

https://dspace.org/

Ripples, rhythms and rapture: sounding spiritual technologies as marronage

Julius, Zara

2021
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/33936

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Ripples, Rhythms and Rapture

SOUNDING SPIRITUAL TECHNOLOGIES AS MARRONAGE

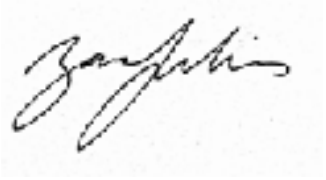
ZARA JULIUS

(in partial fulfilment of a Master of Art in Fine Arts under the supervision of Donna Kukama)

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
School of Art (WSOA)
SENATE PLAGIARISM POLICY
Declaration by Students

I, Zara Julius (Student number: 538968) am a student registered for a MAFA in the year 2018.
I hereby declare the following:

- I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without their permission and/ or without acknowledging the original source) is wrong.
- I confirm that ALL the work submitted for assessment for the above course is my own unaided work except where I have explicitly indicated otherwise.
- I have followed the required conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others.
- I understand that the University of the Witwatersrand may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this in not my own unaided work or that I have failed to acknowledge the source of the ideas or words in my writing.
-

Signature:  Date: 28 May 2021

To Prof. Francis Nyamnjoh (for helping my politics find their words) & Great-granny "Manning"

(for reminding me that our namelessness and collective loss is not theoretical)

*

The pages that follow are an offering to, and exploration of rituals of survival through waters and

across oceans; a survival that is not necessarily biological, but a survival of a

different kind. The survival of peoples, of consciousness,

spirit(s) and ritual that mutate along

sprawling networks and

journeys.

mumbo jumbo

[Mandingo mā-mā-gyo-mbō, “magician who makes the troubled spirits of ancestors go away”: mā-mā, grandmother+gyo, trouble+ mbō, to leave.]

From the Indian Ocean and Red Sea coasts of Africa, to the Pacific islands of Vanuatu and Hawaii, there lives a fish as big as a human. It is amongst the most powerful and populous in the sea. Despite its size, it is an astonishingly agile hunter both in and out of the water. Mostly solitary, this fish gathers amongst the southern archipelagos of Mozambique with others just like it for only a few weeks a year to embark on an extraordinary pilgrimage inland, to the Mtentu river in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. This group of giant trevally are lead by their 'king' upstream into fresh waters. As if steadily seduced in a sermon, the demeanour of these fish **trance**-forms from determined hunters into faithful devotees; traveling to the very limits of their survival needs of water depth, temperature and salinity, and in response to an unknown cue, the fish stop swimming, and begin to circle. Like a group of whirling dervishes, these spiralling trevally appear to be entranced - a mysterious meditation of sorts that is said to serve no biological purpose such as feeding, courting or spawning. After about an hour of this necessary (though unexplainable) annual **dance**, the fish make their way back eastwards to resume their solitary lives hunting in the world's warmer oceans.

THE IDEA OF SCRIPTURE

Spiritual or religious texts are texts that belong to a spiritual or religious tradition. They offer a compilation or discussion of beliefs, mythologies, ritual practices, ethical considerations, and spiritual aspirations. They are enforced through community across generations, and in turn, they foster community. These texts also serve a ceremonial and liturgical role in their performance of time. Sacred texts are divinely inspired. Religious texts present us with narratives that are discursive in nature.

This text is both.

This text belongs to a (geographically and culturally) expanded conception of the Black Radical Tradition (Robinson, 1983)[1]. It dances with and sings alongside many others - oral, aural, performed, material, visual and written texts - that have emerged in the face of anti-black and anti-indigenous violence. Those texts that present necessarily syncretic, opaque (Glissant, 1990) and intricately networked possibilities beyond Blackness'[2] ongoing abjection. This text presents a decidedly fragmented, yet collective utterance with the cries of centuries from Africa and its diaspora in the wake (Sharpe, 2016) of the impositions of domination and oppression brought by racial slavery and settler colonialism[3]. This text performs a refracted mapping and imagining through and across waters and polyrhythmic time; past, present, future, past continuous… Concerned with the (Black) spirit[4] (Warren, 2017), this text is inspired by experiences of and aspirations for rapture - both my own, and those of many others. It asks what it might look, feel and sound like if there was a radical sharing of these experiences, aspirations and strategies of

---

[1] This text is in line with Asher Gamedze's (2018: 2) observation of "Africa's epistemological absence in much of the Black radical tradition, beyond minor essentialised and, at times, romanticised notions of an irretrievable source, a point of origin, or a site generally relegated to the past".

[2] My working definition of Blackness loosely follows that of Steve Biko's (1987) Black Consciousness ideals, in that it takes on an expanded understanding of Blackness beyond the phenotype, and towards an understanding of Blackness as a mental attitude and political stance pertaining to those who have, by law or tradition, been politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group. In the South African context, this would include folks racialised as 'black African', 'coloured' and 'indian' under the apartheid regime. My use of the term, however, is applied to a broader geographical context, and would in this instance include black and indigenous communities in the Americas, and those folk who have been on the receiving end of racialisation and dispossession (of land, culture, language, time, and human life), and whose mobility (geographic, economic and political) has been controlled or annexed by hegemonic groups and systems of power through slavery, imperialism and apartheids. In the Latin American context, this would not apply to *white-tinos* or those wholly profiting off the violence of settler generations. Similarly Afrikaaner communities in southern Africa — whilst technically "creole" — continue to benefit from racial imperialism and white supremacy. This expanded working definition develops Biko's lament on the "fragmentation of the Black resistance" and thinks through a strategic lobbying of racialised persons who have, for generations, been reduced to units of labour and have reckoned with loss in manifold ways.

[3] Settler colonialism is an important analytical category in so far as it generated a crucible for explicit racialisation, tribalisation, and categorisation of race and humanness, where colonial "subjects" are identified and racialised within broader constructions of racial and ethnic hierarchical structures with the enduring presence of whiteness, and its various forms of "decentralized despotism" in the present day (Mamdani, 1996).

[4] The use of the word spirit here is multilayered; the pneuma, pneumatology, the supernatural (Anderson, 1992), as well as a reference to a paraontological conception of blackness that insists on the creative potentiality of blackness (Moten, 2003).

and for Black survival; a corporal and spiritual survival of the everyday in the context of historical trauma and coloniality in the global south.

The scriptures and spiritual technologies presented in this text serve as brief vignettes of a significantly larger, ever-shifting network of enraptured experiences and improvisations engaged in a feedback loop across localities. They articulate brief moments in the ever-unfolding temporal world; propositions for breath and fugitivity. It is from an extended interest in Black spiritualisms, Black Liberation Theology, Black study (Harney & Moten, 2013), Pan-Africanist and post-colonial thought, accompanied by a sustained frustration with the lack of collaboration in the everyday across black human geographies (McKittrick, 2006) that this work[5] arises. Following a nuanced understanding of the many histories and experiences of unfreedom across the global south, this work traces the historical, cultural and spiritual commonalities amongst folks racialised and subjected to systemic oppression and dispossession. Rather than flattening history and situated phenomena, this transnational approach presents us with a site of spirited possibility towards a kind of collective fugitivity.

spirit
/ˈspɪrɪt/

noun: **spirit**; plural noun: **spirits**

1. the non-physical part of a person which is the seat of emotions and character; the soul; pneuma

2. the non-physical part of a person regarded as their true self and as capable of surviving physical death, separation or dislocation.

3. the non-physical part of a person regarded as their true self and as capable of surviving political death

4. an esoteric entity that reveals itself to us and evades scientific and metaphysical captivity; it precedes and exceeds ontology

5. a supernatural being

6. strong distilled alcoholic drink, such as those used for libation

7. creative potentiality in social life

verb: **spirit**; 3rd person present: **spirits**; past tense: **spirited**; past participle: **spirited**; gerund or present participle: **spiriting**

1. convey rapidly and secretly.

[5] Refer to ‘Un Santo Negro’ for an expanded exploration of ‘the work’.

This text is to be used and respected as the handbook and grimoire of a high priestess and diviner; she who is both a teacher and a student. She who acts as media(tion) between a world of suffering imposed by history, and a world beyond 'the wake' (Sharpe, 2016) of gratuitous violence (Wilderson, 2010). She who, reaching beyond what we can name, selectively and intentionally facilitates this reaching for others. Some of the tools for this facilitated 'reaching' can be found at the priestess' *botanica*[6], and experienced through her *mpoho*[7]*.* The priestess insists on the animation of a spiritual terrain, where spiritual movements exceed the locomotive and philosophical constraints of coloniality. We know, now, where the priestess situates her practice. But I have yet to detail how she situates herself. How does one describe the practice of a medium who, in part, operates according to the laws of opacity and concealment? It is my hope that her apparitions throughout this text will do this work.

It must not be assumed that all who study this text (and the numerous texts within it) can/will reach rapture - the ontological outside (The Black Outdoors, 2016) - or even decode the spirit (Warren, 2018). Rapture is evasive. Ephemeral. And though the spirit moves through the flesh, it is not *in* the flesh. It cannot be quantified. This liturgical text is accompanied by a hymn book of ecstatic songs[8] to be engaged throughout this offering. The intended recipients of this tradition will know how these songs are sung. You and your forebears would have sung these songs, and many like them, for generations before this moment

> "Flight generally entails borders. Whether prison walls, plot boundaries, or borders between states, being fugitive implies that borders have been and/or are still to be overcome. One might assume that flight ends when the borders that stood between the captive and their freedom have been successfully crossed. Enslaved African Americans frequently fled their enslavers and legal owners in North America to gain freedom by, for instance, crossing the demarcating lines between slave plantation and the wilderness or the Mason-Dixon Line, the Ohio River, and the borders to Canada and Mexico into 'free' territory. However, with legislation such as the *Fugitive Slave Acts*, a fugitive slave remained retrievable property even in the supposedly 'Free North' so that freedom for a fugitive slave in nineteenth century North America was only a constrained form of freedom, if the term applies at all." (von Gleich, 2017)

---

6 A retail store that sells folk medicine, religious candles and statuary, amulets, and other products regarded as magical or as alternative medicine. These stores are common in many Latin American countries and communities elsewhere.

7 Mpoho is a ritual prayer song in the Zion Christian Church musical tradition which is normally sung when there are issues that need to be addressed by the church (Lebeloane & Madise, *no date*). Unlike hymns and choruses, mpoho are not derived from missionary Christian tradition. Their musical and non-semantic textural structure are a deliberate introduction of Pedi tradition into the Church (Vít Zdrálek, 2015: 174).

8 This hymn book is to be read along the lines of Tina Campt's (2017) *Listening to Images* where the sonic resonance of each hymn is foregrounded in front of any formal visual analysis. It asks that you attune your senses to the other affective frequencies through which these hymns may register.

Preaching to the choir

If you are a member of the choir, then this particular sermon is not news to you. If you are a member of the choir, then in all fairness, you need not read this section. There is nothing written in the English language that can comprehensively or compassionately articulate the many forms and varieties of unfreedom. Yet all religious texts present us with at least one origin story of sorts. And so to remain true to the form, I must comply.

The emergence and construction of racial thinking in Western civilisation did not develop only at Europe's contact with non-European peoples. From its inception, racism emerged as a material force categorising, first, the "internal" relations of European peoples. Here, the construction of race had social and ideological consequences in the organisation of labour under early capitalism that eventually spread far beyond the confines of feudal Europe with the imperial project. Racism operated as a convention in the pursuit of the evolution, organisation and expansion of both capitalist society and of the social structures that emerged from capitalism; accelerating with Europe's eventual colonial encounters with Africa and the Americas (Robinson, 1983: 2-3). In *Black Marxism,* Robinson (2006: 2) describes this process as "racial capitalism"; a process with an enduring and prevailing "historical agency". Since the beginning of the eighteenth century, Blackness and race have constituted the very heart of the expansion of the project of modernity. Here, the construction of race - the fictitious wielding of skin and colour — as a "foundational category that is at once material and phantasmic" (Mbembe, 2017: 2) set centuries of massacre, psychic devastation, displacement, and dispossession in motion for those racialised and colonised against the hegemonic categories of whiteness, Europeanness and modernity.

A marked moment of this project is apparent in the Atlantic slave trade; a long history of European contact with Africa that crossed both the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. In 1652, Jan van Riebeeck established the Cape Colony at the Cape of Good Hope, where the Dutch East India Company (VOC) introduced the slavery and Forced Labour Model. From 1653 until 1822, enslaved persons were introduced into the Dutch settler-colony agricultural economy. Whilst many of the initially enslaved were from indigenous Khoikhoi and San societies, the Dutch bought enslaved persons from ships traveling from Madagascar, Angola, Indonesia, Mozambique and the Indian subcontinent once those indigenous populations were largely diminished. Whilst some of these slave ships had the Cape Colony as their final destination, majority of these ships did not belong to the VOC and were run by other European colonial empires that merely docked and traded in the Cape en route to colonies in the Americas and Caribbean. This expanded geographic network of forced migration, land dispossession and racial capitalism laid the initial groundwork for the racial violence and continued dispossessions carried out by the apartheid regime that would follow, and the exploitative and racialised migrant labour system that endures in contemporary South Africa that mirror legacies of racial subjugation in the Americas. Whilst South Africa was one of the few settler colonies on the African continent, similar processes of enslavement, forced

migration and violence occurred throughout central and west Africa; transporting enslaved Africans to the Americas, establishing European settler (plantation and extraction) colonies and in many cases, devastating indigenous American and Caribbean populations as a result of the introduction of European diseases, massacres and arduous forced labour.

Of course, the Atlantic slave trade could not have taken place without the relative cooperation, or complicity, of many Africans. However it is through the slave trade and settler-colonialism that men and women from Africa were transformed into human-objects, labouring bodies, human-cargo and human-money (*ibid*: 2); '*kaffir*', '*negro*', '*nigger*', '*savage*'. It is through European colonial encounters in Africa and the Americas, and the construction of race and Blackness that Africans, indigenous folk and their descendants were and still are deprived of their own names[9], lands, and languages. Here Africa in general, and Blackness in particular were constructed as the 'heart of darkness' - void of the human, categorised by (no)*thingness* and capital. To be Black was to be a nonperson from a juridical, economic and socio-political standpoint.

As stated by Mbembe, "it would be a mistake to believe that we have left behind the regime that began with the slave trade and flourished in plantation and extraction colonies" (2017: 13). The production of Blackness was, and continues to be the production of a "social link of subjection and a *body of extraction*" (*ibid*: 18); an exploitable object, relegated to the domain of generational suffering, from which the maximum amount of profit is extracted. Space and place in the settler post-colony are accentuated by racist paradigms of the past and their ongoing hierarchical patterns. Whilst the implications of slavery, settler colonialism and coloniality (Mignolo, 2000) are vastly different in the diaspora and the African continent, I would argue for similarities between the contemporary Black diasporic experience(s) and the Black experiences in settler-postcolonies like South Africa, where black dispossession and ancestral, geographical, temporal and intergenerational displacement and dislocation endures beyond the colonial moment. The transnationalisation of the Black condition was a formative moment for Western modernity, with the ocean as its incubator (Mbembe, 2017: 15). Whilst colonisation is supposed to be a question of the past, the world continues to go through the globalisation and reinforcement of "a civilization system that has coloniality [and capitalist expansion] as its basis" (Maldonado-Torres, 2016: 1). Consequently, in his *Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality*, Maldonado-Torres argues that we find ourselves in a "nexus of knowledge, power and being that sustains an endless war on specific bodies, cultures, knowledges, nature, and peoples" (2016 :2). It is this enduring neocolonial project of the modern Western world that Christina Sharpe refers to as "the ship"; a

[9] Enslaved persons across the diaspora were named with surnames of their slave-masters, or with the month in which they were bought and sold. In the US, it is not uncommon to find African-descendants with the surname "Smith", for example — the name of a prominent plantation owner. In South Africa, surnames like September and February are not uncommon amongst black creole communities that are locally referred to as 'coloured'. "The slave names at the Cape were descriptive tags that constantly reminded householders of their slaves' racial descent, origin, language, sometimes parenthood, but always their slave status" (South African History Online, 2019).

reminder and remainder of colonisation, the middle passage for those in the diaspora, and "a signifier of the im/possibility of Black life" under these conditions (2016: 46).

Central to the formation of anti-black axioms and coloniality has been the negation that the lives of racialised persons comprise of interior worlds. Worlds in which we love, laugh and hold intimacy. Worlds in which we cultivate joy and life and spirit. Against this backdrop, humanness is made known through the refusal of Black life.

Stars in the ocean

Moving beyond the political ontological focus of Afropessimism and the universal humanist assumptions of black optimism, the high priestess must engage blackness in a manner that abandons ontology in pursuit of the black *spirit*…a pursuit of the mystical. That which, for a glimmering moment, exists outside.

In the beginning of Paul Taylor's (2016: 1) book, "Black is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics", he relays an eyewitness account from 1790 where, upon the arrival of a slave ship in the Dutch Gold Coast in Suriname, slaves were found to have etched stars in their hair. The account details the ways enslaved Africans, of various cultural and geographical backgrounds, had shaved their heads whilst in the hold, leaving patches of hair in the shapes of half moons and stars, with the help of a broken glass bottle (Thompson, 1962). Taylor explains how, despite the colonial attempts to strip the enslaved of their culture, and reduce Africans to 'niggers' in the project of racialisation, those in the hold of the ship built wholly new practices and life-worlds out of various old worlds. This human act of self-fashioning shared life demonstrates the irrepressible cultural vitality of those in the hold in the face of extreme dehumanisation; "a stylized barrier between [the enslaved] and the new social forces with which they would be forced to contend" (Taylor, 2016: 2).

According to Taylor, it is these improvised moments of agency, beauty and meaning that present us with a bricolage of resistance[10]. Taylor's thinking on the formation of black aesthetics in the African Diaspora provides a useful framework for looking at Black spiritualisms[11] and the ritual devices they employ; as that which emerges under the crucible of racialisation, as an assemblage

[10] Of course these moments of aesthetic improvisation are likely to have emerged out of practical necessity, such as astronomical navigation for example. Everywhere in Black aesthetics, we are met with the ways function, necessity and survival emerge in beautiful ways. It is rare that aesthetics are simply aesthetics.

[11] The domain of the spiritual, sacred and religious in the global south has been conceptualised (through academia and mission stations) according to a largely Eurocentric fundamentalist epistemological framework that intended to reconstruct landscapes and ideologies along its binary understandings of the world – tradition and culture set up against modernity and rationality. Africa, Latin America, African and Afro-diasporic spiritualities, all of which comprise of the subaltern side of the colonial difference, have continued to be written and circulated as necessarily alter – deviations from a Western norm and thus pertaining to a residual category (Shepherd & Haber, 2011). This entrenches the racial/ethnic hierarchy in the European/non-European divide, where Eurocentric forms of knowledge, modernisation, spirituality, and the cultural/ideological process tend to subordinate subalternised knowledge in Africa and the Americas (Grosfoguel, 2008: 10).

and entanglement at the point(s) of encounter with difference and violence, and indeed that which allows its bearers to traverse, survive and momentarily transcend the aftermath of this encounter.

Following these same trajectories of encounter, genesis and acculturation are what cultural anthropologists, historians and theologians term 'syncretic religions'. Those religious and spiritual formations that have emerged as the consequence of a dominant culture forcing its own religion on a culture of minority or less systemic power, so as to make it the official religion (Leopold & Jensen, 2004: 4-5). When considering the co-implication of missionary Christianity, slavery and colonial domination in Africa and the Americas, religious and cultural syncretism become improvised, oft-concealed, utterances of resistance, and an insistence on relevance; even if it is to newly birthed cultures, such as that created by those who shaved stars in their hair. It is in these moments - the carnival, the vigil, the maroon, the droster, the shrine, the revolt, the libation, the pilgrimage, the masquerade, the altar, the song, the dance - that we may consider survival strategy as spiritual technology[12], and find momentary rapture and briefly (trance)end the violence of the everyday. This is *the work*.

RAPTURE
rap·ture | \ 'rap-cher \

noun

1. an expression or manifestation of ecstasy or passion
2. a state or experience of being carried away by overwhelming emotion
3. a mystical experience in which the spirit is exalted to a knowledge of divine things

This text is a response to Nyamnjoh's (2017b) call for a "conviviality" that makes space for a reading of popular African, and Afro-diasporic ideas and experiences as legitimate, and "recognises the deep power of collective imagination and the importance of interconnections and nuanced complexities". Advocating for the work of Nigerian novelist Amos Tutuola, Nyamnjoh asks that we "drink from the cosmic gourd", and "collapse the dichotomies...between nature and culture, the visible and invisible, tradition and modernity, Africa and Europe, gods, spirits, ghosts, animals and kindred creatures of the bushes, and humans". Following from this, the high priestess insists on a praxis that, contrary to Eurocentric epistemology, does not discredit the collective

[12] The use of the term 'spiritual technology' here is an attempt to disrupt the binaries of language and coloniality; belief/ reality, religion/science, primitive/civilised, polytheism/ monotheism; and acknowledge ritual practices as legitimate archives of knowledge and purpose.

imagination of the theological and the mystical[13]. It is here, within the nectar of Tutuola's "cosmic gourd" that we may find a grammar to imagine an escape from anti-blackness and coloniality (even if a permanent escape is not possible).

