

Sigiya Ngenoma:

Sonics after the Struggle – Kwaito and the Practice of Fugitivity

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A research report submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Sociology)

at the

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

2019

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Sithembiso T. Mdlalose

To all the people I've crossed paths with, dead and alive. To all the people whose work I've read and could not meet. To all the souls that touched me, and to the ones I've seen. And to all the names that cannot be named, I thank you.

Abstract

Can there ever be a space for radical Black performativity, by which I mean, a type of Black performance that is a challenge to, and not just a reiteration of (including in others' enjoyment of it) the anti-Blackness of the world? This project – film and conceptual essay - investigates the limits and boundaries of this question and it does so through kwaito: a uniquely South African post 1994 musical and cultural phenomenon that is specifically born from the experiences of township life and of Blackness in South Africa. It does so as a way to think about the validity of the proposition put forward by Black Studies (mainly in Afro-pessimism) that violence in the modern world underwrites the Black person's capacity to think, act, and exist spatially and temporally, this is in opposition, say, to Fred Moten's Black Optimism, that holds that 'objects', that is to say Blacks, can and do resist and they do so through performance.

This project then enters the debate in Black Studies through a questioning of the 'authenticity' of Black radical performativity and cultural practices and it reads kwaito as a Black cultural performative practice that is a form of fugitivity. This paper looks at some of the more hopeful, humanistic interpretations of Black aesthetics and proposes as a challenge that we rather think about and read kwaito as something close to a deranged apocalyptic response to anti-Blackness, that does not offer answers, and is a movement that operates as a form of fugitivity that unveils the quotidian and banal subjectivity of Black township life in South Africa post 1994.

Introduction

Can there ever be a space for radical Black performativity? Ever since my engagement with Black Studies I have been haunted by this question. It always seemed to creep in and demand of me the time for an answer. Can this space be found in the music of kwaito and its associated performative practices?

I grew up on kwaito. I have memories of me and my friends in Katlehong singing and pantsula jiving to kwaito tunes, abo Trompies, TKZee and Mapaputsi, to name a few. One of these times, I still remember so vividly, was in 1998 at the front view of my grandmother's four room house in Katlehong on New Year's Eve waiting for the New Year and the song that will usher us into it, though we already had in mind what this song was. The clock struck midnight; fireworks started going off to embrace the New Year to the kwaito sounds of Mdu Masilela's Mazola: *gibela phezu kwendlu ubatshela umaZola useka daar*. Kwaito was the soundtrack to the township, and maybe even Black life in South Africa.

My Honours thesis was on the township as a closed private space, where the religious practises of late (the drinking of petrol, eating of live wild animals, etc.), at least to me, were dangerous and posed a health hazard as a form of escape and catharsis. I was trying to think about what this all means in relation to questions of dispossession and Black psychic life. I've long since departed from some of the arguments I made in that paper, however I carried some of them into this Masters' project. I'm interested in Black people, the spaces they inhabit and their relation to the world. This project comes from a space of love for Black people and for kwaito.

One scholar describes kwaito as "undoubtedly the most singular innovation in popular culture in South Africa in the 1990s" (Peterson, 2003:198). I agree with this. However I'm still haunted by the question of the possibility of radical Black performativity. By which I mean, a type of Black performativity that is a challenge to, and not just a reiteration of (including in others' enjoyment of it) the anti - Blackness of the world. Is kwaito this radical Black performativity? Are we asking too much of/and from it? Let us assume that it is; can it challenge and escape David Marriot's inquiry about Blackness and "the question that remains, beyond the immediate negotiation even as it continues to loop back to it, is whether a politics, which is also to say an aesthetics, that affirms (social) life can avoid the thanatological dead end if it does not will its own (social) death"? (cited in Sexton, 2011:9). This question, even as I write this, torments me and I

want to tackle it head on. The tradition, if we can even call it that, which poses this question, is known as Afro – Pessimism and Frank Wilderson is its leading theorist. For Afro – Pessimists, violence in the modern world underwrites the Black person’s capacity to “think, act, and exist spatially and temporally” this is in opposition, say, to Fred Moten’s Black Optimism, that holds that ‘objects’, that is to say Blacks, can and do resist and they do so through performance.

My project then enters the debate in Black Studies around the ‘authenticity’ of Black culture and performance. I want to read kwaito as a Black cultural performance through this debate of whether there is the possibility of an “authentic” Black culture, to put it crudely. I sympathise with Afro – Pessimists, however, I have to clarify that I do not want to apply Afro – pessimism as a theory to kwaito – as in kwaito is the object of study and Afro – pessimism is the theory I use to understand it, that is not the case. Instead, it’s really that Afro – Pessimism as a theory leaves me with a proposition, a provocation, and that I want to use kwaito to think about the validity of that proposition.

This paper is intentionally complicated; much like the subject(s) it studies. Everything is mixed together as one: the different sections/chapters are divided by kwaito lyrics, which also seek to introduce and build on the arguments being made. The whole project is a more experimental approach and having said that, this essay does not necessarily discuss, though I would have liked to given more time, the more general scholarship on Black music in South Africa, and/or the debates about Black music in the USA, and elsewhere in the world.

On method

This project is a package; it comes together with a film, titled *Ghetto Scandalous* (the name borrowed from the kwaito artist Zola 7’s song from his 2000 project Mdlwembe). I take a narrative approach in this project and I interview people who have engagements with kwaito and/or Black performativity on camera. This is in part to destabilise the now quite suspicious distinction between the ‘researcher’ and the ‘research subject’, and on the other hand, to avoid the problem of the researcher becoming no more than a ‘translator’ of the research interview. Semi – structured interviews were conducted with the performers of kwaito, academics who have done work on kwaito, and cultural critics or opinion makers (the consecrators). The film is thus a compositional essay that consists of the texts of the semi – structured interviews. It is divided into three parts

or chapters, the first covering the what is of kwaito, the second, the political vs apolitical character of kwaito that seems to have occupied the mind of the academy and popular culture, and lastly in the final part it deals with, in general, Black sociability and relationality in and with the world. A reflection piece on the film is attached to this paper at the end. By using the semi – structured interviews in film format, I both claim an authorial stance as well as use the embodied arguments of the ‘research participants’ as co – constitutive of knowledge.

There is a less theoretically – informed scholarship on kwaito than one would expect. Popular media seems to engage kwaito more seriously than scholars. This is surprising; one would think that the academy would have jumped at the opportunity to do work on popular Black youth music (especially anthropology). But I guess kwaito has always been regarded as ephemeral and as such not worth the engagement. Perhaps the work of Dick Hebdige (1979) on subcultures can be of assistance in trying to understand the lack of interest in kwaito. Hebdige argues that subcultures more often than not are trivialised, naturalised, domesticated or transformed into meaningless exoticas and/or pure spectacles. They are seen as less important, sometimes as a stage in youthful development. This project aims to add to the little, but growing, scholarship on kwaito (and popular culture alike), without trying to offer a definitive reading and analysis of it. I only wish to generate discussions.

The project is made with the intention that the paper must be read together with the film, however the film can be viewed as a stand – alone, though they are mutually inclusive. The aim is for the project to reach a much wider audience, beyond the walls of the academy.

*Ke tswa hole
ke tenwa ke ntho ena
o ntse o mpotsa ore nna ke tswa kae
Ke tswa hole*

Trompies – Ke Tswa Hole (Date unknown).

The Kwaito generation constructed their culture, their politics, through this new sound: kwaito – an eclectic sound, but arising specifically from the experiences of township life in South Africa and of Blackness; an aesthetic creation. In academic circles kwaito is seen as an authentic, uniquely South African post 1994

musical and cultural phenomenon. Gavin Steingo (2005) writes that kwaito is “a collection of fragmented ideas and ideologies of young black South Africans after apartheid” (page number missing). The filmmaker, cultural critic and scholar Bhekizizwe Peterson (2003) asserts that kwaito’s emergence is “undoubtedly the most singular innovation in popular culture in South Africa in the 1990s” (198). The creators and performers of the genre simply call it ‘township music’.

Hehehe hohoo

Hehehe hohoo

Mathata thata a lefatshe lena

Mathata thata a lefatshe lena

E'inkinga

Ezom 'hlaba

Lom 'hlaba uya hlaba

Lom 'hlaba uya hlaba

Mashamplani – Ratlala (1997).

In a series of interviews the filmmaker Aryan Kaganof captures the explanation of kwaito from its creators. The self – proclaimed king of kwaito Arthur Mafokate describes it as “kwaito is South African ghetto or township dance music.” The member of the kwaito group Mafikizolo in a similar fashion as Arthur describes it as such: “kwaito is very South African, it’s something that represents the youth of South Africa basically, and especially from the townships.” The kwaito superstar, who is always hailed as the first kwaito cross over artist (that is to the White audience), the late Mandoza had this to say: “kwaito, it’s a language that we use, a music that we use to express our ghetto lifestyle. It’s the way we talk in the ghetto.” The once Sony Music executive and the founder of the gospel charting group Joyous Celebration Lindelani Mkhize tells Kaganof that “kwaito music is a voice for the South African youth; it is a loud microphone that the youth of South Africa uses to spread their message to the country and to the outside world as well” (all quoted in Kaganof, 2003).

All these people are in agreement that kwaito is a prominent and formidable part of the Black youth experience in the townships (after 1994). It cannot go unnoticed. It is blatant and in your face. However,

regardless of this, not everyone shares the sentiments that kwaito is an important social and/or political aesthetic. The views are polarising. There are, in the main, two camps; one arguing that kwaito has or shouldn't have a place in society, that the music and the culture associated with it is apolitical, something that is seen as a grave sin in "Post – Apartheid" (yes the quotation marks do matter) South Africa. It was expected that after 1994 the Black youth will take the baton from their elders and 'continue with the struggle'. On the other side you have a camp of people, although not too many, who think that kwaito has a social message to it, that the rest of the people (the ones from the other camp) mis – read or misinterpret what kwaito is and what it is trying to achieve.

