shaping the social cognition of the public at large” (Dijk 1993: 242). The question of power is of crucial importance in this context for it has enormous control over what its audience will watch, become interested in, and invited to think about. The role of the “mass media in the reproduction of racism in contemporary European and North American societies is as fundamental as its general role in the political, social and ideological reproduction of modern societies” (Van Dijk 1993: 241). It plays a pivotal role in organizing and regulating our perceptions of issues such as crime, poverty, politics etc.

As one of the most pervasive elite institutions, the mass media plays a central role in the construction and reproduction of race and racism. The power of the mass media to define social issues cannot be separated from the politics of identity formation. It is through the power to communicate specific representations of both the self and the Other, “that we develop and share the multidimensional impressions of our selves and others that becomes part of the structures of meaning we rely upon to guide us through our day-to-day routines” (Grandy Jr. 1998: 4). In this context, the mass media serves as a point of reference that determines how identities are socially constructed and policed.

Therefore, the production of popular culture such as the hood genre cannot be dismissed as merely innocent entertainment without any pedagogical implications, undeserving of serious academic interrogation (Giroux 1997, Van Dijk 1993, Fiske 1993, Hall 1979). Rather, the production of popular culture has to be viewed as a central and important pedagogical site where learning occurs outside of formal institutions. According to bell hooks, “whether we like it or not,

cinema assumes a pedagogical role in the lives of many people” (hooks 1996: 2).

Audiences often engage in popular culture as a site of entertainment, pleasure and diversion from their daily routines, not realizing that popular culture simultaneously functions as an educational tool through which learning transpires. The pedagogical implications of popular culture are being recognized by some instructors in the classroom. This is exemplified by bell hooks when she writes; “it has only been in the last ten years or so that I have begun to realize that my students learn more about race, sex, and class from the movies than from the theoretical literature that I was urging them to read” (hooks 1996: 2). There exists the need to shift away from the static and restrictive definition of pedagogy, which couples education with formal institutions for the purpose of credentials. As George Dei points out,

education refers to activities which take place beyond the confines of social structures, this conception includes consuming popular music, playing on sports team, watching television and movies as forms of and sites for educational experiences (Dei 1996: 20).

Popular culture enters and shapes our learning processes outside of formal educational institutions. Hence, education has to be seen as a transformative process which, “happens at/in multiple sites and contexts-with a diverse body of participants involved” (Dei 1996: 248). Education occurs at multiple sites.

Popular cinema has to be recognized and interrogated as a pedagogical tool that informs our processes of learning. The films outlined within in the hood genre has to be implicated and critically discussed as a pedagogical tool. Hood films has to be seen and problematized as “powerful pedagogical forces, veritable teaching machines, in shaping our social imagination” in relation to identity politics (Giroux 1997: 109). As exemplified in the introductory chapter, the ways in which white youths use hood films to inform their performance of blackness speaks to their role as pedagogy. In the like manner, the intended use of John Singleton’s film *Boyz n the*

Hood by the Metro Toronto Police Services Board in 1991 as a training video for its officers, points to the pedagogical implications of the hood genre (Walcott 1997: 123). The Metro Toronto Police Services Board saw the film *Boyz N the Hood* films as a mirror that can be held up to “real”. Consequently, the underlying narrative that is legitimized, is that black bodies need to be managed through surveillance and violence.

4.3 The Hood Genre as a Discursive Site

The production of popular culture through the mass media not only functions as a pedagogical site, it also functions as a discursive site through which knowledge is produced, organized and regulated. Cultural Anthropologist, Vulda Blundell, defines discourse as, “regulated systems of statements through which knowledge is produced. Discourse is characterized by rules which limits what can and cannot, be said about a particular topic” (Blundell 1989: 71). In relation to raced bodies, the production of knowledges are organized through racialized discursive fields. According to David Goldberg,

the field of racialized discourse accordingly consist of all of the expressions that make up the discourse, that are and can be expressions of this discursive formation. It is the (open-ended) theoretical space in which the discourse emerges and transforms in and through its expression(s) (Goldberg 1993: 42).

It is through these discursive fields that knowledges about racialized bodies are produced and legitimated as stable knowledge. Racialized discourses are not static rather, they are trans-historical, their characteristics shift according to their historical specificity.

In contemporary North American culture, the mass media functions as the primary racialized discursive field through which the production of racialized markers are produced and regulated. In this context, the hood genre as a specific example of cultural production speaks to

this shift. As the dominant genre through which black bodies are represented, it functions as a discursive site where racialized knowledges are produced and regulated in regards to blackness. It is only through the concept of discourse that blackness as a social construct can be recognized and understood . As John Fiske points out, "Discourse always represent the world by producing knowledge about it and thus exerting power over it. There is a physical reality outside of discourse, but discourse is the only means we have to gain access to it" (Fiske 1993: 15). Hence, the established rules of the hood genre as a discursive practices shapes and limits the ways in which blackness is understood and re-articulated. Knowledge cannot be produced outside of a discursive practice, they are co-dependent on each other. consequently, "what we accept as reality in any social formation is the product of discourse" (Fiske 1993: 15). Within the hood genre as a racialized discursive practice there exist an underlying grammar through which bodies are categorized, analyzed and objectified.

