

From Compton to Cape Town: Black(faceless)ness and the Appropriation of Gangsta Rap in Die Antwoord's “Fok Julle Naaiers”

by

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Abstract

Existing scholarship on the gangsta rap-rave group Die Antwoord concentrates on how the band represents South Africa's Cape Coloured community and White Afrikaner poor. This essay contributes to existing studies by analyzing how Die Antwoord utilizes gangsta rap and represents Black culture in their hit video *Fok Julle Naaiers*. Using hip hop and literary theories as conceptual frameworks, this essay argues that Die Antwoord's performative gestures involve strategic acts of erasure that effectively reduce gangsta rap and African American culture to negative stereotypes. The origin and intent of gangsta rap, critical responses to the subgenre, and Die Antwoord's appropriation of the art form are discussed at length.

Introduction

This essay is about how *Die Antwoord*, a controversial yet increasingly popular White South African gangsta' rap-rave group, represents select Black American identity and appropriates gangsta rap. Using hip hop and literary theories as conceptual frameworks, this essay expands current scholarship by critically examining how *Die Antwoord's* hip hop routine constitutes a type of 'thug minstrelsy' that simultaneously erases and essentializes Black identity.

I argue that *Die Antwoord's* mimetic act reveals not a new or necessarily alternative White South African identity but the return of an age old one that uses innovative technologies, in this case gangsta' rap and the internet, to transmit longstanding codes of Black inferiority - codes that violently contradict "post-racial" and "Rainbow Nation" sensibilities in the United States and South Africa. The first section of this essay examines the origins of and responses to gangsta rap. The second section explores how Die Antwoord draws upon and advances the subgenre by critically analyzing the group's hit video *Fok Julle Naaiers*. The essay concludes with a statement about the broader implications of Die Antwoord's routine for African and African Diasporic hip hop.

Whereas African-American gangsta' rappers, like *N.W.A* and *Tupac*, initially affected the gangsta' rap tradition in effort to disavow White racial and socio-economic hegemony in the United States, *Die Antwoord* has resurrected, revised, and repurposed the gangsta' genre of the nineties to reflect White values in post-apartheid South Africa. *Die Antwoord's* spectacular act has received a measure of critical attention. Some scholars dismiss the group either as modern blackface minstrels or as an apolitical parody band that substitutes shock effect for skill in order to sell records. Others emphasize the group's re-articulation of 'zef,' a uniquely South African counter-culture that caricatures the trashier elements of Afrikaner life. Scholars in this camp read Die Antwoord's performative gestures as sure signs of shifting trends in White identity politics. Taking as a point of departure front man Ninja's infamous self-introduction, "I represent South African culture. ...Blacks. Whites. Coloureds. English. Afrikaans. Xhosa. Zulu. Watookal...I'm like all these different people, fucked into one person," yet another school of thought appreciates the group as liminal artists who bridge socio-cultural divides by performing across race, class, and language barriers. Despite varied interpretations of Die Antwoord's significance and legitimacy, critics across the spectrum of perspectives recognize and heavily rely upon the group's usage of coloured identity and zef culture in their critical examinations. They overlook how Die Antwoord strategically employs gangsta rap and Black identity.

However, gangsta rap, not zef, is the primary cause of Die Antwoord's international success. For starters, 'zef' is a local phenomenon that fails to attract widespread, crossover audiences. 'Zef' fans may flock to Hatfield Square or the Little Karoo, as Krueger observes, but they likely won't be found in Harlem or Hamburg, Los Angeles, Lanzhou, or Libreville (401). Unless, of course, they are on YouTube tuning-in to Die Antwoord's latest exploitation of the slow beat, deep base, synthesized sounds and universal appeal of gangsta rap. Furthermore, in a recent interview, Ninja shared, "Rave music is high energy and gangsta rap is more hardcore and dangerous and sexy and there's the thoughtless nostalgia...When we heard that we knew that's where we wanted to head (Hanra)." In another interview, Ninja explains the origins of the group. He offers, "We thought 'Die Antwoord' was a kak-cool name and we were always walking past taxis that were playing f*cking loud gangsta rap or klapping this heavy rave music and we thought that was an ultimate that we can base our style on (Milton)."