Simon Stephens (in Nuttall and Michael, 2000) describes kwaito as "The Party Politic". Kwaito here is described as without a political or social element, as only caring about the life of the party. Kwaito then breaks from a long tradition of struggle and protest music into a space of enjoyment and "physical freedoms". All the scholars, even the ones who try to defend and offer an alternative reading of kwaito cannot seem to escape this hedonistic reading of kwaito. In their defence they end up affirming the hedonism of kwaito. Sandisiwe Vilakazi (2012) in her Masters dissertation on the representation of kwaito in the *Sunday Times* newspaper between 1994 and 2001 does not shy away from mentioning all the examples and times kwaito has been associated with unthinking and all about the life of violence and pleasure. Steingo (2005) writes that considering South Africa's history with gold and the violence the Black population underwent because of it, how puzzling kwaito appropriated gold as a sign of success. Surely kwaito should know better after a racially exploitative system to then (after 1994) adopt European capitalist values? David Coplan in his revised second edition of *In Township Tonight* (2007) laments the absence of politics in "post – Apartheid" music. However, in this second edition he but merely pays attention to urban Black culture and music after 1994, with a mere 12 pages dedicated to this.

Those who offer an alternative reading of kwaito include Tuulikki Pietila (2013) who argues that kwaito's historical and political awareness is expressed in embodied performance forms that build on earlier township styles. Pietila argues that kwaito is unintelligible to its critics, who in the main are middle class and most often from the older generation before 1994. S/he situates kwaito in a genealogy of Black resistance that is not opposed to politics and liberation. Raffaella Delle Donne (2003) on his/her Masters thesis is on the same train as Pietila. S/he argues that kwaito artists (among other Black musicians in genres such as hip – hop and

reggae) are contributors in the re – imagining and forging of identity (or identities) that challenge Western conceptions of identity, culture and of power. Thokozani Mhlambi (2004) in a pamphlet style academic paper attempts to “save” kwaito by explaining to its critics, both inside and outside the academy, that kwaito is an “authentic South African phenomenon” and that, yes, even though it may be more about the party life, it is still an authentic and an important musical and cultural genre (my emphasis added).

Any resident of the townships or kwaito listener will tell you that yes, in the main, Kwaito sings about almost nothing at all (allegedly), that it’s about dance not song (Peterson, 2003). But there is also another strand of kwaito (still kwaito – that is to say it’s still kwaito township and employs the same aesthetics that have come to be characteristic of Kwaito) that addresses social and political issues. This kwaito Christopher Ballantine (2003) calls mature kwaito, and inversely, the kwaito that does not address the social and political issues he calls immature kwaito. His logic is that mature kwaito evolved from immaturity and that immature kwaito is still stuck in infertility. However be that as it may, the so called immature kwaito is popular, outsells “mature kwaito” and when people talk about kwaito more often than not they are talking about “immature kwaito” and not “mature kwaito”, as the academic literature and popular media has it. Steingo (2007) has this to say about this mature versus immature kwaito: “In my view, this ‘mature’ kwaito is far less interesting than the so – called apolitical or immature kwaito. Mature kwaito agrees to play the game of conventional politics; moreover, the ‘mature’ version is readily reduced to discursivity, thereby renouncing the bodily and pleasurable aspects of ‘immature’ kwaito that are not so easily conceptualized” (29). Steingo (2007) argues that immature kwaito however, especially before, during and after the 2004 general elections, became “politicized”. Even though politicians accused kwaito (that is, “immature” kwaito – the popular kwaito) as being unthinking and apolitical; most notable of which was Thabo Mbeki who lamented that kwaito was a distraction. They – politicians - soon realised that kwaito does not need to be “political” to be used or co – opted. The popularity of kwaito is much more important to be left to its own; rather politicians now use kwaito to their benefit. Steingo (2007) calls this movement “From the ‘Party Politic’ to Party Politics”.

Thath' isgubhu

Usifake ezozweni

Ufake amaspex uzowuzwa

ubumnandi obulapho

Yho!

Thath' isgubhu izwa mdala

Thath' isgubhu izwa dimama, dimama

Thina siyagiya ngenzoma

And our style just rock like so

And our style just nice like so

And our style versatile like so

Dimama, Thath' isgubhu izwa mdala

Bongo Maffin - Thathi Sgubhu (1998)

“Perhaps God speaks to us through the drum” – Sive Mqikela.

To be honest, when I started this project I had little faith, let alone patience for kwaito. Though I grew up on the music and culture of kwaito, my now academic and ‘middle class’ self, wanted kwaito to be unapologetically radical and political. I wanted kwaito to be a social and political commentary and even a critic of the post-1994 political dispensation. Maybe I had/or was spending too much time in libraries and lecture halls that I had forgotten about this music and culture we call kwaito.

In my interviews with individuals who have engagements with kwaito, some raised questions I could not ignore. For example, Sive Mqikela, an artist with Black Thought Music, challenged me on this “political and apolitical” debate. According to Mqikela this discourse of the political/apolitical nature of kwaito is asking too much out of Black people. Black people, according to Mqikela, are already positing a politics just by their mere presence. They don’t have to sing and dance to a particular tune to be political. Blackness alone is already enough as it is. Esinako Ndabeni the author of *Born to Kwaito* (2018) agrees with Mqikela. Critics like Simon Stephens fail to realise this logic about Black life. So Blacks cannot, must not ‘let loose and jive’ to their music, they always have to be political. Such a hard thing it is to be Black. In my interview with Siyabonga Njica, an art critic and a jazz scholar, s/he makes the argument that if jazz is without lyrical content but is considered political and kwaito is laced with lyrical content, no matter what the content is, it is considered apolitical, then this is an unfair judgment and shows infidelity in our musical and cultural palate. “Perhaps God speaks to us through the drum”, Mqikela remarks in the interview. I don’t want to rehash the

studies about the sound of kwaito here, but I have to say this: anyone who listens to Kwaito will tell you that the sound is different; it's distinct from other musical genres. The kwaito beat speaks to the South African taste, style and experience. What makes the slowed down drum and bass in kwaito more excitable to the South African township palate? Maybe Mqikela is right, perhaps God speaks to Black people through the drum. When it plays it immediately excites in us a language we are most familiar with. A language that has a long history – that precedes us.

The Drum is an important musical instrument in African cosmology and it marks various rituals, from puberty, marriage, and death to many more. The rhythm and style of play differs from region to region. It is also worth mentioning that the chanting in kwaito music is also rooted in a long history of African music. I do not want to regurgitate these studies here, but for some texts that make this argument, Johnston (1971), Vimbani Chamisa, (2017), Nzewi, Meki, Israel Anyahuru, and Tom Ohiaaramunna (2001).

The slowed down drum and bass in kwaito music speaks to the township and the African sensibility alike and is uniquely and distinctively connected to various African traditions, cultures, spirituality and rituals. I do not think that it is a happenstance that the kwaito beat and sound is the way it is, other than the most cited reference of trying to bypass copyright laws. I think there is more to this than that. So the argument about the political or apolitical nature of kwaito I find limiting. This paper, and the project as a whole, takes Peterson's (2003) invitation on "recasting the debate" about urban Black youth culture. Peterson also reminds us – and here he is thinking through Jacqueline Rose's (date) argument of fantasy and desire - to read kwaito through the agency of Black youth and their desires, post 1994, to construct their own narratives and meanings. He states so eloquently that: "there is no 'way of understanding political identities and destinies without letting fantasy into the frame', (ii) that 'fantasy, even in its own psychic terms, is never only inward turning; it also contains a historical reference in so far as it involves, alongside the attempt to arrest the present, a journey through the past', and (iii) that 'fantasy can be grounds for license and pleasure'. The intention is to think through contemporary cultural practices in ways that continue to aid the historical desire to 'blast open the future'" (197).

I want to take a quick detour here, a necessary roundabout, to House Music; in order to return to kwaito and show how all this is connected.

When the pioneers of Kwaito tell the story of how the genre came to be, among other things they cite the influence of American House Music. Oskido tells the story of how when he was starting out as a club DJ in Joburg and receiving all these music from America, house music, in order to avoid things such as copyright problems he and his mates would slow down the music and repackage it. I want to argue that no matter how slowed down the beat may have been our shared African cosmology with the rest of the Black world, here America, we immediately recognised and appreciated the sound that started right here in this continent, travelled to America and came back to us in the form of house music.

House music, contrary to what many may believe, is a Black invention. It all started in the Black neighbourhoods of Chicago around 1977. A new club called the Warehouse opened on the south side of Chicago and the young Frankie Knuckles was a resident DJ and he mixed old sounds, from disco to soul and funk. Many credit him as the inventor of the genre, this may be so, however I would like to believe that the feeling at that time was the original inventor of house music, rather than attributing it to a single individual. The same can also be said of kwaito. But what is most definite is that house music developed from African – American musical traditions such as jazz, soul, gospel, funk, and blues. This oppressed group of people felt the need for an alternative body of music that spoke to their sensibilities (for a full discussion on house music, see Rietveld (1998), and Lee and Reynolds (2000)). Scholars often write about the roots of some of the sound and traditions of genres like soul and blues as being African. However some Euro – American scholars write about the ‘cultural *tabula rasa*’ of the Black people conscripted to the Americas. This is the idea that there is little, if at all, remaining of Africa in African – American culture and traditions. That some way the waters of the middle passage erased all that is African in the people that were to become slaves, that their contact with ‘the powerful American culture’ destroyed all remnants of Africa. This is not entirely true, or false. The capturers tried to force ‘Africa’ out of the slaves, and perhaps may have been successful in many instances – I’m reminded of that powerful but horrifying to watch scene in Alex Haley’s film series ‘*Roots: The Saga of an American Family*’ where Kunta Kinte, a slave, is beaten to near death by his White slave master and is forced to forsake his birth name for another name: Toby. Africa is beaten out of Kunta Kinte and Toby is imposed. However even though Kunta Kinte was no more, his spirit could still be heard and seen in the music and dance of Toby. This is the argument many of the scholars have shown, most

notably in the 1974 paper by Olly Wilson titled: “*The Significance of the Relationship between Afro-American Music and West African Music.*”

It can also be argued, and rightly so, that Africa is not a homogenous entity. That the musical styles and taste of Africa and its people vary and differ from region to region. So instead of African music we should opt rather for African musics. Plural not singular. However be that as it may, there are many commonalities in these plural. As Kwabena Nketia argues (in Wilson, 1974):

The plural concept of African music based on the “ethnic” groups as a homogenous musical unit can be misleading, for divergences merely represent areas of musical bias. They are the result of specialisation or differences in emphasis on the selection and use of common musical resources, common devices and procedures, specialization which have over the years tended to group African peoples into different communities of taste (4).

