

'Who am I?' Thoughts on Fabricating the Body in Postcolonial/ Post-apartheid South Africa¹

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1 Fabricating the body

Racial and gender discrimination has always been based on the ontology of race and gender. From recent public debates (the controversial anti-rape advertisement of Charlize Theron, the position of women in some Afrikaans churches within the Reformed tradition and the accusation of racism within the media) it appears as if that very ontology is still firmly in place, albeit, in some instances, in a reversed situation. The danger lies in a tendency to perpetuate the very frameworks which are being rejected, to come full circle. During the past three centuries, the racial (European) and gender (male) gaze on the body 'invented' the African as a dangerous individual and the female as a lesser human being. In turn, as if in a gesture of retaliation, the African and female gaze on the European in Africa and on men, can 'invent' a personality that is perceived as a source of danger, corruption, alienation, in short, a menace to racial harmony and gender equality (cf. Butchart 1998:126).

This article focuses on the notion of the fabrication of the Other. The word 'fabrication' suggests that, in one's mind, one forms a picture of what the other person is. Because one sees the other person as a body, it is easy to regard those attributes attached to the other as ontological features. The moment one starts thinking in terms of ontological features, the fabricator exercises a power over the fabricated.

By the term 'Other' is meant people with whom we interact and with whom we share space and time, in other words, anyone crossing our paths in a direct or indirect way at any moment in history. In this regard, the article takes its cue from Emmanuel Levinas' idea of the encounter with the other person as Other. It is an

¹ This is a revised version of a paper given at the annual meeting of the New Testament Society of South Africa, organised by the Rand Afrikaans University on the RAU Island, April 2000.

encounter between an individual (called a 'self') and another person (called an 'Other') where that other person demands from the individual not to be killed (cf. Levinas 1985:89). Our recent past, characterised as an encounter filled with hate, violence and disdain for people whose bodies differ in terms of gender and race, has shown how futile this demand actually is. In our public debates in the aftermath of this past, we not only struggle to overcome our disdain for each other in terms of our racial categories, but within particular communities (for example, a church community) the lessons learnt in terms of racial discrimination are simply not conveyed to issues such as gender discrimination.

The issue to be discussed is the ethics of our fabrication of the Other. It concerns not only how we perceive other people, but also those reasons why we perceive people in the way we do. The article starts with a brief discussion on cultural rootedness of the fabrication of the body. It then proceeds to the issue of power in the fabrication of the body by questioning an ethics of reading the Bible which sent many a battered woman to an untimely death. Recognising the effect of one's fabrication of the body of the Other, the article explores two instances where the fabrication of the body has serious repercussions:

- (a) the sexed body in the church (the role of women in church structures, specifically in the *Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika* [RCSA]) and the sexed body in Hollywood (implied by the controversial anti-rape advert by Charlize Theron); and
- (b) the South African Human Rights Commission's (SAHRC) inquiry into racism in the media.

The article argues that the current debate leaves a person as an Other without any moral claim inasmuch as the body is constructed in ontological terms, resulting in a Foucaultian gaze that is so consumptive that it leaves the Other totally incapacitated, as was the case under colonialism. In this essay I opt for a view that sees the body of the Other in terms of a performance rather than in terms of ontology. With the help of Levinas' conception of ethics and responsibility, I argue for a look that respects the complexities of the individual in global society. Levinas' notion of responsibility is linked to Joe Teffo's interpretation of *Ubuntu*. Gender and race are social constructs by which each person tries to make sense of the presence of the body, and Levinas' idea of responsibility suggests that the gender and racial gaze should not become all-consuming.

2 The defining, defined and definite body

Randall Bailey (1998:77), an Afri-American scholar from Atlanta (USA), argues that unless one is aware of one's own cultural biases and interests in reading a text, one

may be enticed to adopt another culture which could be diametrically opposed to one's own health and well-being. According to him, this is exactly what happened with the reading practices of African people: they have accepted the reading strategies that support the ways in which whites read texts, resulting in a reading process that he deems detrimental to the African well-being (1998:78). In this regard he finds the Pauline fabrication of the bodies of those who dared to differ from him (Paul) very painful. Paul depicts his opponents as sexually undesirable persons, so that the readers of his letters would distance themselves from these opponents. In his opinion, the Pauline strategy of sexually labelling dissenters (Ephesians 4,19; Galatians 5,19 and Romans 1,26-27), that is, as practitioners of sexual taboos, is a linchpin in the discourse on black people in the USA, or in Western culture. Bailey (1998:78) says:

We have been the victims of the use of sexual innuendo. We have been described as being more sexually endowed and active than whites. We have been described as having more voracious sexual appetites than they, and because of this, we have been described as 'animal like'.

The accusation of a predominantly Western approach has also been levelled towards current South African biblical and theological scholarship. The idea that our scholarship is too closely tied up with European and North-American scholarship to be labelled 'African' in any meaningful sense of the word, has been echoing in certain South African circles since the early 1990s (cf. West 1997:101, Deist 1994). The idea, moreover, is usually reinforced by visiting European and North-American scholars whose expectations are frustrated when they do not find a deliberate 'African' slant in Euro-African scholarship. Yet, in this labelling process the term 'African' mostly eludes definition. It is to be expected that whatever would be regarded as 'typically' African, would reinforce an African stereotype.

The situation of cultural stereotyping is not unique. The Palestinians face a similar dilemma. Christian Palestinians are expected to be more Islamic, because many European scholars regard Palestine as a Muslim country. The Palestinian Christians are regarded as 'latecomers'. Much of the Western Christian support for Israel is based on the assumption that the Jews have a right to their country. Compared to this Jewish right, Palestinian Christians are regarded as intruders, although their presence dates from apostolic times!²

² Naim Ateek (1992:131) is of the opinion that Palestinian Christians are penalized by Western Christians because they have accepted the Messiahship of Jesus. But for Christian Arabs, Palestine is their homeland (1992:140). They had no part in the anti-Semitism in Europe, yet they feel they are paying the price for European atrocities (Ateek 1992:146).

Most Europeans currently living in South Africa do not do so by choice. We are here because of the colonial and imperial tendencies of Europe which have unfolded since the seventeenth century. To Europe we will forever be a reminder of their fabrication of the African body, a gaze that led to an industrial revolution in South Africa, although resulting in an exploitation of mineral wealth, a dehumanisation of people, and a destruction of African traditions. With the last visible vestiges of European power now gone, how does one negotiate the European presence in South Africa? Will it be similar to the European fabrication of the African body, as Alexander Butchart claims in a prize-winning study on the European construction of the African body? He says:

So, just as the African personality has coalesced under the earlier regime to invent the African as a dangerous individual, it was now the personality of the white man that was the source of danger, corruption and alienation (1998:126).

Butchart vividly portrays how Western socio-medical science constructed the African body, from the establishment of a refreshment post at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652 to the final years of the apartheid regime in 1990. Each period reflects a temporal specificity that produced the doctor and, in turn, the human body as its object (Butchart 1998:18). What is of major concern to Butchart (1998:180), is the methodological configuration of the colonialist gaze on the foreign body. It is a configuration steeped in objectification, reification, stereotyping, prejudice and positivism. The African body is simply an external body, stripped of any interest or ideology. He says (1998:180):

Hence, as a tactical complex within the force field of disciplinary power, the affinity of the South African socio-medical sciences with methods devoted to stripping away veneers of interests, motives and ideologies mutates into a machinery of production that sustains the material matrix of the corporeal and the social as parts of an objectively given external reality.