As previously outline in chapter three, the rules of the master narrative in the hood genre determine the spaces that black bodies are allowed to occupy and the ways in which they should act. Within its narrative structure blackness is defined and authenticated in relation to the ghetto, violence, compulsive heterosexuality and maleness. It is through these markers that blackness is recognized and re-articulated. Discourse sets the rules which serve to construct a specific version of reality. Within this context, a specific body of knowledge is produced and organized in regards to blackness in contemporary North America. Although there exist other markers of blackness, they are not accessible because they do not fit rules of the discourse through which blackness is defined within the hood genre.

Discourse not only regulates the production of knowledge, it also regulate who can and cannot speak about a given subject. Discourse regulates how its subjects should act and speak. An individual cannot speak or write outside discourse, rather, it is within discursive practices

that an individual subject position can be located. We all enunciate from specific and sometimes contradictory discursive fields as an authoritative source of knowledge. The racialized narratives within the hood genre are authenticated as the “truth” or representations of the “real” by making hyper visible the bodies of black men as the directors of these films. This allows for individuals such as John Singleton, director of *Boyz N the Hood*, and Allen and Albert Hughes, directors of *Menace to Society* to become experts on blackness. Their expertise is frequently called upon by other media sources.

At the same time the production of racialized knowledges through discourse cannot be separated from its location to power. The validity of specific knowledge or narrative is dependent on its proximity to power. Although there exists a dominant narrative in relation to a given subject, this does not mean there are no other narratives. Rather, there are competing narratives within multiple discursive practices. However, “truth” is determined by the relationship between discourse and power. In this context we need to take careful note of Foucault’s comment on regimes of “truth”:

each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as the true; the mechanism and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault 1980:131).

A critical reading of Foucault, ‘truth claims’ are imposed by the dominant structure of power. It is through power that a specific ‘truth claim’ or narratives can become legitimized as “the truth” and attain the status of common knowledge. As Foucault reminded us, “Knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and there is no point in dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power” (Foucault 1980: 52). Within the Foucauldian paradigm outlined, power produces knowledge.

It is within this context that the voices and experiences of marginalized communities are silenced and rendered invisible. Films within the hood genre are produced and distributed by large multi-national production companies with millions of dollars in their budgets allocated to post production expenditures such as promotions and music videos. In contrast, counter hegemonic narratives can be found in independent black films (which will be discussed in chapter five) which seeks to disrupt normative narratives. However, these films are usually produced and financed on the margins. Unlike the hood films that are produced and distributed by large multi-national production companies with millions of dollars allocated to post production expenditures, films produced on the margin are usually made with very little financial resources. The reality is that the audiences that they reach is minimal in comparison to culture produced in the center for mass consumption.

4.4 Ideological Implication

Ideology as an analytical concept is central in understanding how narratives produced within dominant discourses are normalized and accepted as common-sensical knowledges. We cannot do research, write or talk about the representation of 'race' in popular cinema without recognizing the significance of ideology. It is within this ideological dimension that specific bodies of knowledges are normalized and legitimated as stable knowledge. The cinematic representations of blackness, specifically in the hood genre serves to ideologically organize how black bodies are constructed and interpreted in the contemporary.

For the the purpose of this project ideology, is conceptualized as the product of social practices maintained within the realm of everyday experiences. At the same time we are usually unaware of the ideological practices in which we are engaged, for ideologies function to mask and

deny its own existence. "Ideology never says, I am ideological" (Althusser 1971: 175). The concept of ideologies cannot be conceptualized as static, with no fluidity to its existence. For ideology it is not a "static set of ideas imposed upon the subordinate by the dominant ruling classes, but rather a dynamic process constantly reproduced and reconstructed in practice" (Fiske 1992: 187). Similar to discourse, ideology are also trans-historical, always changing in order to adopt to its specific moment in history.

In particular, the work of Italian scholar and political activist, Antonio Gramsci, and the French Marxist philosopher, Louis Althusser, have contributed to the understanding of the complexity of ideology. Gramsci has provided much needed insight into the understanding, inner workings, tensions and contradictions involved in the process of ideological production. Central to Gramsci's work is the concept of ideological hegemony which refers to the systematic ways the ruling class is able to rule through consent rather than force. In his seminal work the *Prison Notes* Gramsci writes: "the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group" (Gramsci 1971:12). For Gramsci, the ruling class exercises hegemony insofar as its interest and idea are acknowledged and normalized as the prevailing ones. In this context ideology is dependent on its proximity to the existing power bloc. At the same time once hegemony is accomplished it is never absolute, such "consent is always fragile and precarious, is always subject to contestation and consequently has to be won and rewon" (Fiske 1992: 41). These prevailing ideas appear to be natural and not in the interest of the ruling class. Hegemony is accomplished through consent rather than cohesive force

Following in the traditions Gramscian, Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, proposed a formulation of ideology which has proven most useful in the understanding of how ideology serves to organize our perceptions. In particular his work on the concept of interpellation is

crucial in understanding how media functions as an ideological site. For Althusser, ideology recruits its subjects through the process of interpellation. According to Althusser “ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing” (Althusser 1971: 174). It is within the process of interpellation that subject positions are constructed. Ideologies hail its subjects, in the like manner that you would call out to someone on the street, “hey you!”. That individual in the crowd on the street will recognize that they are being hailed. In other words “ideology functions as a system of address, and individuals are positioned as social subjects through their response in the system” (White 1992: 169). The main premise of the Althusser’s concept of interpellation is that individual beliefs are “formulated within positions already fixed by ideology as if they were their true producers” (Larrain 1996: 49). In the process subjects are recruited and subject position are legitimized.

