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Shem, Ham, Japheth and Zuma – Genesis 9:25-27 and masculinities in South Africa[1]

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Abstract

The article explores the interpretation and reception of Genesis 9:25-27 and how the so-called 'curse of Ham' contributed to the construction of masculinities in South Africa. The impact of the Ham ideology on black people and on the construction of masculinities is explored from the perspective of a contemporary theological anthropology as 'embodied sensing'.

The Ham ideology also has a remarkable longevity, especially in South Africa with remnants of the curse still visible and alive in the minds (and bodies) of people. Because of the unique way in which this ideology was employed in South Africa from the time of slavery and during apartheid, it is reasonable to conceive that it also played a vital role in the construction of the masculinities of males in South Africa.

Keywords

Curse of Ham, theological anthropology, embodied sensing, Black bodies, masculinities

1. Introduction

In 2012 the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg held an exhibition titled *Hail to the Thief II*. The overall theme of the exhibition was a reference to the perception of widespread corruption in the South African government, even in the upper echelons. The controversial painting, *The*

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1 This article originated from a paper delivered at the annual meeting of the TSSA (Theological Society of South Africa) on 'Faith and Family: Reflecting on God, Gender and Generations', 17-19 June 2015, Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary, Pietermaritzburg as well as participation at a panel discussion on 'Biblical Masculinities' at the annual meeting of the EABS (European Association of Biblical Scholars), from 12-15 July 2015, Cordoba, Spain.

Spear of the Nation by the well-known artist Brett Murray formed part of this exhibition. In this painting, President Jacob Zuma is depicted in the posture of the iconic picture of Vladimir Lenin by Viktor Ivanov, but with his penis hanging out.[2] The title of the painting alluded to the military wing of the ANC, 'Umkhonto we Sizwe' [The Spear of the Nation] and was a satirical portrayal of Zuma's 'exuberant sexuality', painted before he married his sixth wife and referring to his history of polygamy, seduction and accusations of rape.

Reaction to this painting was intense, with the ruling African National Council (ANC) launching a lawsuit on the basis that it violated the dignity of the president and his office, as well as all Africans. The minister of education labelled the painting as 'a violation of the black body by racist South Africans over the centuries'. David Freedberg interprets the reaction of the ANC and the government as a 'way to gain support for Zuma [by inserting] … this case into the whole history of racist prejudices about black male sexuality'.[3] A young black art historian Mpho Matheolane interprets the event as a focus on 'the issue of black people's representation at the hands of whites … called a continued sense of colonial othering', a practice that has been governed by 'the Western ideological gaze'.[4] On 22 May 2012 the painting was defaced and vandalized, first by a fifty-eight-year old white Afrikaner male, who dressed in his suit, took out a small pot of red paint and drew a red cross over Zuma's penis and then over his face. While he was being apprehended, a younger black man splashed black paint all over the painting.

A more sensible commentary in analysing the role which *The Spear* played in the dehumanisation of black people was made by the songstress, Simphiwe Dana. She calls this form of dehumanisation the 'Sarah Baartmanisation' of the black body.[5] With this term she refers to the Khoikhoi woman,

2 David Freedberg, 'The case of the Spear,' *Art South Africa* 11, no. 1 (2012): 37.

3 *Ibid*., 38.

4 Mpho Matheolane, 'Defacing race and culture: The Spear and politics of representation', *Mail & Guardian*, May 23, 2012, http://www.mg.co.za/print/2012-05-23-defacing-race-and-culture-the-spear-and-politics-of-representation.html

5 Simphiwe Dana, 'The 'Sarah Baartmanisation' of the black body', *Mail & Guardian*, June 12, 2012, http://www.mg.co.za/print/2012-06-12-simphiwe-dana-on-the-sarah-baartmanisation-of-the-black-body.html

Sarah Baartman who was exhibited in nineteenth-century Europe as the 'Hottentot Venus' serving as a freak show attraction. After her death on 29 December 1815, her skeleton, genitals, brain and body-cast were displayed at the Paris Museé de l'Homme until 1976.[6] Dana comments that the painting is not about Zuma with his penis hanging out, but about a black man on display in a gallery, on the internet and in newspapers. She writes that 'this is the image we have carried with us and it has shamed us, humiliated us … we, the Africans, have internalised these feelings of shame imposed upon us'. What is at stake is not culture, but dignity 'and sensitivity to a horrid past full of dehumanisation and other injustices'.