In other words, Die Antwoord discovered in gangsta rap a means by which to market a different type of musical sound, one that maintains the central attributes of Afrikaner song aesthetics while manipulating the chief characteristics associated with a particular style of African-American creative expression. Although several scholars attribute Die Antwoord's success to its re-articulation of zef-style, referencing its reliance upon hip hop only in passing, the fact is manipulating gangsta rap is how Die Antwoord got over.

The oversight of gangsta rap in Die Antwoord's musical repertoire might be attributable to the widespread understanding of hip hop as common property to be exploited without care. As Ice T so aptly puts it, "Now [rap] is mainstream. Now the weatherman raps. Now its in any given commercial. And they'll use it, but respect it, that's another thing (CNN)." Although the genre has grown from a Black American ghetto product to a global commodity, I share Ice T's sentiment. I argue that hip hop, in particular gangsta rap, continues to function as a powerful, provocative symbol and rhetorical strategy with sweeping range. Rather than falling into an abstract abyss of what Die Antwoord is or is not or succumbing to dismissive tendencies, this essay addresses how gangsta rap shapes Die Antwoord's performativity and, in turn, how Die Antwoord reshapes gangsta rap.

Gangsta Rap: From Compton to Cape Town

In its original configuration, gangsta' rap is a gritty, confrontational form of first person narrative that stresses survivalism, individualism, and materialism as it comments upon social inequity (Quinn 6). The form builds upon the rich legacy of African American oral expression by functioning as both a challenge to racism and as an alternative method of voicing contemporary Black experiences and desires. Far more than senseless rhetoric for sheer entertainment, gangsta' rap is a highly stylized rhetorical strategy, in effect it is a weapon of resistance against injustice, exclusion, and erasure.

Gangsta rap emerged as a distinct subgenre of hip hop culture in the late 1980s, after the Compton, California posse Niggaz Wit Attitudes (N.W.A) released their groundbreaking debut album *Straight Outta Compton*. Provocative tracks like "Fuck tha Police," "Gangsta Gangsta," and the title hit, "Straight Outta Compton" catapulted hardcore, seemingly realistic lyrical and visual imagery of Black urban youth culture to the forefront of American mass media. The art form grew increasingly popular as advertisements, movies, and regional MCs totally consumed it throughout the 1990s. Although gangsta rap significantly waned from the American music scene at the turn of the century, it exploded overseas. The form has left such an indelible print on expressive popular culture in the United States and beyond that it is recognized as "...truly the culture that ate race (George, 2005)."

The epic rise of gangsta rap from grassroots to global phenomenon is readily identifiable in the immense popularity of Tupac Shakur, the wildly successful slain gangsta rapper whose “thug life” image advanced him from localized ghetto hero to a national patron saint to widespread martyrdom. After his death in 1996, Tupac imagery was locatable on nearly every continent. Jeremy Prestholdt shares,

In Nairobi, Mombasa, Arusha, and Dar es Salaam Tupac was everywhere: on walls and buses, in barber-shops and video cafes, in cassette stalls and blasting from car sound-systems. In the years that followed murals in Los Angeles, New York, Tijuana, Tokyo, St. Petersburg, Lomé, Cape Town, and Freetown honoured Tupac. His image adorned shops and homes in Johannesburg, Lima, and Port-au-Prince. Graffiti in Norway, Germany, Slovenia, Cyprus, Guinée, the United Arab Emirates, and New Zealand praised him. His image has even been featured on the national stamps of Tajikistan and Moldova (198).

In Africa alone, Tupac lyrics and imagery have significantly influenced Ivorian, Ghanaian, Libyan, Kenyan, Nigerian, and Ghanaian artists and urban youth, among others. Most notably, the youth-led Sierra Leonean rebel unit, Revolutionary United Front (RUF), adorned their weaponry with references to hit Tupac records, adopted Tupac T-Shirts as a type of army fatigue, and assumed the lyrics of his songs as their battle cry (Sommers 34). “[A]cross Africa,” Sommers writes, “[Tupac] conjure[s] an image of a defiant, proud antihero, and an inspiration for Africa’s young and alienated urbanites (34).” This image is indebted to N.W.A, the Compton crew that ushered onto the global stage the gangsta style for which Tupac is celebrated the world over, as well as the African American culture and community from which the rhetorical strategy stems.

