

The New Africans: A textual analysis of the construction of
‘African-ness’ in Chaz Maviyane-Davies’ 1996 poster
depictions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

THESIS

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Abstract

In 1996, Zimbabwean graphic designer Chaz Maviyane-Davies created a set of human rights posters which represent several articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, from what he calls an “African perspective”. In this study I investigate how Maviyane-Davies has constructed ‘African-ness’ and probe what he refers to as the “alternative aesthetic” that he is trying to create. I use a visual social semiotic approach to examine the discourses he draws on to re-image and re-imagine Africa and Africans in a manner that contests the stereotypical representations found in political, news and economic discourses about Africa, paying particular attention to the ways he uses images of the body. My analysis of the posters shows how complex and difficult it can be to contest regimes of representation that work to fix racialised and derogatory meanings. In response to the pejorative stereotypes of the black body, Maviyane-Davies uses images of strong, healthy, and magnificent people (mostly men) to construct a more affirmative representation of Africa and Africans. Significantly, he draws on sports, touristic, traditional and hegemonic discourses of masculinity in an attempt to expand the complexity and range of possible representations of African-ness. In so doing he runs the risk of reproducing many of the stereotypes that sustain not only the racialised and gendered (masculinist) representations of Africa, but also a sentimentalisation and romanticisation of a place, a people and their traditions. Apart from women in prominent positions, other conspicuous absences from these images include white people and hegemonic references to Western modernity. I do not believe he is discarding whites and modernity as un-African, but is rejecting the naturalisation of whiteness as standing in for humanity, and particular icons of Western modernity as significations of ‘modernity’ itself.

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Introduction

Zimbabwean graphic designer Chaz Maviyane-Davies describes his “destiny” as an African designer as being “bound up with the necessity for profound social change” (Maviyane-Davies, 1999: n.p.). He began his work in 1983 in a newly-independent Zimbabwe with the establishment of the Maviyane Project, a Harare-based design studio comprising a small team of designers and a photographer. At the end of the guerrilla war, the newly elected government set about the reconstruction of the country and the establishment of a socialist state (McQuiston, 1993: 76). The Maviyane Project’s concern with issues around social development and solidarity within the so-called Frontline States struggling against apartheid and South African aggression supported these efforts (McQuiston, 1993: 76). In addition to their political concerns, the Project also tackled issues of consumerism, health, nutrition, social responsibility, the environment, and human rights – interests that Maviyane-Davies continued to pursue after the closing of the Project in 2000.

But the promise of post-independent Zimbabwe began to disintegrate by the end of the 1990s as Zimbabweans suffered the effects of economic deterioration, government mismanagement and President Robert Mugabe’s ruthless retaliation against any opposition¹ (Meredith, 2008: 17). Maviyane-Davies then began using his design talents to take Mugabe’s Zanu-PF government to task for their abandonment of democratic principles in favour of violence and intimidation. During 2000, in the run-up to the general election in June 24 – 25, Maviyane-Davies initiated his “30 days of graphic activism” campaign during which he produced 50 poster images accompanied by written texts, distributed on email and across the internet, commenting on the political situation in Zimbabwe (Maviyane-Davies, 2007: n.p.). He also called on other graphic designers to support and participate in this work. While it is unclear whether the campaign had any effect on the outcome of the election (which Zanu-PF won by a narrow margin), Maviyane-Davies did succeed in highlighting the political abuses prevalent in Zimbabwe at the time. As a result, he and his family were forced into exile in 2001. He took up a teaching post at the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston, USA (McQuiston, 2004: 178; Murg, 2007: n.p.).

¹ The average wages were lower than at independence in 1980, unemployment had risen three-fold, public services were breaking down, life expectancy was falling, Mugabe’s rule was sustained through violence and repression, courts were ignored, property rights were crushed and the independent press was suppressed (Meredith, 2008: 17).

Despite being trained as a designer in the West², Maviyane-Davies was frustrated with what he perceived as the domination of Western visual culture in Zimbabwe which he felt “patronised the black community not only in the handling of the images of black people, but in the attitudes and strategies employed to sell them goods” (McQuiston, 1993: 76). As a result he and the others in the Maviyane Project sought “to create a new graphic language that would not only serve the communication needs of a modernised society, but would also be relevant to the black community, respecting the strong indigenous visual culture present mainly in their traditional arts and crafts” (McQuiston, 1993: 76). But Maviyane-Davies’ irritation with the manner in which Africans were portrayed was not restricted to graphic design. He was also frustrated with a news media that, for the most part, constructed an image of Africa as “a continent torn apart by hatred and brutality, corpses and corruption”. In his view, if you “ignore these images ... the continent has no other identity” (Maviyane-Davies, 2007: n.p.).

Maviyane-Davies’ view is shared by Ebo (1992: 15) who speaks of the “negative and misguided image of Africa portrayed in the American media” and insists that the portrayal of Africa as “a crocodile infested dark continent where jungle life has perpetually eluded civilisation” is a “deliberate and systematic process” that is maintained by the way in which the American media select foreign news. The creation of an Africa with an identity that is associated with the “quality of lack” can be seen as part of the strategies of legitimisation of the African colonial project (Bates, 2007: 69). Identifying Africa and Africans as being somehow deficient has justified the ‘civilising’ influence of the colonists. While this image of Africa is historically linked with the colonial project, its legacy is argued to continue today partly in the simplistic generalisations of mass media representations of Africa as a single, racially, geographically and economically homogenous entity, perpetually in a state of crisis and conflict (Hawk, 1992: 8; Pieterse 1992: 80; Grant & Agnew, 1996: 729; Bates, 2007: 69). Africa is normally constituted as culturally and nationally monolithic and its conflicts represented in the pejorative language of tribalism. In contrast, the West is understood to be culturally and nationally diverse and its conflicts represented and understood in this light (Ebo, 1992: 15). But as much as the African continent is seen in this negative light, the

² Maviyane-Davies was born in Zimbabwe and went to school in Zimbabwe and Zambia. His design education includes an MA in Graphic Design from the Central School of Art and Design in London, and an Advanced Diploma in Postgraduate Filmmaking from the Central Saint Martins School of Art and Design London. Maviyane-Davies followed this up with a year in Japan studying three-dimensional design and nearly a year in Malaysia working on a variety of design projects for the International Organisation of Consumers Unions and JUST World Trust.

African body has frequently also been constructed as deficient in a variety of ways by the Western media (Bates, 2007: 68). This deficiency is even perpetuated in representations of Africans in sport, where their successes are represented in such a way as to reinforce the notion of Africans as “all brawn and no brain” (Andrews, 2000: 182).

It is these kinds of representations of Africa that Maviyane-Davies rails against when he speaks of his “indignation at the way Africans are always portrayed” and which, in 1996, motivated a self-initiated task of creating a set of human rights posters which represent several articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from “an African perspective” (Maviyane-Davies, 1999: n.p.). His posters constitute a set of 12 images (Appendix A) which illustrate or represent articles of the International Declaration of Human Rights. The image which introduces the rest of the set comprises a manipulated photographic image, a dedication to “all people whose lives have been destroyed by intolerance, greed, fear, stupidity, misunderstanding, political gains, egotism, carelessness, profit, progress, self-righteousness, indifference, deception, sterility, absolutism, ignorance and power...”, and the words “UN RIGHTS” on it. The other 11 posters are also manipulated photographic images with the selected Human Rights charter articles printed at the bottom of the image. In 1997, he added a 13th image to the set and published it as the Rights Calendar for that year (McQuiston, 2004: 230-233). The rights he chose to illustrate are Articles 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 15, 19, 21, 26, 27 and 29 (Appendix B), which deal with issues of equality, discrimination, oppression and torture, nationality, governance, expression and opinion, education, culture and responsibilities to the community and the environment. As part of this undertaking, he set himself three tasks: first, to use his creativity to fight for human rights in Africa; second, to create an “alternative aesthetic” in an attempt to counter the “pre-packaged, off-the-shelf, foreign images”; and third, to understand the notion of human rights, not only in terms of their abuse, but as positive, integral parts of “the celebration of the human spirit and intelligence” (Maviyane-Davies, 1999: n.p.; Spiegel, n.d.).

It is Maviyane-Davies’ aim of creating an alternative aesthetic, and his efforts to counter the negative identity of Africa and Africans, that I am interested in exploring in this thesis. Edward Said (2005: 188) talks about the existence of a “counter-will: that is the will of other people to resist” the imposition of an identity. In his response to being ‘Othered’, Maviyane-Davies is quite clearly attempting to assert a counter-will and articulate an alternative discourse. In this study I investigate how Maviyane-Davies has constructed African-ness and

probe the alternative aesthetic that he constructs. To this end, I will ask, “In his attempt to create an alternative aesthetic and a more progressive image of Africa, what discourses, apart from the political, news, and economic discourses about Africa, is he drawing on?” I am also particularly interested in the way he uses images of the body. In contrast to the hegemonic images of conflict and disease, Maviyane-Davies constructs images of the African body as strong, healthy, and magnificent. Why is this important? How are the body and identity linked? Brooks (1993: 3) maintains that a body is a narrative and that the representation of a body in a particular manner depends upon and produces a story. So another question I will investigate is: “What alternative narrative is Maviyane-Davies trying to produce, and what role does the body play in this story?”

I conduct an initial examination of all 13 of Maviyane-Davies’ images to identify key themes in them, and then analyse their construction. In the analysis I pay attention to the manner in which he uses images and composition in a “visual grammar” (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996: 20). I also look at other discursive mechanisms, such as rhetorical tropes and intertextuality, in order to discern how he creates a new meaning of African-ness. My analysis of Maviyane-Davies’ posters will be informed by three main approaches: critical discourse analysis (CDA), which aims to generate a critical understanding of how ideology and power work through language (Parker, 1992: 40; Janks, 1998: 195); and Thompson’s (1990) work on the operation of ideologies in texts.

The use of CDA enables one to expose how power works to make phenomena seem natural or common-sensical, and to shed light on discourses which help to sustain these practices (Parker, 1992: 17). Meaning is constructed through a complex, mediated relationship between things in the world, our concepts in thought, and language (Hall, 1997a: 28). From this perspective, or semiotic approach, language can be studied as a system with coherent internal structures (Janks, 1998: 195). But neither the study of narrative structures nor the use of semiotic analysis on their own go far enough: meaning often depends on whole discourses which operate across areas of knowledge about subjects (Dellinger, 1995: n.p; Hall, 1997a: 44-46; Janks, 1998 195) and how this knowledge connects with social practices and questions of power (Hall, 1997a: 47). This approach has been influenced largely by the work of Michel Foucault, who understood discourse to be much wider than language, including many elements of practice and institutional regulation, which are absent from the semiotic and narrative approaches. All discourses construct subject-positions from which we (producers of

knowledge, producers of media, etc) must operate. In a structuralist understanding, the subject is the producer of individual speech acts, but these speech acts – far from being original and creative – are subjected to the rules of the language. In other words, the language speaks the speaker. In Foucault’s conception however, it is the discourse, not the subjects, which produce knowledge. Subjects produce particular texts, but they do so within the boundaries of the discourse and the “regime of truth” operating within a particular context, and so the speaking subject is constituted by discourse and subjected to its rules and conventions (Hall, 1997a: 76). Discourse thus functions to constitute social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief which establish versions of reality (Fairclough, 1995: 55; Janks, 1997: 330-331). In this poster series Maviyane-Davies attempts to establish a new African reality, a position that he claims is vital in the development and the upholding of human rights in Africa.

Thompson’s work on the operation of ideology through texts will also be useful in analysing Maviyane-Davies’ images. Thompson has a critical approach to understanding ideology. According to Janks (2000: 175), he is interested in understanding how meaning is mobilised to maintain and reinforce established relations of domination. He has shown how ideologies operate in texts, and distinguishes five modes through which ideology operates in language: legitimation, dissimulation, unification, fragmentation and reification (Thompson, 1990: 61-65). I use Thompson’s framework to identify dominant notions of African identity that are evident in Maviyane-Davies’ work, despite his attempts to create a new understanding of African-ness. But Thompson’s work is also useful in describing how Maviyane-Davies uses visual language to try and establish different power relations, in particular, how he uses more optimistic imagery to create meaning in the service of a power that does not yet exist.

Finally, my analysis probes the use of intertextuality in Maviyane-Davies’ attempts to generate a new discursive understanding, and more progressive notions of African-ness. The common understanding of intertextuality is “the dependency of discourse’s meaning on a text which was produced earlier” (Gadavani, 2002: 36). But Fairclough (1995: 76) looks beyond the textual level and sees intertextuality as the existence of different genres within the same discourse. This is an important distinction as it acknowledges the *form* of a text which is established and conventionalised through social practice. So the form is not only part of the content, but it is that which links it to social practice. So for Fairclough (1995: 33), the point of intertextual analysis is to go beyond the descriptive linguistic analysis of a text, to a more

interpretive analysis that is concerned with the relationship between the texts and the social practices from which they were produced. He argues that the use of intertextuality in the production of texts is a discursive mechanism that can bring about change in discourses, which is a key aim for Maviyane-Davies in the production of these posters.

In my efforts to understand how Maviyane-Davies has constructed African-ness, what he means by “alternative aesthetic”, and the role that the body plays in these constructions, I begin in Chapter one with a review of the literature on representation and a selection of studies on contemporary discursive strategies employed in the construction of identities. In the second chapter, I describe the research methodology and methods used in the analysis of the posters. This chapter looks in some detail at visual social semiotics as the main methodological framework used in this study and briefly describes how it is used in the three phases of my research design. In the final chapter I present a broad description and analysis of Maviyane-Davies’ images, establishing the semiotic resources that he uses to create meaning potentials. This leads to a more detailed analysis of the main discourses represented in the images. In the concluding part of this chapter, I consider what has been left out of the images and the possible meanings of these omissions.

Chapter one

Theoretical framework

In this chapter I review the literature which informs my study of Maviyane-Davies' posters in general, as well looking more specifically at the literature which enables me to situate my analysis of his work in the context of certain discourses. He created a set of posters in 1996 depicting several of the articles of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, with the aim of creating an "alternative aesthetic" to generate a more positive representation of Africa and Africans (Maviyane-Davies, 2007: n.p.). I present the literature in two sections: In the first part of this chapter, I review the literature on representation, which broadly informs my investigation into how Maviyane-Davies constructs African-ness through his posters. In the second part I discuss discourses of the body and sports, tourism, tradition and maleness which are evident in Maviyane-Davies' construction of African-ness.