This generalisation is not to downplay the diversity of musical and cultural performances in the African continent. What I’m trying to draw attention to is the subsistence of interrelationship in African music and culture. The argument here is that there is a common characteristic that underscores African music. Wilson cites Alan Merriam (*Continuity and Change in African Culture*) on African musical cultures that there is “a matter of specialization within a common practice” (4). He continues to make the argument that there are seven musical areas in the continent, and each one having a special area of concentration:

- (1) Bushman; Hottentot; (2) East African; (3) East Horn; (4) Central Africa; (5) West Coast; (6) Sudan; Desert; divided into [a] Sudan and [b] Desert; and (7) North Coast.

To strengthen this argument Wilson also cites Waterman to further argue on the idea of a common sub-Saharan African musical practice. Waterman argues that there are five characteristics common throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, and they are:

- (1) Metronomic sense (2) Dominance of percussion (3) Polymeter (4) Off-beat phrasing of melodic accents (5) Overlapping call and response.

To be fair, it has to be noted that these studies were done by mainly White men from America and Europe and their audiences was similar from there. This can also be deduced from their writing styles; you can tell

that they are writing about the ‘Other’ – to understand him/her and make him/her legible to their audiences. However of the many accounts I have read this, I think, is the most ‘progressive’ one.

Few scholars contest these characteristics, this include Merriam, however they all, in the most, agree that on the importance of rhythm and ‘percussive rhythmic techniques’. And this Wilson suggests is an indicator of a reasonably cohesive musical system in Africa. Again this is not to suggest that there is a monolithic African musical or cultural approach but rather that there are underlining elements of commonality that run through all these independent musical practises (Wilson, 1974).

Over and beyond these shared musical commonalities Black people also share the same sufferings. What perhaps appealed to Black South African youth in the townships about this ‘new sound’ called house music is the fact that the people who created and enjoyed this music also shared the same experiences of exclusion and marginality. Of course one might argue that house music was not/is not the only musical genre performed by oppressed youth in America. The rap and hip – hop aesthetic, that started in the ghettos of America in the 1970’s is one of them, and arguably the most significant and dominant one. Rap and hip – hop in South Africa never enjoyed the same privilege, not that it never existed. It did. But that it was seen, in the main, as a genre that was consumed by middle class youth who attended private and model – C schools. This class of youth spoke English and had the resources to acquire that type of music. In a country of deep inequality, where the rich youth spoke a language different to the majority of the Black youth, hip – hop, in as much as it was a Black creation by the marginalised, became a foreign language to the majority of Black youth in the townships. For example, Brothers of Peace in their 2005 album *King Of Kwaito Uyagawula* can be read as making an argument and commentary on this. Maria McCloy (no date) has also written on this during her time with the online publication Rage [the site is no longer available online, however Steigo (2007) cites the article extensively in his paper and so does Swartz (2003)]. David Coplan writing mainly about jazz and theatre “under Apartheid” writes: “The analysis of black status relations in urban South Africa involves oppositions – urban–migrant, westernised–traditional, and petty bourgeois–unskilled – but these relations have always been unstable” he continues: “In the first half of the last century, the school – educated ‘middle class’ viewed their white and, to some extent, American counterparts as a primary reference group” (2007: 400).

But, when Black youth, like Oskido, received house music in the late 1980/early 1990, they understood it and embraced it, because, it was ‘their’ music. It was house music finally making its way back to Africa. It travelled across the ocean, fusing and adopting different styles and returning back home as house music.

“After 1994”, states Peterson:

[DJ’s] had to respond to the need expressed on dance floors for a new music. After the decades of the politically charged toyi – toyi, the call was for a sound, dance and attendant styles that would capture the sense of release that young people felt following the demise of apartheid. Working in studios and using synthesizers, the DJs started off by updating the ‘bubble – gum’ sound by infusing it with new local and international beats, especially ‘slowed down’ house – music (198 – 199).

This fusion of sounds, house music being an important part in this mix, created this eclectic genre we now know as kwaito.

Celukbuza

Hey man celukbuza

Umuntu o fana nam umcindezala kanjani? (x2)

Ngoba ma uthi uvala la

Ngi vula le

Uthi uvala le

Ngi vule la

Nja seng la, khona la, uzong thola kwa phalafala

Kwa phalafala, uzong thola kwa phalafala

Nel' nahana entlek le tlo fella kae (x2)

Nel' nahana entlek

Nel' nahana entlek, entlek

Nel' nahana entlek le tlo fella kae

Trrratatatata tada ta (x2)

Trrratatatata (x2)

Trrratatatata tada ta

Kere, batho batho ba mona never ba loke (x4)

Trrratatatata tada ta (x2)

Trrratatatata (x2)

Trrratatatata tada ta

Nel' nahana entlek le ilo fella kae (x2)

Nel' nahana entlek

Nel' nahana entlek, entlek

Nel' nahana entlek le ilo fella kae

TKZee ft Dr Mageu - Ota Fella Kae (2001).

Hannah Arendt (1968) offers a theory of private and the public spaces. I'd like to borrow these concepts from Arendt to make my point here. Arendt argues that each type of human activity has its proper place in the world, and that this place is the only authentic space in which those kinds of activity can truly unfold. Arendt's argument also includes things such as the role of women and men in it, of which we will not entertain much here. However I think her theorisation of the private and the public can help us. Arendt theorizes that "the public realm represents that space of appearance in which moral and political greatness, heroism, and preeminence are revealed, displayed, shared with others" (4). She goes on to argue that the public space is a space for competition, where people compete for recognition, precedence and acclaim. The other thing about this space, argues Arendt, is that it is exclusive "in that it presupposes strong criteria of belonging and loyalty from its participants" (4). Arendt defines private as that space where things, such as aspects of the 'domestic intimate' sphere, are hidden from sight of the public eye. She believes that certain things need to be hidden from public display, of which this includes the political sphere. Theorists, such as Frantz Fanon (1963) and Lewis Gordon (1995), have shown that in the colonial situation there is a topographical distinction between the space where White people live and that one where Black people live. That of the White people, is considered, more or less a space where citizens live, and that of the Black people a space where 'denizens' live. The place of the Black people, that is the townships, is constructed to service the needs and interests of the place of White people. In essence White spaces matter and Black spaces do not. I think Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* puts it far better than I have:

The colonial world is a world divided into compartments. It is probably unnecessary to recall the existence of native quarters and European quarters, of schools for natives and schools for Europeans; in the same way we need not recall apartheid in South Africa. Yet, if we examine closely this system of compartments, we will at least be able to reveal the lines of force it implies. This approach to the colonial world, its ordering and its geographical layout will allow us to mark out the lines on which a decolonized society will be reorganized.

The colonial world is a world cut in two ... The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity. Obedient to the rules of pure Aristotelian logic, they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity. No conciliation is possible, for of the two terms, one is superfluous. The settlers' town is a strongly built town, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly lit town; the streets are covered with asphalt, and the garbage cans swallow all the leavings, unseen, unknown and hardly thought about. The settler's feet are never visible, except perhaps in the sea; but there you're never close enough to see them. His feet are protected by strong shoes although the streets of his town are clean and even, with no holes or stones. The settler's town is a well-fed town, an easygoing town; its belly is always full of good things. The settlers' town is a town of white people, of foreigners.

Fanon continues:

The town belonging to the colonized people, or at least the native town, the Negro village, the medina, the reservation, is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute. They are born there, it matters little where or how; they die there, it matters not where, nor how. It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other, and their huts are built one on top of the other. The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire. It is a town of niggers and dirty Arabs.

Fanon could have ended his argument there (and it would have saved me the pain of this lengthily quotes) but he continues:

This world divided into compartments, this world cut in two is inhabited by two different species. The originality of the colonial context is that economic reality, inequality, and the immense difference of

ways of life never come to mask the human realities. When you examine at close quarters the colonial context, it is evident that what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race, a given species (Fanon, 1963: 37 – 40).

The same still continues today, colonialism is still rearing its ugly head, as the activists from the September National Imbizo and Blackwash used to say: “94 changed fokol!”. I’d like to put it forward that the logic from Fanon (still) applies post the 1994 South African project. The communities that Black people inhabit do not mirror those that the White people inhabit. One is better than the other. However, let us say, hypothetically speaking, that 1994 did signal something and brought about fundamental change in South Africa, this wouldn’t necessarily mean that the Black person is now a person with some form of relationality, that these Black spaces we call townships are now relative to other spaces in South Africa and the world over. They would not, they do not. Lewis Gordon (1995) reminds us that, “there is ‘something’ absent whenever blacks are present. The more present a black is, the more absent is this ‘something.’ And the more absent a black is, the more present is this something,” Gordon continues, “blacks seem to suck presence into themselves as a black hole, pretty much like the astrophysical phenomenon that bears that name” (103). Wilderson would say that Blackness is the destruction of presence. So then the township is the township not because it is somehow under-serviced and far from the city centres, although this is so, the township is so because it is simply Black.

Of course Arendt’s definition of the private and the public has nothing to do with the arrangement of the natural and artificial physical features of an area or institutions, the public or the private can appear whenever and wherever. But take this paragraph from Arendt (1973):

Although the distinction between privacy and the public coincides with the opposition of necessity and freedom, of futility and permanence, and finally, of shame and honor, it is by no means true that only the necessary, the futile, and the shameful have their proper place in the private realm. The most elementary meaning of the two realms indicates that there are things that need to be hidden and others that need to be displayed publicly if they are to exist at all (73).

There is a striking similarity between Arendt and Fanon and Gordon about what matters and what does not. About what needs to be hidden and what must be put on display. It is clear that Black people, because they

are Black and as such the places they live in do not matter and are deliberately kept hidden, in the private space, inside these borders, and out of the radar of public opinion. Ruth Wilson Gilmore would call this ‘enclosed places’. “The township is a cursed space” Mbuyiseni Ndlozi – the national spokesperson of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) - once remarked on a live television debate.

*Ya lasphuma khona,
Esiphuma eZola, emabhodini
Kwamshaya zafa wonke umuntu uyazi,
Nabelungu bathi beat him to death
Aw look at the sister,
Angisaboni I lewe kulamalanga sokulikhuni uyazi
Akusafani nakudala
Umuntu angena i-house to house a cela i-Happy (happy)
Izinhliziyi zibuhlungu,
Abantu abasafuni ukuzwa nex,
Ngoba lasingena khona bashaya amatshe
Kuvutha umlilo
Makungena zona izinja zase Zola
Abobani abakhumule izinja la, ayeye bazozwa
Abobani abakhumule izinja la, abebengazi benziphutha
Abobani abakhumule izinja la, ayeye bazozwa
Abobani abakhumule izinja la, abebengazi benziphutha
Abobani abakhumule izinja la*

Mapapusti – Izinga (2002).