However, gangsta rap is as reviled as it is revered particularly amongst American audiences. For example, several critics and commentators chide the style as newfangled minstrelsy, arguing that it builds upon longstanding codes of Black inferiority through the performance of exaggerated African-American cultural idioms. Staunch detractors of the subgenre including Stanley Crouch, Spike Lee, Dr. C. Delores Tucker, and Bill Cosby have repeatedly linked gangsta rap acts to Sambo, Zip Coon, Amos n’ Andy, and Stepin Fetchit, racially offensive, slapstick stupid minstrel figures that kowtowed, tap danced, and crooned to the satisfaction of White audiences. The popular argument holds that gangsta rappers shamelessly invoke stereotypical brutal Black buck imagery not to portray the lived experiences of America’s Black urban poor and not for social or political effect. They do it simply because it sells.

Hip hop scholar Imani Perry contends that rap artists deliberately mimic stereotypical images of African-Americans in order to critique and disrupt White hegemony. Mimicry is a form of stylized imitation that manifests in specific behavioral and sensory performances. In scientific research, it generally relies upon complex social interactions, an effective three-way exchange between a model, a signifier, and a receiver of particular information. The model must first convey data that a second subject receives, interprets, and transmits to yet another entity that, in turn, recognizes the material as original or artificial. Not unlike research in the natural sciences, prominent cultural critics associate mimicry with precise acts of exchange between signifiers and receivers, more precisely between colonizers and the colonized, for the purpose of either compensating for self-perceived cultural shortcomings or resisting cultural domination (Fanon; Naipaul 175; Bhabha 127). In this latter configuration, the social interaction is necessarily contentious and effectively reduced to two points of exchange – the model or message generated by the colonial oppressor and the response produced by the colonial subject. To paraphrase a popular inscription from postcolonial discourse, the empire talks back to the imperial center (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin).

Perry's interpretation of mimicry ventures in a slightly different direction. In her seminal study, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop*, she argues, that the full range of stock characters in African-American imagery and the White imagination, from players and pimps, hookers and hoes, dope fiends and dope-dealers to everything else, are on full display and in total performance in hip hop music. Hip hop artists accept, even dramatize, these unfortunate stereotypes but they assume control over the narratives framing their existence by using rap music as a vehicle to voice the generative source of Black ghetto subjectivities. Drawing specifically upon the gangster figure, Perry writes, "This embodiment becomes an indictment of White supremacy when listeners hear, in the context of [the thug] narrative, a critique of the sociological conditions – poverty, police brutality, and joblessness – that contributed to his or her becoming this person (109)." Thug mimicry does not consciously embrace notions of Black cultural inferiority nor does it fully reject White racist constructions of Black urban identity and social space. It talks back to the dominant culture in hope of wresting from that establishment the authority to tell its own story.

Thug mimicry is a necessary and productive intervention in cultural studies discourse but it is not altogether unproblematic. The signifier-receiver relationship in Perry's conceptualization is further complicated if not completely blurred such that it becomes unclear who is mimicking whom. The negative stereotypes that hip hop artists perform are themselves by-products of the White imagination, indeed a White racial inferiority complex that has historically manifested in staged productions and strategic mis-readings of a mythological, racialized Other. In *The Mask of the Art*, Clyde Taylor reveals that as early as the twelfth century Europeans were actively engaged in defining and privileging themselves in opposition to different communities.

By the Age of Enlightenment, prominent philosophers, including Hegel, Locke, Kant, Jefferson and Franklin, had propelled the relatively small scale, ineffectual xenophobic projects of previous eras into a fully operational and incredibly effective White racist machinery that fortified White superiority by propagating and projecting obscene images and attitudes about the European self onto the non-European Other (Taylor) 26. Taylor writes:

The European encounter with the non-European took two classical forms. The characteristics of the people encountered were forced into familiar patterns, analogous to European behavior, sometimes ennobled as proof of some benign unity of the human race. Or these same characteristics were viewed as intrinsically foreign, strange, repellent instances of difference...(22).

