

*Straight Outta Cape Town - The Negotiation and
Instantiation of Identity in Cape Town-Based Hiphop.*

A thesis submitted by

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Abstract

My thesis will illustrate how the work of Cape Town-based hip-hop group *Brasse Vannie Kaap* (translated to “Brothers of the Cape”) challenged the fixity of identity and social placement intended by apartheid ideology. BVK as they came to be known, were a collective of hip-hop performers active in the South African musical scene primarily between 1996 and 2007. Under the apartheid system of racial taxonomy the group's core members would have been considered “non-White” and more specifically, “Coloured.” This classification placed them at the midpoint of the tripartite racial scheme in South Africa. Socially and politically, Coloureds were regarded as “less than White, but more than Black.”

A lyrical and contextual analysis of selected tracks from the 2007 album *Ysterbek* (“Metal-mouth”), will demonstrate the extent to which BVK traversed these imposed boundaries. I argue that BVK, through their music, achieved three objectives: 1) they dissolved conceptions of essential “Whiteness” by their specific choice of vernacular language, 2) they promoted Coloured cultural practices in their lyrics, thereby legitimating a marginalized grouping, and 3) they destabilized notions of fundamental “Blackness” through political rhetoric. BVK embraced the resistive and instantiating ideologies of hip-hop, employing the discursive strategies of this musical genre to narrate their own personal histories.

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[T]he biggest contribution has been breaking down barriers, opening up doors for a new generation to come through and also influencing rappers that are out there today to rap in Afrikaans, because Cape Town's now got a big Afrikaans slash "dialect" movement going on...[I]...People are out there and they're doing the thing in their mother tongue or the language they feel comfortable with, expressing themselves with. I think that's what BVK has done and [I] also think that BVK's been the only successful hip-hop band in South Africa to be able to cross over to a completely different audience you know, and take over and headline big rock venues. It was unheard of, and it's something that has not been done I think, by any other hip-hop crew than BVK. In terms of those type[s] of accomplishments, that[s] obviously helped to open up doors and make people see hip-hop differently.

- Deon "Ready D" Daniels.

“Straight Outta Cape Town” - The Negotiation and Instantiation of Identity in Cape Town-Based Hip-hop.¹

Introduction

*Popular culture serves as an important means of defining individual identity - ethnic, racial, or otherwise - and the position of that identity relative to others. Especially in the culture of repressed minorities, these constructions reflect an opposition between conformity to dominant views of themselves and an assertion of their own.*²

In 1950 the implementation of two notorious policies by the apartheid government presaged the irrevocable alteration of South Africa’s social landscape, and (for the purposes of this study) the Western Cape region in particular. Under the Population Registration Act all South African citizens were categorized according to race resulting in the dichotomy of White and Black, but also the intermediary classification of “Coloured” for people determined to be of “mixed” racial heritage. The Group Areas Act further entrenched segregationist ideals through the forced removal and relocation of Coloureds to an area on the periphery of Cape Town known as the Cape Flats. Three years later, the Separate Amenities Act allocated segregated public facilities based on racial

¹Except when direct quotations are given, in this study I use a convention borrowed from Marcyliena Morgan: “I write the word “hiphop” without a space or hyphen. I do this for two reasons: first, the meanings of the words hip and hop are not related to the meaning of hip-hop culture; second I use the term to refer to both an art form and a cultural practice.”

Marcyliena Morgan, *The Real Hip-hop: Battling for Knowledge, Power, and Respect in the LA Underground* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 197.

² Robin D. Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afro-Cubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920 - 1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 8.

classification (one of numerous “petty apartheid” rulings), and by 1956 the Afrikaner-led National Party had managed to amend the constitution to remove Coloureds from the common voter’s roll completely.³ This calculated “distribution of individuals in space” was designed to systematically erode civil and psychological prerogatives. Thus in a series of distinctly Foucauldian moves the apartheid government succeeded in enclosing, partitioning, and ranking a considerable section of the country’s population.⁴ Although the legislative scaffolding of apartheid has ostensibly been dismantled, the repercussions of this system continue to permeate contemporary South African society. The racially and phenotypically based distinctions of White, Black and Coloured, are still in use as identity or cultural markers today - terms that cannot be divorced from the infamy of their historical origins.

Given this background, my thesis will illustrate how the work of Cape Town-based hiphop group “*Brasse Vannie Kaap*” (“Brothers of the Cape” or “BVK”) challenged the fixity of identity and social placement intended by apartheid ideology, by crossing racial, and geographical boundaries. BVK were a collective of hiphop performers active in the South African musical scene from 1996 up until late 2007, when they disbanded following the death of MC Ashley “Mr. Fat” Titus. Under the apartheid system of racial taxonomy all members would have been considered “non-White” and more specifically, “Coloured.” In this study I will present a lyrical and contextual analysis of selected tracks from the group’s final full-length album *Ysterbek* (2007), which contains their most emphatic pronouncements of social and cultural determinism.

³ For my immediate purposes, “Afrikaner” is the racial categorization for White South Africans of Dutch descent.

⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) 141-149.

On a number of levels, my work engages Bourdieu's description of *habitus* - that "system of durable, transposable dispositions" which compel the actor to think and respond in certain ways.⁵ The strictures of apartheid demanded a particular *habitus* for both its enforcers and recipients. "History turned into nature" established modes of conduct between racial groupings, collective cultural practices within those groupings, and also (in BVK's case) a resistance to the originating *habitus*. It is this circularity, indeed the "generative principle of regulated improvisations" integral to Bourdieu's theory that provides an inroad to understanding the cultural and compositional procedures of hiphop as well. Hiphop embodies what I would call "an aesthetic of reference." Samples, lyrical quotations, and in some cases the technology used to produce a work evoke nostalgic, and contextual resonances that have the potential to deepen the listening experience. These references would obviously not exist were it not for an historical precedent, a "diachronic *habitus*" perhaps, enacted via the "synchronic *habitus*" of contemporary performance. Moreover, the performer's status or accumulated capital rests on the skillful presentation of these references, which is constantly evaluated by an audience familiar with both the overt and veiled meanings of the script. Thus, the strategic use of ambiguity has the potential to either unify or separate an audience. The political implications for hiphop as a tool of resistance, subversion, and even underscoring commonalities between divergent groups, are clear.

This same propensity for *habitus* to change according to time and circumstance can be witnessed in the shift of political consciousness that accompanied Coloured resistance to apartheid laws. Despite its intention, the term "Coloured" does not refer to

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 78-95.

an homogenized grouping, but instead extends to a people of differing religious beliefs, socio-economic standing and most absurdly, given the “pigmentocratic” nature of apartheid, varying shades of skin coloration. The 1976 Soweto Uprising is widely acknowledged as having played a pivotal role in the contestation of the term, and the re-evaluation of identity by the individuals who fell under this assigned racial category.

On June 16, 1976, Black students engaged in a peaceful protest of the Afrikaans Medium Decree. This legislative proposal mandated Afrikaans - the language of the ruling White National party - as the language of instruction for core subjects up until seventh grade. In response, police fired on the students with live ammunition. Among the numerous objectives the decree sought to achieve, was the further estrangement of Black South Africans from the cultural prerogatives embodied in their own indigenous languages.

The Afrikaans Medium Decree simultaneously addressed the ideological threat that English posed to the apartheid worldview; considered a more “universal” language by many non-Whites and a link to the outside world, English was also a constant reminder of the colonial yoke from which *Afrikanerdom* had recently been emancipated. Following the Soweto Uprising – now commemorated as “Youth Day” - there was an increased ideological association of mixed-race non-Whites with the Black Consciousness movement.⁶ From this perspective, the tripartite racial organization of

⁶ In her recently published ethnography *Hip Hop Desis*, Nitasha Tamar Sharma connects the dots between minority groupings, hiphop, and Black Consciousness more explicitly. She explains how certain South Asians in America, subscribe to the politically enabling worldview of *global race consciousness*: “...historical processes that have shaped global racial formations...[that]...impact, for instance, the relationships between 'Asian' and 'Black' diasporas across national borders.” Thus race and specifically “Blackness” becomes a means of “thinking about and being in the world rather than a reference to an individual's biology or phenotype.” Hiphop as an historical expression of Black resistance - and by Sharma's estimation, Blackness - is embraced by Desis as an articulation of their own historical displacements and marginalizations.

“White-Coloured-Black” would be reduced to polarities of simply “White and Black.” Such a move could potentially have two outcomes: On the one hand the term “Coloured” could be rejected as a delineating construct of apartheid. Although this shift would reinforce the idea of immanent difference between imagined racial categories, agency and authority could be reclaimed from the dominant power. Conversely, acknowledging an affinity with Black South Africans would mean relinquishing the degree of relative privilege over this group, afforded by the categorization of “Coloured.” Refusing this latter option would imply a tacit approval of apartheid polity.

In *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough* (2005), Mohamed Adhikari examines the historical question of racial identity as it pertains to the South African Coloured community. He posits that although Coloureds were granted more political and social agency than Blacks, as a group they were nevertheless regarded from a position of inherent deficit. On the one hand, Coloureds were unable to meet their apparently fundamental aspirations of “Whiteness.” On the other, they were neither considered a truly indigenous people due to the commonly held perception that the Coloured race was an unfortunate result of “miscegenation” between Dutch settlers and slaves. Bearers of an ascribed racial identity, Coloureds literally found themselves in the midst of a three-tiered hierarchy of White minority dominance and Black majority subjugation. Their liminality was in fact confirmed and perhaps assured in the following statement by Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd. Addressing parliament in 1962 he opined: “One must distinguish between citizenship of a country...and the components of a homogeneous nation....There is no doubt that the Coloureds are citizens of this country. There is just as little doubt that

Nitasha Tamar Sharma, *Hip Hop Desis: South Asian Americans, Blackness, and a Global Race Consciousness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010).

they are *not* part of this homogeneous entity that can be described as ‘the nation’” (emphasis added).⁷

If political allegiance problematized the status and legal definition of Coloureds, these issues were further complicated by language. Afrikaans for example, was also the primary language of a large majority of Coloured South Africans, finding expression specifically within the Western Cape Coloured community as a vernacular form. This dialect of *Kaaprikaans* - an elision of *Kaap* meaning “Cape,” and Afrikaans - includes elements of English. A cursory (and wholly disingenuous) analysis, could interpret the use of Afrikaans in any form as a siding with one racial grouping over another. Similarly, the use of a variant form might be used to reinforce binary discourses of authenticity as opposed to negative connotations of derivation or “bastardization.”

Returning to Adhikari, it is the question of placement within South African cultural and racial spheres that forms the basis of his argument. Adhikari identifies four prevailing dilemmas in the formulation “the Coloured identity:” *the problem of assimilation* (the frustrated hope of being culturally and therefore politically accepted by the dominant power); *intermediary status* (standing in between and in transgression of government sanctioned “apart-ness”); *the negative associations of “Colouredness”* (indeterminate classification); and as a corollary to this last point, *a lack positive associations or conclusive “myth of origin”* (unlike White Afrikaners or indigenous Black groups in South Africa, Coloureds, Adhikari maintains, cannot lay claim to a definitive ancestry). While Adhikari’s conceptual framework is useful in assessing the historical challenges to claims of selfhood, his distinctions are problematic. By his own

⁷ V.A February, *Mind Your Colour: The ‘Coloured’ Stereotype in South African Literature* (London and Boston: Keegan Paul International, 1981), 10.

admission, Adhikari's study presents the "enduring characteristics" of Coloured identity: the relatively stable and "predictable parameters" within which a core identity functioned during apartheid rule and continues to function in the present day.⁸

The parameters that Adhikari describes however, consistently regard Coloureds from a position of deficiency and want; they only serve to perpetuate the notion of Coloureds as "less than" or "in desire of." Not only is "Coloured identity" presented as a monolithic entity, but also determined and evaluated by corresponding essentialist assumptions of White and Black identities. In fact, this viewpoint relies on misguided conceptions of racially "pure" White and Black lineages. By Adhikari's account, Coloureds are seen *in relation to* Whites and Blacks, and dispossessed of any agency in self-representation. Accordingly, the negotiation of identity by these actors either individually or collectively, is neither possible nor plausible.

In contrast, the collection of essays edited by Zimitri Erasmus (2001), calls for a post-apartheid "re-imagining" of Coloured identities.⁹ Erasmus' use of the plural form demonstrates that various types of identity are available for contemplation; the historic emphasis on racial identity can now be considered together with previously restricted enquiry along national, and socio-economic parameters. It also alludes to the inherent fluidity – the possibility for continuity and re-evaluation - of these formations. Her argument emphasizes the malleability of Coloured identity, as well as the cumulative processes through which various lines of origin (colonial, indigenous, and heterochthonous influences) have been "appropriated, translated and articulated." From

⁸ Mohamed Adhikari. *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2005), 6-7.

⁹ Zimitri Erasmus, "Introduction" in *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town*, ed. by Zimitri Erasmus (Cape Town: Kwela Books and South African History Online, 2001), 21.

this perspective, “[C]oloured cultural possessions and practices” can be identified and although not shared by all members of this grouping, they are sufficiently acknowledged to allow for the conception of “[C]olouredness as a distinct cultural form” (emphasis added). A more hopeful assessment than that proposed by Adhikari, one nevertheless encounters the following dialectical bind: throughout Erasmus’ volume, it is the same apartheid-era designation of “Coloured” that is used to describe the populace in question. Rather than confirm the implicit boundaries of this construct, the authors collectively seek to supplant prevailing negative associations and offer unexplored contexts for a term that has become entrenched in the social imaginary of South Africa.

In her introduction to *Coloured By History, Shaped by Place*, Erasmus uses the term “creolization” to describe those instances where cultural formulations have occurred under oppressive conditions:

Coloured identities were constructed out of fragmented cultural material available in the contexts of slavery, colonialism and cultural dispossession. This leaves their constructed and composite historical nature always evident and their dislocation always present. These are identities produced and re-produced in the place of the margin.¹⁰

Within the South African context “creolization” necessarily requires an active engagement on the part of the actor, for the instantiation and expression of discrete cultural prerogatives. It is therefore BVK’s conscious participation in the production of identity – that will be examined in my work. I propose that the group’s use of language

¹⁰ Erasmus, *Coloured*, 22-23.

(BVK rap exclusively in *Kaaprikaans*) and referential themes validate and legitimize the experiences of a disenfranchised and disregarded socio-cultural grouping by evoking a “sense of Colouredness.” BVK simultaneously engages conceptions of “Blackness” and “Whiteness” - negotiating parity with the former and an access to the “sealed” domain of the latter.¹¹ As such, the first chapter “Born African” is an exegesis of the album’s opening track, simply entitled “*Intro*.” A solo vocal performance by MC Deon “Ready D” Daniels (the producer and featured turntablist on *Ysterbek*), this piece describes BVK’s social and political outlook and foreshadows the thematic content of the entire album.

The second chapter, “Say it Loud,” addresses the notion of language sovereignty, and the relationship between language and nationhood. The track “*My Taal*” (“My Language”) challenges the commodification and portrayal of language as the exclusive domain of a particular cultural and racial group. This section explores the mutual affinities that varied groupings might claim with respect to one language, and the legitimacy of those claims.

“*Krap Kommentaar*” forms the basis of the third chapter, entitled “South African Dialogue,” and stands apart from the rest of the album as the only piece that does not feature a vocal contribution from one of the group’s numerous MCs. An entirely sample-based track, it features the work of Ready D in his capacity as turntablist. The direct translation of the title - “Scratch Commentary” - suggests that turntables can be used as a medium with which to offer “verbal” critique, but moreover implies that a sampled human voice is comparable in expressive power to that of a “live” human voice.

¹¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks: The Experiences of a Black Man in a White World* (New York, Grove Press, 1987)

Erasmus maintains that it is not only the content of cultural practices that demand inquiry, but also the contexts under which they were formed. The final chapter (“Local is *Lekker*”)¹² looks at the geographical and psychological space of the Cape Flats, the locus of BVK’s work, and deconstructs the tracks “*Hulle is Bang*” (“They’re Afraid”) and “Cape Flats.” Murray Forman (2002) investigates the degree to which spatial awareness/reference contributes to the construction and efficacy of hip-hop’s contextual and lyrical tropes. I agree with Forman’s contention that “place” and “space” can be considered as two independent entities. However, I postulate that the former might describe one’s physical environment, whereas the latter pertains to one’s philosophical and ideological relationship to the actual location. The example of the Cape Flats region is interesting in that both the “place” and the “space” were constructed through imposed legislation and later adapted to by its inhabitants.

In discussing “placement” I must also consider my own role as researcher within this narrative. My interest in the specific negotiation of Coloured identities, stems from my personal background of having grown up in Belhar - a suburb of the Cape Flats – and living in the United States for the past seven years. While my thesis is perhaps an exercise in “repatriating ethnography back home” to quote George Marcus,¹³ it is also cause for reflection on my own relative degrees of “outsiderness” and “insiderness” with regard to homes on both sides of the Atlantic.

¹² The Afrikaans word “*lekker*” translates literally to “nice” and is used to express a pleasurable experience. “Local is *Lekker*” is a common South African expression denoting regional or national pride.

¹³ George Marcus, *Critical Anthropology Now: Unexpected Contexts, Shifting Constituencies, Changing Agendas*, ed. by George Marcus (Santa Fe, N.M.: School of American Research Press, 1999).