It is within the theoretical works of Gramsci and Althusser that the concept of racial ideology can be located and understood. Racial ideology can be best defined as a “system of belief that is cooperated into a wide range of discourse in ways that reinforce and reproduce beliefs and assumptions about individuals because of their identification with a particular racial group” (Grandy Jr 1998: 81). One characteristic of racial ideology is its ability to “disappear from view into the taken-for-granted ‘naturalized’ world of common sense, like gender, race appears to be ‘given’ by nature” (Hall 1990: 9). It is within this ideological realm that racialized knowledges are reproduced as common-sensical beliefs. Racial ideologies “work by constructing for their subjects (individuals and collective) positions of identification and knowledge which allows them to utter ideological truths as if they were their own authentic author” (Larrain 1996: 49). For example, the idea that contemporary North American society is under siege by young urban black males as a

dangerous class can now be re-articulated as common-sensical knowledge.

In this context, the hood genre functions as an ideological site where racial ideology are reproduced and given legitimacy. It determines and shapes the ways in which blackness as a social construct is recognized and understood. The hood genre as a media text “interpellates the spectator and offer them the position from which the text is obviously comprehensible: thus the position of the [spectator] is that of the subject in and off ideology” (Young 1996: 35). Hood films rarely subverts the dominant narratives through which blackness is signified. Rather, dominant narratives are affirmed by such representations, reinforcing racism and policies. In the recent years the “media representations of poor black males (e.g Rodney King and Willie Horton) served as the symbolic basis for fueling and sustaining panics about crime, the nuclear family, and middle class security while they displaced attention from the economy, racism, sexism and homophobia” (Gray 1994:177). These films provide further evidence that black folks are violent, involved in drugs and other criminal activities. Dangerously, the hood genre “shows that the same old racist/sexist stereotypes can be appropriated and served up to the public in a new and more fashionable disguise” (hooks 1996: 58)

Central to the body of knowledge that is ideologically reproduced, is the politics that are involved in the production of culture and the political and historical context in which it is consumed. First, films within the hood genre are consumed predominantly by white audiences who would otherwise have no contact with black culture. At worst these films “rarely position audiences to question the pleasures, identification that they experience as whites viewing dominant representational practices of race” (Giroux 1997: 110). The narrative structures of theses films are organized in such a way that white Spector ship are not displaced from their comfort zone.

Secondly, these images are produced by large film studios who not are interested in

making a profit. These large film studios are interesting in blackness as a commodity rather than for social transformation. As bell hook points out, “the ‘idea’ of a ‘black film’ has been appropriated as a way to market films that are basically written and produced by white people as though they act represent and offer us – ‘authentic’ black” (hooks 1996: 52). These images are usually informed racist/sexist stereotypes which have proven to be large box office success pass. Consequently, “it has become most evident that as black artist seeks a ‘crossover’ success, the representations they create usually mirror dominant stereotypes” (hooks 1996: 58). Human agency is active in the reproduction of these images.

At the same time, we can not simply take up these films in regards to discourse, production of knowledges and ideology as merely free floating ideas without any material consequences. The production of knowledge is neither a-political nor generated in a social vacuum. Rather knowledge is produced within specific political and social contexts in relation to power. These films are grounded in a reality in which their consequences are real in terms of how it determines and organizes the experiences of racialized bodies. The imagery in these films can be dissociated from the bleak economic and social realities that many African Americans and Canadians experience. Along with the increase in unemployment and under employment experiences by members of black communities there is also an increasing number of black men incarcerated as a result of the expanding penal industry. These images cannot be separated from the alarming number of black students who are pushed out of the school system as a result of various pull and push factors (Dei 1998). In North America in recent years there has been an anti-discriminatory back lash as a result of gains made by the new right wing movement. In the United States the gains made by the civil rights movement in the sixties are slowly being dismantled. It is within this political and economic climate that these narratives have to be grounded.

In particular, the construction of blackness through the cultural marker of violence and nihilism serves to provide evidence that blackness needs to be contained. As Henry A. Giroux points out, "such racially coded discourses serve to mobilize white fears and legitimate "drastic measures" in social policy in the name of crime reform" (Giroux 1996: 56). The constructs of blackness as a threat have been used to legitimate polices, surveillances and the containment of black bodies. In the present trend of neo-conservatism and the pathologization of communities, these narratives provide the evidence that urban ghettos are a space of violence and social decay that need to be contained. It also adds currency to the racist discourse that already exists in regards to black bodies.

4.5 Conclusion

It is apparent, that knowledge is produced and regulated through discursive fields which are maintained within the realms of ideological practices. This chapter critically connects the production and maintenance of racialized knowledges through the hood genre as pedagogical, discursive and ideological site. Images of black men and women in the hood genre are grounded in well-worn stereotypes that are constantly reproduced. At the same time these images are neither fixed or static. These images can be ruptured through human agency. Hence, the next chapter will explore the production of counter narratives through third/ independent cinema.

CHAPTER FIVE

Third Cinema: Disrupting Hegemonic Discourses

5.1 Introduction

Undoubtedly, dominant cultural hegemony has constructed and objectified black bodies as the Other within structured and established narratives. Specifically, the images that dominant cinema have traditionally projected usually reflect western perception of black identities grounded in racialized markers. As previously outlined in chapter three, markers such as the inner city, drugs, violence, and the dysfunctional family are frequently deployed in the construction of blackness in dominant North American narratives. At times these narratives function as the real which regulates the gaze in which black subjects/objects are positioned.

