

The Ten\$ion of Post-Apartheid Whiteness

A Study of Die Antwoord's Performance of White Identity and Power

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Abstract

Die Antwoord are a South African rap group based in Cape Town that has achieved unparalleled success in the Western world. Ninja, Yolandi, and DJ Hi-Tek comprise the group, who, amongst many triumphs, have amassed nearly one billion views on YouTube and have starred in a major feature film titled *Chappie* directed by Neill Blomkamp. Whereas their Western fan base is vast, fervent, and embraces the group for their African Otherness, they are far less revered or even respected in their home nation. This understudied and misinterpreted international media and communication phenomenon is particularly fascinating because, as this interdisciplinary study argues, Die Antwoord's artistic production possesses a distinct postcolonial and postmodern mandate to tactically confront, through parody, what they view as the racial injustices of post-apartheid South Africa. To meet these ends, they communicate themselves to audiences as an uncomfortable, provincial, morally bankrupt model of whiteness with the objective of repudiating and demystifying the colonial power of South African whiteness. Their objective is to become one with the other and to cultivate a sense of belonging across all races and cultures. Problematically, to reinscribe their whiteness, they unapologetically appropriate the unique cultural signs and symbols of other persecuted and unacknowledged South African races and cultures, particularly the culture of Coloured (South African term for people of mixed-heritage) men and boys who live in the gang- and poverty-ridden townships of the Cape Flats. Thus, Die Antwoord further embody and reinforce the ongoing supremacy of white colonialism. This study examines Die Antwoord's self-righteous altruistic mandate and their efficient postmodern communication tactics to cultivate interest in their work—most of which is based online. Primarily, this interdisciplinary analysis explores a model of young liberal white South Africans as being concurrently privileged, adrift, erratic, unstable, and entitled in a digital, post-apartheid

South Africa. Moreover, it interrogates the enduring power of whiteness in an African country that continues to reckon with its treacherous Apartheid past.

Keywords: South African art, communication, whiteness, Die Antwoord, popular culture, postcolonial, post-apartheid, postmodernism.

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Chapter 1: An Introductory Primer on Die Antwoord

The South African rap-rave group Die Antwoord, which translates from Afrikaans to “The Answer,” received international attention when their music video *Enter the Ninja* (DieAntwoordVEVO, 2010) went viral in February 2009. The video, watched by 89 million viewers on YouTube, begins with cutaway visuals of a gaunt white man with crude, misspelled, hand-poked tattoos, gold teeth, and a bizarre haircut which elicits flashbacks of early 1990s American hip-hop. The backdrop for *Enter the Ninja* is a dark, grimy space with primitive looking art drawn on the walls. The tattooed lead rapper and writer of the group, Ninja Vi\$\$er, introduces himself in an exaggerated provincial Afrikaans accent by declaring, “I represent South African culture... Blacks, whites, Coloureds, English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu—watookal. I’m like all these different things, all these different people, fucked into one person” (Die AntwoordVEVO, 2010, 0:06). Remarkably, this controversial introduction might be the most explicit expression Die Antwoord has communicated to audiences about their artistic intentions since the mysterious group propelled onto the international spotlight over a decade ago.

Die Antwoord is an internet and communication savvy musical outfit out of Cape Town, South Africa, composed of three members: vocalists Ninja and Yolandi Vi\$\$er and their DJ, DJ Hi-Tek. The trio live strictly according to what they refer to as a *zef lifestyle*—a subcultural paradigm rooted in lower-class whiteness but, as I discuss, that is monumentally influenced by Black and Coloured – the South African term for people of mixed-heritage – street culture. The group performs Afrikaans and English rap music (see Figure 1) and creates various artworks through multitudinous media, communication, and artistic platforms. Although most of their attention is directed towards their music and music videos, they also paint, photograph, write and produce films, design toys and clothing, and are objectively dynamic on social media. All these

forms of cultural production and artistic output fall explicitly within their rigid conceptualization of “zefness.” As Ninja’s aforementioned quote signals, Die Antwoord has self-identified as “the love child of diverse cultures—‘black, white, coloured and alien’” (Eggington, 2010, para. 6) and is notorious for its high-octane, coarse mixture of “crunk, grime and Cape Flats patois” (Bloom, 2010, para. 5).

Figure 1

A Photo of Die Antwoord in Concert



Note. From *Lollapalooza 2012—Die Antwoord* [Photograph], by S. Hirschman, 2012, Flickr (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/88958153@N00/7751391174>). CC BY-SA 2.0.

By all accounts, Ninja is the heavy-handed creative and artistic director of the group. A self-described control freak, he writes all the songs, creates the artwork, produces the videos,

publishes the online media, and cuts and styles the group members' hair. He also personally provides group members with hand-poked tattoos. His grand sounding birth name is Watkin Tudor Jones, and he was born in Johannesburg to a middle class, white, exclusively English-speaking family. Ninja began rapping two years after the abolishment of apartheid and two years before Nelson Mandela became president of South Africa. Before the creation (or emergence) of Die Antwoord, he spent two decades rapping under a variety of personas and in a genre of hip-hop that might best be described as “intellectual” or “conscious”—rap music that challenges dominant social discourse.

According to Ninja, he abandoned the conscious genre to make “hostile-takeover shit” (Herrera, 2012, para. 6) after coming to the realization that there was not much popular interest in intellectual rap music from a white, English South African. He proclaimed in a *Rolling Stone South Africa* publication in 2012 that “we appeal to the man in the street. We run the exact same campaign as Zuma and Malema do. We make pop music. We don't make intellectual music” (Innes, 2014, para. 19). This assertive comment is representative of Ninja's ongoing artistic and political communication campaign and also offers some subtext into who he is as a person and artist. Though Ninja was raised in relative affluence, he has faced several significant personal obstacles in his life, including the murder of his father during a car robbery, and the suicide of his only sibling (Jimbostephens, 2013).

Having spent much less time in the public spotlight prior to Die Antwoord, a lot less is known about Yolandi's past. Born as Anri Du Toit, she is a former art school student who was adopted during apartheid by a deeply Christian family in Port Alfred. As a teenager, she ran away from home and her pastor father to live on a farm in the countryside with other orphaned children, most of them Coloured (Ryder, 2015).

If little is known about Yolandi's background, almost nothing is known about DJ Hi-Tek. The group is so coy about revealing the identity of their DJ that he dons a face veil for all their live shows—typically a mask that depicts Blackness in some way. His most common mask is a caricature of the famous American boxer Mike Tyson's face. DJ Hi-Tek is also excluded from all media interviews. However, thanks to some internet sleuths, it is known that Justin De Nobrega is the group's producer and DJ (DJ Hi-Tek). The only significant personal fact available concerning his identity is that he is gay, which was revealed because Die Antwoord (2012b) succumbed to public pressure and obligation to explain Hi Tek's copious use of the word “[f-word]” in their single, “Fok Julle Naaiers” (Die Antwoord, 2012b). Of note, Ninja and Yolandi were in a romantic relationship for a number of years and have a child together (named Sixteen Jones), who was born in 2006. The pair are no longer romantically involved but have often stated publicly that they are best friends and soul mates.

While performing together in Die Antwoord, their group dynamic works as such: Ninja is a boorish, dancing antagonist who is covered in prison-style tattoos of the notoriously violent 26s, 27s, and 28s Cape Town gangs comprising mostly young, poor Coloured men. In an ode to the obsolete style of the early 90s American hip-hop scene, he sports an absurd Vanilla Ice-inspired haircut and regularly wears a dangling dolphin earring and Pink Floyd *Darker Side of the Moon* boxer shorts. Prior to their third album, *Donker Mag* (Afrikaans for “Dark Power”) in 2014, Ninja would often rap in a manner that was meant to be understood by their audiences as self-serious, when in fact he was guilefully mocking his created character of Ninja. More recently, there seems to have been little to no self or character deprecation. Instead, most of his rapping has been defensive, egotistical and aggressive. Some observers (e.g., fans on online

message boards, journalists, music critics) of the group have pondered whether Watkin Tudor Jones has stopped playing Ninja and has instead become his uncouth, once conceptual character.

Yolandi, who is deliberately quiet in public but equals Ninja's vulgarity on the microphone, regularly wears gold sneakers and a Pokémon onesie pajama outfit. Her hair is bleached blonde and is cut into a unique, now infamous, and often emulated mullet (by American pop star Lady Gaga and Prada models alike), which is totally shaven on the sides, long and spikey at the back. DJ Hi-Tek does not speak in public—a trait Yolandi flippantly claimed to have manifested from an embarrassing speech impediment (as cited in Damolay, 2011). As mentioned, DJ Hi-Tek always wears a plastic mask of a disfigured face. He, like Ninja, is usually shirtless.

Lyrically, their songs are sexual and quite violent. Although they are sometimes denotational as they confront issues of race and politics in their music, most of their sociopolitical mandate to shock conservative and colonial sensibilities is disseminated through connotative communications. Instead, topics like fame, sex, partying, and drugs are most prevalent in their lyrics. Though they are purposefully antagonistic, they endear audiences through their oft-humorous tone and content. Since about 2014, the group has essentially stopped giving media interviews, however, during the era when they spoke to reporters regularly, Ninja occasionally offered audiences evasive reminders that even though their productions may seem facetious, they take their craft seriously. As Noakes (2010) captured in his video interview entitled "Die Antwoord Exclusive," Ninja said:

Everything you see, we're doing ourselves. We're into art. We're fully into pop art fused with high art. And we're also into rap music. We like different mediums. We like

photographs. We're serious about that. We're also serious about movies and videos. I'm also serious about my fucking hairstyle. I'm serious about everything. (0:58)

This “seriousness” or devoutness to their artistic communication is demonstrated through the essential to note fact that their onstage persona performance does not end. Ninja will not respond to anyone who calls him Watkin, and his prison tattoos—face and otherwise—are real. The group has been nearly utterly consistent in staying true to their antagonist characters and not conceding their performance (Smit, 2015, p. 2). In Die Antwoord's (2012b) video for *Fok Julle Naaiers*, Yolandi asked Ninja if “it's real,” and he responded by rapping aggressively, “No it's just a big black joke, when speaking with an idiot there's really nothing you can say. Next time you ask, I'm going to punch you in your face” (2:28).

Similarly, when a Norwegian interviewer asked them about the passionate Internet debate which arose around their debut (and has since considerably dissipated) surrounding Die Antwoord's authenticity, Ninja replied, “We are a rap group from South Africa. Some people think too much; other people fucking get it. Do you consider yourself to be an intelligent person? What do you think?” (Piotrkitlarz, 2010, 0:37). As can be gauged from these examples, Die Antwoord are very devoted to their artistic performance, and it is a topic they are eager not to address.

After the success of their first viral hit, “Enter the Ninja,” they were signed to Interscope Records, but promptly and unceremoniously left the label after concluding that they were being coerced to create more mainstream Western media-friendly content. Die Antwoord's following albums have been released on their own label, Zef Recordz. The “zef” is Die Antwoord's most frequently used term and represents the purportedly self-manufactured post-race subculture by which they live, perform, and communicate.

Discovering the Postcolonial Identity and Artistic Communication of Die Antwoord

A Personal Reflection

I remember in detail my personal introduction to Die Antwoord. I was at a friend's house when she asked if I had seen this music video that had gone viral by a white rapper from Africa. Thanks to the video release time stamp on YouTube, I can confirm this first encounter with the band must have occurred sometime in 2010. I and a few others at the small gathering followed our host to her desktop computer where she played Die Antwoord's inaugural music video, *Enter the Ninja* (DieAntwoordVEVO, 2010). We watched the evocative video with the gangly "white guy from Africa", the age ambiguous chorus singer with a bizarre haircut, and Leon Botha (the group's apparent DJ with the very rare genetic disorder progeria—a disease characterized by premature and rapid aging at a young age. Botha has since passed away) with confusion, fascination, and an unspoken sense of superiority. I recall my friends laughing at the sheer absurdity of the video. A grown man who calls himself Ninja with the phrases "PRETTY WISE" and "HOW CAN A ANGEL BREAK MY HEART?" tattooed on his body? And rapping verses such as the following from "Enter the Ninja":

I'm a ninja, yo

My life is like a video game

I maintain when I'm in the zone

One player, one life on the mic limited time (Yo Ninja, go!)

No fucking around I'm cutting down anyone in my path

Trying to fuck with my game with razor sharp lyrical throw stars

And:

My blades swing free

Decapitate a hater

With amazing ease

This is not a game, boy

Don't play with me

I work my mic-saber like a wild fucking savage from the dark side danger! (Die AntwoordVEVO, 2010, 1:23)

To my friends and me, and to millions around the globe, *Enter the Ninja* (Die AntwoordVEVO, 2010) was terrific comedy. We snickered at them because we perceived the group as terrifically misguided. To us, they were clearly unfamiliar with the unbridled cruelty of the internet. Reminiscent of the fictional characters found in slapstick comedy films, these musicians were so self-serious and self-assured despite their undeniable absurdity. They presented as childish and confused. For my friends and me, their lack of self-awareness was the gag—everyone but the intricately yet feebly costumed subjects understood their folly. We were laughing at them, not with them. To us, these musicians were brought to our computer screens from across the planet solely because of the newfound existence of YouTube. They were truly and exclusively a communications phenomenon of our digital age. Without the still relatively new and more democratic media platform, Die Antwoord certainly would never have had the means or talent to reach international audiences as they surely did not possess the appropriate appeal or style to convince any label to affiliate themselves with the group. The video's level of production (or lack thereof) indicated as much.

Although they seemed mostly foreign to my friends and me at first glance, Die Antwoord did recall one Western cultural archetype that was familiar to those who came of age within the drab dominion of lower- and lower-middle class Canadian suburbia. That is, the disoriented

white teen whose desperate search for some semblance of a coherent masculine identity has led them to clumsily appropriate American hip hop culture as a means to present themselves as authentic and dangerous. Indeed, in 1990s Canada, this was a common teenage identity genre. My previous acquaintanceship with many young people of this likeness in Ottawa, Canada, led me to a half-conscious and presumptuous understanding of Ninja as a desperate white kid unfruitfully toiling away, begging for acceptance and legitimization in a mostly Black music genre on a mostly Black continent. The recognizable identity frenzy demonstrated by this group, connected my friends and I to them, in a way, and without much critical thought, we labelled Die Antwoord as dim-witted, rudderless weirdos whose naiveté on the relentlessness of cloaked commentators on the internet led them down a cruel path towards global ridicule. That was that. Or so I thought.

Over the next few days, then weeks, then months, Die Antwoord kept popping up in my mind. I was surprised that I kept thinking about them. I was not holding any meaningful inner deliberations on their cultural origins or validity, nor was I motivated enough to quickly Google them, but the *Enter the Ninja* video (DieAntwoordVEVO, 2010) would return to me from time to time—particularly, the look of absolute conviction on Ninja’s face (sustained throughout the video). Retrospectively, I think Ninja’s self-assurance was signifying to me just how disproportionate the understanding of the internet could be, and I began to feel pity. In my insulated mind, many of these misunderstandings could be traced to locations with less access and money and Die Antwoord’s video therefore underscored the immense disproportionate qualities of life that persisted around the globe.

Fast forward two years, and by chance, I would once again stumble on Die Antwoord when the music video for their song “Baby’s on Fire” from their second album *Ten\$ion* (Die

Antwoord, 2012a) appeared in my social media feed. When I first saw the video, it had been online for only a week and already had hundreds of thousands of views (in 2022, the video has 262 million views). My first viewing of *Baby's on Fire* was the moment that I realized I had been duped. It dawned on me that I was a perfect, and likely typical, mark for the band. It was mine and millions of others' deep-rooted Western presumptions and prejudices that Die Antwoord had capitalized on to catapult themselves to international fame.

Like *Enter the Ninja* (DieAntwoordVEVO, 2010), *Baby's on Fire* (Die Antwoord, 2012a) is a highly produced and scripted video, with satirical dialogue, self-deprecating humour, violence, and sex, but this video was clearly better financed. Ninja and Yolandi, whose fame at the time was on the rise, were again dressed in a deliberate and communicative manner. Once more, the spaces within the video are richly curated and deeply odd. Everything within the video—from its pop culture references to colour palates—seemed to fit perfectly into an obscure, uncomfortable, and haunting box. Without knowing much about the group, I recognized that what I was watching was exquisitely stylized, distinct, and created by individuals with a masterful grip of contemporary digital communication systems and processes. I realized the same could have been said about their first video, which may have been produced on the cheap but still managed to have sunk its fangs into my neck.

For me, viewing these videos was a similar kind of experience to viewing a Warhol painting in the sense that the production seemed to capture a particular ethereal, tenebrous essence that was offering viewers a weighty, yet purposefully obscured, communication and commentary. It had intentions both to challenge and expose its viewer. Again, reminiscent of a neo-Expressionist painter, *Baby's on Fire* (Die Antwoord, 2012a) was too perfectly chaotic to not have been exceedingly orderly. For these reasons and more, I became spellbound by Die

Antwoord, which was an odd reaction considering that I find their music grating, even if I do acknowledge their talent and dedication.