My first encounter with members of BVK occurred in Cape Town in late 2005 when I participated in a turntable workshop facilitated by Deon “Ready D” Daniels, Enver “E-20” Peters, Shamiel Adams, and Ricardo “Azuhl” Nunes. Soon afterwards I returned to the States and during the 2009/2010 winter break, traveled back to Cape Town to carry out fieldwork for my thesis. Having re-established contact with performers via e-mail, I conducted in-person interviews with D, E-20, and Azuhl, as well as Adam Haupt, professor of film and media studies at the University of Cape Town, and prominent hiphop scholar. My interview with Emile “Emile YX?” Jansen, frontman of the Cape Town-based group “Black Noise,” was conducted exclusively via e-mail.

To conclude: *Ysterbek*'s release in 2007 came in the wake of two critical periods of political transition in South African history: The first democratic election of 1994 with its appeal to “Rainbow Nation” inclusivity, and beginning in 1999, president Thabo Mbeki’s aesthetic of “African Renaissance.” If the first campaign addressed the formulation of post-apartheid identity at a local or national level, the second policy extended its vision to the rest of Africa. Both programs conceded to and highlighted the necessity for a redressing of personal identity within shifting social paradigms. This admission also implied that identities, however intractable they might appear, *could* in fact be re-interpreted and re-imagined. As I will demonstrate, *Brasse Vannie Kaap* not only advocates but also exemplifies these negotiations.

Chapter 1 – Born African

“I am not a ‘Coloured’...never was, and will never be....”

- opening line from BVK’s track *Intro*.

Vernie February (1981) and John Western (1996) describe how under apartheid rule, Coloureds were ultimately defined by “what they were not” – considered literally neither White, nor Black, but an amalgam of two apparently absolute polarities. The subject of this chapter is an inquiry into how *Brasse Vannie Kaap* addressed this denial of identity by directly confronting the stereotypes that accompanied the racist ideology of apartheid. *Brasse Vannie Kaap* similarly define themselves by "what they are not," but in their case it is an empowering negation of and refusal to be limited by impositions of character, race and culture. This viewpoint will be articulated through an analysis of *Ysterbek*’s opening track, appropriately entitled *Intro*.

The Population Registration Act of 1950 required all South Africans to be classified under the broad terms of “White,” “Native,” and “Coloured.” BVK’s members would have been relegated to the latter category. While subsets for all three delineations existed, the legal definition of “Coloured” was contingent on essentialist distinctions of the other main racial types. A “Coloured person” for example, was plainly understood as: “any person who is not a member of the white group, or of the native group.” This ruling extended to include:

any woman to whichever race, tribe, or class she may belong, between whom and a person who is...a member of the coloured group, there exists a marriage, or

who cohabits with such a person...[and]...any white man between whom and a woman...is a member of the coloured group, there exists a marriage, or who cohabits with such a woman.¹⁴

Maintaining this reasoning, a “White person” would be recognized as “[any] person who in appearance obviously is, or who is generally accepted as a white person, but does not include a person who, although in appearance obviously a white person is generally accepted as a coloured person.” The term “Native” referred to “any member of an aboriginal race or tribe of Africa,” a statement that by its very definition denied the indigeneity of Coloureds to South Africa.¹⁵ The subjectivity and plasticity of the phrase “generally accepted” is exemplified in the story of Sandra Laing, the subject of a 2009 bio-pic directed by Anthony Fabian. The movie *Skin* relates how Laing, born in 1955 to White Afrikaner parents, was reclassified under apartheid legislation as Coloured. As a result of her parents’ legal and media campaign to have this ruling overturned, the Population Registration Act was amended or rather refined in 1957 to prioritize *descent* and not appearance as the basis for categorization.¹⁶ This conclusion is rendered absurd if one considers the interpretation of “a coloured person” as someone of mixed racial origin, whose classification is confirmed by the visual identification of specifically non-White ancestry.

The first line of *Intro* emphatically rejects apartheid-era racial categorization. The track begins with a violin sample accompanied by the “technostalgic” phonograph effect

¹⁴ John Western, *Outcast in Cape Town* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1996), 9.

¹⁵ February, 8-9.

¹⁶ http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/women/families/article6725566.ece

of vinyl hiss and crackling.¹⁷ In the third measure, Deon “Ready D” Daniels abruptly proclaims:

I am not a “Coloured,”

Never was, and will never be.

Ek moet mal wees om in te gee, vir my enemy, (I’d have to be crazy to surrender to my enemy)

When I look in the mirror, it’s God that I see.

I am not a “Coloured,”

Ek is ‘n mens met ‘n kop en ‘n pens.

(I’m a human being, with a mind and soul)

Met intelligence,

(With....)

Gebruik die Scripture as reference.

(Use the Scripture as a reference)

And you will never stand a chance,

Because skin colour is not evidence.

To try and force me into a box,

classify me as a gangster, *‘n skelm of ‘n klops.* (...thug, or coon)

Oor die kleur van my vel and my “street” talks. (Because of my skin colour....)

Apartheid’s false.

D’s opening line is followed by an ominous synthesizer interjection, reminiscent of prison bars slamming shut. This sonic effect alludes to the stereotype of Coloureds as criminals (mentioned in the following stanza) and also to the observation by well-known Coloured poet and dramatist Adam Small: “I...live behind bars in this country....The bars are the colour of my skin.”¹⁸ Adam Small’s involvement in this discourse is telling: A member of the Coloured intellectual elite, a social class that arguably preferred *suiwer* (“pure”) Afrikaans, Small nevertheless chose to write exclusively in *Kaaprikaans*, “a

¹⁷ Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology has Changed Music* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2004), 146.

¹⁸ February, 122.

mark of low social status and cultural inferiority.” The poet defended his position, maintaining the legitimacy of *Kaaprikaans* as a form of cultural expression:

It is said to degrade instead of uplift, thereby only confirming the Afrikaner in his prejudiced belief that the coloured is culturally and linguistically a buffoon...[however, it] *is* a language in the sense that it carries the full fate and destiny of the people who speak it.¹⁹

Herder’s model of romantic nationalism - the “*Volk* with its own language, which it must preserve as its most distinctive and sacred possession...and the national consciousness to which it gives rise” - can certainly be applied to this discussion.²⁰

If Afrikaans could be considered the language of the *Herrenvolk*, BVK’s decision to use a vernacular form simultaneously challenges the “purity” of Afrikaner ideology and the notion of Afrikaans as a symbol of White Nationalism and authority. Interestingly, the genesis of Afrikaans as a language owes much to the indigenous Khoisan people, slaves and “directly miscegenated” Coloureds during the time of the Cape’s settlement as a trading post under Jan van Riebeeck.²¹ The language that was eventually to become Afrikaans is widely regarded as the result of a their creolization of Dutch. By 1925, English and Afrikaans (having replaced Dutch) were the official languages of the Union of South Africa. But *Kaaprikaans’* derivation from and melding with English carries further implications. Under apartheid, many “non-Whites” considered English was considered a more “universal” language - a link to the outside world. It also served as a

¹⁹ Ibid., 95.

²⁰ F.M.Barnard, *Herder’s Social and Political Thought: From Enlightenment to Nationalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965) 58.

²¹ February, 20.

constant reminder of the colonial British yoke from which *Afrikanerdom* had recently been emancipated. At a metaphorical level then, *Kaaprikaans* alludes to the mixing and blurring of cultural and racial lines, a direct contestation of language sovereignty.

This idea is illustrated in the first stanza with the line “*Ek moet mal wees om in te gee vir my enemy* (I’d have to be crazy to surrender to my enemy).” The morpheme “my” has the same meaning in both English and Afrikaans, although with D’s intentional Afrikaans pronunciation it functions here as a bridge between the two languages. “Enemy” is an explicit statement of a political position, signaling opposition and defiance.

The reception of *Kaaprikaans* in both public and private spheres can be likened to that of African American Vernacular English in the United States. While this regionally specific form of expression is practiced and developed by a considerable demographic within Western Cape society, it has been and continues to be criticized within the upper classes of that society as reinforcing stereotypes of subjugation and ignorance.²²

Kaaprikaans is derogatively known as *Gamtaal* (literally “the language of Ham”), a reference to the “curse of Ham” that indirectly provided biblical justification for segregationist ideology. D’s directive to “look to the Scriptures for evidence of legitimacy” as well as the evocation of “having being made in God’s image,” challenges this notion.

Despite his confrontational stance, D delivers this manifesto in a controlled, measured tone throughout.²³ In fact, the interruption of musical expectation - the

²² Western outlines stereotypical White attitudes towards Coloureds as: paternalism, miscegenation, drunkenness, musicality, acquiescence and powerlessness, child-like immaturity propensity for crime and violence, and unbridled sexual appetite along with promiscuity (Western, 15-27).

²³ This technique finds analogue in the African-American rhetorical trope of “playing the Dozens.” Some consider The Dozens a precursor to the language play of contemporary rap. In

conscious manipulation of the listener's musical expectation - is an essential aesthetic feature of the piece. The first occurrence of this disruption occurs at an "audio-spatial" level. The placid violin sample appears to come from a distance, while D's jarring proclamation is foreground in the mix. Adam Small's metaphor of "imprisonment" is extended by the close-micing of the voice; the added reverb creates a sense of enclosure, evoking the image of a solitary figure in an empty room. The listener's relationship and discomfort in being so close to the speaker is complicated by the actual content of the text: D is taking us into his confidence. Tricia Rose's construction of the MC as a preacher – and rap as a unique "form of testimony"²⁴ – underscores the obligation of someone in this position to articulate the concerns of his/her community, essentially to "tell it like it is." D's Biblical references contribute to the confessional nature of his explication – only in this sonically and technologically constructed space is he able to "speak the truth."

Disruption is also accomplished through the violation of anticipated motives or lyrical themes. Instead of reaching compositional resolution, the abruptness and resultant tension of the opening statement is compounded by the synthesizer entry. Structurally, the vocal entry falls on the third pulse of measure three: it continues the commetric rhythmic articulation of the violin onsets, but introduces a more urgent sixteenth-note configuration to the arrangement (Figure 1.1). More conspicuous is the synthesizer interjection, which falls on the second eighth-note of the fourth pulse. Acting as an

this game of trading insults the object was ostensibly to test one's emotional strength. The loser was the first person to display anger.

Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 68.

²⁴ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 144.

exclamation point to D's vocal provocation, the cumulative effect is sensorially destabilizing.

The musical score for the opening four measures of the Intro is shown. It features three staves: Violin (treble clef), Synth (bass clef), and Voice (percussive clef). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 72. The lyrics are "I am not a Co-loured Ne-ver was and will ne-ver be".

Figure 1.1: Opening four measures of *Intro*, showing only violin, synthesizer and vocal lines. All musical transcriptions used in this thesis are my own.

In the same vein, the fourth measure introduces a new instrumental texture to the work, that of a percussion-based *ostinato* (Figure 1.2). The shaker entry that begins this four-measure figure is evocative of a match being struck - perhaps a fuse being lit - and engages the listener's sense of anticipation.

The musical score for the percussive *ostinato* is shown. It features six staves: Piano (treble clef), Synth (bass clef), Conga (bass clef), Shaker I (percussive clef), Shaker II (percussive clef), and Woodblock (percussive clef). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 72.

Figure 1.2: Percussive *ostinato*, approximate instrumental timbres are given.

At measure three, the dialogue between the second shaker and the synthesizer part sets up the expectation of a repeated rhythmic motif. The recurrence of the "dotted-eighth-note,

percussion section. Furthermore, the percussive grouping exemplifies the theoretical viewpoints of Richard Waterman's "hot" rhythm, and Olly Wilson's "heterogeneous sound ideal." Waterman describes a distinctly African musical and philosophical aesthetic that is culturally rather than racially based,²⁶ whereas Wilson's expression refers to the emphasis in African-based musics, on timbral independence within a stratified or layered polyrhythmic system.²⁷ As a "colleague in creation," the vocal line metaphorically negotiates the territory between these two absolutes as by engaging the commonalities of language with the former, and culture, with latter.²⁸

These ideas are supported by Rose's argument of (specifically) rhythmic repetition as a "Black practice" and her observations of its usage in hip-hop.²⁹ She contends that Western classical music privileges harmonic device over rhythmic activity; accents and metrical groupings assist in the preparation and resolution of harmonic dissonances. Conversely, rhythmic complexity and repetition especially, are integral characteristics of African and African-based music. For Christopher Small: "...(t)he repetitions of African music have a function in time which is the reverse of (Western classical) music – to dissolve the past and future into one eternal present." Meki Nzewi states more explicitly that "(r)epetition in African music has philosophical as well as psychological rationalization and musical meaning...[constituting a process] of musical growth, a re-cycling, not re-circling."³⁰ If hip-hop is a continuation of these musical

²⁶ Richard A. Waterman, "'Hot' Rhythm in Negro Music," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 1, no.1 (Spring 1948): 24-37.

²⁷ Olly Wilson, "The Significance of the Relationship between Afro-American Music and West African Music," *The Black Perspective in Music* 1, no.2 (Spring 1974): 3-22.

²⁸ Rose, 66.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 65-72.

³⁰ Meki Nzewi, *African Music: Theoretical Content and Creative Continuum – The Culture-*

prerogatives, BVK's decision to engage in this genre definitively aligns them with the ideals of both Black and African cultural practices.

In terms of textual content and message the first stanza can be regarded as relatively self-contained, whereas the second stanza functions as an intermediary, running straight into the third (the first line of stanza three is a syntactical continuation of the second stanza's last line). Both the first and second stanzas follow an unusual scheme of ABBB, before stanza three settles into a more regular pattern of rhyming couplets. While the first line of stanza two reiterates D's argument (I am not a "Coloured"), it is interesting to observe the interactions between vocal and synthesizer lines. As I have already indicated, on the first mention of the word "Coloured," the synthesizer onset occurs one eighth-note after the vocal onset. At the beginning of the second stanza, the synthesizer and vocal parts coincide. This effect is an instrumental reinforcement of D's perspective. In terms of "instrumental" organization, the percussion *ostinato* drops out after five repetitions, but is heard again at the entry of the fifth stanza. This compositional technique of reducing the overall texture emphasizes the central theme of D's proposition and marks the apex of the implied arch form. The violin samples continue during this passage, but their entries are neither strictly periodic nor predictable. Stability and relief is only achieved with the re-entry of the percussion motif.

The word *klops* or "coon" (third stanza) is a reference to the "Coon Carnival" celebrations practiced by the mainly working-class Coloured community of Cape Town. These festivities are regarded as a signifier of Coloured culture, and heralded as one of the "Mother City's" main tourist attractions. Historically however the majority of Whites

Exponent's Definitions (Oldershausen: Institut für Didaktik Populärer Musik, 1977), 59.

consider it a “boorish, disreputable, and even depraved” spectacle whereas for middle-class Coloureds, participation in this event only perpetuates negative racial stereotypes of buffoonery and minstrelsy.³¹ In his study of the Carnival, Denis-Constant Martin (2000) makes passing reference to Bahktin’s assessment of “the festival:” the comic subversion of accepted behaviors and established social roles. Martin imagines the Coon as an “ambivalent” character who embodies the political and emotional histories of the Coloured people while at the same time asserting the latent power of his people as a “musical ambassador” - fusing nineteenth century performance practices with contemporary musical and dramatic elements.³² In my view, Martin fails to adequately address the negative implications of such a “Feast of Fools” or most surprisingly, the connotations of minstrelsy and the pejorative aspect of the word “Coon.”

As Adam Haupt (2001) points out, BVK has grappled with the perpetuation of these stereotypes in their work before.³³ Citing their 1998 track “*Kaap van Storms*” (Cape of Storms) Haupt describes BVK’s criticism of mainstream media portrayal of Coloureds:³⁴

Hulle wys altyd lelike prente van ons mense

Hoekom moet ek altyd ‘n gangster of ‘n klops

Soos al wat ons sien in ‘n koerant of TVs.

Hulle trek hulle neus se, “Sies, jy’s ‘n low-class coloured.

³¹ Adhikari, 16.

³² Denis-Constant Martin, “Cape Town’s Coon Carnival” in *Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies*, ed. by Sarah Nuttal and Cheryl-Ann Michael (Oxford: O.U.P., 2000), 363 – 379.

³³ Adam Haupt, “Black Thing: Hip-hop Nationalism, ‘Race’ and Gender in Prophets of da City and Brasse vannie Kaap” in *Coloured by History, Shaped By Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town*, ed. by Zimitri Erasmus (Cape Town: Kwela Books and South African History Online, 2002), 180-181.

³⁴ “Cape of Storms” is a geographical reference to Cape Town itself, but also an obvious allusion to the “stormy” contestations of racial and cultural identities.

Jou voorvaders was whites en slawe. So it must be a bastard. ”

But, wait a minute, if you trust my story and not his story *sal jy sien.*

My voorvaders was a king and a queen and never knew drugs, guns of 'n kantien.

Hulle was altyd daar om God te bedien.

Translation: They always show insulting, derogatory images of our people

Why am I always portrayed as a gangster or a coon

In newspaper and television reports?

They turn up their noses and say:

“Ugh! You’re a low-class Coloured!

Your ancestors were Whites and slaves, so you must be a bastard.”

But wait a minute, if you trust my story and not his story, then you’ll see

My ancestors were kings and queen who never knew of drugs, guns, or liquor

Their purpose was always to serve the Creator.

Images of “turning up one’s nose” and miscegenation were common themes in early South African literary accounts of Coloureds, most notably in the works by Sarah Gertrude Millin and Cedric Dover who coined the phrases “God’s stepchildren” and “smelling strangeness” respectively, in their descriptions of “half-castes.”³⁵ Haupt maintains that BVK’s response – the presentation of “my story” instead of “(his)tory” – is an invocation to re-conceptualize imposed narratives of the past.

