

Janette Yarwood

Deterritorialized Blackness: (Re)Making Coloured Identities among Youth in Post-Apartheid South Africa

»When I was a kid in the early eighties, this music [hip hop] was the first I'd heard that I could relate to. You know, »Fuck da Police«, and all that shit, that's what I was feeling.« (Shamel X, producer and DJ in Cape Town)¹

During the summer of 2003 I took my first trip to South Africa to develop my dissertation topic on coloured identities in post-apartheid South Africa.² Although it is no secret that hip hop as both a musical genre and a defined lifestyle has gained recognition and popularity around the globe, I was not prepared for what I experienced in South Africa. I encountered cars blasting Jay-Z, Sean Paul and P. Diddy among others; people wearing *Sean John*, *Avirex* or United States sports team jerseys; and cell phones ringing to the tunes of the latest 50 Cent or R. Kelly songs. I found that as a black person from the United States, I felt a common blackness with the coloured people I interacted with not because of a common African heritage but mainly because of black popular culture and hip hop culture specifically. This led me to ask: What does it mean to be black in today's world? After spending a few months in South Africa, I became aware that coloured young people rely heavily on black cultural images emerging out of the United States, the Caribbean and Europe and I was led to further ask: Is there a transnational or globalized notion of blackness?

For many African Americans, discussions of Africa conjure up images of »the motherland«, their origin, the place they imagine when constructing their blackness. Simultaneously, African American popular and hip hop culture³ has become global in nature touching many corners of the world. I suggest that hip hop and black popular culture has become a site used by coloured youth and young adults in South Africa to articulate transnationally-engaged notions of blackness. Through a focus

on hip hop and popular culture, fashion and hair politics, I argue contemporary racial identities are constructed through an engagement with local racial categories and black popular culture. In this way, the universe of potential racial identities and race in South Africa is no longer situated in one place or space but rather inhabits a deterritorialized shifting cultural space. Through such identity processes and cultural strategies, I suggest that post-apartheid generations are actively engaged in remaking the historically structured coloured racial identity in post-apartheid South Africa. This article is based on interviews, data gathered from local television and radio programs, newspapers and Internet resources in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban, South Africa.

Deterritorialization and Blackness

I have entitled this paper »Deterritorialized Blackness« and will begin by addressing my use of this phrase. The movement of symbols and meanings – in this case images of blackness – can be seen as part of a current of goods and ideas that move among populations. Here I draw primarily on the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's use of the term deterritorialization in his article, *Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology*. According to Appadurai, »this term applies not only to obvious examples such as transnational corporations and money markets, but also to ethnic groups, sectarian movements, and political formations, which increasingly operate in ways that transcend specific territorial boundaries and identities.«⁴ Additionally, the concept of »scape« also captures the processes and relations that are involved as globalized images of blackness move, mutate and are re-created in various spaces around the world. A scape is a way to characterize the flow of global cultural movement that influences and transforms the practices, identities and meanings of local groups who use those spaces. Rather than place cultural flows in a linear relationship between core and periphery, the scape captures the intense interactions that occur as a result of the movement of capital, people, ideas, media and technology. Similarly, anthropologist Ulf Hannerz describes a world of creolization, where holistic notions of bounded cultures do not have explanatory power.⁵ Instead the boundaries between existing cultural units shift, dissolve and are reconstituted in a world that exhibits high degrees of transnational connectedness.⁶ Further, Stuart Hall states, »Because of the process of globalization the relationship between the national cultural identity and the nation-state is now beginning to disappear.«⁷ The coloured young people in my study are situated within and affected by the flow of global black popular culture yet simultaneously they select various images of blackness and incorporate them thereby creating distinctly new local spaces and identities.

Cultural theorist, Paul Gilroy developed a similar approach to describe the interconnectedness of peoples around the world.⁸ However, Gilroy refers specifically to the connectedness of dispersed African populations globally. He argues that for a century and a half, black intellectuals traveled and worked in a transnational frame that precludes anything but a superficial association with their country of origin. Gilroy states, »The specificity of the modern political and cultural formation I want to call the Black Atlantic can be defined, on one level, through [a] desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity.«⁹ Further, central to Gilroy's argument is the shared experience of slavery among black diasporic communities. It is this common experience that is at the heart of a transnational black experience. Through an examination of black popular music and specifically the musical mix of soul, reggae and hip hop of performers like Soul II Soul, Monie Love or Maxi Priest, Gilroy argues that ideas and styles travel, interact, and become transnational. Additionally, making reference to his own experience with music as an adolescent he writes:

When I was a child in London, black music provided me with a means to gain proximity to the sources of feeling from which our local conceptions of blackness were assembled. The Caribbean, Africa, Latin America and above all black America contributed to our lived sense of racial self. The urban context in which these forms were encountered cemented their stylistic appeal and facilitated their solicitation of our identification. They were important also as a source for the discourse of blackness with which we locate our own struggles and experiences.¹⁰