Although I have never listened to their music for any sonic pleasure, I attribute my ongoing fascination with the group to their tireless efforts towards expressing their identities through intricate art, technology, sound, and style rather than communicating their message through overt discussion. Also, I understood them as artists whose productions were most influenced by their own, possibly fragile, racial identities, and who were seemingly ardently concerned about a racially harmonious path forward. But it was not clear to me if they were seeking harmony for all people, or just for themselves. What was clear is that Die Antwoord is a neatly complex incarnate of tenuous and inequitable postcolonial status.

And although it only took a bit of digging for me learn that the members of Die Antwoord are deeply problematic individuals and that their objectives and actions are far more nefarious than they believe, I remained determined to learn more about them given that identity formulation and communication have always been what most often captures my interest. I believe this captivation is rooted in my idealistic and imprudent notion that there is discoverable good, or at least discernible logic, in most people; individuals just need to decode and then reconfigure the deviations. Through a meaningful analysis of individuals and groups, people might be able to excavate solutions to best address and dismantle some of society's deep-seated malevolencies.

Subsequently, I believe that understanding identity expression and construction in today's rapidly fragmenting Western capitalist, colonialist, digital society is vital research, and the convolutions of how and why people conceptually situate and present themselves amongst others is central towards understanding any society. In any state that purports an anticolonial status,

vigilance of those with power is particularly essential because cultural abuses frequently operate in a covert and insidious fashion. State-sanctioned police brutality, strategically implemented systemic poverty, racial scapegoating, white fragility, dog whistle politics, and relentless cultural appropriation are but a few examples of standard contemporary indictments.

In setting out to write a thesis, I wanted to modestly, but coherently, analyze this postcolonial calculus within a limited page count, and auspiciously, a famous group of communication savvy, identity-concerned white rappers from a country most known for its steps towards hybridity after overcoming a brutal colonial past. Die Antwoord, a group led by a white man who wholly presents as an example of the oscillating, angry, entitled, self-perceived victimized savant, has provided me with a terrific intersectional vessel to interrogate, from an interdisciplinary perspective, the protracted and more latent power of colonialism, whiteness, media, art, communication, and curated identity. Die Antwoord has had more than their share of eruptive moments which function as bombastic examples of manifest white racism, but they also serve as an encapsulation of the daily patterns of whiteness as a compilation of privileges, assumptive prejudices, and entitlements that deeply influence the how much of the world continues to unjustly operate.

A Personal Acknowledgement

Given that this thesis is meant to encourage reflection, introspection, and heightened self- and contextual awareness, I believe it is my ethical obligation to include within this study of post-apartheid whiteness a brief qualifying discussion on my own privileged background before I delve into the nuances and complexities of race and racial politics in South Africa. I am a white settler male from a working-class family who was born and currently lives in deeply colonized Canada on the traditional, unceded territories of the Algonquin Nation. Having traversed my

personal reality in white skin, I have a familiarity with many of the sentiments and sensibilities outlined in this analysis—for example: a sense of rootlessness; feeling as though I am without a worth-cherishing culture; and the perpetually, bubbling just beneath the surface, shame of my settler history, which constantly reminds me that I am living on a land in which I might not belong. White guilt has been a persistent, lifelong reckoning, but is, comparatively speaking, *not* a burden. In fact, being a white man almost always operates as an unearned gift that keeps on giving. I undeniably contribute to the maintenance of the existing racist and colonial system by continuing to implement my birth-given privilege by taking professional, educational, and social opportunities that those of less innate privilege—and often racialized—are not afforded. The very fact that I have penned this analysis at a distance from its subject matter and as a graduate student at a university is some corroboration of my enterprising white, western license. This acknowledgement is no feat of courage nor is it virtuous. However, I think that a dialogue on my own race and culture is a mandatory jumping-off point because, in any interrogation of race or racial politics, it is undeniable that my whiteness will have implicitly and explicitly wrought the narrative. Moreover, much of this study is focused on writings of white self-reflection and self-analysis, meaning that my own disposition is relevant to the context. Most important, a note on my whiteness is germane because, at times in this study I am representing communities and cultures whose experiences I will never understand. Keeping my insulated status in the forefront of one's mind as one considers my representations of others is therefore necessary. As deliberate as I have been in this research, there might be elements of unconscious bias interwoven throughout the text.

In other words, because I do not have access to the communities I am focusing on, my representation of them is limited. Yes, imprecise parallels can be drawn between the experience

of being white in Canada and the experience of being white in post-apartheid South Africa, but there are certainly also dramatic divergencies. For this reason, I frequently lean on the written work of the limited number of South African scholars who have studied the undertheorized concept of post-apartheid whiteness, such as Steyn (1999, 2001, 2005, 2007) at the University of Cape Town, the famous poet Krog (2012a, 2012b) at the University of Western Cape, Steinberg (2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2020) at the University of Oxford, Ndebele (2011) at the University of Cape Town, and perhaps most important, Scott (2009, 2012a, 2012b) of the University of Kwazulu-Natal, whose inquiry into postcolonial white identity, fragility, and renegotiation as expressed through art and writing has been foundational to this paper. I should also note, that I am fundamentally critical of much of their analysis and perspective of becoming and belonging.

Finally, an important subsequent reason I have deemed it necessary to begin my analysis of whiteness in the digital age with acknowledgement of my privilege and bias is to not be hypocritical. At the core of this dissertation is a criticism of a group of white artists who militantly dismiss the status provided by their race and affluence. Instead, their premise is that “all people in South Africa are equal and we’re going to show you how,” which superficially might excusably sound okay, or even commendable. In reality, Die Antwoord offer their “equality” through the appropriation and parody of those with less societal power than themselves for their own, selfish success.

Die Antwoord are arguably South Africa’s primary media ambassadors to the western world—audiences who mostly have no understanding of their favourite group’s home nation, which remains fraught with racial tension and inequality despite South Africans having lived 25 years without the cruel restraints of apartheid. Die Antwoord’s mission as artists is to cleverly communicate that race should not exist by doing everything to strip whiteness of its resonate

power by repositioning their race amongst others in South Africa. I show that this makes them a walking, rapping contradiction, as they have been given many opportunities borne from their cultural heritage, but refuse to acknowledge this truth. They demand license to take from anyone and anything for their own benefit and use their ‘commendable’ post-race mandate as justification.

Die Antwoord speak in accents of other cultures and make wanton statements in interviews about how they are “actually Black, trapped in a white body” (Haupt, 2012a, p. 417), and rap in their songs, such as “Fish Paste,” that “I am a coloured... cause I wanna be a coloured” (Colorful Collective, 2010, 1:31). When giving any thought to the conceptual art and communication of Die Antwoord, one must ground their consideration with the knowledge that the members of Die Antwoord are cunning, well read, educated, contemplative, and purposeful people. They have named themselves “The Answer” because they believe that the apparently raceless culture they present in their art is the answer to the question, “How does South Africa truly move forward from apartheid,” and perhaps more specifically, “How and where do white people fit in South Africa?”

Although this statement may seem like a leap, my forthcoming literature review provides necessary context on the vast convolutions of post-apartheid whiteness in the cultural mosaic that is South Africa, and how young white liberals, Watkin Tudor Jones and Anri Du Toit, came to their “answer” for postcolonial white fragility. In a sentence, one cannot accurately apprehend what Die Antwoord or any of their art is without an understanding of postcolonial white identity within South Africa. As I would come to learn first-hand after viewing Die Antwoord live in Montreal, any nuanced understanding of South African identities did not seem acknowledged or considered by their impassioned western fan base. Before moving any further I would like to

acknowledge that while I feel quite confident in the accuracy of my forthcoming readings and decryptions of Die Antwoord and its members, many of my deduction can be understood as well-informed subjective interpretation. Due their shadowy, and frequently purposefully evasive communications, there is no human way to know their precise intention(s). With that stated, I feel my interpretations are educated and reasonable and I will establish the logic of each of my statements of the group.

A Live African Experience (in Canada) and Explicit Racism Caught on Camera

In October of 2012, not long after viewing *Baby's on Fire* (Die Antwoord, 2012a) for the first time, I attended a Die Antwoord concert in Montreal, Canada. By this point, the group had already achieved recognition as one of South Africa's most consumed artistic imports. They had amassed nearly 100 million YouTube views at the time (their official channel had well over one billion views and was still growing in 2022). Unsurprisingly, the show at The Metropolis (capacity 2,300) was sold out. The crowd was a mix of people, predominantly white, who appeared to come from a variety of subcultures and scenes from punk and hip hop, to house music. The show was loud, and it appeared the group had seized upon the ignorant Western perceptions of African otherness to which I had originally fallen victim. Obbard and Cork (2016) wrote succinctly about this phenomenon in their article entitled "Skin Salvaged: Die Antwoord, Oscar Pistorius, and the Spectacle of the Flesh in the Rainbow Nation:"

Through the sensationalizing of their stories, a former image of a wild and violent South Africa has been reinvigorated, with these figures allegedly revealing the innate differences between the civilized West and the exotic rest. American media representations of Die Antwoord seem to further entrench visions of South Africa as a primitive place. (p. 417)

Again, this concert in Montreal, Canada, was a terrific example of Die Antwoord's understanding of how Western audiences grasp their Africanness without possessing any or very limited knowledge of their highly crafted disposition and performance. Much of this crowd in Montreal sang along in English and Afrikaans, and throughout the 90-minute set, fans simultaneously laughed *at* the group and cheered them on. The phrases which I heard most consistently from the audience were, "They're so weird," "What the fuck," and "They're crazy!"

Before Ninja's solo encore performance of their first hit, "Enter the Ninja," he spoke to the crowd. "As you know, I come from the deep dark depths of Africa," he explained in an ominous tone. The audience cheered upon hearing the word "Africa." This was an illustration of Die Antwoord's understanding that a Western audience distinguishes their Africanness as "other," and as dangerous.

Barber (1997) tackled perceptions of Africans and African art and culture around the world in her book *Readings in Popular African Culture*. She wrote: "Otherness is produced by global capitalism, not discovered and ingested by it, but produced with the co-operation of those represented as other who are pursuing their own strategies of self-presentation and self-differentiation" (Barber, 1997, p. 10). Here, Barber explained the reaction of the Canadian fans at the concert as a product of the widely held Western view that Africa, as Obbard and Cork (2016) posited, is the epitome of "backwards." By calling the band "weird," "insane," or "WTF," audience members are likely articulating their belief that Africa is incomprehensible based on their Eurocentric value structures. Although many of these are fans so dedicated that they can phonetically repeat Afrikaans lyrics without knowing the language, the majority appear satisfied with the explanation that their favourite band—who possess a unique and obviously refined aesthetic, and who promote their self-created complex subculture of zef—require no additional

contemplation beyond “they come from Africa.” These fans, who paid \$100 for their tickets to see Die Antwoord, made finger guns with their hands and waved them in the air while shooting imaginary bullets into sky throughout the concert, despite that fact that few of the band’s lyrics (at the time) dealt with gun violence.

This behaviour also exposes the Western perception of Africa as inherently violent and/or at war. The second half of Barber’s (1997) quote, “[Otherness is] produced with the co-operation of those represented as other who are pursuing their own strategies of self-presentation and self-differentiation” (p. 30), is again particularly apt for a preliminary comprehension of Die Antwoord. By referencing Africa as “deep and dark,” Ninja strategically played to the crowd’s understanding of Africa as the poor, violent continent that the rest of the of world purposefully disassociates itself from or has straight-up forgotten.

After the show, I spoke with a couple of self-proclaimed “diehard Die Antwoord fans” whom I had met earlier in the day while getting coffee. I asked them why they liked the group and what they thought of the performance. They both echoed the sentiment that was heard repeatedly throughout the show—that is, they loved that the band is so odd and aloof. These fans explained to me that Die Antwoord have “the mentality of not giving a shit about what anyone thinks, and they don’t care where they’re performing. It’s hilarious.” This is an ironic take given that (as will be proven) Die Antwoord are fundamentally a conceptual project militantly mandated with influencing their audience’s perceptions. This conversation served as some tangential proof that the group was successfully fulfilling its mandate.

One note: Having followed Die Antwoord over the years and now having read most media published on the group, I have noticed a change in the makeup of their fanbase and also their representation in media coverage. When the band first travelled in North America, the fan

base seemed considerably older (e.g., based on fan pages, internet comments, and which media outlets featured their output), and the coverage was more concerned with the problematic intellectualism innate to the band's work. Previously, media coverage had at least some concern about figuring out (with little result) what the band intended to communicate, represent, and/or accomplish.

As the group has grown in international notoriety, and as they have played to larger audiences, the focus of fans and music critics alike seems to have shifted to explicitly understanding them as a model of subversive African hedonism. As will be exhibited, in the past, media and online fan communities seemed to understand Die Antwoord as an African event, and as their Western audience, they were keen to learn more about and experience a disparate culture and unfamiliar identities, but not so much anymore. I hypothesize that this shift might be a case of familiarity breeding apathy and/or acceptance.

As I learned more about Die Antwoord, I came to the naïve conclusion that my thesis would manifest in some form of academic "gotcha" exposé. The band purposefully moves in the shadows, and I thought that my paper, thanks to the work of some brilliant South African scholars whom I have leaned on heavily, would provide readers with a well-calibrated Die Antwoord scope. The more I researched the model of whiteness operationalized by Die Antwoord, the more I came to realize how devious they were for their unabashed and lucrative cultural appropriation, their at-times-resolute and at-times-unintentional maintenance of white power, and for repellent and possibly diagnosable ego complexes.

Predictably, their character continuously resulted in their despicable treatment of others, both from close and afar. Above all, I aspired for my thesis to contribute to stimulating a larger conversation on Die Antwoord's fundamentally white-serving false racial altruism. I wanted to

expose how they serve as a tidy emblem of the lingering power of whiteness in a supposedly hybrid space during the digital age. I had all my ducks in a row and was ready to lift the veil through deep readings of their art and obscure interviews, and through the curation of the brilliant but too frequently overlooked theory and contemplations from South African scholars and thinkers. Using my years of research, I was going to verifiably demonstrate that Die Antwoord was not only ridiculing the people from whom they have stolen and profited, but also that they held congenital racist feelings of contempt and detestation for them. Through the intricately placed puzzle pieces, I was going to unmask Die Antwoord as white individuals who feel an innate entitlement and superiority to other cultures, and therefore possess the authority to take whatever they would like from them. I was confident that I had curated a logical and sound (though complex) argument which would prove their racism. But then, in the winter of 2019, that plan changed, and any exposé on the band was no longer necessary.

The mostly implicit had become completely complicit.

After substantial sexual abuse allegations levelled at Die Antwoord, many former colleagues began to break their silence and publicly share once-whispered anecdotes of the band's misbehaviours. Their former videographer, Benjay Crossman, began to upload candid videos of Die Antwoord in casual social situations when they first rose to fame in the early 2010s. The videos included displays of homophobia, victim shaming, and unabashed racism. There were frequent uses of racist language and garrulous justifications on why they had the right to use such labelling and terminology. In one of Crossman's videos, Yolandi said to Ninja: "You should say '[n-word]' if you want to say [n-word], cause you've got freedom of speech, bitch.... Ninja's more like a [n-word] than a [n-word]" (Zef TV Worldwide, 2019, 0:21).

Once this clip was released, Yolandi followed up with a post on Instagram, justifying her actions (with two lesser-known Black artists sitting at a table in the backdrop of her calculated social media video set):

People speak differently in Africa. Because, you know how we all say like, Yo wassup, my [n-word] ? Like, how you doin'. Like what do you got—[n-word] s doin' and stuff. Like we just say that shit like whatever. You know when you're in America, like people don't say that. I didn't know until I moved here. Like I didn't know they don't fuck with that. I thought it was just a cool way to speak. (Ouggibbons, 2019b, 5:30)

This statement is a lie. As we will come to see, Die Antwoord is intelligent and self-aware and know that it is inexcusable to use the n-word, and the first quotes articulate that understanding. Even if one pretends what they were saying is true—that they were surprised that the n-word had such negative connotations in the West—then why do they continue to use it at their shows in the West as white people to all white crowds? They want, and feel entitled to, access to the racist term.

In a video from the back of a taxi in New York City taken by Crossman a few months after I had first seen them live at the Metropolis in Montreal, Ninja said: “Did you hear my part when I said, ‘My [n-word] DJ-Hi Tek!’ That was the first time I’ve ever said ‘[n-word]’ live. It was pretty epic. It felt *so right*. In the flesh” (Ouggibbons, 2019a, 1:04). Then he began singing: “My mind is telling me no, My body is telling me yes.... “That’s when I bust a nerve. You know that feeling, yeah? And it felt correct. I might kick it in Brooklyn next time” (Ouggibbons, 2019a, 1:30). Another video shows Yolandi laughing at a Black man for wearing his baseball hat in an unusual way: “Only a [n-word] can wear a cap like that. I ain’t Black enough to rock it like that” (Ouggibbons, 2019a, 1:43)

As Die Antwoord disabled all comments from their social media accounts, got dropped by numerous festivals, and cancelled their 2019–2020 North American tour (but kept their European dates) in response to these videos, the once evocative lustre on the ambiguous group dulled to a familiar colonial apathy. In 2020, an angry and overindulged white man (Ninja) complaining about and feeling victimized by cancel culture and political correctness is hardly a headline-making narrative.

