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All men are equal, but some men are more equal than other men



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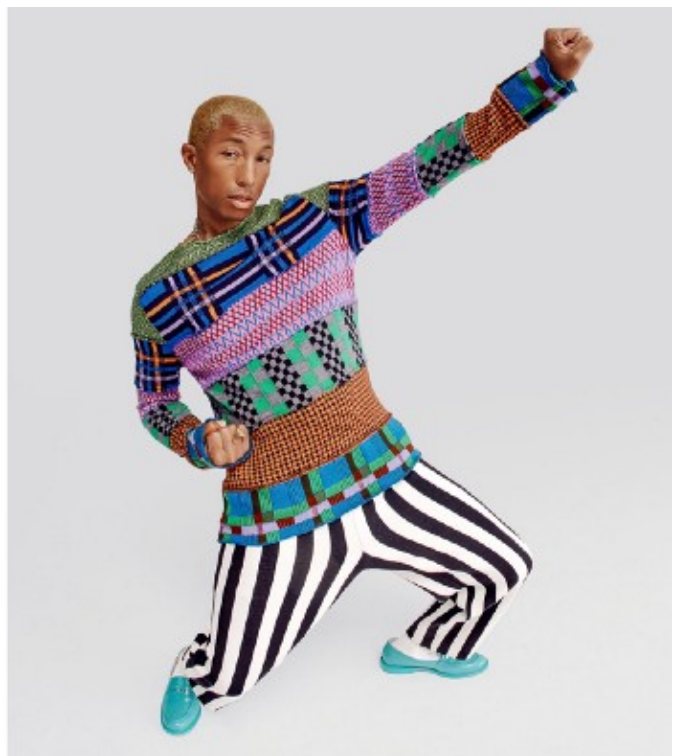
Masculinity, in its normative definition, has been unequivocally monopolised by a single sub-culture of men — white, heterosexual, young, Christian and middle-class men (Kimmel 2004:184). This hegemonic intersectional identity that has been on the receiving end of the uneven and unequal distribution of the socio-cultural and political power in society, are the bar measured against for all things ‘manly’, for the *othered* men who are in the periphery of the masculine centre particularly, and for women and children in general. The socio-political, cultural and economic institutions that endorse the stereotypical and reductively-monolithic construct of mainstream masculinity, such as that of ideological state apparatuses: mass communication outlets, religious institutions, the education system, societal norms and the repressive state apparatus of the military/police that all collectively produce and reproduce this image of masculinity.





Masculinity needs to evolve

MacInnes (1998:12–13) provides a broader and more nuanced perspective on contemporary masculinity, which explores how qualities that were once considered virtues in a given spatial, political and temporal context, such as apartheid for instance, have been correctly villainized into vices, the fundamental contradiction of the very denotative and connotative associations with the term ‘hegemonic masculinity’ and essentially he traces the beginning, and forecast the finality of this form of problematic masculinity, because of society moving towards a more just, critical and equitable society.



Modern masculinity

Liz Walker (2005:226), in contemporary South Africa, brings forth new waves of masculinity, those responding positively to the crisis of problematic masculinity and actively engaged in a critical and robust discourse for the dismantling of all social inequalities. With the many hurdles that threaten hindrance for such revolutionary change for men that have come to a consciousness that the spectrum of violence, from aggression, to abuse, rape and beatings, and its ideological foundations of patriarchal, authoritative behaviour and emotionally devoid, inhuman behaviour is regressive and

it calls for a commitment to the cause of change in metamorphosing into a neo-manhood.



This essay will firstly explore the writings of Michael S. Kimmel's "Masculinity as Homophobia" (2004), MacInnes's "The end of Masculinity" (1998) and Liz Walker's chapter from *Culture, Health & Sexuality* (2005) in efforts to form a theoretical background for analysis of Mark Bher's *The Smell of Apples* (1993). The primary analysis of the novel will explore the possibility of Marnus's complicity in his father's rape of Frikkie as an observer, and the broad symbolic significance of silence in terms of Afrikaner politics, ideology and masculine identity in Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples* (1995).

In efforts to fully comprehend what is; the ambiguous-identity-and-unknown-role crisis of men and manhood, we ought to investigate what was; the traditional and conventional masculine customs of yesteryears so as to navigate to a more cohesive future where social roles are not founded on socio-cultural uncertainty and political instability, so as to strike a balance between being a contemporary man, both responsible and respectable and some of the archaic ways that are conventional. The restructuring of the social condition that is hegemonic masculinity and a redistribution of power to alternative masculinities to settle the fear, competition, aggression and