Racial and gender discrimination is only possible as long as the reification of the body and the social as parts of an objectively given external reality are being upheld. As long as the methodological configuration of the colonial framework holds its intellectual power, racial and gender discrimination will persist.

Ideally, in the post-colonial condition, the previously colonised actively confronts the colonial master's dominant system of thought in order to lay bare its lopsidedness, inadequacies and unsuitability for the now liberated oppressed (cf. Sugirtharajah 1998:93). However, given the power of the methodological

configuration of the colonial master it seems as if the former colonised constructs the former colonial master along the very lines of the objectivistic framework that was vehemently opposed in the past.

Racism and sexism are based on the ontology of race and gender. In the face of post-colonial criticism, which is a process of a cultural and discursive emancipation from the dominant imperial political, linguistic and ideological structures, it appears as if the fabrication of each other in our minds remains very much based on the same kind of ontological thinking.

Bailey warns against the use of the dominant force's reading strategies, as this merely perpetuates oppression and enslavement. But what if the dominant force is overturned and its reading strategies are turned onto its own members by the former subjugated masses? It may be sweet justice, but if that dominant ideology once caused enslavement and oppression, in future there will yet again be no escape from the latter. My fear is that this might currently be happening in South Africa within the debate about racism and gender issues, because the paradigm of objectivism (the framework on which apartheid was based) is still prevalent. We are still constructing images of each other as Other without taking responsibility for our constructions. It is a situation where the command 'thou shalt not kill' proves to be futile (cf. Levinas 1985:89). It is a situation where disdain for the Other is perpetuated through the discourse, sometimes deliberately, sometimes inadvertently, as is illustrated by the traditional understanding of 'turning the other cheek' in the next section.

3 The battered body

In a *Semeia* volume exploring the notion of the Bible and ethics of reading, Danna Nolan Fewell and Gary Phillips (1997:2) recount the following anecdote which forcibly illustrates the need to take responsibility for the result of one's actions (here the action constitutes a reading of a biblical text that could have a detrimental effect on others):

The ... story ... took place in an Introduction to the Bible class (the basic introductory Bible course) at Perkins School of Theology. The class was studying the institution of the *lex talionis* in Genesis 9:5-6 and Jesus' variation on the law in Matthew 5:38-39. The question was posed: If the *lex talionis* were a law meant to constrain violence, was Jesus' admonition to turn the other cheek meant to function the same way? An affirmative answer led to the next question: Does 'turning the other cheek' actually constrain violence? One after another some twenty students agreed, 'Yes, by turning the other cheek, one refuses to respond to violence with more violence and

this violence is constrained.' This refrain echoed around the room until finally a woman, who had in her C.P.E. training [continuing professional education] dealt with many battered women, spoke up and said, 'You people are so naive. This text has killed more women than any of us here would care to count'.

Traditionally this 'hard saying' of Jesus is thought to describe a course of action in the face of an unprovoked assault that kindles immediate resentment and retaliation (cf. Bruce 1985:68-71). It is argued that this saying counteracts the law of retribution found in the Old Testament. Instead of retaliation, Jesus is thought to have said that one should not retaliate at all. Add to this a particular understanding of Romans 13 that allows a ruler to use violence in order to enforce obedience.

It is in the domestic scene that such a traditional understanding wreaks havoc. In this scene, the husband (understood to be the head of the household) will have so much power that he practically has power over life and death. In households, domestic violence is usually the result of family subordinates questioning the activities of the dominant father. Thus, if a household is structured along the lines of a hierarchy where the husband is the head, and the rest of the household mere subordinates, violence might be an acceptable way to maintain order. It is in this sense that the 'turning of the other cheek' becomes problematical, because violence is not stopped. Women and children are usually at the receiving end.

Milavec (1995) argues that this saying of Jesus (turning the other cheek) could have had a very significant function in the life of those who entered the Jesus movement³. The abusive behaviour that the members of the Jesus movement experienced, corresponds to the examples of resistance explained by Matthew and Luke. 'Turning the other cheek' could happen in the following context: The son becomes a member of the Jesus movement and the father wants him to withdraw. When all arguments fail, the father backhands his son, an act that finally erodes the filial bond between father and son. The son then literally turns the other cheek and indicates to his father that his attempts to shame his son into servility have failed. Wink (1991) suggests that the act breaks a cycle of humiliation with humour and ridicule, exposing the injustice of the system. It recovers for the poor, the

³ In the early days of the church, the formation of the Jesus movement proved quite disruptive within Judaism. It disturbed family bonds, so that brothers, sisters and parents did not want to sit with the family member who had become a member of the new sect. In some cases it meant that the livelihood of a family was endangered. A similar situation is described in the *Didache*, a document purported to be the teaching of the Lord by the twelve Apostles to the Gentiles.

marginalised, and the subordinate some measure of initiative that can force the dominating group to see the oppressed in a new light⁴.

The traditional understanding of Matthew 5:38-39 creates a false consciousness when it is proclaimed that turning the other cheek will stop any violence. I say 'false consciousness', because the traditional understanding of this text is shaped by a dominant patriarchal society whose public transcript will underscore male domination and violence, if necessary. In his book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, James Scott (1990:4) argues that a public transcript is usually produced in close conformity with the way the dominant group or ruling elite would wish to have things appear. Thus, if a particular male domination seems to be intolerant towards female disobedience of any kind, in terms of a traditional understanding it would mean complete subordination of women, even in cases of violence. When the public transcript is defined by male superiority⁵, one can expect the dominated to be forced to accept the exertion of 'sovereign power', even over their bodies.

In his book *Discipline and Punish* (1977) Foucault identifies two systems of power:

- (a) sovereign power with the king as the major locus of power; and
- (b) disciplinary power that focuses on people's bodies as points of articulation of disciplinary strategies.

Sovereign power exists to the extent that it is visible to those over whom it is exercised. In monarchic times, sovereignty had to be observed, either in pomp and ceremony, or in its marking of the body of the criminal in the process of punishment. Vestiges of this kind of power can still be seen in the way people talk about power: it is something to be seized, something which can be overthrown, resisted or succumbed to. Power is equated with force, which coerces, constrains, represses, blocks or negates (cf. Armstrong 1987:68). The traditional understanding of 'turning the other cheek' reflects this kind of power when referring to domestic relationships

⁴ Gerd Theissen (1992:130-156) situates the Matthew text in the aftermath of the Jewish War (after 70 CE) when the Jews were struggling with the Roman military force. Milavec's proposal (1995) makes more sense when he argues that the consequences envisioned by the text of Matthew are too mild for the aftermath of the Jewish war. In the case of life-threatening events, the inclination would be to flee rather than to physically resist. Milavec (1995:135) argues that Theissen has been influenced by the tradition of nonviolent resistance.

⁵ This is the case with the King James Version where Matthew 5:38-39 in particular makes Jesus authorise monarchical absolutism (cf. Wink 1991).

where the husband is thought to have 'power' over the woman, because he is the 'head' of the household. 'Head', in terms of the story worlds of the Bible, should be understood in the way power was exerted over people, by kings, dictators and despots. In most of these cases power was quite authoritarian. Hence the authoritarian father figure in the household.