On the 20th and 21st of October 2018 I attended a conference under the banner: ‘*Re-framing Africa Restructuring the Self*’ hosted by the Wits History workshop, the Wits School of Arts, and the Market Photo Workshop. The conference was an engagement with what they call the African [film] archive and thinking through that as a site for knowledge production, and its encounters with modernity, trying to reclaim the

archive and using it as a site for new episteme's. A lot was discussed at the conference, however one paper caught my attention and I have been unable to shake it off me. Jacob Cloete, a Filmmaker and a scholar at the University of the Western Cape presented a paper titled: *The second limitation: decolonising the African cinema archive through dance*. The central premise of Cloete's paper is that Europe's quest to destroy Africa's past, present and future was not entirely successful. Cloete then makes the argument that dance, specifically *the rieldans*, is an example of how colonialism failed, and or rather continues to fail. Dance, argues Cloete, "preserves the records of the past and embodies the promise of the present to the future", so then the Black body is the "repository and collection facility". Looked at this way the Black performative body is a preserver of history, it opens and gives a language to centuries of traditions and cultures not yet or unable to be corrupted by colonialism. I think Cloete's argument, more or less, shares the same likeness as Bibi Bakare – Yusuf's (1999) argument in her essay: "*The economy of Violence: Black Bodies and the Unspeakable Terror*". Bakare – Yusuf argues that the unimaginable bastardisation of Black bodies has no referentiality in this external world. Violence on the Black is language-destroying. Black pain has no voice; it is a mute motherfucker that eats every day the bodies of brown objects (emphasis added). Bakare – Yusuf is much more interested in the non – availability of the grammar of suffering of Black bodies. She argues that for White people to identify as White and Human, violence toward the Black is necessary. The White torturers captive of Black voice confirms his/her power and existence in the world and the Black's non – Humanity and thus non-existence (emphasis added). Using a Foucauldian analysis she holds that where there is power there is also resistance. Bakare – Yusuf reads Hortense Spillers 'flesh' concept to argue that the body always remembers and that it produces resistance and disruption to violence. Spillers in *Mama's Baby Papa's Maybe* (1987) argues that the Slave, here synonymous with Black, is an estranged body, a degendered body. The argument is that slavery through its violent machinery made a 'theft' of the body thus resulting in splitting it from its 'motive will' and its 'active desire'. She draws a distinction between body and flesh and this is important in how she thinks about bodies that are captive and with those that are liberated. Alexander Weheliye (2014) also argues along these same lines describes it as such: "the flesh thus operates as a vestibular gash in the armor of Man, simultaneously a tool of dehumanization and a relational vestibule to alternate ways of being that do not possess the luxury of eliding phenomenology with biology. Not an aberration, yet excluded, not at the center of being but nevertheless constitutive of it, the flesh is 'that

ether, that shit that make your soul burn slow’ as well as a modality of relation” (34). For Weheliye, though, the flesh remembers, as dance also remembers for Cloete.

The well – known and celebrated South African playwright, author and poet Gcina Mhlope during the 2018 Heritage month celebration gave a public lecture at the Nelson Mandela University titled: *Bones of Memory: In Pursuit of Cultural Heritage*. In a somewhat similar articulation to Cloete, Mhlope argues that African heritage is necessary for South Africa’s identity, dignity and even sanity. Following South Africa’s long and ghastly history of Apartheid and colonialism, that still linger to the present, our culture has, or rather is, an “intangible heritage” that needs to be preserved and these heritages bear testament that Africans, and South Africans in particular, have been liberating themselves through their rich and cultural heritage ingrained in music, among other things. This is what Mhlope means by ‘bones of memory’. These bones carry in them a long knowledge of ourselves. To add another note to this, Mhoze Chikowero, a native of Zimbabwe and an associate professor of history at University of California Santa Barbara in his 2015 book also makes a similar case about music. Chikowero is interested in the role music, and generally Black aesthetic performances such as dance, play in the shaping of African identities among people living under colonisation, more specifically, for him, in colonial Zimbabwe. For Chikowero, European colonial rule, through its many machinations, such as Christian missionaries, tried to manipulate the African experience of music. He writes: “colonists rationalized their harnessing of cultural expression, particularly music, as a weapon to undermine African sovereignty and, on the other, how Africans similarly deployed their musical cultures to tell their own stories, reclaim their freedom, and reconstitute their being” (2). So the colonialists, through Christian missionaries, attempted to destroy African cultures and identities, and this was of utmost importance in order to achieve their mission, and Chikowero argues that music and dance were the key components that were targeted. However, as Chikowero explains, these aesthetic performances were the driving force in the national identity of Zimbabwe and the opposition of minority rule. Regardless of the performance’s lyrical content and/or its context, what mattered is that the continuation of the performances created and strengthened an identity as well as a sense of self. So these performances are read as political. They existed in such a hostile political climate, encouraging this shared sense of African culture, whereas it was deplorable, and it thrived. Chikowero writes:

The musical context encapsulates the people's shared cognitive forms and societal values, and their associated behaviors and underlying moral codes and concepts (Ngugi 1997, 11). Music is a vector of communication not only amongst the living, but also between the living and the world of the ancestors, *nyikadzimu*. This cosmological essence constitutes the music's sacrality and power. It is therefore not surprising that music became deeply involved in the battle of cultures that characterized the colonial encounter, with the colonists seeking to conquer indigenous knowledge in order to disarm a people who had deployed their cultures not only to resist evangelization, but also to fight the imposed alien political order (1).

Many of the musical forms and dance accompaniments Chikowero is referencing are indigenous performances. Similar to Cloete's indigenous *rieldans*. However Chikowero does acknowledge that many of the performances, especially those in the townships, are influenced by various cultures, both indigenous and western. But the fact that the colonised people never lost their sense of performance, amidst the harsh colonial rule, bears testament that colonialism did not/or does not, take everything. The song then becomes an instrument for protest, a "weapon", as Chikowero argues, that "'Africans drew to elaborate their self – liberation" (18). Chikowero argues that, yes indeed, there was a catastrophe; however there was not a comprehensive and extensive cultural erasure. He further argues that this can perhaps be attributed to the demographic location, the southern part of Africa, owing to the fact that there was never a complete demographic collapse like other parts of the world. So whereas Fanon, as he explains, 'fetishizes' the gun he again misunderstands the power and meaning of cultural armament in African philosophies and practices of self-liberation" (214). Africans, asserts Chikowero, were still able to deploy their cultures in the ultimate struggle for self – liberation. The song for us, according to Chikowero, is a constant companion. He further writes:

When the children went to the mission schools they took their songs, they took their foundational philosophical ideas to those mission stations. And when they were marching — they marched every morning — the songs that they sang were often in their own languages, or rearranged to sound like they were singing about Jesus and 'civilization.' Sometimes when they sang about Jesus they were still singing music that actually protested the new system of the oppressors — 'the people without knees' —

a reference to Europeans' forcing Africans to labor for them as if they did not have knees. They came to this country and forced us into slavery and all these things (244).

Closer to home, Coplan in *In Township Tonight* writes (2007) that “[Black] performance is a form of agency that is both instance and expression of social action” (6). In the final chapter, where he is trying comment on participation in city life occasioned by popular culture, he writes:

In a short time entire alternative social realities took shape, as a powerful defence against the identities that apartheid ideology attempted to impose. In performance as in sport, a good offence is the best defence, and the authorities found the new black city culture offensive indeed. Performers were among the most active participants in shaping these alternative realities, re – ordering expressive elements and learning new compositional procedures to create distinctive local styles for the accordion, autoharp, violin, guitar, or jazz orchestras, and township vaudeville and theatre. In these ways, the flow of creative effort has been channelled into the production of maps of meaning that reimagined and then ultimately transformed the landscape of power (401).

Then these Black musical and cultural practises for these writers are read as this humanistic hopeful ‘resistance.’ Kwaito, I would like to argue in this paper, is a township genre and an aesthetic movement that operates as a form of fugitivity. Kwaito displays; puts on show and unveils the quotidian and banal subjectivity of Black township life in South Africa, and so re – engendering the township as a private space. Kwaito is an incessant movement that refuses this position of marginality, however it does not assume that it can enter into the public realm. My thinking draws on Black theorists who have used this concept of fugitivity (Fred Moten, 2009), however here I’m reading Tina Campt’s (2012) work on photography and how it participated in identity formation in a hostile Nazi – German era, especially her 2014 paper *Black Feminist Futures and the practice of Fugitivity* [given as a lecture and the paper unpublished]. For Campt fugitivity means the practices of those who “cannot or do not remain in the proper place, or the places to which they have been confined or assigned”. It is about the “everyday practices of refusal, resistance, and contestation...” counter to “the very premises that have historically negated the lived experience of Blackness as either pathological or exceptional to white supremacy” . My reading of this Black music, kwaito, as fugitivity is then in opposition to these previously cited texts.

Trompies – Malabulabu (2009).

I want to spend some time looking at some of the kwaito lyrics, as well as some of its performative practices: the “everyday practices of refusal, resistance, and contestation” (Campt), the spoken language part of it: the Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho, and the clothing aspect of it, the Pantsula wear. This is in order to demonstrate on why I hold the position of my reading of kwaito as a practise of fugitivity. “Demonstrate rather than assert” as my supervisor advises.

It is important to grasp and appreciate the circumstances that form the setting for kwaito songs. Without these we cannot fully understand this performance and will constantly ran into the error of dismissing it as most academics and middle class intellectuals have. Peterson reminds us once more that “the meaning of songs does not solely reside in their lyrical content” (203 – 4). The series of events and changes in time, and moments play a significant role in the sonic performance. Peterson in his paper invites the British socio – musicologist and critic Simon Frith in helping him think through popular culture. According to Frith (as cited in Peterson, 2003) we shouldn’t ran into the common mistake of deifying lyrics. By doing so, argues Frith, we assess these lyrics as if they were poems without any reference to the music. These lyrics must however be treated as what he calls ‘speech acts’ or ‘modes of expression’ that is as words to be analysed in performance. Listening to music and its lyrics is a creative skill and perhaps even imaginative and to do so Frith proposes three things: “the words with their ostensibly independent semantic meaning; rhetoric, ‘words being used in a special, musical way, a way which draws attention to features and problems of speech’; and voices, words being spoken or sung in human tones which are themselves ‘meaningful’, signs of persons and personality” (204). Frith continues to argue that if we look at songs in this way we see that they are about their expression rather than about their ideas and/ or content. As with the genre he is analysing: pop music, he states that the songs occupy a position of “establishing the communicative situation as with communicating, and more to do with articulating a feeling than explaining it” (204). I find this approach refreshing and an invitation to think of kwaito in ways that move beyond the political and apolitical debate. Kwaito here is imagined as saying and meaning something to its consumers (both performers and receivers) and conveys emotions and experiences that typical grammar sometimes cannot properly articulate.