2. Theological anthropology and the exploration of masculinities

How does this incident of the portrayal of Zuma's body connect to the narrative of the curse and blessings of Shem, Ham and Japheth in Genesis 9:25-27? How was the Ham-ideology received and interpreted in Christian tradition and how did it contribute to the construction of masculinities in South Africa?

Theological anthropology amongst others explores the question of what it means to be human and living a flourishing life in relationship to God. Many contemporary theological anthropologies expand this question to include inquiries around personhood, human uniqueness and the evolution of consciousness. I have been advocating a theological anthropology that takes the body and the experiences of the body seriously as a site of knowledge and as a guiding principle within theological anthropology. I proposed a model for 'theological anthropology as embodied sensing' – a contemporary theological anthropology with a sentiment of the flesh and a sensitivity to the textures of life.[7] Such a theological anthropology functions within the intricate and complex connection of the living body, language, and experiencing in a concrete life-world with an openness to

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6 Rebecca Holmes, *The Hottentot Venus. The life and death of Saartjie Baartman: born 1789 – buried 2002* (Johannesburg & Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2007), 169.

7 Jacob Meiring, 2015, 'Theology in the flesh – a model for theological anthropology as embodied sensing', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71(3), Art. #2858, 8 pages. http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i3.2858.

the 'more than'. This implies that it has a wide interdisciplinary scope, also building on David Kelsey's suggestion[8] that theological anthropology could be an exercise in 'conceptual bridge building' with other 'strategically selected secular conversation partners' from anthropological wisdom and appropriate sciences, as well as different religious traditions.

David Kelsey refers to the 'epistemic mysteriousness' of living human bodies, that not all manner of knowing of the human body can be exhausted, and that the Trinitarian formula of humans being created by 'the Father through the Son' grounds our knowability 'in the very life of God'.[9] Living human bodies are amazingly complex and in this sense they are 'inexhaustible objects of knowledge'. This ties in with what Les Todres describes as 'the unsaid' of the human body and the idea that not all human bodily experiences can be expressed in language. He expresses the 'unsaid' in the idea that the experiences of spirituality in everyday life 'are grounded by the palpable lived experience of meeting a mystery that is always in the excess of the known'.[10] His concept of the living body is that it is not merely an object encapsulated by skin, but that it is a subjectivity that is 'intimately intertwined with what is there beyond the skin'.

There is a 'more than' to the eventing of human bodily experiences in a concrete life-world; there is a 'more than' to the richness of textured bodily life that cannot easily be conveyed into theological articulations. Kelsey expresses this 'more than' in the notion of eccentric existence, and the continuity between physical human bodies and glorified bodies as 'God-related bodies', living in 'the sociality of community-in-communion' where they are recognisable as an individual with unconditional dignity and unqualified respect. Kelsey describes Jesus Christ as 'uniquely God-related', and it is as the 'imagers of the image of God' that humans are finite living mysteries that image the triune living mystery.[11] The 'more than' is also an attempt to illustrate that we are 'more than' the obsessive objectifying of objects, events and each other. The word 'sensing' (derived

8 David H. Kelsey, *Eccentric existence: a theological anthropology. Volume 1 & 2* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009):7.

9 *Ibid*., 268.

10 Les Todres, Embodied *enquiry: Phenomenological touchstones for research, psychotherapy and spirituality*. (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 185.

11 Kelsey, *Eccentric existence*, 1009.

from the Latin word *sensus*, which expresses the faculty of thought, feeling and meaning) is an effort to move away from the subject/object distinction to a more participatory approach and, as the linguistic philosopher and psychologist Eugene Gendlin phrases it, 'to speak from how we interact bodily in our situation'.[12]

Flowing from this model for a contemporary theological anthropology as 'embodied sensing', the bodies and the experiences of black people (and in this case black males) within a concrete life-world (southern Africa) should be taken seriously as a source of revelation and a site of knowledge when exploring the reception of a text like Genesis 9:25-27.

3. An overview of black bodies and masculinities in South Africa

What were the perceptions and experiences of black people and specifically those of black males within the South African context? How were the bodies of black people perceived and portrayed in the writings of early travellers and missionaries? What were the experiences of black people during colonialism and apartheid and how did it influence the construction of masculinities in South Africa?