In other words, Enlightenment thinkers needed and therefore established a counter image, a clearly defined, diametrical opposite, to uphold their sense of White racial superiority. Constructing Whiteness as the embodiment of all things good necessarily involved constructing Blackness as the embodiment of all things negative. Modern manifestations of this mindset and process of social exchange are readily available in popular culture of the late eighteenth century through the present day vis-à-vis re-worked depictions of Mammy, Sambo, Uncle Tom, the Black Buck, and pickaninnies. Within the context of Perry's thug mimicry, then, the signifier-receiver relationship relies upon the model embodying a warped self-image and intentionally transmitting false data about that image first to itself and then to a second subject, both of which internalize the performance as fact, and both of which transmit these performed falsehoods to a global community of receivers. Unlike mimicry in the natural environment, the fiction or mimesis of Perry's variation begins with the model's first act.

At best, then, thug mimicry is a complicated critical approach, an intricate web of interdependent signals that simultaneously captures and reflects White racist ideologies, Black cultural identities, and Black resistance strategies. The questions remain whether and how 'thug mimicry' functions as a rhetorical tool for historically privileged communities.

In the following section, I examine how Die Antwoord appropriates gangsta rap to signal White South African values rather than inner-city Black American realities, thereby distorting and diversifying the initial focus of the subgenre. This reversal of representation is an outgrowth of the present post-racial moment, a carefully constructed reflection of shifting attitudes about the politics of race and representation in post-transition South Africa and post-race America, two exemplary societies in which racial discrimination is supposedly no longer a chief organizing principal of state governance or social ordering. The issue is not the diversity of representation per se. White rappers like the Beastie Boys, Vanilla Ice, and Eminem abound. The problem, I argue, is that Die Antwoord's performative gestures, and rapidly growing fan base, suggest a definite turn toward rather than away from the precise attitudes that spawned racial injustice centuries ago.

Die Antwoord's approach sanctions an 'anything goes' mentality and bleeds old forms of racism into a dynamic cultural landscape desperate for change, corrupting in the process possibility and hope for a truly developed post-racial world order. If Die Antwoord represents the future, as it proclaims, then African hip-hop artists, fans, and critics might well brace themselves for an onslaught of recycled racist performance idioms that use new technologies to capitalize on past experiences of racial subjugation. Perhaps worse still, Blackness will continue to function as a universal sign of inferiority – even in its absence.

Enter the Ninja (and the Nymph): Black(faceless)ness and the Appropriation of Gangsta Rap

Die Antwoord is a controversial yet increasingly popular White South African rap trio that rose to fame in 2010, after the video for their debut album, *Enter the Ninja*, went viral on the Internet. The group's front-man, Ninja, born Watkin (Waddy) Tudor Jones, is an English-speaking White South African whose stage name and public persona betray his British roots and upper-middle class identity. Prior to fashioning Die Antwoord, Jones was at different times "The Man Who Never Came Back," "Yang Weapon," MC Totally Rad," and Max Normal, performing both individually and collaboratively with *Constructus Corporation*, *MaxNormal.TV*, and, most notably, with *The Original Evergreens*, a South African rap group that was signed to Sony Music in the mid-1990s. Yo-landi Visser, born Anri du Toit, is the female force of the group. A native speaker of Afrikaans, du Toit is a trendsetting hipster originally from Port Elizabeth. Public image aside, Jones and du Toit are a married couple with advanced training in art and a relatively lengthy record of success in South Africa's underground music scene. The third node of Die Antwoord, is beat master Justin de Nobrega, whose stage persona, DJ HiTek, is almost always concealed by grotesque masks, hoods, or disabled bodies. The group is widely known and fiercely criticized for its profane performances and tactless treatment of race, sex, and class politics.

Stories abound about Die Antwoord's legitimacy and their purpose for refashioning themselves from well-educated, upper-middle class artists to seemingly realistic representations of South Africa's Cape Coloured community and White poor. Despite this controversy, however, Die Antwoord has enjoyed a meteoric rise to fame in a relatively short timeframe. The group has become an international phenomenon. Since their debut video in 2010, they have been featured in several prominent international magazines including, *Spin*, *Rolling Stones*, and the *New York Times*. They appeared on *The David Letterman Show*, became the voice and face of Alexander Wang's T Campaign, and they entered into but chose to back out of a major record contract with Interscope Records. Die Antwoord won the South African Music Award's International Achievement Award in 2011, and their work has been exhibited in European galleries as well as at the Guggenheim in New York. In 2012, the group performed sold out shows in North America, Australia, Europe, New Zealand and Japan, with additional stops planned for Israel, Mexico, and Russia.