anxiety that exists between men (Kimmel 2004:183), the hegemony and the (sub)alternate. The power relations become unbalanced when cultural power that of white men, belonging to a middle-class to upper-class, of heterosexual sexual orientation and find themselves in their middle ages only, as Kimmel explains (Kimmel 2004:184). Most importantly, Kimmel contends that masculinity as a social construct enacts itself as: power relations, as flight from the feminine(femininity), as a homosocial enactment, as homophobia, as a cause of sexism, heterosexism and racism and finally works as system that facilitates the empowering and disempowering function in the lives of men (Kimmel 2004:184). McInnes (1998:12–13) adds nuance to the face of hegemonic power by further describing them as being of ‘good’ weight, fair complexion, athletic, employed in a socially revered job, ‘respectable’ height, married, non-rural, non-Catholic and a graduate of tertiary studies. Although, this list is primarily stereotypical and rarely anyone fits the description exactly, the imbalance is very real which inevitably brings about the fear and anxiety of other men, as a deflective tool to prevent emasculation and degradation to ‘non-manly’ status. Contemporary discourses around masculinity being hegemonized rests on the aforementioned argument of the elitist nature of manhood, selecting the smallest of fractions of men, and their features, and practices, as being the centre while relegating, discriminating, disenfranchising the overwhelming majority across racial divides, alongside class status, discriminating on the criteria of age and sexual orientation. So, the socially accepted connotations of manhood marginalized a vast majority, perpetually, leaving the power only ever accessible to a distinct minority, as Kimmel (2004:186) mentions this as the root cause of masculinity being enacted as homophobia and sexism.

A Charlize Theron infomercial from the early 2000s

Manhood has been relegated to a show-and-tell exhibition, to prove oneself, first and foremost, that one is a man to other men, particular those that enjoy access to hegemonic masculinity — this homoerotic desire, and equally as important, to prove this to women — which more often that note becomes patriarchal and sexist. As any exhibition can go two ways, the path of success or the road to failure, chronic anxiety and unceasing restlessness cripples the peace of the majority of men, eternally under *The Smell of Apples* illustrates how Afrikaner identity is cultivated and guarded by the parents in the homestead, Johan and Leonore Erasmus in the Erasmus family life for their children Marnus and Ilse. In the same way Marnus's identity, masculinity and coming of age are closely observed, moulded, and encouraged by his Army General father Johan Erasmus, whose own masculinity is shaped by apartheid ideology, as well as his military background, a hybrid of a problematic ideological state apparatus and violent repressive state apparatus facilitated by the fascist Apartheid government.

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During apartheid, whiteness, nationality and the church were three facets of life that were inextricable from one another, each the source of affirmation and fuel for the other. The army, as seen as the force underpinning the government, was no less affected by these realms of white South African life. The young men in army training, on the Border and in service of the Defence Force, were to represent this apartheid ideal in a highly formalised, concentrated fashion. They had to be 'real' men; rugged, masculine, rugby-playing, hunting, heterosexual men their fathers would be proud of. Masculinity and fatherhood occupied private spaces, like homes and classrooms, but were made public through constant (re)performance. Being large, overarching Afrikaner institutions, the South African government and the Dutch Reformed Church were major prescriptive entities, which educated and informed white South African maleness, the sexuality which that implied, as well as particular notions of fatherhood. The correct execution of this white South African maleness and fatherhood, in turn, reinforced and upheld these religious and governmental ideals. Although the white South African family is under scrutiny here, it should be added that it is the white Afrikaner South African family that I feel is particularly at the core of this discussion. *In The Smell of Apples* Marnus's father, supposedly the perfect example of a father and a man, exposes the fluidity of these ideals. Johan's character exposes to the reader how these apparently formidable ideals themselves are flawed by the imperfect humanity keeping these ideals afloat through constant re-performance. Marnus is offered no real alternative to being proud of his father and the man that he too will become one day. He is however complicit through his silence having witness his friend being raped by his father.



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Johan's touching of Frikkie's penis, and further raping Frikkie, as Johan's son and bestfriend to Frikkie, Marnus watches in his bedroom through the little holes he made in the floor that give a clear view to the General's bedroom. Frikkie is tough and has athletic ability and is seen to have a future as a Springbok player, but Frikkie seems frightened of Marnus's father. The apples bears the stain of sin and as such its smell is allegorically associated with Johan's semen: "These apples are rotten or something", says Frikkie, and he turns his apple around in his hand after sniffing at it. 'They stink. Smell this', and he holds the apple to my nose. I smell the apple in his hand. It smells sour (Behr 1995:179)" It is not the apple that smells sour but Frikkie's hand which is still covered with Johan Erasmus' semen. When Frikkie touches the apple, he transfers the mark of the rape onto the fruit. More broadly in terms of symbolism, Behr can be

said to assimilate the conquest of South Africa by his forefathers to a rape, the violence of forced occupation, theft, genocide, literal rape and other unspeakable violences and trauma that inform today's performative reality that is built on historical erasure.