The first description of 'Ethiopians' appears in the sixteenth-century version of 'Etymologies' under the heading 'On men and monsters', which was written by Isidore of Seville in the sixth and seventh centuries. In it he writes of the race of Sciopedes that exists in Ethiopia 'with only one leg but marvellous speed – in the summertime they stretch out on their backs, covering themselves with the shadows of their huge feet'.[13] From 1500 to around 1650 human bodies were known through the study of authoritative texts and not through direct inspection, but eventually the age of Renaissance thought gave way to the age of Classification, where perceptible physical characteristics replaced imaginary ones. This more or less coincided with the European colonisation of Africa.

12 Eugene Gendlin, 'How philosophy cannot appeal to experience, and how it can,' In *Language beyond postmodernism: saying and thinking in Gendlin's philosophy*, ed. D.M. Levin (Illinois: North-western University Press, 1997), 15.

13 Alexander Butchart, *The anatomy of power. European constructions of the African body* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 1998), 34.

During the period from 1650 to 1830, the African body for the first time moved beyond mythological descriptions and emerged as a collection of perceivable external organs. The 'African body as a surface' was all that existed for Europeans, a body without internal organs and systems. Butchard refers to the work of Dapper (1668), who described in detail the forehead, eyes, nose, lips, mouth, neck, belly and buttocks of the Koisan (Hottentot).[14]

Both the anti-slavery movement and the notion of spreading the Gospel to 'heathen nations' were rooted in the humanitarian movement which had become stronger since 1760. John Barrow (1764-1848) was one of the first English travellers to South Africa who held strong opinions about the Boers, slavery and the character of Africans. He thought that Africans were ugly, but also qualified beauty in the light of the 'Noble Savage' (an exclusively male image), where beauty was an important characteristic of the Noble Savage. Older men were described as wise and dignified, but in sharp contrast, older women were negatively portrayed as ugly, hideous and frightful.[15] The trope of the 'Noble Savage', the idealised African became a handy symbol for Evangelicals to hold up against the moral corruption in European societies. Africans were however purely measured by European standards with the hope that one day they might reach the European standard of civilisation.

Lahoucine Ouzgane, a scholar in postcolonial theories argues that this way of pathologizing the black male through the process of 'othering' was done to elevate the European as superior and different to other races. He concludes that 'at the core of this body politics lurked an intense white masculine insecurity and anxiety'.[16] White bodies were considered to be civilised and controlled, whereas black bodies were portrayed as 'oversexed and savage'. African bodies and sexuality became the touchstone for the justification of colonial enterprise objectives — 'to civilise the barbarian and savage natives of the 'dark continent''.[17] It was a mission that was implemented through paternalism, brutality, force, arrogance, humiliation, and insensitivity.

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14 *Ibid*., 55-56.

15 *Ibid*., 5.

16 Lahoucine Ouzgane, 'Guest editorial: An introduction,' *The journal of men's studies* 10, no. 3 (2002):244.

17 Sylvia Tamale, ed., *African sexualities: A reader.* (Oxford: Pambazuka Press, 2011), 14.

Two fundamental experiences have shaped the borders of masculinity in South Africa in the beginning of the twentieth century, namely impoverished rural life, and the workplace (primarily mines). Colonialism and apartheid not only destroyed the basis of traditional African communities, but also tore apart the history of gendered rituals upon which sexual division of labour and male power was based.

Any idealism of racial integration disappeared in the 1920's and 1930's with South African society becoming increasingly racially divided. New forms of masculinity were forged, based on ideas of work and ethnicity. Sotho men working on the mines formed the 'Sotho masculinity' that promoted the idea that all Sotho men were prepared to do dangerous mine work and were physically tough. Some Afrikaner men, however, formed a 'Republican masculinity', a modernised form of ethnic masculinity that built on the notion of racial superiority over blacks, and a desire for freedom from the British. This masculinity put the focus on 'the importance of independence, resourcefulness, physical and emotional toughness, (the) ability to give and – take orders, of being moral and God-fearing'. This masculinity later turned into an established masculinity that was unforgiving, unapologetic, and authoritarian.[18]

The scholar in gender studies, Robert Morrell makes the statement that 'masculinity and violence have been yoked together in South African history'.[19] In the townships created under apartheid, masculinity was rooted in violence and crime, especially among youths and gangs. Gender identity was influenced through manipulation of race and class, which created social distance between citizens from different races. All this could explain the chauvinistic nature of South African men which supported the oppression of women and the authority, and presumption of male power. 'The country's history also produced brittle masculinities – defensive and prone to violence', with white men becoming defensive about challenges to their position of privilege, and a dangerous edge to black men, whose masculinity is based on poverty and 'the emasculation of political powerlessness'.[20]

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18 Robert Morrell, ed., *Changing men in Southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001), 13-15.