Hip hop artists and other young people in my study have asserted similar views regarding the appeal of hip hop. In the quote at the beginning of the paper, rapper Shamel X states that hip hop was the first music he heard that he could relate to because it's content is so close to home. Further Reddy D, the lead singer of *Brasse Vannie Kaap (BVK)* states, »We use hip hop and speak about our reality here on the Cape Flats because that's where we come from.«¹¹ More recently, Berni of the all female hip hop group Godessa states that like the South Bronx in the United States, the Cape Flats are synonymous with the birth of hip hop because of the similar urban experiences and feelings of marginalization.¹²

According to Gilroy, blackness can be understood, not simply as a racial entity, but also as a common experience of racialization and discrimination throughout the diaspora that unites peoples of African descent who are identified as ›black‹.¹³ Though blackness can at times be essentialized as a racial affiliation emanating from primordial African roots, for Gilroy it is not confined to the territory of Africa, because it

is also an identity of displacement, the feeling of belongingness to a community that transcends national boundaries, and it is a much less territorialized identity. Similarly, Hall states that black is a historical category, a political category, a cultural category created as a consequence of certain symbolic and ideological struggles.¹⁴ Therefore, in this paper, following Gilroy and Hall, I use the term blackness to refer specifically to the shared experiences of oppression, discrimination and marginalization among black diasporic populations. Today the global ›traffic in blackness‹ (literally the exchange of consumer goods and images) facilitates this identification across national borders and challenges the primacy of nationally bounded affiliations. In this paper, I am interested in examining the methods by which local identities (and political consciousness) are formed within both national and international spaces. I argue that black experiences or diasporic constructions of blackness operate as a key source of identity construction among South Africa's coloured young people. I am specifically interested in the ways hip hop and black popular culture create spaces for coloured youth and young adults to engage in efforts to transform coloured identities in post-apartheid South Africa. This is done by mixing, blending and layering hip hop symbols and global images of blackness with their local cultural influences ultimately fashioning black identities and plugging into a blackness that bypasses place and space.

Many theorists of cultural globalization argue that cultural flows move from the North to the South and lead to northern hegemony and local cultural destruction.¹⁵ However, Daniel Miller argues that cultural globalization does not necessarily lead to generic Westernization.¹⁶ Not only are global cultural forms incorporated and shaped by local histories and cultural contexts but in the case of Africa and the Diaspora, as I have discussed above and will further argue throughout this paper, there has been a circulatory ongoing exchange of ideas and cultural forms. For example, according to Sheila Walker, in an effort to reconnect with an ancestral heritage, African-Americans look across the ocean to Africa for roots, identity and inspiration. Although the African American relationship to Africa is more pan-Africanist in orientation, African Americans look to the African continent nonetheless to re-establish those symbolic connections.¹⁷

In the realm of popular culture, the flow between South Africa and the Diaspora stretches back to the 1940s.¹⁸ For example, David Coplan, Ulf Hannerz, and Rob Nixon address the influence of global (black) popular culture from the United States on blacks in South Africa.¹⁹ Nixon examines the ways that the blossoming of artistic expression in Sophiatown in the 1950s draws on the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and other black American influences.²⁰ Similarly, Coplan examines the history of the interaction between American and South African jazz musicians during the 1940s and 1950s.²¹ According to Nixon, it was the musical influence of Dizzy Gillespie,

Count Basie, Bessie Smith, Charlie Parker and Duke Ellington that took root and inspired South Africa's most scintillating performers such as Miriam Makeba, Dolly Rathebe, Hugh Masekela and Abdulla Ibrahim. As the South African musician Todd Matshikiza testified, »some of the mission educated musicians had internalized a disdain for African forms. Yet, ironically, it was the African undertones in Ellington and Count Basie that increased their appeal to South African Performers.«²² Nixon states, certain performers who felt ambivalent about African music found it more alluring and acceptable when it returned in a transmuted, transatlantic guise yet what emerged from this influence was distinctly South African.²³ For many active in Sophiatown, there were many similarities between the cultural renaissance in Harlem and Sophiatown but the similarities were not merely imaginative, they sprang from particular social affinities. Both Harlem and Sophiatown experienced a cultural upsurge in the aftermath of black migration toward the inevitable unsteady promise of urban employment during an era of growing industrialization. These migrations led to a distinctly black urban population in both New York's Harlem and Johannesburg's Sophiatown. Many of the writers of *Drum* magazine, the principal outlet for Sophia writing, recognized in the Harlem literature a world that was black and urban and spoke of the trauma and promise of displacement.²⁴ At the time when the very idea of belonging to the city was coming under increasing legislative pressure, the Harlem Renaissance helped emergent South African writers fortify their claim. The contemporary flow of hip hop and other aspects of black popular culture between Africa and the Diaspora therefore become part of the long history of this interaction.

