

# *Freshlyground* and the possibilities of new identities in post-apartheid South Africa

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## *Abstract*

Popular music and indeed popular art forms struggle for critical attention in the academy (Larkin, 1992). Relegated to a focus on performance, or to peripheral sub-disciplines such as cultural studies, the study of popular art forms is risky terrain in higher education (Wicke, 1990). Instead, and particularly within the humanities, it has been claimed that the study of canonised art forms (Viljoen & Van Der Merwe, 2004) may enable the student to analyse a range of texts with equal skill and superior insight. This paper deals with both the popular and the interdisciplinary in relation to a theorisation of the lyrics of popular South African contemporary music group *Freshlyground* and the possibilities for a post-Apartheid identity explored in these lyrics through the theoretical lenses of New Historicism and Cosmopolitanism.

## **Introduction**

In this paper, the lyrics of the South Africa group *Freshlyground* are analysed as music texts in order to problematise ideas about the possibilities of identity for post-Apartheid citizens. In departments of literature or music, or drama (though the latter to a lesser extent), the popular art form of the lyric remains divorced from even strong traditions of orality, oral literatures and praise poetry, for example. Yet, if one argues as Grové (1992: 256) that even the earliest

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forms of poetry were closely associated with music (the ballad, the sonnet, the lyric poem), and that music and poetry were synonymous for many great scholars of the Renaissance, then one must question the extent to which popular music remains unexamined in the academy. Why is this? Is it because it responds too narrowly to what is private or momentary, and does not preoccupy itself with lasting universals? Surely not. Most popular music will touch on key features of human experience: the need for meaning, the absence of meaning, the need for and loss of love, the experience of joy, the flight from pain, resignation and resistance to fate, the embrace of hope, the rejection of illusion and oppression (Gray, 2004). However, even these arguments for the popular as focus of critical enquiry suggest the need to theorise carefully the premises for any analysis.

Although I am neither a music historian nor musicologist, my interest in the subject arises from perspectives offered by literary studies and linguistics. It is the focus on language, how we use it to express what untested ideas we have of experience and knowing, that compelled thought to paper about the possibilities and ambiguities of representation in a selection of South African contemporary multilingual music. A focus on the interplay of languages in music already restricts this paper to a few artists who use both English and isiZulu, or English and isiXhosa, in their performance, and hence the choice of *Freshlyground*.

At the same time, interdisciplinarity offers a theoretical and methodological basis for this paper. Given the complexity of the popular art form – whether video installation, house music (Cummings & Abhik, 2002), wordless advertising, or the audio text – I believe the most thorough and historicised understanding of the contemporary is arrived at through multiple lenses: the theoretical, methodological and historical, and finally disciplinary.

The paper is structured in three parts. The first will deal with the theoretical framing of the lyrics as texts and argue for the use of New Historicism for an understanding of the texts in relation to two phenomena or events: the transition to democracy in South Africa and the subsequent impact of globalisation. At the end of this section, I will also provide a rationale for the choice of *Freshlyground* as the subject for this paper. The second section of the paper, drawing from Appiah's work on identity and Cosmopolitanism, will provide a methodology for analysis, expanding on concepts described by Appiah. The third section of the paper will integrate a New Historicist understanding of the 'situatedness' of the *Freshlyground* lyrics with the concepts borrowed from Cosmopolitanism as a theory of modern identity. The paper argues that such possibilities as presented respond to the opportunities provided by globalisation and democracy, but are deeply conflicted and attenuated in South Africa with the rise of new class elites.

### **New historicism, cosmopolitanism and lyrics as music texts**

Brannigan in *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* (1998) claims that "literary texts occupy specific historical and cultural sites ... at which ... political and ideological contradictions are played out" (203); and furthermore that texts are "part of the process of ... change, and indeed may constitute historical change" (203). For Porter (1988), the difference between 'old' Historicism and New Historicism is that with the latter the concept of 'power' has replaced that of 'progress' and its associations with the assumptions of the Enlightenment. It is thus not surprising that the work of many new historicists draws on Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) in order not simply to describe events and how

events lead to change, but rather to understand how events are circulated, elaborated and controlled (Brannigan, 1998: 209).