Indeed, this text demonstrates an engagement with the expanded possibilities afforded the high priestess and the diviner; decidedly undisciplined in their privileging mediumship over the primacy of medium. A resistance and affirmation of its own kind (Nyamnjoh, 2017b: 267). True to form, it offers both a compilation and discussion of mythologies[14], ritual practices, ethical considerations, and spiritual aspirations. It asks how we, as African and Afro-diasporic folk "survive (and more) the afterlife of property" (Sharpe, 2016: 18). It explores the technologies and modalities of rapture, breath and fugitivity that embody an insistence on black survival(s) in Africa and the African diaspora (both at the juncture of colonial encounters, and in the contemporary age).

My practice is transdisciplinary. Given my background as a student of anthropology in the academy, part of this project is an engagement with the discipline and practice of anthropology, however it is not of anthropology. Nor is it pure comparative ethnography. Similarly, this project demonstrates an engagement with the expanded possibilities of (re)presentation afforded 'the artist' in the visual and sonic arts, as part of my practice has been as a photographer, filmmaker, object-maker and a vinyl deejay, but it is not wholly concerned with the specificity and primacy of medium. Instead, I am interested in how both my writing and aesthetic practice(s) may live decidedly undisciplined, too. The pairing of art and anthropology in this way challenges what Schneider and Wright (2010: 1) term the "iconophobia" & "chromophobia" within the disciplinary boundaries of anthropology - anthropology's fear of both phenotypical & chromatic colour. Above all, I am concerned with the agency of what we might term, 'the archive', the ways it may be written through gesture and affect, and developing a type of on-going syncretic projective remembrance through various kinds of social practice. But of course, this is not really about me…

The priestess is a traveler who resists classification and the western epistemological foregrounding of binarised thinking, where the 'rational', 'a priori' is that which legitimises knowledge as true. She conducts her work behind a curtain of cowries; facilitating the deep listening of frequencies and waves, in sounds and plants and dreams and oceans. She asks, "what elicits rapture?" in communion with a congregation similarly in pursuit of flight. She is persistently caught by, in and with the groove. She resists the crass assumption that something ought to be *exposed* in order to be felt and understood. Her heart expands to the sound of the

---

[13] This is not to suggest that religious, mystical, and spiritual discourse is not, at times, saturated with anti-black sentiment, but it is to suggest that we need additional grammars and lexical imaginations to counter these sediments and sentiments.

[14] The word 'mythology' is not used to discount the validity or weight of such stories. It is not to relegate the contents of such narratives to the domain of belief. Rather it is used to refer to narratives that have endured time, and do the work of holding community. They are beyond belief.

clave, and her eyes swell with the waters of the oceans that lick multiple coasts on multiple continents. The priestess is a selector. Hers is the power of sound and frequency — not the music itself, but the music on the self. In the beginning was the sound, rhythm: Fuel for a kaleidophonic rapture steeped in improvisation, meditation, repetition, myth and ritual. This is the journey of the spirits, and their experiments remain in the listener affirming that creative energy is ancestral energy. She is a medium — a traveller between realms, dimensions, time signatures, and temporal realities. A media(tion) between this living world and a world beyond 'the wake'. She is a child of the stars[15]; thinking herself and technologies through the senses as she mourns the various forms of black death, and insists on Black life through these ineffable things we call joy, and rapture and flight

> "It's like when [John] Coltrane, having been shown a transcription of his solo on 'Chasin' the Trane', was unable to sight-read what he'd improvised. The beautiful distance between sound and the writing of sound requires a kind of faith…" (Moten, 2003: 60)

The high priestess is interested in the "though not absolutely"; those moments in which we improvise and imagine new algorithms of attending to Black life and Black suffering (Sharpe, 2016: 22) that allow us to rupture "the wake" through rapture, if only momentarily. She demands that we create space for these syncretised technologies to engage in a feedback loop through waters and across oceans on their own terms, according to their own internal logics. Consequently, this text is written in "the pursuit of endogeneity", so as to avoid "the epistemology of alterity" (Adesina, 2011: 48). As defined by Adesina (*ibid*), endogeneity commits one to a centering of localised "discourses and experiences as the basis of one's…work". In critically engaging with the ways Africa and Latin America have been written, this text demonstrates a different project of 'the subaltern' through an obligation to co-production in an "intercorporeal and intersubjective endeavor" (Nyamnjoh, 2012: 86; Adesina, 2011: 98). The priestess asks, how might these improvisations provide fertile, ecstatic, immersive and legitimate archives (Taylor, 2003) from which we may imagine life differently? How might we listen to these improvised utterances?

Furthermore, the priestess demands that we take seriously the constitutive force and ephemerality of the waters through which these technologies have, and continue to travel; rivers, bodies, oceans. These currents consume, hold, undo, refract and re-assemble. The ocean is

[15] According to the Waite-Rider deck of tarot cards, the high priestess is lead by (and shares) her intuition. She is the "daughter of the stars" (Waite, 1909: 76)

saturated in both life and death. It is a zone of interdetermination, aquapelagic[16] entanglement and tidalectics[17]. A generator of a transcultural pantheon of spirits. A space of interrelation between the terrestrial and the subterranean; that which is under, outside and beyond complete grasp. Water transforms and transports. It remembers what we have forgotten, and sweeps it ashore.

[16] Coined by Philip Hayward, in the field of Island Studies, 'aquapelago' refers to an aggregation of marine and terrestrial elements, in which aquatic ecologies are key to community livelihoods and senses of selves. Aquapelagic assemblages identify processes of transformation along aquatic spaces at the interface of human sociality and marine environments. (Hayward, 2012)

[17] Coined by Kamau Brathwaite, 'tidalectics' is an analytical methodology that aims to formulate an oceanic worldview, reflective of the rhythmic fluidity of water and the unabated ebb and flow of the tides as governed by the moon. (Refer to 'Sonic Tidalectics & Rhythmic Ruptures' for a more in-depth exploration of the concept.)

Through looking at identity, Glissant embraces the necessity of complexities in the world, the "chaos-monde" (a multirelational world), acknowledging the ways structuralist attempts to categorise undermine the integrity of the whole. He insists, thus, that "we [must] demand the right to opacity" (1990: 189); an ethical assertion against imperialism and the fixities implied by colonial domination. He calls for the opaque, the irreducible, that which exceeds categories of identifiable difference in pursuit of a successful radical democratic project. In doing so, he asserts the proposition that individuals, and culture need not be exposed in ways that are easily identifiable and digestible. Glissant's ideal of opacity, or the refusal to be a single being, embraces ambiguity, ambivalence, and the opaque as a form of resistance in the simultaneous acts of revealing and concealing.

SOME OF THE MANY NAMES OF THE MOTHER WATER SPIRIT[18]

Mawu-Lisu (sometimes seen as an aspect of Mami Wata)	Benin
Yemonjá (or Yemanjá; becoming popularly identified with the spirit)	Brazil
Kuitikuiti, Mboze, Makanga, Bunzi, Kambizi	Republic of the Congo
Mohana, *Madre de agua* ("Mother of Water")	Colombia
Yemanya (or Yemaya; becoming popularly identified with the spirit)	Cuba
La Sirène ("The Mermaid"), *Madame Poisson* ("Mistress Fish"), Mamba Muntu	Democratic Republic of the Congo
Maman de l'Eau ("Mother of the Water"), Maman Dlo, Mama Glo	Dominica
Mamy Wata	Guinea
Mamadilo	French Guiana
Maame Water	Ghana
Mamadjo	Grenada
Maman de l'Eau, Maman Dlo	Guadeloupe
Watramama	Guyana
Zulu: Mamlambo; Ndebele: NoMlambo	South Africa
La Sirène, *La Baleine* ("The Whale"; a Rada loa that is a cross between *La Sirène* and *Erzulie Balianne*); (Erzulie and Simbi are also identified with *La Sirène*)	Haiti
River Mumma, River Mama, River Maiden	Jamaica
Lamanté (A probable distortion of the name "Lamantin" which is the French name for the manatee, animal on which Van Stipriaan suggested she may be based. That animal gave its name to a town of Martinique, Le Lamentin...), Manman Dlo, Maman Dilo	Martinique
Maman de l'Eau, Maman Dlo	Netherlands Antilles
Igbo: Mmuommiri ("Lady of the waters"), Edo: Obanamen/Oba n'amen ("King/Queen of the waters"), Yoruba: Yemoja, Ibibio/Efik: Ndém	Nigeria
Watermama, Watramama	Suriname
Maman de l'Eau, Mama Dlo, Maman Dglo, Maman Dlo, Mama Glow	Trinidad and Tobago

[18] Mami Wata is directly translated to mean ‘Mother Water’. *Mami Wata: Arts for Water Spirits in African and Its Diasporas* was an exhibition at the Smithsonian National Museum for African Art in 2009. It explored the world of water deities and demonstrates how art bot reflects and actively contributes to belief, religious practices, and globalisation of the water goddess. https://africa.si.edu/exhibits/mamiwata/intro.html

Tio Guachupecito - Leonor González Mina (2000)

*English translation

En los ríos del litoral pacifico,
hay un pez negro largo y flaco llamado guachupe.
A todo negro largo y flaco le dicen guachupe
y por cariño lo nombran guachupecito,
Todo negro viejo es tío y todo negro joven sobrino.

In the rivers of the Pacific coast,
there is a long, skinny black fish called guachupe,
All of the long and skinny dark skinned men are called guachupe, and they affectionately call them guachupecito,
All black old men are uncles and all the black youth are nephews.

El tío Guachupecito va subiendo por el rió,
con su recatón y su palanca empujando su canoa,
Cuando los sobrinos que están en la orilla,
Le alcanzan a ver y le gritan...

Uncle Guachupecito goes up stream by the river,
with his pick and lever, he pushes the canoe.
When the nephews who are on the shore,
see him in time and they shout ...

Tio Guachupecito, siéntese, siéntese, siéntese
Paraíto nada más, hay sobrinos,
Paraíto nada más, hay sobrinos,
Paraíto nada más.

Uncle Guachupecito, sit down, sit down, sit down
I'll just stand a bit, oh nephews
I'll just stand a bit, oh nephews
I'll just stand a bit, (and) nothing more.

. . .

. . .

En el cielo pintan santos,
yo también quiero pintar,
pintar a un santo negro,
y hoy lo vamos a celebrar.

They paint saints in heaven,
I also want to paint,
to paint a black saint,
And today we're going to celebrate.

Hay pintajaron, hay pintajaron, hay pintajaron, hay pintajaron.

Oh they painted, oh they painted, oh they painted, oh they painted

. . .

. . .

Hay celebrar hay celebrar, hay celebrar…

Oh they celebrated, oh they celebrated, oh they celebrated…

“Otherwise, as word—otherwise possibilities, as phrase—announces the fact of infinite alternatives to what *is*. And what *is* is about being, about existence, about ontology. But if infinite alternatives exist, if otherwise possibility is a resource that is never exhausted, what is, what exists, is but one of many. Otherwise possibilities exist alongside that which we can detect with our finite sensual capacities. Or, otherwise possibilities exist and the register of imagination, the epistemology through which sensual detection occurs—that is, the way we think the world—has to be altered in order to get at what’s there. Moving in and through us like the trillions of neutrinos that pass through each square inch of Earth every second, there but undetected until we create and utilize certain technologies in the service of harnessing that which is unseen to naked eyes. How to detect such sensuality, such possibility otherwise, such alternative to what is as a means to disrupt the current configurations of power and inequity? How to detect, how to produce and inhabit otherwise epistemological fields, is the question of Black Study.” (Crawley, 2016: 2-3)

Black Pentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility

To detect, to produce and inhabit *otherwise* is The Work. Miriam Makeba’s work. Alice Coltrane’s work. The work of Thomas Sankara, Caster Semenya, Celia Cruz, Isaiah Shembe, Herbie Hancock, Serena Williams, Las Adelitas…and The Black Madonna. The work of simultaneous insistence and refusal. The work of creating a new world out of various old worlds. The forms of social life and practices of care that emerge in, and that are conditioned by what Afropessimists term “social death” (Sexton, 2011). A methodology of spirit that turns away from blackness’ ongoing abjection, and toward apprehending an ethics of engagement, and a poetics of relation (Glissant, 1990) that insists that “there are ways to make Black life visible, if only momentarily” (Hartman in In the Wake, 2017).

Black ~~being~~

Afropessimism seems to offer us very little in terms of imagination of ourselves and what we could be or do as a collective. As a congregation. However, (following from the notion of coloniality and the understanding of blackness as a constructed residual category under modernist commerce), Afropessimism and its interlocutors - black optimism[19] and what Calvin Warren (2017) terms 'black mysticism' - offer useful departure points against which we may understand the necessity and significance of the high priestess, *The Work* (of this text and the many texts it sings with), its propositions for rapture and fugitivity.

Afropessimist theorists like Wilderson (2010) and Sexton (2011) argue that the question of blackness is an entirely political ontological one. Following from blackness' construction under slavery as a violent discourse to subject and denigrate African being, blackness is not from Africa, but is rather thrust *upon* Africa and its diaspora. Afropessimism maintains that blackness emerges as "pure means" (Warren, 2017: 223), and not as a feature of human difference[20]. On this, we agree. Blackness here is *non-ontology;* contained within the symbolic order of whiteness, under a (neo)colonial arrangement of enduring anti-blackness. In this matrix, Afropessimists reach the conclusion that political programs will do very little to bring blacks into the realm of humanity (ibid: 220) as anti-blackness fundamentally excludes black people from civil society. For thinkers like Wilderson and Sexton, political transformation is not possible. 'Blackness is [*always*] slave', inextricably bound by a psychopathology received from the "interiorisation of the white psyche" (Curry, 2019), which maintains an inevitable and necessary hopelessness of the black condition.

Coloniality persists, and significant aspects of racism are structural, cultural, reproductive and unchanging, and Afropessimism provides us with a useful framework for thinking through the political position we find ourselves in. The ontological argument of Afropessimism, however, insists that the reproduction of 'blackness, the slave' within the hegemonic symbolic order dissolves or assimilates all the resources of the black psyche. It relegates blackness to the death-scape of the political, and a "social death" (Sexton, 2011) that denies blackness' potential to imagine or project itself outside of anti-blackness; it's potential to produce rapture, and thus

---

[19] "The term black optimist describes a diverse group of scholars committed to humanism. Although these scholars do not self-identify as black optimists, the term dockets a humanist desire either to fold blacks into humanity and resolve the ontological problem, or to move *beyond* race and embrace an optimistic future of universal humanism" (Warren, 2017: 220) where blacks are included in a Civil society in which political transformation is possible.

[20] The recipient of derogatory racial terminology associated with blackness and the African subject has always been a moving target of otherness that initially had very little to do with phenotype, but rather a maintenance of an *other*. For example, the term *kaffir* was an intentionally pejorative term used by Muslims in the 16th century reserved to refer to non-believers throughout what is now the East African coast, India, and Afghanistan. The term was then used as a racial slur in reference to any black African under apartheid South Africa. Its usage is now legally actionable in the post-apartheid context. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/28/world/africa/south-africa-hate-speech.html, https://www.etymonline.com/word/kaffir

become enraptured. Indeed, it is against this very assumption that the need for rapture becomes salient as a means to rupture this political-ontological matrix. Here I am interested in the disruptive capacities found in the otherwise world of the enraptured — how the embodied expression of ecstasy and the mystical (both within the flesh and somewhere 'outside') — may "produce a break with the known, the normative, the violent world of western thought and material condition" (Crawley, 2016: 4-5). For the priestess, blackness has, does, and continues to possess the capacity for rapture.

In an online discussion on race and civil disorder between Tina Campt, Ekow Eshun, Saidiya Hartman and John Akomfrah, Ghanaian-born Akomfrah emphasised the powerful continuities, and echoing breathlessness in Black experiences across the diaspora in reference to his 1986 film essay *Handsworth Songs* (Lisson Gallery, 2020). The film explores the civil disturbances of September and October 1985 in the Birmingham district of Handsworth and in the urban centres of London. Running throughout the film is the idea that the riots were the outcome of an enduring suppression by British society and police of black presence subsequent to the arrival of the Windrush generation[21] in the UK from the Caribbean. In the discussion Akomfrah notes that, whilst there are of course discontinuities in Black[22] experience, he is interested in thinking through these continuities — some of which are joyful, and some of which are immensely painful — that are not just about what we do, but also about what gets done *to* us; the ways in which systemic white supremacy ensures our breathlessness as a form of spectacle.

Over the years, breathlessness has emerged as a refrain in the face of systemic anti-black violence. During the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's amnesty trials, it emerged that strangulation was the preferred method of murder carried out by the apartheid counterinsurgency unit at Vlakplaas in their missions to disappear anti-apartheid activists. The reason for this was to ensure that no blood evidence was left behind. This emerged especially in reference to the state-sanctioned abduction and subsequent killings of Jeffrey Sibaya, Samuel Ledwaba, Matthews Lerutla, and Oupa Mohale, who disappeared on August 17 1987 in Mamelodi, South Africa during political protests (Maughan, 2019). On July 17, 2014, Eric Garner repeatedly exclaimed "I cant breathe" eleven times while lying face down on the sidewalk in a chokehold before being murdered by New York police officer Daniel Pantaleo in attempting to arrest him for supposed

---

[21] "The Windrush generation" refers to those arriving in the UK between 1948 and 1971 from mostly anglophone countries. The term is in reference to the ship MV Empire Windrush, which arrived at Tilbury Docks, Essex, on 22 June 1948, bringing workers from Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and other islands, as a response to post-war labour shortages in the UK. The ship carried 492 passengers - many of them children. In 2018, the legal immigration status of these children who arrived on their parents passport's from Commonwealth countries was thrown into dispute, despite the fact that these individuals helped create the modern economy that UK prides itself on.

[22] Throughout the conversation, Akomfrah's use of the word "Black" refers to Blackness as a political identity of the formerly colonised and not just to racial signifier, as it was championed by the black consciousness movements between the 60s and 80s. His use of the word extends to include those of south-asian descent.

suspicious activity. His murder was captured on camera phones[23], causing the footage and the protest hashtag #ICantBreathe to go viral. In 2020, this refrain has continued its echo, with the murder of George Floyd on May 25 by Derek Chauvin, a Minneapolis police officer who pressed his knee to Floyd's neck for almost nine minutes, killing him by mechanical asphyxiation. Handcuffed and pinned face down by three police officers in an attempted arrest, with a fourth preventing onlookers from intervening, Floyd too repeats this refrain, "I cant breathe" multiple times before he dies captured on camera. 10 days later, Tshegofatso Pule was found hanging from a tree in Roodeport, South Africa. Pule was 8 months pregnant, and a victim of an on-going gender based violence crisis in South Africa where black women are raped and murdered at disproportionately high rates. This echoed refrain of black breathless in the face of systemic white supremacist patriarchy occurs throughout Frantz Fanon's writing, where he uses terms like "suffocated" and "smothered" to describe the experience of black being in colonial Algeria (1963; 1965). In Black Skin White Masks, Fanon states, we revolt "quite simply" because it has become "impossible […] to breathe", in more than one sense of the word. (1952: 176). Breath amongst this breathless condition, then, is "combat breathing" (Fanon, 1965: 65).

Throughout history there have been moments of marronage, slave revolts, radical histories of Africanist thought, anti-colonial movements and (oft subversively complicit) religious and spiritual orders that I would argue have not been limited by the world imaginary of the white culture of the symbolic order, in absolute terms (Sharpe, 2016). The innovative diagnosis proposed by Afropessimism, however, whilst baring political validity around our collective breathlessness, appears hamstrung by what seems to be an ahistorical denial of the creative potentiality of blackness. Whilst racialisation was created under a particular oppressive political and economic project of capitalist imperialism (Robison, 1983), we need not look at blackness only in terms of political ends — whether or not it's still under a colonial or neocolonial arrangement — but we must also endeavour to understand what the culture is producing. It is this approach that allows us to break away from the claim of the universalisation of blackness as an ontological category (Curry, 2019), where the ontological internalisation of a specific set of signs, like 'blackness, the slave' is not placed within black people *completely*.

It is through the work of Fred Moten (2003) and his black mysticism that *The Work* can be read not as mere deluded hallucinations of freedom, but rather as moments of rapture *toward* freedom — however fleeting and seemingly trapped. A *petite marronage*, where freedom is not a destination but an on-going praxis. Black mysticism provides us with a gap, between the Afropessimist and black optimist opposition, and steps into The Black Outdoors (Duke University, 2016). Instead of ascertaining the efficacy of political action to resolve the problem of ontology and black humanity, black mysticism seeks to abandon both ontology and politics (Warren, 2017: 220); embracing a

[23] Further reading: *Death in the Browser Tab by Teju Cole*
https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/24/magazine/death-in-the-browser-tab.html

Los Angeles–based artist and filmmaker, Kahlil Joseph's BLKNWS (2018 - ongoing) is an unending ever-shifting series of newsreels that create a visual register for Black excellence, critical thought, social life and resistance in the USA. Produced in the genre of the news broadcast, the on-going two channel video installations present us with what it might look like if newscasts were targeted with black liberation and black social life in mind. The BLKNWS newscast splices appropriated historical and contemporary found news and social media footage with newly shot scenes of news room and documentary reportage. Challenging

"They thought that by fumigating the Place Congo in the 1890s when people were doing the Bamboula the Chacta the Babouille the Counjaille the Juba the Congo and the VooDoo that this would put an end to it. That it was merely a fad. But they did not understand that the Jes Grew epidemic was unlike physical plagues. Actually Jes Grew was an anti-plague. Some plagues caused the body to waste away; Jes Grew enlivened the host. Other plagues were accompanied by bad air (malaria). Jes Grew victims said that the air was as clear as they had ever seen it and that there was the aroma of roses and perfumes which had never before enticed their nostrils. Some plagues arise from decomposing animals, but Jes Grew is electric as life and is characterized by ebullience and ecstasy. Terrible plagues were due to the wrath of God; but Jes Grew is the delight of the gods." (Reed, 1972: 6)

Mumbo Jumbo: A Novel

verb: **marronage**

1. the collective act of physically isolating from a surrounding society in order to create a fully autonomous community

2. the flight of those who escaped slavery with intention to create independent communities on the outskirts of slave societies

3. Integral to interpreting ‘freedom’ as a concept in Suriname,

noun: **grand marronage**

1. people who permanently removed themselves from the plantations or mines on which they were enslaved

2. permanent marronage carried out by individuals, small groups, or it could be the result of plantation/mine-wide or even colony-wide rebellions.

noun: **petite marronage**

1. a strategy of resistance, whereby enslaved individuals or small groups escaped their plantations/mines for a number of reasons, for a short period of days or weeks and then returned.