Foucault defines disciplinary power⁶ in terms of a prison, the 'Panopticon', that consists of a circle of cells with a tower in the middle from which prison wardens can freely gaze at the prisoners (1977:200). Since the guards gaze at the prisoners, the guards remain faceless, hidden behind shutters. They do not represent the king, as they themselves are monitored by their superiors in the prison hierarchy. In a hierarchy of automatised and disindividualised power (1977:202), movement is limited by the gaze of an other. It is a power that manifests through relationships of observation.

The anecdote of the woman counsellor illustrates how oppressive and negative a public transcript can become when the effects of a particular reading are ignored. According to Scott (1990:71), the dominant ideology conceals or misrepresents aspects of social relations that would be damaging to the interests of the ruling elite. If the traditional understanding of Matthew 5:38-39 is defined by a male class (this would not be far-fetched, given the dominant power of men within the church) it is possible that the effect of their reading would not come to their attention that easily. And take note, it is a woman who made the class attentive to the destructive effects of the traditional understanding.

The woman's gaze on a traditional reading of the Bible, questioning its truth, throws a disciplinary gaze on our Bible reading, petitioning us to think about the kind of body we are constructing to receive that other blow. She asks for a surveillance of the body, in order to see the effect of power on that body. By merely stating the fact that the traditional reading of Matthew 5:38-39 has sent many women to their death, she made visible the object (who is supposed to turn the other cheek) as a target of violent power.

⁶ Butchart (1998:30) draws the following comparison between sovereign and disciplinary power: Where sovereignty exerts control through violence and restraint, discipline does so through surveillance alone. Where sovereign power requires the visibility of itself, the unseen force of discipline makes visible the individual as object, effect and target of power. Where sovereign power emanates from a central point, disciplinary power is relational and distributed into each body and every gap between bodies. Where sovereign power is sporadically eclipsed and restored, discipline functions constantly and automatically through recruitment of the individual and the social as its relays. Where sovereign power destroys and conceals beneath its weight, disciplinary power creates and illuminates its points of articulation in the objects, effects and knowledge it sustains.

To the woman counsellor in Fewell and Phillip's anecdote, the traditional understanding of Jesus' saying is laden with political repression and demagoguery that causes the victim of domestic violence to collude with her own oppression. The counsellor expresses 'disciplinary power' in Foucault's sense. She advocates resistance and not merely the resistance of violence. She draws her audience's attention to the consequences for the female body of the exertion of sovereign power. She asks, in effect, whether the traditional understanding of 'turning the other cheek' can be valid if the consequence is death. In other words, the question is: how ethical is a particular reading of the Bible if it condemns people in abusive relationships to death or subjects people to inhumane life conditions, as was the case under apartheid?

The anecdote illustrates the consequences of failing to ask ethical questions concerning the public transcript that has become so all-consumptive that it denies the Other a distinct identity. Such a totalisation⁷ occurs whenever one knows what the other is about before the other has spoken. It is a denial of the otherness of the other, as is illustrated within the gender realm and the race realm in South Africa. It is to these two realms that the discussion will now give attention, illustrating an absurdity to which gender stereotyping may lead as well as the paralysing effect of racial stereotyping.

4 The sexed and raced body

4.1 The sexed body in the church and in Hollywood

In January 2000, at the National Synod of the *Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika* (Reformed Churches in South Africa—RCSA) the RCSA reaffirmed⁸ their 1988

⁷ I follow the general trend of Levinas' philosophy (1969) in this regard. In his philosophy, totalisation refers to that act whereby one consumes something so that nothing is left over. It is a total consumption. Anytime one takes the person in one's idea to be the real person, you close off contact with that person.

⁸ *Beeld* reported (cf. Jackson 2000a:12) that these churches did not see their way open to regard 1 Timothy 2:11-13 as a discourse determined by time (*tydsgebonde*). Paul's beliefs that women should refrain from speaking during worship, from opening up themselves for learning and from being allowed to exercise power over men, are regarded as having validity (cf. Potgieter 2000:10). Although it was said that women would not be allowed to hold official positions (elder, deacon and minister) within the church, the Synod decided to do more research regarding the role of women in the church. It seems that the question was: Now that the door has been closed to women who wish to become elders, deacons or ministers, what should their role be in a male dominated church (cf. Jackson 2000c:9 and 2000d:13)? It was requested that women serve on this research panel. For a discussion on the public debate about the position of women in the RCSA prior to the Synod's decision, see Snyman 1999.

decision that women would not be eligible to serve in the office of a minister, elder or deacon. This decision was based on what they believed to be biblical evidence. In a certain sense they are correct: in the Bible stories and events referred to in their decision, women play a minimal role in management affairs. The patriarchal nature of ancient Israelite and early Christian societies made it impossible for women to play a significant role in the structures of decision processes. The societies' male hierarchical structure has found a resonance in the churches' religious structures. But this does not mean 'the Bible is right'⁹.

A small follow-up report by Jackson (2000b:6) illustrated the banality of the churches' decision with great acumen. In Philipvale, a small town near Phillipolis in the Northern Cape, a minister worked and succeeded in getting enough people to re-establish a church that had ceased to function. The only problem was that there were not enough men around to become elders and deacons. The question before the Synod was whether the establishment of the new congregation should be postponed indefinitely, or whether women could be appointed in the offices of deacons or elders. The Synod answered that there could be no congregation when there are no competent men to fill the offices.

Although many other things happened at the Synod (cf. Vergeer 2000:6), the scope the daily newspaper *Beeld* gave to the problem of gender inequality in religious structures illustrates the importance prominent societal institutions attach to the problem of discrimination. *Beeld* even went so far as to suggest ways to alter Synod decisions (cf. Jackson 2000d)! In a male-dominated structure knowledge of how to change a decision is not that easy to find, because that knowledge is guarded by the men to whom women would have to turn to if they wanted to know how to change things.

The strength of male hegemony in the church is illustrated by the weak response *Beeld* received from female readers. Of the two who wrote letters to *Beeld* during the Synod, only one was a member of the RCSA. She (Van Dyk 2000:16) was very disappointed and expressed a concern that there would be no future generation

⁹ In a previous article I argued that to regard the Bible as prescriptive in its entirety is equal to embracing violence as biblically prescribed. I argued that once the pattern of a holy text has been established and bathed in divine authority, it only takes a small step towards subjugating other people as Israel once did (Snyman 1999:392). I believe this is currently happening to women within the RCSA. When the subjugation of women and their relegation to the margins takes place in the Bible, is it morally correct to do likewise in the 21st century? Although the RCSA Synod may argue they have 'biblical proof', it does not mean that the ideologies and ethics of ancient Israel and the early Christian church, as they are embedded in the biblical texts, are suitable to life in a society far removed in time, culture and place.

within the RCSA as the younger (female) members would seek greener pastures. Another, Büchner (2000:8), who is not a member of the RCSA, asked how long women would accept this open discrimination while they were offended as human beings by having their voices silenced. Two months after the Synod the editor of the women's magazine of the RCSA, *Die Gereformeerde Vroueblad* (cf. Venter 2000:3), published a subversive answer to the continuing exclusion of women from the power structures of the RCSA. Demanding not to be left out in the decision making process, she actively encouraged women to make their voices heard.

The absurdity of the ruling that no church is possible without men in leadership positions becomes clear when one relates these events to another discourse that put South African men in the dock, namely the anti-rape advertisement by Charlize Theron, a South African actress who found fame in Hollywood in films in which her nudity and on-screen sexual exploits raised many an eyebrow.

