

https://dspace.org/

The tailored suit : a reimagining of Can Themba's The Suit

Lelliott, Kitso Lynn

2011-09-22
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/10443

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

The Tailored Suit:

A Reimagining of Can Themba's *The Suit*

Kitso Lynn Lelliott

A Research Report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Film and Television.

Johannesburg, 2011.

ABSTRACT

This research report examines the period of 1950s Sophiatown and its socio-cultural legacy pertaining to race and gender. Though the establishment of a cosmopolitan black identity was significant in its undermining of Nationalist Party segregationist ideology, the struggle for equality was predicated on a racial struggle that subsumed a gendered agenda. The work of Can Themba and *Drum* magazine, which have become mythologized in the contemporary South African imaginary, are interrogated with particular emphasis on one of Themba's iconic pieces, *The Suit*. Through engagement with Themba's text, this research report foregrounds the processes through which black women have been subjected to multiple, compounded subjugation. In response to the representations of black femininity in *The Suit*, the film component of this report, *The Tailored Suit*, privileges the black woman, Matilda's, articulations. It thus functions to foreground the agency of marginalised subjects. In articulating from the periphery, the subjugated destabilise the hierarchical social structures that would subordinate and objectify them. By engaging the representations in *The Suit*, part of an iconic historic moment prefiguring the contemporary socio-cultural milieu, the reimagining in *The Tailored Suit* offers a fragmented frame of reference, positing an alternative to a homogenising masculine discourse on history.

DECLARATION

I declare that this is my own unaided work, save insofar as indicated in the acknowledgements and references. It is being submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Art in Film and Television, in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.



Kitso L. Lelliott

10th day of January, 2011

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor, Prof. Jyoti Mistry for guiding me through this process and helping me find my feet.

I thank my parents, Batsile and Anthony Lelliott, for all the support and encouragement.

Thank you to Ross and Judy Lelliott for believing in me, and to Angela Moamogwe for lending a helping hand.

I would like to thank the cast and crew of *The Tailored Suit* for putting in a great deal of hard work and long hours, in particular to Mbali Langa who brought Matilda to life. Thank you for your commitment and dedication.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT……II

DECLARATION……III

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS……IV

INTRODUCTION……1

***THE SUIT,* HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND TEXTUAL ANALYSIS……5**

The Period Model, *The Suit*……7

Elasticity of Malleable Fabric: Reading Women's Resistance……10

Elasticity Wearing Thin: Structural Resistance to Woman's Resistance……12

Starching the Fabric: The World of Can Themba……14

The Unravelling and Re-Stitching of Black Identities……17

FRAYING THE THREADS OF RESISTANCE: THE SUBJUGATION OF BLACK WOMEN….27

SELF-STYLING: RECLAIMING SELF DEFINITION……38

The Clothes Pattern: Synopsis……38

Combining of Fabrics: Multiplicity as Revisionist……41

Interlining: Voice Over…… 44

Complimentary Textures: Countryside and Staging……45

The Stitching: Collapsing of Narrative Spheres……50

Refashioning a Fitted Suit: Weaving Together the Strands……54

Darning Old Tears: Perspective from 2010……60

CONCLUSION……64

APPENDIX……67

BIBLIOGRAPHY……76