Certainly some will argue that hip hop has taken on a new meaning because young people around the world use it as a vehicle for addressing the oppressive forces they experience. However, according to Tricia Rose, this should not be equated with a shift in rap's discursive or stylistic focus away from black pleasure or black fans.²⁵ Rose states, »Rap's black cultural address and its focus on marginal identities may appear to be in opposition to its cross over appeal for people from different racial or ethnic groups and social positions.«²⁶ It is true that rap music, like many black cultural forms before it, resonates for people of vast and diverse backgrounds, however Rose asserts, »To suggest that rap is a black idiom that prioritizes black culture and articulates the problems of black urban life does not deny the pleasure and participation of others.«²⁷ She further states, »The drawing power of rap is precisely its musical and narrative commitment to black youth and cultural resistance, and nothing in rap's commercial position and cross cultural appeal contradicts this fact.«²⁸

The Making of the Coloured

The ambiguous place of those once officially classified as coloured in contemporary South Africa is the result of the complex racial history of the country. Coloured identity is a complex, historically located identity that stems from the process of slavery, genocide, rape and perceived miscegenation.²⁹ Certainly all formerly colonized countries have produced a racially heterogeneous creolized population but because of the hardening of this category through the racial classifications of apartheid, coloureds in South Africa are unique in many respects.

In 1652, the Dutch *East India Company*, under the command of Jan Van Reiback, went to the Cape in South Africa with the intent of establishing a refreshment station to supply their ships en route to and from the East.³⁰ Although they did not favor the establishment of settler communities in the Cape, the company allowed some of its employees to set up as independent farmers in order to serve the needs of the refreshment station. Encouraged by the success of these initial farmers and because the indigenous people were reluctant to part with their cattle, the company granted free passages from 1685 to 1707 to Hollanders wishing to settle at the Cape. From very early in the colonization of the Cape, slavery became an important source of labor supply. Company authorities decided to import slave labor from the East Coast of Africa, Madagascar, the Indonesian Archipelago, Bengal, South India and Sri Lanka.³¹ Birgit Pickel defines coloured origins by stating, »With the arrival of the first white settlers an ongoing process of absorption and miscegenation between European colonists, the indigenous Khoikhoi peoples of the Cape, slaves, and the so-called Bantu-speaking people gradually created a heterogeneous group of mixed people later to be called coloured.«³² Since the early days of the Cape, the white population has seen coloureds as not quite white enough. At the same time, due mainly to their comparatively privileged position under apartheid, the coloured population found itself disliked and distrusted by the black population.³³ In South Africa where skin color was the determining factor for social position and life chances, where whites and blacks had clearly defined positions, the coloured came to occupy a place between the two.

Under the *Population Registration Act* of 1950, the apartheid state officially constructed and enforced four classifications of South Africans: black, coloured, Indian and white. The imposed coloured category had a great impact on the socialization and identity formation of the members of this population. Additionally, apartheid policies such as the *Group Areas Act* allowed for the physical segregation of different racial groups. Under this act urban and rural space in South Africa was carved up into racially exclusive enclaves that were to be inhabited by the populations racially designated by the apartheid state. At least two million people across South Africa were forcibly removed from their existing residences as urban and rural spaces were

racially separated and ›cleansed‹.³⁴ Further, the very conditions that led to the formation of the coloured population were made illegal in apartheid South Africa by the *Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act* (1949) and the *Immorality Amendment Act* (1950). These processes served to shape and reinforce a coloured racialized identity as one separate from whites, blacks and Indians for a diverse population with a multiplicity of identities.

Even with the dismantling of apartheid, coloured identity remains ambiguous and problematic this was clearly illustrated during the 1994 and 1999 elections when an overwhelming number of individuals identified as coloured in the Western Cape voted for the *Nationalist Party* (NP), the party that instilled apartheid. For many, it was strange that just at the moment when coloured identity should have waned, there was a reassertion and reclaiming of coloured identities. The ›coloured vote‹ led to a great deal of scholarly attention for those formerly identified as coloured as outside observers, academics, activists and intellectuals sought to understand what happened to the historic alliances that linked coloureds to Indians, blacks and progressive whites during the anti-apartheid movement.³⁵ According to some scholars the ›coloured vote‹ was instrumental in highlighting the fears of the coloured population in the Western Cape, however other scholars believed that the vote finally forced a discussion and examination of the coloured identity.³⁶ Coloured identities in South Africa have been inscribed with a great deal of conflict and discomfort primarily because this identity is intrinsically linked with the historical and political development of South Africa. The origins of the coloured population can be traced to the colonial era while the institutionalization of the category is indicative of the apartheid government's subsequent policies of racialization.

The end of apartheid has destabilized the identities of all South Africans and has led to discussions of how all formerly apartheid prescribed identities need to operate in post-apartheid society. However, the nature and continued assertion of coloured identity continues to be heavily debated in post-apartheid South Africa. In general, many formerly classified coloured people are finding new and innovative ways of articulating colouredness in the new post-apartheid space. Some sectors have decided that it is most effective to reach back to history by identifying with a slave past and others have sought out and/or reinvented Khoisan roots as a way of renegotiating coloured identity. Still other sectors identify more closely with rainbow nationalism and notions of an inclusive South Africa. In contemporary post-apartheid South Africa people are choosing to identify as bruin or bruin-ous, browns, coloured, Khoisan, mixed-race, or multicultural or South African. Others state they will never again acknowledge or be called by a name imposed upon them and still others have chosen to identify as black. Regardless of how those formerly classified as coloured are choosing to identify, what is clear is that coloured identity

remains tenuous and, for the first time in South Africa a new generation of coloured individuals have come of age whose past, present and future are neither completely defined by the social and physical ordering of apartheid nor completely free of it.