To date, Die Antwoord has accumulated more than a half of a million Facebook fans, over 100,000 Twitter followers, and a combined total of nearly one billion viewers of their most popular videos on YouTube, prompting LA Times writer Chris Lee to situate Die Antwoord as potentially the biggest rap cross-over group since Falco (Lee). Die Antwoord's authenticity apparently matters little to mass consumers.

Die Antwoord's song and video performances offer new ways for understanding the intersecting worlds that comprise South Africa's multicultural landscape, particularly as it relates to music developments owing to transnational exchange and cultural appropriation. More specifically, Die Antwoord's seizure of gangsta rap reveals not only how South Africa's historically privileged White minority manipulates rhetorical strategies of historically oppressed communities to advance alternative narratives about its relationship to society, but also how this community continues to rely upon age-old, racist attitudes in its identity construction. Although Die Antwoord's evocation of gangsta rap has been read as a profitable but otherwise politically insignificant refashioning of Whiteness in a country that now recognizes the plight of its Black majority, the group's appropriation of racial 'otherness' as a means of creative expression demonstrates both the flexible instrumentation of the gangsta trope and the perpetuation of oppositional racial and socio-cultural topographies in post-apartheid South Africa. Die Antwoord's popular music video, *Fok Julie Naaiers*, is illustrative.

Fok Julie Naaiers begins with an old, squat dark skinned man intensely peering into the lens. In sync with the soundtrack, the camera repeatedly jumps between alternating shots of a despondent White boy, menacing Coloureds, and Ninja, the violently angry master subject of the text. The visual montage moves from long shots to close-ups as it captures increasingly hostile portraits of South African masculinity and sets the stage for the lead act – Ninja against the world. The subjectivities portrayed in the opening montage capture, reflect, and erase several identities that comprise South Africa's complex social matrix. The first subject signals an older, ever more frustrated generation that came of age in the midst of apartheid, hungrily awaited the benefits of a free, democratic society, yet still remains largely disenfranchised. The second figure of an embattled youth represents a growing population of dejected White Afrikaners who experience not the sense of privilege enjoyed by their forefathers but the sense of uncertainty typically associated with minority groups. The succeeding images of apparent Coloured gang offenders function as markers of the perilous state of affairs in contemporary South Africa. The camera eventually rests on Ninja, who self identifies as a representation of the future. With the possible exception of the old, squat, dark skinned man that initiates the video, Black men are noticeably absent from the opening montage.

As the video progresses, visual content and cinematic techniques combine to reinforce the juxtaposition of imagery established in the opening shots. Ninja and Yolandi assume supernatural authority as they parade against a backdrop of upright and inverted Christian symbols with deadly insects swarming their bodies.

One shot captures Ninja dangling a scorpion by its venomous tail. Another features a tarantula scaling his face. Yet another shows worms spilling from his mouth. Moths flock Yolandi. In contrast, Coloured characters morph into a cartoonish collage of toothless, tattooed, and gun-toting ventriloquists. Extreme close-ups, cameo lighting, and high contrast work together to strengthen the psychic feel and oppositional structure of the frames. The cumulative effect is the dichotomous depiction of Die Antwoord as insurmountable deities and of Coloureds as criminally insane. With the exception of a muscular, hooded Black male body that literally punctuates Ninja's words by appearing as a "big black joke," and Ninja's emulation of Tupac's signature refrain, "I hope ya feel me," Black men remain invisible throughout the video production.

The last minute of the video caricatures former undisputed heavy weight boxing champion of the world 'Iron' Mike Tyson ranting at a detractor. Dubbed the 'Baddest Man on the Planet' in popular media, Tyson often seized his opponents in a matter of seconds using fierce jabs and peek-a-boo boxing techniques. He was an astounding image of Black masculinity at the height of his career in the late eighties but a pitiful picture of defeat by the time he fought and lost an epic battle with Lenox Lewis in 2002. The rant that Die Antwoord incorporates is arguably the worst of several diatribes in which Mike Tyson deploys obscene homosexual references to assault White men, much to his own ridicule. Die Antwoord effectively satirizes Mike Tyson's performance and manhood by masquerading DJ Hi-Tek in an exaggerated costume of the figure, rapping his tirade almost verbatim. Perry suggests that the relationship between boxing and hip hop is fraught with symbolic import:

Boxing may serve as a good metaphor for hip hop.... Not only because both foster a diverse group of bragging personalities with aggressive styles but also because they are strategic competitions. Hip hop is poetry that shifts styles of defense and offense, moving between grace and bull-like forward barreling. It dances, it leans back, and then it attacks. It uses the broadest allegory to discuss the individual moment of confrontation (59).

