

The Tailored Suit:

A Reimagining of Can Themba's *The Suit*

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## 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.



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