Discourse and text thus are acknowledged to possess the power to constitute a subject (or an event), but at the same time subjects sometimes exist as unique and permanent even when a discourse for them has not yet been articulated. While identity does constitute the subject, it is not always an act of will. Corbey and Leerssen (1991) describe a post-modern notion of 'identity' as fluid, contemporaneous and nebulous, which exists in tension with the idea that identity is constituted by history and experience (in other words, cultural and material processes; Hall & Du Gay, 1998). It is for this reason that I claimed earlier that interdisciplinary research which borrows from a range of disciplines in order to create a discourse for the event (in this case, the analytical frame necessary to understand and interrogate post-Apartheid identities and the possibilities these present in a form such as contemporary music). To be clear: what I focus on are cultural and material forms, but what I seek to understand are those moments when power permits denial or allows expression of difference, or diversity. In modern scholarship in the humanities or social sciences, it has long been outmoded to use the Enlightenment binaries of 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity'. Subjectivity has since been claimed by post-colonial and feminist scholars, while objectivity retains a diminished status in the natural sciences. An objective opinion is unlikely to be offered in any academic context. Instead the discourse of scholarship in relation to a New Historicist perspective on texts has turned to "objectivity and discursivity" (Brannigan, 1998: 211), with the former concept referring to that narrow range of observable and measureable phenomena and the latter those processes that constitute subjects. It is with the discursive in view that attention shifts in this paper to the discourse of identity in the lyrics of *Freshlyground*.

This paper takes into account the content of a growing scholarship of the popular contemporary music in Afrikaans (see for example, Lloyd, 2004) across the race divide in South Africa. References to an established tradition of scholarship on poems, lyrics and music are to found, for example, in Grundlingh (2007), and one need only to make reference here to the continuum represented by performing artists or groups such as *Die Antwoord*, *Brasse Vannie Kaap*, Gert Vlok Nel, Karen Zoid and Hennie Aucamp to illustrate this. The relationship in scholarship between poetry and music composition has a long history in South Africa, with the publication of Aucamp's (1984) *Woorde wat Wond: Geleentheidstukke oor Randkultuur*, and Ballantine's (2004) analysis of identity and change in relation to popular music and white identity. However, although my paper is informed by the work of Aucamp and Ballantine, respectively, both scholars locate their research within particular cultural and race groupings for specific reasons: in the case of Aucamp, the Afrikaners, and in the case of Ballantine, white (English speaking) South Africans. However, these antecedents here are not unhelpful, since the music produced by selected groups in English (for example, *Freshlyground*), isiXhosa (for example, Simphiwe Dana), Afrikaans (for example, Zoid), etc. are all notable for the code switching they employ with a view not only to appealing to audiences beyond the confines of their ethnic and cultural origins, but also to address issues such as class as competing with race and gender as primary constituents of identity politics in South Africa post-1994. Krog (2006) has also identified the singularity of this new generation's music, arguing that the younger generation have abandoned poetics in order to reach a wider audience:

*Hulle wroeg hulle apatie, aggressie en gevoel van verwerping uit in hulle songs en dié wat heel besonders is, dié is reeds besig om in 'n nuwe bedeling 'n nuwe genre, 'n nuwe taal en nuwe temas te skep* (Krog, 2006: 14).

But why chose *Freshlyground* especially? Their popular appeal has been widely acknowledged and commented on in South Africa. *Freshlyground* was the South African group chosen to perform with Shakira during the closing ceremony of the 2010 FIFA World Cup. It is also the only group to have been selected to perform at the Opening of Parliament in 2004, and performed at the FIFA World Cup in Germany in 2005 too. The list of music awards is numerous and critics (journalists and music critics) have variously pointed out that “*Freshlyground* is an almost textbook example of how well consensus can work” (*Cape Etc*, April 2004, Justin Zehmke in GRIOT, 2010: 6). The consensus here refers, I think, not only to the stylistic harmony of many of the compositions, but also to the ideal of race and gender harmony encapsulated in official state discourses, and numerous civic, religious and secular organisations in various forms of public communication.