Perry continues

... in hip hop tactical shifts occur within the style of metaphor, which is highly variable even within one song, as well as in the distinctive style an artist might have... Hip hop is a war of position, and the position one takes manifests in the performance of language (59).

Thus, Die Antwoord's performative gesture constitutes far more than a dismissive joke about one of the world's greatest and most controversial sports icons. By appropriating the crudest components of Tyson's speech, Die Antwoord punctuates *Fok Julle Naaiers* with implied metaphors that jab at the crux of Black masculinity and effectively reduce it to contemptible idiocy.

Die Antwoord's strategic depiction of certain racialized subjects and erasure and mockery of others remaps racial hierarchy as an organizing principle. Interestingly, the hierarchy patterns apartheid practices of social ordering by establishing Whites as superior, coloureds as intermediaries, and Blacks as peripheral. Nonetheless, the true significance and representational value of *Fok Julle Naaiers* rests in what is referenced but not fully seen in the video – Black male bodies. The absent Black male body—its creative response to struggle, its stereotypical imagery, its marginality, defiance—frames the text and facilitates Ninja's movement throughout it by functioning as that which he must enact and erase or become and surpass in order to establish a sense of superiority. Toni Morrison discusses at length the visualization of the “impenetrable White body” in relation to the erasure of the “serviceable and servicing black figure (38).” She writes,

...it falls clear: images of blackness can be evil *and* protective, rebellious *and* forgiving, fearful *and* desirable –all of the self-contradictory features of the self. Whiteness, alone, is mute, meaningless, unfathomable, pointless, frozen, veiled, curtained, dreaded, senseless, implacable (59).

Morrison's comment highlights the “parasitical nature of White freedom,” but it also pinpoints the incredible range and power of Blackness as a symbolic form (59). This far-reaching symbolism makes Blackness particularly vulnerable to negative manipulation. In Die Antwoord's case, gangsta rap is the effective tool by which pejorative images of Black identity are engaged and by which White identity is renegotiated. Die Antwoord uses gangsta rap to affix the grittiest elements of humanity to Blackness without ever revealing an unmistakable blackface. In effect, gangsta rap becomes the vehicle for essentializing Black identity and, by turn, Black invisibility becomes the vehicle for establishing White superiority.

The opening montage and succeeding shots of *Fok Julle Naaiers* effectively situate Die Antwoord as “the answer” to or end result of a political system that no longer privileges Whites. Against the backdrop of cartoonish Coloureds, caricatures of Black masculinity, and images of White defeat, Ninja and the nymph emerge as great White redeemers of the new South Africa. The song lyrics reinforce this positionality by encapsulating who Ninja was, is, and will be in relation to South African social order:

I got sick and tired of getting treated like a stupid fuck-up/ So I fucked my enemies up one time and blew the fuck up/Before it was like yo: who's dis stupid weirdo?/Now it's like a new breed of rap superhero/ To defeat these devils Ninja becomes a devil/These God-forsaken wretches will never be on my level

Whereas he was once downtrodden, Ninja envisions himself resurrected as an unconquerable champion that defeats his adversaries by aping the ways of those “God-forsaken wretches.” In this context, Ninja’s lyrics constitute an emotional rant, a decidedly vengeful reminiscence that echoes the sentiments of marginalized White Afrikaners (Marx and Milton 739). Memory, anger, and imagination index Ninja and the world he represents in opposition to the Cape Coloured and Black subjectivities referenced/erased at the beginning and throughout “Fok Julle Naaiers.”