Part 1: Representation

Our social lives are made up of representations which we need to understand and navigate our social environments, and to be able to connect with one another. The manner in which we think, communicate, and act in these environments is often based on what we understand to be true; and what we think to be true is, in turn, based partly on how the media represent and mediate the outside world to us (Williams 2005: 121). So language (whether it is textual or visual) can be used to say something meaningful about the world to other people. Hall (1997a: 24-25) provides three theories that attempt to explain this phenomenon. The first is the *reflective* or *mimetic* approach in which language simply reflects meaning which already exists in the world of objects, people and events. In the second theory an author, in the process of creating texts, imposes her or his unique meaning on the world through language. This is the *intentional* approach to representation, which argues that words and images mean what the authors intend they should mean. The third approach is the *constructionist* approach to meaning and language in which meaning is constructed through language. In this constructionist approach, language can be studied as a system with coherent internal structures (Hall, 1997a: 25-28). Languages are simply signs organised in various ways to create meaning. But in order for us to understand these signs, we require shared codes, which enable us to decode the signs in a meaningful way. These codes are crucial for meaning and

representation and are constructed as a part of social convention, and as such are part of our culture. So the constructionists propose a relationship between things in the world, our concepts in thought, and language. This approach to language presents a symbolic domain of life where texts (words, images and objects) function as signs that have meaning in relation to other signs (Hall, 1997a: 29).

This constructionist approach tends to focus on the structure of a text rather than on the processes involved in its creation and (importantly) its interpretation. The danger of such an approach is that it can lean towards textual determinism – the assumption that texts are read much as was intended by their creators, leaving little scope for contradictions within and between texts or for variations among their interpreters (Chandler, 2002: 185). However, Hall (1980: 130-131) rejects this, insisting that readers also have agency in the construction of meaning from texts. Inasmuch as creators of texts encode meaning into the text, readers of texts decode them. This includes not simply basic recognition and understanding of what a text says but also the interpretation and appraisal of its meaning with reference to relevant codes (Hall, 1980: 130-131), or interpretive repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 139). So meaning-making is a socially located practice and, depending on who reads or views a text, there are many potential meanings – texts are polysemic:

Meaning floats. It cannot be finally fixed. However, attempting to ‘fix’ it is the work of a representational practice, which intervenes in the many potential meanings of an image in an attempt to privilege one. So rather than a right or wrong meaning, what we need to ask is ‘Which of the many meanings in this image does the [author] mean to privilege?’ Which is the preferred meaning? (Hall, 1997b: 228)

So meaning-making is highly complex, often depending on larger units of analysis – narratives, statements, groups of images and discourses which operate across whole areas of knowledge about subjects (Dellinger, 1995: n.p.; Hall, 1997b: 228; Janks, 1998: 195). Janks (1998: 195) asks questions about how an audience can use its knowledge of a text and the context in which it was produced to understand not so much what was said, but what was implied:

Think for example of how much social and linguistic knowledge is necessary for a listener to interpret a remark as racist or sexist. What does the listener have to know about the meaning and choice of words, the pattern of intonation used, the sequence of information? What does the listener have to know about the speaker?

What does the listener have to know about the structures of domination and subordination in the society? What does the listener have to know about the social conventions and the context? What past experience and personal history does a listener have to bring to such a remark? How do listeners know how to combine their linguistic, personal and social knowledges? (Janks, 1998: 195)

In an effort to respond to these kinds of questions, researchers have become more concerned with representation as the production of knowledge, and how this connects with social practices and questions of power (Hall, 1997a: 51). This approach to representation is influenced largely by the work of Michel Foucault, who was interested more in the production of knowledge than in meaning-making. He was interested in how knowledge is produced through what he termed discourse and the relations of power, rather than the relations of meaning. Foucault's understanding of discourse is much wider than language and includes many elements of social practice and institutional regulation which are absent from the semiotic approach (Foucault, 1980: 114-115). It attempts to overcome the distinction between language and practice. Foucault understood discourses as defining and producing the objects of our knowledge and as a consequence ruling in certain ways of talking about a topic or of conducting oneself in relation to that topic, and ruling out and limiting other ways of talking and behaving. Discourses then, are principally organised around processes of exclusion, and so mark out legitimate positions for the speaker, influencing how ideas are put into practice. These ideas/statements are put into practice through, and can be identified by, the institutions from which they come and to which they relate (Hall, 1997a: 44; Macdonnell, 1986: 4). Discourse is thus more comprehensive than language. Discourses are not simply disembodied statements or collections of statements, but rather groupings of statements that are "enacted within a social context, which are determined by that social context and which contribute to the way that social context³ continues its existence" (Mills, 2004: 11). According to (Macdonnell, 1986: 4), Foucault asserts that nothing meaningful exists outside of discourse – "whatever signifies or has meaning can be considered to be part of discourse".

³ The social context and historical specificity are very important in Foucault's understanding of discourse. He acknowledges that a different discourse or episteme (the current way of thinking or state of knowledge) will arise at a later historical moment. "Thus things mean something and are only true within a certain historical context. For example, the *production* of a 'homosexual' as a kind of social subject is *produced* within certain kinds of moral, legal, medical and psychiatric discourses, practices and institutional apparatuses in operation at a particular moment in history" (Hall, 1997a: 55).

Foucault's understanding of the subject differs too from that of the structuralists. From a structuralist point of view, the subject is the producer of individual speech acts, which are subservient to the rules of the language – in other words, the language speaks the speaker (Chandler, 2002: 198). In Foucault's conception of the subject, it is the discourse, not the subjects, which produce knowledge. Subjects produce particular texts, but they do so within the confines of the discourse and the "regime of truth"⁴ operating within a particular context and so the subject is produced within discourse – it must be subjected to the discourse and submit to its rules and conventions (Hall, 1997a: 55). All discourses construct subject positions from which we must operate (Hall, 1997a: 55), but because discourses never exist in isolation from one another, these subject positions are not fixed and therefore the subject is a site of contestation and contradiction (Jupp, 2006: 75).

In his work, Maviyane-Davies is reacting to the African subject constructed primarily in Western news discourses (Maviyane-Davies, 2007: n.p.), in which Africa is depicted as an homogenous entity or as a single country. This means that generic terms can be used to refer to events in specific African countries, so that a problem in one country is seen as a problem prevalent in all African countries. Africa is also frequently depicted as the 'Dark Continent': a discourse which constructs Africa as an ahistorical region with backward traditions, practices and superstitions; where hunger, famine, starvation and disease (particularly HIV and Aids) are showcased as typical of the African existence; and in which political instability, violence, conflict, coups and civil war are endemic (Michira, 2002: n.p.).

So in order to answer the question posed in this particular study – how has Maviyane-Davies constructed African-ness? – I need to use this notion of discourse and its implicit idea of power relations as a way of understanding what discourses he is reacting against, and resorting to, as a mechanism for challenging dominant representations of Africans and Africa. Foucault's interest in the relationship between knowledge and power, and how power operates within institutional apparatuses and its technologies thus provides us with a useful tool for textual analysis. He argues that power relations permeate all levels of society and therefore operate at every site of social life (Hall, 1997a: 50). Further, the object of the operation of power incorporates the physical body: different discursive formations and

⁴ Knowledge and the application of knowledge are always forms of power, and knowledge linked to power assumes the authority of truth and has the power to make itself true. The application of knowledge in the world has real effects and in that sense, it becomes a truth. Thus Foucault did not speak of the absolute truth of knowledge, but of a "discursive formation sustaining a regime of truth" (Hall, 1997a: 55).

apparatuses categorise and “inscribe the body” differently (Hall, 1997a: 50). “Dominant cultural norms, values and beliefs are literally inscribed and contested on the physical body” (Atkinson & Wilson, 2002: 385). For example, a central icon of the caring person in Western culture is the figure of the mother as she signifies the caring, nurturing nature of women (for example Michelangelo’s *Pieta*) (Miller, Brown & Cullen, 2000: 144). So a category of motherhood is created and invested with a regime of truth. This regime of truth defines, amongst others, the behavioural traits that are outwardly visible (women are primary carers for children, breast feeding is important, etc). These traits are invented or identified by professionals with knowledge (paediatricians, parenting experts, politicians, etc) and are placed within the discourse of motherhood which naturalises and constrains the behaviour of mothers within a social context – good mothers are in stable, monogamous, heterosexual relationships, are self-sacrificing and selfless; bad mothers are lesbians, single, overbearing or have jobs which makes them neglectful. So motherhood is not a biological category, it is a social one which is constructed in such a way that it has physical effects on the bodies of women (Macdonald, 1995: 135-139). Foucault radically historicised the conception of the body as a surface on which different regimes of power, “write their meanings and effects” (in Hall, 1997a: 51). The body is a “text of culture” and bodily appearance impacts on, and is impacted by, a person’s interaction with society (Atkinson & Wilson, 2002: 385).

In the next section I discuss some of the key discourses that I have identified in Maviyane-Davies’ poster series. These include discourses of the body and sports, tourism, tradition and maleness.

Part 2: Discourses in Maviyane-Davies posters

Representations of the African body

Contemporary representations of the African body reflect a visual legacy of degeneracy and disease inherited from the discourses of 19th- and early 20th-century colonialism (Pieterse, 1992: 35; Bates, 2007: 69). During the colonial period, documenting Africa and Africans was an important enterprise as it was the only way the most ordinary Europeans “knew anything about the places that their countrymen were busy ruling” (Landau, 2002: 141). As such, the documentation was a reflection of the broad attitudes about Africa and Africans which constructed them as ‘Other,’ and in a negative light in order to legitimise the colonial project (Pieterse, 1992: 35, 80; Grinker, Lubkemann & Steiner, 2010: 22).

Symbolic representation of bodies is one of the primary techniques by which they can be socially ordered, differentiated and segregated (Ezuluomba, 2009: 14). Representations of African bodies as deficient enabled Europeans to categorise Africans as inferior, and at the same time to highlight certain positive and redeeming qualities of the colonisers whose construction of Africans was derived from their own requirements, prejudices and imaginations of self (Pieterse, 1992: 35):

visual imagery representing Africa has more to do with European paradigms and attempts to order knowledge about the world, than with the supposed (yet constructed) intrinsic, predictable qualities of the people and places depicted. (Bates, 2007: 69)

The intrinsic racism of ‘Othering’ serves not only to mark difference but also to create a hierarchical structure with Europeans as better than Africans. Pieterse (1992: 35) suggests that negative images of Africa and Africans, which came into currency under conditions of people’s ignorance about Africa, served to construct difference and so affirm European superiority and accomplishment. In this process Africans are constructed as savages and inferior, rendered voiceless and degenerate in terms of the attributes of European notions of civilisation. An overriding characteristic associated with African people during the colonial project was the quality of lack:

The icon of the 19th-century savage is determined by absences: the absence, or scarcity, of clothing, possessions, attributes of civilization. (Pieterse, 1992: 35)

Bodies are central in determining individual and cultural understandings of the world (Frank, 1991: 13), and constructing the African body and continent as deficient legitimised⁵ the colonial project which, at the same time, proposed distributing the effective attributes of civilisation, such as clothing, morality and order. Such negative images of Africa have persisted (Hall, 1997b: 245) and black people are frequently portrayed in terms of social problems (Horne, Tomlinson & Whannel, 1999: 175). In many contemporary visual constructions of Africans there is frequent allusion to something “dirty, degenerate, decaying and dying” (Bates, 2002: 67), or inhuman and vicious. Media representations of black people “fall largely into two categories – victims and perpetrators” (Horne *et al*, 1999: 175). One of the places where these stereotypes do not hold, appears to be in the arena of sports imagery:

⁵ See **Legitimation** in Chapter two as one of the modes of operation of ideology as described by Thompson (1990).

Here, uniquely, we see black people as active and successful, achieving goals and receiving popular acclaim. In athletics, football and cricket, black sportspeople have achieved a prominence much greater than their proportion within the population might suggest. Media sport offers a fund of images of black people achieving success and therefore offers role models to young black people. (Horne *et al*, 1999: 175)

De Wachter (2001: 90) proposes an optimistic view of the potential of sport as a mechanism for the rehabilitation of the image of the ‘typical’ African: sport offers the utopian ideal of modernity in which everyone is entitled to equal rights and equal opportunities and under these conditions, the best person will win (de Wachter, 2001: 92). So in contrast to the bleak representations of Africans in news discourses, sports discourses offer a mechanism for the construction of an African-ness in terms of a different more “positive” social identity (MacClancy, 1996: 3, 12). However, Horne *et al* (1999: 176) caution that while sports discourse contains the potential for alternative representations of black people, this may simply reproduce many of the stereotypes that sustain racism. The most common myth reproduced through sports imagery is that of the ‘natural’ ability of black people to succeed in physical activities like sports and the consequent assumption of an inability to perform in more cerebral activities.

In the truncated dialectic of whiteness and blackness, whiteness alone is mind – or at least the essence of mind. By contrast the blacks as a cultural group are most associated with their bodies. (Birt, 2004: 59)

And so the stereotyping of Africans as essentially physical and savage, mentally lacking and therefore as deficient, is perpetuated in a contemporary form and black bodily identity is still presented against the backdrop of the “dominant persistence of whiteness” (MacDonald, 2009: 241). Sports discourses are not only racialised, they are also gendered. Masculine imagery⁶ which celebrates strength, toughness, determination, aggression, commitment and discipline, and where emotions are marginalised, is at the heart of sporting discourse (Horne *et al*, 1999: 173). Images are typically of “superbly-honed athletic bodies, tensed in action, super-men and super-women” (Hall, 1997b: 233).

⁶ Female imagery is becoming more frequent in sports discourses, but tends to associate women athletes more with appearance than with performance and so offers the female athlete’s body as an object for the male gaze (Horne *et al*, 1999: 173).

Touristic discourses

Sport is not the only discourse in which the display of the body plays a central role. Touristic representations rely heavily on the display of idealised female and male bodies to appeal to potential travellers (Pritchard, 2001: 80). Through these and other highly selected images (Ip Yui Ling, 2008: 9) the essence of people and places is constructed through tourism discourses (Papen, 2005: 79; Rogal, 2005: 173; Pritchard & Morgan, 2001: 169). Tourism has been described as a “parade of commodified difference” (Taylor, 1998: 4), and the features of tourism discourses include “a set of expressions, words and behaviour as well as particular touristic structures and activities that describe a place and its inhabitants” (Papen, 2005: 79). The language used and images chosen are consciously selected to present only the positive, attractive and exotic sides of the people and places (Ip Yui Ling, 2008: 8). For example, the National Geographic site lists the following under “South Africa Tourism: Ten Things to See and Do”: game parks, Robben Island (the prison island where Nelson Mandela was incarcerated), vineyards, the “Big five” (lion, leopard, buffalo, rhino, and elephant) and ocean life, “including whales, flying sharks, seals, sea otters, dolphins, tuna, and penguins and other marine birds”, Table Mountain, Bushman paintings, cultural villages (like Shakaland), the “Big Hole” in Kimberley (a remnant of South Africa’s diamond rush), travelling through the country on the Blue Train (a luxury train) and, finally, the Palace of the Lost City (an entertainment and leisure complex constructed on the theme of an imaginary palace in the African bush “inhabited by a lost tribe of gentle people”) (National Geographic News, 2010). While references to Zimbabwe as a tourism destination are much harder to find, they similarly gloss over the political problems to present the country in terms of its breath-taking scenery (mostly Victoria Falls, but also Eastern Highlands), wildlife (Hwange National Park), extreme sports (bungee jumping, white water rafting, etc) and heritage sites (Great Zimbabwe, various museums, etc) (National Geographic Traveler, n.d.; Borden, 2012: n.p.).