*Freshlyground's* performances on occasions of state and other ceremonies confirms that the symbolic, as well as emotional charge of the music, appeals to, and indeed is sanctioned by, power in and beyond South Africa. To return to the concepts borrowed from New Historicism, the appeal of *Freshlyground* from a symbolically sanctioned and popular perspective derives from, but also reproduces, the official aspirations of the post-Apartheid state towards a non-sexist and non-racist harmony. Participation in a range of sanctioned and popular spectacles suggests that, of all contemporary South Africa music, this group has achieved a prominence not simply derived from appeal:

*Freshlyground's music may sound like it was manufactured by Benetton mixing not only race and gender but also nationality, musical style, language, age and event height... However the mix was created it's one for which the world is developing a taste. Freshlyground's ambivalence about their diversity hasn't stopped others from seizing on them as the personification of the Rainbow Nation* (Time Magazine, April 2007, Alex Perry in GRIOT, 2010: 5).

To be sure, the categories for this endorsement are made explicit as seen in the quotation above. The focus is on the community of diverse race and gender backgrounds. Simply put, the congruency between official discourses articulated by the state is evident: people centeredness, *ubuntu*, people first, growing our people, working together, and innovation through diversity (all derived from South African government department or state organisational logos). However, what is intriguing is the extent to which the lyrics complicate and sometimes interrogates these very assumptions. It is clear that *Freshlyground* does not produce a series of *ATKV Volksliedere* for the post-Apartheid state. If one reads the claims made in the media, then the music of *Freshlyground* succeeds not because it affirms a series of formulations about transformation and diversity in South Africa, but because it allows also for their subversion and interpolation in relation to the historicity of the texts itself: in other words, the extent to which the text interprets or rejects interpretations of our collective past. Scholarship in this regard is not new in South Africa. Such notions speak to the identity articulated by the group itself, a point to which I return in this paper in relation to Perry's (2007: 5) suggestion that the group's “ambivalence about their diversity” has been seized on as what he terms the “personification of the Rainbow Nation”.

Having delineated the theoretical frame, it is also useful to account for a methodology for analysis in order to arrive at a series of interpretations. A number of approaches suggest themselves. New Historicism claims the methods developed by Foucault for an interpretation of how power constitutes its subjects. Post-colonial theory and feminism would provide an account for the subject positioning of identity in terms of race or gender and an account of the domination or subversion of patriarchal norms (McCredde, 2007). However, a more cogent approach for my purposes involves using Appiah's work on Cosmopolitanism in *The Ethics of Identity* (2005) and *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006) for the following reasons. Appiah describes in *The Ethics of Identity* (2005: 45) philosophical perspectives on identity from before the Enlightenment to the present and argues that conceptions of autonomy (as a key feature of identity) are largely based on a false binary of self and other and that distinctions made between full or partial autonomy of the agent do not cohere (2005: 52). In the analysis to follow, I am informed by Appiah's insights in suggesting that the possibilities of identity made available to post-Apartheid citizens are not formed in isolation, but rather are informed by the very practices of globalisation, which sanctions privilege along the lines of class, gender and race. Appiah draws on the psychosocial theory of identity associated with the work of Erikson and Gouldner, stating that "ideas shape the way people conceive of themselves and their projects" (2005: 66). In my paper, 'projects' can refer not only to the work of nation building, and thus the creation and affirmation of new ideas about people, but also those projects undertaken consciously by people to shape themselves in relation to the larger social collective.

Anderson (2006: 6–7) has described what it means to create, and be part of, an imagined community: "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship". At the same time, dimensions of identity may not be entirely constructed and are not constituted out of will or desire. A gay man or a black woman does not choose his or her desires and thus, according to Appiah, there are parts of identity that are not merely a matter of individual choice. Liberalism typically favours the idea that individuals ought to have the autonomy of choice in terms of their identities and that the function of the state is to ensure that favouritism or persecution on the basis of religion, colour, status or creed does not occur. The South African state contained and still contains within it structural forms of favour and protection (for example, affirmative action, the preference for poor, and the protection of women and children), which, as Appiah (2005: 109) points out, arises from the fact that the simple right to human dignity is not sufficient protection in a state in which an individual might still be attacked on the basis of not conforming to the conventions established by a group. In such circumstances, persons at risk have the right to the protection of their recognition and it may be necessary to resist, escape or recode damaging discourses (for example, those surrounding black or gay persons).