With his final line “apartheid’s false,” D challenges the authority of separatist ideology and exposes it as a fabrication. If his statements reflect a movement *from* these perceptions, which direction are they pointing us *towards*? Is his response simply a

³⁵ February, 2.

reaction to White racism or is it a conscious mobilization of social and cultural priorities?

D continues:

“Coloured...”

A racist weapon,

A term of oppression

wat my mense 's integrity threaten.

(...my people's....)

The Cape Flats, that's my Heaven,

The home of brave women and men

who have died for the revolution.

Now you know where I stand.

So take your “coloured” comment,

take your “coloured mentality,”

take your “coloured rap group,”

en hou it op 'n jaard,

(...and hang it all)

Waar die mense suip en praat,

(where all they do is drink, and gossip)

bitch, moan, en haat.

(complain, and hate)

Long live...humanity!

Again he denounces the term “Coloured” – the pause after this word provides emotional and intellectual space for contemplation, and is also a respite from D’s unrelenting discourse. Thereafter he adopts a more menacing tone, directed explicitly towards apartheid ideologues: D’s emphasis on the word “racist” clearly illustrates his disdain for this classification. The final line of this stanza informs the listener of the role that Coloureds as a subset of “non-Whites,” played in the struggle against apartheid.

Western’s observation of Coloureds as overlooked, “invisible men” in the eyes of White

Afrikaner legislative and social prerogatives is noteworthy.³⁶ South African political history having been characterized by hegemonic discourse, it could reasonably be argued that resistance to apartheid has historically been regarded as a struggle between the diametric racial oppositions of Black and White. D's interpretation of the appellative "Coloured" as "a racist *weapon*" (emphasis added) – a tool devised to separate and stratify an oppressed majority - reinforces the confrontational nature of this dynamic.

Under apartheid, Coloured political allegiance with "Blackness" could spell several outcomes: Loss of relative privilege and status, but also recognition within an already established binary. In a post-apartheid situation (and recalling the shift in the Population Registration Act from "appearance" to "descent"), does "Blackness" instead mean "African-ness"? Emile Jansen - a.k.a. "Emile YX" - frontman of seminal Cape Town group "Black Noise" comments on the dilemma of authenticity with regard to South African hip-hop: "...because we are so-called coloured, they say oh, its not ethnic Africa or using th[ose] kwaito style beats...[there is a]... perception that if it's not "Spaza" or [doesn't] have Xhosa additions, it can't be South African...."³⁷ Jansen, himself a "so-called coloured" specifically aligns with Black identity. As an example, the following lyrical quotation is taken from Black Noise's 1994 track "Who Taught You to Hate Yourself?" (the title is a reference to Malcolm X's famed admonishment of African-American self-hatred):³⁸

³⁶ Western, 21.

³⁷ E-mail interview with Emile Jansen, December, 2009. "*Kwaito*" is a house-based genre of music sung in indigenous and vernacular Black languages. A "*spaza*" is a small convenience store in South African townships that often operates from someone's home.

³⁸ Marc D. Perry, "Hip Hop's Diasporic Landscapes of Blackness" in *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International Since the Age of Revolution*, ed. by Michael O. West, William G. Martin, and Fanon Che Wilkins (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 252-253.

That's right the whites taught me to hate who I am.
 They labeled us as coloured,
 But now I know I'm a black man.
 Apartheid's divide and conquer,
 Made us believe we're a separate race.
 And who wants to be a creation,
 of the supremacist pale face.
 ...[]...
 The word coloured implies,
 That we're genetically 50/50.
 But the black gene is dominant,
 and therefore I'm black see.

Jansen's formulation of Blackness is interesting in two respects. Firstly, it recalls Ortner's discussion of "cultural" prerogatives versus "natural" ones.³⁹ Ortner equates "culture" with the humanly manufactured "systems of meaningful forms" through which natural existence is subordinated. Thus the conceptual system of "White dogma" (revealed in the line "whites taught me") seeks to devalue the natural biological determinant of the "black gene." Secondly, a relatively darker complexion - Jansen's instruction to "see" the "dominance" of the black gene - prioritizes appearance as validation of one's Blackness. This argument could be seen as a reversion to the pigmentocratic basis of apartheid's racial classification. It could equally be viewed as an

³⁹ Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" in *Women, Culture, and Society*, ed. by Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974).

appropriation of the very distinctions to which non-Whites were subjected – an empowering move to unite the disenfranchised majority against a common threat.

In a personal interview, Haupt offered this evaluation of BVK’s political outlook:

[BVK’s] argument was: we’re not saying Coloured doesn’t exist, we’re saying Coloured is a kind of Black, don’t speak about Coloured as separate from, better than, less than Black or White...it’s a kind of Black experience..[]...Is there a Coloured experience? Yes. Is it to be understood in essentialist - racially or biologically essentialist - terms? No, but then again no racial identity can be...[]... Racial identity is fluid, it’s as fluid as language.⁴⁰

If “Coloured” can be read as “a form of Blackness”⁴¹ could this term equally be considered “a form of Whiteness”? Within this last context, the line “now you know where I stand” requires further inquiry.

In addition to the geographical space of the Cape Flats, “where I stand” is a reference to the ambiguous political space that D has chosen to inhabit. It would appear that this juncture would call for another respite, but instead it is a prelude to D’s most direct and specific complaints. He addresses the negative associations of “Coloured mentality” and the novelty of being a “Coloured rap group.” The first statement requires an explication of Afrikaner paternalism towards Coloureds. South African feminist and writer Olive Schreiner describes the origin of Coloureds thus: “He is here, our own; we have made him; we cannot wash our hands of him.”⁴² February mentions the historical conception of “the Coloured” as “a sort of brown Afrikaner.” There is the further entanglement due to shared language, of acceptance within “Afrikaans-dom” but

⁴⁰ Personal interview with Adam Haupt, January, 2010.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Olive Schreiner cited in Western, 17.

arguably not within “*Afrikaner-dom*” (my emphasis).⁴³ This idea echoes Verwoerd’s description of Coloureds as citizens of the country, but not members of “the nation.” The political emphasis on difference – better than Black, but less than White – as well as the conceded association with Afrikaner culture (although always at an arm’s length) has led to the formulation of the expression “Coloured mentality.” It was this attitude that was invoked by the *New National Party* on the eve of the 1994 elections. Apartheid-era propaganda of *swartgevaar* (literally “Black Peril” or more apropos, “Fear of a Black Planet”) and tales of retribution were successfully employed by the National Party to sway the Coloured vote against the ANC. I remember the commentary offered by political cartoonist Jonathan Zapiro: his sketch compared the memory span of an elderly Coloured voter about to cast her ballot for the National Party, to that of a fruit fly.

As Haupt contends, the band “*Prophets of da City*” – precursors to BVK – were able to avoid the labeling of “Coloured rap group” by incorporating Black members. This allowed them to rap not only in *Kaaprikaans*, but a variety of Black indigenous languages as well, thus gaining access to a wider audience base.⁴⁴ There was however a flipside to this approach, as Azuhl explains:

POC did a lot you know, I mean for me...[]...in my opinion still, POC is one of the first vernac[ular] bands...[]...you had members like Junior and Ismael that were rapping in Xhosa and Zulu *those* years already you know, but...[]... I wouldn’t say that only fit the mold for certain people, but it kinda alienated the Afrikaans speaking Coloured community you know, so now you have a group

⁴³ February, 2.

⁴⁴ Haupt, *Black Thing*, 181.

like BVK that's talking about...*gatsby dities* and all of this stuff, stuff that people can relate to....⁴⁵

While BVK rapped exclusively in *Kaaprikaans*, I posit that it was their language affinity with Afrikaners (exemplified in their 2000 song "*Potjiekos*" for example⁴⁶), and shared history of oppression with Black South Africans that allowed them to complicate racial boundaries.

In the last three lines of the final stanza, D asserts that he has no use for negative evaluations or ascriptions of identity. The concluding line: "long live...humanity," gives the listener insight as to how he and BVK perhaps regard themselves and also prefer to be viewed. In 2001, Lee Watkins published an essay dealing with heterogeneity and difference in conceptions of Blackness amongst Cape Town "hip-hoppers." While his essentialist perspective of "colouredism" has been criticized (Haupt, 2001), the results of Watkins' interviews are useful here. This was D's response to the question of specifically "Coloured" hip-hop:

As a group, we don't rap as coloureds or from a coloured perspective.
At the end of the day, we rap from a human point of view
and we speak about whatever influences us and our society because
that is where we're situated...that's our habitat...
so we speak about our surroundings, whatever affects us,
whether it's on a hip-hop level, a social, a political, level.

⁴⁵ Personal interview with Azuhl, January, 2010. A "gatsby dite" is a local Cape delicacy consisting of a baguette, sliced lengthwise and stuffed with salad, fries, and meat.

⁴⁶ *Potjiekos* is a stew prepared in a cast iron pot. The word literally translates to "small pot food," and is culturally embedded in the Afrikaner Voortrekker narrative.

Watkins' interrogation of MC Ashley "Mr. Fat" Titus is equally revealing:

I don't regard myself as a coloured person because that, for me,
 is a derogatory statement. As a black person...I've still got doubts
 about that...my roots are entwined into many, many colours...
 I rather say that I'm a born African...and not try and be the partial one and say,
 I'm a white person, I'm a black person, I'm a coloured person...
 I see myself as a true South African...
 I see myself as a human being first...African second....⁴⁷

These statements by the group's two protagonists exemplify Erasmus' ideal of re-imagined identity while advocating "knowledge of self" – a common trope in "conscious" hip-hop - as the main impetus in this assessment.

The final stanza is presented in the form of a radio broadcast announcing the arrival of musicians prior to a performance. This postscript alludes to a musical performance, but also the "performance" of multivalent identities:

Ladies and Gentlemen,
 Dames en here,
(D)is BVK.
 Hoor daai klang vannie Kaap se vlaktes,
 Nog wild met die gedagtes.
 Mr. Fat, Boeta D, Judah, E-20, DJ Azuhl, P.O.C.
Kom 'n bietjie nader...want die ding gaan rik!
 Translation:

⁴⁷ Lee Watkins, "Simunye, We are Not One": Ethnicity, Difference and the Hip-Hoppers of Cape Town (Race and Class online <http://rac.sagepub.com>, 2001)

Ladies and Gentlemen:
 Introducing BVK,
 the sound of the Cape Flats
 still pushing the limits
 Mr. Fat, Brother D, Judah, E-20, DJ Azuhl, P.O.C.
 Come a little closer...it's gonna be one helluva ride!

Through BVK's specific association with the Cape Flats they have become synonymous with the area – the band effectively *is* the sound of the Flats. The pitch shift that accompanies the line “*Nog wild met die gedagtes*” implies that “going against the grain” is necessarily characterized by a period of projected instability. The penultimate line mentions the names of the performers – Ashley “Mr. Fat” Titus, Deon “Ready D” Daniels, Judah, Enver “E-20” Peters, Ricardo “DJ Azuhl” Nunes, and also Prophets of da City. The inclusion of POC indicates a direct lineage and association with the aspirations and ideals of this group; BVK's work is part of a continuum. *Intro* closes with an exhortation to “come a little closer” - not to be afraid of the rhetoric they propose.

Germane to this inquiry is the following quote by Rose: “Identity in hip-hop is deeply rooted in the specific, the local experience, and one's attachment to and status in a local group...[they] provide insulation and support in a complex, unyielding environment...”⁴⁸ Following Adhikari: “Social identity is cultural in nature in that it is part of learned behavior and is molded by social experience and social interaction. At most, social identities can be manipulated by outsiders – but even then, only to the extent that it resonates strongly with the bearer's image of themselves and their social group as a

⁴⁸ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994).

whole.”⁴⁹ Locally and from a more obviously political stance, BVK was in a state of racial liminality, as well as ethnic and regional specificity. It is perhaps not surprising that the prevailing thematic content of BVK’s output aligned them with the ideals of “consciousness” or “message” hip-hop.⁵⁰

Although hip-hop as a musical genre is produced, consumed and disseminated throughout the world, in the United States it is still philosophically and historically conceived as privileging and prioritizing specifically Black voices and experience. Cecelia Cutler observes that the normativity of Black culture in hip-hop represents an interesting dialectical shift that pronounces “Blackness” and depictions of Black prerogatives as the dominant structure in this paradigm.⁵¹ The centrality and validation of these prerogatives in hip-hop establishes the ideological convention where White participants in this musical idiom must conform to Black authority. In this discourse, it is “Whiteness” that is “othered.” Within a South African context, this aesthetic allows mixed-race individuals unprecedented access to political and philosophical domains that were (or still are) in reality, well beyond their reach. BVK’s “message” as such, is neither a “double consciousness,” nor is it a “dualism.”⁵² Like Ishmael Reed, BVK contests the

⁴⁹ Adhikari, 36.

⁵⁰ For a discussion of hip-hop’s subgenres, see Adam Krims, *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁵¹ Cecelia Cutler, “‘You Shouldn’t Be Rappin,’ You Should Be Skateboardin’ the X-Games’ The Coconstruction of Whiteness in an MC Battle” in *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language*, ed. by H. Samy Alim, Awad Ibrahim, and Alistair Pennycook. (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 80.

⁵² Paul Gilroy describes this as “occupying the space between [apparently mutually exclusive identities] or trying to demonstrate their continuity (1).” Interestingly, Gilroy maintains that “essentialist” and “pluralistic” viewpoints are “in fact two different varieties of essentialism: one ontological, the other strategic (31).”

Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

vision of “[the]...outsider...the figure of the divided self.”⁵³ While Erasmus suggests Edouard Glissant’s proposal of “hybridity and entanglement” as a theoretical framework, perhaps in this instance Homi Bhabha (and Johnny Mercer’s) model of “Mr. In-between” might be more helpful. The first case presents a situation where all South Africans (including those historically defined as “Coloured”) grapple with a simultaneous acknowledgement of and complicity in the events of the past. Central to this process is the realization that “no one...can claim a moral high ground” over another.⁵⁴ Bhabha’s hybridity (exemplified in his account of Nadine Gordimer’s protagonist, Aila) offers I think, a more empowering perspective.⁵⁵ In this vision the actors’ healing is facilitated by their ability to move between and through interstices, articulating connections with various identities and thus obscuring the idea of binary absolutes. Throughout the track *Intro* for example, D does not identify with an explicitly South African racial grouping, but rather aligns himself with the transgressive and empowering ideology of hip-hop itself. Instead, D expresses local and lived experience through the rhetorical strategies of hip-hop culture – strategies that will be explored further in the next chapter, as they apply to language sovereignty.

⁵³ Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the “Racial” Self* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 276. The above reference is to a poem by Reed entitled: “Dualism: in ralph ellison’s Invisible Man.”

⁵⁴ Erasmus, *Coloured*, 24-26.

⁵⁵ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) 13-15.

Chapter 2 - Say It Loud....

Ek praat in my taal, ek slaap in my taal, ek dink in my taal....

Translation:

I speak in my language, I sleep in my language, I think in my language....

- Opening line from *My Taal* ("My Language")

In the previous chapter I described the political and resistive implications of *Brasse Vannie Kaap's* decision to use Afrikaans - particularly a vernacular form - as their means of expression, given the association of this language with Afrikaner Nationalism. However it is important to realize that under apartheid (as it is today), Afrikaans was not the exclusive domain of "White South Africans of Dutch descent." Communicating in Afrikaans was not simply a matter of choice for politically disenfranchised and marginalized non-White South Africans, it was also their mother-tongue. Afrikaans-speaking Coloureds could therefore claim a right to this language, but not to inclusion within the *laager* of Afrikanerdom. Given this framework, an evaluation of "who speaks Afrikaans" is compounded by the notion: "for whom does Afrikaans speak?" Moreover, what would be the implications within this discourse, of Kaaprikaans? I propose that the track *My Taal* ("My Language") is BVK's attempt to address these questions; it represents a validation of Kaaprikaans and consequently, a legitimation of the cultural practices of its users.

Socio-political life under apartheid was characterized by a certain duality: explicitly, the binaries of White and non-White, or self and other. To better appreciate the

implementation of this system requires a brief digression to the development of Afrikaner Nationalism. South Africa's evolution from colony to union and ultimately to republic, parallels attempts made towards the formulation of a definitive Afrikaner identity. The Afrikaner struggle for independence from British rule was articulated by numerous conflicts that were subsequently incorporated into determinist mythology. Most notable of these are the *Groot Trek* of 1838 ("The Great Trek" – the exodus of Afrikaner farmers from the Cape to the interior of the country) and the Anglo-Boer war of 1899.⁵⁶ The "Battle of Blood River" should also be included in this account: Commemorated as the "Day of the Covenant" (*Geloftedag*), December 16 marks the Afrikaner defeat of Zulu king Dingane's forces following the massacre of *Voortrekkers* (Afrikaner frontiersmen) at the foothills of the Drakensberg mountains.⁵⁷ A more perfect symbol for the proliferation of Nationalist ideology could not be evoked: intrepid pioneers guided and protected by the hand of God, defeating Africa's uncivilized hordes to rightfully claim the land as their own. At the centenary celebration of the Covenant, D.F.Malan proclaimed: "[on that]...holy ground...[a] great decision about the future of South Africa [had been made]...about Christian civilization...and about the existence and responsible power of the white race."⁵⁸ This rhetoric conflated national and civil imperatives with religious obligation. The Afrikaner *volk* were to be united and the ideals of Afrikanerdom

⁵⁶ The *Voortrekker* Monument in Pretoria was built to immortalize those Boers who left the British-ruled Cape with the intention of establishing their own republics further inland.