2. The act of temporarily fleeing enslavement in order to carry out smaller acts of resistance, such as religious gatherings, or organising cross-plantation strategies of resistance and escape, such as the underground railway or colony-wide rebellions.

noun: **maroon**; plural noun: **maroons**

1. A person who has fled from enslaved society; either temporarily or permanently
2. A person who has separated themselves from slave society, but does not necessarily live in isolation. Interactions with colonists, indigenous peoples and other maroons was/is common

noun: **maroon society**; plural: **maroon societies**

1. An autonomous community created by maroons who have fled enslavement; often in a perpetual state of war against colonialists.

   maroon societies; *mocambos* (Brazil)*, cumbes* (Venezeuela)*, drosters* (South Africa)*, palenques* (Colombia)*, quilombos* (Brazil) *, rancherias, diamamouves* (Mauritius)*, ladeiras, magotes* (Cuba)*, maneires*

kind of murky optimism that gears itself to the creative potentiality of blackness and the *utility* of the social realm to which it has been relegated. Within Moten's philosophical enterprise, a distinction is made between blacks as a constructed political-ontology under the hegemonic symbolic order, and Blackness as paraontology; that which precedes the political ontological moment, and is thus beyond the symbolic order of whiteness. Consequently, Moten (2013) works against the conflation of Blackness with black 'things' and introduces a mystical framework for an escape from total ontological dread. Here blackness emerges as an abstraction appearing to the world; an apparition, the epitome of transcendence, and the site of a desire to flee that which we can no longer engage. Whether intentional or not, Moten's embrace of the theological or mystical imagination presents us with an expanded grammar with which we may imagine and enact this escape (Warren, 2017). Perhaps this reaching is more aligned with what Ashon Crawley terms the "*a*theology-*a*philosophy of blackness" (2016: 28) in his analysis of the utility and imaginative possibilities of the Blackpentecostal tradition in the USA as it extends beyond the exploitation, alienation and abstraction of the theological project created under the Eurocentric, patriarchal, heteronormative, modernist epistemological order through the tradition's use of shouting, tongues, praise and sociality. The same could be said for the Ziyoni worship tradition in Southern Africa and the many other Afro-syncretic religious traditions of the global south.

Since 1997, Colombia's Santiago de Cali (Cali) has hosted the largest gathering of Afro-Pacific music, The Petronio Álvarez Festival (Petronio). Named after one of the most prominent interpreters and composers of Afro-Colombian rhythms, the festival brings musical ensembles from across the Pacific coast to perform folkloric music and participate in an annual competition in front of a 600 000 strong audience. The music here is as varied as the coast. You can hear salsa choké, currulao, bunde, chirimia, as well as jazz fusions of them all in one. Whilst the week-long festival is usually headlined by mega stars, like Hugo Candelario and Yuri Buenaventura, the competition is an opportunity for more regional ensembles to gain recognition and win cash prizes. It is also an important opportunity for the City of Cali to market itself to both local and international publics as a unique destination of cultural tourism.

Cali is often touted as the second largest 'black-city' of Latin America — admittedly, this was a big drawcard in my applying for an artist residency there. A few days into this residency, the cohort and myself went for a hike up Cali's equivalent of Cape Town's Lion's Head — El Cerro De Las Tres Cruces (The Hill of Three Crosses). Once we reached the top, we were greeted by an expansive view of the city. Pointing out the city's different urban landmarks, one of the residency's administrators said "…y eso es Cali negro / and that is black Cali", as he gestured to the outskirts of the city. Whilst I'm unsurprised by the concept of racial segregation, I still felt quite affronted by the flippant statement, which was void of any acknowledgement of the history and contemporary injustices embroiled in said segregation. It seemed commonplace for white Caleños to speak of "black Cali" as an afterthought, as some amorphous yet homogeneous place where 'the poor blacks live'. Whilst the Caleña population is about 27% Afro-Colombian, urban spatialisation has occurred mostly along class and racial lines. Much like in Cape Town, race and space in Cali presents a hauntology of racial colonialism, urban migration, disproportionate economic opportunities and unequal service delivery. During Spanish colonisation of Colombia, Cali held a strategic position for trade with its strategic location between gold mining regions, and the still-active sugar cane plantations that surround the city. Of course both sectors profited almost exclusively off Black and indigenous labour. Coincidentally, Petronio coincides with the annual sugar cane field burning season and, come nightfall, the hills surrounding the city often glow a golden-red; a hautonology of a different kind.

Apart from commuting street vendors, Afro-Colombian and indigenous populations are mostly pushed to the residential areas on the outskirts of the city's centre or the affluent southern suburbs. In Cali, you just don't really see that many Black folk….unless it's Petronio. Petronio is the one time of the year that the city honours the Afro-Colombian influence in the city, and Black communities show up and show out! But it's bittersweet; the festival creates a platform for Afro-Pacific music to receive an audience, but it simultaneously strips much of the ritual and function from these musical traditions by forcing them to adhere to festival regulations, conventional stage set-ups, commercialisation and most of all, competition.

True to global trends of cultural appropriation, Petronio has become a place that many white Colombian youth identify as a trendy party, where they go to don ‘ethnic’ headwraps and Moyo-esque ‘tribal’ face paint. Additionally, they remain oblivious to the fact that smoking (of cigarettes or cannabis), party-drugs and drinking hard liquor or beer is considered culturally offensive in this context. In order to try keep Afro-Pacific communities as the true beneficiaries of the festival, community leaders lobbied to ban the sale of non Afro-Colombian consumables. Here, you can only buy variations of *viche* (the artisanal sugarcane liquor of the Pacific region) and foods from the Pacific coast. Even so, Nidia Gongora (the proverbial songbird of the Afro-Pacific) is left wanting.

Every night of Petronio, Gongora — a famed canatadora originally from Timbiquí — hosts what she calls “arrullos en el barrio”; lullabies for the spirits in her mother’s alley in Ciudad Cordoba. From about 11pm, each home along this alley is host to packed, sweaty vigils of feverish, communal and spontaneous singing, dancing & playing of marimbas and drums in a call and response that continues until well after sunrise the next day. This is not just an after party. For Gongora, this collective kaleidophonic rapture is essential. Arrullos en el barrio both revitalise the music and facilitate the necessary process of filling the musician and the community back up with spirit after engaging with the commercial nature of Petronio. For it is this ‘spirit’ that allows us to give and receive the music.

This is Black Cali; expansive, restorative, collective.

noun: c**antadora**

f. (plural: cantadoras)

1. One who hands down myths and stories by word of mouth or song; storyteller

According to Moten, the relegation of blackness to the social (and political death) is not the death sentence Afropessimism might suggest. Instead it presents us with a site of spirited possibility and fugitivity where the social enjoys an intimacy with 'life'. It exists as a sacred space, producing sacred texts, which is untranslatable and unsinkable. It insists on opacity as survival strategy since ontology and Blackness are unavailable for each other, and "offers a mystical space of existential reconfiguration" (Warren, 2017). It is here that 'the work' becomes paramount in its ability to partially reveal blackness to itself as that which must free itself from ontological expectation and insist upon black subjectivity (Moten, 2003: 1). For Moten, "this imperative is not something up ahead, to which blackness aspires; it is the labor, which must not be mistaken for Sisyphean, that blackness serially commits" (2013, 749-750) as 'social life'. Here, blackness *is* being, it is in a dialectical *wave* that synthesises into something we can only call 'the mystical' or 'the spiritual'. That which we cannot fully apprehend in written language as there exists no grammar outside of ontology to describe the paraontological (Warren, 2017: 225-226). It is through black social life—black *spirit*—that Blackness, as mystical entity, may become momentarily visible as it manifests *through* black bodies and beings. The priestess is invested in conjuring this spirit; demonstrating resilience in ephemeral social moments and sacred texts, and revealing enraptured beauty within conditions of extreme ugliness (Warren, 2017).

This act of generating life, "in the hold of the ship" and in the wake of slavery, is what Christina Sharpe terms "wake work" (2016: 17)—the work of imagining and living beyond incessant coloniality and the cycles of death and trauma(s) of Black being in the settler-postcolony. By extension, Fanon (1965: 65) might refer to this as "combat breathing". According to Sharpe, this is life in "the wake", where black lives are "swept up...produced and determined, though not absolutely, by the afterlives of slavery" (2016: 8). Thus Blackness (capital 'B')—as mystical entity, as the spirit—is the *sublime* aspect of blackness (small 'b'). Made manifest through The Work, it is an insistence on joy and mystical ecstasy. The Work, thus, is an improvised and inspired declaration of rapture, and a reminder of the creative potentiality of the phenomenology of black spirit that passes through us. This is the work of the high priestess and those many others ordained in the church of Black life; of joy and rapture.

"…My instrument is deepening and widening; it's because I'm possessed of the spirit/I learned it from my mother—the preacher, that's what they called her…/You gotta sing a song; you can't sing jazz/When Bird was around he knew he wasn't playing jazz. He was playing his spirit. And I think that's the problem for a lot of the musicians on the scene now. They think that they're playing jazz. But there's no such thing, really/I'm possessed of my own spirit/This is the music of the African muse/I just want to be of use to my ancestors/It's holy work and it's dangerous not to know that 'cause you could die like an animal down here"

Abbey Lincoln at Ford Foundation Jazz Study Group, Columbia University, November 1999 (Moten, 2003: 23)



Fig. 1 Poster and programme from the 'Rapture Institute'

“The whole point of escape is that it’s an activity”
(Moten *in* The Black Outdoors, 2016).

In his seven minute video ‘Love Is the Message, The Message Is Death’, Arthur Jafa (2016) attempts to create a visual language for the African-American experience; as that which is riddled and trapped within gratuitous violence and anti-blackness. Within this film, he addresses this notion of social death through a seven minute rapid fire montage depicting the complexity and paradox of black pain, joy and alienation set against Kanye West’s *Ultralight Beam.* In spite of the speed at which the images appear on the screen, Jafa’s work reveals and exposes these moments in ways that the pain of black-being seems amplified; swelling with intensity like the image of the bubbling hot plasma-filled sun that repeats several times throughout the film. Jafa often shamelessly and freshingly states that he creates work with Black folk in mind. We are his intended audience. Yet we live this intensity everyday. Indeed, it is important for our lives to be mirrored back to us (by us), but Jafa’s work begs the question of whether we need to be consistently retriggered by the trauma of our everyday, where we are anyway confronted with manifold iterations of black death, anti-black micro and macro aggressions, and the enduring afterlives of colonialism. I choose to look elsewhere, as I am unconvinced by the efficacy of turning black suffering into the spectacular.

Black people living on the African continent are accustomed to seeing images of their people dying on screens, for the consumption of those elsewhere; so as to try coax empathy out of them around certain depictions of genocide in Rwanda, famines in Ethiopia and Sudan, or the refugee crisis of Africans attempting to cross the Mediterranean. Or perhaps more overt forms of systemic anti-black violence, such as the accounts made during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa’s transition out of apartheid; with the pain, terror and grief of black people on display for all the world to see. Our relationship to seeing our people dying on screens is different to those in the west. It is no mistake that we do not see droves of images of white bodies dying or dead. Of course, the systemic structures ensure that these types of bodies are not dying in quite the same numbers. They do not experience constraint of being. And almost more notably, empathy is already assumed. In referring to Frederick Douglass’s account of the brutal beating of his Aunt Hester, who was whipped and verbally assaulted by her slave master after sharing intimacy with another enslaved man, Moten speaks to “the uncertain line between witness and spectator” (2003:3). He states that “rather than try convey the routinised violence of slavery and its aftermath through invocations of the shocking and the terrible, [he has] chosen to…consider those scenes in which terror can hardly be discerned…to illuminate the terror of the mundane and quotidian rather than exploit the shock spectacle” (*ibid*). There is an entanglement of joy and pain in Black life, an entanglement of breath and breathlessness. We can see the suffering and constraint of being even when it is not displayed and exposed for all to see. Within the sublime lives terror (Ray, 2005). It is irreducibly present in the prayer, and in the joy.

This work is concerned with the moments in which we may find and insist on black life, despite, and outside of the overwhelming presence of anti-blackness, and black death. Following Moten's black mysticism, the high priestess is primarily engaged with the spirit of Blackness, and not the phenomenology of anti-blackness. She is engaged with joy, intimacy and ecstasy that may, because of Fanon (1968: 85), be considered guerrilla warfare, an intervention into the emergence into the normative subject-object position (Crawley, 2016: 287).

cult |kəlt|
noun

- a system of veneration and devotion directed toward a particular object or state: *the cult of rapture*.

- a contained group of people having spiritual beliefs or practices regarded by others as strange or sinister; oftentimes characterised by relative secrecy.

synonym: The Black Radical Tradition

Furthermore, she is one of the many mediators of a cult that recognises the primacy of collective imagination; a space of intersubjectivity that exists by virtue of a kind of code-sharing. Some might call this cult the Black Radical Tradition; a space of musical, religious, artistic, physical, political, spiritual, social and theoretical articulation of black strategy of resistance and radicalisms in Africa and her diaspora. The everyday incantations that insist on black survival, the survival of the 'black spirit' in spite of coloniality. Those things that are referred to here as spiritual technologies, where "pneumatology is about the relation of spirit to flesh" (Crawley, 2016: 27).

Following Crawley's exploration of Blackpentecostalism, the priestess is interested in how the spiritual technologies of Black life and joy constitute a disruptive force, ripe for imagining otherwise modes of social organisation and mobilisation. He states that "these sensual experiences [are] not merely performed through duress but [are] the instantiation and sign of life and love. As life and love, these performative dances, songs, noises, and tongues illustrate how enjoyment, desire, and joy are important for the tradition that antiphonally speaks back against aversion, embarrassment, and abandonment, against the debasement and denigration of blackness" (2016: 7-8). Here he speaks of the aesthetic, performative technologies of Blackpentecostalism not just as resistance to the systemic racial oppression in mainline American pentecostalism. The priestess would go a step further to suggest that it is precisely through imagination and creativity that we not only demonstrate resistance or denounce the disavowal of black potentiality but we find freedom from the legacies of a white supremacist object ownership oriented theology-philosophy...even if just through fleeting moments of the kind of rapture that black imaginative improvisation creativity and adaptation provides.



Fig. 2 Still from ‘Sacred Feedback Loop’ session, 18 October 2018

In Cedric Robisnon’s (1983) “Black Marxism”, he maps numerous histories of Black radicalism across Africa, the Caribbean and North America. He details moments of slave revolts in the slave castles in Africa as collective attempts to repair the discontinuity produced by enslavement, as well as the various forms of marronage that took place within colonial settlements, where the syncretic cultural identities emergent from the social mixing pot of slave organisation withdrew beyond the presence of exploitation to forge new runaway societies; “drosters” in the Dutch Cape colony, “palenques” in the Spanish colonies, and “polinks” in the English colonies (*ibid*: 122*)*.

Furthermore, he considers how such moments triggered the trajectory and basis of independence and liberation movements from Haiti, to Burkina Faso and South Africa, as well as intellectual projects concerning the black experience amongst descendants of slaves and freed persons. In his describing of the distillation of what in retrospect[24] has been termed the Black Radical Tradition, Robinson (1983: xxxi-xxxii) states:

[24] It is important to acknowledge that these actions and moments were often as a result of numerous improvisations, they were very rarely employed in the moment as consciously functioning as ‘spiritual technology’ in the ways in which it is referred in this text.

> "…Africans [and Afro-descendants were] subjected to similar and interrelated systems of servitude and oppression, and mobilized by identical impulses [what Moten might term "Blackness"] to recover their dignity. And over the centuries, the liberation projects of these men and women in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas acquired similar emergent collective forms in rebellion and marronage, similar ethical and moral articulations of resistance"

Distilled from racial antagonisms, the objectifications, segregationist policies, temporal and geographic dislocation, forced religious conversions, missionary movements, dress, hair[25], and limited mobility (*ibid*: xxxi), the Black Radical Tradition demonstrates "the magnificence of the… spirit: the inextricable resolve to refashion society according to some powerful but imperfect moral vision" (*ibid*: xxvii). These moments of marronage and revolt may be considered examples of political liberation, but they also generated intricate, syncretic and complex cross-continental networks of social, cultural and aesthetic life throughout history, and into the contemporary era. This tradition extends itself beyond the political, and has insinuated itself into song, into worship, into friendship, and into Black social life across and beyond geographical borders.

[25] In the Caribbean, intricate hair braiding patterns were used as maps to help the enslaved flee plantations. Furthermore, hair braiding / cornrows were used to conceal and transport seeds and grains from Africa in forced migration across the Atlantic Ocean. https://www.africanexponent.com/post/7891-how-cornrows-were-used-by-slaves-to-escape-slavery-in-south-america

Miriam Makeba was born 4 March 1932 in the black township of Prospect, near Johannesburg. Those who are familiar with the *spirit* of her voice will not be surprised to read that Miriam was born to a lineage of healers. In the early fifties, she began her professional musical career singing with the South African all-male close harmony group, the Cuban Brothers; a prophetic start, given she would receive a honorary citizenship to Cuba from Fidel Castro some twenty years later. By 1960, Miriam's career had reached international acclaim, and she began to tour extensively. She rarely sung explicitly political music, but her international success had led to an increase in awareness of apartheid and the antiapartheid movement. Soon after the Sharpeville massacre, Miriam found that she had been exiled from South Africa when she attempted to return home after her US tour to attend the funeral of her mother. Her passport was revoked, and Makeba commenced the work of imagining more humanly working geographies, where she became an increasingly outspoken critic of the apartheid government and informed much of the Black Power movement.

Throughout her exile, Miriam lived in the United States, Guinea and Belgium, and toured extensively throughout the African continent in support African independence from colonial rule and African unity. She sang at the independence ceremonies of Kenya, Angola, Zambia, Tanzania and Mozambique. During this time, she received honorary citizenship and passports to Cuba, Tanzania, Guinea, Ghana…..Additionally, she became a diplomat for Ghana and was appointed Guinea's official delegate to UN in 1975. This was during a period when Guinean President Sékou Touré implemented a radical cultural policy that, aimed at creating a new style of post-independence African music, endorsed musical supergroups, and ensured state support of musicians with a minimum wage if they practiced for a certain number of hours a day. Indeed, this is The Work. In 1974, Miriam performed alongside artists such as Cuba's Celia Cruz, rumba artist, Tabu Lay Rocherea, Bill Withers and Hugh Masekela in the groundbreaking Zaire 74 festival in Kinshasa. The festival was intended to present and promote racial and cultural solidarity between African American and African people. Indeed, it was a radical display of the utility of black song, black social life, and of Black spirit. In 1977, Makeba was also described as the highlight of FESTAC 77, the groundbreaking pan-African arts festival that took place in Nigeria.

In 30 years of exile, Makeba redefined pan Africanism and participated in events and produced art that shaped public cultures on the African continent and around the world. Her work calls into question the limits of existing spatial paradigms of not just the so-called “Bantu woman” in apartheid South Africa, but also exemplifies a rupture of the borders imposed on citizens of ‘the nation state’ through her utility of Black social life; song, resistance and a physical mobility that insisted on the porosity of borders. The mobility and work of Miriam Makeba demonstrate how geography and Blackness may work together to advance a different way of imagining the world. She offers what Marlene Nourbese Philip calls “‘a *public* genealogy of resistance’: histories, names and places of black pain, language, and opposition, what are ‘spoken with the whole body’ and present to the world, to our geography, other rhythms, other times, other spaces” (Philip in McKittrick, 2006: xxvii); The Work.

Miriam Makeba was a woman with no pass, but she was a Black African woman with nine passports and honorary citizenship in 10 countries (Chimurenga Chronic, 2018).

World-traveling: traveling whilst black

In Achille Mbembe's (2018) essay, The Idea of a Borderless World, he laments that "at a deep historical level, African and diasporic struggles for freedom and self-determination have always been intertwined with the aspiration to move unchained. Whether under conditions of slavery or under colonial rule, the loss of our sovereignty automatically resulted in the loss of our right to free movement". Indeed, much of the mess we find ourselves in has been as a result of constant displacement and confinement, forced migrations, forced removals and forced labour. The scramble for Africa in the 19th century and the Berlin convention meant the carving of the continent along colonial lines, and the creation of boundaries and borders that turned the continent into what Mbembe calls "a massive carceral space"; the antithesis of movement, of freedom of movement, where the biggest problem of the colonial state in the continent of Africa was to make sure that the colonial subject stayed in the same place.