The development of the post-Apartheid nation state in 1994 occurred within the development of globalisation, characterised as it is by the erosion of the nation state (and hence the ability of communities to safeguard the recognition of their members), and the emphasis on the development of the global citizen, able to surpass community affinities, shun local loyalties, relocate place, and assume new identities in relation to new expectations and contexts. Castells (2000) is useful in describing what the "space of flows" enables for such global citizens. New definitions of 'identity' emerge to replace those of the post- or neo-colonial, the modern and post-modern: the cosmopolitan and the metrosexual. In both is denoted the ability not only to self-select in terms of choice, but also to exchange multiple

identities (sexual, cultural, economic) depending on time, circumstance and opportunity. Cosmopolitan citizens, associated as they are with the modern phenomenon of urbanisation and cosmopolitan identify with a particular lifestyle: the culture and materialism of this group has come to be theorised as Cosmopolitanism.

Just prior to 1994, South Africans reached a political accommodation that allayed the need for revolution and catapulted the country into the global arena economically, socially, structurally and politically. The complex work associated with recoding identities occurred within the historical events of late twentieth century capitalism and the onset of globalisation. Not unsurprisingly, contemporary art forms responded on a range of levels to the possibilities of the new and the problematic of what could, or should, be discarded from the past. My view is that the place of contemporary art and the status of research on such work at this time (post-1994) are particularly important.

Bennet (1999) and Brake (1980) argue that contemporary popular music is worthy of attention and of interest especially, since the popular art forms have made notions of multilingualism, transgendered identity, plurality, multiculturalism, and post-modernisms accessible to a wider audience. For many South Africans not especially trained in the deep analytical methods offered by the humanities, popular art forms can and do make complex phenomena accessible, especially in relation to identity. While interdisciplinary work allows for diversity of approach and breadth of reference, it comes also with the risk of superficial analysis, or an inaccurate representation of the specific features of canons.

To summarise: the purpose of this paper, then, is to explore with reference to *Freshlyground* new identity formations, new constellations of power in which identity of the self or group is reconstituted and interrogated. The choice was motivated by my awareness of not only the appeal of these artists to a new generation of young adults schooled in mainly multicultural and mostly middle-class schools, but also the evident appeal of such music to a wide range of groupings, and the reaction and appeal of the artists themselves to the histories that had produced them. It is not possible in the seminar space to offer a close analysis of all of *Freshlyground's* music (*Jika Jika* 2003; *Nomvula* 2004; *Ma'Cheri* 2007) and so what I wish to focus on here is *Nomvula*, released as it was ten years after 1994, to illustrate how the music of *Freshlyground* exemplifies but also problematises an emerging theory of Cosmopolitanism as defined by Appiah (2005).

The name of this group, *Freshlyground*, suggests something of the way in which it approaches themes of migration, loss, displacement, change, identity and love in post-Apartheid South Africa. Freshly ground coffee, but also 'fresh', takes on an experience of life; freshly ground down and made palatable to the listener. As a way of ending this paper, it perhaps fitting that I examine an art form (the lyrics in addition to the melodies) that must respond in a manner more rooted in the temporal, than do literature or drama. There has been a long-standing debate about the possibilities represented by popular art forms as a means of reinterpreting, indeed better appreciating, the value of high culture, or great art. High art, or high culture, appears then to serve as a mirror to society at somewhat of a remove from the popular, which is seen to be too close to lived experience to contain any set of universal, or a-temporal, values. Yet, as Jameson suggests in *The Singular Modernity* (2002), the differences between high culture and low culture are marshalled precisely to enforce the elitism of high art in order to remove from it the taint of the popular, and thus to support its removal from the world in terms of abstract universalism with its disavowal of context, history, society and production.