19 Morrell, *Changing men*, 12.

20 *Ibid*., 17-18.

Masculinities are in transition in post-1994 South Africa. The 'top dogs' in the previous political domain, mainly white heterosexual, Afrikaner middle-class and upper-class men were displaced by the 'under dogs', mainly heterosexual black and coloured men, as well as women from the lower middle and working class. Thokozani Xaba describes the masculinity of these 'underdogs' (young African males during apartheid) as a 'struggle masculinity', and in contemporary South Africa as a 'post-struggle masculinity'. This 'struggle masculinity' distinguished by honour, social respect (earned through violent deeds) and a certain status in the community were suddenly side-lined with the expectation of 'a non-violent, non-sexist, peaceable masculinity'.[21]

The crucial question should also be asked why so many African leaders have demonised and criminalised homosexuality? Mark Epprecht suspects that 'something far subtler than homophobia appears to be at play' to explain the violence and hatred against lesbians and gays in Africa, and suggests that this violence could be a displacement of misogyny; or anger at forms of marginalisation among young African men[22]. Heterosexism is at play. In an effort to appeal to the notion of 'African authenticity', political leaders like Jacob Zuma and Robert Mugabe have aligned them with practices that are considered to be African. In this way the 'paternal authority' of these leaders becomes an indication of the pride of the group and 'ascendant manhood has come to signify the reclaimed pride of the entire community'.[23]

4. A brief history of the reception of Gen 9:25-27

The narrative of Gen 9:25-27 forms part of 'the stories of crime and punishment' which constitutes a group of stories within Gen 1-11. As a whole Gen 9:18-27 consists of two units: the first a genealogical detail (Gen 9:18-19) which is viewed as a close of the flood narrative and also an introduction of the family tree of Shem, Ham and Japhet in Genesis 10. The structure of the second unit (Gen 9:20-27) contains the genealogy of the

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21 *Ibid*., 104-106.

22 Marc Epprecht, *Heterosexual Africa*? *The history of an idea from the age of Exploration to the age of AIDS* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008), 12.

23 Lewis, 'Representing African sexualities', 211.

three sons of Noah, the history of civilization, a story of outrage and piety followed by curses and blessings.[24]

> 'Cursed be Canaan!
> Most servile of slaves
> Shall he be to his brothers.'
>
> And he went on:
>
> 'Bless, O Lord,
> the tents of Shem;
> may Canaan be his slave.
> May God extend Japheth's
> boundaries,
> let him dwell in the tents of Shem,
> may Canaan be his slave.'
>
> Gen 9:25-27 [REB][25]

The curse of Ham appears very much to be the curse of Canaan and this is one of the dilemmas of this text. Why should Canaan suffer for the sin of his father, Ham? Some Jewish commentators from the medieval period tried to overcome this paradox by proposing a reading, 'Cursed be the father of Canaan'.[26] Already in Gen 9:18 Ham is identified as 'the father of Canaan' which is a foreshadowing of the curse against Canaan.[27] This identifying expression is considered to be a later addition to balance the name Canaan in Gen 9:25.[28] This is the only instance of five occurrences where the name of Canaan appears in a genealogy as part of a narrative followed by a curse. This attests to the fact that the name Canaan is solely used as the name of an individual and not as part of 'the series of the three sons of Noah'.[29]

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24 Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A commentary*, trans. John Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 482-483.

25 The Revised English Bible (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 7.

26 Kenneth Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, vol. 1A, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 421.

27 *Ibid*., 417.

28 Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 492.

29 *Ibid*., 484.