⁵⁷ Dingane allegedly reneged on an agreement with *Voortrekker* leader Piet Retief and led a war party against Retief's deputation, killing an estimated five hundred people. Dingane's army was later defeated by Andries Pretorius at Blood River. See David Harrison, *The White Tribe of Africa: South Africa in Perspective* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), 15-19.

⁵⁸ As leader of the National Party, Malan became Prime Minister of South Africa in 1948. T.Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University California Press, 1975), 198-199.

propagated through the signifier of common language: Afrikaans. Standing as a “bulwark against anglicization” Afrikaans was enlisted as “the bearer of culture and history.”⁵⁹

The Afrikaner’s claim to language was ultimately a claim to culture, imbued with the full authority and discretion in term so of how - and by whom - that culture was portrayed. As the National Party steadily gained in political power, Afrikaans became complicit in the dissemination and enforcement of apartheid policy, associated with both parochialism and repression. Through “adherence to an ideology which ha[d] to shape the world to its own image,” Afrikaans initially the marker of independence from British rule, became “the language of the oppressor” once that autonomy had been achieved.⁶⁰

My last point highlights the tremendous symbolism of language and also the potential for varied interpretations of that symbolism. It is thus clear that language acquisition and usage have measurable effects on self-representation. Frantz Fanon made this observation concerning the inherent power of language:

To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax,
to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all
to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization...

(a) man who has a language consequently possesses
the word expressed and implied by that language...

Mastery of language affords remarkable power.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Malan addressing members of the Afrikaans Language Movement in 1908. Ibid., 47.

⁶⁰ Andre Brink cited in Hein Willemse, “The Black Afrikaans Writer: A Continuing Dichotomy,” in *Switching Languages: Translingual Writers Reflect on Their Craft*, ed. by Steven G. Kellman (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 226.

⁶¹ Fanon, 17-18.

Attendant to this "mastery" is the strategic manipulation of language via code-switching, or to quote Monica Heller: "the use of more than one language in the course of a single communicative episode."⁶² In his 2000 ethnography of Jewish worship, Jeffrey Summit expands on Heller's definition by suggesting that: "[w]e use language as a code to forge connections with people, or to keep them at a distance...to level or maintain boundaries between ourselves and others."⁶³ BVK's "remarkable power" lies in their use of Kaaprikaans to appeal to a specific cultural grouping, while simultaneously challenging the boundaries established by another.

In terms of structure, *My Taal* begins with a vocal section that is later also employed as the song's chorus. Successive iterations are more robust, receiving fuller voicing and production treatment, suggesting a wider acknowledgement and reception of the song's proposal: "whose language is it?" Three strophic verses are presented - each by a different MC - employing a number of rhyme schemes: couplets and odd-numbered lines, internal and end rhymes, as well as combinations of these devices. The performed effect is that of a "stream-of-consciousness" or freestyle aesthetic with each verse offering commentary on the use and cultural meaning of *Kaaprikaans*. The MCs – Deon "Ready D" Daniels, Judah, and Ashley "Mr. Fat" Titus - manipulate, question, and re-position the binaries of apartheid's imposed doctrine to convey a series of alternative and subversive readings. A turntable extemporization concludes this thematically complex work. With regard to translation, a metaphorical reading is best suited to illustrate the philosophical intention of the piece. "My Language" thus becomes "my way" or "how *we*

⁶² Monica Heller, *Codeswitching: Anthropological and Sociolinguistic Perspectives*, ed. by Monica

Heller (Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter: 1988).

⁶³ Jeffrey Summit, *The Lord's Song in a Strange Land: Music and Identity in Contemporary Jewish Worship* (Oxford and New York, O.U.P.: 2000), 131.

do things” - perhaps a play on stereotypes of Coloureds as irredeemably "other." This move is particularly effective when considering the final lines of the chorus: “*ek kom jou haal in my taal, want my taal is my taal*” (“I’m coming after you in my own language/my own way...this is my language/this is the way we do things). The threat of “coming to get you” also alludes to a petition for the recognition of *Kaaprikaans* as a language in itself.

Ek praat in my taal

Ek slaap in my taal

Ek dink in my taal, want my taal is my taal, ek doen die ding in my taal

Survive met my taal, ek kom jou haal met my taal want my taal is my taal

Translation:

I speak in my language.

I sleep in my language.

I think in my language – this language is mine. I get it done in my language,

Survive with my language, I’m coming after you in my language

– this language is mine

The monophonic recording of the chorus gives the impression of distance; of a radio broadcast infiltrating public and private space from a far off authority. Maintaining this destabilization of aural perspectives, the word “*taal*” (language) is emphasized and not as anticipated, the possessive “*my*.” At this point it seems the question of ownership is still unresolved. Additionally, the phrase pattern of the text follows an unusual arrangement of alternating iambs and anapests: *ek praat in my taal, ek slaap in my taal,*

look at here, we have this bastardized language called Cape Flats language or lingo, whatever, or Afrikaans...which if you look at it is actually a language which is derived from slaves and not the so-called *boere* or Afrikaners in Oranje Vrystaat or wherever...*that* was kind of the mandate of BVK.⁶⁴

Furthermore, the assertion that: “I speak, sleep, and think in my language,” exemplifies Adam Small’s contention that Coloureds (“our people” in the above quotation) “give their *first cry in life* in this language...expectorate in the throes of death in this language” (emphasis added).⁶⁵ As a corollary, it could also be assumed that the speaker would “fight to the death” in defense of his language. The declamation and aggressive nature of the vocal delivery ties in with the connotations of “expectoration” and violent expulsion, but also to hiphop’s verbal trope of “*spitting* rhymes.”

The following section, an extended sample of Khoisan⁶⁶ speech, is preceded by a brief vibraphone passage. The inclusion of vibraphone at this juncture suggests a “dream-sequence” trope: a similar foley effect might be used in television shows to preface

⁶⁴ Personal interview with Azuhl, January, 2010. *Oranje Vrystaat* (Orange Free State) was formerly an independent *boer* republic. This was the first explicit mention of Black Consciousness by any of my interviewees while conducting this research. I asked Nunes if the idea of Black Consciousness was fully accepted by Coloureds, and have underlined what I feel is the crucial component of his argument: “No and yes...[I’ll] be careful with my words here... the kids in our generation that used to belong to the SRCs (Student Representative Councils), that used to throw stones at police vans...kinda had an idea...because you know we were schooled into what Black Consciousness *was* essentially...to bring it back with hiphop; it forces you to trace your ancestry...the so-called Coloured people in Cape Town, the majority of them are descendants of slaves, are descendants of indigenous tribes that were here *already*...[and] later intermingled with White slave-masters...it is our parents of *that* generations that denied their Blackness because...Coloured people were classed *better* than...Black people...so that is where they kinda denied their, I would say, their ancestry...all that you’d hear [was]: “no but, my great-grandfather’s from Germany”...at the time Blackness was associated with chaos...with that generation...my parents’ generation, I would say ‘no’ to a certain degree.”

⁶⁵ February, 95.

⁶⁶ The Khoisan are an indigenous people of the Cape.

flashbacks or indicate that a character is reminiscing about times gone by. This strategy is in fact a reference to the contested origin of Afrikaans or the contribution of indigenous peoples to the development of the language. Ultimately, this “dream reference” is to a theoretical past; a past that acknowledges the country’s indigenous people and alludes to Adhikari’s “myth of origin.” Moreover it refers to an unrealized past, one that was ignored under apartheid rule and exists solely in the collective memories of the formerly oppressed. This contemporary re-imagining of “a Coloured past” occurs in tandem with the re-construction of identity pursued by present generations of WESSA (White English-Speaking South Africans) and Afrikaner youth. Christopher Ballantine’s essay “Re-thinking ‘whiteness’?” examines the extent to which White popular music groups redress their identities in “post-apartheid” South Africa. One strategy is through the integration of indigenous languages and instrumentation while espousing political rhetoric that either heralds or critiques the new ruling party. Another is to co-opt indigenous vernacular expressions and accents, all the while evoking a certain “Africanization” if you will, of Whiteness. In Ballantine’s view, it is those bands that transcend the boundaries of musical genres and offer malleable conceptions of White South African identity in their lyrics that make the most sincere presentations.⁶⁷

It follows that White *audiences* can also negotiate identity through their choice of music or listening preferences. In a 2009 interview I conducted with DJ Enver “E-20” Peters (a turntablist mainly involved in the production of BVK’s eponymous first album), he mentioned that: “Man, for me...the festivals we played, where we went...the response we got from White audiences was *very, very* huge compared to what we got from our

⁶⁷ Christopher Ballantine, “Re-thinking ‘Whiteness’?: Identity, Change and ‘White’ Popular Music in Post-Apartheid South Africa, in *Popular Music* 23 no.2 (May 2004)

own people...[the response from the latter group] *was* huge, it was...but for me personally, it was always from the White audiences.... We came there with the Cape Flats dialect, we never came with *suiwer* Afrikaans...we would say it like we would say it out there on the Flats...and for some reason they liked that.”⁶⁸ Placing the distinctive “Cape Flats dialect” in opposition to *suiwer* (“pure” or standard Afrikaans) implies that it was predominantly White Afrikaner youth that attended BVK’s events. What did it mean for this group to receive an historically marginalized medium? Bakari Kitwana’s examination of White youth fascination and attraction to hiphop might shed some light on Peters’ final remark. Granted Kitwana’s work is set against the backdrop of race dynamics in contemporary America, his opinion of hiphop as a distinctly Black expression is useful here.⁶⁹ According to Kitwana, White audiences’ gravitation towards hiphop can primarily be attributed to: economic shifts of the 1980s and 1990s that resulted in wide-scale unemployment and de-prioritizing of White privilege, the adoption of hiphop’s counter-cultural aesthetic fuelled by a sense of alienation from previous generations’ vision of mainstream America, the recognition of African-American experience as an indispensable part of American identity, and finally, the commodification and resultant impact of African-American experience in popular culture. Parallels can be found in the South African example: the de-stabilization of privilege through Black Economic Empowerment programs, and support of hiphop as a means of distancing one’s self from cultural and language complicity in the hegemonic stance of apartheid. Recalling Fanon’s quip that the Black actor “who wants to be white will be the whiter” as he gains proficiency in the language of the dominant power, the

⁶⁸ Personal interview with E-20, January, 2010

⁶⁹ Bakari Kitwana, *Why White Kids Love Hip-hop: Wankstas, Wiggers, Wannabes, and the New Reality of Race in America* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2005).

affiliation of Afrikaners with BVK's "non-White voice" represents an curious chiastic shift.⁷⁰

Haupt gives a less beneficent interpretation of Afrikaners' seeming acceptance of BVK. Among the festivals that Peters refers to in the previous quote were *Oppikoppi* and the *Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees* (the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival or "KKNK"), annual South African arts events that ostensibly promoted historically White cultural prerogatives. Haupt contends that BVK's participation in these celebrations as well as that of other non-White artists was a disingenuous attempt by the organizers at maintaining and asserting the cultural supremacy of Afrikaans under the guise of inclusivity. Mr. Fat recounts the following experience at the KKNK:

We being, supposedly, the heroes of South African music because we're the saviours of Afrikaans. We know how to flick it back and forth....

I was [told] 'No, man, you see you a special coloured. They just coloureds.'

And I'm like, 'What makes me special?' 'No, you are coloured talent.'

So what does that make me, you see? Which means I'm getting kak inside my own so-called race....Dammit, I'm not a coloured....⁷¹

While inclusion of this nature reinforced attitudes of Afrikaner parochialism and paternalism with regard to non-Whites, it also provided *de facto* recognition of Kaaprikaans as a valid form of communication. Moreover, it would mean acknowledging the dialect as *part* of Afrikaans and BVK themselves as proponents

⁷⁰ Fanon, 38.

⁷¹ Adam Haupt, "Race, Audience, Multitude: Afrikaans Arts Festivals and the Politics of Inclusion" in *Muziki: Journal of Music Research in South Africa* 3 no.1, 2006. The line: "I'm getting kak...." translates to "I'm getting shit...."

of Afrikaner culture.⁷² Acceptance was nevertheless at an arm's length: Titus points out that a distinction was made between "special, talented Coloureds" and those Coloureds to whom the invitation was not extended. Titus also re-iterates his view on apartheid racial categorization and asserts his right to self-representation. It is these very issues that are confronted in the first verse of "*My Taal*." The following exegesis deconstructs the verse into thematic divisions, and explains the contextual basis of each section:

<i>My taal is my taal,</i>	This is my language,
<i>Die way ek hom praat is baie spesiaal</i>	The way I speak (him) is very special.
<i>Hy staan sterk en hy sal nooit val.</i>	He stands tall and will never waver,
<i>Hy kan jou los in 'n dwaal as jy nie note vat nie.</i>	He'll leave you in a daze if you're not careful.

Ready D, the MC in this verse, makes extensive use of rhetorical "Signifyin(g)."

A characteristically African and Afro-Diasporic linguistic trope, Signifyin(g) is defined as "the language of trickery, that set of words or gestures that arrives at 'direction through indirection.'" ⁷³ Henry Louis Gates, Jr. explains that: "[t]he mastery of Signifyin(g) creates *homo rhetoricus Africanus*, allowing...the black person to move freely between two discursive universes..." ⁷⁴ As an example, the third line: "*Hy staan sterk en hy sal*

⁷² Azuhl elaborated on this conflict in a personal interview. Speaking specifically of a hip-hop television show that BVK produced: "Operating...in that corporate White domain we still able to...convey the messages that we believe in, in different ways...so you kinda package it...it's the same thing but you package it in different ways..."

⁷³ Roger D. Abrahams, "The Changing Concept of the Negro Hero," in *The Golden Log*, ed. by Mody C. Boatright, Wilson M. Hudson, and Allen Maxwell (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1962), 125.

⁷⁴ Henry Louis Gates, Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 75.

nooit val” (“He stands tall and will never waver”) attests to the enduring nature of *Kaaprikaans* and its users. Here Titus subtly engages and appropriates Afrikaner Nationalist propaganda: For years, an image of the old republic flag against clear blue skies concluded evening television programming in South Africa - a more direct reference is made with the line “*die vlag wapper met sterke*” in the track: “*Hulle is Bang*” (“The flag beats steadily in the breeze” featured in “They’re Afraid” - chapter four contains an analysis of this piece). D’s re-contextualization of this familiar scene, presents *Kaaprikaans* as the vernacular of the South African people. The picture of the flag was accompanied by a choral performance of then national anthem “*Die Stem*” (“The Call of South Africa”). The mastery of D’s wordplay is evidenced when one considers the third verse of “*Die Stem*.”

(Literal Translation)

Vaderland ons sal die adel

Fatherland, we will bear the mantle

Van jou naam met ere dra:

Of your name with honor;

Waar en trou as Afrikaners,

Dedicated and true as Afrikaners

Kinders van Suid-Afrika

Children of South Africa⁷⁵

The next section criticizes the class distinctions and antagonism within BVK’s “own so-called race.” Adhikari mentions that Whites have historically stigmatized *Kaaprikaans* as a “vulgar patois” – the dialect of unlettered, uneducated lower classes.⁷⁶ Terms like *kombuistaal* (kitchen language) and *gamtaal* (the language of Noah’s outcast

⁷⁵ <http://www.anc.org.za/misc/stem.html>

⁷⁶ Adhikari, 16.

son, Ham) have served to perpetuate this image. *Kombuistaal* especially alludes to Coloureds' alleged servility and status within a White domain. The idea of Kaaprikaans as merely an approximation of "pure" Afrikaans supports Adhikari's assertion that Coloureds are fundamentally and inconsolably plagued by aspirations of Whiteness. Scholars have demonstrated that Coloureds' own reception of this dialect ranges from acknowledgement of (yet continued participation in) its impropriety, to revulsion. Kay McCormick's study of vernacular speakers reveals that: "they know from experience that outsiders stereotype...[them]...as lazy, feckless, poor and street-wise."⁷⁷ Additionally, Western finds that "respectable Coloureds" object to the association with Kaaprikaans.⁷⁸ The final piece in this internalization of racial attitudes is the practice of "playing for White," where light-skinned or "pass-for-White" Coloureds adopt the posture of White middle-class civility by speaking in either English, or standard Afrikaans. D exposes these intricate constructions with the phrase: "they wanna develop accents."

The reference to "point[ing] the *vinger*" can be read as a skillful allusion to former South African president P.W. Botha. Known as "*die Groot Krokodil*" ("the great crocodile"), Botha was a staunch advocate of apartheid and known for pointing and wagging his finger disapprovingly during public addresses. He also implemented the "Tricameral" system that established two new houses of parliament – a Coloured "House of Representatives" and Indian "House of Delegates" (Blacks were excluded) – along with the White "House of Assembly." Total authority however remained in the hands of the White ruling party and the new houses were ostensibly maintained as puppet legislatures. The implication of "respectable Coloured" complicity in apartheid is, I think clear.

⁷⁷ Kay McCormick "The Vernacular of District Six" in *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*, ed. by Shamiel Jeppie and Crain Soudien (Cape Town: Buchu Books, 1990), 91.

⁷⁸ Western, 148.

D shows his disdain for this betrayal by declaring: *“Ek is ‘n vollende Suid-Afrikaner”* (“I’m a fully-fledged, South African”). It is notable that his preferred form of self-identification is not racial, but nationalist.