Urban Marginalization: Making Coloureds Black

Abdou Maliqalim Simone states by the mere act of being born, coloureds were denied fundamental access to the (black) African world.³⁷ That is, because coloured people did not speak an indigenous African language as their mother tongue they have failed to be recognized as black African. Yet, they were certainly too ›black‹ to be white. Simone states that even though coloureds certainly were not striving to become black in the South African sense, during the 1980s politicized youth began to invoke the term ›so-called‹ coloured or even black. He states that this was the by-product of the black consciousness movement, whose theoretical formulations were largely imported from the Diaspora – where the common blackness of light and dark-skinned people was viewed as a historical achievement. However, Simone emphasizes that this move to identify as black or to invoke the ›so-called‹ was not so much a vehicle of identification with black South Africans but rather was a mechanism of undoing the absence of an identity or filling a void. This void was particularly strong for the generations of coloureds who because of the Group Areas legislation were forcibly removed from their homes, particularly from areas like District Six.

The *Group Areas Act* and the subsequent removals of coloured families to the Cape Flats were instrumental in the transformation of working-class communities.³⁸ Before group removals, a supportive network of extended families and neighbors held working-class culture together. This ›extended kinship network‹ created cultural continuity and stability. The Group Areas removals had the effect of breaking this web of mutual support and solidarity as families were removed to various nuclear family units scattered across the Cape Flats. A generation of young people grew up in ›fabricated‹ neighborhoods with little history, few institutions and without the cultural practices, social networks and urban inventiveness that had characterized everyday life for their parents.³⁹ This particular generation of coloured youth therefore, grew up in townships that were very similar to the urban ›ghettos‹ of the 1970s in the United States.

In the 1970s, cities across the United States were gradually losing federal funding for social services, information service corporations were beginning to replace industrial factories, and corporate developers were buying real estate to be converted to luxury housing, leaving working-class residents with limited affordable housing, a shrinking job market and diminishing social services. Postindustrial conditions

had a profound effect on black and Hispanic communities because they were among the poorest and least powerful groups. These communities were more susceptible to slumlords, redevelopers, toxic waste dumps, drug rehabilitation centers, violent criminals and inadequate services and transportation. In the case of the South Bronx, which has been dubbed the »home of hip hop culture«, these larger postindustrial conditions were exacerbated by disruptions considered an »unexpected side effect« of larger politically motivated policies of urban »renewal«. ⁴⁰ In the early 1970s, this renewal project involved massive relocations of economically fragile people of color from different areas of New York City into parts of the South Bronx. The newly »relocated« black and Hispanic residents in the South Bronx were left with few city resources, fragmented leadership and limited political power.

According to Rose, hip hop culture emerged as a source for youth of alternative identity formation and social status in a community whose older local support institutions had been all but demolished. ⁴¹ Alternative local identities were forged in fashions and language, street names and most important in establishing neighborhood crews and posses. Rose states that these crews were new kinds of families that provided insulation and support in a complex environment. She also states that at a time when social services were no longer available and budget cuts to schools reduced access to various programs early Puerto Rican, Afro-Caribbean and black American hip hop artists transformed obsolete vocational skills from marginal occupations into raw materials for creativity and resistance. Many of them were trained for jobs in technical fields that were shrinking or that no longer existed. Therefore hip hop emerged from complex cultural exchanges and larger social and political conditions of disillusionment and alienation. Rose asserts that hip hop was an especially aggressive public display of counterpresence and voice as it asserted the right to inscribe one's identity on an environment that seemed resistant to its young people of color. Further hip hop produced internal and external dialogues that affirmed the experiences and identities of the participants and at the same time offered a critique of larger society that were directed to both the hip hop community and society in general.

Out of a broader discursive climate in which the perspectives and experiences of younger people of color had been provided little social space, hip hop developed as part of a cross-cultural communication network. It was not long before similarly marginalized black and Hispanic communities in other cities picked up on the energy in New York hip hop and developed local hip hop scenes that linked various regional postindustrial urban experiences of alienation, unemployment, police harassment, social and economic isolation to their local and specific experiences via hip hop's language, style and attitude. It was under the similar circumstances of urban relocation and alienation of the Cape Flats that the conditions became ripe for coloured youth to begin looking to black America for ways to articulate their experiences of marginali-

zation in South Africa because they experienced many of the same hardships that led to the emergence of hip hop in New York's black and Latino neighborhoods.