The text of the radio as well as the television advertisement that she recited was as follows:

Hi, I'm Charlize Theron. People often ask me what the men are like in South Africa. Well, if you consider that more women are raped in South Africa than in any other country in the world; that one out of three women will be raped in their lifetime in South Africa; that every 26 seconds a woman is raped in South Africa; and perhaps worst of all, that the rest of the men in South Africa seem to think that rape is not their problem; it is not easy to say what the men in South Africa are like. Because there seem to be so few of them out there.

The advertisement places the South African male in a very tight spot. The Advertising Standards Board found the advert to be discriminatory on the basis of gender. It was felt that it casts half of South Africa's males as rapists and the other half as men condoning rape.

On the Woza-website on the Internet, there was a lively discussion about this advert. Most of the respondents were women, and because they are the usual victims of rape, they did not express any concern about the advert's alleged stereotyping of men. Most of their complaints were aimed at the American accent of the South African-born Hollywood star. Very few regarded Theron's performance as ironical in the sense that the films in which she performed could be regarded as a champion of rape in itself, given Hollywood's own cheap portrayal of sex and violence.

Only a few of the men who participated in the discussion thought that the advert was inoffensive, arguing from the perspective of the deed and its effects. The majority, however, contested the portrayal of the male as a rapist. They argued that

there are men who respect women, and that silence on the issue of rape does not necessarily mean one condones rape. They objected to being labelled as uncaring and to being relegated to the status of common criminals.

For the sake of the argument, let us consider the possibility that the advert is right, namely that there is a link between men's attitudes towards rape and the aspect of their gender. What significance would that give to the Synod's ruling that the presence of men is a prerequisite for the establishment of a church? If male presence is a prerequisite for the creation and functioning of church structures, and if men are regarded as potential rapists, is the unintended consequence not that a church can only exist when the possibility of rape is present? After all, it is men who rape and the Synod made a decision that a church can only exist when men are available to fill the posts of deacon, elder and minister. The reasoning sounds absurd, but the situation nevertheless remains a possibility.

However, behind the RCSA's view on women and the anti-rape advert's view on men lies a gender gaze that has become so all-consumptive that the Other that is totalised by the respective gazes, barely escapes. Within the RCSA, the patriarchal structure reflected in the Bible is used as an argument, so that pious women have no choice but to collude with their own oppression. After all, the Bible tells them so. In the anti-rape advert, the rhetoric provided by a female gaze on men incapacitates men because no matter what men may do or say, they seem to be guilty of rape.

These gazes, in fabricating women and men as Other, create a relationship of power through which a certain ideology can be put forward with very little resistance. This is what rhetoric is about: fabricating the Other in order to create a relationship of power by which the Other can be subordinated to the ideology one expresses. In the male fabrication of women, women are left out of power structures because it is regarded as the will of God. In the female fabrication of the male, the latter is scape-goated. In both instances, the Other is left without any defence. In this way the Other is silenced, a strategy successfully employed in the current debate about racism, introduced by the SAHRC's inquiry into racism in the media¹⁰

¹⁰ As I revised this paper (November 2000), in one week, several racist incidents were reported: the dog attack of the SAPD on illegal immigrants (read white policemen versus Mozambicans), a so-called exclusivist retreat in the Free State that would not allow a black man on its premises and chased him away like a dog, a fatal shooting incident at Unisa where a black employee (reportedly endangering the lives of his compatriots) was shot by a white policeman. Racism is alive in South Africa, but I do not believe it is unidirectional. If racism concerns one's construction of the other person as Other, it is multi-directional. But nevertheless, the events described above make one hang one's head in shame.

4.2 The racist body

The Human Rights Commission received a request from the Black Lawyers Association and the Association of Black Accountants of South Africa to conduct an inquiry into what they believed to be racism within the media. Two reports were commissioned, one by an independent researcher, Claudia Braude (1999)¹¹, and another by the Media Monitoring Project (1999).

The Braude report states that the research into racism in the media was designed to do the following:

- * to test possible continuities between explicitly race-based white-supremacist narratives of South African society in transition and their counterparts in the context of the mainstream media;
- * to reveal possible racist assumptions operating in ways that might not be immediately visible on the surface of the text, but might nonetheless rely on racial shorthands for their explanatory power (Braude 1999:8).

Braude (1999:15) claims to have used two theoretical paradigms in her 'cultural studies' approach:

- (a) the way media creates a reality and a symbolic order; and
- (b) the way social power is maintained through racial discourses within this symbolic order.

She wanted to test whether and how the media functions as an ideological agency that plays a central role in the maintenance and reproduction of racial or class domination and social inequality. She also wanted to inquire into the role the media played in the consolidation and fortification of the racial values and attitudes of its media members. In other words 'to consider both the extent of racism in the media itself, as well as the way the media frequently serves as a communication about racism' (Braude 1999:16).

Reading through her report, I was reminded of the timely warning of stereotyping in a book exploring a cultural studies perspective on the production of meaning (Exum & Moore 1998). One of the problems detected in a cultural studies approach is the effect the individualism of contemporary Western culture has on characterisation. Margaret Davies (1998:415) warns of the danger of breaking down characterisation into a single dominant trait. Arguing that this boils down to stereotyping, Davies (1998:415) cautions that any attempt to discuss cultural aspects

¹¹ The focus here falls on Braude's report because her findings and presuppositions have had a significant impact on the public debate.

of life necessitates a reflection on those details or possible generalisations that are difficult either to define or to encompass.

Stereotyping in contemporary culture is found primarily in popular fiction, radio, television and newspaper presentations of social and political groups. It is society's way of talking and thinking in order to clarify experience (Davies 1998:430). Although useful in learning to make initial distinctions, Davies contends that one should recognise its limitations and guard against rigidity. Individualism requires a kind of justice that gives a just appreciation of individual complexities.

In the past, failure to give justice to individual complexities has led to the stereotyping of other people, giving rise to anti-Semitism and European racism. However, notwithstanding Braude's complaint about the racial stereotyping of black people in the media (which she presupposes from the outset as being owned by 'white supremacists'), her own portrayal of this 'white media' results in a stereotyping from which one finds it difficult to escape. Her failure to define her understanding of racism, added to her continuous reference to the media as owned by white supremacists, linked, moreover, to an inclination to find any evidence that would support a prejudice and combined with her stereotyping of newspaper reporting (as if every white journalist in any circumstance shares the desire to promote white supremacy), together suggest the formation of a possible racial stereotype. Her failure to take into account the complexity of individualism and heterogeneity in the press, and her resulting subscription to an implied definition of racism that is group based, actually reinforce her perceived stereotyping of the media as consisting of white supremacists.

Howard Barrell (2000), political editor of the *Mail & Guardian* newspaper, explains as follows the dilemma she creates in her study: There are two races, the one black, the other white. Each of them has its own racially determined language, art, religion, view of history. Anti-racism is the belief that these two groups are equal. Racism is the belief that the white group is intrinsically superior to the black group. In these terms, racism is something that is acquired over centuries. It manifests itself in overt bigotry as well as in unconscious attitudes that have seeped into white consciousness over years of white domination. The latter is very hard to recognise¹².