And although these recorded revelations were unquestionably positive disclosures for many of its ardent, and too often over-trusting fans, the abominable conduct of Die Antwoord that the videos captured challenged me to keep this paper focused on demonstrating the context in which this white rap band ascended, and how the group's members serve as an example of the subtle, but powerful, communicative maneuvering of whiteness in a postcolonial setting known as the Rainbow Nation, and additionally in the wider and increasingly online world. As these explicit examples of bigotry and racial entitlement leaked, it became tempting to morph this analysis into a graceless one-hundred-page condemnation of these unrepentant artists. They certainly deserved the indignity. Ultimately, however, I reminded myself about the objective of my study: To present the Die Antwoord phenomenon as an example of how white power continues to fluidly traverse the globe (with focus on communication and art) and further, to offer some perspective on the results of the fragmentation of white identities in postcolonial nations. With the ballooning political and media power of bigoted white groups that were forged online such as the Proud Boys and the QAnon and Blue Lives Matter movement, I believe my thesis on white anger, fragility, self-portrait, identity negotiation, and communication has an enhanced importance. Suffice it to say, this thesis has ended up being significantly more complex and more crucial than what I had imagined when I set out.

I am convinced of the importance of this thesis, because Die Antwoord offer a confined example to study the operation of contemporary, digital, postcolonial white power. The group's members are talented artists who are fundamentally driven by a covert political message on race in post-apartheid South Africa. Their work therefore provides an optimal vessel to explore the Pandora's box that is postcolonial whiteness in the modern, ever-internet-dependent reality. Perhaps surprisingly, despite Die Antwoord's international fame and success, not much in-depth research has been done to interpret them. Theorists such as Scott (2012a, 2012b) and Haupt (2012a, 2012b, 2012c), whose work informed my research, have contributed insights into the phenomenon of Die Antwoord, but in the form of shorter articles and chapters.

Although Scott (2012a, 2012b) and Haupt (2012a, 2012b, 2012c) have conceptualized and deconstructed Die Antwoord in different manners and from disparate vantage points, I exhibit how their writings dovetail to argue that Die Antwoord are white, postmodern conceptual artists in the midst of a cultural identity crisis, whose "noble" social and cultural purposes intended to mobilize change in their home nation (which they view as unjust and inequitable) are spectacularly misguided, damaging, and in the end, racist. Using Scott (2012a, 2012b), Haupt (2012a, 2012b, 2012c) and others, I posit that Die Antwoord is a conceptual band created for the internet by fragile whites who are agonizing to find their path forward in a postcolonial world, and, additionally, are the embodiment of neoliberal white altruism born from privilege, insulation, and entitlement.

Particularly fascinating is the band members' unparalleled international fame as South African artists which, from a distance, does not seem to make much sense. Despite wielding a refined message and aesthetic that is esoteric to their homeland, fans from across the globe celebrate them with zeal. It seems their fans are most intrigued by the group as a sensational

mystery. Although it is widely accepted by audiences that on some level, Die Antwoord is engaged in performance art, the group's unwillingness to discuss its artistic mandate has further shrouded them in a seductive ambiguity and controversy.

As I present, most of Die Antwoord's audience, entranced by the group's provincial arrogance and aggressiveness, their pornographic and carnivalesque visuals, lyrics and "next-level" beats, feels satisfied to accept and celebrate them on their lurid surface level and thus look no deeper than the outward performance. Die Antwoord's decree is, fundamentally, an intertextual, self-reflexive conceptual communication project. A project with a covert political mission to confront and displace restrictive racial constructs in post-apartheid South Africa (which is woefully flawed). Die Antwoord intend to accomplish this aim through the semiotic construction of their subversive production and artistic output under their self-created, based in whiteness, cultural umbrella they refer to as their zef identity. Zef is central to all things Die Antwoord. As a means of understanding and critiquing their artistic production and the reception they receive from international fans under the conception of their assembled identity and subculture of zef, I employ definitive postmodern theories on art and identity. Using these methods, particularly the writings of postmodern thinkers like Foucault (1984, 2019), Baudrillard (2000), and Hutcheon (2003), who have given ample consideration to the implications of mass media and communication, I interpret some of Die Antwoord's key interviews.

Notwithstanding Die Antwoord's dubiously altruistic intentionality to help their home nation achieve a state of post racialism, the latter half of this paper explains that Die Antwoord employs indefensible methods to achieve these social, political, and cultural goals. Specifically, I appraise Die Antwoord's self-serving and uncredited appropriation of various underprivileged and non-white South African cultures as a desperate means for them to shed the colonial

implications that are tightly woven into their white skin. In doing so, I show how their theft of the rich culture of others has been foundational to their success. This is an exploitation representative of the enduring existence of white entitlement and power in modern South Africa.

Considering the group's extensive cultural appropriation and exploitation, I mostly focus on the community they relentlessly appropriate from most: poor, gang-affiliated Coloured (mixed-heritage) boys and men who live in the Cape Flats and wield a creative and uniquely African style. To reveal Die Antwoord's abuse of this immense power imbalance and provide important context to this study on South African artists, I provide a brief history and analysis of contemporary Coloured culture in Cape Town's Cape Flats as it relates to the white rap group. By providing cultural context, this section not only sheds light on the true origins of the band's celebrated zef subculture, which they claim as their own creative model, but challenges audiences to reevaluate their perceptions of Die Antwoord as subversive, authentic, cool artists worthy of their adulation. If their supposed coolness is no more than an appropriation and exploitation of a profoundly oppressed culture, is it befitting or defensible that fans and Western media celebrate and emulate the rap group? This section also importantly highlights the festering power, discreet prejudice, and bipolar entitlement of post-apartheid whiteness.

It is important to clarify what I mean by cultural appropriation in this context. Describing cultural appropriation, Kozain (as cited in Jason, 2015) noted that "[appropriation] captures the unequal dynamic where originators are ignored and neglected, and the copycats get the fame and money" (para. 18). Fittingly, when asked about Die Antwoord, Black artist MC Emile YX (as cited in Jason, 2015), of one of Cape Town's longest-serving and most famous hip-hop groups, Black Noise, told the *Mail & Guardian* that "this is what white folks have been doing forever. They find something, they take it, they patent it, they make it their own and they make money

from it” (para. 20). People in and around the Cape Town scene might recognize the group’s exploitation, but others from around the world do not. Rather, the clear majority of their fans come from the insulated West and subsequently worship the group without critical filter. Using a variety of comments and published reviews of the band’s work, I show how these audiences view Die Antwoord as authentically subversive based simply on the group’s perceived African otherness, which is unfamiliar to their own Westernness. This ignorance allows the band to negotiate most of the world unscathed, collecting cultural credit, personal fame, and lucrative monetary dividends.

Through these core arguments within this analysis, my broader mission is to exhibit how the complex Die Antwoord phenomenon is a rich vehicle to help better understand the continuing imbalanced sociopolitical power dynamics in contemporary South Africa and precarious perceptions of Africa and Africans abroad that can be proliferated through digital communications. With this insight in tow, I then conduct three case studies of what I believe are some of Die Antwoord’s most revealing artistic communications. It is my hope that this interdisciplinary analysis provides readers with the proper ammunition to come to their own educated conclusions about what the South African Die Antwoord phenomenon might signify both locally and globally. Ultimately, it is my goal that this analysis of Die Antwoord and the context from which they emerged and were nurtured significantly contributes to a collective understanding of fragile postcolonial whiteness identity and how it operates through media, art, and the internet.

Chapter 2: Post-Apartheid Whiteness

As covered in the introduction, this thesis focuses on a critical analysis of postcolonial whiteness in the contemporary, digital era. It seems apposite, therefore, to state at the beginning of this chapter (intended to offer the reader the methodological plan of action and more importantly to contextually situate *Die Antwoord* within the framework of contemporary scholarship on the status of postcolonial whiteness within South Africa and abroad), that for many reasons, the critical study of whiteness can be problematic. I have dedicated a later portion of this study to explore why focusing the lens on white people in a postcolonial nation is such a thorny business, but, in the spirit of full disclosure from the hop, I state at the onset of this chapter that I come to the conclusion that there are legitimate merits to analyzing frequently destructive white identities and white systems if done so responsibly. The focus must be on outcomes that better situate those with less power, and to do so better comprehensions of ongoing white supremacy and its impacts on people of colour must be obtained. If the overarching goal of progressives is to obliterate the tactical racial hierarchy created by whites for whites, I suggest a fuller understanding of the tyrannical creator who stitched together the colonial monster (out of the discarded parts of the less powerful victims) is required.

One of the delicate facets of moving towards a sincerely anti-colonial world is that it offers an undue opportunity to be forgetful. Although a more thorough and honest command of whiteness has the potential to assist in creating a more equitable world, interrogating how whites and all cultures might move past colonial legacies of violence could also pave the way for an unmerited “out” for the perpetually privileged and rarely accountable architects of colonialism. Should this path be followed, there exists the risk of submission to a reparationless exercise—an

exercise which would inevitably lead to the recreation of the unjust structures that have prevailed for so long.

I do my best to be cognizant of this hazard throughout the remainder of this analysis which intensely examines liberal white racial altruism and self-righteousness. I explain, in the context of Die Antwoord, why whites yelling “Down with racism” loudly (or more likely typing it in all caps) is not necessarily a fruitful activity but instead, frequently, a hedonistic one. Demonstrated through the rap group, I unpack how these types of superficial expressions often function as a strategic manipulation. Trivial altruistic posturing can be tremendously harmful, as costumed antiracism and false equality nourishes and strengthens colonial roots by providing it with the added skills of vigorous deception and gratuitous self-fulfilment. In the case of Die Antwoord, their posturing as being “one with the oppressed” contributes to the cementing of the systemic racism that colonial nations are built upon. Die Antwoord are a prime neoliberal specimen who, when fully understood, lay bare the modern, on and offline power of white hegemony, which is all at once dynamic, obscured, austere, seductive, endlessly energetic, and habitually clever.

Alarmingly, many of these self-righteous white people in the act of toning these colonial muscles do not even realize they are participating in the workout; and this succinctly captures much of the menacing resilience of white imperialism. Moreover, I will explore the spectacle of the many guilt-ridden, self-understood progressives, such as the members of Die Antwoord, who believe that they are actively engaged in fulfilling their personal destinies as the chosen destroyers of racism. As I argue, I believe Die Antwoord has convinced themselves of this identity while consistently being unapologetically racist. This false racial altruism is another example of why I argue that a responsible analysis of whiteness can help interrogate several

foundational questions to best address continued white hegemony. The critical study of whiteness in South Africa abounds with moral quandaries, so how does one responsibly engage in a focused exploration of the experience of postcolonial whiteness? Recentering whiteness and/or corroborating any false sense of white oppression are hazardous concerns, and therefore any researcher must take all precautions. Scott (2012a) correctly pointed out that interrogation of whiteness in South Africa could be misunderstood as being sympathetic to white supremacist ideologies (p. 31); as an experiment to find an unjustifiable path forward for whites in the country where they tormented the indigenous majority for so long.

I agree with Dyer (1988) that whiteness generally, and specifically in South Africa, has too long evaded academic scrutiny. This has furthered asserted white dominance as default.

For most of the time white people speak about nothing but white people, it's just that we couch it in terms of "people" in general.... In Western representation, whites are overwhelmingly and disproportionately predominant... [and] are placed as the norm, the ordinary, the standard. (p. 3)

Further to Dyer's (1988) point, Frankenberg (2004), in her article "On Unsteady Ground: Crafting and Engaging in the Critical Study of Whiteness," described whiteness as the invisible baseline. In South Africa, Frankenberg wrote, there exists a "social context in which white people have too often viewed themselves as nonracial or racially neutral" (2004, p. 111). This entitlement is central as to why postcolonial whiteness necessitates scrutiny. As Bonnett (1997) stated, "whiteness requires serious deconstruction if we hope to undermine it as the default, unproblematic culture which is monolithic and stable" (p. 177). Scott (2012b) added that whiteness is "a category which is not subject to the constant processes of challenge and change that have characterized the history of other racial names" (p. 32). All of these concepts are to say,

responsible and critical analysis could assist in decoding white power and disassembling its unbalanced influence. I believe these are necessary steps towards an imperative and overdue redistribution of power and not just for South Africa. White supremacy around the world continues to flourish at the expense of others.

A clear example of the lingering power of global whiteness can be seen through the ascension of Die Antwoord. Despite being a slight racial minority in their own country, they are one of the few international South African stars who have come to represent their home nation around the world. The other top South African celebrity exports include Charlize Theron, Neill Blomkamp, Oscar Pistorius, and Elon Musk—all of whom are white. This phenomenon of the white international passport to privilege, of whiteness as spectacle, has historically been perceived as an organic occurrence, and until recently, has gone unexamined. Winant (2001), a sociologist and race theorist at the University of California, wrote:

The past half century or so has been the first time since the dawn of modernity, since the rise of capitalism and the knitting together of the globe in one unified “system,” that white supremacy has been called seriously into question on a world-historical scale. (p. 99)

Given the hegemonic fortitude of neoliberal whiteness, I maintain that a concerted and calculated effort is required to combat and dismantle colonial whiteness as much of the world’s subsisting default norm. I offer yet another idea from Lopez (2012), whose thinking has been so foundationally influential to this paper on Die Antwoord. In the quote, Lopez calls attention to the fundamental operational function of whiteness in a postcolonial world; that is, to service its empire by broadcasting far and wide a colonial unconscious:

What emerges in the relation between former colonizers and colonized, now fellow citizens in a post-independence state, is their common dependence upon—and complicity with—the ideology of whiteness, or more specifically of white (hence Western) superiority. Each must now face the unpleasant truth of their own complicity in telling, and believing in, the cultural lie of colonial whiteness. (p. 5)

To be entirely clear, understanding whiteness is essential because of the harm it inflicts on people of Colour, but again, the discipline must exist without replicating the issue it intends to solve, which is to recentre whiteness and focus in on how to further optimize the white experience. It cannot be an exercise aimed at encouraging white racial awakenings to the end of the contemporary conception of ‘wokeness.’ Rather its aim is to critically examine and thus help dismantle the always evolving and expanding impact of white supremacy’s detrimental impact on people of Colour, and on society as a whole.

To responsibly engage in the analysis of whiteness, Matias and Boucher (2021) argue that critical whiteness studies must be included within the wider paradigm of critical race studies within our school systems. The duo concludes that in any worthwhile study of whiteness, there must be significant reliance on and deference to the work and experience of people of Colour. The study of whiteness must not whiteness divorce from the tremendous suffering it has caused, it must go beyond white racial epiphanies and not be consumed with its own reflection, and there should be an effort made to avoid drawing from a white epistemological standpoint. Matias and Boucher write:

Whiteness and its impact on people of colour cannot be separated and continues to be paramount, precisely because the manifestation of one (whiteness) then produces what Said (2000) conceptualises as (literally) ‘the Other.’ This process produces what

Leonardo (2013) calls a 'Black whiteness studies' whereby the objective of studying whiteness is to purposefully and precisely reveal how it harms people of Colour. (2020).

This study of Die Antwoord often relies on white scholars for their own increasingly entangled experiences of whiteness, but it does so through a critical lens to better unravel how white people, even those who claim to yearn for equality like Die Antwoord, endure as nefarious colonial agents whose conscious, semiconscious, and subconscious actions and beliefs continue to have significant consequences for people of colour. For all precise perspectives on how these ramifications are felt and experienced, this thesis will follow Matias and Boucher's recommendation and depend upon the expression of scholars of colour.

Before these varied experiences and perspectives of modern-day South Africa are presented, it is important to understand the now defunct racist government-imposed system that the members of Die Antwoord were born into, a system which, in many ways, continues to define the country and influence South African's attitudes and lifeworlds.

Apartheid–Post-Apartheid

South Africa's apartheid has been written about a thousand times by countless celebrated authors, and yet, it still commands increased scrutiny. Steinberg (2020) wrote that there must be a hundred accurate ways to describe what apartheid was, but resoundingly the brutally enforced racial segregation led by the white Afrikaner-led National Party was "an elaborate 'holding action' ... a project to keep the future at bay" (para. 1). The National Party knew apartheid would inevitably come to a formal end, and they prepared accordingly. Within the strict race-based government rules and regulations within their massive social engineering scheme, the leaders of apartheid pushed simple but powerful racist narratives born out of misguided faith. They used these lies to both explicate and justify their actions.