Although it is important to critically interrogate the dominant regimes of representation through which black bodies are imagined and represented, it is simultaneously a dangerous and slippery terrain. By focusing solely on dominant representational practices, one can easily reproduce a discourse of hopelessness and the lack of agency. Such a position erases the long tradition of resistance through group and collective agency within black communities both historically and contemporarily. It denies the agencies of black subjects and conscious political projects which seek to produce alternative narratives. As a result, this chapter critically explores ways in which counter hegemonic representations of black bodies in third cinema, functions to resist racist, patriarchal and hetero-normative visual constructions as previously outlined in chapter three.

5.2 Third Cinema: Producing Culture on the Margins

It is within the margins of western cultural production that traditionally silenced voices struggle to disrupt fixed and normative assumptions about the identities in which they have been historically positioned. As Stuart Hall reminds us,

instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production'; which is never complete, always in the process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation (Hall 1990: 301).

This position not only problematizes the construct of blackness being fixed, it also draws our attention to possibilities for critical intervention and transformation. In this context, the production of counter-hegemonic narratives through the reworkings and representations of black identities can challenge the ways in which black bodies are commonly represented. Specifically, the production of counter hegemonic narratives in black-oriented films, videos, photographs, mixed media, and literature have played an important role in providing alternative modes of presenting the complexities of black identities in the diaspora. These modes of representations reject the notion of black identities as a fixed and essentialized category. Rather, identities are taken up as multiple, unstable, and historically situated processes that are ongoing.

In particular, the literary works of James Baldwin and Audre Lorde speak to this tradition of resistance on the margins within African diasporic literature. Their works explore the tensions of race, gender, sexuality and its intersectionalities in the construction of identities and the ways in which oppressions are experienced. Interestingly enough the work of Baldwin and Lorde are relegated to the margins within dominant culture because of their racialized identity and within the black community because of their sexual identity. The experiences of both authors speak to contradictions and messy terrains through which identities are negotiated. At the same

time, the contributions of Baldwin and Lorde have expanded the definition of black identities within the African diasporic literary canon by giving traditionally silenced voices such as women, black gays and lesbians a space to speak and to be heard. The reworking of black identity politics in the literary works of individuals such as James Baldwin and Audre Lorde, "creates spaces and free zones of discourses for the formerly profane black subjects who are now empowered with voice and presence" (Reid 1997: 82). In their literary works, both Baldwin and Lorde take up black identities in such a way that it resists and transcends both eurocentric and essentialized notions of black identity politics.

In the like manner, in visual art the photography of the London based, Nigerian born photographer Rotimi Fani-kayode disrupts the essentialized colonial gaze, which positions black masculinity as a site of fear and untamed heterosexuality. Rotimi not only challenges but subverts popular depiction of black bodies in photography. Rotimi's "photography permits a postNegritude visual identity that is racial, sexual and ethnic" (Reid 1997: 86). In his work, black bodies are photographed as whole, occupying spaces which place them outside of the traditional sexualized and racialized gaze. Rotimi in his photographs attempts, "to portray a number of different racial bodies, to constitute a range of different black subjects, and to engage with the positionalities of a number of different kinds of black masculinities" (Smith 1997: 132). In the process, a counter hegemonic imagistic narrative is constructed which seeks to disrupt the dominant gaze through which the bodies of black men are often restricted to in the production of dominant culture.

Moreover, by drawing attention to works of individuals such as Audre Lord, James Baldwin and Rotimi Fani-kayode is to suggest that there is space for resistance and agency through the production of counter hegemonic narratives. It is only through the production of counter hegemonic narratives that we can rupture stable knowledges. As Professor George Dei

reiterated during seminar discussions, "we cannot fold our hands, sit back and give up, we have agency as individuals and as a collective (Dei Jan. 99). We can resist, by engaging ourselves in the production narratives from our communities that challenges existing narratives about who we are.

In particular, interventions through the genre of third/ independent cinema has open up a cinematic space which disrupts dominant representations of blackness by producing counter narratives. Third cinema as genre can be best, "characterized by its political savvy, a politics of critical leftist theory and esthetics and its ability to unsentimentally challenge political and cultural orthodoxies of all kind" (Walcott 1997: 55). The influence of literary works of authors such as Baldwin and Lorde, along side the photographic tradition of Rotimi are highly visible within the aesthetic of third cinema. Cultural Studies critic Manthia Diawara best defines third/ independent cinema when she insightfully writes;

"black independent cinema has remained marginal until now because its language, not unlike the language of most independent films, is metafilmic, often nationalistic, and not "pleasurable" to consumers accustomed to mainstream Hollywood products. Black independent cinema, like most independent film practices, approaches film as a research tool. The film makers investigate the possibilities of representing alternative black images on the screen: bringing to the foreground issues central to black communities in America; criticizing sexism and homophobia in the community; and deploying Afrafemcentric discourses that empower black women" (Diawara 1995: 407).

Third cinema draws its inspiration from the complexity of black communities and histories in the diaspora. These films provide an alternative way of look at black identities outside of the fixed stereotypes of Hollywood cinema.