Slavery in Africa, the Americas and the Caribbean was first predicated on the forceful displacement of African persons, and then the subsequent entrapment of these enslaved Africans and their decedents to plantations and mines for the exploitation of their labour. In southern Africa, we have seen restriction of movement, the exploitation of black labour, and the concentration camps of the Nama and Herero, which provided fertile ground for what is in effect, a land grab that has left descendants of indigenous persons confined to living on reservations. In this region, we have also seen the implementation of the Bantustans labour reserves and the pass laws of apartheid, which severely limited the mobility of black South Africans, and inextricably tied their movement to the exploitation of their labour. The legacies of this confinement and labour migration are enduring far beyond the end of apartheid legislation. In present day Colombia, the country with the highest Black population in the Hispanophone world, it is no mistake that the regions with the highest concentration of Afro-descendants along the pacific coast remain largely geographically isolated from the rest of the country in terms of transport and road infrastructure. This, in conjunction with severe state abandonment has left Afro-Colombian communities to disproportionately bear the brunt of the enduring[26] civil war conflict between paramilitary, narco-traffickers and guerrilla groups; leading only to further displacement and trauma (Francois, 2020). In each case, "to be African and to be black has meant to be consigned to one or the other of the many spaces of confinement modernity has invented" (Mbembe, 2018). It is no wonder, then, that so many struggles for emancipation and racial justice have been braided with the struggles for the right to move freely (*Ibid*).

[26] Whilst a peace treaty was signed in 2016 between the paramilitary and FARC to end the ongoing civil war in Colombia, conflict is still ongoing as the government-backed paramilitary continue to carry arms. Furthermore, this peace process has largely excluded the involvement of civil society, ethnic minorities, communities and even other armed groups involved in the conflict. Instead, the peace treaty has become the backdrop against which the Colombian government has gained corporate investment, where further state-sanctioned forced removals have occurred in Afro-Colombian territories in the name of development (Francois, 2019).

In her exploration of Black women and the cartographies of struggle in North America, Katherine McKittrick states that, “if past human categorisation was spatialised, in ships and on plantations, in homes, communities, nations, islands, and regions, it also evidences the ways in which some of the impressions of transatlantic slavery [and other forms of violent spatialisation] leak into the future, in essence recycling the displacement of difference” (2006: xvii). The question thus is how we may imagine and harness networks, journeys, and crossroads that rupture the many spaces of confinement modernity has invented. Furthermore, how can we think black geographies differently, and in what ways does black mysticism allow us to do this work? If practices of subjection are also spatial acts, then the ways in which black social life negotiates with its surroundings are intertwined with necessary respatialisations and remapping, as traditional geographies and borders (which are reinforced by the hegemonic symbolic order) cannot allow for the emancipatory work to which “blackness serially commits” (Moten, 2013; 750). Black populations and our attendant geographies are not “ungeographic” as western philosophy-theology might have us believe, but rather they exist entirely outside of this geographic convention all together.

“In August 1967 I arrived for the first time in Guinea…My first impressions were— you know, I didn’t know what to think because I had never been to an independent country south of the Sahara…To me it was like an opening of a new world. I mean, it is breathtaking. I had never seen such beauty for a *long* time. And I became more homesick just looking at the beauty of this country when I first came here […] And so the president said to me, ‘ If you ever came to stay in Guinea where would you like to stay?’ And I chose the region, Dalaba. It reminded a lot of home, being in Dalaba […] It was a wonderful experience for me. And the striking thing too is that even though the people were poor, they didn’t have much, but when they were told that I was a visitor coming from a troubled country like South Africa, the people would cry for me! At first I didn’t really understand, but then I did understand that wherever they are standing, is there’s. It’s their land. And they can live wherever they want without *anyone* telling them ‘you can’t live there, you can’t go there’. And *that* was the big difference between here and home”. (Miriam Makeba in Guinea, *date unknown*)

— Miriam Makeba on her time in Guinea

Following Afropessimism's critique of black optimism, the high priestess is not entirely convinced that freedom is fully immanent for Black people within this lifetime. Until such a moment, we must engage all those devices that allow us access to moments of transcendence. We must engage in the on-going practice of mourning ourselves from the enduring pangs and varieties of unfreedom. Consequently, the priestess insists on a praxis that is a trans-disciplinary, trans-continental, trans-historical, trans-sonic transportation in an active searching and fleeing towards rapture, where the spiritual technological conventions of and for Black joy and Black life may rupture, if only momentarily, the conditions that necessitate our on-going screams.

The Kala Pani — translated to mean ‘black water’ represents the taboo of the ocean in ancient Indian and especially Hindu tradition. According to this proscription, crossing the seas (and leaving the home of the sacred river Ganga) causes the loss of one’s varna status, no matter one’s initial ranking. To fall out of this caste system is to be ostracised as an outcaste or ‘untouchable’, where one’s social respectability is lost, and cultural character and posterity are putrefied. One of the reasons behind this Vedic restriction of sea voyages is that one is unable to carry out reincarnation rituals associated with the Gange’s regenerating waters. Another is the sin of contact with *Mleccha* — a Sanskrit term referring to all foreign or non-Vedic peoples who were thought to be uncivilised, impure and inferior barbarians. The Kala Pani features prominently in Indo-Caribbean and South African Indian histories as it relates to histories of indenture in post-slavery British colonies. Here, the British often placed large cauldrons of water from the Ganges on the ships to appease the doubts of the indentured as they were transported to other colonial territories. Whilst crossing the Kala Pani might have dire consequences for those higher up in the caste hierarchy — i.e. the ruling classes — crossing the ocean may have different implications for those at the bottom of the caste system, or those who have already lost their varna status. What kinds of possibilities may the ocean offer for escape, radical re-imagining and futurity for those *already* deemed ‘untouchable’, and without cultural character? In this regard, Khal Torabully, who is partly of Indo-Mauritian descent, describes the Kala Pani as a source of not just the dissolution of identity, but also of beauty and reconstruction, leading to what he terms a “coral imaginary” and “coolitude”; the articulation of future imaginaries of inter and transcultural exchange and mosaic identity construction of those who have been excluded from history and its futures. (Torabully, 1996: 13-17)



Fig. 3 *Untitled,* 35mm photograph, Zara Julius 2013

Coelacanths are elusive creatures living in the deepest depths of the ocean. They thought the coelacanth had gone extinct with the dinosaurs 65 million years ago. But the fish has been busy in the living waters; journeying back and forth between the dreams of diviner-healers, and the bodies of spirit-seekers. Those on the coast of Madagascar have known the fish all this time. It was not put here to be the object of scientific fascination, nor incite debates about the evolution of ocean-dwellers into land-dwellers. It is more than a ‘living fossil’ with paired lobe fins that extend away from its body like legs, moving in an alternating pattern. The coelacanth is an agent of the Black Madonna; moving to the rhythm of the Black technological in(ter)ventions it carries through the oceans, through living waters. Its movement is not alternating, it is syncopated — right in the pocket of our groove. As old as it is, it has seen all the dislocation and flight from the bottom of the waters. It is its imperative to carry any and all moments that undo this alienation through the deep. But it must remain scarce and conceal these secrets of rebellion. Concealment is strategy. We don’t want these technologies appearing on the next high fashion runway, surely.

SONIC TIDALECTICS & RHYTHMIC RUPTURES

Getting messed up is best happened in groups / There by the (storefront) church / There by the kiki / There by the jol / Where you know what it is to be emptied out and filled up / And infused with Spirit / From the outside / A powerful external force // A hymn book is like an album / A hymn book is like a book of essays / Of secrete Black technological interventions / That produces a kind of listening and singing and / Breathing / That's maybe a bit deeper / Subaquatic / Because it's under a little bit of duress / That transfers your consciousness across temporal / Hydrous and geographical boundaries / Through sound.

Sub-aquatic snake or mermaid divinities find home in multiple cosmologies around the Afro-diaspora. They are cosmic generators of life, fertility and water, and their borderlessness is not a matter of coincidence. If practices of subjection are spatial acts, then the ways Black social life (and the radical aesthetics and spirit it produces) negotiates with its surroundings are intertwined with a necessary respatialisation and remapping, as traditional geographies and borders cannot allow for the emancipatory work to which "blackness serially commits" (Moten, 2013; 750). That which we produce as Black life possesses an agency and potency all of its own.

Border-being

The forced-labour systems and annexations embroiled in plantation and mining contexts necessitated the impossibility of black humanity, sustained white supremacy and geographically codified notions of race (McKittrick, 2016: 82) in ways that have endured into the present day and have required our on-going work of radical imagination. According to Mbembe (2018), "the power of utopianism lies in its ability to instantiate borderlessness, movement and place". Currently, the Anthropocene has generated a simultaneous increase in the mobility of capital and a hampering of the physical movement of racialised bodies with a heightened territorialisation of neoliberal nation states[27]. Consequently, Mbembe encourages us to consult the repository of knowledge found in pre-colonial African conceptions of sovereignty to aid in our imagining ourselves free. Present in this archive are numerous examples of not complete borderlessness as such, but rather a porosity and permeability of the shifting territories that might have existed, for "the business of a border is, in fact, to be crossed" (2018). Throughout African histories and literary traditions we find evidence of long-distance trade and circulation, which was fundamental in generating political, cultural, social economic and religious formations and transformation across the continent; where the instinctive principle of spatial organisation was continuous movement.

---

[27] This is most perversely evident in Donald Trump's building a wall between Mexico and the United States to stop Latin American immigration, and the increased presence of ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) in the brutal detention of undocumented migrants. Similarly, South Africa has seen increasing restrictions of their immigration policies towards undocumented African migrants, endorsing unlawful long-term detentions of undocumented folk in inhuman centres such as the infamous Lindela Repatriation Centre. When it comes to issues of immigration and exceptionalism, South Africa is indeed the USA of Africa.

Sovereignty, thus, was expressed through networks, crossroads, and flows of (and between) people and nature[28]. Movement itself was not necessarily akin to displacement. Mbembe states that "what mattered the most was the extent to which flows and their intensities intersected and interacted with other flows, and the new forms they could take when they intensified" (2018).

Of course, the importance of mobility as a vehicle for transformation and change is still part of present day culture, yet syncretistic formations often go unnoticed as they emerge as the natural outcome of contact in a world in flux (Leopold & Jensen, 2004: 4). Increasingly, being on the move is the "very condition of [one's] survival", especially in moments of crisis (Mbembe, 2018). In this regard, Francis Nyamnjoh's prolific works about border-being and mobility in Cameroon all speak to the history of flexible mobility, encounters and fluidity of identities[29] that make frontier communities — those that exist on multiple sides of multiple borders — of African societies as inherently subversive. Drawing from his analysis of the enduring presence of crossroads and networks in Amos Tutoala's novels, Nyamnjoh asks us "to see and relate to frontier Africa and frontier Africans…as people and places subverting the boundaries within which they are confined on the zero sum game of completeness" (Nyamnjoh, 2017: 259). What Nyamnjoh is advocating for here is not just a subversion of the Enlightenment pursuit of 'the whole', but also a subversion of the Enlightenment notion of dialectics, where $a + b = c$. Instead, there is an ebb and flow, a *tidalectic*, between border porosity and resultant cultural circulations that defy the logic of fixedness in the western archive (Mbembe, 2018).

[28] The Mfecane and the Difaqane were a series of Nguni wars and forced migrations of the early 19th century that changed the demographic, social, and political geography of southern, central and parts of eastern Africa. The pattern of the Mfecane — in which ethnic groups were set against each other over an ever-increasing radius — was highly successful in areas weakened by overpopulation and overgrazing. As a result of the Mfecane, some groups scattered, others were completely destroyed, and new groups formed. Consequently, some of the most formidable kingdoms to oppose white-settler penetration in Southern Africa were created, namely the Basotho, amaNdebele, emaSwati and the Gaza Empire. It also facilitated the rise of Shaka's Zulu kingdom during a time of severe drought. (South African History Online, 2011). What's useful here is that despite the Mfecane occurring inland, it did not follow a linear dialectic model, but it rather traced multiple networks across the southeastern region of Africa, depicting flows of movement that simultaneously and rhythmically tell stories of surge and absorption.

[29] Nyamnjoh's analytical propositions around frontier-being flows alongside Glissant's call for opacity, and Trobully's "coral imaginary".

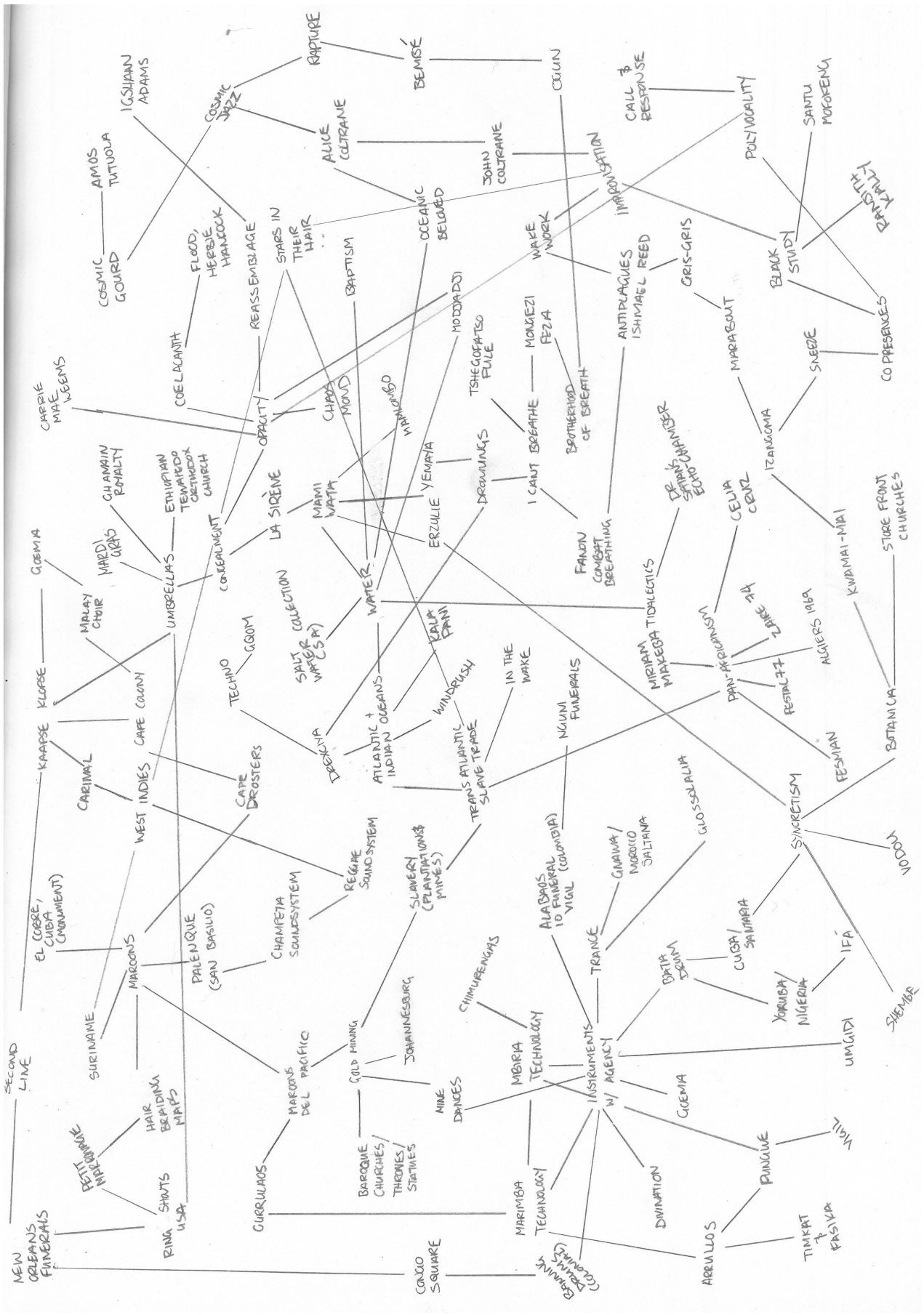


Fig. 4 *Mapping the Spirit,* pencil on paper, Zara Julius 2019

In 2015, I spent three months in Havana. I was working on a film project that broadly thought through the networks between (spiritual) faith, physical health and the faith people have in the remittances they receive from family members who live off the island. In Havana, when you ask, "¿tiene fé? / do you have faith" it is not just an inquiry into someone's spiritual faith, but it is a telling play on words that turns 'fé' into an acronym to mean "familia en el extranjero/ family abroad" or "familia en el exterior/ family on the outside". For many in the city, to have a family member who has managed to achieve some sense of geographic mobility[30], means a higher standard of living of those still on the island[31].

During these three months, El Malecón emerged as a prominent site that seems to capture the imagination of locals and tourists. The Malecón is a broad esplanade and seawall that stretches 8km along the harbour, the most historic districts of the city, and ends at the mouth of Almendares River. Most nights, you will find people of all ages sitting along its walls, drinking rum, talking, laughing, listening to reggaeton playing from a cellphone or a boombox. Many nightclubs in the city are targeted towards tourist budgets. The ocean, its waves licking the sea wall — sometimes leisurely, sometimes violently — is where folks come to enjoy themselves on the cheap. It is not uncommon to find remnants of watermelons, split in half, floating along the rocky shores of the malecón: This is also where folks come to give their offerings to Yemayá. In Santería[32] or regla de ocha, Yemayá is the mother of all living things as well as the owner of the oceans, seas and rains. Oshún, the river Orisha of feminine beauty, likes fine cakes, laughter, joy and music. Yemayá likes watermelons, sweet custards and coconuts. She is fiercely protective of her children, as she comforts and cleanses them of sorrow.

During this trip to Havana, I met a young man, affectionately nicknamed Bobo. He had tried to leave Cuba three times by boat, to seek a different life in the US. Each time, the boat he was on was intercepted by United States Coast Guard, and he was subsequently returned back home. Before making such trips, many lucumí practitioners come to the malecón to make an offering to Yemayá as they ask her for protection as they traverse her waters. Bobo did not. Bobo *no tiene fé*.

---

[30] Due to the economic difficulties imposed by the US economic embargo, Cuba's particular brand of socialism, and the mere fact of it island-nature, has meant that access to international travel has been historically difficult for many Cuban citizens. Whilst some travel restrictions have eased considerably over recent years, access to foreign capital, the cost of a passport and visas remain major obstacles to the average Cuban citizen wishing to emigrate or travel abroad for leisure.

[31] This translates to matters of both physical and material wellness. Throughout my multiple visits to Havana, I have met people who have received items such as sewing thread, prescription medication, building materials for their home improvement projects, smartphones, digital tablets, and laptops. I also worked with a *santera* (a spiritual practitioner of Santeria) who asked me to bring her fabrics in the colors of her *Orishas* (saints) for her altars. Of course, this is over and above the Western Union wire transfers most of us in the global south have sent or received to/from loved ones. It feels important to note, too, that despite folks' desires for material mobility of the aforementioned kind, the island country is in its own flux, and is not "trapped in a time warp" of "dilapidation" as Lonely Planet would have you believe. https://www.lonelyplanet.com/cuba

[32] Santería is often also referred to as, lucumí.

“*infinite possibilities*

coming back around

i know we are more than circles

coming back around to love ourselves fully

infinite possibilities

we are not disconnected reflections of a source

of a life source

no más

no more

no más

no more

no longer will we allow them to

divide and conquer

divide and oppress

define our humanity

no más

no more

no longer

no longer

under your gaze” (Ayewa, 2020)[33]

[33] Moor Mother on *No Más*, by Irreversible Entanglements

Much like these African archives, Barbadian poet, Kamau Brathwaite's conceptualisation of Caribbean history presents us with useful conceptual vocabulary to think through a radical sharing of experiences of and aspirations for rapture, (and the spiritual technologies that facilitate them) across geographic boundaries in the global south. In an interview with Nathaniel Mackey, Brathwaite describes Caribbean history as a confluence of "constant movement of peoples… [whose] very contiguity influenced each other…[in a] creolisation…[, with an] interlapping of experiences" (Brathwaite *in* Mackey, 1995: 23). Through Brathwaite's foregrounding of historical trajectories of migration and dispersal, he highlights waves of settlement and sedimentation, and undermines Hegelian dialectics (Gargaillo, 2018: 157). Instead he champions *tidalectics* as a theory that is compatible with the cyclic "movement of the water backwards and forwards" (Brathwaite *in* Mackey, 1995: 14); that which exists as a polyrhythmic "confluence of repetitions, breaks, and reversals" (Gargaillo, 2018: 156). Brathwaite's position is at once historical, rhythmic and political. It is deeply rooted in a (post)colonial anger and hopeful pursuit of freedom, as he thinks through the oceans and seas surrounding the Caribbean archipelago as a conceptual framework speaking to the real, felt logics of how culture, spirituality trance/form with movement and inherent, legitimate agency. Whilst this idea of tidalectics and movement present glimmers of hope in undoing colonial constraint, it appears that Brathwaite, like the priestess, never *fully* arrives at the kind of ontological freedom he imagines.

From 1993 to 2002, *Drexciya*, the Detroit-based techno music duo released a repertoire of recordings that imagined a fictional, underwater hydroterritorialised world - entitled Drexciya - that was populated by the subaquatic descendants of those thousands of pregnant African women thrown off middle passage slave ships (Eshun, 1998: 83-85). Navigating the Black Atlantic, Drexciya uses electronics to replay and (re)imagine the alien-like abduction of slavery with a fictional outcome; a deep aquatic invasion. With fabulated frequencies entitled "Lost Vessel" and "Digital tsunami", they capture what Kodwo Eshun describes as the "psychoacoustic" "sound pictures" of a giant submarine (1998: 84). Whilst coming from a north American afrofuturist framework, Drexciya provides a useful example of imagining new ways of Black being that may transcend coloniality through the "bifurcation in time" (Eshun, 1998: 85) with the literal use of (sound) technologies and by wielding the aquatics of the middle passage as a radically generative force. In the Black Atlantean depths, Drexciya is simultaneously *of* geography, and *para*-geographic.