¹² Braude's report was not well received within some parts of the media. Mike Robertson (1999), editor of the *Sunday Times*, described the report as 'a staggeringly inept hodgepodge of confused thinking, pseudoscience, half-truths (sic), distortions of facts, and, in some instances, wholesale departures from reality'. The brouhaha overshadowed an accompanying report by the Media Monitoring Project which challenges the media's harmful portrayal of both black and white people. Moreover, Robertson sees in the MMP a redemption in that it recognises the difficulties of defining and identifying subliminal racism.

Barrell argues that Braude's understanding of racism allows the existence of exclusively black structures. Although racially discriminatory, they are not deemed racist because the latter is only possible in the context of white superiority. Racism can only happen amongst white people. Moreover, Western culture is infected by a belief of the innate superiority of white culture¹³. Even when one is unaware of this infection, people belonging to the Western culture are unconscious or subliminal racists. Hence Braude's research into traits of 'subliminal racism' and her understanding of a photo in *The Star* of June 25, 1999, depicting Maribou storks at a refuse container in Kampala, Uganda as an example of subliminal racism.

This photo was a front page photograph of two birds under the title 'Trash for two'. The caption read as follows: 'Pavement café ... a pied crow and a Maribou stork, a bird commonly seen on the streets and pavements of Uganda's capital, Kampala, are seen keeping a proprietary eye on a city refuse container whose scraps keep city birds like themselves on the wing.' Braude (1999:136) read this photo in the light of the previous day's headline in *The Star* concerning a decaying infrastructure and the limited availability of refuse bags.

Hence the following reception:

¹³ Max du Preez (2000:20), a vociferous anti-apartheid voice in the eighties, argued that the HRC has shot itself in the foot by issuing summonses to the editors in order to ensure their participation in what he described as a witch-hunt and the most embarrassing *faux pas* since 1994. Barrell (2000) argues that the outcome of the debate about racism in the South African media will depend on who becomes master of the word 'racism'. In his submission to the HRC he argues that if the HRC follows a definition where only white people are racists, the HRC will be bound to conclude that the SA media is racist to the extent that it has white members of staff. Then there need not be any obligation to show that an act or utterance by a white member of the media was racist in intention or result, because as with the doctrine of original sin, it is already present. There is only one conclusion: racists are sending out racist messages which are received as racist messages. It was to be expected that the SAHRC would find racism in the media. Although it states that the SAHRC found no evidence of the mainstream media indulging in blatant advocacy of racial hatred or incitement to racial violence (2000:89), it nevertheless concludes that: '[t]o the extent that expressions in the South African media "reflect a persistent pattern" of racist expressions and content of writing that could have been avoided, and given that we take seriously the fact that many submissions complained that such expressions cause or have the effect of causing hurt and pain, South African media can be characterised as racist institutions This finding holds regardless as to whether there is conscious or unconscious racism, direct or indirect'.

This is a 'city refuse container' exposed and open to the elements, including people together with disease-carrying birds—a less than hygienic or aesthetic sight. The caption has another dimension. These are not just birds. One is 'a bird commonly seen on the streets and pavements of Uganda's capital, Kampala.' What is this bird doing on the streets of Johannesburg, one might well ask? The caption suggests that the bird is enjoying the benefits of Johannesburg's decaying infrastructure under budgetary constraints. 'City refuse container' becomes a visual shorthand for an Africanised CBD; and the Maribou stork a shorthand for Africa within Johannesburg, for the perceived change from first-world to a third-world city in which hawkers line the pavements referred to in the caption, their persons and refuse adding to the city's detritus. As such, the bird does not only enjoy the detritus of a transformed city; but also, paradoxically, the economic benefits which the city has to offer—in this, like many people who come to the city, both rural South Africans and immigrants from other parts of the continent in pursuit of an economically viable life. As such, the photograph integrates anxieties about decaying urban infrastructure with fears of incursions from Africa.

On the face of it, it is an imaginative *allegorical* interpretation of a caption and photograph in a newspaper based on a recurring theme reported that week in the paper. The validity of Braude's interpretation of the photo and the caption rests upon the link she draws between the birds and African people and the refuse container and the city of Johannesburg. Her allegorical analysis is built upon a text-immanent investigation of the photo in terms of other texts within the newspaper, read with a presumption of what the white supremacist editor had in mind.

An allegory assumes two levels: the concrete narrative level and the moral, spiritual and psychological ideas behind the concrete narrative. However, to function as an allegory, there should be a clear link between the two levels. The allegorical is part of the structure of the work and not something added to the interpretation (cf. Malan 1992:8). Unfortunately, Braude provides no other support for her decision to make these two comparisons underlying her allegory. She assumes that race determines culture and texts. Thus, the photo and caption had to have a racial content, which she constructs as being present in the mind of the white editor—the Other—who she, by definition, deems a racist.

It should be noted that criticism of the report never denied the existence of racism in the media. The problem is the way in which Braude perceived the 'Other'. On the one hand, she appears to presume the existence of exactly that which she wanted to demonstrate: racism in the media (cf. Van Niekerk 2000) and on the other

hand, her demonstration results in a kind of stereotyping of the antagonists. Barrell (2000) observes:

A critic may conjecture—though never prove, because he or she has no gift of insight into another's mind—the presence of cultural and other subjective judgments in a particular story or media product. But the attribution of motive to the writer of such a story—unless it is blatantly rhetorical in tone or contains hate speech—is still more dubious.

Juxtaposed to her own hidden definition of racism, is the definition that would turn her latent understanding of racism into racism itself! If racism is the belief that races have distinctive cultural characteristics determined by hereditary factors and that these characteristics endow some races with an intrinsic superiority, the depiction of a certain group of people as unable to escape their culture's construction of themselves as superior, constitutes an act of racism. Racism, after all, links to race rights and privileges over which one has no say. Except that by Braude's definition—and this is a very common position—only whites can be racist.

5 The effect of moral power

In its editorial on the findings of the SAHRC on racism in the media, the *Mail & Guardian* slammed the report as an instrument which merely rationalised its members' rush to moral judgment (Editorial 2000:24). It is as if the entire process of the SAHRC's inquiry effectuated a moral distinction by defining racism as inherent to Western culture in general. Only when one defines racism as 'an ideology, a system of social, economic and political power structures that perpetuates and justifies itself by creating racist stereotypes and fostering attitudes of racial prejudice' (cf. Kritzing 1999:4) can the racist body become a performance which one can change. Similarly, in the Theron anti-rape advert a moral distinction was created between men and women: men are, in principle, rapists. Only when one sees the current gender roles as belonging to a patriarchal mind-set, can gender identities be conceived as changeable constructions dealing with social reality. But race and gender are still regarded as ontological features from which one can only escape through death.

The dilemma posed by the moral power referred to above reminds me of the catch-22 situation in which Jean Valjean, the main character in Victor Hugo's novel-turned-Broadway-musical, *Les Misérables*, finds himself. Realising that his antagonist, the prison warder Javert, has arrested the wrong person, Valjean confesses that he is the man Javert is looking for, namely prisoner 24601. Valjean is

in a difficult position. If he does not confess, another innocent man goes to prison in his place. And if he talks, he unmask himself. This is his song:

He thinks that man is me
He knew him at a glance
That stranger he has found
This man could be my chance
Why should I save his hide?
Why should I right this wrong
when I have come so far
and struggled for so long?

If I speak, I am condemned.
If I stay silent, I am damned.