As seen in colonized nations around the world, Christianity is malleable enough to provide a template which European settlers can draw upon to create a master race narrative by ascribing a holiness to whiteness. This holiness was often symbolized by light, and evil and the devil by darkness (Steyn, 2001, p. 12), creating a binary, in which white skin was representative of God, light, goodness, superiority, civilization, intelligence, and rationality, and therefore rendering dark skin as the contrary. “The greatest advantage of marking people in terms of skin colour was that it was permanent, given at birth, and could seem to be the way one was created” (Steyn, 2001, p. 12). This powerful sociocognitive manipulation fostered analogous change in the way South Africans perceived themselves and others: the cultured and the savage; Christians and heathens; and natural orders, norms, and deviations. It goes without saying, that the entire propaganda apparatus was nothing more than an imposed myth for absolute control. Europeans represented cultivated culture, while Blackness was strategically manufactured as grotesque.

The ongoing atrocities of apartheid are explored further in this analysis, but for the purpose of this chapter, I keep the definition simple—through violence, segregation (geographically and economically) and powerful storytelling and mythmaking, apartheid was an elaborate but temporary tactic for the white rulers. Whites in South Africa are but a small minority amongst a Black majority, so the white rulers were aware their tight grip on the country would eventually loosen before tiring completely. In a resistance effort led by Nelson Mandela, in 1994, this finally occurred, but it took nearly half a century. Steinberg (2020) wrote that if apartheid can indeed be described as a holding action, it was a resounding success, as it “delivered more than its architects could reasonably have expected... and by the end of that 50 years, white people were considerably more prosperous than they had been at the beginning” (para. 1).

Again, Steinberg (2020) is correct, as apartheid all but rid South Africa of any white poverty. Statistics show that by the 1970s, it was gone almost completely. “And when the dreaded future was finally born, the birth was pretty painless for whites who get so angry when these things are pointed out” (Steinberg, 2020, para. 3). And although post-apartheid South Africa remains a minacious battleground for many a quarter century since the end of the National Party’s regime, the considerable white minority are still vastly overrepresented in white collar work, which is in plain sight at universities and successful business firms. Steyn (2005) opined that “the construction of whiteness was central not only to the processes of power and oppression established during the modern era of colonial domination, but still shapes the postcolonial world we live in” (p. 145).

Lopez (2012), author of *Postcolonial Whiteness: A Critical Reader on Race and Empire*, wrote,

Whiteness is Not, yet we continue for many reasons to act as though it is. It would seem simple enough assumption that the end of colonialism ushers in the end of whiteness, or at least, of its unrivaled ascendancy. Yet, the cultural residues of whiteness linger in the postcolonial world as an ideal, often latently, sometimes not. (p. 1)

In other words, the passport to privilege (Dyer, 1988, p. 44) of whiteness persists through the normative psychological and ontological power of its colonial hegemony which continues to suppress the marginalized Coloured other. Freedom for the marginalized, Lopez (2012) explained, is something “mere national independence does not necessarily bring” (p. 2). White privilege is still a constructed and maintained reality in South Africa and it is done so through highly conscious and visible performance (de Kock, 2006, p. 180).

At the core of this thesis is an exploration of whiteness, power and neoliberal forms of colonial maintenance and consolidation in a post-apartheid landscape but perhaps strikingly, in a study of this rap group, I show how the wielding and upkeep of white power can derive from altruistic ambitions of young white liberals—Die Antwoord as a rigorous example—whose foremost claimed objective is to diminish the social, professional, economic, and political discrepancies between races and ethnicities. Many of these young white liberals also likely *feel* obliterated by South Africa’s apartheid legacy and desperately want to move forward. However, in their sprint towards an imagined idealistic future, they feel as though they cannot run fast enough to escape the sensation of their relative’s racist past nipping at their heels. Meanwhile, as Modiri (2012) outlined, Blacks are being force-fed a false narrative of present legal equality:

This is evidenced by the popular use of the phrase “previously disadvantaged group” to refer to, *inter alia*, blacks. The erasure implied in describing historical racial disadvantage in such terms as “previous” (as if something of the past) stems precisely from the failure to see that racism is so deeply embedded in society that racist practices engendered by law and legal institutions can exist long after the abolishment of the laws or the replacement of the government that enacted those laws. (p. 407)

Modiri (2012) argued that these discourses of continued white supremacy must be problematized and analyzed in more complexity and nuance. This analysis “entails seeking out and critiquing the paradox of the co-existence of a non-racial, multi-cultural constitutional democracy with white racial privilege, anti-black racism and inequality” (Modiri, 2012, p. 407). I align with Modiri to expose how normative political and social life is saturated by racial power and order governed by the Western white hegemony and thus denying both the Black experience and history. Here, Modiri and I are attempting to confront the same problem with matching

ammunition: by providing radical new context. Yet, we are approaching the issue from different angles. Whereas my critical focus is on the framework of how whiteness actively—consciously, semiconsciously, and subconsciously—maintains ongoing false power structures and hierarchies, and how whites operate within them to their own advantage, Modiri has focused on the profound legal, social, and political consequences on Blacks who live within a racist system that refuses to acknowledge its own bigotry. In an article that promoted the implementation of critical race theory in South African legal philosophy, he concluded that there is no turning back or easy way out of these structures for Black South Africans:

We know that we are faced with the paradoxes of hope and despair, forgiving and forgetting, equality and freedom, denial and dialogue and white power and black emancipation. Perhaps the greatest paradox can be found in those moments where our optimistic hopes are crushed by harsh realities, while our pessimistic intuitions are constantly troubled by hard-worn struggles and victories for racial justice. Though the binaries of black and white; rich and poor and victim and beneficiary haunt and divide the nation, they also confirm that our futures, destinies and fortunes are inextricably linked. So, as race, transformation and reconciliation remain central in shaping our daily lives and relationships, setting the scene for new tragedies and new triumphs, CRT is an invaluable tool in making sense of it all. (Modiri, 2012, p. 436)

And although Modiri (2012) and my thesis focus primarily on this phenomenon in South Africa, as is evidenced by his quote, this is a theme that spans across the globe. I would be remiss not to mention that I write this at the beginning of 2022, at a time when the American Black Lives Matter movement has transformed from what was once simply recognized as a Twitter hashtag into an international rallying cry for racial justice. After decades of state-

sanctioned police devastation, the smartphone-filmed lynchings of George Floyd (Harris, 2021) and Ahmaud Arbery (Hill, 2020) by police, and the unpunished murder of Breonna Taylor (also by police), seemed to offer hope as significant meter movers. Millions of people rose to protest the ubiquitous racist systems that encourage police brutality against minority populations including in my home country of Canada. “Being Black above the forty-ninth parallel is an experience in erasure, one we reject when we discuss the complexities of our identities in the colonial state of Canada...we express our commitment to abolition: in a liberal future there is no carceral violence. There are no prisons. There are no police. There is no colonization. There is no imperialism” (p. 315-316) write Diverlus, Hudson and Marcus Ware (2021) in “Until We Are Free: Reflections on Black Lives Matter Canada”. The objective of Black Lives Matter is to eradicate anti-Blackness and to create a system in which Black people thrive Hudson & Mare, 2021). It is my hope that my deconstruction of white power and its colonial lies has something to contribute to the Black Lives Matter movement at a time when racial justice and the harm inflicted by whiteness on Black bodies have never been so central in the global discussion. The elasticity of white supremacy has been proven consistently. When systems are reoriented, white power recalculates.

In South Africa, as the research presented in this analysis suggests, when the government enforced clamp of apartheid loosened in favour of a purported non-racial, democratic system, many liberal identifying whites found themselves in a conceptual purgatory as they reckoned with the sins of their predecessors while also desperately attempting to settle comfortably into a more egalitarian society. In their work, Die Antwoord is hastily trying to accomplish the latter without appropriately addressing the former. And while achieving this democratic ideal has, in theory, the potential to help all South African peoples, the path forward for professed anti-racist

whites has rightfully yet to be cleared of cluttered debris. Much reflection and negotiation still need to occur in post-apartheid South Africa. In terms of whiteness as a concept or category, it has understandably not been a central or prioritized topic of discussion in South African public discourse or academe. Lopez (2012) submitted that missing debate on whiteness in the contemporary world may be the result of hegemonic conflation: “That is, whiteness in this context may be so closely associated with colonial domination that no further distinction seems necessary or desirable” (p. 3). This perspective presents deep-seated issues not only for whites but for everyone in an evolving South Africa that is looking to liberate itself from the resonating influence of whiteness on all people.

Feelings of White Cultural Purgatory

Crucial to understanding post-apartheid South Africa and further to Lopez’s (2012) point on systemic segregation, Goodwin and Schiff’s (1995) *Heart of Whiteness* explains that “apartheid has not failed. It has succeeded tremendously well in building two worlds, in keeping the white and black... worlds apart” (p. 27). It is again worth emphasizing that South Africa is a country that remains very much understood through racial lines and divides, so one’s race has an unbounded impact on their realities. This mutual but diverging experience is as tangible as it is unavoidable: “The concept of race entangles and informs almost every aspect of daily lived experience, it is not surprising that white South Africans have always been acutely aware of their racial identity” (Steyn, as cited in de Kock, 2006, p. 180). An ethnographic study out of Durban University reported that racial identities remained the most important form of social division (Dolby, 2001a, p. 15; see also Dolby, 2001b). Similar localized studies have found that informal racial segregation between races is typical (Durrheim et al., 2005, p. 18), including on university campuses in South Africa (Foster, 2005, p. 27). Other studies have also discovered that race often

dictates residential practices (Dixon et al., 1994, p. 13). Although many young whites state that they want perceptions of them to be less based on the colour of their skin, informal, and systematically purposeful segregation persists. Steyn and Foster (2008) noted that “localized studies are corroborated by large-scale surveys that show persistent patterns of whites’ resistance to integration and the new non-racial social order” (p. 22). Indeed, white people in South Africa understand that they are viewed negatively, and so young whites are leaving the country in such vast numbers that the white population as a whole is regarded as “abnormal” (Steyn & Foster, 2008, p. 27).

Unlike the experience of a white person in a deeply colonized country such as Canada, as a significant minority group in South Africa (8.9% in 2020; South Africa Gateway, 2018), whites have never been able to claim invisibility based on prevalence. Instead, many fragile young whites have “been self-conscious and insecure of the privilege such a position accords, which have been taken for granted and naturalized” (Scott, 2012b, p. 36). There is a long history of cultural division, not just out of hate and false superiority, but also out of fear of the unknown. Malan (2000) stated:

Whites were clinging to power because they were apprehensive about blacks’ intentions toward them.... Most whites were so afraid of Africans that they never went anywhere near the townships.... They crossed the road when they saw Africans coming, or locked the doors of their cars. They were so scared they wouldn’t even attend professional soccer matches in the secure heart of white Johannesburg because they knew blacks would be present in large numbers. (p. 189)

This white effort put towards the avoidance of other races has resulted in an insulated and subsequently ignorant category of people. For Blacks, the opposite has been true. “Black people

always had to move into the white world, so they knew how the white world worked. But white people never had to move into the Black world, so they know nothing about the black world”

(Malan, 2000, p. 189). Malan (2000) continued:

Whites don't know Blacks, or what their rise portends. To most whites, Blacks are inscrutable; they can't talk to them, don't understand them, and struggle to see them in three dimensions. Blacks are merely black; they are blank screens onto which whites project their own fears and preconceptions. (p. 189)

Apartheid was a society shaping belief system, and as it collapsed, it released white South Africans into a strange new world which commanded deep reorientations of self and other. Although countless systemic privileges of apartheid have been maintained to this day, with the fall of the National Party, white realities were undeniably altered, and their response has often been erratic.

White Fragility and Exquisite Agony

“To apply the colour white to white people is to ascribe a visible property to a group that thrives also on invisibility,” wrote Dyer (Dyer, 1988, as cited in Lopez, 2012, p. 1)

Post-apartheid South Africa is a profoundly complex cultural and societal configuration, and I see no other way of examining white perspective and its lingering supremacy other than leaning into the nation's mosaic nature. And thus, I believe that whiteness should not be examined exclusively. Rather, whiteness should be regarded as but a thin layer amongst many layers or as a low-pitched single voice in a raucous conversation in a crowded locale.

Since 1994, racial and cultural life in South Africa have been in a state of flux. And even though whites still retain an unequal degree of power in professional and economic realms, many feel as though they face the complicated undertaking of reconstructing their identities,

reconceptualizing their personal narratives, and renegotiating their positions in an unwelcoming new existence. On the developing dynamic of the post-apartheid era, Scott (2012b) wrote, “The old social order has been dismantled and must be rebuilt as something new; the old fabric of social relations is unravelled and must be rewoven. All South Africans face this task of re-imagining” (p. 33). For the category of people who engineered a system intended to assuage life for themselves and their own at every corner, this represents a massive upheaval.

For whites who earnestly aspire to carve out an equitable space for themselves in the nation in which they were born, they are tasked with the weighty objective of disassembling the significant barriers and exterior scaffolding that kept them comfortably shielded for all those years. Presuming this goal is even achievable, after a half-century of legislatively enforced racial supremacy, being white in South Africa has earned its status as being “replete with dissonance” (Steyn, 2005, p. 122). This means that even though the social and political apartheid installed obstructions have been demolished, the prodigious legacy of whiteness continues to cast a dark and long shadow

Farred (1997) wrote in his paper “Bulletproof Settlers: The Politics of Offence in the New South Africa,” that “for centuries the province of white dominance, now presents itself as an unhomely space, a country rapidly becoming inhospitable to, if not uninhabitable by, its white occupants, post-apartheid South Africa’s inability to provide physical and mental sanctuary for a community accustomed to such protections by virtue of its race” (p. 73). Wicomb (1998) synthesized that whiteness has ceased being cherished in post-apartheid South Africa by poignantly writing that white is “no longer a nice word” (p. 169).

Now that the condition of whiteness which was once singularly powerful has lost its undue cultural lustre, many younger generations of whites who have little experiential memory

of the National Party rule and claim to aspire to move past apartheid feel as if they are in a perpetual dreary state of overcast within the rainbow nation. For young people who have claimed identity as lifelong anti-authoritarians and anti-racists (like Die Antwoord), they purport to feel tremendous degrees of angst and shame for the sins of their blood predecessors and often for their own inaction toward both the official and unofficial protocols standardized by the previous Nationalist government (Dyer, 1988). This shame may be a burden, but whites must be careful not to feel overburdened, as they are not the victim in this context; they have not been persecuted.

And yet, as Dyer (1988) explained, the manifestation of the guilt-ridden victim as a contemporary genre of fragile white identity has become a conventional and recentring archetype. “White liberal guilt at its most performative has the additional effect of diverting attention from the facts of white racism and oppression to how badly the Enlightened white liberal feels about it” (p. 206). Scott (2012a) summarized this identity performance as that of “exquisite agony”: “As if as with a sleight-of-hand, attention shifts from the benefits and privileges that white South Africans cling to, to black South Africans who will not accept that the whites are sorry” (p. 41).

The performance of exquisite agony is common amongst whites as they try to reconstitute their postcolonial identity. By qualifying themselves as also victimized by apartheid, they are reinforcing one of the immense privileges of being white: “that one could choose not to hear, not to know” (Steyn, 2005, p. 9) about the true devastations of apartheid. By claiming persecution, whites not only further obscure the ceaseless white privilege borne by racist government policies, but they also muffle the voices of the true sufferers of apartheid. Fabricated self-victimization is an example of how, throughout history, whites have used their latent

normative power to quell the marginalized other. Lopez (2012) clarified that whiteness is *not*, yet modern societies continue to act as though it *is*.

It would seem a simple enough assumption that the end of colonialism ushers in the end of whiteness, or at least of its unrivaled ascendancy. Yet the cultural residues of whiteness linger in the postcolonial world as an ideal, often latently, sometimes not.... Although the state of being demonstrably white remains... a passport to privilege and despite the obvious role that the visibility of whiteness—what Satya Mohanty calls the “white man as spectacle”—has played in the colonial context, whiteness itself remains a largely unexamined category. (Lopez, 2012, p. 2)

Mohanty’s (1991) designation of the “white man as spectacle” is a reference to the international power of whiteness as a continuing tactic norm through postcolonialism. While explicit, legislated colonialism (written law) diminishes, implicit colonialism through popular culture, neoliberal politics, and commercialism remains as intrusive as ever. It is important to delve more into the global influence of whiteness because it has a particular impact on white South Africans. That is, for the many white South Africans who acknowledge their malicious past, the ubiquity and omnipresence of the international white identity leaves them feeling not quite African (based on the apartheid shadow being replete with dissonance) and not quite European or English (based on their perceived Africaness)—a phenomenon obvious in Die Antwoord’s actions and artistic production.

da Silva (2007) explained that the struggle between white Englishness and Afrikaansness exists in white South Africans because they are drawing on global associations of white privilege and thus expecting such entitlements. But at the same time, they are also attempting to remain local in South Africa, where these privileges are becoming less pronounced, and where being

white isn't looked upon with such admiration. In South Africa, whiteness no longer possesses a colonial enforced glow. This leaves many whites feeling "at once African and inevitably always already out of Africa" (da Silva, 2007, p. 291). This of "no land or culture" sensibility is another example of the notional entanglement of white South Africans as they desperately grapple to form a coherent and comfortable postcolonial identity.