The narrative attains a political character when it is interpreted as a pronouncement of the relationship between peoples. Shem then becomes a paradigm for Israel and Ham the symbol for Egypt and Canaan, the enemies of Israel. The ancient notion of 'corporate responsibility' lies behind this where 'the character of the father is anticipated in the deeds of the sons'.[30] Claus Westermann admits that this patriarchal history could have implications in the political domain, but he interprets it as a social matter which is 'pre-political'. It is not primarily a narrative which could be employed to explain or condone political servitude, but a story that takes place in a family, between a father and his sons.[31]

The narrative of Genesis 9:20-27 is characterized by physicality, by a certain presence of the body. It tells a story of cultivating the soil (v. 20) and how civilization moved a step forward with the planting of vines and the making of wine. It is a narrative of too much drinking, of Noah becoming drunk and passing out, leaving himself uncovered and naked. It tells of Ham's 'outspoken delight' in seeing his father lying naked, rushing of to inform his brothers.[32] There is a physicality in the piety of Shem and Japheth, slowly moving backwards, step by step, avoiding any sight of Noah's naked body, covering their father's body with a cloak.

There has been ample speculation by Christian and Jewish commentators on what Ham's sin could have been, many of these pointing to a sinful act based on a physical transgression. In the language of the Pentateuch the phrase 'saw his father's nakedness' indicates some kind of sexual offence. There is however agreement that Ham dishonoured his father and in this grave breach of tradition lays the sin of Ham.[33]

Westermann writes that 'a line of demarcation in human relations' was taken very seriously in the ancient world and that the 'undisturbed' passing on of traditions from generation to generation guaranteed the 'continuity of the life of a group of people'. In primeval history individual behaviour was focussed from day to day and from generation to generation on the

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30 Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 421.

31 Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 491-492.

32 Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 419.

33 *Ibid*., 489.

survival and order of the family.[34] Steinberg writes that 'in this kinship system, generational continuity is governed by principles of patrilineal, patrilocal endogamy. The 'world of family' was also marked by competition and strife and this rivalry unfolded in successive generations.[35] Ham's behaviour was considered to be a serious threat the 'sacred relationship between parents and children'.

Genesis was reworked and re-interpreted in various documents from the Second Temple period found at Qumran and occupied a prime position in the Dead Sea Scrolls.[36]The first part of the Genesis Apocryphon, the genealogy of Noah is moved in front of the narrative of the vineyard and Shem is emphasised as being the firstborn. Noah is also portrayed as obeying the injunction by only drinking wine produced in the fifth year and the in this version, his drunkenness is omitted. This omission fits into the propensity to tidy the actions of the ancestors.[37] The Commentary of Genesis A dating from around 50 BCE deals with the theme of the land and its rightful position. After Noah wakes up from his drunken stupor, he curses Canaan, the son of Ham and this is interpreted as an explanation why the Israelites has the right to dispose of the Canaanites and occupy the land. Another theme, connected to the theme of land, is that of sexual wrongdoing. Those who are dispossessed of their land are by association guilty of some kind of sexual misconduct. Sexual conduct is a prominent theme in the documents of the Qumran community.[38]

It appears as if the curse of Ham shifted in the way it was received during the centuries. Ham became a moving target. The commentaries on Genesis of Philo of Alexandria had an enormous influence, also on the works of the church fathers up to the Middle Ages. He refers to Ham as the 'warm man'

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34 Naomi Steinberg, 'The World of Family in Genesis,' In *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception and Interpretation*, eds. Craig Evans, Joel Lohr and David Petersen (Leiden & Boston: BRILL, 2012):298.

35 *Ibid*., 299.

36 Sidnie Crawford, 'Genesis in the Dead Sea Scrolls,' In *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception and Interpretation*, eds. Craig Evans, Joel Lohr and David Petersen (Leiden & Boston: BRILL, 2012):353.

37 *Ibid*., 361.

38 *Ibid*., 367-368.

in a degenerating tone.[39] Many church fathers saw Ham as the forefather of the heretics and because of the fierce hate of Jews as 'the killers of Christ', many Christians did not want to acknowledge them as a nation of God with Shem being their leader. Jews were seen as 'Ham people', cursed by God and by Noah.[40] By command of Charles the Great (768-814), the Frankish abbot Wigbod wrote a commentary of Genesis where he refers to Shem as the representative of the apostles and patriarchs, Japheth as the representative of Christians and Ham representing the Jews and other heretics.[41] The Jews as the 'people of Ham' became the bearers of the curse of Ham.