Within the discourse of third cinema black bodies are neither marginalized or taken up within the stereotypical imagistic roles such as the gang banger, drug dealer and over sexed. It challenges and disrupts the master narratives in which blacks bodies are traditionally located. For third cinema usually reflects a sense of community while functioning as a site of resistance. In this context, third cinema performs "a critical function in providing a counter-discourse against

those versions of reality produced by dominant voices and discourses" (Mercer 1988: 52). These marginal interventions in the essentialized and static depictions of blackness allow for the possibility of variance in the construction and recognition of the multiple points of political identification that constitute black diasporic identities. Most important, third cinema is financed, produced and marketed outside of the dominant powers structures with finances the production of mainstream films. As a result, the narrative structure of third cinema usually deals with issues from within the communities in which they are produced.

Third cinema as genre physically emerged primarily out of Britain, the Caribbean, Africa, Latin America and the United States, outside of Hollywood structures. Canadian contribution to third cinema has been minimal (Walcott 1997). Third cinema as a genre can be best characterized by the works of individuals such as Isaac Julien, John Akomfrah, Julie Dash, Charles Burnett, Black Audio and film collective, Cheryl Dunye, Michelle Parkerson, and Jack Waters to name a few. However, for the purpose of this analysis I will focus specifically on Julie Dash's (1991) acclaimed film *Daughter of the Dust* and Cheryl Dunye's (1996) most recent film *Water Melon Woman*, as sites of resistance and broadened definitions of black diasporic identities.

5.3 Reading Daughters of the Dust

In particular, American independent film maker Julie Dash's (1991) *Daughters of the Dust* has become one of the most recognizable and influential films within the genre of third cinema. Through a nonlinear narrative structure Dash explores the Gullah culture of South Carolina and Georgia Sea Islands. The main plot of the film examines the anxieties felt by four generations of the Peasant family as they decide whether to migrate north and leave behind their community, heritage, identity and African communal values. This film takes place in a single day and is

narrated through the voice of the unborn child of Eula and Eli. Viola Peazant (Cheryl Lynn Bruce), a Baptist missionary who has lived on the main land, arrived to her island ancestral home and the home of her extended family to bring them to the mainland. She brings along Mr. Snead (Tommy Hicks), a photographer, to document the family's migration. Like Viola, Yellow Mary (Barbara O) accompanied by her lesbian lover, also arrives to the island the place of her birth. However, unlike Viola she does not occupy the role of the missionary, rather she is symbol of independent womanhood and sexual choice. Interestingly enough, Yellow Marry occupies the role of the outsider within her family, her light complexion is frequently a source of criticism by the other women on the island.

Nana Peazant (Cora Lee Day) the matriachial head of the Peazant family struggles to keep the family's traditional values intact on the eve of their migration. Nana can be best described as the "family griot, nurturing her fragmenting family with knowledge of Yoruba religious and medical practices" (Reid 1998: 29). As the rest of the family prepares to leave, Nana struggles with her ties to tradition and her ancestors. Through the process of remembrance we learn about members of the Ibo people who were brought to America in chains, survived slavery, and kept their memories intact of their ancestors. It is these memories of ancestry and indigenous knowledges that have served to define Nana's relation to the Gullah community. Rightfully so at the end of the film Nana decided to remain behind.

Another major plot in the film, involves Eula Peazant (Alva Rogers). She has been raped, presumably by a white man, and is pregnant. Eli (Adisa Anderson), her husband, wants her to tell him who raped her and is worried that the child isn't his. However, Eula does not want to tell him because she fears he will retaliate and consequently be lynched. This fear is articulated by Yellow Marry in her response to Eula. "there is enough uncertainty in life without wondering what tree your husband is hanging from". As a result Eli became highly interested in the anti-

lynching movement on the main land. At the end of the film through the narration of his daughter we find out that he became involved in the anti-lynching movement.

The farewell picnic, a ritual 'last supper', not only brings the family together, but also, makes visible the conflicting elements among the family's women. It is during the preparation for the picnic that we discover the tensions and clashes of identities. Grandma Nana, opposed to the migration North, which she sees as a destruction of the family, and a disconnection from her ancestors (Diawara 1995: 417). In contrast, Haagar who was married in the Peasant's family echoes Viola's Christian teaching is most harsh critic of Nina's indigenous beliefs. Haagar sees the migration to the north as a positive step for the Peasant family. She strongly believes that it will improve their lives with both material and symbolic resources, in particular educational improvement for their children. However, one is left to wonder how their spirit void will be filled on the mainland without the ancestral teachings of Nana.

Interestingly enough, one of the most important and symbolic sub plots in the film is the relationship between Haagar's daughter Iona (Bahni Turpin) and St. Julian Last Child (M. Cochise Anderson), the last Cherokee in the region. The name "St. Julian Last Child" is symbolic of the systematic genocide of the aboriginal communities and their contact with Christianity. "Last Child" is depicted as being articulate rather than a docile body or noble savage as commonly portrayed in dominant narratives. In his letters to Iona we find out that he is not only articulate but also very passionate and poetic. Through the practice of naming he reminds both the audience and Iona that the physical space which Ibo landing occupies once belonged to his ancestors. At the end of the film as the boat is about to depart for the mainland, Last Child rides in the screen on his horse, Iona ran from the boat and willingly rides off with Last Child. Iona and Last Child riding off together in the sunset on a white horse has become the most powerful and memorable scene in the film. According to film director Julie Dash, "where have

you ever seen a Native American win in the end and ride off in glory? When have you ever seen an African American woman riding off into the sunset for love and not escaping?" (Dash 1992: 49).