I am the master of hundreds of workers.
They all look to me.
Can I abandon them?
How would they live if I am not free?

If I speak, I am condemned.
If I stay silent, I am damned.

Who am I?
Can I condemn this man to slavery?
Pretend I do not see his agony?
This innocent who bears my face
who goes to judgment in my place?

Who am I?
Can I conceal me for evermore?
Pretend I'm not the man I was before?
And must my name until I die
Be no more than an alibi?
Must I lie?
How can I ever face my fellow-men?
How can I ever face myself again?
My soul belongs to God, I know
I made that bargain long ago

He gave me hope when hope was gone
He gave me strength to journey on.

Who am I? Who am I?
I am Jean Valjean.

And so, Javert, you see it's true
That man bears no more guilt than you!

Who am I?
24601!

Valjean takes up the moral question concerning the mistaken identity. He has to decide what his responsibility is (à la Levinas) by looking the mistakenly identified man in the face as the Other. By keeping quiet, Valjean will remain a free man, but he will also be sending an innocent man to prison. By speaking out, the other man might become free again, yet Valjean will once more be subjected to Javert's assault on his body in the nineteenth century penitentiary:

If I speak, I am condemned.
If I stay silent, I am damned.

Valjean felt himself totally incapacitated, a feeling one has in the light of the Theron anti-rape advert and the SAHRC's findings of racism in the media. What kind of defence is open in the face of an Other whose gaze is so consumptive that it leaves one totally incapacitated?

Barrell (2000) argues that Braude's kind of definition leaves one with only three kinds of white people: overt racists, racists who have acknowledged their guilt and unconscious racists who continue to deny their racism. Behind the gaze on men or white people as the Other, there is a tendency to take total control of the Other which would deny them any autonomy. Here is a nifty power play playing itself out: if race (and gender) determine culture and intellect, even though the cultural products are equal, there is still a moral distinction:

- * a male lacks a moral claim to equal treatment because of his perceived refusal to acknowledge the problem of rape (in fact, his refusal is a recognition of guilt);
- * a white person lacks a moral claim to equal treatment because of his or her racist past.

In both cases, one's rapist or racist inclinations should be acknowledged. There is no escape. The Other is castrated. In Foucault's Panopticon, power has become efficient. The 'white' Other is fabricated by the 'black' self in order to establish a relationship of power by which the Other can be subordinated to the ideology the self expresses. In both discourses, the Other (men and white people respectively) are scape-goated and left without any defence. In this way they are successfully silenced.

Butchart (1998:114) points out how the Carnegie Commission that looked into the problem of 'Poor Whites' (1928-1932) objectified the black body of the African as a source of corruption (black peril) and the white body of the European as a victim whose Protestant work ethic was thought to be seriously undermined by what was regarded as the coarse and careless African. With it came a language of government that could manage racial distinctions and cultivate a culture of difference.

If one understands how someone's gaze can fabricate a body and how a group of people with political power can formulate a policy to enact their own fabrication, the question of responsibility arises. It is not a mere question of exercising the right to fabricate on account of being the major political force, or a case of correcting historical imbalances, but a question of how to constitute the face of the Other without reducing the Other to nothingness—a nothingness which results in a total omission and forgetfulness of women in religious sects by excluding them from power structures. Levinas' notion of ethics and responsibility towards the Other may be of some help.

6 A body with a face

To understand Levinas, one has to grasp two terms central to his thinking: the 'Other' and the 'self'. In terms of any social engagement, two persons are involved. From the perspective of person A the 'self' is person A and person B plays the role of the Other. From the perspective of person B, the Other is person A and the self would be person B. The Other is always that person with whom one engages in a particular situation. Levinas' questions concern the responsibility of the 'self' towards that other person.

That other person (the Other) is not incognito. The Other has a face. It is not a face hidden behind the anonymity of race or gender. In *Ethics and Infinity* (1985:83ff—his most accessible text) Levinas argues that one meets the face of the Other in its utter nakedness and destituteness. The face is exposed, menaced, as if inviting one to an act of violence, yet simultaneously, forbidding one to kill. According to Levinas, the first word of the face is 'Thou shalt not kill', because the Other is perceived as a stranger in the world of the self, a foreigner in one's country,

someone completely out of place. It is a person essentially without familial ties, like a widow or an orphan, vulnerable and alone in the world.

In the gender/racial panopticon, the inmates are viewed as belonging to a group under observation. They are perceived as having certain similar features. Are these features ontologically determined, i.e. inherent to the group, or are they constructions in the minds of the observers? From Levinas' point of view, knowledge of other persons is not ontological, but rooted in ethics. The ideas one has about other people are not representations of something outside of one's being. It is not a discovery one makes, but rather an invention of the mind, because, as Beavers¹⁴ (1990) puts it,

[A]nytime I take the person in my idea to be the real person, I have closed off contact with the real person; I have cut off the connection with the other that is necessary if ethics is to refer to real other people. This is a central violence to the other that denies the other his/her own autonomy.

Levinas calls this violence 'totalisation': It is a denial of the other's diff-

¹⁴ I owe my current understanding of Levinas' ideas to Beavers (1990 & 1995). Levinas' work is incredibly difficult, especially his book *Otherwise than being or beyond essence* (1981). Davis (1996:70) argues that many features of Levinas' textual practice seem calculated to disorientate the reader. 'To put it plainly, the difficulty of Levinas' prose is not simply a product of the philosophical complexity of what he has to say. Meaning is endangered by a practice of writing that eludes ready comprehension.' (Davis 1996:73). And, 'The difficulty of the work and the problems of understanding that it poses are not tangential to the point; they are the point. Interrogating Levinas' text becomes a process of self-interrogation, as local problems of understanding confront the reader with more fundamental questions: "What does Levinas mean by responsibility?" slips into "What is my responsibility, how am I responsible for my neighbour?" The reader makes the text, and in the process makes herself' (Davis 1996:91). Similarly, my understanding of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) is directed by Armstrong's (1985 & 1987) interpretation as well as Butchart (1998) who relies on Armstrong's representation. At this stage, my own reception of both French authors is quite naive and very superficial. Postmodernism necessitates a disclosure of the contexts which have a bearing on my thinking. Moreover, it also urges me to pin down my ideas and not to wait until I have digested the entire spectrum of ideas about Levinas and Foucault. My impression is that within a modernist paradigm I would not have been able to say anything unless I was totally sure and absolutely certain about my 'facts'.

erence and the otherness of the other. In the gender/racial panopticon such totalisation occurs whenever the other is limited to a set of rational categories, be they racial, sexual, or otherwise. Whenever someone knows what the other is about before the other has spoken, that which is essentially 'other' is reduced to someone else's consciousness. The other is reduced to 'sameness' (Levinas 1985:91)¹⁵.

However, the reduction to sameness, or the non-recognition of autonomy constitutes exactly the accusation levelled at the media: The lack of individuation in the news affirms a racist tendency in newspapers read and owned by white people. Beavers (1993) says the following about the media in the USA:

So, here we are in the 'real world' of the Six o' clock news where reality is defined by the known. This knowledge consists primarily of the totality of representations presented by the media. These representations are of others without their otherness. Their stories are depersonalised by an interpretative transformation into a language that all can understand and no one can question. They become known to us, but without the responsibility that comes with face to face confrontation. I may see the face of the other on television, but I know simultaneously that the other does not see me, and this means that I face a person for whom I am no longer responsible. The Other has been handed down over to me murdered by a society of anonymous individuals each of whom in his/her anonymity is freed from a responsible relationship, the Other has been defaced.