Martin Luther interpreted the narrative of Noah much deeper than Ham merely being the slave of his brothers. Noah was a holy man, the leader of a new religion after the Flood. Noah is also the leader of the church and of a new way of governing. The sin of Ham, was his unwillingness to recognise this new order in the church and state. When Ham's grandson, Nimrod build the tower of Babel, it was a further indication of sin against and new political and church order. John Calvin was more demure in his interpretation of the curse of Ham. He held the opinion that not all the descendants of Ham were cursed, but he does refer to Ham as a dark spirit.[42]

The ideology of Ham gained momentum with the discovery of a trade route by Portuguese explorers along the west coast of Africa. From the sixteenth century till the nineteenth century this ideology was shaped in such a way that the 'sons of Ham' must be portrayed as people with a dark skin and condemned to be slaves forever.[43] The sons of Ham have supposedly worked in copper mines, were slaves in the temple and were condemned to be the hackers of wood and carriers of water.[44] The ideology of Ham was employed as a justification for slavery and was more generally focussed on Africa. Europe had the right to subdue the cursed sons of Ham. In 1703

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39 Jan van der Linde, *Over Noach met zijn zonen: De Cham-ideologie en de leugens tegen Cham tot vandaag* [About Noah and his sons: The Cham ideology and the lies until today] (Utrecht, Leiden: Interuniversitair Instituut voor Missiologie en Oecunemica, 1993), 15.

40 *Ibid*., 24.

41 *Ibid*., 33.

42 *Ibid*., 58-59.

43 *Ibid*., 77.

44 *Ibid*., 90.

Beckers noted that the 'vervloekte ras van Cham' [the cursed race of Ham] was condemned by God to servitude and 'mishandeling' [maltreatment].[45] Much earlier, Jewish exegesis spoke of the children of Canaan who 'shall be born ugly and black…their forefather Canaan commended them to love theft and fornication'.[46] Even Abraham Kuyper, who had a tremendous influence on apartheid theologians, wrote in 1898 that it was solely the sons of Shem and Japheth who contributed to the development of civilisation in Asia and Europe, and that the sons of Ham never aimed for a higher purpose in life. He also viewed Africans as a lower form of life and used the metaphor of a pool and swamp when referring to Africans, while likening the 'beschavingscreativiteit' [creativity in civilisation] of whites to a river and the source of life-giving water.[47]

The modern ideology of apartheid had firm roots in ancient European tradition, where the three sons of Noah, namely Shem, Ham and Japheth were the ancestors of Asia, Africa and Europe respectively.[48] There are references in literature to the guardianship of whites over blacks, the special status of Afrikaners as the new people of God (like Israel), and the bearers of the light of the Bible, and of civilisation of Christian Europe to black Africa.[49] The ideology of apartheid and the theological support of it by the Reformed Churches were strongly influenced by the notion of the 'curse of Ham'. This idea reinforced the notion of the guardianship of white people over blacks, and the superiority of the white body over the black body. Stoop refers to Mulder (1956) who maintained that the 'naturellebeleid' [policy on indigenous people] of the colonist in the eighteenth century was already influenced by this notion, as well as the idea of isolation from the inhabitants of Canaan.[50]

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45 Theo Salemink and Bert Van Dijk, *Apartheid en kerkelijk verzet: in de schaduw van nazi-Duitsland (*Amersfoort/Leuven: De Horstink, 1989), 11.

46 Jan Stoop, 'Die vervloeking van Gam in Afrika' [The curse of Ham in Africa] In *New faces of Africa: essays in honour of Ben (Barend Jacobus) Marais*, eds. J Hofmeyr and W Vorster (Pretoria: UNISA, 1984), 156.

47 Salemink and Van Dijk, *Apartheid en kerkelijk verzet*, 11.

48 *Ibid*., 10

49 *Ibid*., 12.

50 Stoop, 'Die vervloeking van Gam', 154.

In his book, *Christianity through African eyes*, Salzzwedel Pheko (1969) asks the painful question of how long Ham will continue to be the prototype for black people in Africa and continues that for many whites in Africa, God has created the blacks as a nation of boys and girls, people that will never grow up.[51] The ancient curse on the son of Ham was firmly inscribed on the bodies of black Africans.