Fig. 5 & 6 Shelf views of the priestess' botanica, "Maroon's Rapture Originals", 2020

Black Waveforms: Oceanic Beloved[34]

In the face of the logic of constraint emerges different ways to pronounce Black life. Not just as repurposed remnants of multiethnic African traces, but as "adaptive social innovations" that move beyond nostalgic idealisation (McKittrick, 2016: 84). If the fate of '*the wretched'*[35] is to function in the zone of constraint of (black)being, then what does it mean if that which we produce — as blackness, as Black life, as spirit, and the affective excess of subjection — insists on (re)spatialising and trance/forming geographic boundaries? What does it mean if that which we produce creates necessarily kaleidoscopic networks of and for rapture that ebb, flow and refract through waters?

In *Dr Satan's Echo Chamber,* Chude-Sokei (2008) thinks through the Black Atlantic and the sonic worlds that emerge from the Black diaspora's encounters with the middle passage[36] and sound production technologies. Chude-Sokei explores the aesthetics and material technologies of reggae, dub and dancehall in twentieth-century Jamaica on its own terms, stating that "reggae became reggae precisely at the moment when it managed to mask its hybridity". Using the analogy of the echo chamber, Chude-Sokei considers the tidalectic mutation of sound and Black aesthetics-as-strategic-innovation as they travel between and amongst the African continent and the Black Atlantic - generating an infinite amount of echoes and resultant territories. Here he distinguishes the echo from the initial sound itself, as it resonates with various cultural practices "far enough away to make their own local meanings out of the echo before it decays" (2008). What we hear is a repetition that ends up elsewhere, without the sound being the same.

In this essay Chude-Sokei (2008) states that "it is no mistake that the fastest-growing market for reggae music is on the [African] continent itself. And it is no accident that continental reggae producers and West African sound systems are beginning to engage with Diaspora by way of a sound that has always asserted its island origins simultaneously with an African pedigree and by way of an African American influence." (Here Teddy Afro and Lucky Dube come to mind; two famed and politicised reggae artists from Ethiopia and South Africa respectively.) Furthermore, he draws reverberating networks between Africa, R&B in the USA (by way of the transatlantic slave trade), colonial Jamaica (by way of broadcasting and migrant labourers), reggae, dub and dancehall sound system culture in Jamaica (by way of Rastafarianism and Jamaican

---

[34] Oceanic Beloved - Alice Coltrane (A Monastic Trio, 1968) — https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEYuelIUsdg

[35] 'The wretched' is a term that Frantz Fanon uses throughout *The Wretched Of The Earth* to speak of "the subject who appears at the crux of the coloniality of power, the coloniality of knowledge, and the coloniality of being" (Maldonado-Torres, 2016: 20); they who functions in the zone of non-being. Though Fanon situates 'the wretched' in a matrix of violence and non-being, Fanon also contemplates the moment when 'the wretched' may decide to "embody history" (Fanon, 1963: 39) in claiming and transforming those violences, and perhaps produce new energies that ought to create a world in which we may imagine ourselves *living*. This imagination is both the burden and gift of 'the wretched'.

[36] What Christina Sharpe (2016) would theorise as "the hold".

independence movements), and then the birth of Hiphop in the New York Bronx (by way of sound system culture and its technologies such as the DJ, and the MC tradition).[37]

Not noted in his essay, but equally relevant, are the territorial and sonic technological links between central, south and west African vinyl pressings of the 60s and 70s (showcasing highlife, mbaqanga, juju and soukous rhythms) finding their way to the Caribbean coast of Colombia in the 80s, (at the same time as Jamaica's battling sound system culture and sampling technologies, and the ragga, zouk and compás haitiano from the Antilles) to form what is commonly referred to as champeta[38] and the rivalling picós or sound systems played at full blast. Here, sounds and technologies of African and Jamaican independence and resistance find themselves generating new rebellious sonic and performative landscapes in Palenque de San Basilio, Colombia's first renowned maroon community, and in cities like Cartagena and Barranquilla, where Black communities have faced centuries of forced removals, displacement and racial discrimination — often being reduced to stereotypical figures that add 'exotic flare' for the regions tourism industry. These networks bear importance not just due to the politics of the times in each context, but also because of the way liberation politics and philosophies get articulated in sound through "cross cultural, yet intra-racial influence". Here, echoes "merely ricochet off each source and off each other" (Chude, Sokei, 2008) as they travel through the hydrosphere[39].

Of course this is not a phenomenon that only occurs on the western shores of the Atlantic. West African music — the majority shareholder of hips — has *always* been in conversation. We can hear this in Tony Allen's Afrobeat and its response to the calls of Wéré/Ajisari music[40], Ghanaian highlife, and African American jazz, soul and funk, all brewed in the crucible of Fela Kuti's political

---

[37] One might also trace the ways MC and Hiphop traditions as echoes of African praise-poetry lineages (in both form and style), and the oral traditions from which they emerge, where the praise poet is the original 'hype-man', so to speak. Chude-Sokei does not explicitly make these connections, however.

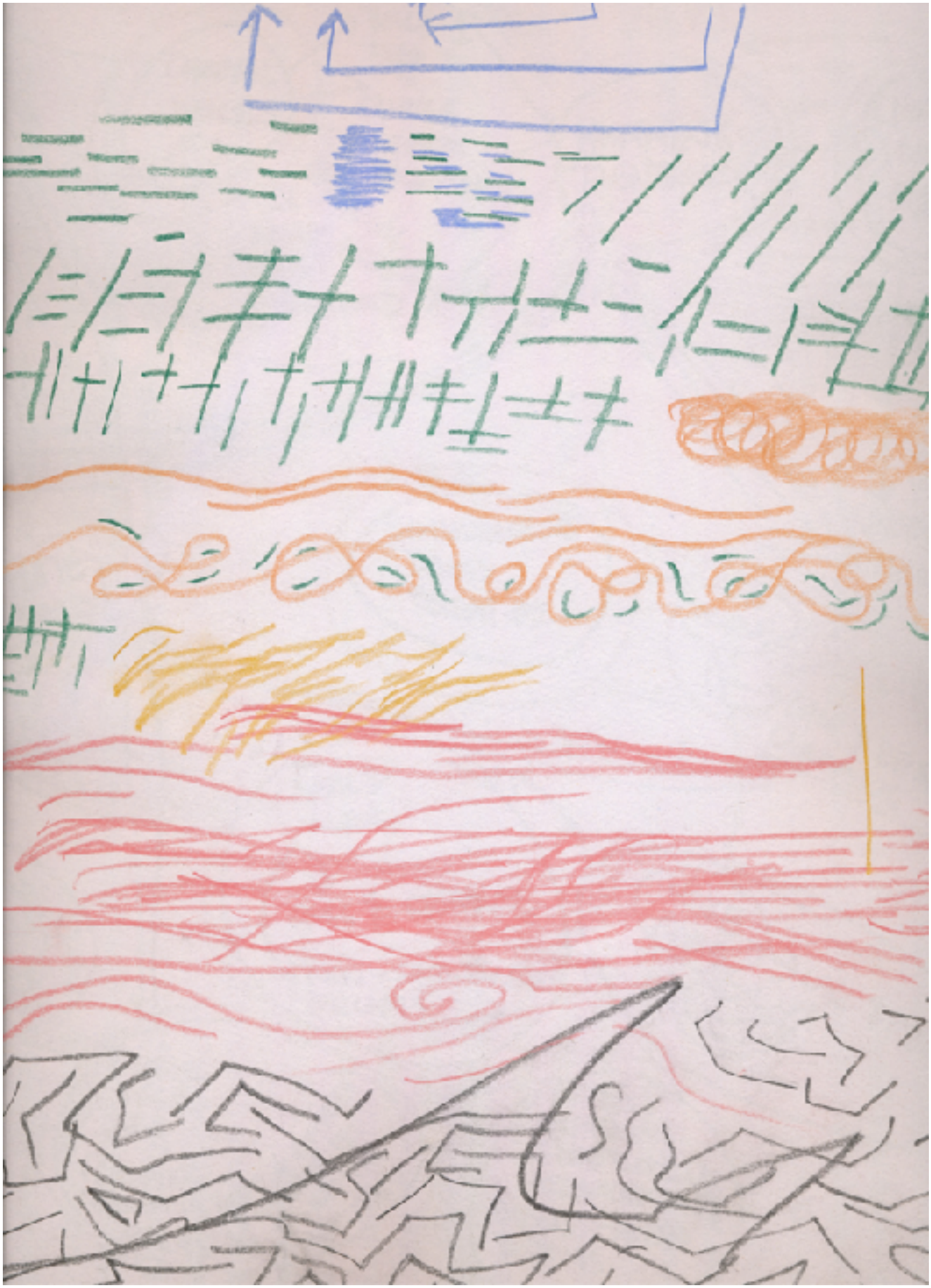
[38] Around 1981 "creole therapy" emerged as a musical genre to be performed and sung. Among its sources of inspiration was recorded music brought into the port of Cartagena from Africa and other African diasporic settlements. Its first composers were people of African descent from Cartagena and Palenque de San Basilio, later joined by folks from Barranquilla and other parts of Colombia. It consisted a fusion of African rhythms (soukous, mbaqanga, highlife, juju) with those from the Antilles, and music of Indigenous and Afro-Colombian origins (bullerengue, mapalé, and chalupa). This style of music came to be known as "Colombian therapy" and later, "champeta" culture. The word "champeta" originally referred to a short work and paring knife that was often used as a weapon in the region. The word is first known to have been used as a cultural identifier in the 1920s, with the term "champetudo", which was applied to Afro-descendant residents of the poorer, outlying areas of Cartagena, by the economic elite in pejorative ways. By the 1970s, the term was later used to identify a dance and eventually a sonic-subculture.

[39] Berlin-based artist Satch Hoyt's Afro-Sonic Mapping project follows the logic of the echo-chamber, in that it seeks to trace the migrations of what he calls the Afro-Sonic Signifier and considers its transfer through the black Atlantic passage. Based on an investigation of the earliest ethnographic recordings of music in central and West Africa, Hoyt's project focuses on the resonances of colonial bombardments and transatlantic migrations in the contemporary urban frequencies of Kinshasa, Luanda, Salvador de bahia, London, Kingston, New York, Los Angeles and New Orleans. https://afrosonicmapping.com/exhibition-hkw/

[40] Wéré/Ajisani music was traditionally an Islamic Nigerian type of music played by Muslim children in Yorubaland to wake those observing Ramadan for Suhur.

activism in Nigeria[41]. Less known, however, are the ways Cuba's sonic ripples lapped the shores of Senegal. No doubt much of Cuban music is derived from the West and Central African rhythms found in Afro-Cuban folkloric genres, but during the 1940s and 50s, Latin jazz emerged from Cuban musicians living in New York, who mixed Afro-Cuban clave-based rhythms with African American jazz harmonies. By the late 50s, Afro-Cuban jazz — exposed to Puerto Rican plena (satirical music of the working class), fused with Afro-Cuban son, mambo and guaracha — evolved into salsa which gained much popularity across the Americas, with Cuba leading the way in record distribution. As the capital of Francophone West Africa, Dakar was a hub of cultural exchange by the time of Senegal's independence. With the regions first radio stations, Cuban music, American salsa and jazz gained great popularity in Senegal, which lead to many local bands fusing Cuban music and salsa with Senegalese dance music, jazz, mbalax and highlife (Goldberg, 2013). From the 1950s right up to the 70s, this echo of salsa in West Africa spread across the region and gave rise to super groups like Orchestra Poly Rhythmo and Orchestra Baobab, which captured a unique period in African history: the end of war and colonialism, and the fresh optimism that came with imminent independence.

[41] Further listening: *Obrigado Radio: Influences of Afrobeat presented by Zara Julius, DJ Kenzhero and Tha_Muzik* https://www.mixcloud.com/ObrigadoSA/obrigado-radio-episode-3-presented-by-zara-julius-dj-kenzhero-and-tha-muzik/



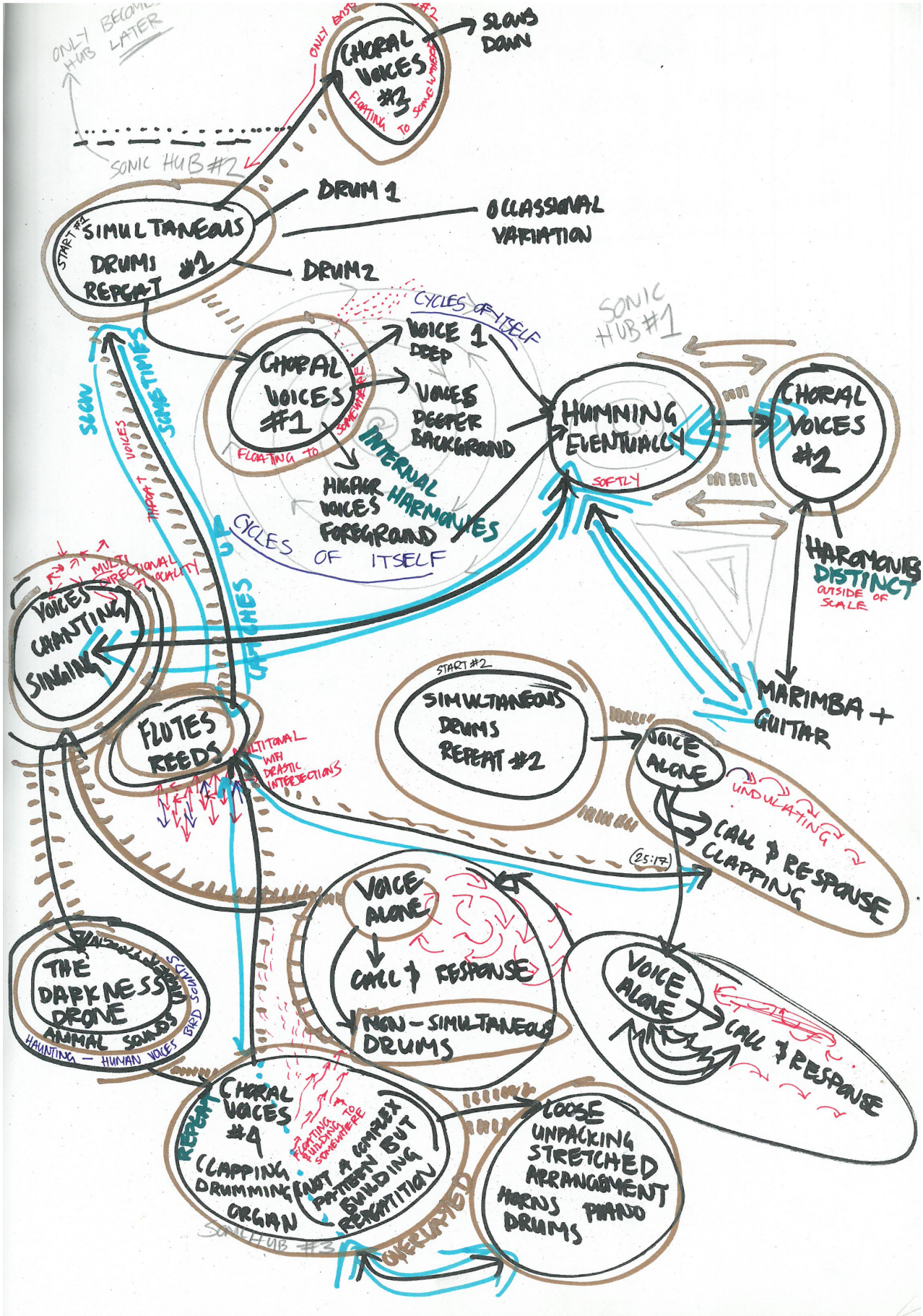


Fig. 7 & 8 Process Drawings of the priestess' sonic consultations, Zara Julius 2019

To recognise the "Black visualsonic resistance to [the] imposition of non/being" is answering Sharpe's call to sit in "wake work", where we attend to Black life and Black suffering (2016: 21 & 22). In Black Metamorphosis[42], Cuban-born Jamaican theorist, Sylvia Wynter couples rebellion, critique, invention and reinvention with rhythms and grooves. In her exploring multiple plantation histories throughout the 'New World', and the location of black nonpersonhood and nonbeing within the fabric of normative collective social consciousness, Wynter thinks through slave rebellions, emergent religious and cultural syncretism, the making, praxis and agency of music, and the formations of maroon societies as creative acts that mark the formation of black life in ex-slave archipelagoes (McKittrick, 2016: 83 & 81). Here, beats and grooves present an alternate way of thought, where the mind does the feeling, and the senses become the theoreticians (Wynter *in* Sharpe, 2016: 90). It is through that logic that "one grooves *out* of the logics of antiblackness and *into* black life" through a "revolutionary demand for happiness" (*ibid*: 89 & 81).

Tire machèt is a Haitian martial art using machetes. The practice has roots in the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), where rebels defeated Napolean's armies, armed mostly with machetes; the very tool they were forced to use on sugarcane plantations. A combination of multiple African combat systems and European fencing, *Tire machete* is a radical demonstration of subversive complicity in the insistence of survival — both in battle, and as self-defence. Whilst styles and techniques vary from family to family, much of the ritual, technique and custom of *tire machèt* remains shrouded in secrecy, and is only passed down through formal master and disciple relationships.

True to the echo-chamber, machete fighting emerged in Afro-Colombian communities — independent to that of Haitian *tire machèt* — as a subversive technology of resistance. Here, *grima* is also said to have emerged amongst enslaved communities, brought to Colombia to work on the gold mines and the sugarcane plantations. Whilst published history of the Colombian wars of independence emphasise the role of 'creole' military leaders, who were descendants of Spanish settlers, *grima* presents us with counter-memories that highlight the role of common soldiers of African descent in achieving independence.

[42] Black Metamorphosis is an unpublished manuscript by Sylvia Wynter. All reading of Black Metamorphosis here is done through the works of Katherine McKittrick whose work engages in a prolonged feedback loop with Wynter's.

According to the logics we find ourselves in, to belong, settle and accumulate in the world is to be embroiled with the systemic dispossession of black and indigenous labour units. The plantation and mining economies and their afterlives hinge on the "object-nothing" of the slave, and the "human-being" of the settler (McKittrick, 2016: 82).

What is the sound of enslaved units of labour? The monotony of shucking sugarcane, or the monophonic picking of an axe on the mines? Sweat?

It is curious that whilst black persons have been reduced to the object-nothing, the locals of their labour-production have historically been romanticised as sites of immense cultural production by settler ethnomusicologists.

Against the backdrop of South Africa's forced migrant labour system, British ethnomusicologist Hugh Tracey, generated a wealth of field recordings at the migrant hostels on the gold mines of Johannesburg (then Transvaal). True to the apartheid system's divide and rule strategy of retribalisation, these overcrowded hostels were often organised according to ethnic groups. Tracey's so-called interest in African music fell in accordance with this divisive and often imagined 'tribal' world that fetishised ethnic and cultural purity. Averse to musical hybridity, Tracey's recordings completely omit the dynamic sounds of urban working-class Johannesburg, and instead attributes each recording to a particular 'group'. Indeed, to engage with the archive, is to be confronted with profound cultural and political loss.

In McKittrick's extension of Wynter's work, she advocates for black *waveforms* (not just black music) as rebellious enthusiasms. Here, the beats, rhythms, acoustics, notational moods, and frequencies that encompass black music — the "ungraspable resonance" — emerge as life-affirming in their refusal of the mechanisation of the black labour-unit status and the antiblack practices of the past and present that are designed to break 'black' into "absolute negation" (*ibid*: 81 & 83). These anti-black practices of subjection include, but are not limited to segregations of communities and families (such as the apartheid labour system that necessitated the fracturing of black families with men caught in the migrant labour system, as well as the selling of enslaved persons to different plantation owners), bindings, lynchings (both past and present), premature and preventable deaths (such as those that occur at the hands of negligent, under-resourced and anti-black healthcare systems that assume black persons are more tolerant of physical pain, and those that occurred in the middle passage), malnourishment, lashings, genocides (both purposeful and by way of pandemics that erupt with the arrival of settlers) branding, rapes, incarcerations, and impoverishments (*ibid*: 83).