But maybe what is regarded as 'racism' in the so-called 'white media' in South Africa is simply the problem of anonymity bestowed on reports about people in a global society where a faceless populace is controlled by an equally faceless media. It is simply a feature of the modern nation state whose pooling of resources results in massification and de-individuation. Facelessness is clearly the order of the day. Or should one rather argue that facelessness can result in situations where racism can be experienced? This seems to be the position of the SAHRC. In Theron's advertisement the facelessness is acute: as a media product everyone is able to see

¹⁵ One can argue that Braude drew her conclusions after the media as the Other had spoken. However, the 'media' does not consist of a singular individual. Although Braude came to an understanding after she had read newspapers and listened to the radio, she never intended to look at the individuals who produced the media articles or broadcasts. In fact, it would have been impossible. Her endeavour to link newspaper reports and photos to authorial intent fails, because it is not possible to read someone's mind on the basis of a text alone.

her face, but she was looking into the lens of the camera and never saw the eyes of her audience¹⁶.

The problem underlying the debate about the role of women in a church like the RCSA is that women are being defaced by an equally faceless Synod. According to what is referred to as 'presbyteral' church law, once the Synod is dissolved nothing exists and the dominees and elders disappear behind the lines of a faceless membership. It is easy for a meeting consisting only of men to make decisions about women when they are not obliged to look them in the eye. With a membership of fewer than 100 000, facelessness is not the result of massification, but of ideology divinely sanctioned.

Regarding the complaints about racism in the media, the SAHRC's various reports on racism in the media, the media's reaction to these reports, the uproar about Charlize Theron's anti-rape advert and the reaction (albeit very low key and small) to the absurd resolution at a RCSA Synod, indicate that we are dealing with an Other that is reduced to something the Other refuses to be reduced to. We are dealing with an 'Other' who is essentially alone in the world, leading an independent existence and wishing not to be totalised or reduced to sameness.

Although the self and the Other are alone in the world, both preserved as independent and self-sufficient¹⁷ (Levinas 1981:27), each can only exist because of the other one. Levinas' problem consists in constructing a relation between the two, allowing both to retain their independence, for when one constructs a relation, the nature of the relation is such that the moment the Other is brought into the sphere of the self, the self reduces or deletes the otherness of the Other (cf. Davis 1996: 41).

The self would want to enjoy the Other, but cannot because the Other resists the self's consumption (cf. Davis 1996:43). It is in the sphere of this tension created by the possibility of becoming absorbed in each other, and the paradox of a relation where each should retain its separateness, that Levinas suggests the ethical moment. It is not a doctrine of moral norms or principles, but a radical obligation which infuses every act of critical thinking (Phillips & Fewell 1997:4):

¹⁶ The question arises whether the media would be able to individuate at all. We are dealing with an audience whose extent enables the existence of the media. Were the audience small, the media as we know it would not be able to exist.

¹⁷ The self has its own economy. It lives from the world (Levinas 1981:112) that is fully available to the self and ready to meet the needs of the self and fulfil its desires. Levinas calls this 'enjoyment' (1981:113): It is a process by which the self makes itself at home in a world where otherness is not a threat to be overcome, but a pleasure to be experienced (1981:119).

[W]e are obligated—before we think, before we critically analyze or conceptualize—to something / someone other than ourselves. And it is in the face of the Other (the one who escapes any horizon or conceptual scheme I might wish to impose upon it) that the experience of this obligation to be responsible for the other is concretely and practically discovered. In the face, the look of the eye, we meet responsibility.

The encounter, or rather, the mere possibility of an encounter with the presence of the Other, questions the independence or separateness of the Other. In the face of the Other the self experiences a vulnerability (because the Other can hurt you) and a proximity (defined by Levinas (1981:85) as '[s]ignifyingness, the-one-for-the-other, exposedness of self to another, it is immediacy in caresses and in the contact of saying'). This experience demands a response. Levinas understands this response as a responsibility for the Other: 'a responsibility for what is not my deed, or for what does not even matter to me; or which precisely does matter to me, is met by me as a face' (1985:95).

Meeting the face is not a perception of the face, but an indication of the presence of the infinite that cannot be reduced to a representation. In this proximity, says Levinas (1985:96), the self is responsible for the Other without even having taken on responsibilities in his or her regard: The responsibilities of the Other is incumbent on the self. It is a responsibility for the Other where the self is responsible for the responsibility of the Other. Responsibility is the tie with the Other. But Levinas is only concerned with the self in the face of the Other. The responsibility of the Other towards the self is his or her own affair. Responsibility is not a reciprocal undertaking (1985:99).

Responsibility implies an imperative force by the Other to put oneself in his or her place, not to appropriate one's own objectivity, but to answer the need of the Other, to supply for his or her want with one's own substance. In other words, to give sustenance to the Other (Lingis 1981:xxii). Levinas calls it substitution: to be for the other person. Being in the place of an Other means to be in the place of an other as a hostage for the Other (cf. Levinas 1981:127). The self is defined by the Other and to kill the Other would destroy the very origin of the self's responsibility.

7 Responsibility in an African context

How is one to conceive of Levinas' notion of responsibility in Africa, when wars continue to ravage the African continent?

On 23rd March 2000 the 'CNN African Journalist of the year' awards were

given out¹⁸. The Free Press-Africa award went to Sorious Samura of Sierra-Leone, who faced the guns of his own country in his quest to record the civil war where children are drugged to kill and rape their mothers. In his speech, as reported by Dube (2000a:4), he said that Africa is a continent of both bad and good, ugly and beautiful. However, the story he (Samura) is forced to tell, is that of doom, because the ugly rears its head more frequently in Africa.

Levinas' notion of responsibility for the Other reminds one of 'Ubuntu' and the phrase '*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*', meaning a person is a person because of other people, or more simply, I am because you are. It looks as if both Levinas and the notion of Ubuntu embrace humanism. It also looks as if both assume respect, or rather, treatment with dignity and empathy¹⁹. Levinas' ethics or responsibility for the

¹⁸ According to reporter Pamela Dube (2000b:3), the awards ceremony enabled African journalists to come of age and to take their rightful place in a world obsessed with all that is Western. The awards symbolise the wish of Africa to tell her own story, over against the West's distortion of the African story. Dube's evaluation represents a stream of thought that only an African can have an understanding of what Africa is all about. In other words, understanding and knowing the Other is closely linked to one's presence in a context. It is a presence not simply of being there, because then anyone would do. No, it is a presence with a particular ontology: birth, citizenship, and race. Of Jaques Pauw, who won the African Journalist of the year award with Brian Hungwe of Zimbabwe, Dube says: '[B]ut being well-resourced does not mean the West has an understanding of what Africa is all about.' Pauw—whom in terms of the Braude report would be labelled a white supremacist because of his face—argued that, being African, he and his team were cultured enough to understand the intricacies of a civil war on the continent. The problem Dube had with him, was his admission that he had resources and facilities which his fellow Africans did not have.