Interestingly, Die Antwoord’s approach is in alignment with a new wave of Afrikaner nationalism. Here, Bezuidenhout’s analysis of both the shifts in Afrikaner music from the late eighties to the present and the ways in which the lyrics of this music “embody,” “mobilize,” and recycle old cultural symbols is particularly revealing. Bezuidenhout locates a resurgence in Afrikaner nationalist symbols that surfaces as nostalgia, romanticism, and/or cynicism in contemporary popular music (11). “The nostalgics,” he writes, “long for a past without crime and affirmative action. ...The romantics...[sing] about parties, love, booze, drugs...but see no need for protest (11). Conversely,

The cynics celebrate their marginality and sing about crime, emigration, poverty, and the new fat cats in government. ...[M]ostly [they] complain about how things are going wrong. Some are tired of feeling guilty about apartheid (11).

Whether Ninja’s tirade straddles between nostalgia and cynicism or presents a hybridized alternative, the thematic symbolism of his lyrics are consonant with the overarching focus of past and present Afrikaner music (10). Although Anton Krueger distinguishes earlier music trends like the Voelvry movement as oppositional and ‘zef’ as a show of solidarity with the poor and racially oppressed, Die Antwoord’s lyrics demonstrate that it is as antagonistic and singularly concerned with the White self as preceding popular Afrikaner music acts.

However, Die Antwoord’s oppositional stance is also a critical component of the gangsta rap ethos. But, unlike classic gangsta rappers that employed hardcore lyricism to challenge and criticize longstanding legacies of widespread oppression against African-American men, *Fok Julle Naaiers* aims at unnamed enemies whose only apparent vices are not appreciating Die Antwoord’s style and claims of authenticity. For example, whereas Ninja emphatically exclaims, “All my fuckin life I lived a normal fuckin life,” and “Muddafukkaz tell me to slow my roll but sorry no can do/My style is so brand new, I try to make you understand it,” Tupac Shakur’s original version of *Fuck All Yall* chides

Fuck the law give a shit I'm even worse than before
I know they wanna see a nigga buried
But I ain't worried still throwing these thangs
Got me locked in chains
And hey nigga what the fuck is you wailin' 'bout
Soon as I hit the cell I'll be bailin out
And when I hit the streets I'm in a rush to ball
I'm screaming Thug Life nigga fuck all yall

Both artists are enraged but the causes and targets of their wrath are remarkably different. Tupac, N.W.A, nor any of the classic gangsta rap crews or the communities they represented could ever seriously claim a life of normalcy or quibble about accusations of inauthenticity because the harsh realities of their existence as contested beings, on and off the music stage, forcefully prohibited them from doing so. In fact, the gangsta style that these artists advanced was a direct response to discriminatory employment practices, draconian law-and-order policies, mass incarceration, sociopolitical alienation, among other ills specifically aimed at the Black American urban poor (Quinn 42). Quinn shares

...gangster rappers chose to mobilize explicitly the very social conditions they faced to forge their product. The ironies run deep: these artists turned the very social costs of urban poverty, violence, and social isolation into assets, and they placed this enterprising "conversion narrative" at the heart of their imagery (42).

Original Gangsta rap, then, is a reactionary discourse. It is a political speech act or what bell hooks might call "a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible (9)." In other words, much like other African American gangsta rappers, Tupac's target is the state and his talk is about survival - making a way out of no way, the promises and pitfalls of which are evident in his life story.

In contrast, Die Antwoord focuses on the reception of its artistry. *Fok Julle Naaiers* challenges critical interrogations of the group and its stylistic approach but nothing more. In this regard, Die Antwoord's rap act subscribes more so to elitist notions of poetry for poetry's sake than to any undergirding issues or inspirational elements framing original gangsta rap. Die Antwoord's lyrics may be profitable but they are not overtly political or subversive. Consequently, in Die Antwoord's hands, the subgenre born in Black American ghettos in the wake of the Civil Rights era and on the horizon of Reaganomics is distorted to signal luxurious Eurocentric values of unaccountable creative expression and purposeless art.