5. The masculinities of the 'sons of Ham'

The narrative of Gen 9:25-27 which contains the so-called 'curse of Ham' was employed throughout the ages (along with other ideologies) as a justification for land occupation, the persecution of Jews, the burning of heretics, for political manoeuvring during the Reformation, the abominable practice of slavery, the humiliating subordination of millions of black people on the African continent through colonialism and in South Africa, the barbaric implementation of apartheid policies in the state and church. As an ideology that condemned people to servitude based on an ancient curse and the notion of African barbarity that had to be tamed by European civilization, the Ham ideology dehumanized both men and women. The Ham ideology encapsulates a variety of ideas: the idea of a predisposed servitude; the notion of being immature and uncivilized and the perception of an inherent 'ugliness', an inferiority for being different – for being black. The philosopher and psychiatrist Franz Fanon captures the complexity of the colonial relation in the idea that 'what is often called the black soul is a white man's artefact' since 'the dark side of the soul' was often portrayed in Europe by the black man as a symbol of lesser emotions, of evil, sin war, death and famine.[52]

The Ham ideology also has a remarkable longevity, especially in South Africa with remnants of the curse still visible and alive in the minds (and bodies) of people. How is that possible? And how then can the curse of Ham be connected more exclusively to the construction of masculinities in South Africa? Robert Morrell holds the opinion that the understanding of a man's own masculinity is strongly influenced by race and class.[53]

51 Van der Linde, *Over Noach*, 122.

52 Franz Fanon, *Black skin*, *white masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 191.

53 Morrell, *Changing men*, 110.

In conjunction to this he works with the idea of 'the micro aspects of masculinity', where the body becomes a prime bearer of the values and symbolism of masculinity'.[54] If one looks at the way in which black, male bodies have been perceived over the centuries, where even the exclusively male trope of the 'Noble Savage' was held to be uncivilized, barbaric and inferior to Europeans, it is reasonable to conceive that the body of the black male became the prime bearer of the curse of Ham. The narrative of Gen 9:18-27 is a very masculine and bodily story that was described, received and interpreted within the context of a male dominated life world. In patriarchal societies where the experiences and the bodies of women were and often still are considered to be somehow inferior and subservient to their male counterparts, it is reasonable to conceive that 'down the line' the curse of Ham came to rest more squarely on the shoulders of the 'sons of Ham'. It is these 'sons of Ham' that were exploited as cheap labour and oppressed in colonial and apartheid society by the 'sons of Japheth' (Europeans and their descendants) in the mines and other industries.

The South African educationalist and social commentator, Jonathan Jansen explores the question of how historical knowledge is transmitted across generations, especially within white Afrikaner students in his book, *Knowledge in the blood: confronting race and apartheid past*. He builds upon the conceptual framework of the work of Eva Hoffman who studied the transmittance of knowledge within second generation Holocaust survivors, writing that 'Hoffman's construct of indirect knowledge is linked to other empirical accounts and conceptual frameworks on the transmission of especially traumatic knowledge and memory from one generation to the next'.[55] He investigates 'with what content knowledge travels between living generations' within the contexts of family, church, sport (especially rugby), schools, cultural networks and peers and concludes that 'many Afrikaner youths and their parents continue to hold this knowledge of a barbaric black people' and that the armed force did nothing more during apartheid than to upheld law and order in the townships.[56] He then defines 'knowledge in the blood' as 'knowledge embedded in the emotional, psychic, spiritual,

54 *Ibid*., 108.

55 Jonathan Jansen, *Knowledge in the blood: confronting race and the apartheid past* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2009), 52.

56 *Ibid*., 82.

social, economic, political, and psychological lives of a community'.[57] The curse of Ham over centuries became embedded in the blood of those who received the curse and the blessings of Noah. Because of the unique way in which this ideology was employed in South Africa from the time of slavery and during apartheid, it is reasonable to conceive that it also played a vital role in the construction of the masculinities of males in South Africa.

6. Conclusion

The painting of Jacob Zuma, hanging on the wall in a white-owned gallery in Johannesburg, was not merely the depiction of an oversexed and corrupt president – it was once again the public display of a son of Ham, painted by a son of Japheth. Of course the socio-political landscape in South Africa is more nuanced and perhaps less categorical than this (as illustrated by the participation of the white middle-aged male in vandalising the painting and a black painter who later also depicted the president in naked splendour), but read in the context of recent debates on racism, whiteness and white privilege, it is reasonable to conceive that there is still a deep insensitivity towards the depiction of black bodies as less human and less civilised and the history of humiliation during our colonial past. Even though it was perhaps not the intention of the painter, *The Spear of the Nation* slotted into the inherited, colonial construct of a certain trope of the black body – the black, uncivilised male body with a huge penis and an insatiable appetite for sex.

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57 *Ibid*., 171.

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