<i>Som(mige) public het glad (n)ie hart (n)ie,</i>	Some folks have lost their “heart”/nerve
<i>Hulle wil hom nie meer praat nie,</i>	They don’t want to speak (him) anymore,
because of <i>dinge en dinge</i>	Because of this and that
<i>En ander vrinne.</i>	and their “new” friends.
They wanna develop accents	They wanna develop accents,
and then they wanna point the <i>vinger</i> .	And then wag their fingers.
<i>Ek is ‘n vollende Suid-Afrikaner.</i>	I’m a fully-fledged South African.

The final passage can be taken as a response to the co-opting of BVK as “saviors of Afrikaans.” D employs language code-switching throughout his verse, but it is perhaps most effective in the line: *“in my taal se ek vir jou: I’m not a Coloured of ‘n Kleurling.”*⁷⁹ Here “my language” is neither explicitly English nor Afrikaans, but a hybrid form encompassing elements of both. The signification of English is important because it alludes to historical British dominion over Afrikaners as well as presenting an alternative to the hegemonic associations of Afrikaans with apartheid. Kaaprikaans is a conscious decision and metaphor for the reconciliation of these two expressive codes.

<i>Nou’s die hele land op my spore,</i>	Now everybody wants a piece of me.
<i>In my taal se ek vir jou:</i>	Let me give it to you straight:

⁷⁹ “Kleurling” is Afrikaans for “Coloured.” As in English, the suffix “-ling” denotes a diminutive form and exacerbates stereotypes of Coloured infantilism.

“I’m not a Coloured *of ‘n Kleurling*”
Jy sal jouself vasloop en jouself deurbring,
apartheid is verby en dit suffer van teuring.

“I’m not a Coloured or a *Kleurling.*”
 You’re only fooling yourself,
 apartheid is over; it lies in ruins.

Language code-switching is a common feature to all three verses, and its effectiveness in caricaturing essentialist conceptions of race and cultural identity has already been demonstrated. As illustrated in the opening of the second verse, MC Judah continues on this tack, deftly navigating the boundaries of linguistic and ideological realms:

Hy is my taal,
en ek gaan dit uithaal
want ek is nie bang nie,
 Jah can only judge me,
Ek kan net myself wees,
hoe kan ek myself dis?

This is my language,
 and I’m not afraid
 to use it, because
 Only Jah can judge me.
 I have to remain true,
 how could I disrespect myself?

In contrast to the controlled pacing of D’s delivery, Judah’s verse is more idiomatic and evocative of reggae verbal performance (Judah is a Rastafarian). As a result his lines are shorter, more concise. He consistently and suddenly raises the second last syllable of each line, returning to his original intonation on the final syllable. This nuanced inflection of crests and troughs unsettles prescribed notions of language authority. Additionally, Judah places emphasis on the possessive “*my*” indicating

that this truly is *his* language – a more definitive response than the accent placement of the first verse (Figure 2.2).



Figure 2.2: Rhythmic transcription of Judah’s opening line. Pitches are approximate and serve to illustrate the contour of Judah’s speech inflections.

Biblical references - “*Alpha en Omega...daai is wat geskruif is* (“as it is written”)...love *jou taal* like you love your neighbours (“love your language....”)” - enjoin the same civil/religious directives as Nationalist dogma, but stem from an obviously oppositional basis to that of Afrikaner conservatives. Judah’s final line: “*pot sonder ‘n deksel*” (“a pot without a lid”) refers to sense of displacement. If it is true that: “[t]o speak a language is to take on a world, a culture,”⁸⁰ then being dispossessed of authority with regard to that language, engenders an innate sense of disjuncture:

Alles wat gebeur het,

Everything that has come to pass,

Kom weer van oor af,

Will happen again.

Alpha en Omega:

As it was in the beginning,

Daai is wat geskruif is.

So shall it be in the end.

Hulle se:

It is written in the Scriptures:

“Love *jou taal*,

“Love your language,

Like you love your neighbours

As you love your neighbours”

⁸⁰ Fanon, 38.

An interesting metonymic relation links the second and third verses. The first line of Mr. Fat's exposition is a direct lyrical reference to the song "I Can See Clearly Now the Rain Has Gone," but also "Signifies" the composer Johnny Nash's association with Bob Marley and the resistive nature of the latter's work. As the final contribution to "*My Taal*," the allusion is perhaps also to an imminent "bright sunshine-y day." This transition concludes Judah's reggae-based verse, introducing a "revelatory" aesthetic as well as a new rhythmic phrasing (Figure 2.3).

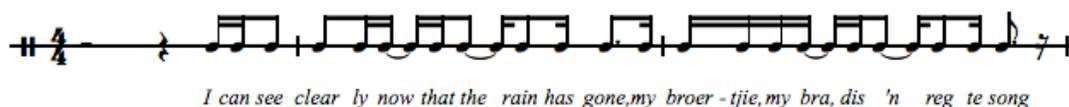


Figure 2.3: Rhythmic transcription of Mr. Fat's opening line.

Mr. Fat shares the "realization" that "*my broertjie, my bra, die 's 'n regte song*" – he uses both standard and dialectic Afrikaans versions of "brother" (*broertjie* and *bra*, respectively) to demonstrate the commonalities between these languages. The word "brother" in particular indicates a solidarity and unity of purpose. As the line continues, he explains that this is a *real* song in a *real* language and demands that it be taken seriously:

I can see clearly now that the rain has gone

My broertjie, my bra die 's 'n regte song

I feel it in my fingers *dit vloei van my ink,*

brother, this is a real song

...(my language) flows from my pen

<i>skink reality, it is ingesink</i>	the truth of the situation has sunken in
<i>Dink is a thought ge-face met consequence</i>	action stems from thoughts
Deep meditation bring up <i>woord</i> existence	...word...
<i>Sinne word gevorm, praat in paragrawe,</i>	words take shape, realized as paragraphs

“I feel it in my fingers” describes the innate and corporeal connection to language first alluded to by D:

<i>Hy is binne in my hart en my brein,</i>	(He) comes from my heart and brain,
<i>En dan kom hy verby my tande</i>	Slips through my teeth
<i>tot binne in jou ore.</i>	and through to your ears/understanding

and again, through Judah’s association of language facility to spiritual imperatives.

Mr.Fat ends his verse with a discussion of the formation of language and those elementary grammatical components common to all forms of communication. His directive to “post and deliver *na alle soorte*” (“deliver it, marked for everyone’s attention”), proposes the idea that the fundamental message is conveyed to all types, but there is still a choice as to whether that message will be received, appreciated or heard:

<i>Die pen word gemove ek praat van woorde</i>	As the pen moves, I talking about of words
Post en deliver <i>na alle soorte</i>	Delivered, marked for everybody’s attention:
<i>Vokaale, konsonante en alfabete</i>	vowels, consonants, alphabets

If the first two vocalists effect a consistency of diction and inflection, Mr. Fat's performance describes a marked instability. This is emphasized in the last phrase "*swaaiende praate*" ("swinging" or "exuberant talks"), where his inflection rises dramatically on the first syllable. Both D and Judah use the masculine pronoun when referring to "their language." Thus "he" becomes a living entity with a particular shape and personality. This reference also suggests a gendered dynamic and engages stereotypes of virility and masculine power. At no point does Mr. Fat use the phrase: "*my taal*," instead presenting a neutral perspective that demonstrates the potential for understanding or bridging linguistic models by literally "swinging" across divides. As an intermediary then, he exemplifies Victor Turner's analysis of the inherent societal power of the "in-between" or liminal figure.⁸¹ Mr. Fat's inflection and enunciation is sometimes so varied as to render the text unintelligible, giving the impression that particular sounds are used more for dramatic effect than lexical coherence. This strategy brings us back to the Khoisan sample heard in the beginning of the piece. There is arguably only one word that the majority of South Africans would be able to recognize or discern from the aural and sonic stream. The inclusion of the word "*Hayi-bo!*" points to the possibility of appreciating the intention of another speaker, without fully understanding his language.⁸²

D concludes *My Taal* with a turntable extemporization, suggesting that the technique of scratching and turntablism itself can be regarded as valid means of

⁸¹ Victor Turner, "Liminality and Communitas" in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969). Turner builds on the progression in *rites de passage* described by Arnold van Gennep (1960), of: "separation" from a fixed social position, to "margin" or liminality, and finally to a consummated and stable state of "aggregation." The Coloured individual as a liminal figure, appropriately "slip[s] through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space." Aggregation in this instance might refer to a desired acceptance within the cultural and social milieu of apartheid-era and contemporary South Africa.

⁸² *Hayi-bo!* translates to "no" but is more an expression of incredulity or disbelief.

communication (an idea that is explored further in the fourth chapter). His scratches are reminiscent of “laser” sound effects and invoke a nostalgic if not outdated sense of futurism. It is perhaps the futurism envisioned by Herbie Hancock’s “Rocket” and Grandmaster Flash’s perhaps naïve scratch technique. In this sense the turntable exposition “cuts through” preconceptions of language sovereignty. Fragments of the chorus are recalled as a codetta, emphasizing the fundamental message of the piece: *“Ek praat in my taal...want my taal is my taal.”* The sheer density of motives that characterize the work are unified by this pervading theme. The movement from D and Judah’s idiomatically consistent lyrical “flow,” to the ambiguity of Mr. Fat and the final turntable expression, represents a successive deconstruction of fixed conceptions of language. The actors succeed in overturning entrenched binaries, presenting more inclusive evaluations of Coloured and South African cultural prerogatives. Power lies not only in the “mastery of language” as Fanon puts it, but also in the ability to transcend varied modes of communication. Chapter three continues the idea of transgressing perceived boundaries with an exploration of how hip-hop sampling (the ultimate hybridizing deconstruction and re-configuration of expression) and the “surrogate language” of scratching, re-evaluate entrenched views of cultural identity.

Chapter 3 - South African Dialogue

"...ons bly stil en sal nie raas...."

Translation:

"...we'll be quiet and won't make a sound...."

- Vocal sample featured in *Krap Kaommentaar* ("Scratch Commentary")

In previous chapters I have described the predicament of full participation yielding only partial inclusion, with regard to racial and cultural identity. Apartheid placed Coloureds at the margins of essential Whiteness or Blackness, and a shared language allowed for backdoor access to the cultural domain of Afrikanerdom. Hiphop provided the perfect vehicle for *Brasse Vannie Kaap* to explore and critique this transaction. Arising from the intersections of “social alienation, prophetic imagination, and yearning...[this genre is]...a cultural form that attempts to negotiate the experience of marginalization [and] truncated opportunity.”⁸³ Hiphop is therefore inherently oppositional; a means of expressing resistance to dominant social structures by giving “voice to the voiceless.” In this section I will examine how the practices of turntable sampling and scratching address notions of power and authority, challenging and subverting ideological barriers to inclusion. In this case, the medium *is* the message. Sampling is essentially diachronic – in order to be utilized in this way musical material needs to have been “pre-made.” The turntablist is in direct contact with the past - through the tactile experience of scratching and the (hiphop) cultural prerogative of “digging in the crates” to unearth samples - while

⁸³ Rose, 21.

simultaneously enacting a specific present via performance. To illustrate these concepts I will analyze the track *Krap Kommentaar* ("Scratch Commentary"), a solo turntable performance by Deon "Ready D" Daniels. *Krap Kommentaar* stands at the convergence of the ideas I have mentioned thus far: racial, cultural, and expressive periphery. This track also addresses the sense of "voicelessness" incurred through the denial of agency in self-representation.

Hiphop relies on a partnership with technology at every level of its "production, distribution and consumption."⁸⁴ This fact is most evident in the art of DJing – one of the "four elements" of hiphop – of which turntablism is a subset. Thus turntablism and specifically the technique of sampling (using pre-existing material to "speak for you"), represents the point of confluence between the human and the machine. In other words, D's work exposes and summarily subverts prevailing political and cultural ideologies through the mediating impetus of technology. The impact of D's subversion is best understood with an explication of the counterbalance of dominance and servility characterized by apartheid governance. Motshile Nthodi's poem "South African Dialogue" ably illustrates this relationship, specifically as it occurs between White Afrikaner landowner and non-White worker:

Morning Baas,

Baas,

Baas Kleinbaas says

I must come and tell

⁸⁴ Joseph Auner, "'Sing it for Me': Posthuman Ventriloquism in Recent Popular Music," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 128, no. 1 (2003): 99.

Baas that,
Baas Ben's Baasboy says,
Baas Ben want to see
Baas Kleinbaas if
Baas don't use
Baas Kleinbaas,
*Baas.*⁸⁵

Although written in English the hierarchical social designations of Afrikaans are maintained: *baas* refers to the senior “boss” and the diminutive form *kleinbaas* (“little boss”) refers to his son. It follows then that *baasboy* translates to “the boss’ *boy*” connoting not only ownership, but also a multivalent immaturity and inferiority on the part of the objectified worker.

The “enormous redundancy” of these types of exchange was however necessary for the formalization and maintenance of apartheid hegemony.⁸⁶ Nthodi’s poem depicts “ironically, at the level of dialogue, the inefficiency, the opaqueness of apartheid colonialism.”⁸⁷ The poem only describes the *worker's* imagined dialogue, and not the voice of the landowner. For Nthodi, reflecting the worker’s perspective in English and silencing the dominant power, was unquestionably a political act: he regained the dignity

⁸⁵ Motshile Nthodi, “South African Dialogue,” in *Explorings: A Collection of Poems for the Young People of South Africa*, compiled by Robin Malan (Claremont: David Philip Publishers, 1988), 17.

⁸⁶ Jeremy Cronin cited in Willemse, 227.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

lost through dehumanizing polity, and the absurdity of discourse under apartheid was brought to attention of a wider audience.⁸⁸

Following James Scott, Tricia Rose speaks of the dual systems of interaction between those in authority and their subordinates. “Public transcripts” are the open communications that seemingly endorse the *status quo*, whereas “hidden transcripts” deliver veiled critiques to this authority. Rose explains that “(u)nder social conditions in which sustained frontal attacks on power groups are strategically unwise or successfully contained, oppressed people use language, dance, and music to mock those in power, express rage, and produce fantasies of subversion.... These cultural responses to oppression are not safety valves that protect and sustain the machines of oppression... [rather, they] produce communal bases of knowledge about social conditions, communal interpretations... and quite often serve as the cultural glue that fosters communal resistance.”⁸⁹ With particular reference to *Krap Kommentaar*, I posit that sampling and the specific performative technique of modifying this material through scratching, offers a highly effective means of enacting both public and hidden transcripts.

The crucial factor in this paradigm is of course the element of choice: samples are intentionally selected and consciously manipulated to convey particular thoughts and elicit certain responses, either saliently or covertly. D is intimately familiar with the strictures of an oppressive regime. In 1988 together with MC Shaheen Ariefdien, he formed Cape Town’s first hip-hop crew “Prophets of Da City” (POC). Their work was

⁸⁸ A similar strategy was used by kwaito artist Arthur Mafokate in his 1995 track: *Don’t Call Me Kaffir*. In South Africa the word “kaffir” is a racial epithet directed towards non-whites, and specifically blacks.

⁸⁹ Rose, 100.

openly critical of the country's political machinations and often met with government censure. Although a number of tracks from the 1993 album *Age of Truth* were banned, POC's efforts were acknowledged when they were asked to perform at the 1994 presidential inauguration of Nelson Mandela.

Returning to the musical example at hand: *Krap Kommentaar* stands in contrast to the rest of the album as the only track that does not feature a vocal contribution from one of the group's numerous MCs. Instead D uses an Afrikaans children's tune in this purely sample-based piece. The direct translation of the title - "Scratch Commentary" - suggests that turntables can be used as a medium with which to offer "verbal" critique, but moreover implies that a sampled human voice is comparable in expressive power to that of a "live" human voice. This is especially significant given the inferences of the album's opening track *Intro* (discussed in the first chapter), which again features D, but this time in his role as an MC. The gravity and multi-faceted interpretation of *Intro* is clearly the result of human and machine interaction; D's "live" vocal delivery combined with pre-recorded sonic effects in a studio. With *Krap Kommentaar*, D shows us that a track executed solely through technological device, can bring about similar implications.

The core and most intelligible vocal samples used in *Krap Kommentaar* are the phrases: "*Ons bly stil en sal nie raas*" ("We'll be quiet; we won't make a sound") and "*Jan Pierewit*" (the first and last name of the protagonist in this children's tune). These are both taken from an apartheid-era compilation of Afrikaans children's songs. As in *My Taal* ("My Language" - the subject of the second chapter), language sovereignty is clearly being contested; this is immediately made known by the fact that the children's vocal samples are recorded in "standard" Afrikaans. Structurally, it is useful to think of *Krap*

Kommentaar in terms of an arch form. It is then possible to deduce the following arrangement:

Section A: [0:00 – 0:20] – an introductory passage featuring instrumental samples and manipulation of the word “*ons*” (“we”)

Section B: [0:21 – 1:12] – material based on manipulation of the phrases: “*ons bly stil*” (“we’ll be quiet”), and “*Jan Pierewiet*.”

Section C: [1:13 – 1:25] – occurrence of new vocal sample, the word: “everybody.”

Section Bⁱ: [1:26 – 1:59] – passage primarily referencing the word “*ons*.”

Section Aⁱ: [2:00 – 2:17] – conclusion drawing on material from the introduction and the phrase “*ons bly stil en sal nie raas*” (“we’ll be quiet and won’t make a sound”).