Tourism discourses seek to construct a kind of utopia (a form of reification) where everything is ideal or in a perfect state – a world of economic calm and political tranquillity – and in so doing it glosses over any socio-political problems and its own involvement in creating and/or sustaining them (Taylor, 1998: 5). Such utopian representations can be seen in, for example, the constructions of indigenous culture as represented in cultural villages. These offer an experience of cultural difference by exoticising and romanticising traditional cultures and livelihoods (Schutte, 2003: 484) thus enabling the tourist to experience and consume “Otherness” in relation to Western modernity (Taylor, 1998: 5). Cultural villages are social

constructions which construct the ‘natives’ specifically around what tourists want to see, and possibly even as constructs of Western cultural understandings of local traditions and cultures (Saarinen, 2007: 141). Over time, the repetition of such representations leads to the emergence of particular connotations and symbolic meanings that form a ‘place image’ – the various distinct meanings connected with real places regardless of what they are like in actuality.

Place images are always partial, often exaggerated or understated, and may or may not provide an accurate representation of everyday life in these locales. They are often simplified versions of reality; a result of stereotyping or prejudice towards locales or their inhabitants. (Coyle and Fairweather, 2005: 149)

These stereotypical constructions are often persistent and stable, and circulate as a form of popular discourse. Related place images coalesce to create a place myth which while relatively stable, can change over time (Coyle and Fairweather, 2005: 149). An African touristic place myth typically focuses on:

pristine landscapes, free-roaming wildlife and culturally pure and untouched Africans ... and with all the associations that come along with these words like huts, water buckets on women’s head, dirt roads, far and free horizons, lions, danger and so on... (Wishitemi, Spenceley & Wels, 2007: 1-2).

As with all representations, what is significant about place myths is that what is left out is often as revealing as what is included. Absent from many African touristic place myths are representations of achievements and inventiveness that are often associated with modernity – such as automobiles, sky-scrapers, mobile phones, computers, etc, as these do not fit the Western image of what Africa is (Wishitemi, *et al*, 2007: 3). Touristic discourses thus often construct the object of the touristic gaze as pristine, primitive, traditional, peripheral, and ‘Other’: an example of what life was like before the “assault of progress and modernism” (Taylor, 1998: 17).

While the construction of touristic place myths is not without problems, it does create an exploitable product that can be sold to potential tourists (Coyle & Fairweather, 2005: 151), offering governments a tool for nation-building through the construction of a distinctive national identity (Leong, 1989: 356-357; Fürsich & Robins, 2004: 133; Rogal, 2005: 172):

Apart from the economic benefits of promoting tourism, many governments develop tourism as it gives them the opportunity to select and market certain cultural practices and meanings as part of a national heritage or national tradition. In this way, they can choose certain traditions and histories and transform them into versions of history that promote and sustain a particular version of a national identity and nationhood (Leong, 1989: 357). For example, the South African ‘rainbow nation’ coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu was adopted by political figures, used by business and a variety of organisations within civil society to advance various political and socio-economic causes, and to encourage patriotism. At the time it was accepted by both the national and the foreign media as an accurate description of what the South African nation had become, and charmed the world into declaring the South African transition a miracle (Habib, 1996: 16). Coyle and Fairweather (2005: 150) speculate that if a place-myth is repeated often enough through the media, advertising and political statements, it has the power to influence local populations as much as visitors, as it offers an “emotional salve” (150) to the realities of life and becomes embedded in the local consciousness as a real and accurate representation of the national identity. So place-myths offer local populations a utopian alternative to their lived realities:

...the image of ‘something better’ to escape into, or something we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don’t provide. Alternatives, hopes wishes – these are the stuff of utopia, the sense that things could be better, that something other than what is can be imagined and maybe realised. (Dyer, 1985: 222)

The rainbow nation place-myth doesn’t offer any mechanisms for how to get to that utopian state, but it presents what such a place would *feel* like and as such it “works at the level of sensibility” (Dyer, 1985: 222).

Leong (1989: 359) explains how the selection and transformation of certain traditions of some ethnic groups, which are then represented as part of the national heritage or tradition, are as much about “indoctrinating into the local citizens a sense of the nation’s past and achievements” as they are about constructing touristic attractions. Many of the monuments and museums which are constructed for tourism are also visited by locals and in this way they are given lessons about their national heritage which become incorporated into their own identity as a citizen of that nation. In this way much of what is understood as traditional, even by locals, is often a construction of tourism.

Reclaiming tradition

The emancipation of tradition from the clutches of colonialism and modernity has often been a preoccupation of liberation movements whose aim has been as much to “reveal and promote indigenous traditions” (Baaz, 2001: 9) as to achieve political liberation. African traditions tend to have been understood in two ways by colonialists: as primitive and without “significant history” or as “genuine and natural”, as opposed to the industrialised West (Skogh, 2001: 186). In the 1920s, African art and traditions began to become associated in the West with a kind of “redemptive primitivism” and became desirable for their “cognitive and aesthetic values that transcend the prison house of modernity and civilisation” (Gikandi, 1996: 178). In postcolonial Africa there have been calls to re-appropriate African indigenous culture as a means of developing a cultural nationalism that could contribute to the creation of a national identity which emphasises African cultural difference from the West (van Haute, 2008: 26).

Proponents of the notion that traditions, customs and tribalism are inventions, argue that traditional African institutions and practices are constructions of colonial authorities and missionaries conspiring with African elders to create and maintain colonial power (Spear, 2003: 3; Mamdani, 1996: 36). Similarly, customary law is seen as an invention of colonial authorities, missionaries and African elders who cobbled together local customs, colonial law, Christian morality and administrative regulations, codified them, and made them enforceable by chiefs. These are seen as contrary to pre-colonial practices (Spear, 2003: 3). While these claims may be overstated, (Spear, 2003: 4-5; Keulder, 2000: 150) it is likely that the nature of tradition and customs has been transformed by colonial policies, but in a far more negotiated manner than the ‘invention of tradition’ school admits:

Far from being created by alien rulers, then, tradition was reinterpreted, reformed and reconstructed by subjects and rulers alike. (Spear, 2003: 4)

Attempts to revive traditions assume such traditions would have remained timeless and unchanging and that it is only through the intervention of tradition’s “evil twin of modernity” during the colonial period that they have become sullied (Spear, 2003: 5). It also assumes that contemporary invented traditional practices are purely a consequence of a conscious construction of tradition, focused on colonial power and agency and disregards normal historical processes of reinterpretation and reformation. Furthermore, the notion of invented traditions constructs Africans as gullible subjects (Ranger, 1983: 212).

That traditions appear timeless, is only because they can endure for long periods of time (Spear, 2003: 6). Their ability to last is because the ways people understand, think about, and classify their traditions, are in constant dialogical tension with social reality. The consequence of this is that traditions are historicised and subject to constant readjustment, so tradition “constitutes a discourse by which people assert present interests in terms of the past” (Spear, 2003: 6). And as a discourse, tradition is not simply imagined, but also exists in tangible forms such as scriptures, institutions, art, music etc. which undergo continual renewal and adjustment to accommodate shifting social and physical realities (Spear, 2003: 6; van Haute, 2008: 25).

Traditions, then, consist both of fixed precedents and principles and fluid processes of adaptation that enable them to be continually renewed in an autonomous and self-regulating process. (Spear, 2003: 6)

It would be false to assert that the persistence of cultures and traditions means that they have not been deeply influenced by the presence of colonialism (Kirkegaard, 2001: 75). But it would be equally wrong to assume that (in spite of the clear power imbalances) the influence of the colonial tradition on indigenous traditional culture has resulted in a “neat copy” (Baaz, 2001: 14) of a perfect colonial model. The influence of colonialism, national and global economic imperatives and tourism have rather been to create a hybrid culture, as the cultures and traditions of both colonised and colonisers have been refigured in the colonial and nation-building processes (Baaz, 2001: 14; Spear, 2003:7-8). Such hybridities should not be understood as existing somewhere in between pure original cultures, but as an on-going condition of all human cultures: by definition, culture is hybrid. This view challenges the idea that pre-colonial cultures and traditions existed in some pure, bounded form, and makes a nonsense of the possibility of retrieving some real, unspoiled and timeless African tradition as a way to liberate Africans from the corrupting influence of modernity (Baaz, 2001: 12). Endeavours to retrieve pre-colonial African culture and tradition are unavoidably selective – the criteria for selection, ironically, often being influenced by modernity (Kirkegaard, 2001: 60). Attempts to retrieve traditions and customs in early post-colonial Tanzania, for example, sought to use selected traditions to create a new national culture for consumption by both locals and tourists. Traditions that enhanced or promoted national unity were selected, while those that promoted tribal identities were rejected (Kirkegaard, 2001: 60-62), demonstrating the political project underpinning and linking creation of tradition and national identity. The

reclamation and representation of tradition in more constructed environments like cultural villages is also highly selective. Those traditions that offer the tourist an experience of primitivism and an escape from modernity are promoted:

Bare female breasts, mud huts, spears, clay pots, barefoot dancing, drums, simple technology, witchdoctors, snakes and crocodiles all evoke the primitive. The juxtaposition to cell phones, computers, dress for success and so forth is most extreme and the modern Western person may look upon the primitive as the possibility of escape to the exact opposite of modernity. (Schutte, 2003: 485)

On the other hand, those that might offend modern sensibilities such as animal sacrifice are suppressed (Schutte, 2003: 479). In this way cultural villages are representations of African traditions in a series of homogenised clichés. African indigenous culture is reduced to different kinds of homesteads; the production of certain crafts and cultural artefacts; selected traditional dress and regalia; preparation of particular kinds of traditional foods and drink; the ever-present witch doctor; and certain kinds of dance and music in which traditional regalia and instruments feature strongly (Xulu, 2005: 76; Saarinen, 2007: 148).

Men on top

The notion of the supremacy of men is deeply embedded in both Western and African cultures (Coetzee, 2001: 300). In these kinds of patriarchal societies, “the norm of what counts as human is provided by the masculine ... in the same way that ‘man’ is said to stand for men *and* women, or ‘his’ incorporates ‘hers’, etc” (Gledhill, 1997: 345). Content studies have shown that media tend to reproduce and strengthen such traditional versions of masculinity (Fejes, 1992: 21) which generally encompass the “values of strength, power, stoicism, action, control, independence, self-sufficiency, male camaraderie/mateship and work” and which tends to devalue “relationships, verbal ability, domestic life, tenderness, communication, women and children” (Barker, 2003: 312). By contrast, in stereotypical representations of femininity, submissiveness, sensitivity, beauty, manipulability and domesticity are valued, and rebelliousness, independence and selfishness are undervalued⁷ (Barker, 2003: 317; Milestone & Meyer, 2012: 114). In addition, men are most often associated with the public domain and the world of work, and women are represented as

⁷ It should be noted that with the emergence of the ‘new man’ and ‘new woman’ some of these stereotypes have been modified. For example the ‘new man’ is able to be artistic, express his feelings and love his children, but these characteristics are represented as strengths rather than weaknesses – so the ‘new man’ is still represented in terms of his strength and agency (Barthel, 1992: 147).

being happily confined to the private spaces of the home and domestic life (Milestone & Meyer, 2012: 99, 115).

Popular culture has conflated femininity with youth and physical appearance in ways that are not the case with men (Milestone & Meyer, 2012: 94, 98). Since the 1980s, and the development of men's fashion magazines, men's bodies have been put on display in ways that were previously reserved for women (Milestone & Meyer, 2012: 119), but while women's beauty centres around age and thinness, the ideal male appearance emphasises a highly toned and muscular physique. But there is another difference: while representations of women are primarily for the male gaze, representations of men in popular culture are not primarily for women – it invites a masculine gaze (Milestone & Meyer, 2012: 122). These stereotypes are also replicated to a lesser extent in sports discourses, where images of male athletes (which predominate) tend to construct them in terms of hegemonic masculinity, describing them as powerful, with self-control and agency, aggression, and their ability to succeed. Women athletes on the other hand are constructed within typically feminine stereotypes and are described, often in sexualised terms that pertain more to their appearance and attractiveness than their sporting prowess (Sabo & Curry Jansen, 1992: 176; Hall, 1997: 231). So the gendered narrative structures of sports and advertising media are inclined to replicate and reinforce normal and natural representations of dominant, controlling masculinity and subservient, passive femininity, and the appropriate relations between them (Sabo & Curry Jansen, 1992: 179).

Conclusion

This chapter reviews the literature which enables me to situate my analysis of Maviyane-Davies' posters within the context of representation as a signifying practice. I have also discussed the discourses of the body and sport, tourism, tradition and maleness which have been appropriated by Maviyane-Davies in his efforts to "re-image" (Mushengyezi, 2004: 51) Africa and Africans. In the next chapter I review the literature which informs my research methodology and discuss the methods used in my analysis of Maviyane-Davies' posters in order to examine his construction of African-ness.

Chapter two

Methodology and research design

This chapter describes the research methodology and methods used in the analysis of Maviyane-Davies' posters in order to examine his construction of African-ness. His project comprised 12 posters of which I analyse four. A preliminary analysis revealed four major themes in this work: the use of traditional African imagery, the use of images of the body, the maleness of the images, and the use of touristic imagery⁸. Although these themes (discourses) are evidenced in all the posters, they are most strongly featured in the following four posters which form the basis of my analysis: Article 1 (All people are born free and equal in dignity and rights), Article 2 (All people are equal regardless of race, religion, etc), Article 7 (We are all equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection before the law), and Article 27 (Everyone has the right to participate in the cultural, artistic and scientific life of the community).