This view is echoed by Jane Battersby who argues that »South African hip hop as a genre is a form of social text and as such offers opportunities for new identities for the South African coloured community.«⁴² She also posits, »that hip hop can be seen as an expression of a particular facet of [African-American] blackness, one that is rooted in a radical urban identity relating to ghetto life.« She states,

the overtly political messages of early U.S. hip hop and the links with the U.S. Black Power Movement struck a cord with many highly politicized coloured youths in the early 1980s. At this time the youth dissatisfied with apartheid education, were taking to the streets for their education. During apartheid, coloured youth from the Cape Flats used hip hop to work through the tensions of being racially marginalized in a space where their experience of racial oppression and marginalization was experienced differently from South Africa's [black] African population. It was also a way for these young people to identify with black people around the globe based on a common oppression and struggle against racism.⁴³

This view is consistent with Stuart Hall's argument that in that very symbolic and ideological struggle is »a change of consciousness, a change of self-recognition, a new process of identification, the emergence into visibility of a new subject. A subject that is always there, but emerging, historically.«⁴⁴

Adam Haupt examines the ways that the rap groups *Prophets of da City (POC)* and *Brasse Vannie Kaap (BVK)* employ *Gamtaal*⁴⁵ in order to problematize hegemonic representations of black subjects.⁴⁶ Haupt states, »It appears that the group's use of an African-American art form, rap music, conforms with black artists' reliance on African-American or Caribbean material in their attempt to construct Black Nationalist narratives that rely on the notion of a global black experience of oppression and resistance.«⁴⁷ Although the members of *POC* and *BVK* consciously rely on a music style from the African Diaspora, this global music form is mixed with the local influences of Jazz and other African sounds. Therefore, my focus on the influence of the global does not discount the impact of local influences. In fact it is important to note that hip hop is continually reworked and molded to fit a distinctly local South African racial and class context through the use of Afrikaans and local English idioms and by commenting on local South African situations. For example, Both *POC* and *BVK* were involved in voter registration drives and *POC* in particular was actively involved in the voter education program *Rapping for Democracy* and they went through great pains to persuade Cape Town's largely coloured electorate

not to vote for the *Nationalist Party*.⁴⁸ In the song entitled »Dallah Flet 2« they state (translated by Haupt):

Don't let FW [De Klerk] puzzle you
He's a smooth talker
He still thinks of you as a kaffir [Nigger] and hotnot [hottentot]
They sponsor township violence and give licenses to shabeens
Because they know that wine fucks up your brain
And then you get involved in shit and then you get blamed
The whole thing is planned because you're going to jail
And you're gonna get hanged.⁴⁹

Despite the use of U.S. hip hop by groups such as *POC* and *BVK* as well as other coloured youth during the 1980s and 1990s for ways of creating an oppositional voice to their lived experiences, one cannot conclude that all youth from the late 1990s onward look to hip hop to express an explicit black nationalism. Rather, my research suggests that although there are some who continue to assert the black consciousness perspective a new generation of coloured South African young people use black popular culture as a means of actively engaging with, reworking and creating identities that rely on apartheid era racial classifications but these new identities do not necessarily conform to old South African notions of race. Additionally, a new generation of hip hop artists are using hip hop to speak specifically to issues affecting working class coloured communities, the perceived marginal experience of coloured's in post-apartheid South Africa, stereotypes of the coloured population and as a way to work through various other issues affecting coloured populations in contemporary South Africa. The fall of apartheid and the new moment of globalization with faster flows of information that emerged during the 1990s have given coloured youth and young adults daily access to varied global images. Yet, coloured young people do not accept all popular culture wholesale. They continue to filter their choices through local realities and continue to draw on global black popular culture and hip hop culture and African-American athletes and actors continue to hold a prominent place for constructing identities.⁵⁰

Coloured identity continues to be contested in post-apartheid South Africa and new generations of coloured young people continue to use hip hop as a vehicle for engaging critically with colouredness. There are many young people who reject the term coloured while others, particularly of the working classes, continue to adhere to a racialized conception of colouredness as a means of identification.⁵¹ Yet through their engagement with hip hop, coloured young people are attempting to problematise and reinvent coloured identity as well as link into a global notion of blackness

based on common understandings of dislocation, displacement, rootlessness, marginalization and racial oppression. For example, in a song entitled, »I Remember Way Back«, the group *Godessa*, which released their first album *Spillage* in 2004 highlights that it was their specific engagement with hip hop that allowed them to view themselves as black subjects:

But let me move on to the days
When self-development began
It was strange to my fam[ily]
How I changed all my plans
And from the onset
Knowledge of self was the concept
I never thought of myself as being a born black
Till the contact with hip hop
Led to even more facts.