Since this paper has been concerned with questions of what a new South Africa(n) may value, and what multilingualism and multiculturalism must mean for a new generation of youth and educators (Epstein, 1998), and how we might understand this new identity to be represented in a new canon, and what genres and texts would feature in the curricula that emanate from these new understandings, then being aware of the popular is critical. For, whether it be in the form of television serials like *Isidingo*, *Backstage*, *Egoli* or *Generations*, or new advertisements, and music, the popular is important as a means of understanding the possibilities for that which we seek to retain from the past, that which we seek to better understand about the present, and what it is from the past and the present that is worthy of retention in the future.<sup>2</sup>

In previous sections, I have provided an account for the relevance of a New Historicist perspective on the locatedness of text in time, and explained the possibilities offered by Cosmopolitanism as a theory of identity in the age of globalisation. The final sections of the paper illustrate, with reference to the lyrics of *Freshlyground*, what I refer to as ‘constellations of idea’ about identity in which the juxtaposition of the past with present experience serves not only to interrogate old formulations of power and identity, but also, unwittingly, to articulate preoccupations with class and power as the new constellation affecting identity politics in South Africa.

### **Enforced and chosen migration and displacement: the post-local identity**

The first constellation is *enforced and chosen migration and displacement: the post-local identity* and exemplified in Track 3 (*Tin beaker*) of *Nomvula* (Freshlyground, 2004), where the speaker recalls an object that defines his migration. The tin beaker is the element that is both portable and without identity, and yet associated with an identity that has been subject to migration. The refrains of “we have been waiting for so long” and “baby to be loved by you” recalls the experience of mineworkers as documented by many Marxist historians on mining capitalism and migration (or forced labour) in South Africa. Expression is given to long-experienced bondage and the easy love associated with displaced labourers as they attempt in Johannesburg to locate themselves, but without any links to the family or homestead that might otherwise have secured human relations in the rural hinterlands. These bonds are experienced as vanished and vanquished, as the last line ends with an injunction “don’t stay in one place”. That sense of vanishing values and banishing leads to Track 4 (*Vanish*) in which these same elements are rearticulated from a middle-class (possibly white) perspective.

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<sup>2</sup> The song (Track 1: *I am the man*) provides an indication of how young people from a variety of cultures and countries in Africa might consider the possibilities of the present in relation to the constrictions imposed by the past. Look, for example, at the references in this text to the notions of a “frightened land”, to the need to “bring it glory”, to the “tightened hand”, and to the need to give expression to our stories, for a tangible sense of the relationship between a past in which fear and resistance, mistrust and deception prevented those stories from being expressed. This suggestion is extended in the hope that by telling the hidden stories, untightening the fist, and releasing the fear will allow for conditions in which ‘glory’ becomes manifest. That the future is bright does in some way depend on the past being released, its effects on our behaviour as post-Apartheid citizens being limited, and our stories being shared in a way that was not possible previously.

Initially, this experience of loss is individualised to represent nostalgia for a more ‘original’ identity (“before you were too cool”), in which friendships did not depend on class mobility but on ‘real’ feeling: “I ran into a friend who perished in the fire of your mind”. Clearly, this nostalgia is located within a middle-class (as opposed to working class) perspective; the “skinny-dipping in my pool” can only occur with certain freedoms associated with status and leisure time as givens. That middle-class location is extended to include features of a cosmopolitan identity, in which the touch of a person is associated with “summer in Greece”, and the pleasures of willing displacements and dissociations that take the form of holidays in Europe or ‘travel abroad’. Interestingly, this song is not sung by a white woman or man, but is clearly the voice of the middle-class woman in which the divisions of race and gender are not experienced as tensions.<sup>3</sup> Class in this instance erases race, in the same way as the speaker suggests that “to *banish* all the feelings inside you” is to erase the bonds of a friendship now inconvenient. Disassociation is not the only feature of the urban cosmopolitan experience, since even the identity of being a South African of the middle class can be effaced willingly. This in order to assume the global identity of the cosmopolite, in which, as Appiah (2006) notes, local identities can be exchanged variously, depending on will and the means of the individuated (and Western) individual who chooses to emigrate to a place “Outlandish! Is the place you live in really central heated?”. That individuated identity resonates with *Tin beaker*, where the injunction “don’t stay in one place” is revealed to have another dimension when the speaker suggests, “I feel you’re the only one you need”. Isolated, wilful, enabled, changing and without ties or affiliation, the new post-local identity is revealed to be flawed, since it is able neither to give nor to accept love, which in this analysis must mean the association of place and person with precisely the ties that the cosmopolite is able to free himself from – a cold, indifferent, displaced and self-willed migrant. If this is the condition of the middle-class Westernised African, then Track 5 (*uCarolina*) demonstrates the implications of this value system for women, who are shown to have remained disempowered in post-Apartheid South Africa.