The Idea of Folded Togetherness

Ndebele (2011) has a powerful and often-referenced quote which expands on the global invulnerability of whiteness in the South African context in his book, *Fine Lines from the Box: Further Thoughts About Our Country*. He wrote:

We are all familiar with the global sanctity of the white body. Wherever the white body is violated in the world, severe retribution follows somehow for the perpetrators if they are non-white, regardless of the social status of the white body. The white body is inviolable, and that inviolability is in direct proportion to the global vulnerability of the black body, this leads me to think that if South African whiteness is a beneficiary of the protectiveness assured by international whiteness. (p. 137)

Here, Ndebele (2011) has pointed to the borderless jurisdiction of whiteness to protect its own from the class susceptibilities of people from other races in South Africa. In other words, global white power informs and contributes to the economic vigor of white power in the South African context. Earlier, Steinberg (2020) evidenced that whites in South Africa have unwarrantedly maintained their monetary and social supremacy post-apartheid. As long as this armour exists, colonialism persists. To truly conciliate and enter into a genuine egalitarian system, forfeiture needs to occur. Whites must shift their value system to privilege anti-racism and liberation and not their own class interests.

Ndebele (2011) sees this renegotiation as a possible answer for whites in South Africa to sever themselves from colonial whiteness. He maintained that whites have an opportunity to write a new chapter in world history, but whiteness “will have to come out from under the umbrella and repudiate it. Putting itself at risk, it will have to declare that it is home now, sharing in the vulnerability of other compatriot bodies” (p. 137). On the surface, Ndebele’s belief is synchronous to Die Antwoord’s artistic tactic to unapologetically present to the world a shattered, vulnerable South African whiteness.

Scott (2012a, 2012b) considered the potential of whites sharing in the vulnerability of compatriot bodies, as Ndebele (2011) presented, by pointing to the duality of what is meant by whiteness. Scott (2012b) wrote that within postcolonial discourse, whiteness is squared in theoretical and abstract terms which detach the white experience from the body and the skin:

This move away from skin can be understood as an attempt to move away from the essentialised, eighteenth-century interpretation of race, and in fact humanness, as determined by skin colour. While this approach has been useful in allowing scholars and theorists to interrogate whiteness in ways that destabilize and decentre the structural advantages associated with the position of being white, it overlooks the visceral experience of living in a body marked by skin colour. (p. 230)

Corresponding to Ndebele’s (2011) previously presented quote on the global sanctity of whiteness, the following passage from Scott (2012b) draws attention to the overlap of the bodily experience of having white skin and the theoretical position of whiteness which identifies the structural privileges of being white:

South African whiteness can only be challenged and dismantled through the experience of bodily vulnerability, of sharing a “folded-togetherness” with the black “other.” The

experience of “folded-togetherness” and the process of “becoming-other” require a “liminal” space, an interface that allows for the simultaneity of self and other. I suggest that “skin” offers this liminality and thus the space for potential becoming. (p. 230)

The Aspiration of Ubuntu

German philosopher Heidegger (1953/2010) had his own analytic for folded togetherness—*Mitsein*. *Mitsein*, as Heidegger defined it, is a transcendental condition of understanding that one traverses the world with others. The literal translation of *Mitsein* is “being-with.” Lopez (2012) proposed that the concept offers some utility in imagining how some persisting colonial barricades might be breached:

It is this learning of a postcolonial *Mitsein*, this being-with others after the fact of domination, abuse, and outright murder of them, that constitutes the ground of the most important negotiation between erstwhile colonizers and colonized that postcolonial studies can offer... a “being-with” that undoes white solipsism and escapes the ontological dead end of colonialism by changing the script of the Hegelian Lordship-Bondage relation, or at least its outcome. (p. 5)

Lopez (2012) continued: “It is in the interest of helping foster precisely this spirit of intersubjectivity and mutual recognition between postcolonial whiteness and its others—once slaves and colonial subjects, now peers and fellow citizens” (p. 6). For many postcolonial theorists including Lopez (2012), Scott (2012a, 2012b), and Ndebele (2011), *Mitsein* holds potential as an imperfect but potentially beneficial destination, but all these scholars understand that before its realization, an onerous road lies ahead. They see *Mitsein* as a possible destination because whiteness in its current form, thanks to its ongoing promotion and complicity with the horrors of apartheid, has now more than ever been rendered as a nearly blank canvas, one that

merely portrays prejudice and evil. And thus, largely and deservedly, whites are viewed as an illegitimate culture of people. de Kock (2006) wrote that whiteness is bestowed as “blank, a taken-for-granted negative essence, a place less looked-into, a site of unredeemed racism and assumed uniformity” (pp. 175–176).

It is this simplistic portrait of whiteness that has caused the theorists presented in this section to seemingly agree that whiteness holds the potential to be reconstructed as an egalitarian model, without the perceived purity and disproportionate clout it once beckoned. For a semblance of *Mitsein* to be achieved, these theorists believe the white collective must first fully dismantle whiteness and sever from its ongoing privileges, class status and otherwise. It is then when whites might be able to make real and collaborative efforts towards being with. And while much of postcolonial scholarship focuses on the *Mitsein* concept of being with or belonging, I believe the African ethno-philosophical paradigm of Ubuntu is additionally contextually relevant to this study. Additionally, it may help to further explain the repeated failures of whites to attain belonging in a space of interracial harmony.

Ubuntu is a traditional philosophy indigenous to South Africa which refers to the morality of a human being. It is understood in Bantu languages as meaning ‘among others’ (Mangena, 2012, pp.2), and is derived from the African proverb “*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” which translates to mean that, to be human is to recognize the humanity of others. And while it has a similar, panorama to *Mitsein* and being-with, the African ethic more deeply puts the imperative on the community and less on the individual’s personal aspiration for universal acceptance. In Ubuntu, the benefits and burdens of the community are shared in a way that no one can be prejudiced, and that colonialism cannot persist. Mangena explains that its emphasis

is on humanness, gentleness, hospitality, and generosity (2012, pp. 17). Further, Beja writes that Ubuntu foregrounds human dignity:

The spirit of Ubuntu is essentially to be humane and ensure that human dignity is always at the core of your actions, thoughts, and deeds when interacting with others. Having Ubuntu is showing care and concern for your neighbor. It's lending a helping hand and displaying an understanding of the dignity with which human beings ought to be treated — for the simple reason that they are human. Ubuntu exists because human beings exist and seeks to provide a code of conduct for the co-existence of human beings. (2020, para. 2).

Mangena continues:

Archbishop Desmond Tutu expounds on this human connectedness in his definition of Ubuntu, where he defines Ubuntu as, “My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in what is yours” (2020, para. 2).

When speaking in Johannesburg at the 2018 Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture, former president of the United States of America (the land of celebrated rugged individualism), Barack Obama, famously evoked Ubuntu, stating, “There is a word in South Africa — Ubuntu — that describes his greatest gift: his recognition that we are all bound together in ways that can be invisible to the eye; that there is a oneness to humanity; that we achieve ourselves by sharing ourselves with others, and caring for those around us,” (Siphe Williams, 2018, para.3). And while Ubuntu may be a worthy and restorative ambition that presents as a possible ballast to the ever-blossoming prowess of market informed and driven individualism, it is not achieved by sudden personal enlightenment.

Kenyan scholar James Ogude believes that fundamentally, Ubuntu is self-effacing and thus anticolonial:

“There's a sense in which ubuntu as a concept, and the African communitarian ethos, imposes a sense of moral obligation regarding your responsibility for others even before you think of yourself. You must, as the Russian critic Bakhtin would say, look into another person's eyes and have that person return the gaze. When the gaze is returned, that recognition is what humanizes you,” (Paulson, 2019, para. 9).

Ogude explains that there is a two-way empathy to Ubuntu, an earned and merited trust between all parties. Therefore, an accelerated evolution to Ubuntu is unrealistic, because it must be fully and completely accepted and reciprocated. In other words, whites cannot realize Ubuntu through their own actions and behaviours. Any self-declaration of achieving the status (like that of *Die Antwoord*) is dishonest and meaningless.

Although I acknowledge the importance of the hope and offer of healing that Ubuntu represents, I am very cautious to consider its way of being as a forthcoming outcome. There is frankly so much undoing still to be done before any genuine compromise and mutual understanding can occur. Moreover, there are countless examples of counterinitiative selfish deviation. As whites who tackled the journey towards being-with through accelerated, individualistic force and who were completely stifled by their lack of empathy, understanding, self-awareness, and meaningful relationships, *Die Antwoord* serves as a representative model of this deviation. Despite being mostly ignored and disavowed by other cultures in their artistic mission, *Die Antwoord* self-declared that they have successfully achieved a status akin to Ubuntu through a performative personal reorientation of their own race. The profound consequences of these actions and attitudes will be further explored shortly.

One must also ask if the path to ‘being-with as aspired by Die Antwoord and other white South Africans is even a justifiable resolution for them to strive towards? Does Ubuntu’s distant but often discussed potential embolden whites to engage in yet another self-indulgent exercise to realize their racial consciousness for their benefit while not paying proper attention to the impacts of whiteness on people of Colour? Having barely evolved beyond their apartheid-era dispositions, is it morally prudent for white people to be conversing about becoming and belonging at this inaugurate stage? To me, these are legitimate questions, but as will be shown in the following section, precious white dialogue on becoming and belonging is already fervent.

Becoming Black, The Myth of White Farm Killings, and Oscar Pistorius

Steyn (2005) contended in her article “White Talk: White South Africans and the Management of Diasporic Whiteness” that lying at the deepest heart of all whiteness is “the intimate role that the denigration of Africa has played in the identity construction of whiteness on this continent cannot be evaded” (p. 170). Rather than “lamenting the perceived failings of Fanon-inspired claims to colonial sovereignty, how do they [whites] move beyond anticolonial longing and towards postcolonial becoming as the condition for grappling with the challenges of divided polities still emerging from colonial violence” (Motha, 2010, p. 2).

In her book *Begging to Be Black* (the conclusion to her famous trilogy of books that dealt with race in South Africa, which includes *Country of My Skull* and *A Change of Tongue*), white liberal author Krog (2012a) wrangled with discourses of identity, change, interconnectedness, intersubjectivity, and becoming and belonging in South Africa. In *Begging to Be Black*—which Krog describes as a personally arduous soul-searching exercise to write—Krog (2012a) held discussions with other white South Africans, including expatriates, about the challenge of thinking about themselves outside of their whiteness as members of cultural groups beyond

whiteness. Her ethnography is lush with articulations of white identity and introspection, including this particularly revealing tête-à-tête which succinctly captures the enshrouded white sentiment of being-with as presented throughout *Begging to Be Black*:

Krog: But are you saying: because you lived in this apartheid bubble which tried to keep itself whites-only and Western, that this has stunted your own changing and becoming?

Respondent: Yes. So, I am not necessarily interested in African philosophy versus Western philosophy, but rather in what kind of self I should grow into in order to live a caring, useful and informed life—a “good life”—within my country in southern Africa.

Krog: Are you talking about a kind of entanglement?

Respondent: No. It’s not about mingling, or the entanglement of roots, but how one root can become or link to another. A synapse.

Krog: Perhaps that is the word. (Krog, 2012a, p. 95)

The beginning of Krog’s (2012a) interview presents vital insight toward understanding the perspective of white liberals in South Africa who grapple with the lasting effects of apartheid insulation. Cultural illiteracy is one of the primary consequences for whites who claim to want racial progress, and borne of this nescience is an additional obliviousness concerning themselves in relation to their compatriots who possess a different skin. Although the respondent envisages a synapse into Ubuntu—a flipping of the script towards intersubjectivity and being-with—they are also acknowledging their own stunted development based out of their by-design severance from other races. By recognizing their own cultural ignorance, the respondent has demonstrated a pearl of preliminary wisdom. This acknowledgement of personal ignorance and confusion is perhaps an appropriate first step towards progress and one that avoids more sinister outcomes, as

time and time again, it has been demonstrated that lack of knowledge of others often diverges into fear and prejudice.

This unfortunate inclination is portrayed in Steinberg's (2010a) book *Midlands*, which explores the mythical narrative that white farmers and homeowners are being murdered by Black trespassers in post-apartheid South Africa. In *Midlands*, Steinberg (2010a) details the deeply woven insecurities and self-perceived defenseless exposure of post-apartheid whites through his investigation of the widespread and disturbing legend that Blacks, out for comprehensive apartheid justice, are vengefully murdering white farmers. Steinberg (2010a) explained that these tales of revenge are so potent because they reinforce the very real fear of whites that the era of the South African white man will come to a belated and violent end – one they might consciously or subconsciously believe they deserve. Blackness offers a symbol of their regressing power, and so it is conceived as treacherous. “The [Black] body before them was inscribed with the signs of the time, a time in which whites had lost institutional power and Black men had become brave enough to walk onto a farm and kill its proprietor” (Steinberg, 2010a, p. 6). Whites are aware of their historical grievances, and so the threat of retribution from the contemporary and more powerful Black majority looms large in the minds of Steinberg's (2010a) white subjects. In addition to their persistent fear of justice, white people's aforementioned cultural illiteracy further renders Blacks as “blank screens onto which they project their own fears” (Steinberg, 2010a, p. 6). As Scott (2012b) described, cultural stagnation emerges from this white distress. Whiteness, while interrogated and revealed as riddled with fear and mistrust, is never offered a means of moving out of the colonial present and into a space of postcolonial becoming and is thus trapped in a relentless “frontier war” with an “other” who remains mysterious and threatening. (p. 145)

How pervasive is the self-created narrative of the Black threat within white South Africa? One only needs to look so far as the internationally covered trial of the famous South African sprinter, Oscar Pistorius (Perry, 2013), for the 2013 murder of his girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp. Pistorius' high-priced defense team operationalized the permeating narrative of imminent Black threat as their central argument for their client's innocence. The lawyers argued that Pistorius believed a nefarious intruder had broken into his gated mansion and that their client was hiding behind the bathroom door in preparation to strike in self-defence at the ominous threat lurking on the other side of a thin wall. The world-famous sprinter, who had a recorded history of abusive behaviour towards women and a reputation for reckless gunplay, claimed that he chose to shoot multiple rounds into his own bathroom to thwart the adumbral infiltrator before a pending attack. Pistorius stated that after all went silent, and to his grand shock, behind the bathroom door lurked no murderous criminal. Instead, tragically, he found his 30-year-old partner and housemate, Steenkamp, dead. He had shot her four times (Perry, 2013, para. 1).

Despite his documented violent past and multiple witness testimonies that they had heard a loud domestic quarrel between Steenkamp and Pistorius moments before the gun fired, in September of 2014, Pistorius was found not guilty of murder by a jury of South Africans but guilty of culpable homicide (Perry, 2013, para. 22). In 2015, the Supreme Court of Appeals overturned the culpable homicide verdict and found Pistorius guilty of murder. Astonishingly, in 2016, Pistorius was sentenced to only six years in prison for murder, notwithstanding a minimum sentence of 15 years for murder in South Africa. In 2017, his jail term was extended to 13 years (Perry, 2013). Not only was Pistorius' murder of Steenkamp symbolic of white standing and perspectives in post-apartheid South Africa, but it is also a distillation of how South Africa is depicted and understood globally. Die Antwoord grasp the famous case's allegorical power and

mine it often, including in their use of the story as the premise of one of its most-viewed music videos. I will return to Die Antwoord's use of the case later in this analysis.

Chapter 3: Speaking Black and the House of Zef

In the previous chapter, I paid much attention to Krog's (2007a, 2007b, 2012a, 2012b) anguished ruminations because for me, they are perhaps the aptest treatise of the insulated context and white perspective in which Die Antwoord was conceptualized. Although Die Antwoord has deviated from Krog's more nuanced and gentler (but still detached) desire to realize a form of becoming and belonging, I believe that her writings are a vigorous source to help decrypt the intended configuration and objectives of Die Antwoord's identity and art. In this chapter, I expand on Krog's musings of movement toward Blackness by 'speaking Black' and how her work denotes Ninja's rushed efforts towards becoming and belonging through language, body modification, and a smothering of his actual status and cultural background in favour of a local and global model of white trash that Die Antwoord call zef. Also in this chapter, I further track how zefdom is synchronously a move to obtain regional validation from other cultures and an identity that exploits Western stereotypes and misunderstandings of Africa.