The narrative structure and cinematic styles of this film deviates radically from the basic convention and techniques associated with dominant cinema. This film provided a space for African American women at the center of the screen where they can discuss issues in relation to other black women. In the film "*Daughters of the Dust* the screen belongs to black women" (Diawara 1995: 416). *Daughters of the Dust* can be best described as a woman centered film. As Ed Guerrero points out, "like the novels of black women that started to emerge in the 1970s, *Daughters of the Dust* pointedly sets out to reconstruct, to recover a sense of black women's history, and to affirm their cultural and political space in the expanding arena of black cinema production" (Guerrero 1993: 175). Rather, than occupying the margins or being completely erased black women are placed at the center of the narrative. Unlike the hood genre notions of blackness and community do not revolve solely around the black male.

Most important, *Daughters of the Dust* disrupts the popular images of black women as sexual objects, drug addicted and/or mothers on welfare. Rather, this film depicts African American women as complex characters, with multiple subject positions, who are capable of discussing and articulating issues in their daily experiences. As bell hooks points out we are never going to see a break with the stereotype if someone does not intervene and challenge us to think and feel differently about Black female images (Dash 1992: 41). In this context, *Daughters of the Dust*, acts as "critical intervention, opening up a cinematic space where women can disinvest from and disengage with old representations" (hooks 1996: 19). This film opens the possibilities in the re-representation of black women.

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95

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converting to Christianity. Slaves were brought to the diaspora "from different countries [in Africa], tribal communities, villages, languages and god (Hall 1990: 227) This position destabilizes the construct of Africa as a homogeneous land mass constituting a homogeneous and essentialized identity from which diasporic identities have originated.

Most important, Julie Dash explores how the boundaries of racialized identities are imposed and policed from within communities. Throughout the film the character Yellow Mary is frequently criticized for not being black enough. In one moment in the film, Eula reminds both the audience and the Peasant women that no one is blacker and purer than anyone else. As Manthia Diawara writes in relation to this scene; "the spatial representation again becomes paramount, because Eula's speech is directed to the on-screen audience of the Peasant family, as well as the off screen spectators" (Diawara 1995: 420). Within this particular scene Julie Dash draws the audience attention to the ways in which black communities both historically and contemporarily have policed the boundaries of racialized identities and its consequences.

5.4 Water Melon Woman: Race, sex, and Living In-Between

The exploration of the multiplicity of black subjects that is further explored in more recent cinematic work Cheryl Dunye (1996) in her film *Water Melon Woman*. The main plot of *Water Melon Woman* revolves around an aspiring filmmaker Cheryl (Cheryl Dunye) along with her best friend (Tamara) Valarie Walker, two video store clerks in Philadelphia. The film documents Cheryl's struggle to define her identity, reclaim a viable self image from the established stereotypes of dominant cinema, and finally to get her out of her dead end job at the video store. Cheryl becomes attracted to and intrigued with an obscure mammie character who had small parts in a number of pre-1940 motion pictures with titles such as *Plantation Memories*.

This elusive woman becomes the subject of Cheryl's film. With great difficulty she begins to piece together fragments of the actress' life.

Cheryl solves the first piece of the puzzle after speaking to her mother and going through her archive of movie magazines and photos from the pre fifties era. She discovered that the actress sang at black nite clubs such as the Blue Note and Show Boat in her home town in Philadelphia. Subsequently, after searching the public archives and library without any success, Cheryl is referred by her mother to Shirley Hamilton a close friend of the actress listed as the Watermelon Woman. It is at this point in the film that both Cheryl and the audience discovers the actual name of the *Watermelon Woman* was Faye Richards (Lisa Marie Bronson). Shirley Hamilton explains to Cheryl that Faye Richards was indeed a former night club singer and the lesbian lover of the white female director Martha Page who cast Faye in her films. Cheryl travels throughout Pennsylvania in search of information about the Water Melon Woman brings her into contact with friends and intimates of the late actress, archives, the sister of Martha Page. In one scene in an interview with Cheryl, Camille Paglia makes a cameo appearance playing herself in a hyperbolic argument that says black should be proud of the mammy and of water melon eating because such symbols of fruitfulness and abundance are good.

As Cheryl digs for facts about the Watermelon Woman, the similarities between Cheryl's subject and own life becomes apparent to the audience. One of the most important sub plots in the film involves the relationship that develops between Cheryl and Diana (Guinevere Turner) an economically secure young white woman. Cheryl and Diana became attracted to each other after their encounter each other at the video store where Cheryl works. A sexual relationship develops between Cheryl and Diana. Also, Diana used her privilege to set up an interview between Cheryl and and Martha Page's sister.

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98

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identities which compose the category black" (Hall 1996: 443). In this film no individual is allowed to occupy one subject position. Cheryl's search for Faye Richards allows the audience to experience the multiple points of political identification that Cheryl occupies as a twenty-something year old, black woman, working class, lesbian involved in an inter-racial relationship. In particular, through the relationship between Diana and Cheryl the audience begins to see the multiplicity of subjects that black bodies can occupy, all of which find resonances both in the lives of Faye and Cheryl. Films such as *Watermelon Women* make it perfectly clear, "that the question of black subject cannot be represented without reference to the dimensions of class gender, sexuality and ethnicity" (Hall 1996: 444) In the film *Watermelon Women*, race, gender, class and sexuality are central to the narrative and the ways in which their points of intersections organizes and determines the experiences of the women in the main plot of the film.