By identifying with the situation of black people globally, hip hop artists bypass local South African understandings of blackness and are able to move past perceptions of being half-victims to authentic marginals.⁵² In response to a question about why coloured young people have been so drawn to hip hop, Chris, a young man from Mitchell's Plain on the Cape Flats responded: »We're like African Americans, we can relate to them best because we don't always know where we're from and like the African Americans we live in Ghetto's. We're like the same only we live in Cape Town.«⁵³



Fig. 1: Photo of a young man in Cape Town, South Africa 2006

As young people engage with black popular culture generally and hip hop specifically they are able to plug into the global black experience. Yet simultaneously they continue to use hip hop to speak specifically to local issues of identity in post-apartheid South Africa. In a hip hop track entitled, »You Never Know«, the Durban-based hip hop artist Big Idea grapples with the issue of coloured identity. He also claims a distinctly African identity for South Africa's coloured population when he states, »I'm a brown African my cuzzie [cousin] this is my gully [country].« In the following lyrics the rapper draws attention to the fact that the lived experiences of those formerly classified as coloured remains tenuous in post-apartheid South Africa and he is addressing and working through many of the contemporary issues being discussed and debated within various sectors of the coloured population:

The gods must have been crazy when they made me
Misplaced people
But they call me a bushie
That's an irony
Coz bushie's are the original inhabitants of the Kalahari
I'm with my band touring the country
It doesn't mean I'm on Safari
I'm a brown African my cuzzie
This is my gully,
Don't worry, I'm certain of my identity
Cultural complexity
Means your black and white visions
Keep on vexing me
I'm proof there's an in between.⁵⁴

The Global Traffic in Blackness

It is now commonly understood that individuals construct identities with the tools of cultural production made available to them. Through an examination of how young black men in Columbia use rap music to create cultural identities, Peter Wade argues that individuals are constantly involved with producing representations of their cultural identities and that this production is both material and symbolic.⁵⁵ Similarly, Nadine Dolby argues that local and global contexts and tastes based on global popular culture emanating from the United States and Europe shape the ways young people in South Africa create identities.⁵⁶ In an article based on a one-year ethnographic study at a high school in Durban, South Africa, Dolby argues that,

because of the effects of globalization and the expanding influence of global popular culture, youth identities no longer belong to one place or location; instead they are influenced by a plurality of languages and cultures. She further concludes that global popular culture is a key site for identity formation as students spent a great amount of energy both in and out of school consuming the global popular. She states that notebooks were plastered with pictures of musical groups and movie stars while the latest dance craze dominated lunchtime conversation. She also argues »that students desire to model their lives not on Nelson Mandela but on the lives of the then most popular American celebrities – Michael Jordan, Oprah Winfrey or the cast of New York Undercover.«⁵⁷ Dolby therefore concludes, »The global commodity, explained and policed through a discourse of taste, becomes the fulcrum for constructing one's own racial identity, connecting self to others who are of a similar race.«⁵⁸

Dolby highlights an important point by noting that youth are not the passive receptors for an undifferentiated onslaught of corporate generated popular culture, but instead they carefully select, mold and combine specific commodities and other aspects of popular culture to create identities that are both racialized and contextualized within particular circumstances. Based on my research, I would take this a step further by arguing that coloured youth and young adults in particular engage in the consumption of black popular culture and not simply global popular culture. This has been illustrated by the history of identifying with hip hop artists from KRS-ONE to Tupac Shakur, and other West Coast rappers and the consumption of contemporary African-Diasporic artists such as Ludacris, Jay-Z, Sean Paul or Nas. Throughout the past three years, I have spent a great deal of time listening to local South African radio stations primarily targeted for black and coloured audiences and most music played has been a mix of mostly popular R&B and rap music from the United States and to a lesser extent local South African music. For example, U.S. based R&B and rap artists dominate the weekly list of the top singles played on *MetroFM*, *Good HopeFM* and *P4* radio. Further, the entertainment news sections on air and on radio station websites usually cover the latest news on American rappers and R&B singers, African-American movie stars and other African Diasporic celebrities. The daily give-a-ways usually include CDs and posters by American R&B and rap artists or other African Diasporic artists including reggae and reggaeton⁵⁹ musicians. Additionally while in Johannesburg, I visited the *MetroFM* radio station and was able to observe one of the radio programs and interview the host and producer. After the interview the producer pulled me aside and stated, »If you ask me I think there's more America in South Africa than Africa in America.« She then amended her statement by stating, »You know, I mean black America, right?«⁶⁰

During 2004, I observed a weekly hip hop show entitled *New York Live crossover with Thabo* that was produced in New York but aired live in South Africa. The show

was co-hosted by a young South African man in New York and DJ Zak in South Africa. The goal of *New York Live* was to give South Africans the most up-to-the-minute news on the U.S. hip hop scene by addressing music, music videos, movies and the latest celebrity entertainment news. Throughout the hour-long show, there was great emphasis placed on the fact that they were »coming straight out of NYC«. Both hosts also stress that listeners are getting the »hottest info« because »they're bringing it live straight across the Atlantic«. Throughout the hour-long show, Thabo made many references to the New York City weather outside or what he observed on the way to the studio, again adding emphasis and perhaps an added level of authenticity to the fact that he was in New York. After observing the show for several weeks, I was reminded that hip hop culture also encompasses discourse about rap music and there is also an emphasis on language and word choice. It is common knowledge that slang is a key identity marker for youth in general and rap music in particular. The use of slang creates a sense of identity and a common culture with which young people in South Africa and the United States can relate and identify.