Johan Erasmus and his son's bonding activities include showering together and swimming naked in the ocean. While the swimming in the ocean is a silent activity, their showers together are filled with conversation. As a homosocial practice, Johan is particularly interested in what Marnus and his friend Frikkie do in their spare time, and, seemingly, in his son's physical development: "So tell Dad, does that little man of yours stand up yet in the mornings?" (Behr 1995:63). Erasmus' rape of Frikkie "cast[s] a darker implication on these interchanges" (Heyns, 1996:93). In the same way Marnus' idyllic swimming sessions with his father also gains a darker meaning when his father starts insisting that a reluctant Frikkie join in their naked swim (Behr 1995: 51). Lurking behind the rugged heterosexual masculinity of the father is a predatory paedophilic nature, that causes him to express a homoerotic and homosexual facet of his identity, in an unacceptable way, through raping Frikkie. This menacing, predatory, possessive and action of power is inherent in hegemonic masculine identities. The binary oppositional framing of heterosexual and homosexual identities, as polar opposites when sexuality is rather a spectrum and fluid, which has been so carefully cultivated in the Afrikaner mythology in the nationalism project, is exploded. Homosexuality, ostensibly seen as unacceptable in the Afrikaner community, becomes, ironically, one of the main ways in which Marnus' father, as a representative of the Afrikaner patriarchy, maintains his feeling of power.

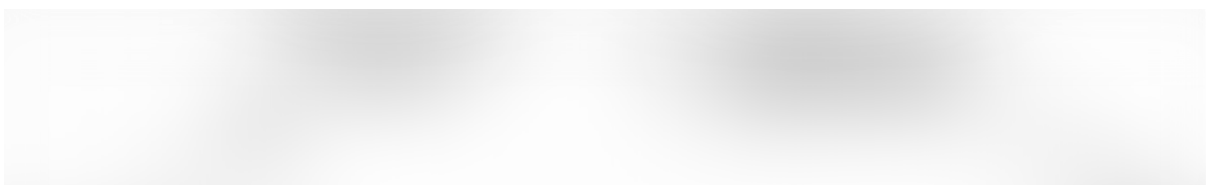
Frikkie is depicted in the novel as a boy on the verge of the dissident period of adolescence. He is both physically more developed, more world-wise and more sexually aware than his friend Marnus. Erasmus, probably aware of Frikkie's potency and tendency to rebellion, might be using the rape as a method to curb the boy as socialising practice. Perhaps Erasmus is envious of Frikkie's tendency to break the rules and transgress regulations, something which Erasmus' social role as a military officer does not allow him to do. Symbolically, Frikkie as the developing, potential man, must be 'put in his place' by the elder generation. The violation is a disturbing comment on the nature of the masculine power dynamics underlying Afrikaner patriarchy. The connections or bonds between the older and younger generation of men in this society are concerned with the transmission of power along generational lines. The success of the patriarchal system can only be maintained if the younger generation concedes to the wishes and mouldings of the fathers. Often violence seems to be necessary to

ensure that this shaping of the younger generation takes place successfully. On a symbolic level, then, the rape scene [...] symbolises the “generational violence” (Barnard 2000:208) inherent to the maintenance of the Afrikaner patriarchy.



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In *The Smell of Apples*, the characters appear to labour under a layer of history which weighs heavy on their shoulders. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the biblical principle, as quoted above, is precisely the one to which the narrator alludes: “I know that it is one of the greatest commandments, never to take the name of the Lord in vain. It’s one of those sins where the punishment gets carried from one generation to the next. Even if you don’t take the name of the Lord in vain yourself, but your great-grandfather did, you’ll still be punished for it (Bher 1995:10).” This remark ironically foreshadows the boy’s epic race in the bush of Southern Angola. There, he desperately tried to escape from God’s punishment (from death) but instead embraced it. In his soul-searching, he was forced to contemplate his past and that of his forefathers. He realised that he had refused to acknowledge their wrongdoing as well as his own. Had he chosen to; he might have freed himself from this burden. Facing death, he attempted to make a closing expiatory confession, “I try to speak to him, to tell him that I well knew all along, just like all the others.” But it was already too late. He was “dumb” (198). Marnus surrendered to death as his parents surrendered to deceit because they were uncomprehending of omnipresent yet concealed guilt.





Marnus is coerced into the patriarchal system through both violence and tenderness from his father. This occurs when the family opens the Chilean general's parting gifts after his departure. "Mister Smith" has left Marnus his military epaulettes and his family encourage him to put them on: "It's Ilse who suggests that I put on my camouflage suit so that we can fit the epaulettes on to the shoulders. I shake my head and say that I don't feel like getting changed. But now Dad also says I should go and change into the camouflage suit. He'll help me fasten the epaulettes with their little screws. look at Mum, but she also says should go" (Behr, 1995:195).

What the novel tells us broadly is that both toxic masculinity and patriarchy continue to exist because other men and members of society say nothing. The loud silence allows for evil to triumph. — — — (2200 words)

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Masculinity

Sexual Assault

Hegemonic Masculinity

Ideology

The Smell Of Apples



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