The main methodological framework used in this study is visual social semiotics (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001; Harrison, 2003; Aiello, 2006; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), which finds its genesis in textual analysis and the work of Michael Halliday (1978). He proposes that any semiotic system has to be able perform three simultaneous functions. First, it has to be able to represent experiences or perceptions of the world; second to project relations (attitudes, feelings or judgements) between the producers and receivers of that sign; and third, it has to have the capacity to form organised, coherent complexes of signs, or texts. He refers to these functions as *metafunctions*. The first, the function of creating representations, he calls the ideational metafunction; the second, the part that language plays in creating interactions between texts and the readers of the texts – the interpersonal metafunction; and finally, the mechanisms within texts that bring together all the component representations and interactions into a coherent text (advertisements, interviews, etc) – he calls the textual metafunction (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 140).

⁸ While I have identified these four major themes, they are not the only discourses present in the poster set. Other discourses which could be considered include Pan-Africanism and race. As Pan-Africanism is a particular political discourse, I have chosen to focus on African identity in a broader sense. The issue of race is alluded to by the absence of whiteness within the representation of a broader African identity.

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) have adapted and extended Halliday's ideas to produce a framework for analysing visual texts which similarly consists of three main metafunctions: the *representational meaning* (what is being said), *interactive meaning* (the manner in which the images create relations between *participants*⁹ in the image, and between the participants and the viewers), and the *compositional meaning* (how meaning is conveyed through the layout of the image). Within each of these metafunctions producers and viewers of visual texts make use of *semiotic resources* to construct and interpret meaning (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 140). The term semiotic resource is key in social semiotics and van Leeuwen, (2005: 3) defines it simply as the "actions and artefacts we use to communicate". It is comparable in many ways to the term interpretative repertoire Potter and Wetherell (1987: 139) use to refer to building blocks (constellations of terms, descriptions, tropes, imagery, etc) used by members of communities to produce and understand texts.

Any particular repertoire is constructed out of a restricted range of terms used in a specific stylistic and grammatical fashion. Commonly these terms are derived from one or more key metaphors and the presence of a repertoire will often be signalled by certain tropes or figures of speech. (Wetherell & Potter, 1988: 172)

Similarly, semiotic resources are "signifiers, observable actions and objects that have been drawn into the domain of social communication" (van Leeuwen, 2005: 4) that readers or viewers can use to make sense of the texts before them. Social semioticians stress that the meanings attached to these semiotic resources are not pre-given or fixed, but are affected by their use. And as Hall (1980: 125) points out, there is no necessary equivalence between these processes of encoding and decoding. But while meanings are never permanent or inevitable, the field of possible meanings is restricted because those with cultural power create and perpetuate the conventions of visual representation which favour certain interpretations and readings over others – thereby limiting the meaning potentials created by the use of certain semiotic resources (Aiello, 2006: 90).

Social semiotics is functionalist in that it sees all visual texts as having been constructed to perform specific actions or "semiotic work" (Aiello, 2006: 90), and therefore its main interest is to investigate how various textual strategies are harnessed to construct particular messages. Its use of the term semiotic resources rather than codes distinguishes it from conventional

⁹ Kress and van Leeuwen use the term "participant" to mean people, places or things and I will be using it in this way.

semiotics which emphasises rules or conventions linking signs and meaning. Some forms of visual communication do work according to strict rules and their meaning is highly motivated. Road signs for example, operate as prescribed rules allowing little room for creative interpretation. But at the other end of the scale, some forms of modern art are created with more imaginative invention or with reference to other examples and forms (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 134) and meanings are produced by highly unmotivated signs which allow for openness in reading. Whether viewers of these more artistic images will attempt to interpret them with reference to rules and conventions, or will draw on a variety of resources of interpretation and intertextual connection, will depend upon their “interpretive repertoires” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 139). That different cultural conventions apply in different contexts is an important point from a social semiotic point of view. And by using the idea of resource rather than code, social semioticians are able to account for “change and power imbalance in the visual signification process as defined by its two ends: representation (or, encoding) and interpretation (decoding)” (Aiello, 2006: 90). The significance of the term “semiotic resource” is that it can be used to talk about the resources drawn on by both producers and readers of texts.

Another key element in the social semiotic approach is that resources are discursive – they are not natural, but have been developed over the course of history to prioritise certain interests and functions (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 136). The notion of linear perspective for example, was developed during the Renaissance (when subjectivity and individualism were becoming important social ideals) as a way of representing reality, but has since become established as the natural way of looking at and representing reality (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 136). This has enabled the semiotic resource of “point of view” to be developed. The vertical and horizontal positioning of elements in images in relation to one another and to the viewer creates certain symbolic power relations within images as well as between those elements, and the viewers of those texts. It is also important to note that while the relations of power, detachment, and involvement are not real relations, it is exactly this ability to create these kinds of symbolic relations that makes things like point of view a semiotic resource (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 135), and such resources can be deployed to construct certain meanings.

Up to this point, I have been discussing social semiotics in general as a system. From here, I will elaborate on it as a system of meaning-making and interpretation, with reference to Maviyane-Davies’ 1996 poster set.

The analysis of the images created by Maviyane-Davies in his set of posters can be conducted using a social semiotic framework in a manner which has been developed from Halliday's (1978) work on written texts (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 135).

From within each of the metafunctions described by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), certain semiotic resources are drawn upon to create a range of meaning potentials. I will elaborate on each. First, *representational meaning* is in the first instance conveyed through the participants depicted, the manner in which they are depicted, and the relationships between them and other participants. Images are space-based semiotic environments, and the 'syntax' of the elements within the image are determined by where they are and whether or not they are connected in any meaningful way – for example through lines (vectors¹⁰), colour, shape and so on (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 141). There are two kinds of syntactic pattern. The first is where participants are related to one another in terms of unfolding action, events or processes. These kinds of relationships create narrative representations. In contrast, in conceptual representations, participants are not represented as doing something, but rather as “being something or meaning something or belonging to some category, or having certain characteristics or components” (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 141). Such participants are represented in a more stable manner as “timeless ‘essences’” (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001:141). It is possible for conceptual representations to be embedded within narrative processes (Harrison, 2003: 52).

The second metafunction, *interactive meaning*, is concerned with the associations among the participants in the production and those viewing the image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 119, 254). Although there is little action within Maviyane-Davies' posters, his images create strong symbolic relationships between the viewers and participants in the pictures, which promote this second metafunction. Three main semiotic resources are activated in the creation of symbolic relationships. Firstly, spatial distances are related to emotions of intimacy and distance, and in visual texts this is represented by the size of a person within a frame. If people are depicted close-up, this has the effect of creating a symbolic relationship of closeness and intimacy. Conversely, if we see people from a distance, it is as if we are relating to them more as strangers. Secondly, contact refers to the manner in which the people

¹⁰ Vectors are imaginary, oblique lines (often diagonal) of association that connect participants in some kind of active relationship (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 57).

within an image look at the viewer (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 123) explain that people from inside a picture frame looking directly at viewers create a demand picture – that is, they symbolically demand some kind of relationship with the viewer. What exactly is being demanded is indicated through facial expressions and gestures: for example, an unblinking looking down on the viewer can demand attention and respect. The third semiotic resource, point of view, relates to the manner in which a frontal angle can be used to create certain types of symbolic relationships and degrees of viewer identification and involvement with participants in visual texts. If the position of a viewer is implied as being below an element (if they are looking up at it) in a composition, then that element has potential symbolic power over the viewer; whereas if they are positioned at the same level, then there is a sense of equality between them. Similarly, variations in horizontal angle will create symbolic relations of involvement or detachment. Frontal arrangement of elements allows for maximum involvement, whereas if something is depicted from the side, the viewer is able to remain detached from the image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996:146). Jewitt and Oyama point out that these notions of power, detachment, and involvement, are not the meanings of these angles in an image. They are merely “an attempt to describe a meaning potential, a field of possible meanings, which need to be activated by the producers and viewers of images” (2001: 135).

The *compositional metafunction* is the third metafunction delineated by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 181-229). They suggest that four semiotic resources can be activated through it. First, the *placement* of the participants within an image will affect their role in the composition. Their placement to the left or right, upper or lower part or in the centre or on the margins will invoke certain cultural meanings¹¹. For example, if a participant is placed on the right of an image, it is regarded as representing given (or accepted) knowledge – something which is familiar or common sense. Those on the left are understood to be new or depicting an issue, a problem or a possible solution. Elements placed at the top of an image are seen as ideal (affective, or of offering a sense of promise or what might be, or could be imagined), while those placed in the lower part of the image are seen as real (factual, informational or more down-to-earth). Participants in the centre of a picture provide the nucleus of the information and participants surrounding that are subservient in informational value. A

¹¹ It should be noted that cultural values attributed to placement of participants in various areas of the text, refers primarily to analysis of images in Western societies where the reading of a text is from left to right and top to bottom. This might not necessarily apply to cultures in which reading occurs from right to left or in columns (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 153; Harrison, 2003: 57).

second resource within this metafunction is *framing*. The manner in which participants are framed indicates whether they can be grouped together, or given separate identities within a composition. Frame lines or dividing lines are the most obvious way of creating disconnection, but other elements such as empty space and contrasts produced using colour, form, tonal value, light and dark, and blur and sharpness, etc are all ways of creating discontinuity within a text. Connection on the other hand can be achieved using exactly the same elements, but in a way that signals similarity rather than contrast. A third semiotic resource – *saliency* – refers to the manner in which some elements are made more eye-catching than others. The most obvious techniques to create saliency are size and foregrounding. The larger a participant in the text, the more noticeable it will be. Similarly, components of the image that are foregrounded will likely be more noticeable than those in the background. But a designer can also deploy similar techniques to create saliency as those used to create framing. Sharpness of focus, tonal and colour contrast are ways of manipulating the saliency of various participants and can also be used to modify the saliency of a large or foregrounded participant. For example, an object that is large within a frame would normally be the most salient part of an image, but if it is out of focus it will be less prominent than other smaller participants which are in sharp focus (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 183). The final semiotic resource within the compositional metafunction is *modality* (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 151; Harrison, 2003: 58).¹² This refers to the truth status of an image. Images with a higher modality appear to be more real than those with lower modality. Modality markers (which normally run along spectrums of possibility (see Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 165)) include colour saturation, differentiation and modulation, contextualisation, perspective and illumination. In general, photographs tend to have highest modality (Scollon and Scollon, 2003: 90). All of Maviyane-Davies’ images being investigated in this study are photographic in, giving them a higher modality or appearance of reality than if he had drawn them. Harrison (2003: 57) points out that while some images may appear more real than others, the meaning constructed through the image may not necessarily hold greater validity or truth value for viewers.

The analytical framework described above provides researchers with a systematic way of analysing texts which is “effective in bringing out [their] hidden meanings” (Jewitt & Oyama,

¹² While modality is not strictly a compositional element and Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) do not include it in any of the metafunctions, I have followed Jewitt & Oyama (2001) and Harrison (2003) who have both incorporated it as part of the compositional metafunction.

2003: 154). However, on its own it does not “offer all that is needed for the social interpretation of images” (Jewitt & Oyama, 2003: 154). Consequently, in order to answer the question posed in this study – “how does Maviyane-Davies construct African-ness in his representations of some of the articles in the International Declaration of Human Rights?” – I draw on Foucault’s notion of discourse (Hall, 1997a: 44-51).

A discourse is a system of rules and practices for the construction of meaning – a set of representational codes (including a specific interpretive repertoire of concepts, tropes and myths) for constructing particular forms of reality (Hall, 1997a: 44; Chandler, 2002: 126). Foucault was interested in how knowledge and power were linked in discourses to maintain those forms of reality – how “knowledge was put to work through discursive practices in specific institutional settings to regulate the conduct of others” (Hall, 1997a: 47). The dominant tropes within a discourse determine what can be known and said – instituting a regime of truth and helping to establish the basic episteme of the age (Chandler, 2002: 126). So knowledge is inextricably linked to power as it is always employed for the prescription of social conduct (Hall, 1997a: 46).

Foucault’s interest in the relationship between knowledge and power and how power operates within institutional apparatuses and its technologies provides us with a useful tool for textual analysis. He argues that power relations permeate all levels of society and therefore operate at every site of social life. Further, power is not only repressive, it is also productive: it produces forms of knowledge (discourses) and subjects. Discourses therefore are the product of relations of power within a socio-historical context that can be related to the functional organisation of language. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an analytical method that attempts to explain the relationship between language, ideology and power by examining discourse in its material forms (Janks, 1998: 195). CDA is a careful reworking of Foucault’s ideas into an analytical method which aims to produce a critical interpretation of how ideology and power work through language to produce the individual subject (Janks, 1998: 195).

Fairclough’s (1989) approach to CDA offers a useful multidimensional synthesis of Foucault’s notion of discourse. Any example of discourse or communicative event has three simultaneous functions or values, namely the experiential, expressive and relational. The *experiential value* of a text describes the manner in which the producer “experiences the

natural and social world” (Fairclough, 1989: 112), and accounts for the construction of systems of knowledge and belief. The *expressive value* looks at the construction of social identities and the manner in which the producer is trying to construct reality in the text, and the *relational value* looks at the social relations represented in the text (Fairclough, 1989: 112). To describe the operation of these functions in texts, Fairclough (1989: 110-112) outlines a series of questions, most relating specifically to linguistic texts, but some can be usefully applied to the analysis of visual texts¹³.

The experiential value of a visual text can be identified by asking three questions: 1) what classifications schemes or discourses are being drawn upon to establish reality?; 2) to what extent is there *rewording* (a process of replacing an “existing, dominant and naturalised wording” by a different wording that is in “conscious opposition to it” (Fairclough, 1989: 113) or *overwording* (a process of restating the same thing over and over in slightly different ways)? and 3) are there examples of *synonymy* (words or images with the same meaning), *hyponymy* (terms which designate membership of a class) and *antinomy* (a word opposite in meaning to another)? The expressive value of images can be recognised by looking at the use of *metaphor* – representing one aspect of experience in terms of another and analysing whether these are positive or negative in relation to the experience to which they refer and within the discourse within which they are operating (Fairclough, 1989: 119). To identify relational values, one has to look at assumptions about what is being perceived as good or bad.