Spokes H with his song ‘*Peace Magents*’ from the album *Rafifi* (2010) pleads with the robbers, which he calls brothers: *Bafwetho*, not to take his life but rather his belongings, even down to his underwear. Such are the conditions of Black life that one’s life can be taken away just like that (Wilderson’s gratuitous violence?) even for something as unthinkable as underwear pants. 5 years earlier Brothers of Peace (B.O.P) on their song *Egoli* from the album *Kings of Kwaito* (2005) make similar assertions about violence and the precarity of Black life.

Mashamplani in his 1996 album *Lost 'N Found* has a song titled *Ratlala*, which translates to ‘playing’ from the Southern Sotho language, however can also mean ‘full’. Mashamplani in the song laments the conditions of the world, I would suppose his world, the township. “*Mathata thata a lefatshe lena*” which loosely translates to: the problems of this world are too much – to bear. Mashamplani continues: “*Lom ’hlaba uya hlaba*” meaning this world thorns. This is an obvious stating of the facts. The song continues with him ‘crying’ and laughing about this: “*Hehehe hohoo*”. There is no space in the song where he posits a liberatory gesture, a hopeful transcendence of the problems of the world, the problems of being Black. *Sibhodlindlala sonke* in the ghetto (we’re all suffering in the ghetto) and one can only laugh and cry about it as Mashamplani does.

Dr Mageu in *Otla Fella Kae* asks a question: *Celukbuza?*

Hey man celukbuza

Umuntu o fana nam umcindezala kanjani? (x2)

Ngoba ma uthi uvala la

Ngi vula le

Uthi uvala le

Ngi vule la

Nja seng la, khona la, uzong thola kwa phalafala

Kwa phalafala, uzong thola kwa phalafala

Where do you think you will end up with your entices? How do you suppress a person like me? Dr Mageu asks, he is a hustler, even though *usatani* (satan) (I’d like to read this as general anti – Blackness) is always causing him pain: *Sonke le skathi man, satani u loko uyanglinga, Hey uyangyekha*, he is a fugitive always on the run, even though this running borders on nothing but failure, and Dr Mageu knows this, as one of his

colleagues in the song sings: *Uyazi mfana yase mzini mangabe bayas'hlula ek'jiki sisebenzisa intsimbiyomlungu* (You know my brother if it fails we'll use the gun). The 'if', '*mangabe bayas'hlula*', in the speech expresses uncertainty, a condition of doubt, like not knowing that one might fail or that *usatani* will get them, however for now: *Uthi uvala le, Ngi vule la*. Always trying, always a fugitive trying.

However, I admit, in the songs I just cited, there is a hint of trying to elaborate Blackness in a fashion that Wilderson warns against, of an understanding of suffering through the grammar of exploitation and alienation. But some go beyond this, for example Zola 7, whose name is a combination of the famous or infamous Soweto Township Zola and the number 7 believed to represent completeness and has a significant value in the Bible. In his song *Don't Cry* from his 2004 album *Bambatha* Zola takes on the character of a recently died person who consoles the living/left behind or better yet 'the dead' living. "*Cel' usul' izinyembez 'ungakhali*" (please wipe your tears don't cry). *Bhu!!!*

Kwaphinde kwaw' umatrass,

Nak' amajimbosi enza umama umfelokazi

Wakhala wakhabakhaba waphalaz' igazi

Khinxi pho! pho! pho!

Majimbos ekasi,

Bamchith' amapop corn agcwal' istrat

Sodibana boguluva lapho nidonsa majazi

Izihlobo, izelamani nabu nobufakazi

Kulelindoda emadodeni umfana kithi syamazizi

Zola, like other kwaito artists, Spokes H and B.O.P, recognises the deep intimacies between death and Blackness, that as a Black body death is always waiting for you, it can happen at any time. "The Black body magnetises bullets" Wilderson once remarked in a lecture.

Stress iphilisi nogavin

Kwenzaboguluva banukwelwe igazi,

Look I had a choice ukuth ngblome emakhishin,

Forget this life kumele kude ngbali mali, but I couldn't inkaba yami iseke ekasi

It breaks my heart ngbonolov' emakhoneni

Kusho kona ukuthi imisebenzi ayitholakali

Kumanzi imicamelo abomama ngezinyembezi

In this section Zola reminisces about wanting to leave the township and staying in the city, to become a worker *emakhishin* but he couldn't, so he remained in the township where he was eventually killed: *Kumanzi imicamelo abomama ngezinyembezi*.

Zola's description of the Township and Black life is bare and leaves nothing behind. Violence is the norm and everyone is a criminal: *So fuck this lyf*

udarkie uhlal' emikhukhwini

Young black and gifted

Sesgcwele masyleni

Day after day sobalahl' emathuneni

Ishisa ngaphakathi nalengom' ivuzigazi (Zola 7).

However moments like these in kwaito are rare, kwaito is not popular for its expressive lyricism (again the political versus apolitical/mature versus immature kwaito debate), the one liner chant kwaito songs overwhelm the 'political/mature' kwaito and it is this kwaito that most interests me. The 'expressive kwaito' is important and as I have tried to show has moments where it grapples with the paradigmatic structures and the ontological vacuity of Blackness, however in the main my argument on kwaito as a fugitive practice lies with the so called one liner immature kwaito. There is something about the refusal of laws, respectability and categories in "immature Kwaito" that I find appealing. It makes sense. One does not preoccupy oneself with the building of a home when s/he is always on the run. What one does, I suppose, is care about the body – what it eats, drinks, wears, etc. the "hedonistic" character of kwaito must not be quickly dismissed as something useless and apolitical but rather I challenge anyone who would listen to read it as a strategy of survival.

I'm reminded of the African–American rock guitarist, singer, and songwriter Jimi Hendrix of 'The Jimi Hendrix Experience' when he once remarked that "If I seem free, it's because I'm always running". The one liner chant is a technique that all those in the private space understand and share. "*We Godoba*" – cyborg move your skeleton - (Mandoza, 2001).

Kwaito, especially the old kwaito, the one that is assumed to be apolitical (the “immature kwaito”), is, I argue, profoundly political. This kwaito is rooted in the old idea of escaping. This kwaito is a language in search of ‘paradise’, an other world, an alternative to South Africa. It is self-medication in an anti-Black South Africa/world. Steingo (2005) has written about kwaito’s refusal to be political as a form of politics in and of itself, an opposition to politics. He writes “kwaito [the so called apolitical one] represents a radically new politics which negates politics. So-called apolitical kwaito, then, is music that represents the refusal of politics” (342). Steingo uses this category of the political to mean, I assume, a clearly defined set of beliefs and principles or ideologies that challenge the state or engages with the social and lived realities of the people concerned (I’m being pedestrian in my description), though, I have to state, he does admit to be using these concepts (political and apolitical) as a deployment of “strategic essentialism”, just conventionally so, and he here borrows from Gayatri Spivak (1996) to do so. I agree with this definition of apolitical as political, however I also find this limiting. Steingo’s theorisation married with that of Camp, I believe, does better to conceptualise kwaito. When thought of in this way kwaito is then an aesthetic running in search for an other world (flight), however still in the township/the ghetto. It remains still in the private and sounds out its dreams, even if they are impossible to reach, they are sought out nonetheless. Moten, in *Stolen Life* (2018), while thinking and writing about Amiri Baraka, among others, in a particular period in his life writes: “Fugitivity, then, is a desire for and a spirit of escape and transgression of the proper and the proposed. It’s a desire for the outside, for a playing or being outside, an outlaw edge proper to the now always already improper voice or instrument” (149). This is kwaito. I’m reminded of the (in)famous masked kwaito musician known as Mzekezeke. The mysterious kwaito artist, always in a balaclava and overalls, was most active between 2002 and 2007. Before overalls were used by politicians as some sort of symbolic for the Black working class, Mzekezeke was rocking them, every day and everywhere. Mzekezeke was characteristically vulgar and eroded a politics of respectability, even going as far as ‘disrespecting’ politicians and the sitting president. Surprisingly what many considered a gimmick was the most popular thing in South Africa. On radios, television shows, newspapers, and award ceremonies, Mzekezeke dominated. The ghetto understood the gimmick because it looked and sounded like them. Mzekezeke’s performance was a creative practice of refusal, his guluvanness and township artistic was a practice that undermined the continuous hegemonic category of Apartheid that only, and can only, produce and reproduce violent conditions for Black life.

Angeke ungikhunfeme ngoba ngiyi pantsula for life

Akhekho nzima ukhubona ukhuthi ngiyi pantsula for life

Ngamayi unyekhe ngoba ngiyi pantsula for life

No mamam uyasho ukhuthi ngiyi pantsula for life

Baningi abafana nje ngami

Baningi abagqoka nje ngami

Baningi abo don't care

Bazokutshela where do get off nje ngami

Baningi aba ngema ndaba nje ngami

Bayasiphilela

Bayas'hlanganisela

Abanye abo hlomo hlasela

So ibekesise kahle lento ukuthi vele ayijiki lento

Mina managenge together as one

Pantsula for life

Kabelo – Pantsula For Life (2003).

Tsotsitaal, a combination of two words, tsotsi from the Sesotho language meaning a thug or robber and taal from the Afrikaans language simply meaning language. Iscamtho or Isicamtho on the other hand, a Zulu word that combines, again like Tsotsitaal, two words, the isiZulu prefix 'isi-' that represents language and the isiZulu word ukuqamunda meaning to talk too much. Tsotsitaal has a base language of Afrikaans with a mix of different South African languages and was most prominent in the 1940s and 1950s while Iscamtho is based on different South African languages and has no definitive base however IsiZulu and Sesotho are the most popular languages in Iscamtho. Both of these languages (Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho) are associated with criminality and rebellion. They are an enduring work of language mixing, code switching and of coining terms. At first Tsotsitaal was a language of thugs and they would use the language to conceal secrets in it (only they could understand it), but later young people caught on to it and it became a reputable sign of rebellion against the Apartheid state and general respectability politics. The Apartheid government introduced Afrikaans as the only medium of instruction in schools after *The Bantu Education Act of 1953*

and the young people took to the streets to protests this language imposition, with the state responding violently, leading to 176 deaths, many injuries and countless young people leaving the country ‘illegally’ to receive military training. Many young people also abandoned Tsotsitaal for Iscamtho as they wanted nothing to do with Afrikaans, however many of the Tsotsitaal words can be found in Iscamtho. Regardless Iscamtho also had the power to conceal speech like Tsotsitaal and existed in a time when language mixing, even of different South African languages, was against the law. Much is written on this and for a full reference see: Ndabeni (2018), Ntshangase, (2002) and Slabbert and Myers-Scotton (1996).