Specifically, *Watermelon Women* takes the representation of race and sexuality. Black women and their sexuality are placed at the center of the narrative. There is the tendency to reduce blackness to an entirely hetero-sexual construct as exemplified in the hood genre. However, the sexuality of the main characters draws attention to the challenges of representing and questioning the multiple points of political identification that black women occupy.

Similar to Julie Dash. Cheryl also draws our attention to the ways in which racial categories are imposed and policed from within black communities. In one part of the film an angry Tamara explained to Cheryl, "all I see is once again you going out with a white girl acting like she wants to be black and you acting like a black girl wanting to be white". Cheryl insightfully replies "I am black, who says dating somebody white does not make me black, who says anything about who I fuck in the first place anyway". Through the act of inter-racial dating Cheryl is not only displaced from her community but her identity is questioned by her best friend.

5.5 Renegotiating Black Masculinity

Lastly, I will like to turn my attention to the representation of black masculinity within the genre of third cinema. The social construction of masculinity is very much informed by racist and patriarchal assumptions about racialized bodies. As Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien points out,

the hegemonic repertoire of images of black masculinity, from docile "Uncle Tom," the shuffling minstrel entertainer, the threatening native, to "Super spade" figures like Shaft, has been forged in and through the histories of slavery, colonialism and imperialism (Mercer and Julien 1994: 199).

At different points in history black masculinity has been mediated through different socially constructed signifiers. As illustrated in chapter three, within the hood genre blackness is frequently signified through markers such as drugs, sexism, hetero-normativity, nihilism, crime, prison and disengagement. As a result, there exists a vast and empty space in the cinematic representation of black masculinity. Missing "from Hollywood's flat, binary construction of manhood is the intellectual, cultural, and political depth and the humanity of black men and their contribution to culture" (Guerrero 1994: 185). Third cinema works within this void by producing an counter hegemonic narrative in relation to black masculinity.

Third cinema as a genre works within this vast and empty space of representation in its struggles to redefine and contextualized black masculinity against the traditional tropes which black masculinity is relegated. As exemplified in both *Daughters of the Dust* and *Watermelon Woman* black masculinity is re-articulated in such a way that its decentered and at the same time liberates black men from the established tropes through which black masculinity is traditionally articulated. In both films, the over sexualized and violent black male which have dominated the imagistic modes of representing black bodies are absent. Rather, we are presented with black men

who are fathers, brothers, grandfathers, gays and bisexual, hetro sexual, working class, middle class, and the list goes on. The multiple positions of identification that black male bodies occupy in communities in the diaspora are made visible. Both Dash and Dunye works with a concept of blackness that seek to, "challenge and disturb racial and class construction of blackness" and the patriarchal and hetro normative basis of black masculine privilege and domination (Gray 1994: 177). As bell hooks points out watching these "film may be the first instance for many people to look at black maleness with visual pleasure, not with a sense of threat or danger" (hooks 1990: 198). What both films reveal is that black masculinity can be constructed in multiple ways. As Thelma Golden reminds us, "there is no one black masculinity, no essential "subject". There is no single way to represent the black male as a definitive character" (Golden 1994: 25). The possibilities of representation of black masculinities are multiple.

Most importantly, third cinema as a genre shifts away from the tendency to locate black masculinity within tropes of compulsive heterosexuality. Specifically, in the film *Watermelon Women* which deals with intersections of sexuality and race the representation of black gay men is most visible. Although gay black men do not occupy the center in this film, he is still a visible part of the community, as a friend of the Cheryl's family, he can be seen and heard on the street, and in the library. Unlike the hood genre where black gay men are visually amputated from the community, rather gay men are visible part of their community. Contrary to misinformed ideas and the discourse of homophobia the reality is that, "gay men have always been an integral part of black society, active in politics, the church, and cultural activities like music and literature and art" (Mercer and Julien 1994: 199). Moreover, in *Watermelon Woman*, bodies of gay men are not relegated to the one dimensional character, occupying the role of the victim such as in Clements Virgo's film *Rude*. In his film he occupies a space of pleasure.

The complex representations of blackness in third cinema as exemplified in *Daughters of*

the Dust and *Watermelon Woman* function to subvert the traditional representations that locate blackness within sexist, homophobic and misogynist narrative structures of dominant cinema. However, unlike the hood films that are produced and distributed by large multi-national production companies with millions of dollars allocated to post production expenditures, films produced on the margin are usually made with very little financial resources. For example Julie Dash's *Daughter of the Dust* was produced and financed with the help of community organizations. Although *Daughter of Dust* premiere quite successfully at the acclaimed Sundance film festival, it had difficulty finding a distributor (Guerrero 1993: 177) The lack of financial support for films with the genre of third cinema points to ways in which eurocentrism and capitalist continues the influence the production of popular culture. As Ed Guerrero insightfully points out, "the way that film industry and its organs perceive projects, issues, or cultural perspective that not easily packaged, commodified, or subordinated to the demands of colonized, ready made market" (Guerrero 1993: 177). The production of popular culture is separate off the economic structures in is produced.