But Janks (1998: 197) maintains that it is not adequate simply to assume a clear correlation between a single text and social reality, between “textual realisations and social explanations”. It is also necessary to look for patterns of representation and meaning that appear across a range of texts and behaviours which belong to the same discursive formation, or for “discontinuities and hybridity which can signal disorder and social change” (Janks, 1998: 197). Identities are constructed from a range of “unstable and historically contingent elements” (McRobbie, 2009: 25) and such a combination of representations which serve to sustain and contribute to the reproduction of social conditions and identities are referred to by Stuart Hall as *articulation* (Hall, 1985: 93; Rojek, 2003: 123). McRobbie (2009: 25) notes that *disarticulation* occurs when articulations are deliberately disrupted in order to impose a

¹³ Within each of Fairclough’s questions there are sub-questions, not all of which can be usefully adapted for visual analysis.

new kind of social order. She uses it to explain how a unified feminist identity has been actively disrupted. In my study articulation and disarticulation are useful to elucidate how Maviyane-Davies deliberately disarticulates representations from particular discourses and attempts to rearticulate them in different ways to construct new meaning. Fairclough (1992: 270) contends that the use of *intertextuality* in this way – as a discursive mechanism – can transform texts and generate new ones and, potentially, new or altered discourses. Intertextuality can refer to the manner in which a reader of a text creates meaning through making connections with other texts (Hall, 1997b: 232), but my main interest is the way it can be a textual strategy in which one text reproduces and integrates elements of other texts in order to make it transformative and counter-hegemonic (Ott and Walter, 2000; 431).

But the manner in which language is able to achieve these social effects is complex. Thompson's (1990) view of ideology as meaning in the service of power is useful in this regard. He examines how texts serve to "establish and sustain relations of domination" (1990: 58) and identifies five general *modes* of how ideology operates through "strategies of symbolic construction" (Thompson 1990: 60): *Legitimation* is identified through the use of mechanisms which represent something as legitimate and therefore worthy of support. Such strategies include rationalisation, universalisation and narrativisation. *Dissimulation* uses displacement, euphemisation and trope to hide or obscure relationships of domination. *Unification* establishes a collective identity for something and hides possible divisions and difficulties through the use of standardisation and symbolisation of unity. The effect of *fragmentation* through differentiation and expurgation of the 'Other' is to separate people into groups – often with the effect of constructing conflict. And finally, *reification* presents the status quo as natural, a-historical and outside of social processes through the use of techniques of naturalisation, eternalisation and nominalisation or passivisation (Thompson 1990: 64). Thompson stresses that it is likely that they do not work in isolation from one another, and that they probably intersect and reinforce one another (1990: 65).

Research design

My research consists of three phases. First, I conducted a preliminary descriptive analysis of all 13 posters through which I identified four main themes: the use of traditional African imagery; the use of the body; the maleness of the images; and the resort to touristic imagery.

Next, questions adapted from Fairclough's (1989: 110-112) procedure for textual analysis together with an examination of intertextual references are used to examine the semiotic resources that Maviyane-Davies employs to construct African-ness, and to probe what African-ness potentially means. They included questions about the experiential, relational, and expressive values of grammatical features of the texts.

Finally I examine the images for evidence of Thompson's five modes through which ideology (Thompson, 1990: 61) operates. This is useful in enabling me to see how some discourses are so naturalised that Maviyane-Davies uses them in these texts which are intended to be transformative. It also allows me to identify which other discourses he naturalises in place of them.

In Chapter three, I present the analysis of the texts using the framework described above. It will describe the formal features of the images and their main participants, the semiotic resources that are activated using Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) visual grammar and the manner in which these may be activated to construct certain meanings, through Fairclough's (1989) approach to CDA and Thompson's (1990) modes of operation of ideology through language.

Chapter three

Analysis

In this chapter, I present an analysis of the images that Chaz Maviyane-Davies created in the mid-1990s which represent some of the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from an “African perspective” (Maviyane-Davies, 1999: n.p.). I draw on the relevant literature summarised in Chapter 1 and the research methodology of social semiotics presented in Chapter two. The chapter is divided into three parts, the first is a broad description and analysis of the images in the set of 13 (see Appendix A). I use Kress and van Leeuwen’s (1996) three metafunctions of visual communication – the representational, interactive and compositional – to establish the semiotic resources that Maviyane-Davies uses to create meaning potentials. In the second part, I consider in more detail the main discourses – sports, touristic, tradition, and maleness – represented in the images. The traditional, touristic and sports discourses or themes are featured in all the posters, but they are most powerfully exemplified in the posters depicting Article 1 (All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights), Article 3 (All people have the right to life, liberty and security of purpose), and Article 27 (Everyone has the right to participate in the cultural, artistic and scientific life of the community). It is the analysis of these that form the main body of this chapter. In the third part, I briefly consider what has been left out and the possible meanings of these omissions, considering the gendered nature of the poster set. For ease of identification and reference, I use the Article number as the title of each of the posters, and I refer to the wording of the article as the “caption”.

Part 1: General description and analysis

All the posters are created in portrait orientation with the same general structure. Each of the posters is divided into two parts. The top part, which I will refer to as the image, fills the top 80% of the poster with the lower 20% containing the wording in black or red text and a black band running the entire width of the poster. Protruding from the top left hand part of this band is the word “Rights”. The type is black and in a bold sans-serif typeface. It is joined to the band from just above the baseline¹⁴ of the text making it look as if it is rising out of the band

¹⁴ The baseline is the line upon which the base of the lower case “x” rests (Blackwell, 1998: 165).

into the bottom left corner of the image. The “R” of the “Rights” bleeds¹⁵ off the left hand side of the poster. Above the “ht” of “Rights” is the word “Article” in a strong red serif typeface. To the right of “Article” in a relatively large decorative¹⁶ font is the number of the Article being illustrated. The number extends from slightly above the word “Article” to about two thirds of the way down the black band. To the right of the number (vertically centred in the black band), written in red serif type, is a paraphrased version (See Appendix C) of each of the rights being illustrated. In the bottom right hand corner of the black band is a light blue logo for Quantel – a company that gave Maviyane-Davies an award for this work (Maruziva, 2004: n.p.).

The use of different typefaces together (serif and sans-serif, for example) can delineate the components of a text to express their degree of similarity or difference, and it can foreground key elements of a text and background less important elements. Typography is frequently combined with other means of expression such as colour and texture (Van Leeuwen, 2006: 143). Different typefaces are also often combined to add visual activity and to help clarify the information for the viewer (Samara, 2004: 55). The use of formal sans-serif and serif typefaces connotes a kind of formality and the red colour of the word “Article” creates salience, despite it’s relatively small size. The boldness of the sans-serif typeface used for the word “Rights” is also effective in helping to make it visible and attractive

The division of the posters into two parts, as Maviyane-Davies has done, is fairly typical of the composition of Western advertisements (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 164). The placement of participants within an image affects their role in the composition. Those participants placed in the top part of the image are seen as *ideal* – offering a sense of promise, of what could be or might be imagined. Those placed in the bottom part are seen as *real* or factual – more informational or down to earth. The use of the large decorative type for the number of each article probably functions as a tool to draw viewers from the top part of the image to the panel at the bottom where the caption is located. Its size, colour and rough, stylistic contrast offer a strong visual cue that draws the eye down to read the associated text. In the top part of Maviyane-Davies’ posters he re-images Africa in a positive way; offering

¹⁵ Bleed refers to the any part of the image which extends past the area that will be trimmed off. This allows images to continue to the very edge of a cut page (Ambrose & Harris, 2006: 41).

¹⁶ Decorative is a type classification that encompasses a wide variety of type styles that do not draw on a particular historical tradition or form of production and can include elements that simulate handwriting, stencilling, etc. Many of these typefaces are produced with a specific purpose in mind and are most often used at large font sizes for posters, billboards, etc. (Blackwell, 1998: 181; Flask, n.d.).

an ideal of what could be, and imagining Africans as healthy, strong, wise, just and creative. In the bottom part, he offers something real, concrete and credible (the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) as a basis for his representation.

The images themselves are all full colour photo-montages. In each case, the participants of the pictures are derived from photographic material and collaged to create a single image. In every case, the posters have been created by composing elements deep etched¹⁷ together in various compositions or superimposed onto new backgrounds. In Article 1 for example, the image has been created by layering a photograph of a baby on top of a photograph of a wooden mask which in turn is laid over a dark, marble-like background. Shadows have been added to give the images depth, making them appear more ‘real’, and therefore more convincing as a single, coherent image which appears photographic. In most of the posters, the predominant colours are warm¹⁸ greys, browns, reds and oranges, contrasting with cooler greys, blacks and blues, making them all appear quite dark, and creating an overall tone of seriousness and sombreness. While this could be interpreted as a reproduction of Africa as the ‘dark continent’, the choice of participants in the posters enables Maviyane-Davies to create images that convey a sense of “power and dignity”, constructing “human rights [not] in terms of abuse ... but positively, as an integral part of the celebration of the human spirit and intelligence” (Spiegel, n.d.). Significantly, what is absent from all these pictures (with the possible exception of Article 5) is the sense of despair commonly associated with the ‘dark continent’. There is also an absence of any frivolity or irony. The photographic nature of the images, the use of natural, often muted and unsaturated colours, combined with the expert manner in which they have been constructed create images which mimic photographs with very high modality, giving the images an *appearance* of reality.

Apart from using certain common compositional semiotic resources like colour, salience and placement, there are also certain shared features in the choice of participants in the images – the representational semiotic resources. All of the posters contain a person, with the exception of Articles 2 and 19, which have two people. With one exception all the people

¹⁷ Deep etching is a process of removing a specific section of a photograph or image from its background so that it either stands alone or can be used in a different composition or on a different background (Hubpages, n.d.).

¹⁸ Warm colours tend to have yellows or reds in them which make them appear to advance out of the page while cool colours have blues or greens in them which tend to make them appear to be receding into the page (Morioka and Stone, 2006: 60).

depicted in the images are black¹⁹. In Article 2, one of the two people in the image appears to be of an Arabic nationality. Most of the human participants in the images are male, while only two are obviously women and both of these are in Articles 2 and 19 which also have men in them. It is difficult to determine whether those in Articles 1, 15, 21 and 29 are male or female. A common and important feature of the people, whether male or female, is that they are all depicted as being contented, good looking, healthy and in some cases particularly strong and well-built. Apart from the human participants, most of the images also contain participants that could be identified as being stereotypically African: a mask, zebra skin, porcupine quills, an African buffalo, clothing, and to a lesser extent other fauna and flora, and jewellery. In terms of the relationships between the participants, there is very little action. None of the relationships is what Jewitt and Oyama (2001: 141-142) refer to as *narrative* relationships: those in which there is some kind of event, action or process. In contrast, the relationships are *conceptual* in the sense that the participants are not represented as doing something but rather they are being, or meaning something as a consequence of having certain characteristics or constituents. As such, they come to represent “timeless ‘essences’” (Jewitt and Oyama 2001: 141). This is important in Maviyane-Davies’ project of trying to reimage Africa and Africans in a positive light. I will deal with this in more detail in the second part of this chapter.

An analysis of the composition of the top part of the posters is significant. With a few exceptions, the most salient feature in each of the posters is placed more-or-less in the centre of the image, or is centred horizontally across the image. The effect of this is to make the central feature the nucleus of the information and the surrounding participants have subservient or supportive informational value. Moreover, this feature becomes the entry point to the image. Images composed in this manner have very little movement focusing viewers’ attention on this one aspect of the composition and viewing other participants as peripheral to this. A good example of this composition is the poster of Article 15. The image in this poster comprises a piece of cloth with more-or-less horizontal stripes of red, green, black, green and yellow. The black stripe is centred horizontally. The cloth, which is reminiscent of a flag, is draped over a man’s face in such a way that you can see the shape of the forehead, eyes and nose. The man’s face is positioned in the centre of the image. The central black stripe becomes the man’s face in the area where the cloth overlaps it. So not just the shape of the

¹⁹ In this analysis, when referring to people, I am using “African” to refer to black Africans.

eyes is visible, the eyes themselves are visible, not through the cloth, but as a part of the cloth. This is also the case with the nose which is at the centre and top of the second green stripe. It is as if the face and the flag merge into one object at this intersection. The effect of this is that the eyes, in particular, create a powerful and arresting component in the centre of the image and make a compelling entry point to the poster. But what does it all mean? The meaning becomes clearer when this image is viewed in conjunction with the caption in the band along the bottom:

Everyone has the right to nationality. No-one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his/her nationality nor denied the right to change it.

The cloth represents a flag – a symbol of unity, nationhood and a distinct nationality. The merging of the man and the flag into a seamless object represents the notion that being part of a community with an identity is an inherent part of being human, and therefore no-one should be deprived of that.

Another interesting feature of this and other posters in the set is the way that Maviyane-Davies activates certain interactive semiotic resources, such as the social distance created between the viewer and the person in the image. In this instance, the man's face is a close-up shot (as is the case with Articles, 2, 4, and 5). The symbolic relationship created therefore is one of intimacy. The man is also depicted as not looking at the viewer, so this image (as with Article 4) is an *offer*: the viewer's role becomes that of onlooker and the represented participant is offered to the viewer as an item for scrutiny in an impersonal way (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 124). The intimacy created by the close-up, and the offer created by the lack of eye contact allows us to examine him closely, but also, potentially, to feel a kind of closeness and empathy. This is enhanced by the fact that the man is photographed from the same vertical angle as that of the viewer, creating an equal power relationship, and from a frontal horizontal angle implying high levels of involvement between the viewer and the participant. By contrast, in Article 4, the represented participant is also a close-up and is looking away from the viewer (out of the bottom left hand corner of the image), but he is seen from a higher angle, putting the viewer in a position of power over the represented participant. In addition, the picture is taken from a slightly oblique horizontal position. These elements allow the viewer to examine the represented participant from a more detached position of power than the manner in which the man is represented in Article 15. Creating these kinds of symbolic relationships between the viewer and the participants potentially

allows the viewer to see the “essences” of the participants in the images – to see that they are essentially human, strong, healthy, dignified and whole.

As with Article 15, the human participants in Articles 2 and 5 are also photographed as close-ups, and in Article 21 as an extreme close-up. However, in these images the people (or skull in the case of Article 5) are looking directly at the viewer. This sets up a different kind of relationship – one that is referred to as a *demand* (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 122). In this case, an imaginary connection is created between the viewer and the participant in such a way that it creates a visual form of direct address which represents an image act that demands something from the viewer. What exactly is demanded is signified by the other participants in the image, or by facial expressions. In Articles 2 and 21, the facial expressions of the participants are emotionless but suggest a feeling of calm, confident determination which demands attention, respect and acknowledgement. What is interesting about the face in Article 21 is that it is visible through a cross, in an almost opaque purple foreground, which represents a cross on a ballot paper. We thus see an African person demanding respect and attention in the context of an indexical symbol which is a powerful signifier of democracy. This is reinforced through the caption which says:

Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his/her country. The will of the people shall be the authority of the government; expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote.