¹⁹ Broodryk (1996:36) argues that 'Ubuntuism' is not that unique when compared to certain ideologies. He says that if 'unique' means unusual, incomparable or extraordinary, Ubuntuism seems not to be unique. Ubuntu does not exist only in one culture; people of all cultures and races can have what he calls 'this magic gift'. The qualities of Ubuntu can exist in each person. Currently, Ubuntu appears to be South Africa's quest to dignify African culture, especially in management and business circles (cf. Lascaris & Lipkin 1993:45-47). Makhudu (1993:41) has argued, however, that although other cultures have philosophical concepts similar to Ubuntu, no other culture approaches the all-pervasive aspect of Ubuntu as a living process of co-operation of humanhood. Louw (1998) argues that Ubuntu sees the human being as 'being-with-others' as well as what 'being-with-others' should be all about. He sees Ubuntu as a distinctly African rationale for relating to others.

Other is not 'out there', but, like Ubuntu, exists the moment the face of the Other appears. The proximity of the face commands a responsibility for the Other. Similarly, Ubuntu seems to cause people to act in a way they intuitively know to be right. It is not something they choose (Boon 1996:33).

Joe Teffo of the Department of Philosophy at the University of the North (1997:106) defines Ubuntu as one of those modalities of the spirit pertaining to human beings which manifests a people's humanness, understanding and existential peace. Teffo's thinking on Ubuntu that is based on his reading of the French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre (Levinas' tutor), is, to my mind, the closest one can get to a correlation with Levinas' concept of the Other.

In an earlier essay, Teffo (1996:101) uses the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre to elucidate the problem of the mind of the Other within the context of African philosophy. Teffo argues that the other is seen not as the Other, but as an other with certain inherent racial limitations. In very broad terms, Teffo holds that in Sartre's mode of being in the world there are the 'they-group' and the 'us-group'. The they-group treats the us-group as instruments to achieve their goal within a context of master and slave. In the South-African context, this modality has certain consequences. To Teffo, two different modes of being in the world were impressed upon society: a 'they' and an 'us' experience, which he respectively labels being-white-in-the-world and being-black-in-the-world. Whilst he argues that the latter mode implies experiencing oneself as a problem, a non-being in the eyes of the non-black, the SAHRC's inquiry certainly succeeded in rendering the continued presence of the vestiges of the Western culture as being-white-in-a-world-of-blacks problematical.

Teffo contends that the black consciousness philosophy can be instrumental in overcoming the dichotomy of being-black-in-the-world and being-white-in-the-world in order to enable the emergence of the new colourless person²⁰. He regards the body as the bearer and medium through which the totality of human experience can be articulated in order to underline the wholeness of human life. In fact, he argues (1996:103) that wholeness is the hallmark of an African perspective on life in

²⁰ Kritzinger (1999:23) echoes the same longing for this colourless person. He regards race as a way to describe social reality. He says that the elevation of biological differences between people into matters of anthropological significance lies at the heart of perpetuating racism. To him, the terms 'white' and 'black' describe significant patterns of privilege and disadvantage. He says: 'I would agree with Robert Sobukwe and others that if we are to use the term 'race' at all, we should use it to refer to the human race as a whole.' Kritzinger (1999:24) aims at going beyond white and black to an inclusive African identity or a set of open and flexible African identities in which there is a free cultural interchange.

its totality. This wholeness is the link to Ubuntu: 'Humankind is a communal being, and s/he cannot be conceived apart from his/her relationship with others.' (1996:103). Ubuntu is therefore a unique interdependence of persons for the exercise, development and fulfilment of their powers. A person is not defined by a set of properties or features, but by the relationships existing between him/her and others.

It is this idea of a person defined by his or her relation to an Other that opens new possibilities for the African concept. Although my reception of Levinas into an African concept of Ubuntu is at this stage preliminary and tentative, it seems to me valid to assert that both define the human being in terms of a relation rather than in terms of ontology. Nonetheless, they are not the same, because they are manifested in two different cultures. I suspect that Levinas' idea of the Other is very open: The Other can be everyone. Although the Other has a face, that face is rather vague because the self does not look the face in the eye, since that would mean that the Other became consumed in the gaze of the self.

Teffo is influenced by Sartre, whereas Levinas follows a route somewhat different to that of Sartre²¹. However, Teffo seems to widen the scope of Ubuntu. Traditionally, Ubuntu is limited to the tribe or clan that constitutes the corporate identity of the individual. He (1996:103) contends that every person, every individual, active and passive, joined from above to the ascending line of his or her ancestry and sustaining below the line of his descendants, falls within the ambit of Ubuntu. Humankind is a communal being, and s/he cannot be conceived apart from his/her relationship with others, says Teffo (1996:103).

The line, as described in terms of ancestors and descendants, indicates the possibility that Ubuntu and the Other can be limited to the hereditary line. What happens when someone from outside this line of ancestors and descendants enters into the community? In underpinning the problem of racism inherent in the narrow function of Ubuntu, Teffo argues that Ubuntu reaches beyond the mere clan or tribe. When Ubuntu is implemented in a very narrow sense, he judges it as 'black racism'. Ironically, it is a position he, as a black consciousness philosopher, takes in against the kind of thinking behind the Braude report! He (1996:103) says:

This debate can be taken a step further, to include black racism. All too often the black oppressed of Africa, in an attempt to affirm themselves, do so in the negative. In their rejection of white racism, many of the oppressed

²¹ Sartre argued that the fundamental nature of human relations was conflict and Levinas argued that the face to face encounter is more or less pacific, because the revelation of the face is essentially non-violent (cf. Davis 1996:48). I think Sartre's focus on conflict gave Teffo the impetus for his assertion regarding being-black-in-the-world.

epitomize the very racism that has harmed their own dignity and sense of worth. Racism is racism, it knows no colour and, like a two-edged sword, it cuts both ways. As fellow human beings we must affirm ourselves in the universal sense. This ultimately implies respect for oneself and for other human beings.

8 Conclusion

Sugirtharajah (1998:94) states that the imperialiser and the imperialised are inevitably locked together. The focus on gender and racism is part of the re-examination and re-assessment of Western values. We are in a process of renewed perception, in a changed location regarding power. But it should go beyond what Sugirtharajah (1998:94) refers to as essentialist and contrastive thinking. The categories of 'us' (African culture) and 'they' (Western culture) or women versus men perpetuate the killer gaze of the past. We are reminded that we indeed fabricate each other in our meeting of one another. The question is how we proceed in our fabrication. Levinas reminds us of the ethical moment in the meeting of the face of the Other. And Africa provides that prospective common meeting ground. It is possible that the West and Africa are not all that far removed from each other.

The body is an interpretive category, but not in the sense that behaviour and thoughts can be linked to a specific gender or racial category. Gender and race are social constructs by which a person tries to make sense of the presence of the body when meeting that body as a face. Levinas' idea of responsibility for the Other (without demanding reciprocity) suggests that our gaze dare not be all-consuming. The Other is not our prisoner, and will always try to avert or frustrate the gaze out of fear of being reduced to nothingness by its absolute otherness. In our debate about gender inequality and racial discrimination we are reminded that our gaze of the Other in this regard can never be final.

Meeting the Other means seeing the Other in its destituteness, exposed and menaced, yet simultaneously realising one's own limits and freedom. And our relation to the biblical text? The text is an Other which demands not to be reduced to our sameness. It is, after all, an ancient text that needs to be read against its ancient contexts. And when we, as scholars or ministers, interpret this ancient text for others, those Others retain their absolute otherness. They cannot be reduced to obey the whims of ancient patriarchal society.

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