The invocation of a nostalgia for the past (a past that is shown to be one in which summary and enforced displacement was an experience common to many) has other dimensions and is utilised here to illustrate the value of the epithet ‘*plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose*’ (the more things change, the more they stay the same). Such nostalgia is revealed, finally, to be a cruel irony for those women (the two domestic servants in this track), still disempowered and oppressed in South Africa. *UCarolina* is almost a political satire (the Mjongenis – the Yengenis – are driving around in Mercedes), in which the new middle class continues to require the cheap services of its underclass, the black domestic worker (We’re feeding the small kinds/ ...we scrub the floors). Reference to the political icons of the new era (the Matibas – *Madibas* – the Umbekes – *Mbekis*) reveals to the listener the contrast that is sustained to devastating effect throughout this otherwise cheerful song (in terms of tempo, pitch, and pace).

Taken together, what the African renaissance has delivered is a class (the *waBenzi*) associated with a car (the Mercedes), loud madams who “bring us low”, and boyfriends, who with their history of enforced dislocation now bring the consequences of such damage in the form of destructive behaviour (infidelity) and disease (AIDS). In the face of challenges arising from this ‘brave new world’, the disempowered women (Carolina and her domestic labourer friend)

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of this phenomenon, please consult Ballantine (2004).



call on the icons of previous ages: the Mahatma, a figure of passive resistance (the role most often associated with women in South Africa – think of the present re-enactment of the 1956 Women’s March on the Union Buildings in 2006), and the Virgin Mary, the archetypal mother figure obedient to and glorified by God. Both value systems, the religious and the political, are revealed to be inadequate in this time. They have been displaced by a self-interested class, global, status driven, cosmopolitan and indifferent. The final stanza of this song is where the satire, begun in stanza 1 and sustained in stanza 2, breaks down. Carolina and her friend forgive the inability of the icons to defend and save them. Perhaps for these women, these figures were inadequate to begin with. What is chosen to replace the icon, and the social realities they cannot obscure, is a further appeal to nostalgia as evident in *Vanish*. Only this time, in a cruel irony Carolina appeals to the figures of the Apartheid past (Verwoerd and Botha) who in their oppression appear to have provided these women with a cause for resistance, and reason to hold out, remain faithful, and hope for a better life as evident in the words: “Hold my hand and may we fly in the clouds”. In the closing line “when they said they would destroy us”, there appears to be a suggestion that this oppression and threat defined roles for the women in which a belief in the possibilities offered by post-Apartheid could be retained as ideal. *UCarolina* brings together the trilogy of tracks on this section of the compilation in which nostalgia in the face of present disappointments are shown to have their origins in a past in which the enforcement of migration, the fragmentation of identity, have come to be the cherished values of a new class. The repetition of the words “we saw him” is deliberate in its reference to the continued hegemony of men, the major political and economic force, in the new South Africa, which remains indifferent to the conditions of the poor and disenfranchised (shown here to consist mainly of women). A critique of the injustice of the past and the disappointing continuities of class oppression, despite race liberation, may confirm media reports concerning the value of the band not only in popular or musical terms, but also in terms of the political economy, where “crossover” between the silos of race and gender categorisation is suggested in the following media extract:

*Freshlyground is probably going to become SA’s most important band in the 21st century. I realised this when I watched them at Loftus Versfeld supporting Robbie Williams. Sixty thousand people sang along to their hits, with passion. And they’re the biggest crossover group since Mandoza ... (Cape Argus, October 2007 in GRIOT, 2010: 5).*

Between race crossovers, gender crossing and popular commercial appeal arises the need to formulate new forms of connection and association and to explore the extent to which these offer possibilities not previously available to the South African (middle-class) citizen.