As Scott (2012b) discussed in her dissertation, *Whiteness and the Narration of Self*, Krog's (2007a, 2012a, 2012b) renowned trilogy is an autobiographical excavation of her lifelong internal battle toward becoming and belonging, and often by petitioning for Black validation. Like many liberal whites, Die Antwoord included, Krog has felt confined and guilt-ridden in the white conceptual purgatory of contemporary South Africa and has therefore been desperate for acceptance from the people her people caused so much harm. Her lifelong pursuit of Black acceptance has led her (and other whites) to a hypothetical resolution: that is, to lean into Blackness. Krog (2012b) asked:

How do I flee towards black if I have never cared to know what black means? So, my first question is this: is it possible for a white person like myself, born in Africa, raised in

a culture with strong western roots, drenched in a political dispensation that said black people were different and therefore inferior, whether it is possible for such a person as myself to move towards a “blackness” as black South Africans themselves understand it? (p. 94)

In this meditation from the appositely titled *Begging to Be Black*, Krog (2012a) declared that she “want[s] to speak Black” (p. 268). In other words, she naively wishes for Blacks to understand her as more than a white colonizer. She (2012a, 2012b) desperately wishes to flee the cultural depravity entwined with her white skin and belong to South Africa not as an interloper but as a compatriot with the peoples who are indigenous to the continent. Given that Krog’s (2007a, 2012a, 2012b) soul-searching trilogy is widely considered as a literary gem (by South African and international critics), much analysis of her books by other writers and researchers has occurred, including by Rowe (2005), who wrote:

What is significant in this formulation is that she [Krog] is not calling for an either/or dichotomy, but rather for a politics of relation which: is not striving toward absolute alterity to the self, but rather to tip the concept of “subjectivity” away from “individuality” and in the direction of the inclination toward the other so that “being” is constituted not first through the “Self,” but through its own longings to be with.

Belonging precedes being. (p. 17)

Rowe (2005) further explored Krog’s aspiration towards becoming-with:

Thus, not “intersubjectivity,” as in a subject exists and then let’s think about the spaces between subjects, but rather that something called “subjectivity” may be thought as an effect of belonging—of the affective, passionate, and political ties that bind us to others. Thus, there is no separation between longing—to be with—and being. (pp. 17–18).

Although Krog (2007a, 2012a, 2012b), Scott (2012a, 2012b), and Rowe (2005) never mentioned Ubuntu, I believe the philosophy mostly aligns with this strand of white longing for individual and cultural transformation towards something shared. Die Antwoord has diverged from Krog's more thoughtful, but still naïve intentions (2007a, 2012a, 2012b) to represent more pointedly the old, apartheid-era white haunts of exploitation of the marginalized unchecked power and self-perceived racial heroism. Yet, the group was birthed from a similar frame of mind, engineered as an art project about white becoming, belonging, and intersubjectivity in South Africa. Once again, consider the group's maiden statement from their first song, which is spoken moments prior to their musical introduction: "I represent South African culture... Blacks, Whites, Coloureds, English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu—watookal! I'm like all these different things, all these different people, fucked into one person" (Die AntwoordVEVO, 2010, 0:06).

Through these words, Watkin Tudor Jones proclaims that, like a ninja, he and his character can move between cultural identities stealthily and effortlessly, transcending his tired race to offer a new model of white South African. In his mind, he has arrived in an Ubuntu reality.

I argue that Ninja longs so constitutionally for both an internal feeling and an outwards projection of his Ubuntu status that he has permanently superscribed his own skin with the marks of others. Head to toe, his body is full of scribbled tattoos borrowed from other cultures, including the very relevant tattoo on his forearm, which reads, "ugly on the skin, lovely from within." This marker exemplifies the social and cultural identity articulations etched into most of Die Antwoord's artistic output. "Ugly on the skin" is Ninja's recognition that he traverses his world, which is full of Blackness (both in South Africa and rap music), in a white skin which, in

itself, is replete with dissonance. “Lovely from within” is quite obviously his communication that despite his skin colour, he has kindness, acceptance, and community in his heart.

The indelible ink that tarnishes his white body communicates to others that he holds no pride in his consecrated white skin, nor does he value it. His skin works as an interface that instantaneously transmits that he is not of the old, conservative Afrikaaner ilk but is a product of a racially integrated South Africa. The poorly executed tattoos of vulgar signs and symbols from gangs from other cultures that saturate his skin represent a betrayal of his whiteness and a stripping of his skin’s international sanctity. In an act of expedient becoming, they implement the signifiers of others, such as tattoos, accents, clothing, vocabulary, and language. By doing so, Die Antwoord believes they are effectively relegating themselves to a status of belonging amongst non-advantaged peoples in South Africa. With these superficial actions, they wrongly believe are they modelling an equitable postcolonial route forward.

Krog (2007a) has longed urgently to “speak black,” and so, too, has Ninja, who rapped in the song “I Don’t Dwank”: “When I’m in South Africa, I speak like I’m black.”

As will be further illustrated, the existence of Die Antwoord serves as a case study on how fragile whites longing for Ubuntu can so quickly and easily diverge into a toxic recentering of whiteness that only further inflicts harm on others while strengthening whites. The following section will examine Die Antwoord’s postmodern ideology of whiteness that they loudly refer to as zef.

The Global Category of White Trash

An elemental aspect of South African whiteness and whiteness generally that has been overlooked so far in this thesis is that variation lives within the wider racial designation. It is important to address the truth that not all whites are afforded equal colonial privileges. That is to

say, class marginalization, although significantly rarer and much more tepid than experienced by other races, occurs for whites in colonized spaces all around the world. As Lopez (2012) explained, “From its beginnings in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the spread of hegemonic whiteness through colonialism has not necessarily meant that all whites enjoyed the same privileges by simple virtue of race identification” (p. 18).

Many whites who do not meet the sanctimonious qualifications of their race have been deliberately relegated to a lower-tiered category now colloquially referred to as “white trash.” Because the inelegance and indignity of poverty would blemish the colonial mask, poor whites are othered, bestowing them as a severed, separate genre of whiteness.

In the books *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Wray, 2006), *White Trash: Race and Class in America* (Wray & Newitz, 1996), and *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness* (Rasmussen et al., 2001), sociologist Wray and others have investigated the cultural phenomenon of white trash othering. In these works, Wray described the white trash stereotype as a specific model of hopelessly poor folks with too many kids, possibly born out of incest, who have been forgotten by god. Those branded as white trash are seen as filthy, insatiable, luckless heathens mocked not only by their white superiors but by all cultures for their inability to cash in on their bequeathed golden white ticket (Rasmussen et al., 2001; Wray, 2006; Wray & Newitz, 1996).

In the early twentieth century, white American lawmakers believed that those whom they regarded as white trash presented an existential threat to the maintenance of their ruling race, so they took drastic measures to impede the white populations that they felt degraded their people. In an article for *The Society Pages*, Wray (2013) wrote, “By 1921, American eugenicists had so firmly implanted fears of racial pollution that 15 states had passed laws permitting involuntary

sterilization. Between 1907 and 1927, over 8,000 such operations were performed” (para. 15).

Wray (2013) noted that

many were carried out on “feble-minded” men and women—those we would today regard as severely developmentally disabled. But an untold number were carried out on men and women whose only apparent fault was belonging to the class popularly labeled as white trash. (para. 15)

Throughout North American history, these horrific measures have been consistently practiced on various groups belonging to the underclasses.

Fast forward a century or so from the early 1900s, and the term white trash “evokes images of trailer parks, meth labs, beat-up Camaros on cinder blocks, and poor rural folks with too many kids and not enough government cheese” (Wray, 2013, para. 1). Fascinatingly, although the designation of white trash continues to mostly be an insult to whites who are perceived as too lazy or stupid to have made it, there are many people in North America who now wear the term as a badge of honour. Wray (2013) continued:

Much as African American youth turned the despised word [n-word] into an expression of pride and solidarity (usually as the abbreviated [n-word]) or the way that LGBT activists have reclaimed queer, some white people now identify as “white trash” to signal rebelliousness and cultural difference—their refusal of a bland, mainstream white society that oppresses and stifles. (para. 2)

Wray is hitting on something important to understanding *Die Antwoord* in this statement, but before moving forward, it must be noted that his quote can be reasonably read as an irresponsible abstraction. Yes, some lower-class whites have reappropriated a pejorative expression, but there are no honest grounds to equate the term ‘white-trash’ with the power and

virulence of the hateful phraseology discharged to oppress races, genders, and sexualities. ‘White trash’ should be predominantly understood not as a racist term but as a classist one, and this can be seen in its recurring use to denigrate rich white celebrities when they act in a manner disagreeable with celestial whiteness:

Despite her millions, Paris Hilton can be called out for a trashy lifestyle, and George Clooney can tell us, in his self-mocking kind of way, that beneath a dapper exterior, he’s really just white trash. And, as comedian and actor Tom Arnold said of his marriage to comedian, actress, and political aspirant Roseanne Barr, “We’re America’s worst nightmare—white trash with money!” (para. 3)

Tom Arnold’s quip possesses a potential truth and exposes conservative fear that uncouth whiteness with a public platform might disrupt the myth of white divinity that modulates the heartbeat of hegemony. This supposition would indicate that innate to the concept of white trash is a capability of subversiveness.

Comparable to the North American model Wray (2006, 2013) has presented (see also Rasmussen et al., 2001; Wray & Newitz, 1996), South Africa has a similar archetypal designation for provincial whiteness, one which may also hold some subversive power. For decades in South Africa, poor, uneducated, working-class whites have been sneeringly referred to as zef. Zef, as a term, derives from the early 1970s muscle car by Ford named the Zephyr.

Zef became a designation after a fleeting mining boon in the 70s that resulted in the acquisition of some modest short-term wealth for some poor whites. Legend has it (according to Marx and Milton, 2011) that, with their newfound funds, many of them purchased the Ford Zephyrs automobiles (Smit, 2015, p. 3). Marx and Milton (2011), who believe there is authenticity and transgressiveness to zefness, explained the aesthetic characteristics that shaped

the zef archetype: “Clapped out Fords with fur on the dashboard, tight mom jeans pulled up too high... mullets” (p. 3). They further noted,

Zef has always been around and it’s everywhere in the world. It is a term created for those who (want to present themselves as stylish and unique) but can’t afford Diesel and Dolce; people who are struggling for their next plate of food. It’s honest. (Marx & Milton, 2011, pp. 23–24)

As Hall (2001) famously wrote in *The Spectacle of The Other*, “what unsettles culture is matter out of place—the breaking of unwritten rules and codes” (p. 236), which is precisely what the North American white trash nightmare and zef culture threaten – to expose the unsightly underbelly of whiteness, destabilizing the strategic myth of inborn white superiority and its consequent dominance.

South African White Liberal Art

For many fledgling liberal white South African artists in the early aughts, it seems the model of zefness presented them with a potential and attractive opportunity to annul themselves and their work from the ugly colonial reputation inscribed in their whiteness. To seize zef was viewed as a possible shortcut to becoming and belonging. As George Clooney and Roseanne Barr embraced the model of white trash in an American context and transformed it into something of a self-depreciating pride separate from a broken system, white, upper-middle-class South African artists like rapper Jack Parrow and Die Antwoord began to self-identify and perform the zef mythology to articulate their politics.

Concurrently, the expressions of poverty or street realness afforded by zef also held the potential to improve their credibility in the hip-hop industry—a genre which was given life by the art and storytelling of marginalized Black youth in urban America. Zefness underscores

underprivileged whiteness, and for Smit (2015), this is an essential aspect for whites to prosper in the genre. Smit used Eminem as an example of a rapper who successfully presents himself to audiences as a poor white and then, in an additional effort to prove authenticity, draws attention to his whiteness as a way of reminding audiences that his race renders him a longshot in art dominated by Black people. This positioning cultivates an accepting audience for the white artist: If they are white but respected by Black rappers, they must be authentic. Smit (2015) wrote that “a white rapper can be authentic by proving him/herself through a sincere and honest presentation of self through hip hop.... White rappers accentuate their whiteness, thereby challenging the invisibility and privilege of whiteness” (p. 3).

Whereas Eminem did, in fact, ascend to success from poverty, Jack Parrow and Die Antwoord attempt to descend from their upper-class echelons. Rather than accepting their actual status and producing art reflective of the context in which they were reared, they initiated processes of parodied personal mythmaking and contrived street realness to expand their cultural capital.

One of Die Antwoord’s first artistic creations is a short film entitled *Zef Side* (stewartridgway, 2010), which would be featured in the Guggenheim Museum in 2010 as one of the top 25 videos of innovative digital artists. *Zef Side* is a highly edited interview with Ninja, Yolandi, and DJ Hi-Tek in a poor Cape Town neighborhood which they claim as their home. Each member of the group dons recycled clothing featuring American iconography that invokes the white trash stereotype. Yolandi wears a teal T-shirt with the professional wrestler known as Batista; DJ Hi Tek sports an American football jersey and has tied a marijuana plant bandana around his forehead; Ninja is shirtless with a thick gold chain around his neck and wears Pink Floyd *Dark Side of the Moon* boxer shorts (stewartridgway, 2010).

In *Zef Side*, the band gives short responses in clunky Afrikaaner accents to a few innocuous questions, while the b-roll footage shows short cutaways of poor, working-class white people (stewartridge, 2010). The video, although brief, is meant to enunciate the wholeness of their zef ideology. As Van der Watt (2012) explained in her article, “Ask No Questions, Hear No Lies: Staying on Die Antwoord’s Surface,”

When Die Antwoord resurrects zef, they redefine it as a positive and desirable appellation that extends to their sense of style, fashion, and talk.... No longer rooted in context, zef is something to be claimed at will by cool kids with street cred, selectively using visual references to the original context from which it derived. (p. 411)

Although Die Antwoord have proudly presented themselves as a familiar model of white trash, the group has refused to acknowledge their parody of zef as having anything to do with trashiness. If they were to nod at the (pretend) provincialness, it would expose their mime. In an interview with the *Times Live* in 2010, Yolandi (as cited in Eggington, 2010, para. 3) stated:

We don’t like to be referred to as trash.... We see ourselves as fancy, sophisticated people.... It’s just a zef style.... We’re poor but we’re fancy.... It’s a slang word in South Africa for when you dress like this—it’s zef. And it’s a cool thing as opposed to like a trash thing. Trash is like scum,... and we’re not that. We’re on fire.... Luck, we’re millionaires. (para. 3)

Even if she is playing coy to the interviewer’s question, the character of Yolandi has self-embraced her zefness as a positive feature, one that should be sought after and realized as dynamic. In an interview later in 2010 with *The Los Angeles Times* (Lee, 2010), Ninja elaborated on the band’s model of zefness and in doing so, revealed some of his discernment of Western

perceptions of Africans (toying with the interviewer's and audience's presumed lack of knowledge of South Africa) and vice versa:

Zef is disorganized and completely dysfunctional. A little bit broken. Everyone's a little bit zef in South Africa. You see a kid in Liberia wearing a Tupac T-shirt. That's so zef! Zef is, like, American style. It's like the debris of American culture that we get in dribbles. We tape it together and try to be American. (para. 13)

In the same interview, Yolandi added, "It's like, broken things stuck together. But you stick it together and in a weird way, it works. The zef style is a coarse style" (Lee, 2010, para. 15).

It is crucial to take stock of Die Antwoord's belief that zef can be exercised by wearing clothing depicting Americana. This implementation of Western symbolism to communicate themselves is indicative of the previously mentioned struggle by Mohanty (1991) that many South African whites face as they attempt to weave a communicable and coherent identity out of their feelings of cultural disillusionment and unbelonging in the post-apartheid South African context. This disenchantment often leaves them feeling more of a connection with international forms of whiteness than South African whiteness. At the same time, by wearing the outdated "debris of American culture" such as an old T-shirt featuring a professional wrestler, or Ninja's Vanilla Ice haircut, Die Antwoord is communicating their Africanness to global audiences who are familiar with images of African children wearing previously owned, outdated, and obscure clothing donated by Western missionaries and charities. On the global stage, this zef articulation of third-worldness further undermines Die Antwoord's whiteness, authenticating them to hip hop fans across the globe who demand street realness.

Ninja's quote to *The Los Angeles Times* (Lee, 2010) validates that Die Antwoord keenly understand the standing of their Africanness in an international context, and they have tactically exploited these erroneous perceptions. When asked about their "trashy" zef aesthetic by an international reporter, Ninja responded: "We're not trashy.... Maybe it's because your country is like much more first-world than our country, so maybe we look a bit trashy to you" (as cited in Piotrkitalarz, 2010, 2:11). In defending their zef style, Ninja pointed to and sardonically ridiculed these dominant but often whispered perceptions of Africa as home to the 'shithole country'. Ninja's sardonic but sociopolitically charged response calls attention to the three-way conceptual discord between the first, second, and third worlds (Smit, 2015, p. 4). Ninja is aware that the nuances of their constructed African identity are mostly misconstrued by Western audiences who possess little knowledge of South African history, economics, and politics, and he discerns that his and his bandmates' identities resonate with Western audiences exclusively on a superficial level. He knows that these audiences embrace them as "cool" based on their perceived authenticity and absurdity derived from their curated dangerous African otherness.