In his quest to represent Africa in a positive way, Maviyane-Davies creates images that construct it in terms that run counter to contemporary representations of a continent and people as predominantly undemocratic and governed by despotic dictators. In his posters he uses human participants in contexts that are not common in representations of Africans. For example, in the final poster, Article 29, he constructs a human face from a person’s face, an eagle, fish and a succulent plant, thereby creating an image of an African as being one with a verdant, productive environment. The man and woman in Article 19 are represented in the context of art and writing, while in Article 26 the man is constructed as part of a book and associated with culture, learning and creativity. This is a deliberate strategy

not only to see human rights in terms of abuse (I can let the media do that) but positively, as an integral part of the celebration of the human spirit and intelligence, thereby emphasising the cultural diversity that abounds amongst us. I hoped that the viewer would see themselves in the images and see in themselves – the essence of

civilisation – inherent in all our cultures and our traditions. (Maviyane-Davies, 1999: n.p.)

While there are clear differences within these posters (there is variation in participants and interaction between participants and viewers), the similarities in compositional semiotic resources enable them to share a consistent visual identity. This, as well as a single starting point (the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) and coherent purpose all interact in such a way that the posters work well together as a set.

Part 2: Looking at the discourses

To get a more detailed understanding of how Maviyane-Davies constructs African-ness I analyse three of the posters in more detail using Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996: 40-41) three metafunctions of visual communication and Fairclough's (1989: 110-112) three functions of a text (their experiential value, expressive value and relational value).

The first image in the set – Article 1 – depicts a naked African baby positioned over a traditional wooden mask. The image is constructed so that the viewer is more-or-less directly above the participants, looking down. The wording on the band across the bottom reads:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

The baby, which is probably female, is quite small in the image, but is made salient by the fact that she is foregrounded, is more brightly lit, and is a different colour to the greys and blacks of the mask and the marbled background. She is also the only human participant in the image. She is slightly animated and appears to be a strong and healthy baby. The mask, which takes up most of the vertical space in the image, is grey with a high forehead and delicate features. The most prominent features are a loop of what appears to be hair at the top of the mask, and large, closed eyes and an elongated delicate nose. The small mouth is just visible above the black band at the bottom of the image which obscures the rest of the mask. The baby is spatially at a close social distance²⁰ from the viewers and she is looking outside of the picture, not making any eye contact with the viewer, making her “the object of the viewers’ dispassionate scrutiny” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 124). The composition places the baby centrally in the image, covering up most of the forehead of the mask, making her the

²⁰ Close social distance is understood as the whole figure of participants being represented (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 130).

nucleus of the information and other participants like the mask subservient to her in informational value. The baby's placement, contact and social distance invite viewers' dispassionate examination.

In one sense, this image could be read quite literally. It is the first of the Articles in the declaration, it is the first in this set of posters, and it is about all humans being born equal. So an image of a baby is a logical way to represent all those things. However, in the contexts of contemporary pejorative representations of Africans and of Maviyane-Davies' aim of re-imagining Africa and Africans in a more positive light, the image could represent more. Babies and children are useful metaphors for describing the state of a community. In colonial literature there is a persistent relationship between childhood and savagery (Pieterse, 1992: 171). Childhood is bound up with primitiveness, dependency, inability and immaturity and was often used as a metaphor for young and immature developing nations in comparison to the mature nations of the West (Pieterse, 1992: 171). In contemporary media representations the emphasis has changed, but African children are still represented in predominantly pejorative ways – most frequently as poor, emaciated and fly-ridden (Mahadeo & McKinney, 2007: 17) – and are still metaphors for an underdeveloped, failing continent. So in some ways, African babies and children are representative of all Africans. In this piece, we see evidence of rewording (where existing, dominant, naturalised representations of African children are consciously replaced) and antinomy (he is using the image of a child to represent the opposite of what it is normally used to symbolise). These experiential values describe how the producer of a text experiences or sees the world. In this image Maviyane-Davies represents Africa as more than simply a political, social and economic basket case.

The presence and use of metaphors in a text is an indication of its expressive value which shows how the producer is trying to construct the social world. Maviyane-Davies is using the metaphor of childhood as standing in for a greater thing, but in contrast to the frequently negative representations of African children in stereotypical presentations of poor, sickly babies in ragged clothing, we are presented with a healthy child as a metaphor for potential and new life, and as an alternative representation of Africa. Furthermore, the context in which the child is presented is not the bustle of urban or rural degradation, but one of quiet serenity created by the mask behind the baby. The mask is beautiful in its simplicity and attitude. It is not brightly coloured, and apart from the main facial features, some scarification marks and the loop of hair at the top, there is little detail or embellishment. The loop of hair on the mask

could be positioned so that it is an extension of the navel of the baby – in other words, it could be seen to be an umbilical cord. The contentment of the child in this context implies that the natural place for an African baby to be is in the calmness and security of African traditional life. The mask is often used as a Western symbol of Africa and African tradition as it is an artefact that is a tangible expression of number of areas of traditional life such as art and craft, music, dance, ancestral worship, story-telling, rituals such as funerals and various festivals (Segy, 1976: 2-3). So the African mask is a visual representation of tradition and, by extension, a discourse that people use to express current concerns in terms of the past (Spear, 2003: 6). And this is precisely the way that Maviyane-Davies is activating tradition in these images. But while he is using tradition and images of traditional artefacts to try to liberate Africans from negative representations, he doesn't imagine that he is retrieving some real, unspoiled and timeless African tradition:

My work has tried to embrace our own cultural dimensions whilst never forgetting it has to communicate. It has also striven to be an education in ways of seeing – an alternative aesthetic again – by attempting to rekindle some of the images we lost when we adopted the prepackaged, off-the-shelf, foreign images that now envelope us ... From an image point of view – this means that any icons or visual manifestations of our traditions and past are waylaid and considered inferior as we readily adopt the global (American) lifestyles and attitudes that surround us. I do not believe that we should live in the past, but we must adapt and develop our traditions and values to suit us, thus defining our truly independent future. This, with a symbolism and visual language that is meaningful not only to us, but enriching to a world that has run out of ideas other than market forces (the new world order). I try to creatively extract and adapt aspects that are seemingly lost and use them as a vehicle for communication... (Maviyane-Davies, 1999: n.p.).

We can see similar references to African tradition in Article 3²¹. In this image we see a grown African man facing the viewer at an oblique angle. He is naked and sitting upright with his right leg bent underneath his buttocks and his left leg bent up so that he can place his arm on his thigh, just above the knee. He appears to be leaning on his right hand which together with most of his right arm is obscured behind him. The image is cropped so that the viewer cannot see the end of his left foot at the bottom of the image or his head, top part of his neck and part

²¹ This was not one of the original images of the set, but was added later when the set was converted from a poster series to images for use in a Human Rights Calendar that was released in 1997.

of his right shoulder at the top of the picture. Despite this, it is possible to see that this man appears healthy, fit and muscular with a well-toned body. Around his neck, hanging on what appears to be a leather thong, is a rectangular pendant which looks to be made from wood or leather, with two horizontal brass-coloured bands wrapped around it. Hanging from the bottom of the pendant are three small, white shells. In his left hand, which is hanging in a relaxed manner over his knee, he is holding what looks like a pair of cow bells joined together at the top with a u-shaped handle which is covered in woven string or straw. Just above the wrist of his left forearm are 18 porcupine quills²² that look as though they are emerging from his skin. Slightly behind the man and framing him on his left and right are some rocks, and behind them is a plane, ending in an horizon with a dark blue sky above it, depicting either an early dawn or late sunset. There is no visible sun, but the man and all the artefacts described are well lit from the front which implies that the sun is rising or setting in front of him. As with all the posters, the image is framed at the bottom with a black band with a paraphrased version of the Article it depicts. It reads:

All people have the right to life, liberty and security of purpose²³.

Maviyane-Davies has departed from the original wording of Article 3 and changed “security of person” in the original to “security of purpose” in his version. I am taking “security of purpose” as an extension of the narrow legal meaning of “security of person” to mean the right to direct one’s own life, to material interest and to be productive.

In some ways, this poster is a ‘grown-up’ version of Article 1. It follows that those “born free and equal in dignity and rights” should then grow up to have the right to life and freedom and the right to pursue productive employment of their choosing. And there is also a visual continuum – the baby in Article 1 has grown up to be the man in Article 3. The visual link is created by their nakedness and the references to traditional artefacts – the mask in Article 1 and the bells, pendant and porcupine quills in Article 3. Because the man’s face is not shown, and as he is facing in a way that implies that he is looking out of the picture makes this picture an offer. This, together with the fact that he is photographed at a close social distance,

²² In Africa, porcupines are commonly used in traditional medicine for healing (Whiting, Williams & Hibbitts, 2011: 84) and for symbolic purposes such as good luck and defensive charms (African Wildlife Foundation, n.d.) as the porcupine is considered to have protective powers due to its impressive armament of quills (Chevallier & Ashton, 2006: 22).

²³ In the original UN declaration of Human Rights, Article 3 reads “All people have the right to life, liberty and security of *person*” (my emphasis) and “security of person” is understood as security against unlawful imprisonment and the right to *habeas corpus* as a remedy against such imprisonment (Smith, 2007: 226).

invites us to scrutinise him in a dispassionate way. However, as he is photographed in such a way that the viewer is on the same vertical plain as the man, this scrutiny is not from a position of symbolic power over him, but rather as one of equality.

Because we cannot see his face, the salient aspects of the image are the more-or-less centrally placed pendant, porcupine quills and cow bells, and the man is simply a carrier of the other participants in the montage. The unnaturalness of the porcupine quills (people don't normally have porcupine quills growing out of their forearms) makes them the most noticeable aspect of the image. He is not doing anything with them or the bells, so the relationship between him and the other objects is a conceptual one – they are not *doing* something, they are *being* or *meaning* something or belonging to some category. These sorts of artefacts are hyponymous with mysticism and witchcraft and this, together with the surreal nature of the image, would make it reasonable to categorise it as being in the realm of the mystical. In the African context, this is synonymous with a *sangoma* (spirit medium or diviner) or *inyanga* (healer or witchdoctor). In modern, Western societies, attitudes towards witchcraft are often tinged with cynicism, because of its 'primitive' nature and lack of credibility when tested against scientific understandings of cause and effect (Winch, 1997: 257). As a consequence, when viewing African witchcraft from the perspective of a discourse of science, it is relegated to a "superstition" (Natal Tourism, n.d.) or child-like fantasies, marked by adult incredulity. The belief in, and practice of, witchcraft is a sign of child-like Africans and "the moral backwardness in contrast to contemporary Western reason, of stagnant tradition compared to dynamic modernity" (Rutherford, 1999: 91). Those who practice witchcraft are consigned to the categories of quaint, a curiosity that is outside reality and are therefore easily 'Othered'.

Tourism thrives on difference and curiosity (Schutte 2003: 478) and for this reason the image that Maviyane-Davies uses in Article 3 has a touristic feel about it. Schutte (2003) shows how *sangomas* are frequent components of African cultural villages in which certain traditional practices are selected, sanitised and reproduced for touristic consumption. Typically, touristic images are selections of certain components of a place and culture that are cobbled together in a manner which promotes a view of a place, people and their traditions in a sentimental and romanticised manner (Pritchard & Morgan, 2005: 284). They also display idealised bodies as a way of appealing to potential travellers (Pritchard, 2001: 80). In Article 3, Maviyane-Davies' image shows the naked body of a healthy strong man. The construction of the image as an offer, with no head or face, invites us to study the man's body for no reason

other than that it is a body. As in Article 1, with the display of the naked, healthy body of an African child, part of what Maviyane-Davies is doing is to reword' the African body as typically healthy and beautiful. But the representation of the man in this form, together with the conscious selection of positive, attractive and exotic images of traditional artefacts are distinctive characteristics of a touristic discourse. This creates a further visual link with the image in Article 1, where the use of the mask gives it a distinctly touristic feel too. Bremner (2004: 77) describes African masks as “ethno-nostalgic accessories” that are “designed to connote Africa” as it is “perceived in its most romanticised tourist form” (Preston, 2007: 49). Maviyane-Davies' project of using icons and images of African traditions falls foul of the fact that these images have already been appropriated for use as part of a touristic discourse. As a result, viewers' engagement with Maviyane-Davies' posters may well result in them making unintended intertextual references to touristic material in the form of pamphlets, travel magazines, tourism displays, etc., which they perceive to be part of the same genre. It is also conceivable, however, that his strategy of rewording may also be one to claim these Western icons in ways which acknowledge them more positively or progressively.

Apart from its touristic nature, the image also needs to be read in the context of the caption: the right to “life, liberty and security of purpose”. The fact that he has changed “security of *person*” to “security of *purpose*” indicates where his emphasis lies. Along with the right to life and freedom must come the freedom to do what you are called to do. So, regardless of Western attitudes to African traditional healers and mystics, they have the right to pursue that calling, and it has value and meaning in their communities that should be respected. So in this image, instead of the reproduction of witchcraft as being synonymous with childlike primitivism, he constructs it as antinomous to that – as noble and having significance, value and merit. And so in the context of Africa, and in the face of Western cynicism, he constructs traditional healing and mysticism as something good.

In Article 27, while we see a move away from the use of traditional imagery as used in Article 1 and Article 3, there is the strongest example of the display of the body in the set of pictures. The image in Article 27 is dominated by the more-or-less naked body of an African man. The participant is photographed from a far personal distance²⁴ but as with Article 3, the participant is only visible from the chin downwards, ending just above the pubic bone. The

²⁴ Far personal distance is understood as being from the waist up (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 130).

image is also cropped horizontally, so that the man's left shoulder is not in the photograph and his left arm is only visible from the elbow down to the wrist. Both arms are placed behind the buttocks, the effect of which is to force the chest forward slightly. The man is quite moodily lit so that his left side is in shadow, while the right is lit in such a way that his chest, arm muscles and the shape of his right hip are accentuated. The body is strong, clean-shaven and has a healthy sheen to it. The photograph is taken with a very narrow focal plane, so that the maroon and black background is blurred and becomes insignificant. Strapped to the front of his torso is a kind of corset which extends vertically from just below his nipples to just above his crotch and wraps around the front and sides of his body. It appears to have been made from a number of frames of a movie film strip. Two of the three frames which make up the corset are partially visible and only the central one is completely visible. It contains an image of three African children, all of whom appear to have on some kind of face and body paint. The corset is black (as a film strip would be) and the children in it are mostly blue or grey. The child on the man's right is obscured as is the one on his left, but to a lesser extent. The central child, who is most visible, appears to be wearing some kind of beaded necklace. All the children are presented from a close personal distance²⁵, and while their bodies are turned slightly away from the viewer (at an oblique angle), their faces or eyes are turned to look directly at the viewer. None of them is smiling. The faces of the children in the middle and left are repeated in the partial frame that makes up the bottom of the corset. Below the image are the words "Rights" and "Article 27" laid out as described earlier and in the black band, acting as the caption:

Everyone has the right to participate in the cultural life of the community and to enjoy the arts.