It is after Iscamtho, many times referred to as Tsotsitaal, I guess because it sounds attractive to call it that, that kwaito finds expression and popularity. Tsotsis, as kwaito adherents sometimes call themselves, weave their message in kwaito songs and culture and only those that are followers of the genre and culture can understand it. This is about trying to exist outside of the popular, embracing the thug symbol and transgressing the hegemony of Whiteness. In the biographies of once prisoners [eg. Mandela (1994), Maharaj (2007)] we’re told of how they used different clandestine techniques to get their messages across. Mandela and Winnie used to weave protest and struggle messages in speeches about gardening and vegetation, among others, and Mac wrote and distributed letters he wrote with secret ink, milk, and these were not detected by the authorities until it was too late. Mac even managed to hide and smuggled out of Robben Island Mandela’s book *Long Walk to Freedom* for it to be published outside the country. These prisoners found ways to communicate much like the tsotsis of kwaito do in their music. The township is a prison and a game of chance, a cursed space, a form of incarceration with no escape, so hence fugitivity is the practice of the tsotsis of kwaito. When Zola sings in a heartfelt song titled *Tumbling Down* from his 2011 Album *Unyezi* that ... *but I’m a Black man uyazi unghuma ekasi I’ll always be guilty*, translation: but I’m a Black man, you know I’m from the township, I’ll always be guilty. He understands the that Black always already signifies being an outlaw.

Kwaito is a system of communication, a grammar and a practice of these outlaws. It does several things: hides meaning in plain sight, much like parables, and disrupts language as well as ‘proper’ musical conventions.

Amatekamatsha labantwana bathi zonke

Ama VK abantwana ngithi zonke,

The good life, the good food Zonke

ngizfuna zonke

Ngizfuna zonke

Kabelo – Zonke (2005).

“Clothes are a very key, very complex aspect of African cultures. I do not remember a time in my life where I was not aware of the power of clothes and what they can communicate... fashion is an instrument to communicate personal, race, class, gender and identity politics” writes Esinako Ndebeni in *Born to kwaito* (2018:93).

There was once an old man on campus, probably in his 40's, who always wore overalls. Me and my friends thought he was one of the cleaners, but he sometimes carried with him books and would occasionally be seen in public debates and lectures, something that the cleaners at Wits don't do. So this was bizarre. We approached the grey bearded man wearing overalls to get his story, and he told us that he is a PhD student in political sciences working on Kierkegaard. I had no idea what Kierkegaard was about just that I thought that he was 'deep'. The man in question would later, together with the students, shape the course of the Fees Must Fall students' movement on campus. As he walked away after our 'ambush' one of us shouted, "hey sir, we didn't get your name" and he turned and politely responded "oh, my name is Lwazi, Lwazi Lushaba". Here was an academic in 'a former White' elite university, where people enter its gates with the hope of entering the ranks of the bourgeoisie, wearing blue-collar workman's wear 'performing' proletarianness. Lwazi, unknowingly or otherwise, managed to get a few admirers on campus and they would be seen wearing overalls like him calling themselves radicals. I always thought that all this was reactionary, but I understood the symbolism behind it and sympathised with them. I wondered why anyone would wear this dehumanised existential condition, the condition of poverty as a sign of Blackness, as Tendayi Sithole puts it in *Steve Biko: Decolonial Meditations of Black Consciousness* (2016), as a fashion item. South Africa, a country where the Black is constructed as the blue-collar working poor and the White as white-collar rich, or simply rich, to take a page from Steve Biko's "Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity" in *I Write What I like* (2004:107):

Being part of an exploitative society in which we are often the direct objects of exploitation... We are aware that the blacks are still colonised even within the borders of South Africa. Their cheap labour has helped to make South Africa what it is today. Our money from the townships takes a one-way journey to white shops and white banks, and all we do in our lives is pay the white man either with labour or in coin. Capitalistic exploitative tendencies, coupled with the overt arrogance of white racism, have conspired against us. Thus in South Africa now it is very expensive to be poor. It is the poor people who stay furthest from town and therefore have to spend more money on transport to come and work for white people; it is the poor people who use uneconomic and inconvenient fuel like paraffin and coal because of the refusal of the white man to install electricity in black areas; it is the poor people who are governed by many ill-defined restrictive laws and therefore have to spend money on fines for “technical” offences; it is the poor people who have no hospitals and are therefore exposed to exorbitant charges by private doctors; it is the poor people who use untarred roads, have to walk long distances, and therefore experience the greatest wear and tear on commodities like shoes; it is the poor people who have to pay for their children’s books while whites get them free. It does not need to be said that it is the black people who are poor.

To this day it still puzzles me as to why Lwazi, and he still does, wears overalls. Why he deliberately choses to wear this condition of dehumanisation. Perhaps, I think, the Kierkegaard man fully understands the implications of this, the same way the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) parliamentarians do, and the same way Amapantsula – the kwaito aficionados do.

Amapantsula are known for their distinctive dress style: the stylised overalls/workman wear, Converse All Star sneakers and ispoti (bucket hat). They, much like Lwazi, deliberately wear this uniform as a symbol against respectability politics and as a grammar of their socio-economic condition. They “embraced the savagery” as Athi Joja – in the film – would like us to do. I want to go back to that tsotsi called Mzekezeke and his performative practices.

My supervisor wrote to me saying “I find Mzekezeke fascinating for example. Fugitivity is about always being an outlaw, and Mzekezeke performs that just brilliantly – always masked, like a fugitive, an outlaw, in his orange jumpsuit which can be read as either a work overall, but is probably (in being orange) most legible as a prison uniform”. I couldn’t have said it better. My friend Esinako Ndabeni writes about the

overall and prison wear of Amapantsula and Mzekezeke that “the relationship that Black South Africans have with incarceration is a complicated one due to the deliberate and often indiscriminate jailing of Black people by previous governments. The conditions of systemic, racialized poverty undoubtedly facilitated the resort to criminal activity. It is therefore undeniable that drawing on images of jailed Black persons became a political statement of resistance and solidarity” (2018:99). I would add to Esinako’s argument that this still continues today under the current government. South Africa is the incarceration capital of Africa and 8th in the world according to the International Centre for Prison Studies (www.prisonstudies.org), and we don’t have to ask about the colour of these prisoners, they are obviously not White. I don’t think I would be reaching if I said this trend is global in scope. Blacks are in prison because they are always already constructed as guilty. In any case, to repeat myself, the township is a prison and a game of chance, a cursed space, a form of incarceration, with no escape, so one might as well dress the part. And this is exactly what Amapantsula did. Fugitivity is the name of the dance and kwaito is its tune.

Emzala sekumoshakele

Sangena thina amavulindlela

Sashaya isithubu kwa zwakala

Sangena thina amavulindlela

Sayifaka lento kwa thulu’msindo

Sangena thina amavulindlela

Sashaya isithubu kwa zwakala

Sangena thina amavulindlela

Sayishaka lento kwa thulu’msindo

Tshisa

Sayivulindlela kwa zwakala

Tshisa

Sayifaka lento kwa thulu’msindo

M’du Masilela – Chomi Yabana (1999)

I’m reminded of the Black Consciousness Movement philosophy and its ‘inward looking’ process of unlearning or seeking to change the wrongs that the Black people have internalised, a program for Black

people by Black people, a cultural enterprise that involves aesthetics that seek to ‘pump back life into the Black person’s empty shell’. Can this ever be possible? I guess most of the texts I’ve cited thus far in this paper agree, and/or imagine that Black music is a crucial aesthetic that can forge existence out of ‘the private space’, or out of social death, to invoke the Afro–Pessimist schema. “The gun against the drum” Coplan remarks in *In Township Tonight* “and the drum won” (2007:3). As I have previously argued and using kwaito as an enquiry, I’m sceptical about this. Kwaito in this paper is read as a fugitive practice. Fugitivity does not necessarily mean redemption, or the possibility thereof. It does not also mean that it can convincingly challenge the post 1994 South African political dispensation, and actually triumph at it, as most of the theorists covered in this paper would like us to believe. There are moments in kwaito where it seems to pose critical questions that are “dedicated to the understanding of beings whose humanity has been called into question or challenged”, to use Lewis Gordon’s (2008:13) words. However can posing a question or challenging, or even just the mere existence of this rebellious and outlaw music, ever be enough? Or put differently, can music, in this instance kwaito, be a space for Black radical performativity?

Baas!

Say nee!

Baas!

Don't call me Kaffir

Arthur Mafokate – kaffir (1995).

“When a group comprised primarily of African-derived “people”—yes, the scare quotes matter—gather at the intersection of performance and subjectivity, the result is often not a renewed commitment to practice or an explicit ensemble of questions, but rather a palpable structure of feeling, a shared sense that violence and captivity are the grammar and ghosts of our every gesture.” (Frank Wilderson, 2009: 119).

Whether the name of the movement is from a bygone 1950/60 Sophiatown gang: Amakwaitos or a derivative of the Afrikaans word kwaai, which translates to “angry” in English, regardless, the name kwaito when spoken and its memory invoked becomes “imbricated in the syntax and morphology of structural violence” (119), to use Wilderson’s words in *Grammar and Ghosts* (2009). I cannot, for the life in me, overlook the violence that clings to the meaning of the word, however, regardless of its origins; the name cannot escape

the conditions of its existence: violence. For Wilderson violence on the Black, whether be the violence of the event – the capturing of slaves for the ‘new world’ – or the continuation of that capture, is a ‘grammar of emergence and being’. Violence conditions the Black. This is the first premise. Kwaito then is haunted by this ‘ghost’ – the memory of dispossession.