### **Association, disassociation and the cosmopolitan need for connection**

A second constellation that emerges has to do with *association and disassociation and the cosmopolitan need for connection*. If the features of Cosmopolitanism are individuation, freedom from local connection and the past, the will to multiple identities, the extreme control of and isolation from feeling or association, and the need for disassociation in the form of travel and migration, then Tracks 6 to 8 of *Nomvula* problematise the individual’s need for association and connection, though not to community or family as might have been the case prior to the onset of late capitalism or globalisation. Themes addressed in this section of the compilation are referred to in passing in the first third of the compilation, but are provided with a more

thorough treatment here. Track 6 (*What would you do?(I'd like)*) articulates the need for connection in terms of questions that are seemingly never answered. The speaker here appears to take on the characteristics of women mentioned earlier (disempowered, isolated, neglected), but this is in critical relation to the experience of 'being in love'. The words "if I kissed you ... if I held your hand and laid you down ..." are uttered in relation to an anticipated response, which is imminent but also deferred. It is the imaginary other (male, indifferent, disassociated with any specified identity) that is of interest here. The responses of "overly familiar" and "insensitive" are projections that result in consequences "I deserve to die" from "these feelings tearing me up inside". The recognition that indulging this imaginary other is "wasted hours dreaming" suggests all the more powerfully the absence of the other, reinforced painfully in the refrain "I'd like to call you sometime". Here the conditional behaviour is never enacted; it remains a wish. The conditional "if you knew the truth ... if I told you the story" is a key feature of this song, which critics have variously described as haunting and soulful. The sense of separation, even abandonment, is articulated more forcefully towards the end when the speaker states "I'd like you to need me one time", recalling the themes touched on in *Vanish*, in which the line "I think you're the only one you need" echoes a similar sensibility; the difference being that in *Vanish* identity and the cosmopolitan self remain somewhat distanced from the entreaties of the speaker. Similarly, Track 11 (*Father please*) articulates the loss of connection with the past in the person of the speaker's father. The most significant insight offered by this song arises from the lines "I move past a man without a face/ Who turns away as though my touch/ Would be the thing to bring him down" in which it is suggested that the disassociation experienced as a result of loss is similar to that experienced as a consequence of losing one's connection with place and people (*Vanish*). The seeming inevitability of that loss, as suggested in *Father please* is returned to in Track 12 (*Mowbray Kaap*), which I discuss below in terms of the possibilities for an affirmation of relation, connection, community and the creation of a whole identity in relation to other people; considered here to be features of ubuntu.

If *Vanish* and *What would you do? (I'd Like)* describe the cosmopolitan identity available to middle-class South Africans as a consequence of the entry into the global economy and the prosperity that has accompanied foreign investment and various empowerment (BEE) initiatives, then it remains important for us to see that such developments are replicated in the emotional resonance conveyed in popular music. Thus government drives towards the transformation of South African society into a non-racial and non-sexist society have an underside that has resulted in the perpetuation of historic class inequities masked previously by the race discourse of Apartheid (for an account of the effect of neo-liberal policies on South Africa, see Nicholson (2001) *Measuring Change: SA's Economy since 1994*). The lyrics of *Freshlyground* (2004) speak of the sense of loss and isolation owing to the fact that the drives towards transformation have become complicated (even compromised) by developments associated with neo-liberalism, the rapid advance of consumer capitalism, and the creation of new elites. What remained so difficult in the Apartheid literature of oppression was for resistance writers to articulate a vision in their literature for what a post-Apartheid society might look like. Modisane's *Blame Me on History* (1963) is the classic resistance text in which is described the totalising effects of the Apartheid spectacle on the identity of the individual or racial group.