The most dominant participant in this image is the man. He is large in the frame and imposing in his physicality: his body is superbly toned, his stature is erect and proud, and his smooth, tight skin connotes youthfulness. As with Article 3, his head and face are not visible and so his image is an offer. We are invited to examine him and perhaps ask questions about the nature of what he does. Is he an athlete? A dancer? In the context of the wording below the image, with its reference to the arts, we could probably conclude that he is a dancer, but either way, what Maviyane-Davies is doing once again is to reword the African body. This is not the deficient, diseased, corrupt African body that is most frequently seen in African news

²⁵ A close personal distance includes the head and shoulders (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 130).

discourses. This image reproduces the characteristics of sports discourses which incorporate masculine imagery celebrating strength, toughness, determination, aggression, commitment and discipline. Because we can't see his face, we are not privy to any of his feelings and this too is typical of sports discourse, where emotions are marginalised. At the same time, this image displays some features of the 'new man'²⁶ fashion and fragrance advertising which foregrounds muscular appearance but suppresses the aggression often associated with such displays of masculinity (Nixon, 1997: 296). As discussed in Chapter one, one of the problems associated with Africans and sports imagery is that it can reinforce the stereotype of black people as nothing more than brute force with an emphasis on the body and a de-emphasising of the mind. However, Maviyane-Davies' inter-textual references to 'new man' imagery mitigates against such a pejorative interpretation of this image. Furthermore, the fact that he has clothed this model in a corset – a distinctly feminine item of clothing – evokes a sense of femininity that undermines the typical imagery of African men in news discourses and at the same time disturbs any notion of the African male as nothing more than brute force and ignorance.

But while the image of the man is the most dominant in terms of the amount of space taken up in the poster, its salience is challenged by the images of the children on the corset. The incongruity of a feminine item of clothing on a man, the colour contrast of blue on a predominantly brown image and the fact that you can see the children's faces, all combine to make this a very attractive²⁷ element of the poster. So in effect, the man frames the film strip which is separated and made salient. Additionally, the direct look from the children in the corset makes this part of the image a demand, and this competes for the attention of the viewer from the more passive offer of the male image. This part of the image could simply be a film strip as a metaphor for the "arts" in the caption, but the demand requires a deeper engagement. But what is being demanded of us as viewers? The image as a whole is a metaphor for the creative industries, and what is being demanded is a recognition of Africa's cultural capacity and contribution. So the image challenges the discourse of Africa as culturally backward and bereft.

²⁶ The 'new man' imagery, emerging in the mid-1980s through advertising and menswear retailing and magazines, was characterised by a display of masculine sensuality, strength, independence, self-assurance, combined with a boyish softness and sensitivity (Nixon, 1997: 294).

²⁷ By "attractive" I mean that its composition attracts viewers to this element of the poster.

The detailed analyses of these three images reveals the presence of features of traditional, touristic, and sports discourses in Maviyane-Davies' set of posters. His use of traditional imagery is a deliberate attempt to create an "alternative aesthetic" (Maviyane-Davies, 1999: n.p.) in which African imagery as well as, or instead of, Western images are used to tell a more optimistic African story. However, African governments and tourist operators are also telling a positive story of Africa as a mechanism for nation-building, development and commercial gain through tourism. Typical of these stories is the selection of sanitised and positive images of unique components of Africa for the consumption of foreign visitors. As Maviyane-Davies uses similar techniques in the construction of his story, it is possible that his posters could be read in the context of the plethora of touristic imagery in pamphlets, on websites and in magazines. This inter-textual reading has the potential to trivialise his position. A prominent aspect in many of the posters is the manner in which Maviyane-Davies has chosen to display the bodies of the human participants. This display is characterised by the lone powerful male with good muscle definition, smooth, healthy skin, and a strong, confident stance – all features of Western sports discourse. This discourse offers an alternative construction of the meaning of the African body – one in which the savage, deficient, diseased body of news discourses is replaced by imagery of African bodies as healthy, successful, powerful, fit, etc.

Part 3: What's been left out?

There are three telling absences from Maviyane-Davies' set of posters: women as primary participants, white people, and hegemonic icons of modernity. In this part of the chapter, I discuss the possible meanings of these absences.

In only two of the set of 12 posters are there participants who are clearly women – in Articles 2 and 19 – and in Articles 1, 15, 21 and 29 the sex of the participants is not clear. In the remaining seven posters, there is only one human participant in each image and in every case it is a man. Furthermore, in Articles 2 and 19 where there are clearly female participants, they are accompanied by men. In Article 2, the image is divided more-or-less in half vertically, with the woman, photographed from a close personal distance, taking up the full length of the left hand side of the image. To the right but slightly lower is the man, also depicted from a close personal distance. There is no interaction between the woman and the man, with both of them looking directly out of the image at the viewer. Their faces are partially obscured by a

zebra skin which covers the entire image and the manner in which parts of the skin have been made transparent or opaque frames and separates the two participants. The caption reads:

We are all equal regardless of race, colour, sex, language, creed, religion, political or other opinion, material or social origin, birth or other status.

The woman's inclusion in this image is necessary for the caption and the image to work together. The qualities of "language, creed, religion, political or other opinion, material or social origin, birth or other status" can all be inferred as being part of any human participant – be they male or female. However, representation of sexual equality is easiest with the presence of both a man and woman as participants.

In contrast to Article 2, in Article 19 the man and woman are not separated and there is some interaction between them. They are photographed together from a far personal distance, with the woman foregrounded, filling the right half of the image. The man is just behind and slightly to the woman's right, so that he is only partially obscured by her. He is taller than her by about half a head and has his left arm around her back, with his hand resting lightly on and holding her left shoulder. Apart from that, there is no interaction between the two as they both look directly out of the image at the viewer. His face is partially obscured by a kind of mask-cum-crown made of a large golden fountain pen nib that he is wearing, but her face is fully visible with her hair pulled up into a kind of bun which mimics a paintbrush. Her hair is held in place with a gold, metal binding which mimics the ferrule (the metal part holding the brush tip to the handle) of the paintbrush. She has some white markings painted onto her cheeks. The caption for this image reads:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

In this image, although the man is behind the woman, he is still represented as being dominant. He is the larger, more active participant (he is holding her), he is wearing the more prominent crown, appears 'masculine', and his arm around her connotes a kind of 'ownership' of, and control over, her. So although her face may be more salient in the image than his, which is partly obscured by the mask, she is a passive participant as she appear to be held by him, and leaning into, him. She has a stereotypical 'feminine' appearance and so is portrayed in reference to him. Such an image is fairly typical of gendered representations of men and women in the media (Wood, 2007: 273-278). So while it is not strictly accurate to say that there are no women in these images, they certainly do not have the same presence as

men, both in terms of numbers and function, and in this way it would be true to say that they are absent as prominent figures in Maviyane-Davies' conception of a reimagined Africa. With the possible exception of Article 2, none of the posters requires the presence of men and the male participants could all be replaced by women without the meaning being changed.

The effects of the absence of women can best be described using Thompson's (1990) framework for the modes of operation of ideology in texts. The three modes which most obviously apply in this context are reification in which "relations of domination may be established and sustained by representing a transitory, historical state of affairs as if it were permanent, natural, outside of time" (Thompson 1990: 65); unification, "...a form of unity which embraces individuals in a collective identity irrespective of difficulties and divisions that may separate them" (Thompson 1990: 65); and legitimation where relations of domination are represented as "legitimate and worthy of support" (Thompson 1990: 61).

In this context of the absence of women, reification is expressed through the strategies of naturalisation and eternalisation. That Maviyane-Davies chooses to counter the representation of African men, women and children in news discourses as sickly, unhealthy, weak and decadent with images of strong, healthy men (even when they could be replaced by women with no change to the meaning) treats men's socially created status as dominant in Africa as natural, permanent and having no historical character. Unification is evident as there is no acknowledgement of gender domination and the patriarchal nature of male/female relationships in traditional African cultures (Ssetuba, 2002; 6)²⁸ is obscured. So the effect is to create a unity in which strong, healthy maleness is standardised as signifying an ideal for a reimagined African-ness. Legitimation is articulated through the strategy of universalisation, whereby the interests of men come to represent the interests of all Africans. The consequence of this is that in Maviyane-Davies' reimagining of Africa, the political and social aspirations of African women are marginalised.

A second and perhaps more obvious absence from Maviyane-Davies' posters is that of white people. In fact in only one of the posters is there any racial group represented other than black African (in the Article 2 image there is a man who appears to be Middle Eastern, perhaps

²⁸ This is not to imply that patriarchy does not exist in other cultures. I have been specific about African cultures here as Maviyane-Davies is drawing on African tradition as one of the discourses in his reimagining of Africa and Africans.

Arabic). In one sense the absence of racial identities other than black raises some uncomfortable issues. First, it begs the question about what constitutes an African identity. Some whites could assert that as their families have lived in Africa for generations and as they no longer have ties with the European countries of their origin, they are African. Indian Africans could do the same, both basing their claim to African-ness on the occupation of a particular geographical space. Mixed-race Africans, or coloureds, could claim that they have no home other than Africa and are therefore African (Gongo, 2007: 13).

Secondly, if whites are excluded from a reimagined Africa, does this imply that it is their presence that has led to the predominantly negative image that Africa has in Western media? This is an example of rationalisation – a strategy of legitimation that constructs a chain of reasoning that seeks to convince an audience of – in this context – the idea that whites are somehow to blame for pejorative representations of Africans is legitimate. It could also be seen as the “expurgation of the other” – a strategy of fragmentation, which constructs an enemy (white people) that needs to be resisted (Thompson (1990: 65).

But in another way, the exclusion of whites from his posters is understandable, as Maviyane-Davies’ intention is to correct the pejorative representations of Africans in Western media. White Africans are seldom included in these representations and when they are, they are treated much more sympathetically – either as ‘normal’ people going about their everyday lives, as remarkable people saving black Africans from themselves (Pawson, 2011: n.p.), or as victims of black incompetence and/or violence. Ndlela (2005: 83) describes how the Norwegian mainstream media ignored the fact that the conflict over land in Zimbabwe had claimed more lives of black Zimbabweans than those of whites and gave extensive coverage to the plight of white farmers – often identifying them by name. However they are represented, stories about white people in Africa tend to tell us:

[...] who holds power and how it is reproduced, and how closely today’s hierarchies are connected to centuries of history. [...] They remind us that this world was shaped by a trade in slaves ended not so long ago, and that it was justified on the grounds that Africans were said by Europeans to be equivalent to animals. (Pawson, 2011: n.p.)

Even in Western media that is not directly related to Africa, whites are disproportionately over-represented: they have the most central and developed roles, are located as the norm, and come to embody what is regarded as the standard and are symbolically constructed as the

human race (Dyer, 2000: 541). In such instances the dominance of whiteness is sustained through dissimulation – a mode of operation of ideology, which includes the use of the trope synecdoche (the conflation of part and whole such that whole can stand in for part or part for whole) as a strategy. Here, whites come to symbolise the whole human race.

When seen in this light, Maviyane-Davies' exclusion of white people from these images could be motivated by a similar impulse to his replacement of negative images of Africans with more positive images: to correct an imbalance in representation. He is not so much saying that whites are not African, as much as he is asserting the symbolic presence and power of blackness as standing for African-ness. So in his representations of African-ness, there is a similar operation of dissimulation, but with a different ideological purpose. In addition to the operation of dissimulation, there is also evidence of narrativisation – a strategy to legitimise the claim of blackness as the primary representation of African-ness.

Narrativisation involves the recounting of “the past and treating the present as part of a timeless and cherished tradition [...] in order to create a sense of belonging to a community and to a history which transcends the experience of conflict, difference and division” (Thompson, 1990: 61). Maviyane-Davies is not advocating a return to a traditional African way of life as a way of remedying the negative representation of Africans²⁹, but his use of references to traditional discourse and use of traditional imagery, in Articles 1 and 3 for example, indicate a use of African tradition as a way of legitimising his claims of Africa as a healthy, peaceful and prosperous continent. Another consequence of the exclusion of whites and other racial groups from the set of posters is that it reimagines an African identity in terms of blackness as the single collective identity, using *the symbolisation of unity* as a strategy of unification. While he is not naively proposing that there is no poverty, corruption, disease and conflict among blacks in Africa³⁰, what the posters suggest is an imagining of Africa where the defining identities are those of blackness, strength, health, tradition and pride.

A third absence from this set of posters is any overt reference to the modes of life brought about as a consequence of modernity. There are, for example, no references to modern cities,

²⁹ “I do not believe that we should live in the past, but we must adapt and develop our traditions and values to suit us, thus, defining our truly independent future” (Maviyane-Davies, 1999: n.p.)

³⁰ “[...] I've experienced life on a continent where in many parts, fundamental human rights are obliterated with blood and sadness, as conflict and turmoil leave only despair and hopelessness in their wake [...] continue to ignore it and we will all be destroyed by our own lack of humanity” (Maviyane-Davies: Spiegel, n.d.).

factories, roads, cars, industrialised agriculture, science, etc., and limited reference to modern technology (there are no computers or cell phones, for example, but there is allusion to modern media in Article 27 where a piece of a film strip has been used). Arguably, Maviyane-Davies is not proposing a complete rejection of modernity in favour of a return to pre-modern or traditional society as his posters do reference some of the institutions of Western modernity. The very notion of universal human rights that he is using as the basis for his re-imaging of Africa is profoundly modern, as is the idea of the nation state (the use of the flag image in Article 15 – “Everyone has the right to a nationality [...]”), of modern legal institutions and equality before the law (the use of the image of the scales of justice in Article 7 – “All are equal before the law and are entitled [...] to equal protection of the law”), and of democracy (the use of the iconic cross to refer to elections in Article 21 – “[...] The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections [...]”). But he appears to be challenging the naturalisation of urbanisation, advanced industrialisation, or literacy as co-requisites of political modernisation. Giddens (1990: 4), while stressing that there are “continuities between the traditional and the modern”, asserts that:

The modes of life brought into being by modernity have swept us away from *all* [his emphasis] traditional types of social order in quite unprecedented fashion. (1990: 4)

Maviyane-Davies contests this view and is imaging an Africa where traditions are not demeaned or “swept away” (Giddens, 1990: 4) in the light of Western modernism as Giddens suggests, but could be transformed to serve the needs of a modernising society, where features of traditionalism persist within an African modernity.