Through the echo-chamber we can see how delineated spaces and times are in constant communion with one another through the echo, both in improvisation, and also through the use of sound technologies. Furthermore, the *relational* act of listening, making, and grooving (to music) disrupts the very isolation and monophonic temporalities generated by the hegemonic symbolic order. Here it is beneficial to quote McKittrick's reading of Wynter at length:

> "…the invention of black music is a revolutionary act that keeps heretical (nonmarket) time, negates black nonbeing by honouring and recoding black life, repurposes and interrupts linear temporalities, and is expressed in the midst of a violent and stigmatising knowledge system. These musical practices, generated out of time and place, were also collaborative inventions because they were anchored to associative sounds, lyrics, myths, rituals, songs, and experiences—associative because they are familiar waveforms, stories, and tunes that the musician, the listener, the dancer, the audience, come to know jointly. Musical subversion is, importantly, tied to the development and legitimation of new modes of social kinship relations, reciprocal exchanges that do not replicate colonial family configurations or individualist models but, rather, establish networks that collectively rebel. Music, then, is not only an invention that subverts and undoes commonsense workings of antiblackness; music, music making, and music listening, together, demonstrate the subversive politics of shared stories, communal activities, and collaborative possibilities wherein 'one *must participate* in knowing'." (McKittrick, 2016: 88)

Whilst mainly thinking from a position of Blackness in North America, much of Fred Moten's (2015) thinking also calls for the production of ongoing echoes in the task of 'black study', or the study of Black life. For Moten, 'study' is a form and practice of sociality, in the Black everyday (Harney & Moten, 2013: 110-111) where we find ourselves in communion with one another. Much like the echo-chamber, Moten (2015) states that "our modalities of study constitute a feedback loop"; stressing the importance of a congregation of people who are working, thinking and listening alongside us. Moten argues that improvisation is central to the fact of Black life and thus black study for it is what we do in the face of history; becoming both the method of our survival, and also the object of study as we try to understand the survival of ourselves. What is interesting and important here is not just the radical mobility of Black life, mobilised through 'study' - which is in itself subversive because of its propensity for acceleration and strategic movement — but also how the material/aesthetic condition of inevitable syncretism allows for and facilitates such subversion. In this connection, the sonic emerges as ritual technology that *ruptures* as it enraptures. It is precisely with this space-time continuum of Black spirit that the priestess is preoccupied in her attempts to work through an imaginary of this echo-chamber through various technologies; both sonic and spiritual.

In church, it's the same songs every time. And if done correctly, the repertoire hits you every time. The DJ, however, is always trying to bring something new. In the club, you're not sure if your jam is going to come on and fill you up. The priestess is both the organ master and the selekta. She is cognisant of the ripples of sonic vibration through the body, and the aquatic: the human body is 60 percent water, of course. Despite her own ambivalence in her practice, she maintains a preoccupation with resonance and frequency. She splices and samples and selects moments of healing, rapture, and joy from a growing archive of Black sound, image and thought to generate embodied feelings of a divine ecstasy, breath, and prescribe sonic tinctures for directed healing. Not dissimilar to that of Chude-Sokei, the priestess' practice asks what happens when Black visualsonic interventions of simultaneous joy and pain make their way through and across the aquatic; oceanic and somatic. For the priestess, this is both an interior experience and a collective performance. In many instances this momentary flight and refusal is only bearable when it is sharable in spaces generated for black radical thought: in study (Harney & Moten, 2013). Through improvisation, frequency and a commitment to empathy, the priestess pays attention to the haptic and kinetic possibilities of Black life's irrepressible drive toward different kinds of freedom, a different kind of futurity.

“Within the study of reggae or even hip hop there is little attention paid to the actual experience of listening. The ecstatic moment of the break is the moment when the song breaks from its narrative build-up, expands an isolated non-narrative moment in time and then returns to continuity. The break is in this regard akin to the blue notes in African American music, the vibrato in the blues: it is the aestheticizing of rupture and the extension of that pain, transcending it by its beauty. But rather than emphasizing the angst of this space of discontinuity, the beat is a joyful adrenaline rush. The ritual participant enters into the gateways of trance and encounters the possibilities of a freedom unheard of in the world of narrative, the world of hierarchical domination where time and perception are constructions of those classes and races in power. For the descendants of slaves for whom “work” is still tainted by the inequalities of a system based on white European domination and rigid class hierarchies, this “break” is a moment of liberation that is pregnant with deep-seated historical yearnings and utopian visions.

This moment of trance, when the bass, vocals and melodies drop out leaving the pure, non-narrative “break”, is a moment of dub; a moment of existential dread.”

Excerpt, *Dr Satan’s Echo*-chamber, Chude-Sokei 2008

COMMUNION: TAKE ME TO CHURCH

That which we do with other people: picos, perreos, sound systems, mpoho, the kiki, the jol, the church. There is a vast tradition of thought that traces Black music to the secular/sacred tensions of religion, where the confluence between Christianity and putatively 'pre-Christian' spiritual concerns such as spirit and ancestor veneration is acknowledged. Even after music bridges the sacred/secular divide, the impulses towards (re)generating cultural memory and participating in ritual behaviour persist (Chude-Sokei, 2008). Sound systems as ritual space form the basis of many sound cultures as they generate an "alternative public sphere" (Gilroy, 1993) in facilitating the formation of community. Before the Colombian genre and subculture gained the title 'champeta', picos / sound systems were known as "creole therapy" as they provided a distraction from the economic problems of a community that was relegated to the margins of Colombian society. In Jenn Nkiru's film, *Black to Techno* (2019), she considers the origins of techno music in Detroit, and draws parallels between the production lines of the city's manufacturing heritage, electronic drum machines, and the roots of black music in drum patterns and percussive variation. Within Black techno and house-music vernacular, it is not uncommon for a patron to compliment a DJ with the phrase, 'you took me to church'. Tied up in this echo-chamber is gqom; a genre of electronic dance music that emerged from Durban, South Africa in the early 2010s. Gqom emerged as a consequence to South African house music, kwaito, and techno. With slow bpms and repetitive drum rhythms, the music's dark droning can be described as hypnotic and transcendental. In her attending a live set by gqom pioneer, DJ LAG, a friend of mine, Langelihle, exclaimed, "Zara last night I think I went crazy…Gqom is the devil that wants to abuse me. I was possessed and reborn. I was on stages dancing."

Spiritual, religious and healing lexicon and experience has always been intertwined within the vernaculars of black sound cultures, with DJs and musicians adopting the role of the medium and the high-priest/ess. An overt example of this is the formation of the Saint John Coltrane African Orthodox Church[43] in 1969 in San Francisco. Founded by Franzo and Marina King, the church is a response to what they describe as their **"sound baptism"**, when they went to watch John Coltrane (the husband of esteemed jazz musician and spiritualist, Alice Turiyasangitananda Coltrane) play live to celebrate their first wedding anniversary (Hua Hsu, 2019). In an interview with The New Yorker, Marina stated that "when [Coltrane] walked out, the Holy Ghost walked out with him"; the experience was spiritual. As new residents of San Francisco, the couple were in search of community, which they often found in their jazz listening sessions with friends. These sessions first evolved into a jazz club, and eventually into a temple after Coltrane's physical death, with Him serving as their patron saint[44]. With Franzo King as the Archbishop, and their daughter, Wanika K. Stephens as one of the pastors of the church (and a radio DJ of a jazz show called *Uplift!*), mass

[43] the Saint John Coltrane African Orthodox Church is now formally the Saint John Will-I-Am Coltrane Church.

[44] 'The Church of Saint Coltrane' is a short documentary directed by Gilman and Jeff Swimmer that explores this church that celebrates the ecstasy of jazz. Available to watch at https://vimeo.com/155985592

comprises of confession, the Coltrane Liturgy, Scripture readings, Hymns, Spirituals, Preaching and open jam sessions (*ibid*). There are also monthly guided-meditation sessions, where worshippers chant along to Coltrane's "A Love Supreme", and commune with His music.

Growing up, a friend of mine's father often used to jokingly say that "the only JC [he] believe[s] in is John Coltrane", despite his Catholic upbringing in Zimbabwe. Of course, John Coltrane self-consciously started this sanctification process in his explicit quest for spiritual transcendence, adopting the spiritual name Ohnedaruth (which means compassion in sanskrit), and his fathering the spiritual jazz movement. Alice Coltrane continued this sanctification in her work through her remixing John's compositions after his death by her overdubbing her harp and ceremonial strings. Kodwo Eshun (1998: 165) states that "Alice uses the medium of Cosmic Jazz to artificially evolve John into a series of Electric Gods, passing through a succession of new vibrational universes". Through her renaming him Sri Rama Ohnedaruth, the god whose name means Universe World Compassion, Eshun argues that John is "synthetically spiritualised into a studio deity (ibid: 166). Eventually Alice too becomes a spiritual teacher, in her formation of the Sai Anantam Ashram and the Vedantic Center in Agoura, California in 1975 — a centre for the study of the Vedic[45] scriptures by a multi-faith congregation. Adopting the Sanskrit name Turiyasangitananda, Alice Coltrane served as the Swamini (spiritual director) of the ashram and would perform formal and informal devotional Vedic ceremonies there. The devotional music from this time, known as the Ashram Tapes, displays an ecstatic mix of Vedic mantra, Detroit Baptist gospel vocals and the swelling sounds of Turiya's synthesiser. This era of her music is at once transcendental, ecstatic, cathartic and mournful. It feels important to note here that Alice Coltrane died of respiratory failure in 2007.

Beyond the kinds of conscious spiritual imbuing of music found in the praxes of both Alice and John Coltrane, (Black) sonic waveforms possess inherent agency in their potential for conjuring spiritual ecstasies. In his study of the religious dimensions of popular music, Robin Sylvan (2002) traces "the spirit" from the history of West African possession rituals, to the diaspora, and to its integration into popular music as ritual activity and communal ceremony. Central to this exploration is the physiological impact of music, where the body exists as the "locus of integration" for the many facets of a subjective musical experience; physical, psychological and mystical (Sylvan, 2002: 23-24). He states:

> "when one listens to music that evokes a strong emotional response…the ego is temporarily relieved of its dominant position, and other parts of the self, such as emotions and feelings, can come to the surface to be experienced. In other words, there is a temporary restructuring of the psyche" (*ibid*: 25).

[45] The Vedic religious tradition of Indian descent significantly influenced Hinduism.

Rapture is such a temporary restructuring, where the “open state of cosmic consciousness” (*ibid*: 27), of *f*reedom and fugitivity is restored, if only temporarily. The state of trance not only demonstrates the deep connection of sonic frequencies and spiritual life, but also a rupturing of time. In Zimbabwe, the *mbira dzavadzimu*, when played by a master diviner, is a portal for Shona spirit possession and divination. Translated to mean “voice of the ancestors”, the *mbira dzavadzimu* facilitates communication with ancestral spirits, bringing the spirit of the dead back to their homestead. Here, polyphonic variations of the sacred instrument lure participants into trance to allow the spirit to takeover the body through melodic patterns that simultaneously repeat, interlock and invert against each other in all-night vigils. It is these ritual sonic-performances and the rapture they facilitate that helped lead Zimbabwe’s struggle for independence from British colonial rule through mbira divination. These sonic consultations with ancestors rupture the hegemonic symbolic order through a multi tonal technology that undoes both political and ontological time and space through the flesh.

In South Africa, *umgidi* — gatherings for the ancestral grounding of izangoma[46] — centers the repetitive and persistent polyrhythmic beatings of drums super-imposed on each other to facilitate ancestral rapture and celebration through dance. Similarly, the syncretic ritual ceremonies of Cuban santeria, Haiti vodou, and palo in the Dominican Republic illustrate the rapturous power of music in its inherent agency through the furiously hypnotic, polyrhythmic drumming. In these ritual contexts, the central goal is to bring about a state of rapture in one or more participants, in which a particular deity mounts a persons body and becomes physically present in the human realm. This is primarily accomplished through prayers, offerings, percussive-heavy music, dancing and singing in vigil settings. Here, particular rhythmic patterns, physical movements and behaviours are associated with different deities. It is these specific rhythmic patterns that ruptures time and space, and invites the associated deity to the physical realm to mount a practitioner and engage with the ritual context according to their unique personality structure (*ibid*: 25-26).

The inherent agency of waveforms, rhythms and groove to rupture and enrapture is ever-present; the gnaoua music of Morocco, currulao music of Afro-pacific Colombia, the collective stomping of the ZCC’s Mokhukhu. In Cuban Santeria, the Batá drum is scared. One has to be initiated into knowing its secrets. Here drums and beat are “the enabling mechanism of consciousness reversal” that undoes the alienation of black social death (Wynter *in* McKittrick, 2016: 78). The communion of the self and the social body, *in* and *through* the physical body by ways of listening, playing, dancing, singing, communing with the spirit is itself an initiation into humanness (McKittrick, 2016: 79).

[46] Isangoma is a diviner. The word can directly translate to 'person of the drum' or 'the drumming one’.

anything that shows up as if it were
individual only shows up that way because
you didn't look at it closely
enough

these prayers
these humid utterances of
and for freedom
are infused with suffering & constraint of being

the scream & the beating is always
irreducible in the prayer

it is irreducible even when the prayer is
happy
the saddest sentiment with happiest tunes
or
the happiest sentiment with the saddest tunes

this is not prophecy but description
of the constant entanglement of joy & pain
irreducibly moist
With tears & tides

Amidst the 2010 Fifa World Cup hosted in South Africa, leaders of the Nazareth Baptist Church — a syncretic church also known as the Church of Shembe — entered into a legal dispute with Neil van Schalkwyk (co-owner of the Masincedane Sport Company) over the trademark of the vuvuzela. In 1910, Prophet Isaiah Shembe introduced the horn to his congregation, and it has since been used by church members as a spiritual technology in worship services, umgidi, and multiple rites-of-passage ceremonies, such as marriage to this day. Originally named imbomu, the horn was made from cane, and later from metal. However since 2010, the vuvuzela has become the "defining feature of Africa's first World Cup" (Cape Argus, 2010), and saw large scale commercialisation and manufacturing that excluded the church all together. In their fight for recognition that Shembe invented the vuvuzela (not Van Schalkwyk), the church reached a legal agreement that required Masincedane Sport to pay a financial settlement into a fund to empower vulnerable church members. In speaking about the ordeal, Enoch Mthembu, the church's public relations officer declared "We play [imbomu] with an African drum. We don't just blow it…We use it in a more constructive…way. We don't just make noise" (Cape Argus, 2010).

In Ashon Crawley's *Blackpentecostal Breath: Aesthetics of Possibility*, he explores the performative practices of Blackpentecostalism as a disruptive force, "generative for imagining otherwise modes of social organization and mobilization" (Crawley, 2016: 4). The sensual experiences of dance, song, praise, groans, foot-stamping, clapping, and tongues speak to an antiphonal rebellion "against the debasement[, abandonment] and denigration of blackness" through an instantiation of life and love (*ibid*: 7-8). To live in the fact of the flesh in this was, and is to critique and momentarily rupture the violence of modernity, property, slavery and its ongoing afterlives.

"'Vigil' implies watchfulness. Anyone trying to attain perfection is faced with various obstacles in life that tend to sidetrack him. Here, therefore, I mean watchfulness against elements that might be destructive-from within or without." — John Coltrane 1965

This quotation is taken from the original liner notes of Coltrane's final studio album before he died, *Kulu Sé Mama* (1967). Here, the title track, composed by drummer John Lewis, is described as a "ritual" for his mother.

Joy & Pain

Rapture, and the various performance technologies that facilitate it cannot be owned as property. Their potency is not stand-alone but part of a social world; an ecology of intense mood and feeling" (Crawley, 2016: 5 &30) rooted in otherwise epistemologies that work against constraint through community. They are a call and response. "Musical inventions not only cushion 'the shock of dispossession,' they 'oppose it, by reminding, at deep psychic levels, of a potential return to humanity'" (Wynter *in* McKittrick, 2016: 88). The intense mood and feeling produced by the Black sonic is in excess of normative conceptions of meaning and signification. The meaning is greater than the sum of its parts. With all of music's propensity toward the sublime, and its capacity to enrapture, the depth, weight and brutality of systemic oppression and antiblackness find themselves released in the emotional charge of Black technological in(ter)vention. For me, this affective excess is most notable in some of South Africa's music from the 70s and 80s; even when the subject matter isn't explicitly about the kinds of violence people were experiencing at the time. A prime example is Stimela's *Zwakala (Come To Me)* which is effectively a love song. However the exclamations and repetitive, audible breath in Ray Phiri's vocals, the driving hook of the bass line and the chorus speak to something more; something beyond.

In 1971, alto saxophonist, Dudu Pukwana formed the short-lived rock group Assagai in London with fellow South African drummer Louis Moholo, and trumpeter/flautist Mongezi Feza. All three had been members of sextet The Blue Notes during the 1960s (arguably one of South Africa's most historically important free jazz outfits), and Chris McGregor's more fluid big band, Brotherhood of Breath. Like many of our great artists, they lived and *performed* in exile from apartheid South Africa. In Assagai's second album, *Zimbabwe*, the third track *La La* is positioned as a lullaby. The soothing vocals tell a child to sleep, and explain that in the morning, their mother will wake up and tend to the cattle. But the meaning is in excess of this content. The vocals and instrumentation are simultaneously soothing, and mournful, and nostalgic. Are Pukwana, Moholo and Feza the child, and the liberation movement back home, the mother? Or perhaps the mother is *the spirit*. And the cattle, the state of black life[47] under apartheid? For them, the morning of tomorrow was abstract and dislocated. For Feza, that morning never came, as he died in exile from untreated pneumonia. He too struggled to breathe[48]. Like Miriam Makeba's sentiments around the Guinean landscape, this lullaby is at once comforting and heartbreaking. There is a palpable longing and searching…for rapture, for freedom.

In reality, this new dawn has yet to arrive for any of us. The priestess reminds us that political programs do very little to bring us, as racialised people, into the realm of humanity. So too does Zim Ngqawana's 2003 album *Vadzimu*. Released just over a decade after South Africa's first

[47] Across the African continent, cattle exist as units of economic and social wealth

[48] The original Brotherhood Of Breath ended in the late-1970s after the death of Mongezi Feza.

democratic elections, the lyrics of *Unamaqhinga Na?* speak of a great deception and trickery. Zim repeatedly asks:

Unamaqhinga na? (Do you not have tricks?)

And exclaims:

Hayi undigqibile thixo! (He got me, God!)

Undigqibile madoda, ndiyahamba mna. (He got me guys, I am leaving)

Beyond the lyrical content, the mood of the song is one of sorrow, and disillusionment. In many ways, the jazz harp and flute in the arrangement feel in conversation with Coltrane's ashram tapes; yet another transcendental call and response, with the album's title translating to 'spirit' or 'ancestors' in Shona — a nod to the diviners of Zimbabwe. Towards the end of *Unamaqhinga Na?* Zim sneezes several times, as if he had taken some snuif to aid the dismissal of dis-ease in an expulsion of air — breath — and communion with spirit. Furthermore, the song is placed after the ecstatic jubilation of *Tafelberg* / *Carnival Samba*, and precedes *Anthem;* which Asher Gamedze (2018: 60) describes as "the most deconstructed tweaked out intense furious delirious version of the [South African] national anthem that's ever been played". Forming part of the album's 'Liberation Suite', Gamedze's analysis of these three songs illustrates the curious interplay of joy and pain in the Black radical tradition: The carnivalesque moment of South Africa's so-called independence (from colonialism and apartheid). The trickery of the 'transition moment' that occurred behind closed doors with the signing of the less than favourable Sunset Clause[49] in *Unamaqhinga Na?,* and the disarray of the so-called rainbow nation project in *Anthem*, with the continuation of disproportionate suffering for Black people in this supposed "sweet liberation" in post-apartheid South Africa (Gamedze, 2018: 61).

Suffering and constraint are irreducible in black music (Moten, 2003), even if the waveforms themselves are engaged in a different (yet related) kind of work. This excess fills you up from a powerful external force, where the only way out of the devastating marriage of joy and pain in the sonic sublime is to become enraptured by, through and in the mobility and inherent life-force of the waveform. The music is at once a searching, a longing, a resistance and an opportunity for momentary freedom, where the musician, the dancer, the listener may be overcome with spirit.

These hymns mess you up. They empty you out, and fill you up. But getting messed up best happens in groups, where the waveforms suppress the powerful impulse to individuate. They leave you with no choice, and undo the enduring entrapments and subjections of coloniality. These hymns are rebellions to the white supremacist object ownership oriented theology-

[49] The Sunset Clause guaranteed white civil servants a stake in the new South Africa. It is said that the clause helped to break the deadlock in the the multi-party negotiations at the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) through which a political compromise was struck between the ANC and the Afrikaner government. Violent scenes of civil war formed the backdrop to these negotiations.

philosophy blackness' imaginative and creative potentiality. But rebellions are moments and actions, not destinations. To be a maroon is to engage in the activity of flight, through the technological interventions that engender black joy and collaborative acts. The echo, the feedback-loop, the vigil, collective clapping and stomping. Repetition, breath, trance-formations, concealments and possessions. The beat and the groove; the sensational infection by the spread of what Ishmael Reed (1972) terms antiplagues: Ripples, rhythms and rapture.



Fig. 9 Still from 'Ripples, Rhythm, Rapture' video installation I, 2020

The Erzulie is the family of lwa spirits in the Haitian vodou pantheon that are associated with water, fluidity, and femininity. All realms of water take on meaning through the agency of these lwa. Through possession, Erzulie spirits typically mount the bodies of women and queer initiates in order to communicate with the faithful. They promise to connect their dream world with the profound creative principles embodied in the ocean.

Erzulie Dantòr is the mother of the family who fiercely protects the neglects and vulnerable of society. She will give you the Spiritual Knowledge needed to navigate through this material reality. Her gifts last and can be passed on from one generation to another. She is often depicted as the Black Madonna, with two scars on her face.

La Sirène / Lasirenn is the water form of Erzulie. While her realm is that of the ocean or world womb, her human qualities give her access to the mysteries of the land. She is the great bridge between those who inhabit the fathomless depths of the seas and the creatures of the dry land. Her power is that of empathy. She is a repository of sacred information. She appears in dreams, and offers spiritual instruction in her kingdom beneath the reflective surface of the sea. As her name suggests, she is the lwa responsible for the sacred songs of the vodou ceremony. These songs, combining music and the word, focus the attention of vodoun devotees. She is companion to the whale and transmits the generative power of the oceans in the sphere of the emotions. She is often depicted as half-fish, half-human, gazing into a hand mirror. With reflective surfaces, mirrors are pools of captured water that serve as a threshold or portal between realms.