Perhaps it is easier to recognize how Die Antwoord manipulates gangsta rap by considering the ways in which structural racism mediates equal opportunities for social advancement. Despite notions of post-racialism and the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States, Whiteness remains the standard of superiority and the dominant culture throughout the global community just as it ever has. Conversely, Blackness as a chief marker of inferiority is so deeply ingrained in the public psyche that it is intrinsic to and amplified throughout every aspect of human society in ways both overt and obscure. In its original configuration, gangsta rap was a tool of resistance. It was a deliberate attempt to voice the words of the unheard, to make visible the overlooked, in effect a cry for social inclusion. Former N.W.A member Ice Cube informs, “[Gangsta rap] is street knowledge...[Its] letting the streets know what the politicians is trying to do to them. And then, letting the politicians know what the streets think of them, if they listening (*The Art of Rap*).” Ice T adds,

...[gangsta rap] was always attempting to drop game. ...There was morals. There was parables. It was things that you listen to and learn. I wanted somebody to take my album and when they were done be more intelligent about the game than they were, versus me saying you know hey I’m tough (*The Art of Rap*).

A YouTube video showing Tupac’s sworn testimony about the purpose of the art is particularly revealing:

Interrogator: Was it your intention to try to get young black people to be violent...?

Tupac: No.

Interrogator: Were you trying to provoke anybody to do anything particular? Were you trying to get people to do things?

Tupac: Yes

Interrogator: Tell us what.

Tupac: Think! Use your head.

(2pacLegacyNet)

In contrast, Die Antwoord’s variation of the style is reductionist. It strips the rhetorical strategy of political power and didactic value while propagating its most unsavory and nihilistic elements for material gain— all in the name of art. This type of cultural appropriation and distortion is realized by virtue of White privilege.

There is another aspect to Die Antwoord's White privilege that warrants further mention. Adam Haupt points out that Die Antwoord successfully appropriates coloured identity as "symbolic capital" but Coloureds themselves have enjoyed no such fortune in doing the same (421). He writes,

...diverse South African subjects' access to the necessary social and economic capital to produce internationally competitive cultural products is constrained by South Africa's neo-liberal economic policies, which have done little to reduce racialized class inequalities, as well as by hegemonic perceptions of blackness (421).

This paradox points to the insatiable appetite for exaggerated images of racial Otherness. But it also highlights how uneven avenues of access to the instruments and institutions that enable producing, promoting, and distributing ethnic art forms continue to benefit historically privileged groups. In other words, if Die Antwoord were actually the coloured subjects they portray, then their rap act would likely receive no radio play.

Nevertheless, just as the visual content of the video is reductionist so too are the lyrics of *Fok Julle Naaiers*. The song employs the hardcore lyricism of gangsta rap but it diminishes the political and rebellious nature of the form by shrinking its attributes to grittiness, angry comportment, and antagonistic engagement with an imaginary enemy interlocutor. Die Antwoord strategically captures and reflects only the most disconnected, vengeful, and nihilistic parts of gangsta rap and then proclaim themselves new styled purveyors of the art. This reductionist demonstration not only capitalizes on how uninformed audiences (mis)understand and mobilize gangsta rap, but it also obliquely reinforces the attachment of these negative characteristics to African American culture.

In closing, the reductionist lyrical and visual content of *Fok Julle Naaiers* illustrates how gangsta rap can be used to map another type of 'thug minstrelsy,' one that speaks to the dominant culture from a position of privilege instead of oppression. This newfangled performativity engages minstrelsy not through Blackface but through Blackfacelessness and, in so doing, centers Whiteness as the chief focus and central architect of the art form. Unlike Perry's concept, or Bhabha's, Naipaul's or Fanon's, this other type of mimicry involves an inverted power dynamic in which an oppressor manipulates signals of the oppressed in order to substantiate self-perceived notions of superiority. The true consequences of this egotism are the gross distortion of a wildly powerful art form and the perpetuation of Blackness as a symbol of inferiority.

Gangsta rap is an exceptionally appealing, flexible, and effective rhetorical resource. It is not, nor has it ever been, the subject of a single narrative. For almost every antagonistic hit like “Fuck tha Police,” N.W.A released another more sociable song like “Express Yourself.” For each “Fuck the World,” and “Fuck All Yall,” Tupac track produced there was an accompanying uplifting tune like “Keep Ya Head Up,” “Hold on Be Strong,” and “Smile.” Die Atwoord’s gangsta rap act does nothing to acknowledge or advance this complexity. Upcoming and existing African and African Diasporic hip hop artists would do well to honor the spirit of the subgenre, always keeping in mind Chinua Achebe’s potent refrain, “Art for art’s sake is just another piece of deodorized dog shit (617).”

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