Conclusion

In 1996 Chaz Maviyane-Davies, a Zimbabwean graphic designer created a set of human rights posters which represented several articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from “an African perspective”. In this thesis I have set about establishing how Maviyane-Davies constructed African-ness and in particular how he has used the African body to do so.

In his project, Maviyane-Davies rails against the simplistic, pejorative images of Africa and Africans portrayed in Western media. He is indignant at the creation of an African identity as a single, racially, geographically and economically homogenous entity, perpetually in a state of crisis and conflict and continually associated with the quality of being deficient. In his efforts to contest the racialised and negative representations of Africa and Africans, Maviyane-Davies substitutes positive images of black people for the negative imagery which tends to permeate the Western media. In particular, he consistently uses images of strong, healthy black bodies to propose an alternative representation of Africans to the contemporary depictions of the African body as degenerate, diseased, corrupt, poverty-stricken and intellectually lacking.

The images are presented in the context of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was adopted in 1948 against a background of “widespread revulsion against the holocaust and other evils associated with the Second World War” (Chaskalson, 2002: 133). It was drafted by a nine-member committee comprising primarily white men from the major world powers³¹ and adopted by 51 of the 58-member General Assembly – only one of which was a black African state³². Maviyane-Davies seeks to represent various articles of the declaration which “is at its core, and in many of its details, liberal and European” (Mutua, 2002: 3) from an “African perspective” (Maviyane-Davies, 1999: n.p.). In his attempts to more fully universalise the human rights declaration, he has created images of primarily black men, all

³¹ Charles Malik (Lebanon), Alexandre Bogomolov (USSR), Peng-chun Chang (China), René Cassin (France – the only woman), Eleanor Roosevelt (US), Charles Dukes (United Kingdom), William Hodgson (Australia), Hernan Santa Cruz (Chile), John P. Humphrey (Canada) (United Nations, n.d.).

³² Of the 58 member states of the United Nations at the time of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, only three were from Africa – Ethiopia, Egypt and South Africa (which abstained) (United Nations, n.d.).

of whom are depicted as being contented, in control, good looking, healthy, confident and in some cases particularly strong and well-built. Apart from the people, most of the images contain objects that could be identified as being uniquely African – a mask, zebra skin, porcupine quills, an African buffalo, clothing, and to a lesser extent, other fauna and flora and jewellery. Whether he has been successful or not is difficult to say, but as Hall (1997: 272) points out, trying to reverse one stereotypical extreme may simply result in being locked in a different stereotype. His strategy of using African imagery to counter the ubiquity of European and North American designs with selected, positive images of Africa and Africans has the effect of expanding the repertoire of representations of Africa, and counters the oversimplification of what it means to be African. However, at the same time his images have many of the characteristics of contemporary African touristic discourses which combine selected components of a place and culture to promote a sentimental and romanticised spectacle of a place, a people and their traditions – which ironically could be used by local elites to promote a particular image of Africa in a globalised world. The synthetic and highly polished nature of the images that he has created by collaging components from a variety of sources, using software such as Adobe Photoshop ®, mimics an aesthetic that is associated with 21st century commercial culture.

Like touristic discourses which idealise and display bodies in a manner that is appealing to potential travellers, sports discourses also display images of fit, healthy, superbly honed, muscly bodies. In many of Maviyane-Davies' posters we see these kinds of images of black people's bodies, which propose an alternative image of Africans to the bleak representations that litter news discourses. The black body has come to encapsulate what it means to be African – it is a site of struggle for the construction of representations of African-ness. Therefore, by offering pictures of beautiful, strong, athletic, black bodies, Maviyane-Davies is endeavouring to construct a positive identification with what has been made wretched. His poster set expands the range of possible representations of black bodies, but once again, he runs the risk of simply reproducing many of the stereotypes that sustain racism – that African-ness is more about the body (whether healthy or abject) than cerebral activities which are the preserve of whiteness.

While his use of both touristic and sports imagery risks reproducing a “racialised regime of representation” (Hall, 1997: 272), Maviyane-Davies is deliberately disarticulating representations from particular discourses and attempting to rearticulate them in different

contexts to construct new meaning. He deliberately uses the types of images that are normally applied to the (essentially) leisure industries of tourism and sports, in an overtly political context. This intertextual combination of discourse types generates a dissonance that disrupts the articulation of the idealised figures from touristic and sports discourses and reconfigures these faultless bodies to replace the highly-flawed African body that permeates news discourses. Maviyane-Davies' use of images in this way is a discursive mechanism that allows for the transformation of the normal meaning of touristic and sports images to generate new meanings that have the potential to be transformative and counter hegemonic (Fairclough, 1989: 152-155).

Maviyane-Davies' use of a traditional imagery (masks, jewellery, references to the mystical) serves to "reveal and promote indigenous traditions" (Baaz, 2001: 9) with their attendant potential for reviving pride in a past which has been maligned as primitive and undesirable by colonialism and modernity, and for achieving a kind of cultural nationalism. However, at the same time, it has similar potential to revive those cultural stereotypes of African primitivism and backwardness that it hopes to destabilise. In addition, Maviyane-Davies is selecting visual manifestations of traditions in much the same way as is done in touristic discourses which deliberately emphasise African cultural difference from the West in order to primitivise and 'Other' African tradition as a commodity to be sold. Therefore, it is possible for his posters to be understood and interpreted in the context of a plethora of touristic and other forms of commodifying imagery which has the potential to trivialise his position. However, his overt references in this poster set to African tradition³³ in the context of human rights, asserts that the values of *human rights* have always been embedded in African culture and tradition and are not an exclusive discovery of the Europeans after the Second World War.

One area where he doesn't attempt to overturn an African stereotype is in the representation of men as naturally dominant. Women are largely absent from positions of prominence in Maviyane-Davies' posters and he chooses to refute the belittling representation of all Africans in news discourses by using primarily images of strong, healthy men. This treats men's socially-created status as dominant in Africa as natural; maleness is standardised as coming to signify an ideal for a reimagined African-ness, and the interests of men come to

³³ See Articles 3 (right to life), 7 (right to equality before the law), 19 (freedom of expression) and 26 (right to an education). In each of these examples, he uses images of African traditions in his illustration of human rights.

represent the interests of all Africans. A consequence is that Maviyane-Davies' reimagining of Africa serves to sustain the marginalisation of women's political and social aspirations.

The absence of white people from these posters is also striking. I don't believe that the implication here is that whites are not African or that it is their presence that has led to the predominantly negative image that Africa has in Western media. The effect of the exclusion of white people is to correct a disproportionate over-representation of whites in the Western media where they have the most central and developed roles and come to embody the human race – especially in the human rights discourse. Maviyane-Davies is asserting the symbolic presence and power of blackness as standing for African-ness and is re-imagining an African identity in terms of blackness, strength, health, tradition and pride. That he has done this in the context of human rights, affirms that the principles of whatever it means to be human are not the exclusive property of Europeans – but have been principles of African-ness since before colonisation.

The conspicuous omission from these posters of any reference to modern cities, factories, roads, cars, industrialised agriculture, science, computers or cell phones, etc., seems to reflect an ambivalent attitude to modernity. On the one hand, from the images that he has included, Maviyane-Davies seems to favour of traditional lifestyles and values over modern forms of life. On the other hand he represents these values in the context of a profoundly modern document – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Additionally, several of the articles that he has chosen illustrate modernist ideas – the notion of the nation state, of modern legal institutions and equality before the law, and the idea of democracy and the right to choose a government. Maviyane-Davies' exclusion of direct references to modernity in his images could be interpreted in much the same way as I have read the absence of white people – as an attempt to correct another imbalance in representation. He is not discarding modernity as un-African, but is rejecting the naturalisation of urbanisation and advanced industrialisation (and all their attendant trappings) as necessary pre-requisites for recognition as having value and humanity. Instead, he represents African societies as those where traditional practices and values are not demeaned in the light of Western modernism, but persist within and contribute to an African modernity.

Maviyane-Davies has produced this set of posters with the aim of re-imagining and re-imagining Africa and Africans. He is trying to create depictions that challenge the

stereotypical representation of Africa seen in Western news discourses. Interestingly, he does not introduce *new* content as a way of countering pejorative representations. Instead, he works *with* the content that is so often used to ‘Other’, demean and subordinate Africans. Most prominent in this subordination is the use of the body. As black people have frequently been fixed stereotypically within their bodies, Maviyane-Davies confronts this by constructing a range of black body images that expands the repertoire of representations of black people and counteracts the traditional news discourses of Europe and North America. In many ways, Maviyane-Davies’ posters represent the third and final stage in a Todorovian narrative³⁴ about Africa in which a new equilibrium is established after the disrupting influence of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Maviyane-Davies’ re-imaging of Africa constructs Africans who are proud to be black, healthy, strong, productive, responsible, just, and in control of their own destiny, and Africa as a place where there is respect for human rights as part of a deeply-embedded African respect for humanity. However, the question remains as to whether his aesthetic strategy has been successful in achieving the political aims he had in mind when he set out to create this “alternative aesthetic”. This requires further research on the reception of his images, which is beyond the scope of this study.

³⁴ Todorov maintained that all stories begin with an equilibrium in which potentially competing forces are in balance. This balance is disrupted by some event, which sets in motion a chain of consequent events which eventually culminate in a new and different equilibrium (Branston and Stafford, 1996: 26).

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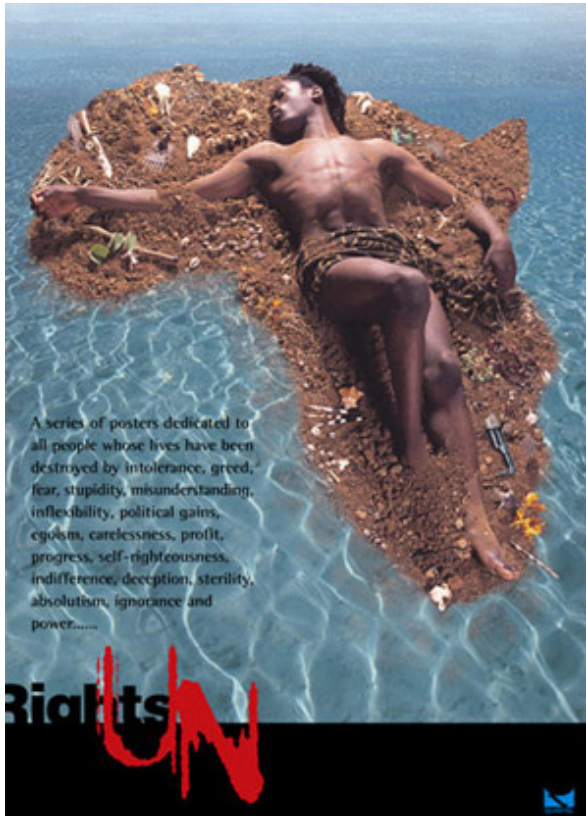
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Appendix A

Images created by Chaz Maviyane-Davies in 1996 which illustrate or represent various articles of the International Declaration of Human Rights from “an African perspective” (Maviyane-Davies, 1999: n.p.)³⁵.



³⁵ Article 3 (see page 69) has a different layout from the rest of the posters as it was not one of the original set and was included for the calendar version in 1997.

Article 2
Rights

We are all equal regardless of race, colour, sex, language, creed, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, birth or other status.

Article 3

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of purpose.

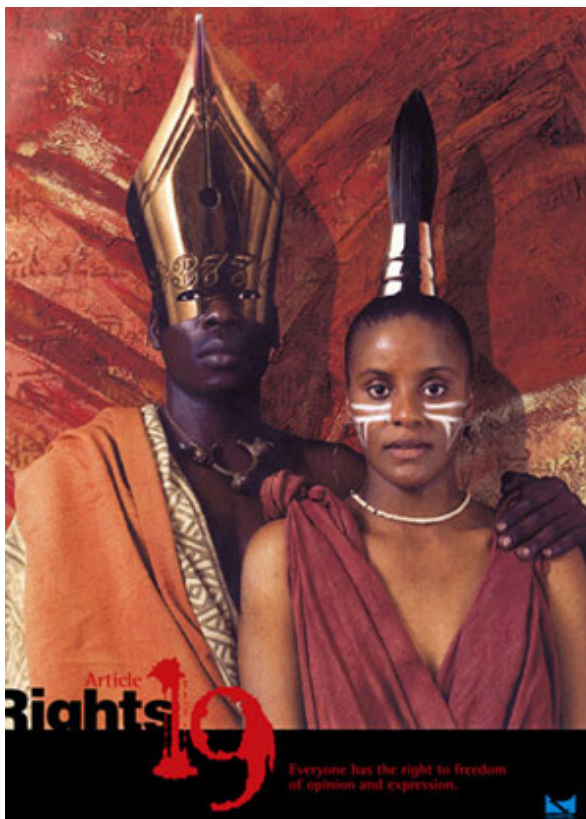
M	T	W	T	F	S	S
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

Article 4
Rights

No one should be subjected to slavery or servitude.

Article 5
Rights

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.





Appendix B

Articles from the UN Declaration of Human Rights selected by Maviyane-Davies for illustration.

Article 1: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2: Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 4: No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 7: All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 15: (1) Everyone has the right to a nationality. (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

Article 19: Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 21: (1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. (2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country. (3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by

universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

Article 26: (1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. (2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. (3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Article 27:(1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits. (2) Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

Article 29: (1) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible. (2) In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society. (3) These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Appendix C

Wording of Articles in Maviyane-Davies' images.

(Note that this is taken from the original poster set. The wording was changed on the 1997 version of the posters that were used for the Human Rights Calendar)

Cover: A series of posters dedicated to all people whose lives have been destroyed by intolerance, greed, stupidity, misunderstanding, inflexibility, political gains, egoism, carelessness, profit, progress, self-righteousness, indifference, deception, sterility, absolution, ignorance and power.....³⁶

Article 1: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

Article 2: We are all equal regardless of race, colour, sex, language, creed, religion, politics or other opinion, national or social origin, birth or other status.

Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of purpose.

Article 4: No one should be subjected to slavery or servitude.

Article 5: No one should be subjected torture or to cruel or degrading treatment or punishment

Article 7: All are equal before the law and are entitled without discrimination to equal protection of the law.

Article 15: Everyone has the right to a nationality. No-one should be arbitrarily deprived of his/her nationality nor deprived of the right to change it.

Article 19: Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

Article 21: Everyone has the right to vote and choose a government of his/her country.

Article 26: Everyone has the right to Education (emphasizing understanding).

Article 27: Everyone has the right to participate in the cultural life of the community and enjoy the arts.

Article 29: Everyone has the duty to the community and the environment.

³⁶ This wording was omitted altogether from the calendar version of the posters.