### **Relocation, identification and community**

The third constellation concerns itself with *relocation, identification and community*. With various democratic freedoms enshrined in the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996), it is possible to articulate resistance to the encroachment of these rights within the legal protections provided, but, as the lyrics thus far suggest, it remains difficult to articulate alternatives, nationally, for how society might be different from the way it is turning out under the influence of market-driven forces and an increasingly powerful sense of individuality/individuation in the Western mode, in which the links to community, the local, and people are differentiated and weakened. In light of this, it is perhaps unsurprising that Track 5 (*Doo be doo*) resorts to a utopian vision for a different kind of interaction between people; one that appears to be inspired by the African notion of *Ubuntu*, in which the emphasis is on the social relationships between groups and individuals: “People have agreed to give their love away” and “Politicians have agreed to honour and obey and come down to listen to what the people have to say”. These references are contrasted in Track 1 (*I am the man*), in which the tightened fist, the unwillingness to share, is perceived as a consequence of our collective past (and not of neo-liberalism or globalisation) of division and race hatred. In *Doo be doo*, children play on once unsafe streets, “neighbours greet each other” with “open hearts”, and “enemies become friends”. The same ambivalence as found in the conditional questions in *What would you do? (I'd Like)* is also present in *Doo be doo* when the speaker says “Feel free to come around/ If you are ready”. Track 12 (*Mowbray Kaap*) appears to be a response to *uCarolina*. Here the value of status symbols (the Mercedes), the fashion labels (Billabong), the objects and accessories (Loxicon) are reversed and non-possession “There is no money/ We have no money” is associated with a freedom from neo-liberalism and the values of consumer capitalism, where worth is measured by worth. In direct contrast to the features of the cosmopolitan self, the lyrics of *Mowbray Kaap* affirm the value of place (or location) in relation to identity and connection, and the repetition of another conditional: “If you have been called by Africa, the same song we all sing” suggests that this is a feature particular to people who consider themselves to be African with the emphasis on the value of social relations and affinities, rather than on objects, wealth or the freedom to move. Unsurprisingly then, Track 13 (*Touch in the night*) takes this affirmation of *ubuntu* and explores its implications for the individual, not in relation to the self, however, but in terms of loving interaction between self and other. This discourse is in contrast to that found in Tracks 4 (*Vanish*) and 6 (*What would you do? (I'd Like)*), where the self, isolated, rejected, self-absorbed or indifferent, is checked (“Stop your mess and your fuss now baby”), reconciled in relation to the other (“You cover me with hands like a flower/ A touch in the night is all right”), and where the possibilities for a better future can be articulated: “You speak the speech of a dreamer/ I know you are the one/ You cover me with hands like the sunshine”. The track ends with “I’ll keep coming home...to you”, affirming two features of identity as made possible through *ubuntu*: the idea of return from exile and the idea of home (together with place, community, and belonging).

### **Reflections on fragmentation**

Using the conceptual tools available to us from New Historicism, Globalisation Theory, and the emerging theory of Cosmopolitanism, it is possible in this analysis of the popular, to release the implicit preoccupations with self, love, and relationship, from a narrowly perceived sense of the individual in society. In South Africa, and with particular reference to

*Freshlyground's Nomvula* (2004), it is clear that contemporary culture responds to the legacy of politicisation and activism arising from the Apartheid past, anticipates the new socio-economic and political constellations of power (in the form of neo-liberalism, its elites, and interests) that appear to support a Western conception of Cosmopolitanism as a vehicle for identity. This conception is challenged on every aspect of its formation (its insistence on an absence of connection, isolation, individuality, and its aspiration to willed migration) to suggest another form of the cosmopolitan self, equally located within the global middle class.

Zanele Mazibuko has always hated the violin. And the flute? Forget it. For a child growing up in the black township of Soweto, she said, those instruments represented a distant world of white privilege, beyond a seemingly uncrossable racial divide. But last week, something began to change her mind. It was a live performance by *Freshlyground*, one of South Africa's hottest bands, which features both a violin and a flute – not to mention five white members out of seven. The music, a fusion of rock, jazz and Afro-pop, sounded 'black,' Mazibuko said, delighted and amazed. 'The music they play, it just goes together.' (*The Washington Post*, December 2005 in GRIOT, 2010: 5).

For all the affirmation of the 'localised connection' in *Nomvula* (2004), identity, history and connection appear to be heavily mediated, indeed fragmented by the possibilities of leisure, class and status, as the means by which location and connection can be negotiated, or rejected in a post-colonial now globalised world.

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