In examining Die Antwoord as a Western phenomenon, Haupt (2012b) drew on Hebdige's theory that subcultural style involves mechanisms of disorder:

In the west, Die Antwoord's seemingly chaotic style is like a kind of blockage in the system or representation. Subcultures represent noise: interference in the orderly sequence which leads from real events and phenomena to their representation in the media. The caricature as demonstrated by Die Antwoord therefore operates at the level of signification by appropriating hegemonic signifiers (of Africa) and associating them with counterhegemonic signifieds, to create a critical and often playful dialogue with hegemonic signifieds. (p. 437)

Haupt (2012a) is correct in his assertion that much of Die Antwoord's resonance with gleeful Western audiences stems from colonial presumptions. These audiences witness Die Antwoord's exotic aesthetic, language, and racial identity and absorb them as simply "African," which they understand as authentic, defiant, and destructive in relation to their Western standard. Obbard and Cork (2016) pointed to Western narratives of South Africa as a violent and primitive space which strongly reinforces the existing narrative binary between east and west. To demonstrate this dichotomy, they used *Time Magazine's* evocative cover story on Oscar Pistorius as their case study (see Perry, 2013). The issue's cover featured a photo of Pistorius framed by splashes of blood with the headline "South Africa's Culture of Violence." Obbard and Cork wrote:

For western media consumers, an omnipresent threat of violence seems to exist outside gated (predominantly white) communities. The killer's defense: that Steenkamp was the tragic victim of a racially splintered society in which fear, and distrust are so pervasive that citizens shoot first and ask questions later. And then there was the murder scene itself, a locked bathroom within a fortified mansion in an elite enclave surrounded by barbed wire, in a country where more than half the population earns less than \$65 a month and killings are now so common that they reach the highest echelons of society and celebrity. (Obbard & Cork, 2016, p. 421)

In other words, Obbard and Cork (2016) describe the *Time's* coverage of South Africa as a place so violent that it is even causing white people to kill each other (p. 421).

I argue that Die Antwoord purposefully build upon these international ideas of comprehensive national violence and, in doing so, help to crystallize the narrative that whites are also complicit in African violence. As Ninja and Yolandi are two of South Africa's most

internationally famous people, this causes significant embarrassment for conservative whites who have long prided themselves on being viewed as innately superior to and segregated from perceived Africanness. Lopez (2012) wrote that “one effective way to administer the desired privilege-ectomy to the white subject is to show how its position within the colonial society is neither uniformly dominant nor stable, but contingent upon a performance of white power” (p. 13). With a zef presentation of feeble whiteness that is deeply influenced by other less powerful cultures (more on this later), they mean to reveal – much to the dismay of the conservative class – that the separation of whites from others only exists in posturing and fantasy.

At their best, Die Antwoord means to remind South Africa that whites are just as susceptible to the indignities of poverty as any other race but maintain their elevated positions exclusively through deep-rooted colonialism. The poor, township, zef white offered to worldwide audiences by Die Antwoord is intended to reveal that, indeed, the emperor wears no clothes.

On paper, through zef, Die Antwoord fulfill some of what Lopez (2012) asked for in his model for a democratic postcolonial whiteness:

The postcolonial critique of whiteness must thus move beyond narrow anticolonialism or reverse racism to ask whether a new relation to whiteness is possible after empire—to construct, in effect, a whiteness without privilege, while still acknowledging the lingering traces of white normativity that remains more or less latent in the postcolonial world as an irreducible part of the colonial legacy. (p. 14)

Die Antwoord display themselves as poor whites proud of their zefness. This is detached from previous forms of colonial sustaining bourgeoisie international white privilege. Die Antwoord’s offer of zef presents some obscured possibility of an equitable post-empire white identity, but audiences must first be compelled to accept the ideology – an exercise the band

realizes requires intentional influence. In analyzing Die Antwoord, it is vital to not only decode what zefness represents but also to understand the chaotic but calculated postmodern method in which they deliver the zef message.

Van der Watt (2012) noted that the most common response by Western audiences to Die Antwoord is “what the fuck did I just watch?” (p. 407). This occurs before they absorb the group as a cultural and artistic entity that they want to associate themselves with. The following chapter provides a reading of Die Antwoord’s tactical transmission of their zef ideology through methodical postmodern communication havoc intended to disrupt grand narratives.

Chapter 4: Postmodernism and Postcolonialism

In the preceding chapters, I provided the necessary theoretical, and methodological framework on politics, race, culture, and identity to best understand the context in which Die Antwoord was created. In this chapter, I offer the theoretical context that I believe helps to best understand Die Antwoord's stunningly proficient mode of chaotic, reality- and consciousness-bending artistic communication. I will do this by reviewing some of the theories of influential postmodern thinkers. This will include an analysis of the enduring work of Hutcheon (2003), Sontag (1965), Barthes (1957/1972), Eco (1980/2004), and perhaps most focally, Baudrillard (2000) and his postulation of hyperreality to comprehend the seemingly chaotic. Their theories will then be used to better parse the Die Antwoord phenomenon in a postcolonial setting. By design, the beginning of the discussion in this chapter surveys the important intersection, and a consistent through line of this thesis, of postmodernism and postcolonialism by way of analysis of Trimm's (2005) work. This examination and situating of Die Antwoord's artistic communication is the final layer of preparatory review in advance of the presentation and analysis of three Die Antwoord case studies in the following chapter.

Trimm's Study of *Cambridge*

A discernible correlation exists between postmodernism and postcolonialism. Both schools of thought are naturally concerned with questioning ontological historical and societal constructs; both interrogate nuances and subtext; both require the possession of an informed, referential self-awareness; and, perhaps most integral to the relationship, both postmodernists and postcolonialists identify master narratives and then disrupt them. In his article "The Times of Whiteness; or, Race Between the Postmodern and the Postcolonial," Trimm (2005) explored how the 1991 novel *Cambridge* by Caryl Phillips implemented whiteness as a seemingly perpetual

and normalizing signifier for many postcolonial contexts—one that is unachievable for those who are not white. Trimm’s article and the story it examines serve as valuable illustrations of the intrinsic correlations between postmodernism and postcolonialism and how both Black and white people attempt and fail to use signifiers and simulation to transcend the narratives on racial categories. Before diving into a postmodernist analysis and critique of Die Antwoord and their performance art, I offer a synopsis of Trimm’s argument as a means to establish the necessary theoretical context to properly consider Die Antwoord’s postmodern art borne out of specious postcolonial context.

Cambridge (Phillips, 1991) is a tragic story of 19th century colonial slavery told through two main characters—Emily, a shameless, bourgeoisie English settler sent to the British West Indies to check on her father’s sugar plantation, and Cambridge (originally named Olumide before his Western religious and cultural conversion), an older Christian slave in search of personal identity and dignity. Trimm (2005) used these two characters for his thematic analysis of postmodernism and postcolonialism because their disparate individual constitutions and their relationship with one another demonstrate the force of the mosaic construct of whiteness.

The novel’s historiography... fractures into an antinomy of the past’s eternal presence through pastiche and the past’s signification of irretrievable alterity. This tension helps extend the conflicting deployments of whiteness as universal presence or originary—and unreconstructable—absence. (Trimm, 2005, p. 248)

The character of Cambridge is engaged in a lifelong quest towards becoming and belonging; a perceived evolution to acquire the distinct signifiers of whiteness—culture, language, and religion—as a mode to be welcomed into the “civilized” echelons of 19th-century colonial society (Phillips, 1991; Trimm, 2005). Meanwhile, Emily, as white gatekeeper, refuses

to grant this sought-after paradigm of English whiteness to Christianity-converted, Indigenous individuals such as Cambridge. She even shelters her hereditary status from the Creole whites born in the West Indies. “Whiteness falters between a rhetorically extensive present and a constricted past, between an attempt to assimilate disparate identities and a reflexive ambition to deny all identificatory marks as contingent” (Trimm, 2005, p. 248). As discussed in the previous section of this paper, and now reiterated by Trimm (2005) through a postmodernist lens, the abstraction of whiteness is perceived as the ‘civilized’ baseline to which all non-white races are forced to conform should they hope to achieve the freedoms afforded to the white and powerful in colonial settings. However, as an abstraction, the baseline lives in a state of metamorphosis, constantly changing its signifiers and bending its intentions to keep it unreachable for those who were not born into it.

Additionally, Trimm (2005) has discussed the ability of colonial whiteness to decree all non-white identities as racial, meaning that white is rendered both invisible and atemporal:

Whiteness is implicitly assumed to be a mature humanness, a humanity that, not being stuck in an early stage of development, has reached the present. Indeed, this progressivist maturity is equated with humanity itself: whiteness is itself the human universal that no (other) race realizes. In theory, no (other) race is, or need be, inferior (it is only the contingent and the accidental that make them so). In fact, all (others) are inferior, having fallen short of the universal and therefore of humanity.... Whiteness therefore is seen as essential realization, a fulfillment against which other identities appear as cut by limiting contingencies. (p. 292)

Here, Trimm (2005) explained that, due to the overlap of mnemonic humanness and whiteness, whiteness, therefore, operates as a universal characteristic of humanity, “positioning it

as an eternal and ever-present attribute” (Trimm, 2005, as cited in Lopez, 2012, p. 22). This detail helps reveal how colonial nations function at the deepest levels. Because these spaces are controlled by whites, any declaration of nation is simultaneously an avowal of race. For a person of Colour, living in such a state means that one’s physical and cultural embodiment signifies that they stand at elemental odds with the colonial country in which one lives. To this end, the clamorous nationalism that exists within all such states further paints non-whites as incongruent to national interests. Trimm cited Paul Gilroy to further interpret this contrived social calculus:

In the contemporary British figuration of racial otherness as internal threat, an enemy within, one characterized by violence, crime, and a “swamping” fertility: The superficially simple question “what kind of people are we” summoned those very images and axioms and answered itself powerfully in the negative... The Black presence is thus constructed as a problem or threat against which a homogeneous, white, national “we” could be unified. (2005, p. 48)

There is an understanding that Blackness signifies Indigeneity and belonging and that belonging represents a hazard to colonial power because it exposes whiteness as an emblem of interloping, weakening its mythology. Thus, monumental efforts are made to not only delegitimize Blackness as an authentic signifier of belonging but to have it represent the contrary. To maintain power, whites must remain as the gatekeepers and messengers. As Trimm (2005) said,

The signifiers of this national identity then suddenly appear contingent, for their function depends on the one who deploys them... If their utterance is performed under the aegis of whiteness, then they signify English identity; however, their remark within the context of blackness signifies less—and more—than Englishness. This excess national identity

proves so unstable a threat that it must be marked as beyond the conceiving of reason. (p. 240)

Moreover, for whiteness to exist, the other also needs to exist, so rigid boundaries of becoming and belonging must be established. To wield racial power requires that other races do not possess such influence, and this divide needs to be clearly presented and demonstrated, so all people know where they fit within the colonial landscape. This was the threat of Cambridge to Emily (Phillips, 1991; Trimm, 2005). Instead of accepting him into whiteness, she would invariably defer, leaving him feeling close to equivalent but still inadequate. There exists no box for Cambridge to check to be deemed equal, but crucially, his hope must be nurtured. Fanon (1968) wrote in his article “The Fact of Blackness” (which helps parse Cambridge’s plight):

For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man... The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man. Blackness then defines itself not only in its own terms but also in opposition to an other, a white other that in turn defines itself against black otherness. (p. 110)

The Other always arrives too late, explained Fanon (1968): “There will always be a world—a white world—between you and us” (p. 122). For white domination to persist, whiteness needs to signify attainability—something for the Other to strive for—but is perpetually out of reach. I maintain that Die Antwoord believes that white power is constituted on mythology and communication, and so they propose that it is possible to make its power accessible by stripping whiteness of its desirability through the strategic shifting of signs. They hypothesize that if they reveal the myth of whiteness by exposing its true depravity, its colonial armour can be penetrated. The theory of bricolage helps to frame Die Antwoord’s postmodern communication strategy for subverting colonial constructs through their zef ideology.

Bricolage was one of the most implemented theoretical concepts to come out of the famed Birmingham School (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies) by Clarke (1975), who first published the theory in the second part of his *Resistance Through Rituals*. Clarke explained bricolage as follows:

Together, object and meaning constitute a sign, and within any one culture, such signs are assembled, repeatedly, into characteristic forms of discourse. However, when the bricoleur re-locates the significant object in a different position within that discourse, using the same overall repertoire of signs, or when the object is placed within a different total ensemble, a new discourse is constituted, a different message conveyed. (1975, p. 136)

Die Antwoord seem to believe that they can exhibit that whiteness is buoyed by colonial myth – that it is but an engineered simulation. They intend to bare this hoax through their performance art, which is designed to denigrate the signified but wholly manufactured divide between races. By revealing the colonial lie through the relocation of white signs and symbols, they intend to destabilize the power structure by creating a new discourse.

Die Antwoord's efforts to renegotiate the positionality of whiteness through cultural bricolage is the constitution of their zef ideology which presents a model of unsavoury, unrefined, and very accessible whiteness. To achieve this model, they implement signs from various people and spaces to forge new narratives to challenge the dominant colonial discourse of what it means to be white in post-apartheid South Africa. They offer a whiteness that can be chastised and, perhaps more powerfully, mocked by all. Scott (2012a) wrote, "As performers, both Ninja and Yolandi are marked by their white skin and, through the appropriation of racial signifiers of other race groups, they are able to render their white identity ironic" (p. 748). This

passage from Scott calls to attention Die Antwoord's intentional satiric positioning of themselves as desperate whites who are emulating authentic cultures as a last-ditch effort to belong and become. They are also obscuring their white signifiers through their mosaic presentation. By wearing particular clothes or costumes, having particular tattoos, or speaking with particular accents; through their provincial arrogance, aggressiveness and their pornographic, carnivalesque visuals, lyrics, and "next-level" beats, Die Antwoord is engaged in semiotic action to create an alternative, anti-colonial narrative.

Consciousness Modified Through Artistic Communication

Hutcheon (2003) asserted that postmodern art is marked "paradoxically by both history and an internalized, self-reflexive investigation of the nature, the limits and the possibilities of the discourse of art" (p. 22). Die Antwoord, in their intricately curated aesthetics and sound, intend to introvert the quaint formalism of the discursive world of defined political, social, and historical meaning systems that exist within post-apartheid South Africa through postmodern art. Always in character as Ninja and Yolandi, the artists blur any separation between art and real life, creating symbolic disarray for their observers. This situates their audiences in a position vulnerable to a dismantling of their inoculated beliefs and subsequently receptive to an acceptance of radical new discourses. "Postmodernist contradictory art still installs that order, but it then uses it to demystify our everyday processes of structuring chaos, of imparting or assigning meaning" (Hutcheon, 2003, p. 7).

As we will come to see, Die Antwoord's art intends to dramatize and provoke change from within by demonstrating that all reparations of South African society are human constructs that derive their value, as well as their limitations, from that very fact. They implement illusion to disempower illusionary human constructs such as racial and class biases, and, as Sontag

(1965) wrote, to ultimately “modify consciousness” (p. 296). The group’s frequently relied upon ammunition in this planned artistic attack to modify the consciousness of mass audiences is their application of shock and awe through chaotic (but diligently chosen) signs and symbols. In a 2010 interview with *Boing Boing*, Yolandi explained,

Our style is like car crash music. Like when there’s a car crash, everyone looks. When there’s like kids dancing playing in the rain, no one really pays attention, but when there’s accidents, everyone is checking it out. So that’s our style. (as cited in Jardin, 2010, para. 1)

In a rare moment, Ninja publicly addressed Die Antwoord’s blueprint of artistic chaos to modify consciousness to *Spin* magazine in an article entitled “Die Antwoord’s Totally Insane Words of Wisdom”:

You can make your confusion work for you. You have to drive into it. When you see that people are paying attention, then you have to push that motherfucker into the red. It doesn’t matter why people like you. It just matters that you do something with it. People are unconscious, and you have to use your art as a shock machine to wake them up. You gotta be a good guide to help people get away from a dull experience, be the enemy.

That’s samurai shit. I believe it. Don’t say, “This is wack”—become the enemy. It took me ten years to understand that fully. (as cited in Marchese, 2015, para. 2)

This quote from Ninja is important because it offers evidence that Die Antwoord are mindful and deliberate in their postmodern antics. Ninja’s statement is also crucial because it reveals the “embrace the enemy” pathos within his performance art. In this claim, Watkin Tudor Jones acknowledges the chaotic unsavoriness of his Ninja character, signalling a purported willingness to sacrifice his perceived personal dignity (and the respect of many) to combat

colonialism. He is willing to parody something ugly that he believes is unrepresentative of his authentic identity in the name of dismantling revered whiteness.