5.6 Conclusion

In this context, Cheryl Dunye's film *Watermelon Woman* along with Julie Dash's film *Daughter of the Dust*, opens up the possibilities of representing blackness by producing a counter narrative. Both films disrupt hegemonic notions of blackness by exploring the multiple points of political identification that black bodies can assume. With the genre of third cinema black identities are not signified through the tropes of the inner city, violence, drugs, maleness or compulsive heterosexuality. Apart from bring the major arguments of this project together, the next chapter, will attempt to provide a conclusion to this project, by exploring the urgent need for transformation through agency.

Chapter Six

Conclusion: Where do we go From Here?

It is primarily through the tropes outlined in the hood genre that black identities are represented in the contemporary. Within the narrative structure of the hood genre, black bodies becomes the symbols of menace, fear, promiscuity, crime and social degeneracy. These films are marked by their claim authenticity. The trope of realism and authenticity is used to justify, legitimate and market these narratives. However, at the same time, the commodification of blackness can not be ignored. Images of black folks as athletics, drug dealers, pimps, gang members and over sexed sells, because they fits into existing racialized narratives which draws on the trope of realism. These images cannot be separated from the patriarchal, hetro normative, racist, capitalist structure in which they are produced. Productions companies are not interested in social transformation, if it means loss in possible revenues.

As a result of its mass appeal the hood genre continues to dominate popular representation of blackness. The latest addition to the hood genre is the film *Belly* (1998) directed by popular rap music video director Hype Williams. Like its predecessors, *Belly*, drew on similar tropes in its representation of blackness. These images are not merely restricted to film within the genre, rather elements of the narrative structure of this genre is reproduced in other sites. One such example of the hood genre influence is in the recent Fox Network animation series the *PJ's*. The *PJ's* draws on the defining tropes of the hood genre, it is set in an inner city, drug infested, violent neighborhood. Like the hood genre, the male characters occupies the center of the narrative while the female characters are placed on the periphery.

These images cannot be dismissed as simply harmless entertainment. As illustrated in my personal narrative, their discursive and pedagogical implication cannot be ignored. The production of these images support and reinforces the racism, mediated by class, gender, and sexuality that black folks experiences in our lived experiences. In this context, racialized identities are maintained by regulating the possibilities of how blackness is represented and imagined. Within the new language of racism, these films provides the evidence that black folks are prone to violence, drugs, social assistance and teenage pregnancy. As Heidi Mirza puts it “the inscription of race on the skin-lingers under the cloak of culture” (Mirza 1998: 111) Within this imagistic economy we can now talk about race without ever mentioning race. Instead we talk about the inner-city poor, welfare mothers, drugs, gangs and the ability to play sports as the signifiers of social and cultural difference. Consequently, these racialized signifiers serves to regulate and police the ways in which black bodies are imagined. My personal narrative in the introductory chapter speaks to ways in which these images regulates and organizes the lives of black folks in their everyday experiences.

At the same time, these constructs are not fixed. The process of racialization is never complete. Racialized identities are actively produced by human agencies within specific discursive sites such as the media, scientific discourses and the production of popular culture. At different points in history, race has taken on different meanings. Identities of black folks are not biologically determined or fixed in some essentialized historical past. There exist the possibilities for change through the production of counter hegemonic narratives. As exemplified through the use of Julie Dash and Cheryl Dunye work, there exist a space for possibilities in the representation of blackness. The production of counter narratives provides another way of looking at blackness. These narratives are intended to confront and rupture existing dominant narratives by providing its spectators with insights into the complex and heterogeneous nature of

black identity politics in the diaspora.

The most important question, is, how do we disrupt and dislodge dominant narratives? One strategy is to expose the inaccuracy of these narratives by directly implicating and exposing the ideological sites where their legitimacies are derived. Knowledge can be destabilized by tracing the genealogy of knowledges and exposing its origins. Knowledge is not produced by a lone scholar in a social vacuum. Rather, the socio-political, economic, historical, and temporal context have to be identified and implicated. It is within this context, that popular culture is produced and consumed.

As marginalized bodies our political project should include the production of our own narratives. This can be accomplished by the inclusion of marginalized bodies and voices such black, female, working class, gay, and lesbian bodies within the discursive sites discussed. At the same time we have to be careful of the danger. Not all black bodies are interested in representing blackness. In this context, my position is similar to that of Isaac Julien's when he writes; "blackness as a sign is never enough. What does that black subject do, how does it act, how does it think politically. Being black isn't good really good enough for me: I want to know what your cultural politics are" (Julien & Mercer 1996: 474). For example, all of the films discussed were produced and directed by men of colour.

Having menoritized bodies in positions of power are meaningless, if their actions are not informed by critical pedagogy. What critical pedagogy does, is to open space of possibilities, other than the dominant approach. The production of our own narratives has to be informed by critical pedagogy, or else we will run the risk of reproducing the dominant narrative. This point speaks to the need for anti-racist education and critical pedagogy. Specifically, this project points to the need for implementation of critical pedagogy in classroom by teacher/practitioners. Like any other text, the production of popular culture has to be read critically. Rather than simply

dismissing these films, they can be used as an educational text for students in understanding and addressing the ways in which media images shapes our everyday experiences and attitudes.

Lastly, resistance through individual and collective agency should be a project of responsibility for marginalized communities. There is an urgent need for resistance through both individual and collective agency. It is within this space of possibility and agency that I would like to conclude this project. As individualized bodies we have agency. To reiterate professors Dei, “we cannot fold our hands, sit back, and give up” (Dei: Jan. 1999).

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