If you have been reading this paper closely, you might have noticed that I capitalise the words Black and White. I borrow this method from Wilderson and I find that it is a consistent method to be able to theorise these ‘positions’. I left this out deliberately until the end because I wanted to schematize properly the scholarship on Kwaito and/or musical cultural creations and performances on their own terms before attempting a project of critique. Wilderson in his magnum opus, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (2010) states:

I capitalize the words Red, White, Black, Slave, Savage, and Human in order to assert their importance as ontological positions and to stress the value of theorizing power politically rather than culturally. I want to move from a politics of culture to a culture of politics. Capitalizing these words is consistent with my argument that the array of identities that they contain is important but inessential to an analysis of the paradigm of power in which they are positioned (23 – 24).

For Wilderson the Black and the White are articulated by two different grammars of suffering. Black people are positioned by gratuitous violence, as opposed to violence being contingent upon transgression. The violence that subsumes Blacks is a paradigmatic necessity, whereas for White people violence is experiential, a “performative contingency” (Wilderson, 2010:4). Whites, argues Wilderson: are “constituted by discourse and disciplined by violence when s/he breaks with the ruling discursive codes” (Wilderson, 2010:4). Wilderson further argues that the Black is a Slave, from birth he/she comes into the world to service Whiteness, the Black is natively alienated, meaning that the Black person is isolated from the protections and support assigned by kinship and community, and that the only one and ‘legitimate,’ socially recognized relationship, for them is that of the master/slave, and as such because of this the Black suffers an ontological death or social death. Fanon also notes that Blacks are dispossessed of being, and as a result they suffer differently to Whites.

Jared Sexton, Wilderson's co-theorist, in *'The Social life of Social Death: On Afro-pessimism and Black-optimism'* (2011), challenges us to think more deeply about what other theorists call an "originary displacement". For Sexton and Wilderson, slavery is this originary. However this slavery he talks about is not the slavery that we might normally think it to be, the slavery of the ancient world (ancient political system) that existed in many parts of the world, including in Africa, the slavery he mentions here is the global invention of racial Blackness and the convergence of the private property regime in the 'New World'. For him slavery is the invention of Whiteness and anti – Blackness, which, he states, is a generalised non – Blackness. So then this is the transformation of freedom, in the New World, to mean something else: "economic value, political category, legal right, cultural practice, lived experience" (Sexton, 2011:17). The Black then is found to be barred from freedom, as essentially a Slave. He/she then exists to facilitate the renewal of the world, even though he/she is not of the world. The Black cannot be recognised by the world nor can it be incorporated. It is not a Human, only a sentient being (Wilderson). In *Red, White & Black* Wilderson puts it as such:

But African, or more precisely Blackness, refers to an individual who is by definition always already void of relationality. Thus modernity marks the emergence of a new ontology because it is an era in which an entire race appears, people who, a priori, that is prior to the contingency of the "transgressive act" (such as losing a war or being convicted of a crime), stand as socially dead in relation to the rest of the world. This, I will argue, is as true for those who were herded onto the slave ships as it is for those who had no knowledge whatsoever of the coffles. In this period, chattel slavery, as a condition of ontology and not just as an event of experience, stuck to the African like Velcro. To the extent that we can think the essence of Whiteness and the essence of Blackness, we must think their essences through the structure of the Master/Slave relation.

Wilderson continues:

It should be clear by now that I am not only drawing a distinction between what is commonly thought of as the Master/Slave relation and the constituent elements of the Master/Slave relation, but I am also drawing a distinction between the experience of slavery (which anyone can be subjected to) and the ontology of slavery, which in modernity (the years 1300 to the present) becomes the singular purview of the Black. In this period, slavery is cathedralized. It "advances" from a word which describes a

condition that anyone can be subjected to, to a word which reconfigures the African body into Black flesh. Far from being merely the experience of the African, slavery is now the African's access to (or, more correctly, banishment from) ontology (Wilderson, 2010: 18).

Patrice Douglass and Frank Wilderson (2013) in *The Violence of Presence: Metaphysics in a Blackened World* think through Elaine Scarry's meditations on the centrality of violence and its despotic power to destroy the subject's metaphysical capacity. Scarry is interested in pain, particularly the pain in acts of mutilation and or torture and how it attempts to annihilate metaphysical presence. The kind of pain scarry mentions is, in the most physical pain, and how, as she argues, inexpressible. This pain is *mimetic of death*. Douglass and Wilderson then borrow this to make parallels between Blacks, however not assuming that all tortured beings are relational beings – as Scarry does. For Douglass and Wilderson, the Black is without any relational capacity even before he/she is tortured (enters the torture chamber), however they all agree that the violence of torture destroys the torture victim's capacity to know itself as a relational being, but for Blacks, because they are not relational beings, they are always already tortured; already victims of 'metaphysical violence'. Douglass and Wilderson put this as such: "We need to imagine metaphysical violence rather than a metaphysics that violence destroys. We need to think metaphysically through social death and the figure of the slave. There is no a priori connection between sentience and relation; no natural link between *feeling* and *world*" (Douglass and Wilderson, 2013: 122).

One may rightfully ask why today do we feel the need to make a 'dichotomous and essentialist pairing of Masters and Slaves' – of Blacks as Slaves and Whites as Masters? Wilderson (2011) points this out and clarifies it not through an empirical response, as would the social sciences. He is against this approach and argues that it rather mystifies than clarifies. "We would be forced to appeal to "facts," Wilderson notes, "the 'historical record,' and empirical markers of stasis and change, all of which could be turned on their head with more of the same" (10). This approach, where 'subjective dispossession' is reached through the reckoning of those "who sell labor power and those who acquire it" (10), where the grammar of suffering is exploitation and alienation cannot sow freedom for the Black. It does not properly articulate the position of the Black. Wilderson points out, echoing Sexton and elaborating him further, that forced labor in the slave system is not its constitutive element; rather the slave is such because he/she is "generally dishonored, perpetually open to gratuitous violence, and void of kinship structure, that is, having no relations that need be

recognized, a being outside of relationality” (11). Here Wilderson is thinking through Orlando Patterson’s seminal 1982 text *slavery and Social Death*. [“Slavery is the permanent, violent domination of natively alienated and generally dishonored persons” (Patterson 1982:13)]. Slavery then is de-linked from the forced labor that one is supposedly supposed to perform when captured, however possible and because of the position of the Black it unavoidably becomes so. If this is the case then the rubric of ‘gains and reversals’ becomes disappointingly limited. To summon Wilderson again: “slavery is and connotes an ontological status for Blackness; and that the constituent elements of slavery are not exploitation and alienation but accumulation and fungibility” (14).

Taking stock of Wilderson, and the Afro-Pessimist argument, what then do we make of Jacob Cloete’s *rieldans* where the Black body supposedly “embodies the promise of the present to the future” or of Gcina Mhlope’s *Bones of Memory* that suggests that Blacks have been liberating themselves through their rich cultural heritage ingrained in music or Mhoze Chikowero’s meditations on Black culture and sonic performativity where it is suggested that Black music is able to reclaim freedom, and reconstitute the Black being, or of kwaito , the ghetto lifestyle genre that is imagined to give a language to the “post-Apartheid” situation: Mandela’s so-called rainbow nation, or, as this paper claims, kwaito as a practice of fugitivity?

If structural violence removes Black people from the world – “no Slave is in the world” (Orlando Patterson, as cited in Wilderson, 2010:11)) –then one position holds that the solution to bring him/her back from it (freedom) lies in the restoration of Black humanity. However, as Afro-Pessimism argues, and this is impermissible, then what of the discourse that labours to locate Black life in Black music? If indeed the Afro-Pessimists critique, as Wilderson puts it:

the position of the Black is... a paradigmatic impossibility ... in the world, in other words, if a Black is the very antithesis of a Human subject, as imagined by Marxism and psychoanalysis, then his or her paradigmatic exile is not simply a function of repressive practices on the part of institutions (as political science and sociology would have it) (Wilderson, 2010: 9).

Is Black music ever enough? Can it, as the current scholarship currently identified as Black Humanism claims, “write scientific and disciplinary knowledge anew, as necessarily a human project” (Katherine McKittrick, 2015:31)? Can this avoid or embrace (as fugitivity) the abject dereliction of Blackness, David

Marriott's (cited in Sexton 2011) enquiry of "the question that remains, beyond the immediate negotiation even as it continues to loop back to it, is whether a politics, which is also to say an aesthetics, that affirms (social) life can avoid the thanatological dead end if it does not will its own (social) death" (9)?

Black performativity (i.e. Kwaito) then does not, *ipso facto*, have disruptive power. It is deprived of ontological resistance, to use Fanon words: "The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man" (Fanon, 1967: 90). What Jacob Cloete, Gcina Mhlope, Mhoze Chikowero, and even Bhekizizwe Peterson, to name a few, miss is that Black aesthetic creations, performativity, and or Black music, and indeed kwaito, is and always will be haunted by this sense of 'grammar and ghosts' (Wilderson, 2009).

My reading of kwaito as a fugitive practice takes into account this grammar and ghosts. Kwaito inaugurates a specific way of life and being in the world, a Blackened life, however this life is essentially one that is troubled: a fugitive life. This fugitivity is always already prescribed as a status, or experience of objecthood. Moten in *The Case of Blackness* (2008) explains fugitivity as

...movement in and out of the frame, bar, or whatever externally imposed social logic—a movement of escape, the stealth of the stolen that can be said, since it inheres in every closed circle, to break every enclosure. This fugitive movement is stolen life, and its relation to law is reducible neither to simple interdiction nor bare transgression. Part of what can be attained in this zone of unattainability, to which the eminently attainable ones have been relegated, which they occupy but cannot (and refuse to) own, is some sense of the fugitive law of movement that makes black social life ungovernable, that demands a para-ontological disruption of the supposed connection between explanation and resistance (179).