The first ten seconds of the piece evoke the image of boxers stepping into a ring. Heralded by a sample of horn fanfare the opponents acknowledge each others’ presence: three “forward stab” scratches on the word *ons* (“we”) are answered by a “beat-juggling” effect (alternately “juggling” between two isolated rhythmic configurations) which presages the percussive layer that will underpin the work. An interesting metric shift occurs in the transition from this introductory section of feints and postures to the consequent series of rapid-fire kicks and snares. The break between these two distinct phases of activity is not strictly quantized like the rest of the piece; an extra eighth-note is added to the 4/4 rhythmic grouping. Speaking of these unexpected “ruptures” in production style, D mentions: “I guess I’m a little unorthodox [in my approach]

...[]...there'll be certain clashes you know...[]...but for me [that's] always the case: to push it to the edge and see: *can* you actually make it work?" D's interest in pushing compositional boundaries can be related to Rose's description of hip-hop producers and engineers who consistently aim to "work in the red."⁹⁰ This expression refers to the practice of manipulating sound and equalization meters until they register within the distortion zone indicated by red warning lights. Rose gives the further example of "sounding White" - using sound and production equipment designed to maintain the temporal regularity of Western art music. D's tactic of confounding rhythmic parameters and instigating a new temporal reference (a new downbeat and percussive groove) at a point of disjuncture indicates a metaphorical re-assessment of "how things have been going up until now." Section B continues D's re-evaluation by pitting the steady percussive *ostinato* against the relative instability of the literally "White sounding" Afrikaans vocal sample. This vocal line is only heard in snippets of one or two words at a time and every attempt to realize a more complete phrase is frustrated by scratch techniques (Figure 3.1).

Sample-based hip-hop by white American artists typically makes use of African-American voice samples as a signifier of authenticity, or as an attempt to imbue works with "soulfulness." By contrast, characteristically "White" voices drawn from instructional videos and other mainstream sources might be used to convey irony, insincerity, or artifice.⁹¹ Within this racialized dynamic there is I think an implicit association of Black voices with "the natural" or "nature," and White voices with "modernity" (recalling Ortnor's argument of culture versus nature in chapter two).

⁹⁰ Rose, 75.

⁹¹ Auner, 120.

Timothy Taylor describes this phenomenon as “technological imperialism,” a strategy in which “the West’s conception of itself as technological and modern is highlighted and reinforced by juxtaposing itself and its technologies against people without those technologies.”⁹² In using decidedly “white voices” and White *Afrikaner* voices at that, D indulges in a “fantasy of subversion” and literally “turns the tables” on the authorities.

The scratch doesn’t merely embody, but actually *becomes* cultural resistance to the verbal edicts and repressive connotations of the language. This is not merely “scratching at the surface,” but a total evisceration of apartheid doctrine. Scratches are enacted through a tactile engagement with the vinyl record. The turntablist transgresses the conventional mode of interaction by physically touching, and disrupting the

The image shows a musical score for the song "Jan Pie-re-wiet". It consists of two systems of music. The first system has three measures. The lyrics are: "Sal nie raas" (Measure 1), "Jan Pie-re-wiet Jan Jan" (Measure 2), and "Ons" (Measure 3). The piano accompaniment features a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a more complex rhythmic pattern in the second and third measures. The second system also has three measures. The lyrics are: "Ons" (Measure 1), "Jan Pie-re-wiet" (Measure 2), and "Pie-re-wiet Jan Jan" (Measure 3). The piano accompaniment in the second system includes triplets of eighth notes in the first and third measures, and a sixteenth-note triplet in the second measure.

⁹² Timothy D. Taylor, “Music and the Rise of Radio in Twenties America: Technological Imperialism, Socialization, and the Transformation of Intimacy,” in *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*, ed. by Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 249.

Figure 3.1: Rhythmic transcription of vocal sample and turntable scratch interaction [0:33-1:12].

The notation *suggests* rather than asserts pitch class: Three prevailing “pitch regions” in the turntable part (identified as high, middle, and low), and are indicated by the fifth, third, and first lines of the staff respectively.

relationship between the record and the needle. The sound thus created is that of forcibly overcoming the physical resistance to the direction in which the record is spinning. The scratches that D uses to truncate the vocal sample and halt its ideological influence are in fact derived *from* that sample. The interdependence of scratching gesture and its source material are illustrated in Katz’s observation that scratches “can only be realized by violating [their] own medium.”⁹³ A similarity can easily be drawn between the seemingly

⁹³ Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology has Changed Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 132.

opposed strategies of *Kaaprikaans* and standard Afrikaans. One form of communication is clearly derived from the other, but they essentially comprise the same language.

Through verbal boasts, insults and moralizing, contemporary hiphop MCs continue the Afro-diasporic tradition of Signifyin(g) – the careful selection of expressions or phrases that can be interpreted in a multitude of ways. The practice of sampling and its effects of referencing and re-contextualizing can be seen to fulfill the same function. However, sampling doesn't only represent a change in the method of delivering the message (sampling as a “digital form of Signifyin(g)”⁹⁴), but a complete change in conception of the message itself. I would argue that due to the structural characteristics of each medium, sampling allows for more thoughtful arrangements and allusions to specific concepts than vocal signifying. Hiphop vocal expression is conceived of as a linear progression on a vertical plane. I posit that sampling is simultaneously linear (vertical), but also horizontal, allowing for more numerous and simultaneous interpretation of compositional elements. As mentioned earlier (chapter one), Olly Wilson refers to this emphasis on timbral independence as a “heterogeneous sound-ideal.”⁹⁵ This concept of “simultaneous multidimensionality” (David Locke – lecture notes, 2009) is helpful when considering the referential and signifying function of sampling.

In a panel discussion conducted in the late 1990's, D acknowledged Public Enemy's influence on his work.⁹⁶ He cited not only their political rhetoric, but also the

⁹⁴ Katz, 155.

⁹⁵ Wilson, 15.

⁹⁶ “The Bomb Squad” was the name of Public Enemy's production team comprised of Hank “Shocklee” Boxley, his brother Keith “Wizard K-Jee,” Eric “Vietnam” Sadler, Norman “Terminator –X” Rogers, Paul Shabazz, and Johnny “Juice” Rosado from Jeff Chang, “Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-hop Generation”

multi-layered and multi-thematic production of The Bomb Squad's sound.⁹⁷ In fact, Katz identifies more than a dozen samples in the first minute or so of *Fight the Power*. Public Enemy's "polytimbral and polymetric meta-loop" is an acknowledgement of both African and African-American cultural prerogatives.⁹⁸ The interaction of multiple repeated patterns is a nod to African structural and aesthetic tradition, whereas the inclusion of samples by African-American artists (James Brown and Clyde Stubblefield for example) is simultaneously an acknowledgement of these artists' cultural influence and a "re-appropriation" of "Black vocal samples" from White artists. The inclusion of James Brown also evokes the memory of this musician's role in the civil rights movement; this effect is almost guaranteed through Brown's metonymic association with the song *Say It Loud (I'm Black and I'm Proud)*. James Brown tracks have been sampled so frequently in hip-hop that this practice can now be considered a musical trope or convention of the genre.

D's sampling style approaches that of The Bomb Squad, thereby inviting a similar metonymic association with Public Enemy's politically motivated songs and cultural influence. D however sets up a distinctly South African system of referential themes and "double-voicedness."⁹⁹ The chant *Jan Pierewiet* is deeply woven into the cultural fabric of both Black and White South Africans. The simplicity of the song also alludes to the 1970's Afrikaans genre of the *lekkerliedjie* - in the words of Ingrid Byerly: "a 'nice song,' a bland form of easy-listening where lyrics centered around flora, fauna, and

(New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005), 247.

⁹⁷ <http://www.redbullmusicacademy.com/video-archive/lectures/uidcall/91/>

⁹⁸ Wilson, 9.

⁹⁹ Katz, 155.

geographical locations to avoid controversial issues.”¹⁰⁰ *Jan Pierewiet* was written by the famed Afrikaner poet C. J. Langenhoven, who also authored *Die Stem* (“The Call of South Africa,” but literally translated to: “The Voice”). In 1957 this poem was adopted as the national anthem and soon became a symbol of apartheid hegemony. During the late 1920’s, Langenhoven was an outspoken advocate for the adoption of Afrikaans (instead of Dutch) as the second of South Africa’s official languages, the other being English. The cultural resonances are clear, as is D’s motivation for using this particular sample.

The line *Ons bly stil en sal nie raas* (“We’ll be quiet and won’t make a sound”) alludes to a children’s game similar to “hide-and-go-seek” where the group is stating their intention to hide from the individual who must then find them. It could also be interpreted as a taunt or challenge extended to the authorities to find the hidden transcripts in the piece. The phrase takes on a more sinister character when thought of as a response to the constant reprimand of a dominating figure. In the first half of section B, every attempt to complete this phrase is interrupted by scratches. The children’s voices finally blurt out: *“sal nie raas”* (“[we] won’t make a sound”) – offering obedience in exchange for an end to this persistent assault. At [0:38] the phrase *Jan Pierewiet* is heard in its entirety before being dissected and fragmented into component syllables through scratches. “Jan” is a common Afrikaans first name; thus D first constructs and then deconstructs the “character” of the typical white Afrikaner male. In contrast to Nthodi’s poem, the *baas* (“boss”) is here addressed by his first name – a sign of familiarity and in this context, of disrespect. The authority of the name is challenged; D’s scratches expand, isolate and distort this phrase to the point where it is unrecognizable from the original. D

¹⁰⁰ Ingrid Bianca Byerly, “Music, Mediator, and Prophet: The Music Indaba of Late-Apartheid South Africa,” *Ethnomusicology* 42, no. 1 (Winter, 1998): 14.

returns to the line *Ons bly stil* ("[We'll] be quiet) at [0:56], but at [1:02] focuses his attention on the second half of the phrase. The vocal "*sal nie*" ("will not") is followed by an extended pattern of scratches. This motive is heard three times; the repetition briefly changes the character of the sample from obedience to defiance. This provocation is short-lived and gives way at [1:10] to the defeated "*sal nie raas*" ("[we] won't make a sound"). To the listener the effect is comical but also unsettling: D's scratches are unrelenting, the precision and intentionality of his technique, unnerving. The sense of discomfort one gets by hearing or "witnessing" this sonic assault is finally alleviated with the arrival of section C.

David Goldberg compares the development of scratching technique to other historical modifications of musical sound such as the bottleneck in slide guitar, and plunger mute in trumpet playing. In these instances the modification is temporary – the guitar and trumpet can be played in the conventional manner once the intervening device is removed. Robert Walser states this point more directly: citing Rose's description of hip-hop as a "post-literate orality," Walser avers that hip-hop is "deeply technological... [embodying]...the specificity of its historical and political context."¹⁰¹ In turntablism for example, the modification to the sound can be heard concurrently with the original recorded version. Using two turntables, the scratch can exist in the same time and space as its referent. "Transgression" or subversion occurs simultaneously with (and when considering the physical placement of the turntables in a DJ setup, literally *alongside*) expected behavior. This phenomenon Goldberg asserts, represented a turning point in the relationship between "the device and its media;" the technique of scratching had the

¹⁰¹ Robert Walser, "Rhythm, Rhyme, and Rhetoric in the Music of Public Enemy" in *Ethnomusicology* 39, no.2, 197.

potential to render the “unadulterated” sound as well as every instant of its transformation. The scratch is therefore an inherent part of the sound, albeit a part of the sound that exists “between the grooves.” Scratches are essentially an interpretation of extant sound, a realization of potential aural events. Goldberg proposes: “a moment on a record can be understood as a complete ‘text’ ... this text can be ‘read’ by simply playing the record, or it can be interpreted through the physical act of scratching, which generates more text in the process of coherently reorganizing the original.” Continuing this metaphor, Goldberg avers that scratches are “discovered” similar to the way “a critical writer [might interpret] a text.”¹⁰² Given their disruptive and restless character, it would perhaps be more appropriate to think of scratches as “being released” from their bonds.

Both scratching and sampling are technological means of modifying sound. Whereas scratching is a temporal modification (shortening or lengthening the original material), sampling affects spatial parameters. The hiphop turntablist takes a sampled idea out of its original context and places it in an entirely new aural environment. The compositional aesthetic of sample-based music is one of layering. From this perspective, *Krap Kommentaer* consists of two primary levels: a percussive foundation or “beat” and a vocal/scratch line. The foundation level is itself comprised of samples - alternating bass kick and snare drum sounds with an occasional bass guitar pattern - that have then been looped. D challenges the listener’s expectation of where and when the “beat” and vocal/scratch lines interact in the piece. Sampling also disrupts physical space by foregrounding and inducing extra-musical associations with particular sonic events.

¹⁰² David Albert Mhadi Goldberg, “The Scratch is Hip-hop: Appropriating the Phonographic Medium,” in *Appropriating Technology: Vernacular Science and Social Power*, ed. by Ron Eglash, Jennifer L. Croissant, Giovanna Di Chiro and Rayvon Fouche (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 118-119.

These associations engage the listener emotionally and intellectually with the composition, effectively bringing him or her “closer” to the work. Both the listener and the turntablist’s experience of the “resultant sound” are mediated by technology: the physiological and physical sensations of hearing and feeling the vibrations of the sound are conducted via amps and speakers. For the turntablist the relationship to the resultant sound is more complex. Access to this final product must first be negotiated through expressive performance on the turntables and selection of samples. Before he can realize a composition, the turntablist must literally “find his voice.”

This particular form of “technological ventriloquism” is interesting because at no point in the track *Krap Kommentaar* do we hear the human voice of the turntablist.¹⁰³ Instead, D employs the surrogate language of scratching together with sampling, to convey his meaning. The middle section of *Krap Kommentaar* illustrates this point most clearly. The sample D uses here – the word “everybody” - is the most mechanized and robotic of all the vocal segments. Again he uses the compositional format of a vocal sample followed by scratch technique. The vocal sample is quoted exactly with every repetition, but the scratch is noticeably delayed, becoming more insistent with each recurrence. Rose describes the subtle variations of musical repetition in hip-hop as “aural manifestations of philosophical approaches to social environments.”¹⁰⁴ A characteristic of Afro-diasporic musics, repetition is seen as a “circulation and equilibrium, rather than...a regulated force.”¹⁰⁵ In his nuanced placement of scratch components, D illustrates a continuity of this aesthetic. Perhaps not a “collision of man and machine” as evidenced in the piece’s exposition, this section then represents a “complicity” in destabilizing our

¹⁰³ Auner, 101.

¹⁰⁴ Rose, 67.

¹⁰⁵ Snead cited in Rose, 69.

conventionally held views regarding the expressivity of the human voice and the coldness of mechanical reproduction.

In his examination of posthuman voices in contemporary music production, Joseph Auner observes that “(e)ven if we repeat ourselves, the tone and phrasing and meaning [of human voices] will always be different. Exact repetition can only be pathological in everyday life....When the recording of the voice repeats, when it is placed into the looping system we associate with the mechanical all [honesty and authenticity] is lost – just as a record getting stuck was always a traumatic moment, shattering the sense of immediacy.”¹⁰⁶ Recalling Nthodi’s poem: it is the repetitive nature of the interaction between worker and landowner, Black and White, which renders dialogical convention meaningless. Looking at the final stanza, the protagonist stumbles over words and pre-emptively the landowner’s predictable response with his own mechanical interjection:

Baas Ben,

Baas Be-ne....

Baas Ben.

Goodbye

Baas Ben.

The human voice has been reduced to giving automated replies, severed of emotion and consciousness. This realization signals a return to humanity; the final prophetic words foretell the end of subordination. Similarly in D’s example it is the “human voice” that loses any sense of authenticity through unvaried repetition (in fact, the album’s title

¹⁰⁶ Auner, 111-112.

Ysterbek, figuratively translates to “metal-mouth”). On the other hand, the “machine sound” of the scratch is “humanized” by the changes to that sound’s inflection. The listener establishes a connection with the scratch sound because of its capacity for human error.

Removed of human-like qualities, the vocal sample of the middle section is a compelling juxtaposition in timbre and meaning to the word "*ons*" ("we") heard in section B. If the former is drained of all emotional content, the latter is the epitome of childlike innocence and ebullience. The dissociation of the mechanized sample from the human body allows D to express sentiments that would otherwise be impossible to vocalize under the social conditions of an oppressive regime. From this safe distance, D is able to deliver his most scathing critique of the apartheid system: the privileges and inclusion that “we” enjoy clearly do not extend to “everybody.” Section Bⁱ continues this breakdown of the concept of nationhood. This penultimate section is comprised mostly of scratch techniques based on the word "*ons*" ("we"), that again distort the meaning and the sound of the word. Section Aⁱ recalls the horn fanfare of the introduction, and also reveals to the listener the first complete iteration of the phrase *ons bly stil en sal nie raas* ("we'll be quiet and won't make a sound"). By deconstructing this line throughout, D suffuses the track with tensions and anticipations. Metaphorically, the descending vocal and melodic inflection of this sample imply the speakers’ submission – “we’ll do whatever you want.” Musically, this segment resolves the arch form structure with an implicit return to the “tonic.” However, D’s inclusion of a final beat-juggling motive

indicates that the “war of position...[the] crucial [battle] in the retention, establishment, [and] legitimation of real social power” is not yet over.¹⁰⁷

As Katz suggests: “[s]ampling is most fundamentally an art of transformation.”¹⁰⁸ Employing strategies of “bifocality, juxtaposition of multiple realities, intertextuality, inter-referentiality and comparison through families of resemblance,” D transforms the samples by placing them in entirely new contexts, and imbues them with new functions and meanings.¹⁰⁹ In the presentation of this allegory, the samples are further disfigured and distorted through scratching. As a turntablist, D becomes the ultimate *bricoleur* in the Levi-Straussian sense: taking apart, re-assembling, and re-assigning the found sounds that constitute his compositional palette to insert himself into a (socio-political) narrative from which he had previously been excluded. As does the *bricoleur*, the DJ “speaks’ not only *with* things...but also through the medium of things: giving an account of his personality and life by the choices he makes between the limited possibilities.”¹¹⁰ In this way, D moves amidst the existing political, historical, and ideological boundaries of his situation. Through technological means he is able to physically “drop the needle” on or at any point of these systems. More than a transgression of established conventions, this is an indication of the capacity to re-imagine and expand these perspectives. The fourth and final chapter of my thesis delves more deeply into such expansions of delimited social and behavioral realms.