(Martinié & Glassman,1992: 154-156 & Galembo, 1998: 26)





MEDIUMS AND MEDIA(TION)

willow

/ˈwilō/
noun: **willow**; plural noun: **willows**

1. a. (also **willow tree**) a tree or shrub that typically has narrow leaves, bears catkins, and **grows near water**. Its pliant branches yield osiers for basketry, and its wood has various uses.

   b. a good tree to dance under, as its branches may conceal your joy. But wear shoes, because the catkins may pierce your feet.

2. a machine with revolving spikes used for cleaning cotton.

Dancing Under The Willows

Throughout settler colonies, we have witnessed many efforts by colonial powers to abolish the sacred icons and spiritual practices of Black and indigenous communities, so as to enforce mainline christianity as the religion of a so-called 'civilised' society. In Latin America and the Caribbean, Afrodiasporic communities survived the armed colonial demolition of their icons by using the Christian saints to masquerade their gods in a kind of "syncretic swapping and borrowing" (Reed, 2019: 13). This syncretic principle not only applies to Cuban Santeria, where the term is most commonly used — where Catholicism and Yoruba faith collide — but it applies elsewhere. In Haitian vodoun, the white python *lwa* of Damballah was often masked by the image of Saint Patrick to appease French catholicism, since he is associated with snakes. In Mexico, the apparition of the Mother Mary as the Virgin of Guadalupe to Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin, an indigenous man, is often identified with Tonantzin, an Aztec earth deity (*ibid*).

In South Africa, many responded to the colonial pressures of protestant christianity, and its accompanying practice of divine faith healing, through the forming of what anthropologists often term, African Independent Pentecostal Churches (AICs). The argument here is that such churches demonstrate a "dynamic interplay of vernacular spirituality and colonial evangelism" (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2008: 92). These churches, whilst Christian in belief, were started in Africa by Africans, independent of those mission churches that had established themselves amongst the black peasant and working class population of southern Africa. An example of such a response is that of the Nazareth Baptist Church, or the Church of Shembe, where Zulu spirituality and customs are

given room to endure and evolve in and amongst the practice of christianity. Not only did this type of syncretism side-step the types of de-tribalisation efforts present in the British colonial and missionary agenda of the late seventeenth century, but it also proved to be a radical strategy on the part of Isaiah Shembe — a Zulu-born Pentecostal evangelist. Here, he attempted to create a type of Zulu hegemony in the black migrant labour force of South Africa. Divinely sanctioned to preach to amaZulu, he set out to train his followers to be exemplary Zulu workers – a distinctive group putatively perceived by their honesty, punctuality and work ethic (Cabrita, 2014). These aspects of ubuZulu and Shembe identity are most explicit in the customary male worship attire. In addition to isinene and ibheshu made from genet tails and cattle hide, Shembe men customarily wear a collared shirt and tie, and carry a briefcase on their journeys to and from church, as symbols of both their professionalism, and their commitment to Zulu tradition in a contemporary context. Today, Shembe has the second biggest following in southern Africa, after the Zion Christian Church[50] (ZCC).

In all the aforementioned examples, we see syncretism, concealment and masquerade as strategies of spiritual and social survival for those on the receiving end of racial and colonial domination. Following from Grosfoguel (2008: 15), I would also argue that these examples are "hybrid, transcultural forms of knowledge, not merely in the traditional sense of syncretism...but in [their]...'subversive complicity' against the [hegemonic] system" of missionary Christianity and European colonialism. Christianity, thus, is harnessed collectively (whether consciously nor not) in pursuit of undoing the very logic on which European imperialism is built.

In addition to the repression of variant religions and customs, colonial occupiers were also on the lookout for any rebellious stirrings among their captives. A common tactic amongst British settlers across many of their former colonial territories was the banning of ritual music, or ritual musical instruments. In Trinidad, nineteenth century colonialists banned drums, which they perceived as communicating plans for slave revolt (Reed, 2019: 12). In response, Trinidadians improvised by creating new instruments from bamboo. When this concealment eventually got exposed and banned, Trinidadians turned to steel drums (*ibid*) — now an important symbol of Trini resistance and carnival. Similarly, mbira music was outlawed on mission land and tobacco plantations[51] in early colonial Zimbabwe. Outside of its use in the contexts of divination, the sound of mbira emerged through chimurenga music in the 1960s and 70s — a hybridisation of Western popular styles and various musics from southeastern Africa — popularising messages of social and political protest in the struggle for independence.

---

[50] ZCC is also an "African Independent Pentecostal Church" that operates in southern Africa, with satellite congregations as far afield as Texas. The church is known for its secrecy to protect its traditions from outside scrutiny and criticism — especially in the media. Whilst outsiders are welcome to attend some services, it is prohibited for any non-members to carry a camera into church meetings.

[51] There seems to be some cruel irony in banning a technology of spiritual mediation, the mbira, on a plantation of tobacco, which is itself a technology of spiritual mediation through as snuif.

In the colonial-era Dominican Republic, plantation owners eventually banned those they enslaved from attending bomba dances on neighbouring plantations, as these musical gatherings were used as a cover for the enslaved to coordinate inter-plantation rebellions. In contemporary Cuba, the secret society, Abakuá still operates under concealment as an Afro-Cuban men's initiatory fraternity. Thought to originate in 1836 in Cuba and Haiti amongst enslaved Africans brought through the slave trade, Abakuá[52] has fraternal associations in the Cross River region of Nigeria and Cameroon. Besides acting as a mutual aid society, the Abakuá performs rituals and ceremonies that consist of drumming, dancing, and chanting in the secret Abakuá language. Chants, initiations and funerals are all restricted to Abakuá members. Even new initiates are blindfolded during their initiation ritual, before they are fully reborn into the association. One of the oaths made during initiation is that one will not reveal the secrets of the Abakuá to non-members (Velez, 2000: 18). Here, concealment and secrecy not only insists on survival, but it also functions as what Spivak (1990) might term an "enabling violation".

Babalawo or Babalao in Latin America is literally translated to mean 'father of the mysteries' in the Yoruba language. A Babalawo is a spiritual title that denotes a priest of divination in both Yoruba Ifá and Cuban Santería.

As part of the Rapture Institute (see pg 29) Dr Sechaba Maape presented his architectural study of two ritual spaces in his hometown of Kuruman in the Northern Cape province of South Africa. Through discussing two caves — sites of local teenage initiation rituals — Maape's work conceptualises ritual as the medium through which we mediate change and transition, where the boundaries of the self are changed in relation to the world (Turner, 1969: 7). He argues that communities simulate the experience of "trauma" through various ritual tools that allow one to surrender to change and this re-orientation (Maape, 2019). In light of the kinds of systemic trauma inflicted upon Black folk in this context, I have used the word "rupture" to refer to this moment where ritual may "mess you up", in order to facilitate (trance)formation. Where Maape says tools, I refer to technologies (such as music, dancing, engendering emotional states and fasting) that facilitate a shift from one state to another, and reframes schemas (*ibid*). Here Maape refers to the trance dances of the San, where repetitive dance *ruptures* the pre-existing schema, to allow room for trance, or rapture to be embodied by participants.

[52] Ayón is known for her highly detailed allegorical collographs based on Abakuá, a secret, all-male Afro-Cuban society

Furthermore, Maape explores secrecy and concealment as such a technology of “trauma” or rupture, that facilitates this shift from one state to another (Nooter, 1993). In the case of teenage initiation in Kuruman, the location of the caves is purposefully concealed both spatially and temporally from society through the creation of a number of social taboos and fear-inducing narratives that prevent folk from seeking their location outside of sanctioned ritual. Often, community members will intentionally point outside cave-seekers in the wrong direction in order to keep its location secret. The river becomes a mythological boundary between the village, the community, and the cave. The very power and potency of the cave is that people don’t know exactly where it is along the river — a river which is also inhabited by a large menacing snake. In order to cross this threshold of secrecy, concealment and fear, one must, through observing appropriate ritual posture of respect and surrender, be an initiate. According to Maape, ritual facilitates the potential of the psyche to change in relation to the contingency of the world (*ibid*). I would go a step further and suggest that ritual posture, and its technologies, help us survive the ongoing and relentless contingent nature of being.

The Priestess

In the development of this text, and through my working with the priestess, it became apparent that those not (yet) in the folds of the congregation[53] grew impatient with not having access to the complete archives and technologies of the priestess. They struggled to make peace with a system of ideas and practices built on ritual contingency and, subsequently, relative concealment. “We want to be enraptured now!”, some said, forgetting that they had not been invited to listen with the priestess and her waters. Sure enough, one cannot plan rebellion with he who shares all your secrets towards freedom with the master. “Show us the technologies!”, they said, unwilling to contend with the fact that not everyone is privy to the gris-gris[54] of the priestess. Rapture cannot just happen on demand. It is curated through ritual and custom.

Like many mutual aid societies, and many syncretic religions, the priestess only imparts her secret ritual and custom to members of her congregation. On most days, you will find the her selling her aquatic sonic infusions out of her shop; Maroon’s Rapture Originals (R.O.A.R)[55]. It is both a

[53] i.e. students and staff who attended studio reviews throughout my MAFA studies at Wits university.

[54] ‘Gris-gris’ is a Senegalese word for amulets worn on the body. They are worn to protect one from evil, bad words and accidents. Gris-gris are often concealed prayers stitched into a tiny leather parcel and attached to a cord buttoned with a cowrie shell. Gris-gris are worn by almost everyone in Senegalese society, from wrestlers, to soldiers, to housewives.

[55] Right of Admission Reserved

“In many first-time interviews with santeros in different locations, I was asked if I was ‘like Lydia Cabrera’, the white Cuban Santería ethnographer, a scholar who was going to ‘steal secrets’ and publish them for profit. Cabrera’s own informant, who she identified as the ‘Black Sorcerer’, described Cabrera’s research as part of a larger white impetus for a black exotic. She was told, ‘Mundele quire bundanga’ — that is, ‘Whites desire the mysterious’.

‘It is not rare for the black who is informing, and is never free of certain resentment,[…]to distort a little of what he teaches to the white,’ Cabrera warns future ethnographers who work with deceptive black Cubans. ‘That is why the white who wants *bundanga*, or knowledge without swearing oneself into a temple, nor committing oneself to anything,’ Cabrera asserts, ‘must ask much, collate all the answers, consult all the most respected authorities, and embark on a long journey to gather bit by bit, pieces of truth, that is scattered about everywhere’. Indeed, the colonial project embedded in anthropological knowledge of Santería is not lost on ethnographic subjects of Santería. This blackening project also produces ‘whites’, *mundele*, both the phenomenological white body as well as the imperial whiteness implicit in the location of ethnographer read through a desire to consume and produce mysterious blackness and uncover hidden secrets.

Lydia Cabrera’s desire for bundanga haunted my ethnography. I felt the need to prove that I was not another mundane who was going to reveal the hidden workings of Santería ceremonies to noninitiates. […]Even as I attempted, albeit impossibly, to distance myself from Cabrera’s style of revelatory ethnography, my interlocutors would paradoxically defend the value of her scholarship while criticizing how she had ‘stolen secrets’.” (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015: 33-34)

— excerpt from *Electric Santería: Racial and Sexual Assemblages of Transnational Religion*

botanica[56] and a storefront church. She welcomes walk-ins for one-on-one consultations, but she does her best work with groups behind closed doors, where she harnesses the human body's innate capacity for empathy[57]. In both cases, it is advised that you bring an offering to place at the foot of her altar. In the broadest sense, she is engaged in listening, sounding and grooving to the spiritual frequencies of sonic waveforms, aquatic waveforms as well as those of plant material.

Since her initiation, she has held multiple group consultations where she brings people together in fellowship with these manifold waveforms in pursuit of rapture, behind closed doors. Each consultation informs the next. As advocated in Diana Taylor's (2003) *The Archive and The Repertoire*, the priestess understands performance in the *everyday*, such as song, dance, and gesture, as holding valuable archives of embodied and transmitted knowledge in the social sphere. It is from this understanding of cultural memory that she builds her practice, and engages what one may call 'the archive'. Following from Sylvia Wynter and Ashon Crawley (2016), tempos, chats, laughter, abrupt turns, hip-sways, foot-stamping, grooves, shouts, whispers, breath…and the stank-face are all "expressions of conscious art, renewed realities, and life-forces for the dispossessed" (McKittrick, 2016: 90), in the flesh (Spillers, 1987).

Sometimes the priestess facilitates rapture, but mostly, she crowd-sources it through her incessant communion and communication with other people, priests, lands, sounds and technologies. Like in the film practice of Trinh T. Minh-ha, and the many mediums who came before her in the echo-chamber, the priestess utilises montage, bricolage and repetition as both political strategies and as aesthetic-spiritual technologies, which both negate and affirm activity in the insistence on opacity. Like the vodoun priest, or the Cuban babalawo, Mihn-ha's *Reassemblage* and *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* demonstrate a constant reassembling, hybridising and disassembling of the visual and cultural 'archive'. She states that "rather than using [repetition] to reproduce the same, one can use it...to shift a center, to lighten the burden of representation, to displace a form from its settled location, and to create new passages through the coexistence of moments" (Mihn-ha, 1999: 23). It is through such devices of syncretism, sampling and repetition in the feedback loop that the high priestess attempts to play, listen, and heal *with* the enraptured in the everyday.

---

[56] A retail store, often family-run, which sells folk medicine, religious candles and statuary, amulets, and other products regarded as magical or as 'alternative' medicine. These stores are common in many Latin American countries and communities elsewhere, such as the Bronx in New York City. They serve as unique sites for the performance of Afro-latin religious and spiritual culture in the public domain, as such sites are often street-facing. It is not uncommon for botanicas to also offer in-house consultations, such as divination, card readings and *limpias* (cleansings) with on-site spiritualists. Today, many botanicas also sell their spiritual supplies online. A great example of this is Original Products Botanica in the Bronx, which has been described as the "veritable home depot of spirituality". https://www.originalbotanica.com

[57] An example of this is where yawning is experienced as involuntarily contagious from one person to another, where one body physiologically empathises with another. This is a common form of echophenomena where the automatic imitation of another's words is known as echolalia, and the automatic imitation of another's actions is known as echopraxia.

A storefront church is a church housed in a building that was previously a commercial property. Often, the inside of the building is converted by putting in chairs and a makeshift pulpit.

In the US, many storefront churches emerged in the urban centres of the north, after former enslaved African Americans migrated from the south. In addition to being places of religious worship, storefront churches were perceived as a centre of social development and free speech in many poor African American communities, as they provided an accessible site (both economically, and in terms of their geographic location as street-facing) for community unity and engagement in a context of rife racial, economic and cultural oppression. This prominence of storefront churches in this context is most strikingly captured in Milton Rogovin's photographic series, Storefront Churches (1958-1961), where he documents churches on the East Side of Buffalo, New York. Rogovin states:

> ”I began my Storefront Churches series as a way of speaking out about problems in our society, through photography. I was encouraged to do this series by historian W.E.B. DuBois, who later wrote an introduction to this series."

Storefronts are still very much a part of the Black church experience today in the US, but also globally. In the north-eastern part of Johannesburg, South Africa, Louis Botha avenue is home to multiple storefront churches of various religious and cultural affiliation.

She performs as a guide in spiritual practice and carries out ritual ordination, but she too is in training. She is both a teacher and a student; an initiate who also struggles to follow the teachings for she is also at the beginning of her journey out of abject subjectivity. Her primary medium of medi(t)ation is that of sound and the turntable, through what Steven Feld may term "acoustemology". This methodology, which bridges 'acoustics' and 'epistemology', brings us to consider sound as a way of knowing in the relational acts of both of listening and sounding. In this conception, sounding-as-knowing, sounding-though-knowing, and sounding-with-knowing become the relationality of knowledge production as embodied archive as we've seen through Chude-Sokei's echo-chamber; that which is simultaneously social, material (Feld, 2017: 85) and spiritual.

In his investigation of the cosmological contexts of South African jazz, Asher Gamedze affirms that "musical and spiritual practices of sangomas, the frequency of the maternal, medicinal relationships with plants and the land, and the communion and communication with ancestors are all channels of South African jazz" (2018: 2). In this study, he explores the reflexive relationship between *malombo* music, Malombo (the tradition of southern African jazz), Philip Tabane, and the bands, Malombo Jazz/Jazz Men/Jazz Makers. The term *malombo* generally refers to "Ngoma dza Hamutele or Khunwa-khunwa and mapili possession cults which are said to have been adopted from the Kalanga of Zimbabwe by the Vharonga, Vhailafuri, the Mbedzi of eastern Venda and other VhaVenda clans living on both sides of the Limpopo lowveld" (Ralushai, 1985 *in* Gamedze, 2018: 27). Here, *malombo* music is a spontaneous use of voice, drumming, dancing and feet idiophones sounded in a cyclical call and response at a fast tempo, in honour of ancestral copresences (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015), and in pursuit of possession, healing and ultimately, trance-formation. Gamedze states that "when the spirit of an ancestor wants to enter someone, that person falls ill - with a spiritual rather than a physical illness. They must be assisted, through a musical and healing ritual, in the process of allowing their ancestor's spirit to enter them. The process can take a few hours or a few days and can induce trance, bouts of uncontrolled shaking and collapse from the exhaustion" (2018: 33). The function of *malombo* technology is to heal a sick person through possession.

Malombo, as it refers to the music of Philip Tabane and a number of popular South African bands by the name, constitutes a jazz tradition derived largely from the drums, style and rhythms of the drumming in *malombo*. Tabane states:

> "Most of my family were sangomas...They used Malombo drums to heal people when they were sick; when I was growing up, I always heard these drums. The drums are the base of my music." (Philip Tabane and Malombo, 1989)

When a sangoma sneezes in a consultation, it is generally a good sign in a moment of divination with the ancestors: “Hiitsii,” to which a client then responds “Camagu” or “Makhosi”. Diviner-musician, Madala Kunene pays homage to this divination technology throughout his music — most notably in ‘Abangoma’, off his album *Kon’ko Man* (2005).

*

“In regla ocha, oricha and other spirits are said to travel through various bodies —and more recently even through filmed recordings of themselves. As opposed to binary notions of ‘home’ and ‘away’, which situate diaspora as a dislocated experience, the uses and understandings of these media technologies instead follow Santería logics that see spirits as traveling through electrifying spiritual currents. These spiritual currents are […] temporal dimensions of movement that are not linear but rather have an unfolding qualitative dynamic. […] The various spirits, ancestors, and Prichard that operate in transnational Santería communities form a broad range of material-immaterial beings that are increasingly moving through diverse Santería worlds. They are described as ‘felt’ (*se siente*) on the body, and understood as ‘presences’ (*las presencias*) within electrifying circuits and spiritual networks. I use the term *copresences* to reference the complex multiplicity of racial spiritual embodied affectivity that the term *las presencias* indicates. Copresences are sensed through chills, shivers, tingles, premonitions, and possessions in and through different transnational Santería bodies and spaces. They are active spiritual and religious subjectivities intimately tied to practitioners’ forms of movement, travel, and sensual bodily registers. Dead African slaves, Yoruba diaspora oricha, and other radicalized entities form part in a reconfiguration of practitioners’ body-worlds. They bring the ‘existential striving’ of racial formations, together with ontological assertions of presence. They form part of a spiritual habits that emerges through a racial-historical matrix of blackened ontologies” (Belision-De Jesús, 2015: 6-7)

— excerpt from *Electric Santería: Racial and Sexual Assemblages of Transnational Religion*

Malombo is simultaneously associated with this *malombo* spiritual tradition, the practice of healing and what we call generally refer to as jazz. I quote Gamedze's analysis:

> "We are confronted, not just in the name but conceptually also, by a collision between, and a coalescing of a couple of, in some senses, separate but essentially mutually constitutive things, a synthesis between an African-rooted spiritual practice that exists beyond contemporary borders, and jazz – a global, predominantly urban-based, Black art form." (Gamedze, 2018: 27)

Gamedze continues to describe the aesthetic, formal and structural similarities of *malombo* and Malombo music. However I would go a step further and argue that these are not simply aesthetic and conceptual similarities. In South Africa, as with many other diviner traditions worldwide, it is common knowledge that 'the calling'[58] is often hereditary. Tabane's Malombo is the answering of this calling. Malombo is *malombo*. It is acoustemology; a sonic way of knowing and being in *multiple* worlds. To listen to Tabane's music, or Madala Kunene's for that matter, is to be in consultation with them, the groove *and* the spirit.

Spiritual, religious and healing lexicon has always been intertwined within the vernaculars of black sound cultures, with DJs and musicians adopting diviner or priest status. In his book, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*, Alex Weheliye (2005) juxtaposes Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* with the artistic practices of contemporary DJs. Here he conceptualises Du Bois as proto-DJ, and contemporary DJs as Du Boisian "sound-smiths" (Somoroff, 2006) in their collective use of "the mix" (Weheliye, 2005: 71). For Du Bois, this is his use of contrasting literary forms and modes, and for the DJ, this is the splicing and repetition of sonic samples, hooks and grooves from one turntable to another. In both instances, "the mix" "highlights…the process of… (re)combination, as much as it accentuates the individual parts from which it springs" (*ibid*). For Weheliye, this mix, as it appears in black cultural production in the twentieth century, "provides us with a model of modern black temporality and cultural practice rooted in and routed through the sonic" (*ibid*). It is precisely this "mixing" that the priestess is engaged in through her use of samples, repetition, aesthetic opacity, and overlay.