It might be argued that naming kwaito as a fugitive practice is not consistent (or reconcilable) with Afro-Pessimism's account of the inescapability of Blackness. This 'inconsistency' is, as I will show, needless. As previously noted earlier with my citation of *Stolen Life* and the one above, I agree with Moten's meditation of fugitivity, however I'm not convinced by its 'optimism'. I agree that Blackness, and *ipso facto* kwaito, is the *activity of escape*, however I do not embrace its affirmation. Moten describes his movement of fugitivity as "a stolen, transplanted organ always eliciting rejection" (2008: 185). I agree with this, Moten further argues that this movement (Blackness) is a "constant demand for an ontology of disorder, an ontology of dehiscence", that it is an 'ensemble always operating in excess of that ancient juridical formulation of the

thing” (2008: 186). And here Moten is in conversation with Fanon on his formulation of Blackness as a (supposedly) ‘pathologically impure object’. According to Moten Fanon posits a misrecognition of what Blackness is (186, 187). David Marriott in *Judging Fanon* (2016) also points out at the instability in Moten’s movement of fugitivity. For Marriott “if x is always escaping then it cannot be said to ever entirely escape...”(4) However Moten is hopeful, he is not a “pessimist”, Perhaps to bring in here his other work: in his much celebrated book: *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (2003) he challenges his teacher Saidiya Hartman on the (im)possibility of modes of radical Black performativity. For Hartman, any kind of Black radical performativity or subversive impersonation (I’m thinking of Homi Bhabha’s *Of Mimicry and Man* (1984) here) is always already immersed in the structure they would abscond. As stated previously, Moten does not believe this is so, or rather it is not always the case that it is and always will be the case. He believes that there is a space for possibility in which the ‘sonic substance’ that protests can be heard. This space lies in between multiple ends, such as between looking and being looked at, between enjoyment and being enjoyed, and here Moten is thinking through Hartman, which he (unfortunately) later departs from. This ‘space’ Moten refers to as ‘in the break’, a socio–spacial space where objects – Blacks, can, do and re – make themselves, or to use his words from a public lecture he gave years ago “to turn this motherfucker upside down”. I embrace this motherfucking of this motherfucker, however I do not embrace its belief that it can turn it upside down.

Marriott, thinking through Fanon to correct Moten, reminds us that there is a “permanent hemorrhaging of this black body which ultimately no art or politics can stem, precisely because in the movement of its history there are few categories that wish to touch it without being made dirty or hysterical” (2016: 7). Marriott points out that “Blackness has an essential relation to social death even when read optimistically” therefore it cannot be that we affirm this. So therefore Blackness and kwaito as fugitivity is death in life. This fugitivity is a ‘performance of a general critique of the proper’ (borrowing from Moten) and cannot escape its ontological positionality. To put it clearly, kwaito, as an aesthetic – political project cannot escape ontology. Kwaito as fugitivity is ‘lived social death’.

Marriott also argues that a reading of Fanon “begins effectively... with the inescapability of this *mort à bout touchant* [died after touching], with the always violent shock of its decrepitude, a lysis where the solidarity of self and language breaks down, neither of which permits a diagnosis of internal renewal however multiple

and dialectical”(10). Marriott is here pointing out the non–relationality of the Black and cautioning against Moten’s Black Optimism. Through an extensive reading of Fanon’s texts Marriott arrives at the conclusion that Blackness symbolises, or rather is, wretchedness and non – sovereignty, this he calls *antinomy* and this is so because it “implies that there is a form of death in life whose everyday struggle expresses a *décalage* or cleavage between sovereign life and black being” (14). However this life cannot be associated with the project of Humanism. “The Human need to be liberated *in* the world is not the same as the Black need to be liberated *from* the world” (Wilderson, 2011:33).

So then, even if we do not embrace Moten’s affirmation of Blackness as a movement of escape, at the end, and as Sexton notes that these two positions “relate through a set–theoretic difference rather than dialectical opposition” (32). So in a way, as Marriot shows, escape is an impossibility for the Black and Black Optimism does not yet want to embrace this blind spot, however it may be that “Afro-pessimism is “not but nothing other than” black optimism” (37) to quote Sexton. And this is so because, as Sexton puts it:

Afro–Pessimism remains illegible—and unduly susceptible to dismissal—without attending to the economy of enunciation that sustains it and to the discursive–material formation in which it intervenes. That discursive–material formation is global in scale, approximating the terms of “the anti–black world” (Gordon 2000), and that economy of enunciation resists the attenuation of black freedom struggle against the convergence of color blindness, multiracialism, and... “people of color blindness” (32).

As a way to conclude then, kwaito poses a challenge, a problem for Black life and how we come to theorise it. Kwaito then in a way is a work of understanding – that does not posit solutions; it is a movement of Afro–Pessimist meditation. A fugitive sonic meditation of the fact of Blackness. A radical critique of everyday ‘privatised’ Black South African life.

Post script: Reflection on the film *Ghetto Scandalous*

I arrived at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2014 to begin my first year in the social sciences. Having had a stint working for non-governmental organisations coming to study full time felt right. At the end of my first year as a student I then decided that I wanted to pursue a career in academia, though I think I always knew that this is what I wanted to do. I then got into a scholarship program that aims to support and increase the number of previously disadvantaged students in the academy. However as the years went by I soon became disillusioned with the academy and I wondered whether I had made a mistake in leaving the non-governmental space and trying to pursue a career in the academy. I fell in love with critical theory, however it seemed as if the academic audience was too small and that academics are, in the main, speaking to themselves.

I've always had a liking for images but I never thought about pursuing this any further, of doing something with this. I just liked good images and thought that they can tell many stories without saying too much. In 2016 I stumbled across a YouTube filmmaker by the name of Casey Neistat and I fell in love with his filmmaking style and his desire to tell stories. About the same time, by pure accident, I also came across a documentary film by Joshua Oppenheimer titled *The Act of killing* (2012) and by the end of the film I had resolved to also want to tell stories through images, but not only that to also forge a way for images to be used as bodies of theory. I then read about and watched many documentary films and that desire for the academy was lit once again.

This thesis project is a culmination of my efforts to theorise, not only for/to a select few in the academy, but to the 'general public' – outside of the academy. In my second year at university in a social theory course I learned about a German sociologist called Georg Simmel. I was not really interested in his ideas but, in retrospect, I liked how he challenged the norms of the academy with his approach to teaching. Simmel was an academic outsider and wrote for a general audience rather than academic sociologists of his time, something I see myself trying to emulate.

I bought a standard DSLR camera in late 2017 and took some footage to learn how to use the device. I had never before this used a camera or knew anything about editing software's and how to use them. This film is a product of experimentation, learning by doing; reading film theory, film practise and trying out what I had

just learned. During my research on film I fell in love with experimental filmmaking and the film project took that route, I was now making an experimental film. However about half way into the film I then wondered who would be the audience for such a project. Isn't the reason for this project trying to reach a wider audience? I had forgotten why I wanted to make a part of this project a film. I then abandoned the experimental route for something a public audience would not have a hard time with.

It took me roughly 6 months of shooting, also during that time I was tagging along with a journalist friend of mine covering her stories and I would use that time to work on the film. With the exception of two interviews with Esinako Ndebeni and Athi-Nangamso Esther Nkopo and some of the visuals that I use as transitions between interviews (and during the interviews to emphasise something was taken in Cape Town), all the footage was taken from Gauteng province and it ranges from protest events, to everyday Township and city life. All these are then strung together by interviews with artists, scholars, writers and the like who have done work on kwaito and/or Black performative practices.

I interviewed 14 people in total of which only 13 are in the film and the footage from the one interview I did with a scholar and musician from the Nelson Mandela University Dr. Glenn G. Holtzman was deleted from my camera. My interviews were semi-structured so the candidates had a bit of freedom to answer however they wanted to and I could ask them questions that I was not necessarily planning to. Each interview lasted for about an hour and thirty minutes (01:30). The original plan was to make the film no longer than twenty minutes (20) however when I was editing the film that proved to be very hard. The film as it stands is an hour and twelve minutes long (01:12). The people I interviewed (the contributors or cast, if you will) and are in the film are as follows:

Rangoato Hlasane

Sive Mqikela

Nkabinde Duma

Siyabonga Njica

Nhlanhla Ngqaqu

Kgafela Oa Mokgogodi

Esinako Ndabeni

Bhekisizwe Peterson

Athi Mongezeleli Joja

Esona Gewu

Athi–Nangamso Esther Nkopo

Mlondi Zondi

Tendayi Sithole

All of these people agreed to be in the film and understood its purposes and objectives. While I sent out many invitations to people to be in the film, these are the only ones that agreed, while others responded too late or not at all. I'm not really interested in debates about how many women are in the project, however I could not find many women to talk about the subject of the film (because maybe men have monopolised knowledge), and of the few I approached only two agreed and are in the film.

It would have also been great to have interviewed some of the 'original' (the OG's) of the kwaito generation. Your Trompies and Bongo Maffin's of this world, but the film project really had no budget and was financed entirely by myself using my scholarship money, and on top of this I was constantly chasing deadlines from the course work I was doing. Some of them were approached but unfortunately could not be in the film.

Editing was hard because I always felt like I was leaving important things out. I would have loved to make the film longer, perhaps a series of films instead of one? Perhaps some other time. I still have all the footage. The footage that made it into the film is based on compromise. I would watch all the footage I had for hours deciding on what to use and what I wanted my audience to get out of the film (what story I wanted to tell).

All the footage in the film was shot by me, with the exception of the one at the cemetery towards the end of the film; I shot it with the help of my friend Sumeya Gasa. Additionally I took footage of the Rhodes Must Fall protests from the movement's Twitter page and some clips from Sethembile Msezane's YouTube page. The works are used in a manner of fair practise that is not intended to infringe on the rights of the owners. I would have also loved to use old footage of kwaito performances but as previously stated there was no budget for the film and that footage is quite expensive, owned by big media companies.

The music in the film was produced by a friend of mine Mpho–Beat Gawd Peril. I just instructed him to produce kwaito songs, and what I got from him is what is in the film. Again because of the lack of funds and

copyright issues I was not able to use some of the kwaito records I love and felt would have added a great feel and emphasis to the film.

Although cinematography matters, I was not really interested in making an aesthetically beautiful film with great lighting, camera movements and other cinematic elements. So this was not a priority. I would often just shoot what was of interest to me and with interviews all I needed was my camera and my tripod. I knew a little about camera angles and overall cinematic language and I would sometimes try to use this knowledge in my filming, however as the film was experimental and I was learning as I go, this was not the main priority.

Film theory dictates that a narrative film is a pre-scripted film often with actors and a particular way of telling the story; it is a fictionalised piece of work. In a documentary film the script is written after shooting. The documentary film is said to capture reality as it happens. This is true, but I already had in mind a script, though not written down per se, other than notes from my thesis paper that I wanted to make known in the film through the people I interviewed, I had a feel of how I wanted the film to look. Even though this film is a 'documentary' with a touch of an experimental element to it, it is scripted and does not claim to be objective. The film is also, in the main, a conventional talking heads film and sometimes feels like a long lecture – The academy could not be fully escaped, however I imagine that this project is a work of fugitivity and the film does not also try to please everyone. It is the first of its kind in the sociology department (where a written text is accompanied by a film) and it is my wish that more students can approach theorisation differently. This is only the beginning.

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