¹⁰⁷ Rose, 102.

¹⁰⁸ Katz, 156.

¹⁰⁹ George Lipsitz cited in Murray Forman, “The ‘Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop” (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 76.

¹¹⁰ Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* trans. from the French “*La Pensee Sauvage*” (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1966), 21.

Chapter 4 - “Local is *Lekker*”¹¹¹ (“Local Content is Best”)

Vannie see tot die berg,

Vannie berg tot die Vlaktes.

Translation:

From the sea, to the mountain,

From the mountain to the Flats.

- excerpt from chorus of *Cape Flats*

Indirection is one of hip-hop’s primary lyrical and lexical tropes. Allusions are variously made through incisive wordplay, simile, and metaphor – all strategic devices employed in the art of Signifyin(g). The other side of this rhetorical coin is explicit reference: passages that situate the actor within specific socio-political, cultural, or geographical contexts. Murray Forman identifies four prominent spatial dimensions within hip-hop music: discourse, text, the popular music industry, and constructions of “realness.”¹¹² Hip-hop’s playing field is undoubtedly an urban locale, with descriptions of city and marginalized “inner-city” life permeating the genre. “Discourse” then refers to the means (denotative and connotative) and the expression (real and imagined) of this lived urban experience. This assessment includes the discursive sites in which dialogues surrounding hip-hop practice occur, be they informal, academic, mainstream, or “underground” settings. Hip-hop’s “textual space” is embodied in its media representations: newspapers, magazines, as well as television and radio broadcasts. These are the agencies

¹¹¹ The Afrikaans word “*Lekker*” translates literally to “nice” and is used to express a pleasurable experience. “Local is *Lekker*” is a common South African expression denoting regional or national pride.

¹¹² Forman, 9-34.

responsible for the dissemination and commodification of hiphop. Forman's third parameter is the corporate music industry itself, with its interplay of marketing imperatives and human practice. The final category relates to the geographical space of hiphop's construction and propagation. The concept of "realness" emerges from the MC's authoritative first-person narratives and "truthful" representations of metonymic experience. The author also makes the distinction between "space" and "place," with the former denoting "scale" and the latter, "value." This conscious telescoping of perspectives reveals the inherent negotiation of, or more pointedly, migration to and from these spatial realms. In relation to BVK's work, this section is primarily concerned with the fourth parameter of physical space and concurrent evocations of "realness" or authority. I also investigate constructions of "performative" and "psychological" space. The first term indicates the actual venues of musical and identity performance: clubs and stadia for example. The second relates to the mental attitude or ideological slant engendered through time spent in a specific location, similar to the idiomatic expression "cabin fever" perhaps. In this chapter, the considerations of proximity and separation will be explored within the context of BVK's geo-political locus and historical racial categorization as "Coloureds." To illustrate these ideas I have chosen to analyze the songs "*Hulle is Bang*" ("They're Afraid") and "Cape Flats (Remix)."

The apartheid-era relationship between Coloureds and White minority rule was characterized by the intimacy of a shared linguistic model and the distance of racial and class boundaries. In 1950 the Group Areas Act facilitated the eviction of Coloureds from Cape Town's center, to a largely undeveloped area on the outskirts of the city known as the Cape Flats. These forced removals created opposing perspectives of dislocation from and instantiation of spatial parameters; sentiments that have been immortalized in the works of

“Coloured” artists such as Richard Rive and jazz pianist Abdullah Ibrahim (respectively, the 1986 novel “Buckingham Palace District Six,” and the 1970s recording: “Mannenberg is Where it’s Happening”¹¹³). This response to historical/temporal and spatial catalysts is summed up in the title of the collection of essays edited by Zimitri Erasmus: “Coloured by History, Shaped by Place.” Considered in two sections, the first half of this phrase is an obvious reference to the classification “Coloured” and the dilemma of an ascribed or imposed identity. The latter conveys the impact of locality and placement on this particular racial grouping. The complete statement moreover implies a finality that situates Coloureds as terminally passive victims of circumstance. This constitutes perhaps a psychological bearing towards apartheid polity, which I would call a “negative psychological space.” With regard to BVK, I argue that the locational content of their verse and the very modality of expression – regionally specific Kaaprikaans vernacular – indicate the extent to which Coloureds themselves have personalized or “shaped” the terrain of the Cape Flats. This display of agency could be referred to as a “positive psychological space.” Kaaprikaans thus epitomizes Forman’s description of “linguistic and symbolic [practice]...enacted or mobilized by social subjects who continually strive to make sense of the world around them.”¹¹⁴ Kaaprikaans is a verbal articulation and actualization of Geertzian worldview, or the “reduction of experience to familiar form.”¹¹⁵ By evaluating the “psychological spaces” inhabited by this grouping in conjunction with their “physical place,” I propose that one can derive at that characteristic “sense of Colouredness”

¹¹³ “Manenberg” (note different spelling) is a Coloured township on the Cape Flats. The eponymous title track is anecdotally regarded as the rallying cry of the anti-apartheid movement.

¹¹⁴ Forman, 10.

¹¹⁵ Edward Sapir, “Selected Writings of Edward Sapir in Language, Culture and Personality,” ed. by David Goodman Mandelbaum (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1985), 15.

alluded to by Erasmus.¹¹⁶ The focus of this chapter then, is to examine how BVK elicits this sense through the interaction of language choice, reference to cultural practices, and geographical signposting in their work.

The use of spatial reference can be evidenced in some of the works analyzed thus far. The first occurrence is with the track “Intro” (chapter one), where MC Deon “Ready D” Daniels defiantly proclaims: “the Cape Flats...that’s my Heaven, the home of brave women and men who died for the revolution.” In the final section of the same piece, BVK is referred to as the definitive sound of the Cape Flats (“*daai klang vannie Kaap se vlaktes*”). This association is most provocative when one considers the chorus of “*Hulle is Bang*.” The track opens with the following narrative:

<i>Hulle is bang vir die klang vannie Cape Flats.</i>	It’s the sound of the Cape Flats,
<i>[D]is “gwa-gwa” hier;</i>	That frightens them.
<i>“Ba-ba” daar.</i>	The sound of gunshots filling the air:
<i>“Een-twee-drie” dan is alles klaar.</i>	It’s all over in a matter of seconds.
<i>[D]is rough, [d]is ready, die lewe is heavy,</i>	Life out here is tough,
<i>Maar vorentoe moet ons gaan.</i>	But still we persevere.

The lyrics convey ownership or a claiming of territory; just as Kaaprikaans is *their* language (“*my taal*” – analyzed in chapter two), the Cape Flats area is *their* land.

The song also describes the consequent irony of apartheid policy: Having created a ghetto in order to contain and subjugate a populace, the “oppressor” is now too afraid to enter.

Socio-political themes of youth education and upliftment are central to BVK’s manifesto.

Since their inception BVK’s members and their predecessors POC, have participated in

¹¹⁶ Erasmus, *Coloured*.

numerous workshops hosted in schools and public sites within the Coloured community addressing the specters of drug abuse, poverty, and gangsterism. If “Intro” is directed towards an unseen proponent of apartheid ideology, the simplistic metaphors and language of *Hulle is Bang* can be read as a cautionary tale passed down to a younger generation about to come of age. A preservation of cultural prerogatives via oral/aural tradition is clearly taking place. The second and third lines of the chorus are onomatopoeic references to the pervasive gang violence on the Flats; the vocal sounds “gwa-gwa” and “ba-ba,” are in fact punctuated by gunshot samples in the instrumental part. This phrase is delivered in the manner of a nursery rhyme (specifically “Old MacDonald”), and it is easy to imagine a translation and re-interpretation as: “here a bang/there a bang/everywhere a bang-bang.” The naïve foretelling is continued with the line: “one-two-three and it’s all over” (“*een-twee-drie...*”). In the penultimate line the key words - rough, ready, “*die lewe*” (“the life”), and heavy - besides iambic stresses receive additional emphasis from their placement on tactus points (Figure 4.1). The difficulty and weight of living under these social conditions can literally be felt in the fits and starts of the syncopated phrasing, which consists mostly of accented sixteenth-notes followed by unaccented eighth-notes. Despite their daily struggles however, life must carry on: “*maar vorentoe moet ons gaan.*”

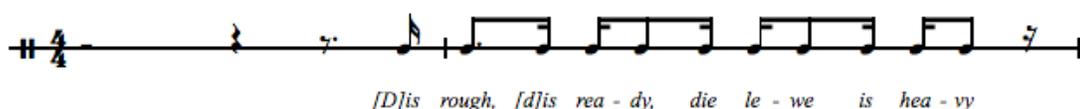


Figure 4.1: Rhythmic transcription from chorus of “*Hulle is Bang.*”

Conceived as a message to the Coloured community, this track is also a criticism of the internalized segregation and self-definition within that community as indicated by the following stanza:

<i>Jou onderbroek is vol bruinmerke,</i>	You shit yourself,
<i>Want die Cape Flats grens(ge)vegte,</i>	The (racial) boundary disputes,
<i>sien deur jou soos 'n stukkende venster.</i>	Are too much for you to handle.

The line “*sien deur jou soos a stukkende venster*” (“to see right through you, like a broken window”) is an allusion to the practice of “*venstertjies kyk*” – being distracted or unaware of one’s surroundings on account of “looking elsewhere” or literally “looking in the windows.” February explains that: “some ‘coloureds’ often [tried] to pass the colour line and pass themselves off as whites...they are generally referred to as ‘play whites.’ When friends or relatives see other ‘coloureds’ approaching who are ‘trying for white,’ [t]hey pretend to be window shopping in order not to embarrass the person(s) or relative(s) in question.”¹¹⁷ “Trying for White” was not only an attempt to avoid the legal strictures imposed on non-Whites, but also necessitated the full adoption and assimilation of apartheid ideology - a complicity in the subjugation of non-Whites. Self-delineation is a component of negative psychological space, colloquially known as “Coloured mentality.” In this regard, Haupt gives the example of BVK’s 1998 track entitled: “*Jy Smaak My*” (“You Fancy Me”).¹¹⁸ The song traces a protagonist’s frustrated attempts at courtship. The female object of affections refuses any advances because of class

¹¹⁷ February, 198.

¹¹⁸ Haupt, *Black Thing*, 183. “*Smaak*” translates to “taste” or “like” – the sexual overtones are clear.

difference: although they both live in demarcated “Coloured areas,” hers is a middle-class suburb. Furthermore she states that:

His hair is, well, *kroes*. There’s no other way for me to say it. And I don’t think that I want to have anything to do with him. I mean, can you imagine the embarrassment? There’ll be no way I can stand for that. Not with my status.

In the above quotation, English itself becomes a signifier of elevated status, distancing the love interest from the protagonist who admittedly “don’t speak it so *lekker*” (“doesn’t speak English that well”). Although she is clearly familiar with Kaaprikaans, communicating openly in this dialect is indicative of lower social standing. Using Kaaprikaans to describe the physical appearance of the protagonist is thus a double indictment. The word “*kroes*” denotes a kinky or wiry quality; the conflation of biological markers either with superiority or inferiority, beauty or repulsion, is the subject of Erasmus’ insightful essay “Hair Politics.”¹¹⁹ Outlining another aspect of negative psychological space, the “Whiteness” of light skin and straight hair, is more desirable than the dark coloration and course hair texture of “Blackness.” Notably, Erasmus discusses the devalorization of “Black hair” - abetted by straightening and chemical relaxing products – and the resurgence of the *au naturel* aesthetic as a signifier of “authentic Blackness.” This allusion to and advocacy for “authenticity” or “the real” is I think the central idea behind “*Hulle is Bang.*” By pointing out various constructions or

¹¹⁹ Erasmus, “Hair Politics” in *Senses of Culture*, ed. by Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

interpretations of lived experience, BVK invites and encourages their audience to draw their own conclusions based on a variety of perspectives. Azuhl explains:

[BVK had the potential to] make people realize...whatever you've been fed has been bullshit, you know? Listen to these stories, this is only, you know, our side of the story, but there's more stories that needs to be told and that are told in the Cape Flats, you know...[our intention was to tell] people: "Look at here, there's negativity everywhere man, no matter where you go. Don't fall into the media's hype of what a certain sector of society is, you know what I mean, 'cause at the end of the day...*ja*, it's for you to kinda,...to go out there and search for yourself for the truth,"

I would say, 'cause that's what hiphop has done for us.¹²⁰

This sentiment is echoed by Ready D:

[the youth today] can't really identify who the enemy is, or what the enemy is, in which form the enemy comes...sometimes we end up being our own worst enemy. So we try and paint a lot of different pictures and scenarios and hopefully between that people will get it, because for us it's not a case of going out and preaching to people, you know: "this is right, this is wrong, you should be this, you should be that." At the end of the day you try and do your bit for people, for society, for community through music....¹²¹

¹²⁰ Personal interview with Azuhl, January, 2010.

¹²¹ Personal interview with Ready D, January, 2010.

BVK's advocacy of social improvement – “doing their bit” so to speak – clearly situates their work within the purview of “message” hip-hop. As D states: “[even] if we’re writing lyrics that sort of border on fantasy...[]...where you’re sorta going out this whole bravado type [scenario], there’s always a degree of consciousness. We’re touching on a whole range of issues...[]...but at the end of the day it’s all conscious-driven music. Definitely, we couldn’t have it any other way, ‘cause that been sort of our upbringing, our encounters with hip-hop. And that’s what we know, that’s what we kinda stick to.”¹²² It is thus impossible to speak of the group without engendering this mandate of community upliftment. In a similar manner, one cannot engage in discourse regarding the Cape Flats or the numerous suburbs contained therein, without evoking its historical estrangement from the city proper. However, by prioritizing the Cape Flats as the focal point of cultural practice and concerns, BVK exacts a reappraisal of marginality as opposed to centrality. It would appear then, that the conceptions and boundaries of “the local” are redefined. The limitations of axis and periphery are dissolved through a succession of reciprocal social relations. While the Cape Flats was “created” as a discrete location separate from Cape Town, BVK’s influence (ideological and musical) extends well beyond this geographical and social demarcation.¹²³ This idea of crossing and muddling borders has already been explored in previous chapters with regard to racial classification and language propriety. The issue of “performative space” has also briefly been touched upon – BVK’s participation in “historically White” music festivals – and will now receive closer attention.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ A parallel might be drawn to aspects of Denis-Constant Martin’s study of the Cape Town “Coon Carnival.” Carnival participants - residents of the Cape Flats and predominantly Muslim *Bo-Kaap* (“High Cape”) area - parade through the city in an act of “reclaiming” the streets.

By 1999 (approximately two years after their formation), BVK was headlining South African rock festivals, performative sites that ostensibly privileged White cultural interests. One of BVK's most popular set pieces at these events – Azuhl refers to it as the “anthem” of these festivals – was in fact a track entitled “Cape Flats” (a “remix” version appears on *Ysterbek* and will be considered here). “Cape Flats” was a collaborative effort between BVK and South Africa's first Coloured rock group “Nine.” In terms of reception, the commonalities of language (Afrikaans) and musical idiom (rock music) surely coordinated inroads to the cultural territory of predominantly White audiences. It must however be mentioned that Nine's access to rock music was a direct result of Coloured's relative political privilege over Blacks, as well as class privilege within the Coloured community itself.¹²⁴ This is most evident when thinking of the fundamental tools required to function and be successful within the genre: financial agency to participate in instrumental lessons perhaps, to purchase instruments or recordings, and leisure time to practice. Author Reebee Garofalo addresses similar discrepancies of access in his essay “Crossing Over.” Garofalo catalogues rock music's historical debt to African and African-American musical influences, as well as its metonymic association with (or appropriation by) White musicians. Speaking of the pattern of “Black innovation and White popularization” in American popular music, or “Black roots, White fruits,” he offers:

[This] pattern is built...[on the]...systematic exclusion of Black personnel from positions of power within the industry and on the artificial separation of Black and White audiences. Because of industry and audience racism, Black music has been relegated to a separate and unequal marketing structure. As a result, it is only on rare

¹²⁴ Personal interview with Adam Haupt, January, 2010.

occasions that Black music ‘crosses over’ into the mainstream market on its own terms.¹²⁵

Nine’s performance of rock music in these venues is not only a transgression of boundaries, but also a relocation of perspective to the genre’s Black (or at the very least, non-White) roots. Nine’s distorted, abrasive guitar sound maintains the performance idiom of rock music while simultaneously engaging the resistive origins of its parent genre and that of hip-hop. Following Walser,¹²⁶ I would argue that coupled with BVK’s lyrical content, the “noise” of this track’s instrumental and production treatment is a sonic representation of the social dissonances experienced on the Cape Flats. Ready D’s addition of “more edge, more drums”¹²⁷ to the remix version adds to the intensity of aural experience. Describing his technical motivation, D’s word choice illustrates an awareness of the aggressive physical component to this foregrounding of musical texture: “...we were *hitting* a different audience...knowing that we’re *penetrating* those audiences I need[ed] to bring something to the production that they could identify with as well, and hopefully that would *strike* a chord...(emphasis added).” The attention and concern in appealing to a new audience is curious, given the confrontational nature of the lyrics. “Cape Flats” begins with a spoken introduction, superimposed over a fragmentation (two to three notes) of the triadic primary guitar riff (Figure 4.2). This preamble is followed by three verses, performed by Ready D, Mr. Fat, and Judah successively. A vocal bridge section precedes the first occurrence of the chorus, with later iterations interspersed between the verses. The opening reads: “BVK...Nine...double trouble...*nou gaan ons die Suid-Afrikaanse vlag hoog*

¹²⁵ Reebee Garofalo, “Crossing Over: From Black Rhythm & Blues to White Rock’N Roll” in *Rhythm & Business: The Political Economy of Black Music*, ed. by Norman Kelley (Akashic Books, 2002), 112.