Hip hop culture does not solely include rap music, but also includes a particular generation of R&B singers as well as the way people dress, style their hair and use language. Therefore in order to plug into this particular way of life, as Peter Wade argues, individuals must continually engage in representing this through the use of particular symbols. This means that individuals' consumption of very specific brands of clothing and particular forms of dress become key. I attended a braai⁶¹ at the home of Swift and Tanya, a 27-year-old couple in Cape Town where I had the opportunity to observe and interview the ten adults present. Hip hop and R&B by U.S. artists was the only music played during the night and a few of the other men present were impressed by Swift's CD collection. Conversations about new cell phones, sneakers and other clothing dominated most casual conversation. I was asked the prices of several items of clothing in the U.S. and also asked if I would be willing to purchase particular items and send them back to South Africa once I returned home. Some of the items included Yankee Starter jackets, basketball jerseys and caps and the latest Timberland boots. This situation repeated itself several times throughout my time in Cape Town and Johannesburg as individuals continually asked me the prices and to purchase items from abroad. The interest of these young people in the brands and clothing styles most affiliated with black popular culture emphasizes that clothing can take on very specific and charged race and class connotations.

Hair can be another symbolic method of expressing blackness. According to Kobena Mercer hair, which is as visible as skin color and also the most tangible sign of racial difference, takes on a forcefully symbolic dimension.⁶² Further, Zimitri Erasmus states, »dreadlocks until recently was specifically a black style« – an article in the April 1999 edition of *Marie-Claire* referred to dreadlocks as a natural and African »hair-type«

as opposed to ›hair style.«⁶³ However, Mercer links the origins of dreadlocks to the Rastafari movement in Jamaica and states that, dreadlocks »are specifically Diasporean and they do not signify Africanness but rather blackness«.⁶⁴ Erasmus states, »In South Africa today, this style has come to represent African-ness«, and she posits:

The increasing popularity of dreadlocks in post-1994 SA [South Africa] can be understood as a process signifying a re-making and revalorization of Africanness through the borrowing and localization of Africentric black American images and ideas. This ›turn to dreadlocks‹ can be seen as post-1994, post-liberation cultural formations. These transnational cultural borrowings and recreations suggest local uses of and for the global.⁶⁵

Further, Teresa, a young woman who grew up in Hanover Park on the Cape Flats states, »If you look around Cape Town today, you'll notice that it's now in for coloured women to wear their hair natural or in dreads so that they can show they're black too.«⁶⁶

Conclusion

It is widely understood that there has been a long history of cultural and political interaction between Africa and the Diaspora. In this paper I have argued that hip hop and black popular culture have assisted in creating a blackness that is less territorialized because it transcends geographical and national boundaries. Through the global traffic in blackness including the exchange of ideas and goods that travel between Africa and the Diaspora, contemporary identity among coloured young people in South Africa becomes a continual and complex interaction between local experiences of identity construction and global black popular culture. It is ironic that the coloured population are not black in the South African sense yet by looking to a blackness based on urban marginalization and the struggle against racism originating in the United States, coloured youth and young adults are able to articulate a blackness that links up with global understandings of blackness based on oppression and discrimination. This examination of coloured identities among post-apartheid generations in South Africa points to the way black popular culture facilitates the articulation of broad racial categories and political affiliations that transcend racial categories. Research in this area is important not simply because it illustrates that local identities and political consciousness are formed within both national and transnational spaces, but because it also points to the fact that hip hop culture can be a potential site in the organizing and struggle against oppression.