Occasionally, the priestess dabbles in the visual in her building of altars, through which we may commune with, and make offerings to the spirit of rapture. The reflective surface of the screen,

[58] to be initiated, and practice as a sangoma, or ancestral healer

like that of the mirror, or the ocean, is a portal for groove[59], and joy and pain. A portal for copresences. In Aisha Beliso-De Jesús' (2015) ethnographic study of transnational Santería practitioners, she explores the ways televisions and videos are "affective conductors that intensify the meeting of technology, bodies, spirits, matter, waves, and other energetic transfers" (*ibid*: 31). Here, Beliso-De Jesús explores practitioners' use of tv, youtube and video-conferencing technologies in their spiritual practice, rituals, initiations and consultations across as geographic, cultural, sexual and racial boundaries as both facilitating and heightening Santería ontologies of copresence through the screen. Here, it is understood that spirits, oricha, and even practitioners travel through television and computer screens, and practitioners are sometimes possessed through watching videos of rituals (Beliso-De Jesús, 2015: 6).

In is through The Work of the priestess that we may see spiritual technologies as strategies for survival in the everyday. Her insistence on opacity, made manifest through her use of the archive, gesture, syncretism, sampling and polyvocality delineate what is a longstanding tradition of sustained and prolonged attempts to "reinvent the black as human" (Wynter *in* McKittrick, 2016: 85).

"When I was in prison…The very first time, when I was in solitary confinement, you are interrogated for seven nights and seven days without any sleep. And God provided a mechanism I had never thought of at the time. I reached a point— I think a threshold where the body could not take the pain anymore, and then I would faint. Those were the most beautiful moments. The body rested, and when they threw a bucket of water to wake me up, it didn't matter that I was soaking wet. I got up, I was so refreshed and I started fighting all over again…" (In Her Own Words, 2018)

— Winnie Madikizela-Mandela on her time in detention by the apartheid state

[59] Not unrelated is Nam June Piak's use of video and tv technology as sculptural installation. In his installation *TV Garden*, Paik demonstrates his own foundation in music methodology, and places tube tv sets amid an undergrowth of live tropical plants. Each tv, varying in size, plays the artist's 1973 collaboration with John J. Godfrey, *Global Groove.* This film "montages performers from around the world into a gyrating visual mix, and the videotape's sound track serves as musical and spoken counterpoint to the monitors' flickers of light" (Guggenheim). To enter the piece is to be teased with a fusion and juxtaposition of colour and sound, natural and technological.

This text has presented brief vignettes, maps and imaginings of a significantly larger, ever-shifting network of enraptured experiences and improvisations that are engaged in a feedback loop across localities. It is a book to think with as part of an on-going conversation in pursuit of rapture. To offer any revelatory conclusion to a project that holds no definite hypothesis would be dishonest. It is my hope, however, that this text has illuminated the possibilities of and in rapture, through a sensorial exploration of what it might look, feel and sound like if we were to harness enraptured mobilities as strategies for Black survival of the everyday across the global south.

We have danced with and sung alongside many (other) texts that have emerged in the face of anti-black and anti-indigenous violence through an expanded conception of the Black Radical Tradition. Those texts that present necessarily syncretic, opaque and intricately networked possibilities beyond the ongoing abjection of blackness brought by racial slavery and settler colonialism. Acknowledging Africa's epistemological absence in much of the Black Radical Tradition, this text has refocused situated knowledges on the African continent as legitimate archives of productive synthesis which are improvised through gesture and repertoire (Taylor, 2003), and not simply essentialist "romanticised notions of a irretrievable source "(Gamedze, 2018). The work of the priestess calls us to channel the spirit, and reminds us that no one is constantly within the folds of radical fugitivity and flight, even if that might be the (a) goal. We are always caught in a dance between the inside and the outside as we endeavour to redefine the terms of black existence in an anti-black world.

The priestess insists on a praxis that, contrary to Eurocentric epistemology, does not discredit the collective imagination of the theological and the mystical. It is here that we may find a grammar to imagine an escape from anti-blackness and coloniality. Even if a permanent escape is not (yet) possible. She reminds us to sit alongside Glissant, and Makeba, and Reed, and Torabully in an insistence on opacity and nuance. To revolt in the face of constraint through song, and ecstasy and projective remembrance, even if just for a moment. This moment. She shows us that behind syncretism may lie improvised, oft-concealed, utterances of resistance, and an insistence on relevance to our lifeworlds. She shows us that it is in these moments - the carnival, the vigil, the maroon, the droster, the shrine, the revolt, the libation, the pilgrimage, the masquerade, the altar, the song, the dance - that we may consider survival strategy as spiritual technology, and find momentary rapture and briefly (trance)end the violence of the everyday.

As stated by Crawley (2016: 30), these "varied aesthetic practices cannot be considered as a stand-alone but part of a social world, an ecology of intense mood and feeling, the practice of otherwise epistemologies against the constraints of western modernity. Through the polyrhythmic confluence of repetitions, breaks, calls and responses, we might be able to confront the affective excess of subjection more closely, and reorient ourselves from a phenomenology of anti-Blackness (political ontology) to a phenomenology of black spirit (black mysticism) and contend

with the sublime possibility of the “afterlife of property” (Sharpe, 2016: 18). Rather than flattening history and situated phenomena, this decidedly undisciplined and unbounded acknowledgment of (epistemological, disciplinary, geographic and spiritual) copresences provides us with a site of spirited possibility towards a kind of collective futurity, which demands we imagine more sustained trans-oceanic, sub-aquatic collaboration between those on the receiving end of racialisation and systemic dispossession. In a time marked by coloniality, where systemic white supremacist patriarchy runs on consumption, (even if it’s consuming itself), we are reminded that deconstruction alone won’t eradicate anti-blackness. In this matrix, “anti-blackness simply winks at the irrationality that deconstruction exposes and continues business as usual or finds sophisticated ways to neutralize the critique by incorporating it” (Warren, 2017).

The priestess proposes an embrace of the captive, the migrant, the refugee and the maroon through the posture of Black Study; an “intense, spiritual, communal intellectual practice and meditative performance” (Crawley, 2016: 8) of life — a simultaneous joy and pain in the flesh. This text is “the mix” (Weheliye, 2005), an occasion for further study and a “revolutionary demand for happiness” (Winter *in* Sharpe, 2016: 89 & 81). For it is precisely these rebellious spiritual technologies, regardless of scale, which trance/form “an impossibility — black humanity — into an imaginable and valuable and expressive form of black life” (McKittrick, 2016: 87).

“What is […] spirituality to you?

To me how seriously we take seasoning our food is a spiritual practice. J’ouvert morning is a spiritual practice. Frying plantain is a spiritual practice. Going to the beach to watch the ocean on your lunch break is a spiritual practice. That deep belly laugh…is a spiritual practice. Poom Poom shorts and a flat shoe whining in a corner by your damn self and singing every word at the top of your lungs to an old skull Buju, or Krosfyah - IS. A. SPIRITUAL. PRACTICE.

Those fetes (parties) where you leave with your shoe mash up, your clothes mash up, dripping wet, smelling like your mother never raise you to bathe - is a Spiritual practice. That first bite into that mango you been eyeing in the tree for the longest while ….is a spiritual practice…”

(Know Your Caribbean, 2019)

*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adesina, J. O. (2011). 'Against Alterity – The Pursuit of Endogeneity: Breaking Bread with Archie Mafeje' in Devisch, R. & Nyamnjoh, F. B. (eds.) *The Postcolonial Turn: Re-Imagining Anthropology and Africa*. Leiden: African Studies Centre.

Africa: Cape. (2013). Directed by Javotte Flatman. BBC One Television.

Anderson, A. (1992). *Bazalwane: African Pentecostals in South Africa*. Pretoria: University of South Africa Press.

Ayewa, C. (2020). *No Más*. Chicago: International Anthem Recording Co.

All About Jazz. (2003). 'Zim Ngqawana: Vadzimu', *All About Jazz*, 25 July. Available at: https://www.allaboutjazz.com/vadzimu-zim-ngqawana-sheer-sound-review-by-aaj-staff.php [Accessed: 28 August 2020]

Biko, S. (1987). *I Write What I Like*. London: Bowerdean Press

Beliso-De Jesús, A. M. (2015). *Electric Santería: Racial and Sexual Assemblages of Transnational Religion*. New York: Columbia University Press

Brathwaite, K. (1973). *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Black To Techno. (2019). [Online]. Directed by Jenn Nkiru. England: Frieze Magazine & Iconoclast [Viewed 19 June 2020]. Available from Vimeo.

Cabrita, J. (2014). *Text and Authority in the South African Nazaretha Church*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Campt, T. (2017). *Listening to Images*. Durham: Duke University Press

Cape Argus. (2010). 'Church claimed rights to 'vuvu'', *Cape Argus*, 22 June 2010 [Online]. Available at: https://www.pressreader.com/south-africa/cape-argus/20100622/282342561095363 [Accessed 24 July 2020].

Chude-Sokei, L. (2008). 'Dr Satan's Echo Chamber', *Chimurenga 12: Dr. Satan's Echo Chamber.* Cape Town: Chimurenga.

Coltrane, J. (1976). [Liner notes]. In *Kulu Sé Mama*. Santa Monica: Impulse! Records

Comaroff, J. & Comaroff, J. L. (2008). 'Faith' in Shepherd, N. & Robins, S. (eds.), *New South African Keywords.* Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana Media. 91-103.

Crawley, A. T. (2016). *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* [Kindle Edition]. New York: Fordham University Press. Retrieved from Amazon.com.

Curry, T. (2019). *Go With the Flow: Answering Afropessimism*. [podcast] Global Debate Symposium. Available at: https://soundcloud.com/gdsdebate/go-with-the-flow-answering-afropessimism-with-dr-tommy-curry [Accessed 9 October 2019]

Edjabe, N. (ed). (2018). 'No Pass, But Nine Passports', *Chimurenga Chronic: On Circulations and the African Imagination of a Borderless* World, October.

Eshun, K. (1998). *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*. London: Quartet Books Limited.

Fanon, F. (1965). *A Dying Colonialism*. Translated by H. Chevalier. New York: Grove Press.

Fanon. F. (1952). *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by C. L. Markmann., 1986. London: Pluto Press

Fanon, F. (1963) *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by C. Farrington. New York: Grove Weidenfeld.

Feld, S. (2017). 'On Post-Ethnomusicology Alternatives: Acoustemology' in Giannattasio, F. & Guiriati, G. (eds.) *Ethnomusicology or Transcultural Musicology?.* Udine: Nota. 82-98.

Francois, F. (2020). 'Colombia is systematically killing off its black citizens', *Miami Herald,* 25 January. Available at: https://www.miamiherald.com/opinion/op-ed/article239352468.html [Accessed: 17 June 2020]

Galembo, P. (1998). *Vodou: Visions and Voices of Haiti*. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press

Gamedze, A. (2018). 'It's in the out sides: An investigation into the cosmological contexts of South African jazz' [Online], MA thesis, University of Cape Town, Cape Town. Available at: https://open.uct.ac.za/bitstream/handle/11427/30526/thesis_hum_2019_gamedze_asher.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y [Accessed: 24 July 2020].

Gargaillo, F. (2018). 'Kamau Brathwaite's Rhythms of Migration', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. 53(1): 155-168.

Gilroy, P. (1993). *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness.* United Kingdom: Verso

von Gleich, P. (2017). 'Afro-pessimism, Fugitivity, and the Border to Social Death', *E-International Relations*, 27 June Available at: https://www.e-ir.info/2017/06/27/afro-pessimism-fugitivity-and-the-border-to-social-death/ [Accessed: 21 August 2020].

Glissant, E. 1989. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Translated by J. M. Dash. Charlottesville: Caraf Books/University Press of Virginia.

Glissant, E. 1990 (1997). *Poetics of Relation*. Translated by B. Wing. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press.

Goldberg, T. (2013). 'Cuban Music in Senegal', *OkayAfrica*, 10 April. Available at: https://www.okayafrica.com/cuban-music-in-senegal-africa/ [Accessed 6 January 2021]

González Mina, L. (2000). *Tio Guachupecito*. Colombia: Sonolux

Grosfoguel, R. (2008). 'Transmodernity, border thinking and global coloniality'. *Eurozine,* 4 July. Available at: https://www.eurozine.com/transmodernity-border-thinking-and-global-coloniality/ [Accessed 16 July 2019]

Guggenheim. n.d., *Collection Online: Nam June Paik TV Garden*. Available at: https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/9537 [Accessed: 20 June 2020]

Harney, S. & Moten, F. (2013). *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study.* New York: Minor Compositions.

Hayward, P. (2012). 'Aquapelagos and Aquapelagic Assemblages', *Shima,* 6 (1), 1-11.

Hsu, H. (2019). 'Fifty Years of Worship at the Church of John Coltrane', *New York Times*, 24 December. Available at: https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/fifty-years-of-worship-at-the-church-of-john-coltrane [Accessed 24 July 2020]

In Her Own Words - Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. (2018). YouTube video, added by you belong [Online] Available at: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmNZK8D1EgQ* [Accessed: 3 January 2021]

In the Wake: A Salon in Honor of Christina Sharpe. Featuring Christina Sharpe, Hazel Carby, Kaiama Glover, Saidiya Hartman, Arthur Jafa, and Alex Weheliye. (2017). YouTube video, added by Barnard Center for Research on Women [Online] Available at: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGE9oiZr3VM&t=408s* [Accessed: 21 August 2019]

Jazz Studies Online. (2015). *Fred Moten on the Odyssey of Improvisation* [Interview]. Available at: http://jazzstudiesonline.org/resource/fred-moten-odyssey-improvisation [Accessed: 18 July 2018]

Know Your Carribbean. (2019). 'What is Caribbean Spirituality to You?' [Instagram] 14 July. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/Bz5EFkiB5rd/ [Accessed: 16 July 2019]

Kunene, M. (2005). *Abangoma*. England: M.E.L.T. 2000

Lebeloane, L. & Madise, M. (no date) 'The Relevance of Oral History as a Methodology of Research in Church History: The Case of the Zion Christian Church', thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria. Available at: http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/4485/Lebeloane-Madise.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y [Accessed: 21 August 2020].

Leopold, A. M. & Jensen, J. S. (eds.) (2004). *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader*. Sheffield: Equinox.

Lisson Gallery. (2020). *John Akomfrah in conversation with Tina Campt, Ekow Eshun and Saidiya Hartman*. Available at: https://www.lissongallery.com/studio/john-akomfrah-tina-campt-saidiya-hartman [Accessed: 18 June 2020].

Maape, S. (2019). 'That Place is Creepy', *Rapture* Institute. The Point of Order, 1-20 October.

Mackey, N. (1995). 'An interview with Kamau Brathwaite' in: Brown, S. (ed.) *The Art of Kamau Brathwaite*. Wales: Seren, 13–32.

Mafeje, A. (2011). 'Africanity: A Combative Ontology' in Devisch, R. & Nyamnjoh, F. B. (eds.) *The Postcolonial Turn: Re-Imagining Anthropology and Africa*. Leiden: African Studies Centre.

Maldonado-Torres, N. (2016). 'Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality', *Foundation Frantz Fanon*, 23 October. Available at: http://fondation-frantzfanon.com/outline-of-ten-theses-on-coloniality-and-decoloniality/ [Accessed 9 November 2019].

Mamdani, M. (1996). *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and The Legacy of Late Colonialism*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Martinié, L & Glassman, S. A. (1992). *The New Orleans Voodoo Tarot*. Vermont: Destiny Books.

Maughan, K. (2019). 'Digging up apartheid's skeletons', *Financial Mail*, 4 July. Available at: https://www.businesslive.co.za/fm/features/2019-07-04-digging-up-apartheids-skeletons/ [Accessed: 17 June 2020]

Mbembe, A. (2017). *Critique of Black Reason*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

Mbembe, A. (2018). 'The Idea of a Borderless World', *Chimurenga Chronic: On Circulations and the African Imagination of a Borderless* World, October.

McKittrick, K. (2006). *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

McKittrick, K. (2016). ‘Rebellion/Invention/Groove’, *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*. 20(1 49):79-91.

Mignolo, W. (2000). *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking.* Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

Minh-ha, T. T. (1999). *Cinema Interval*. New York: Routledge.

Miriam Makeba in Guinea - The Best Documentary Ever. (Official source & date unknown). YouTube video, added by Gwendolyn Medhurst [Online] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDtdMYTptu0 [Accessed: 27 June 2020]

Moten, F. (2003). *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Moten, F. (2008). ‘Black Op’, *PLMA* 123(5): 1743–1747.

Moten, F. (2013). ‘Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)’, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112(4): 737–780.

Nooter, M. H. (1993). *Secrecy: African art that Conceals and* Reveals. New York: Prestel Publishing

Nyamnjoh, F. B. (2012). ‘Blinded by Sight: Diving the Future of Anthropology in Africa’, *African Spectrum*. 47(2-3): 63-92.

Nyamnjoh, F. B. (2017a). ‘Drinking from the Cosmic Gourd: How Amos Tutuola Can Change Our Minds’, Archie Mafeje Memorial Lecture at the Human Science Research Council, transcript, *Read African Books*, 28 March. Available at: http:// www.readafricanbooks.com/opinions/how-amos-tutuola-can-change-our-minds [Accessed: viewed 8 February 2018]

Nyamnjoh, F. B. (2017b). ‘Incompleteness: Frontier Africa and the Currency of Conviviality’, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. 52(3): 253–270

Ray, G. (2005). *Terror and the in Art and Critical Theory: From Auschwitz to Hiroshima to September 11*. New York & Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Reed, I. (1972). *Mumbo Jumbo: A Novel* [Kindle Edition]. New York: Open Road Media. Retrieved from Amazon.com.

Reed, I. (2019). ‘Charles Fréger’s Museum Without Walls’ in Fréger, C. *Cimarron: Freedom and Masquerade*. United Kingdom: Thames & Hudson.

Robinson, C. (1983). *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black radical Tradition*. London: Zed Press.

Schneider, A. & Wright, C. (2010). ‘Between Art and Anthropology’, in Schneider, A & Wright, C (eds.) *Between Art and Anthropology: Contemporary Ethnographic Practice*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. 1-22.

Sexton, J. (2011). ‘The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism’, *InTensions Journal.* 5: 1–47.

Sharpe, C. (2016). *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Shepherd, N. & Haber, A. (2011). ‘What’s Up with WAC? Archaeology and “engagement” in a globalized world’. *Public Archaeology*. 10(2): 96-115.

Somoroff, M. (2006). ‘Book Review—Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity’, *NewBlackMan (in Exile),* 28th February. Available at: https://www.newblackmaninexile.net/2006/02/book-review-phonographies-grooves-in.html [Accessed 13 February 2020]

South African History Online. (2011). *Political changes from 1750 to 1835*. Available at: https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/political-changes-1750-1835 [Accessed 6 July 2020]

South African History Online. (2019). *Cape Slave Naming Patterns by Robert Shell*. Available at: https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/cape-slave-naming-patterns-robert-shell [Accessed 13 July 2020]

Spillers, H. J. (1987). ‘Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book Diacritics’, *Culture and Countermemory: The ‘American’ Connection*. 17(2): 64-81

Spivak, G. C. & Osborne, P. (1990). ‘Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: An interview’, *Radical Philosophy*. 54(1): 32-34

Store Front Churches, Milton Rogovin. Available at: https://www.miltonrogovin.com/photography-series/churches [Accessed 28 May 2019]

Sylvan, R. (2002). *Traces of the Spirit: The Religious Dimensions of Popular Music* [Kindle Edition]. New York: NYU Press. Retrieved from Amazon.com.

Tabane, P. & Malombo. (1989). [Liner notes] In *Unh!.* New York: ICON Records.

Taylor, D. (2003). *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Taylor, P. C. (2016). *Black is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics*. West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell.

The Black Outdoors: Humanities Futures after Property and Possession with Fred Moten & Saidiya Hartman at Duke University. 2016. YouTube video, added by Duke Franklin Humanities Institute [Online]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_tUZ6dybrc [Accessed 22 April 2018]

Thompson, S. (ed). (1962). *The Journal of John Gabriel Stedman, 1744-1797: Soldier and Author, Including an Authentic Account of his Expedition to Surinam, in 1772*. London: Mitre Press.

Torabully, K. (1996). ‘The Coolies’ Odyssey’. *The Unesco Courier.* 49(10): 13–17.

Turner, V. (1969). *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. New York: Aldine De Gruyer

Velez, T. M. (2000). *Drumming for the Gods: The Life and Times of Felipe Garcia Villamil, Santero, Palero, and Abakua*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press

Vít Zdrálek. (2015) ‘Mapping the Individual Musical Experience in Post-Apartheid South Africa: A Bio-Ethnography of Township Dweller Lesiba Samuel Kadiaka’, thesis, Charles University, Prague.

Waite, A. E. 1971 (1909). *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot*. Stanford: U.S. Games Systems, Inc.

Warren, C. (2017). ‘Black Mysticism: Fred Moten’s Phenomenology of (Black) Spirit’, *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*. 65(2): 219–229.

Warren, C. (2018). ‘Black Mysticism’, *Unbag, End-Winter 2018. Available at:* https://unbag.net/end/black-mysticism [Accessed 22 April 2019]

Weheliye, A. G. (2005). *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*. Durham: Duke University Press

Wilderson, F. (2010). *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure if U.S Antagonisms*. Durham: Duke University Press.