¹²⁶ Walser.

¹²⁷ Personal interview with Ready D, January, 2010.

hou” (“We’re raising the South African flag high”), a recapitulation of the nationalist flag trope heard in “*Hulle is Bang*” (chapter two). With this emphatic statement BVK assert their authority in representing not only language, but also nationhood. This spoken section is followed by a sample of the chant “*Hier kom ons nou met die wilde gedagtes*” – “We’re coming right at you/right for you.”

The musical score consists of three systems. The first system, labeled 'Guitar' and 'Spoken intro', shows a guitar riff in 4/4 time. The guitar part is written on a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The spoken intro is on a bass clef staff with a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are: "B - V - K, Nine, dou - ble trou - ble nou gaan ons die Suid Af ri - kaan - se vlag hoog hou". The second system, labeled '3', shows a guitar riff on a treble clef staff and a vocal sample on a bass clef staff. The lyrics for the sample are: " ("Hier kom ons nou..." sample)". The third system, labeled '7', shows a guitar riff on a treble clef staff and a vocal sample on a bass clef staff.

Figure 4.2: Introductory measures of “Cape Flats,” showing interaction of fragmented guitar riff and vocal section. Measures 7-8 show the guitar *ostinato* in full.

Gates’ explanation of the Signifyin(g) trope “in your face” can be applied here. This directed and directional epithet means: “that by which you intended to confine (or define) me I shall return to you squarely in your face.”¹²⁸ The sense of motion and “arrival” is reinforced by the production treatment and presentation: Incomplete cuts fade in and out before the entire line is heard. The vocal timbre of the sample is also distorted, giving the chant a mechanized quality devoid of recognizable “human” characteristics. Thus, by the time the listener is able to discern

¹²⁸ Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 66.

or decipher a threat, it's already too late. Given the antagonistic nature of these lyrics, the fracturing of the opening guitar riff is particularly significant. Counterbalancing the warning of “double trouble,” the partial disclosure of the guitar *ostinato* represents a seduction, or more to the point, a “bait-and-switch.” BVK manipulates White audiences’ familiarity with the rock idiom and the signifier of electric guitar, drawing the listener in before unleashing their rhetoric – it is no accident that the guitar entry precedes the spoken vocal part. Finally, the description of “*wilde gedagtes*” translates literally to “wild thoughts” perhaps evocative of the “concrete jungle” of BVK’s urban landscape. I posit that in this context, the word “*wilde*” refers to “subversive” notions. “*Hier kom ons nou...*” also constitutes the final line of the chorus, which is especially relevant when considering the piece’s conclusion. The final section of “Cape Flats” consists of alternating repetitions of the chorus proper and this final line. This repetition underscores the appeal to community solidarity, re-energizing the crowd with each articulation.

If their modified production style (and collaboration with rock musicians) was intended as a bridge extended to new audiences, the lyrical content of the first verse undermines this intention:

<i>Ek was een van daai snotnies laaities</i>	I used to be one of those snot-nosed
kids,	
<i>Wat jou ruite in sal gegooi het</i>	Who would’ve “smashed-and-
grabbed.” ¹²⁹	
<i>Kaalvoet met ‘n stukkende broek</i>	Barefoot with tattered clothing,
<i>Sal ek jou hele weekend gespoil het</i>	I would have ruined your whole
weekend.	
<i>Met ‘n attitude en ‘n bad look</i>	With an attitude and a sideways glance,

¹²⁹ “*Ruite*” translates to windows; the image of “smashing your windows” is reinforced by a recurrent sample/sound effect of breaking glass. A further allusion might be to BVK’s “shattering the glass ceiling” of rock festivals and mainstream reception.

<i>Kan ek jou hele lewe destroy het</i>	I could have destroyed everything.
<i>Ek sal sommer jou meisie vir</i>	I'd even have asked your girl over,
<i>"huisie-huisie" uitgenooi het</i>	To play "house,"
<i>Dan se ek sommer vir jou</i>	And then let you know,
<i>Hoe lekker ek die tyd met haar ge-enjoy het</i>	Exactly what a great time I'd had.
Well, not much has changed....	Well, not much has changed....

The opening stanza relates a tale of misspent youth: This individual has been reformed/transformed from the archetypal "other Coloured" of his audience's imagination – uncultured, unscrupulous, and thieving - to a more acceptable version now appearing on stage. The tone is almost collegial – two acquaintances reminiscing over shared experiences. The narrator feigns deference throughout, indicating an understanding of his position in the South African social and racial hierarchy by consistently listing what he *could have* done had he wanted to. This reference to fundamental yet subdued power is also heard in *Hulle is Bang*: "*Die dragon het ge-enter, but I'll control my temper*" ("The dragon has entered...")¹³⁰ The pretense of servility is finally lifted with the final line: "Well, not much has changed...." implying that the potential for disruption is still present. A more clear indication of the narrator's perspective is given in the following section:

<i>Ek wiet jy wil een vannie brasse wie</i>	I know you wanna be just like us,
<i>Jy wil spy op my plannetjies,</i>	You wanna spy on my plans,
<i>Hier sal ons jou [opvriet].</i>	But here (on the Flats) we'll destroy you.

¹³⁰ A reference to the 1973 Bruce Lee movie "Enter the Dragon." In Afrikaans the prefix "ge-" indicates the past tense.

The first line recalls Kitwana’s positioning of White hiphop practitioners/listeners as “wannabes” – pretenders to a musical heritage and ideological space of marginalized (specifically Black) groupings. The intention of “spying on one’s plans” further connotes appropriation, but more so, a violation of ownership. The final line in this example implicates BVK as stewards of hiphop as well as the land. References to place are made in the subsequent verses as well, but these are of a less confrontational nature. For example, Mr. Fat announces: “O, Cape Flats, the greatest place of places,” and Judah opines:

Even <i>as ons</i> struggle	Even as we struggle,
<i>In die</i> ghetto <i>is dit lekker</i>	In the ghetto, we get by.
<i>Maak ‘n draai by ons op die</i> weekend	Stop by on the weekend,
<i>Jy sal saamstem</i>	And you’ll agree.
<i>Maak (d)it lekker warm</i>	We’ll take it higher,
<i>Met ‘n lekker</i> hiphop park-jam	With a hiphop park-jam. ¹³¹

The idea of proprietorship heard in the first verse is continued in the choral bridge that occurs before the chorus proper. It has previously been noted that the “*brasse*” – “the brothers,” a contraction of “Brasse Vannie Kaap” – have become synonymous with the Cape Flats. The first line of this passage signifies the critical, authoritarian gaze under which the Cape Flats, its inhabitants, and the group itself have historically been maintained. Ready D recounts: “the strong message was, we’re from the Cape Flats, we’re proud to be from there and we’re always challenging people...[] ...because in some

¹³¹ “Park-jams” are informal gatherings held at community spaces or parks, where the “four elements” of hiphop are celebrated.

areas we still felt that some people didn't take the crew serious[ly], we'[d] been patronized as well in certain arenas...[]...so it's just a matter of raising our voice."¹³²

<i>Hulle hou die brasse dop</i>	They're keeping a close watch on us;
<i>Hulle bid dat ons moet stop</i>	They're praying that we'll stop.
<i>Hulle dink dat ons gaan dop,</i>	They don't think we're going to succeed,
<i>Maar ons staan vas, staan vas (uh)</i>	But we'll stand our ground.
<i>Met die regte hiphop, staan vas</i>	We'll never give up on the "real" hiphop.

The final two lines in particular, frame BVK's struggle to proclaim the "reality" or truth of social conditions, within an ideological and physical "battlefield." By marking actual and imagined spaces, BVK exemplifies Forman's charge that "the city is not an evenly structured space, but one that is prone to a tangible unevenness." The lyrical undertow of these first vocal sections delivers a crushing evaluation of "the distribution of power and authority"¹³³ in preparation of the chorus:

<i>(D)is (d)ie Cape Flats, die Cape Flats,</i>	It's the Cape Flats, the Cape Flats!
<i>(D)is (d)ie Cape Flats, die Cape Flats,</i>	It's the Cape Flats, the Cape Flats!
<i>Van die see tot die berg,</i>	From the sea, to the mountain,
<i>Van die berg tot die Vlaktes,</i>	From the mountain to the Flats.
<i>Hier kom ons nou met de wilde gedagtes</i>	We're headed straight for you.

The "mountain" referred to in this passage is the geographical landmark of Table Mountain, at the foot of which lies the city of Cape Town. The description and spatial references of the chorus accomplish a number of cultural resonances. Firstly, this invocation traces the

¹³² Personal interview with Ready D, January, 2010.

¹³³ Forman, xviii

displacement of Coloureds from the coast (as indigenous Khoi and San peoples),¹³⁴ to the city (specifically the area of District Six), and finally to the Cape Flats. Secondly, it describes BVK's territory or the expanse of their influence, again blurring the delimitations of the Group Areas Act. In terms of these outcomes, a comparison can I think be drawn between BVK's deployment of linguistic, spatial and cultural markers, and their corresponding usage in the stylized presentation of Kaluli *sa-yelab* or "sung-text-weeping."¹³⁵ In Steven Feld's influential work "Sound and Sentiment" he describes the Kaluli convention of "turning over words" (*bali to*) to obfuscate intention, encourage varied interpretation or produce "inside" or "underneath" meanings (*hega*). In addition to these poetic and expressive tactics, *sa-yelab*, specifically a commemoration of the departed, engages the descriptive device of *tok* - a catalogue of places known to the deceased, but also a roadmap for the journey to reincarnation, or rather re-instantiation as a bird. Just as the Kaluli "identify themselves with place names because they see themselves reflected in their lands,"¹³⁶ BVK cite geo-spatial indicators that specifically register with the inhabitants of those areas. It is also these inhabitants for whom the masked transcripts of BVK's vernacular would convey the most meaning. Feld also elaborates on the technique of *halaido domeki* or "making hard." This refers to a progressive intensifying of song structure: "the image of competent formation; it is force, persuasion, the attainment of an energized evocative state. The holding power of that 'hardened' state is its 'flowing' *ebelan*, the sensation that sounds and feelings stay with you after they've been heard or performed."¹³⁷

I would say that the track "Cape Flats" is "hardened" or reaches full maturation in its final

¹³⁴ These indigenous tribes are also sometimes referred to as "*strandlopers*" – "beachcombers."

¹³⁵ Steven Feld, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*, 2nd Edition (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).

¹³⁶ Edward L. Schieffelin, *The Sorrow of the Lonely and the Burning of the Dancers*, 2nd Edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 44.

¹³⁷ Feld, 266.

repetitions of the chorus – the aural and experiential memories of this moment reside within the listener’s consciousness long after their actualization. The final consequence of the linguistic plays effected in the chorus, lies within the performative space of the rock festival itself. As veritable “Pied Pipers,” BVK elicit the collusion of audience members (either consciously or subconsciously), in deconstructing the socio-political directives of previous generations. What could be more destabilizing or threatening to South Africa’s entrenched racial and social hierarchy, than crowds of White youth chanting the multiple and multidimensional significations of this chorus?

As with all music the listener’s appreciation is not predicated on a thorough grasp of compositional structure, language/vernacular use or context. However, by deliberately situating their work within these parameters it is clear that BVK is directing their message to a very particular social grouping. There is a discreet validation of the cultural practices of Coloureds – a racial category for whom BVK’s discourse resonates at numerous planes of understanding and experience. Despite this specificity, BVK achieves an extension of “the local” on a variety of levels. This accretion mirrors Bhabha’s movement away from preoccupation with singularities to “the beyond” – “the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion.”¹³⁸ The first of these interstices occurs on a geo-spatial plane: stemming from the Western Cape region of South Africa, BVK toured extensively throughout the country, gaining converts as they went. Ready D admitted: “We didn’t expect that BVK’s stronghold [would] be in Bloemfontein, or in Pretoria, or in Potchefstroom [areas towards the Northeast of South Africa] amongst youth, White *Afrikaner* youth. We didn’t know; we didn’t do music for th[ose]

¹³⁸ Bhabha, *Locations*, 1

communities, we did what was true for us, and everybody else just locked onto what the group did.” D’s mention of “White Afrikaner youth” in this statement also alludes to BVK’s transcendence of political, racial, and cultural spaces. The fluidity of Afrikaans, the hybridity of its origins, are shown in the appeal and overt construction of Kaaprikaans from both English and Afrikaans influences. The fact remains that Kaaprikaans is a decisive marker of low social and racial status in contemporary South Africa. However, the dissemination of BVK’s work to South Africans of different socio-political backgrounds has arguably raised the currency of this dialect from a regional to a national sphere. The final considerations of “local expansion” – the shift from “place” to “space” - apply to psychological and performative realms. DJ Ricardo “Azuhl” Nunes explains the sympathetic dynamic between these parameters: Speaking about BVK’s access to and their maneuvers within conceptually restricted domains Azuhl noted: “...we got to perform on these major South African music festivals where only White bands were allowed to perform...[.]...through that...[.]...the so-called Coloured community could see that you know, you *can* cross borders.” More than “crossing borders,” BVK were able to move through and between the concrete and metaphorical spatial parameters of the South African landscape, via the general appeal of their work. At the same time, lyrically and contextually, the group laid claim to their historically ascribed locational and social classifications.

Conclusion

*It's the same message, just being packaged in a different way*¹³⁹

Segregating, partitioning, and stratifying the populace – emphasizing difference over commonality, and the “fixity of otherness”¹⁴⁰ – was arguably the prime directive of apartheid. However, this ambitious edifice (or artifice) demanded constant maintenance. Thus imagined racial narratives were reified through stereotyping (for example, the “gangster, *skelm*, or *klops* of Ready D’s “Intro”), and fissures in the bureaucratic veneer were glossed over with increased legislation (the amendment to the Population Registration Act and implementation of the Separate Amenities Act). From a contemporary point of view, apartheid’s greatest achievement was to firmly entrench these conceptions of social diffidence within the South African psyche; repercussions of this indoctrination are still encountered and grappled with long after the policy’s dissolution. The importance of BVK’s work lies in their proposal to re-imagine the identities and representations of self, fomented under and as a result of apartheid ideology. In this document I have attempted to highlight the various strategic moves employed by BVK, in the transcendence and transgression of socio-political and cultural delimitations.

Each of the chapters presented here, have sought to address a salient characteristic of BVK’s mandate. In chapter one, I demonstrated their contestation of ascribed identity and the outright rejection of apartheid designations and categorization. I do not however

¹³⁹ Personal interview with Azuhl, January, 2010.

¹⁴⁰ Bhabha, 66.

contend that BVK imagine themselves as members of a “postracial” society – the rejection (as opposed to denial) of racial discourse requires in the first place, a familiarity and acknowledgement of that discourse. Theirs is a re-positioning from essentialist formulations of Black and White to more inclusive conceptions of selfhood. Chapter two is again a questioning and subsequent shifting of boundaries. *My Taal* is a study not only of language propriety, but the ideological processes - perhaps the “social diagenesis” - through which static ideas of Afrikaans’ usage and meaning were formed. Ready D’s turntable “commentary” – the focus of chapter three – illustrates the inherent fluidity of language and varied modes of expressive communication. Chapter four is a culmination of these ideas: Through hybridity of language (standard Afrikaans and Kaaprikaans), BVK instantiates the cultural practices of a particular socio-geographic realm, while simultaneously extending their message of inclusivity to previously restricted social and spatial arenas. BVK also accomplishes a hybridity in their musical strategies: reconciling the aural/sonic signifiers of Western Art and African musics with “Intro,” and cultural associations of “White rock” and “Black hiphop” in “Cape Flats. Azuhl’s observation – the subheading of this section – is therefore a succinct appraisal of BVK’s accomplishments. The “same message” of commonality and shared lived experience is consistently “re-packaged” and re-formulated to meet the requirements/expectations of South Africa’s varied societal groupings. This distinction between “audience” and “appeal” if you will, is first heard in Mr.Fat’s exhortation to “post and deliver *na alle soorte*” (chapter two, final verse of *My Taal*). The “message” is sent out to everyone; it is up to the individual listener to parse and acknowledge those elements of text or context that carry personal resonances.

This final point clearly articulates the correlation between BVK's ideological and compositional approaches, and Bhabha's cultural hybridity – the theoretical framework I proposed at the outset of this document. BVK's work reveals the “disavowed knowledges” – the inherent similarities between binary constructions - that buoyed the apartheid regime. Not only did BVK dissolve conceptions of essential “Whiteness” through language, but characterizations of fundamental “Blackness” via shared political experience as well. In terms of their own “assigned” racial and cultural identities, the members of BVK have found cultural resonance with the resistive and instantiating ideologies of hip-hop, employing the discursive strategies of this musical genre in the narration of their personal histories.

* * *

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