Notes

- 1 Shamel X is currently a producer and DJ in Cape Town. He is also a member of the rap group *Prophets of da City (POC)*. Motto quoted from Jane Battersby, »Sometimes I Feel Like I'm Not Black Enough«: Recast(e)ing Coloured through South African Hip hop as a Post Colonial Text, in: Herman Wasserman and Sean Jacobs, Eds., *Shifting Selves: Post-apartheid Essays on Mass Media, Culture and Identity*, Cape Town 2003, 109–131, here 116.
- 2 An earlier version of this paper was published in: *Postamble 2/1* (2006), 46–58.
- 3 In this text I alternate between the use of ›African American‹ popular culture and ›black‹ popular culture. I use these terms interchangeably to refer to African-American popular culture originating in the United States which includes hip hop culture and a particular generation of R&B singers as well as the way people dress, style their hair and use language.
- 4 Arjun Appadurai, *Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology*, in: *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis 1996, 48–65, here 49.
- 5 See Ulf Hannerz, *The World in Creolization*, in: *Africa 57/4* (1987), 546–558.
- 6 See also Les Back, *New Ethnicities and Urban Culture: Racisms and Multiculture in Young Lives*, London 1996.
- 7 Stuart Hall, *Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities*, in: Anthony King, Ed., *Culture, Globalization and the World System: Contemporary Conditions for the Respresentation of Identity*, Minneapolis 1998, 41–68.
- 8 See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London 1993.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 19.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 109.
- 11 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/1032070.stm> (6.11.2006).
- 12 See interview on <http://www.urbansmarts.com> (07.08.2004).
- 13 See Gilroy, *Atlantic* 1993.
- 14 See Hall, *Identities* 1998.
- 15 See Elaine Salo, *Negotiating Gender and Personhood in the New South Africa: Adolescent Women and Gangsters in Manenberg Township on the Cape Flats*, in: *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 6/3 (2003), 345–365.
- 16 See Daniel Miller, *Introduction: Anthropology, Modernity and Consumption*, in: D. M., Ed., *Worlds Apart: Modernity through the prism of the Local*, London 1995, 5ff.
- 17 See Sheila Walker, *Africanity vs Blackness: Race, Class and Culture in Brazil*, in: *NACLA – North American Congress on Latin America* 35/6 (2002), 176–182.
- 18 See Adam Haupt, *Black Thing: Hip-Hop Nationalism, ›Race‹ and Gender in Prophets of da City and Brasse vannie Kaap*, in: Zimitri Erasmus, Ed., *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town*, Cape Town, 2001, 173–205.
- 19 See David Coplan, *Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre*, Johannesburg and London 1985; Ulf Hannerz, *Sophiatown: The View from afar*, in: *Journal of Southern African Studies* 20/3 (1994), 181–193; Rob Nixon, *Harlem, Hollywood and the Sophiatown Renaissance*, in: *idem, Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the world Beyond*, New York 1994, 13–31.
- 20 See also Nadine Dolby, *The Shifting Ground of Race: The Role of Taste in Youth's Production of Identities*, in: *Race Ethnicity and Education* 3/1 (2000), 7–23.
- 21 See also *idem*, *Constructing Race: Youth, Identity and Popular Culture in South Africa*. New York 2001.
- 22 Quoted from: Nixon, *Harlem* 1994, 15.
- 23 See *ibid.*, 19.
- 24 See *ibid.*, 16.
- 25 See Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Culture in Contemporaray America*, Connecticut 1994, 5.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 17.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 5.

- 29 See Cheryl Hendricks, Urgent Need for Dialogue in the Western Cape: More to our Tensions Than Identity, in: Cape Times, 02.02.2006, 11.
- 30 See Roy Du Pré, Separate but Unequal: The Coloured People of South Africa – A Political History, Johannesburg 1994, 11.
- 31 See Timothy Keegan, Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order, Cape Town 1996, 15–22.
- 32 Birgit Pickel, Coloured Ethnicity and Identity: A Case Study in the Former Coloured Areas of the Western Cape South Africa, Münster 1997, 10.
- 33 See Battersby, Sometimes 2003, 109ff.
- 34 See Salo, Gender 2003.
- 35 See Erasmus, History 2003; Grant Farred, Better the Devil You Know? The Politics of Colouredness and Post-Apartheid South African Elections in the Western Cape, in: Souls. A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society 2/2 (2000), 50–64; and Ephraim Rasool, Unveiling the Heart of Fear, in: Wilmot James et. al., Eds., Now That We Are Free: Coloured Communities in a Democratic South Africa, Cape Town 1996.
- 36 See Rasool, Unveiling; and Farred, Devil 2000.
- 37 See T. Abdou Mailqalim Simone, In the Mix: Remaking Coloured Identities, in: Africa Insight 24/3 (1994), 161–173.
- 38 See Don Pinnock, Breaking the Web: Economic Consequences of the Destruction of Extended Families by Group Areas Relocations in Cape Town, Cape Town 2004.
- 39 See Simone, Mix 1994, 161ff.
- 40 See Rose, Noise 1994, 61.
- 41 See *ibid.*
- 42 Battersby, Sometimes 2003, 109.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 109.
- 44 Hall, Identities 1998, 54.
- 45 *Gamtaal* is a Cape Flats dialect of Afrikaans which has stereotypically been associated with working class coloured people.
- 46 POC and BVK were two of the first rap groups to emerge in South Africa during the early 1980s.
- 47 Haupt, Thing 2001, 177.
- 48 See *ibid.*, 179.
- 49 Quoted from: *ibid.*, 190.
- 50 See Dolby, Ground 2000, 7 ff; *idem*, Race 2001, 47ff.
- 51 See Mohammed Adhikari, Not Black Enough, Not White Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community, Athens 2005.
- 52 See Simone, Mix 1994.
- 53 Interview, conducted 15.12.2005.
- 54 Compilation CD, Bruin-ou.com 2006.
- 55 See Peter Wade, Music and the Formation of Black Identity in Columbia, in: NACLA Report on the Americas 35/6 (2002), 21–27.
- 56 See Dolby, Ground 2000, 7ff.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 11f.
- 58 *Ibid.*
- 59 Reggaeton is Spanish reggae.
- 60 Interview, conducted 23.08.2003.
- 61 Afrikaans word for barbeque.
- 62 See Kobena Mercer, Black Hair/Style Politics, in: K. M., Welcom to the Jungle. New Positions in Black Cultural Studies, London 1994, 97–130.
- 63 See Zimitri Erasmus, Hair Politics, in: Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl Ann Michael, Eds., Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies, Cape Town et. al. 2000, 380–392.
- 64 Mercer, Hair 1994, 108.
- 65 Erasmus, Hair 2000, 384.
- 66 Interview, conducted 23.01.2006.