Die Antwoord believe that, like a car crash, even if their characters and art are uncomfortable or frightening to look at, they are too compelling to human nature to look away from. And once they have captured the gaze of consenting or nonconsenting audiences (by exploiting many people's biologically driven interest in violence, the absurd, and/or the grotesque), they deem that they have yielded an opportunity to disrupt mythical colonial inoculations and subsequently, synthetic power structures. Barthes (1957/1972) suggested in *Mythologies* that all in the world is intended to be natural, unchallenged, and—it goes without saying—eternal, universal and that this must be contested. Barthes believed that to dismantle this ideology, one must demystify first and then change. Die Antwoord abide by this intonation and function accordingly by acting as agents of demystification through garish and incongruous postmodern parody. Hutcheon (2003) wrote:

Parody is a perfect postmodern form, in some sense, for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies. It also forces a reconsideration of the idea of origin or originality that is compatible with other postmodern interrogations of liberal humanist assumptions. (p. 11)

Further explaining Die Antwoord's postmodern performance art strategy, Crimp (1995) wrote that "the fiction of the creating subject gives way to frank confiscation, quotation, excerptation, accumulation, and repetition of already existing images. Notions of originality, authenticity, and presence are undermined" (p. 53). Additionally, Russell (1985) declared postmodern creation as "an art of shifting perspective, of double-consciousness, of local and extended meaning" (p. 192). The band's zef portrait is the chaotic result of the vast crossing and

intermingling of local and international signals to create complex intertextuality intended to capture the attention of audiences worldwide. While Barthes (1957/1972) distinguished intertexts as “the impossibility of living outside the infinite text” (p. 36), meaning intertextuality is the precise stipulation of textuality, Eco (1980/2004) wrote in *The Name of the Rose* that he “discovered what writers have always known: books always speak of other books, and every story tells a story that has already been told” (p. 20). In studying *Die Antwoord*, nearly 35 years after Eco’s (1980/2004) claims, the same can be said for global culture and media in the digital age. *Die Antwoord*’s parody across multiple media, and digital platforms is a manifestation of an introversion, a self-conscious turning forward toward their created storytelling and reoriented reality (Hutcheon, 2003, p. 128), and their discourse has been primed through the intertextual narratives of the history, media, and art which have informed their identities. I maintain that their postmodern parody derives from their understanding that the colonial history and reality they have been taught are natural are, in actuality, not based on any organic truth. By embodying and exaggerating the fictions they understand through their vulgar white characters, they challenge historical narratives, and they endeavour to expand the scope of restrictive colonial narratives, contesting power through their ironic reconceptualization of signs and symbols. *Die Antwoord* is communicating to its audiences “observe this illusion”—what people are told to know in colonized spaces is not trustworthy.

This model of political expression and resistance at the level of everyday life is an example of a *politique par le bas* (Foucault, 2019, p. 112)—an unstructured resistance ordained through art. Foucault (1984) explained the utility of fiction as (in *Die Antwoord*’s case—parody) to deliver a political message and create newfound social realities by writing:

The possibility exists for fiction to function in truth, for a fictional discourse to induce effects of truth, and for bringing it about that, a true discourse engenders or “manufactures” something that does not as yet exist, that is, “fictions” it. As to the problem of fiction, it seems to me to be a very important one; I am well aware that I have never written anything but fictions. (p. 193)

Through Die Antwoord’s anti-colonial intertextuality based in the real and imagined world, they are formulating a newfound “fictional” space intended to influence audiences and realities across the globe.

Possibilities Emerge From a Loss of Reality

To examine Die Antwoord’s postmodern communication tactics, I have referenced the analyses of many critical theorists so far in this section. However, the thinker whose philosophical work might be most central to any thorough examination of Die Antwoord’s chaotic and subversive postmodern communication should likely be French philosopher, political commentator, and sociologist Baudrillard (2000). Specifically applicable are his theories of simulation that deconstruct the world as an ever-evolving outcome of media—a belief that Die Antwoord embraces and leverages. According to Baudrillard (2000), society is but a simulation in the sense that anything original or authentic to humanity has been lost through the replication of signs viewed through media and those in power. Everything an individual knows or understands—how an individual acts—is the product of a sign reimagined purposefully for some objective, perhaps entertainment, perhaps to consolidate power. Signs have therefore replaced truth with a comforting image and myth more powerful than authenticity. Baudrillard (1995) wrote in *Simulacra and Simulation*, “When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There are a plethora of myths of origin and signs of reality—a plethora of truth,

of secondary objectivity, and authenticity” (p. 12). In auditing Baudrillard’s (1995) assertion, Butler (1999) declared in his book *Jean Baudrillard: The Defence of the Real*, that simulation is “not only the loss of reality but also its very possibility. The aim of simulation is not to do away with reality, but on the contrary to realize it, to make it real” (p. 23). Baudrillard (1995) referred to this phenomenon as *hyperreality*—a state of oppressive and prescriptive being in which everyone exists.

One of Baudrillard’s (2000) most cited examples of hyperreality, and useful to understand the concept, is the existence of Disney World. Disney World, he explained, is a place where Little France and Little Germany use exaggerated and distorted semiotics that adhere to stereotypical conceptualizations of authentic and France and Germany. Moreover, they forget any unsavoriness attached to or administered by these countries. For example, there is no mention of World War II in Little Germany. In doing so, Disney World’s version of the countries become more German and more French in the nationalistic sense than Europe’s actual Germany and France (Baudrillard, 2000, p. 25) because they present more digestible and compelling orientations of the nations (based in fiction) that audiences are more wont to absorb and regurgitate. With each reiteration they become more sensational and more embedded as cannon.

For Baudrillard (1995), this conceptualization is an illustration of what all the world has become. Signs compensate and have become a substitute for all reality, creating a hyperreality meant to maintain hegemonic and capitalistic function. Baudrillard (1995) believed that individuals must espouse the truth about entrenched fictions to affect social change. Smit (2015) wrote, “Perhaps this [the Disney World example] is exactly the strategy of Die Antwoord, who manipulate the desire for the real through the creation of zef” (p. 2). For Smit, who has also deployed Baudrillard to decode Die Antwoord’s work, hyperreality leaves little space for the

enigmatic, “as Baudrillard puts it: the inaccessible secret” (2015, p. 147). Smit recalled Baudrillard’s *The Vital Illusion* suggestion that “for, facing a world that is unintelligible and problematic, our task is clear: we must make that world even more unintelligible, even more enigmatic” (Smit, 2015, p. 83). Die Antwoord, through their in-your-face, car crash, sign-ridden chaotic art (in which they refuse to discuss or present denotatively), present their core conviction. In the article “Enter the Imperceptible—Reading Die Antwoord,” Smit (2015) wrote:

Die Antwoord appropriate from multiple reference points, treating culture as a found object with which to create their particular brand of zef... Borrowing from the subcultural signifiers available to them in South Africa as well as from popular culture, their act heightens the non-reality of the signs they borrow. (p. 2)

Art historian Van der Watt (2012) continued on this Baudrillardian trail by noting that “Die Antwoord’s illegibility and ambivalence is achieved by their obsession with surface and their consistent erosion of depth, continually frustrating our desire to find deep meaning or consistency in their act” (p. 401). Moreover, Pendock (2012) wrote in his article “Baudrillard in Bellville” that Die Antwoord are neo-Baudrillardians in the Boland: “Zef Baudrillard, if you like. With a philosophy based on ‘PC computer’ games on the interweb with the aim to get to ‘the next level,’ these Belville Baudrillards embrace simulation as the new reality” (p. 1). A clear example of Die Antwoord’s postmodern, neo-Baudrillard approach is their promotional video (English, 2012) released in advance of the group’s second album *Ten\$ion*, which employs a notorious South African art piece to deliver a provocative message on their creative intentions and also on their view of the state of whiteness in South Africa.

The following chapter begins with a deep reading of Die Antwoord’s strategic artistic communication in their promotional release for their second album. I then perform the same deep

reading exercise for two additional pieces of Die Antwoord content that I believe best capture the essence and perfunctory intentions of the group.

Chapter 5: Three Illustrative Case Studies of Die Antwoord's Postmodern and Post-Colonial Artistic Communication

Through the first four chapters of this analysis, Die Antwoord has been situated within the cultural and political context of South Africa. Much focus has also centred on the implications of Die Antwoord as a global phenomenon and how, through clever and chaotic artistic communication, they garnered such extensive attention and interest. With these understandings now in tow, this chapter will interrogate three of Die Antwoord's artistic creations that effectively illustrate their essence and cursory intentions. Analysis of these case studies will also help to additionally parse much of the theory presented in the preceding chapters and further demonstrate its relevance to the perspectives and ambitions of the members of the group. If possible, I recommend that the reader view each case study example before reading the respective subsection: (a) *Ten\$ion* teaser trailer (English, 2012), (b) *Banana Brain* (Die Antwoord, 2016), and *Umshini Wam* (VICE, 2012). All examples are available on YouTube.

***Ten\$ion* Teaser Trailer Case Study: The Butcher Boys**

Not only is Die Antwoord's silent teaser for their 2012 album *Ten\$ion* (English, 2012) a terrific example of the band's postmodern communication through their loyalty to Baudrillard's (2000) theory of hyperreality, but the piece also captures their strategic political and cultural mandate. The short clip begins with an angelic image of Yolandi, Ninja, and their daughter, Sixteen. Sixteen and Yolandi are costumed head to toe in chalky white makeup and prosthetic pointed elfin ears. Through the use of contact lenses, Yolandi's eyes are completely black. For the viewer, their appearance is surely startling and not easily processed. Their makeup and costumes blend cherubic signs (white paint and hair) with marks of the beast (pointed ear, black

pupiless eyes). It is not clear if the supernatural figures are intended to be understood as good or evil, and this leaves the audience unsettled. As the music begins to softly play, Yolandi abruptly reaches toward a similarly dressed Ninja and violently pierces his chest with her hand. Although Ninja's appearance is mostly comparable, it deviates from Yolandi's in a few important ways: rather than elfin ears and glistening white hair, a hairless Ninja has long ram horns protruding from his temples, his lips are painted black, and his canine teeth come to a sharp point. He is also wearing boxing shorts designed to look like the American flag. For a moment, Yolandi's hand disappears after violently puncturing Ninja's chest, but then quickly reemerges as she tears the heart from his now bloodied torso. The graphic scene concludes with Yolandi licking her lips before eating Ninja's still-beating heart raw (English, 2012).

This brief clip (English, 2012), which happens to be one of their least viewed videos, is a veiled but indisputable depiction of their artistic mission to deconstruct whiteness in South Africa. For those who study late apartheid-era art, they would recognize the video as a homage to artist Jane Alexander's (1985) life-size sculpture entitled *The Butcher Boys*. *The Butcher Boys* features three muscular, ivory white figures banally sitting on a park bench. Although their bodies are that of men, their faces have lifeless black eyes and no other orifices. Like Ninja in this teaser trailer, growing out of the side of their heads are ram horns (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Die Antwoord Appropriated the Work of Jane Alexander to Communicate Their Artistic Mandate



Note. South Africa—Butcher Boys at National Gallery Cape Town [Photograph], by C. Fred, 2005, Flickr (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/charlesfred/87759897>). CC BY-SA 2.0.

Alexander (1985) explained that *The Butcher Boys* is meant to be a representation of apartheid-era whites being only recognizable as human through fundamental shape; any inherent benevolence corroded and deformed into a monstrosity. Post-apartheid, the frightening sculpture maintains its relevance. Given Alexander's description of her artwork, Yolandi's gruesome act can be read as a deliberate illustration of Die Antwoord's undertaking to continually gnaw away at the mythical racial chimaeras sculpted by apartheid and then ultimately penetrate, devour, and banish the enduring colonial constructs that govern biases and subvert any hope for a society in which they might find a way to belong and become.

This teaser trailer (English, 2012) is one example of Die Antwoord at their postmodern sharpest. They have produced a compelling, symbolic piece of communication work meant to compel and challenge their audiences and to challenge structures with its subtext. They use diverse and recognizable signs to create a fiction that commands consideration for a newfangled reality. What makes this short piece one of Die Antwoord's more creditable artistic outputs is that they do not employ signs from cultures or races to which they do not belong. Moreover, their

message is still articulated rather efficiently—whiteness in South Africa requires radical upheaval and the pain caused by apartheid lingers. Like everything Die Antwoord, there are still foundational issues to their message. Principally problematic in this teaser trailer is the interpretation of their communication as making the statement that it is time for South Africa to liberate whiteness from its ugly but earned reputation informed by the devastation it caused during apartheid.

Banana Brain: A Communication Failure?

Another example of Die Antwoord (2016) at their most efficient as artistic communicators is their video for the song *Banana Brain*, from their 2016 album *Mount Ninji and da Nice Time Kid*. *Banana Brain* is an interesting case study for several reasons, including that its reception sufficiently exemplifies the group as a misunderstood Western phenomenon. *Banana Brain*, through its purposefully chaotic application of absurdity and simulation, has seized attention from many audiences, including those who are not familiar with the explicitly South African message of the song and video. As of 2022, *Banana Brain* had over 116 million views from all over the world (Die Antwoord, 2016), but as is standard with all Die Antwoord productions, most of the attention for the video has come from the West.

Upon its premiere, *Banana Brain* (Die Antwoord, 2016) was received by Western critics in a foreseeable fashion. Akin to the response for their other official music videos, *Banana Brain* was celebrated for its “what the fuck?” surface symbolism. *VICE*’s music website Noisey Staff (2016) wrote about the provocative senselessness of the video:

Holy Shit! In Die Antwoord’s new video for *Banana Brain*, Yolandi Visser drugs her parents with some sleeping pills, jumps into Ninja’s car, goes to a house party, takes some drugs, does some making out, and then gets home as the sun rises. As is her wont... it is

the perfect accompaniment to the most hedonistic, thrill-seeking, drug-fueled adventures into senseless nirvana, and also the absolute worst thing to listen to the morning after.

And here, with all the Day-Glo debauchery they can muster, is what that looks like. (para.

1)

SPIN magazine-owned award-winning music site Stereogum (Breihan, 2016) lauded *Banana Brain* for its visual flair:

It's exactly the sort of over-the-top violent and absurdist vision that this group has been bringing for years. Ninja carries a candy-colored Uzi and wears fake legs like the sprinter/murderer Oscar Pistorius. Yolandi forces her parents to overdose before the song even starts. If you're halfway familiar with this group, none of this will be shocking or even surprising, but they've still got the visual flair to pull this goofy bullshit off after all these years. (para. 1)

It is worth noting that the Stereogum writer acknowledged the South African Pistorius reference but quickly consigned the denotation as no more than another benign example of the group's goofy and purely aesthetic zef reality (Breihan, 2016). Likewise, the website for the prominent punk festival Riot Fest (2016) proclaimed that *Banana Brain*'s meaning was obvious: "The message of Banana Brain is clear: If you're going to party hard, make sure you're in good company" (para. 1).

Finally, UK-based fashion and art magazine *Dazed* (Ryder, 2015) provided the most thoughtful opinion on the video by acknowledging that the publication might be missing some disguised subtext:

Predictably twisted, it contains drug overdoses, bad trips, and huge, pendulous penises. It also, for some reason, is packed with references to convicted murderer Oscar Pistorius;

with Ninja wearing fake leg blades, and at one point attempting to shoot a bathroom door down. (p. 2)

To reiterate, critical descriptors used by Western critics of *Banana Brain* included “senseless,” “goofy bullshit,” and that “the message of *Banana Brain* is clear—‘if you’re going to party hard, make sure you’re in good company.’” This far in the analysis—having examined the motivations of Die Antwoord and now contemplated the group’s postmodern artistic tactics—it should come as no shock that the forthcoming deep reading of *Banana Brain* (Die Antwoord, 2016) diverges a great deal from that of the Western critics whom each were entranced by the video and celebrated the production for its simple hedonistic absurdity. It is also worth taking stock that their video is deemed a compelling success (by the critics) without understanding the video’s full meaning and socio-political mandate. This fact is an expression of the polysemic power of Die Antwoord.

A Close Reading of *Banana Brain*. *Banana Brain* begins with the hypnotic visual of a non-mulletted, pink pajama clad Yolandi pouring tea and a comical number of sleeping pills into two white colonial teacups (Die Antwoord, 2016). Upon completing her concoction, she bustles her way through a lockable white iron gate and upstairs to her mother and father’s bedroom within their posh family home in a gated community. She finds her fictional white parents relaxing in bed—her father reads Die Bybel (the Holy Bible in Afrikaans), and her mother crochets “Jesus is Die Antwoord” onto a floral pillow. A smiling Yolandi asks (in Afrikaans) if Mom and Dad want a cup of tea. The fast-pounding music begins, and cut scene, Yolandi is confidently dancing in front of the mirror. As she dances, she removes her pink sleep robe to reveal an all-white traditional Dutch dress. The next image is of her parents, sleeping, possibly dead, but still sitting up in their bed. As she applies bright pink lipstick, Yolandi looks up at the

family security camera to see that her ride has arrived (a highly accessorized Subaru), so she rushes downstairs and runs through the gates to meet her friend Ninja, who is wearing a knit beanie that looks like a banana (Die Antwoord, 2016).

On the surface, the scene could be taken as a rebellious young woman drugging her parents in order to enjoy a hedonistic night on the town, as was perceived by the Western media critics, but in actuality, I argue, Die Antwoord (2016) is making a precise commentary on conservative white Afrikaans postcolonial culture. The few references to security—multiple iron gates and surveillance cameras—portray Yolandi’s religious family’s cultural insulation and also their fear of outside (racial) threats – a narrative previously underlined by Oscar Pistorius’s defense team and presented in Steinberg’s (2010a) book, *Midlands*, on white farm killings. The drugging is likely meant to symbolize Yolandi putting her ascribed whiteness and continuing relationship (through family) with apartheid to bed as she prepares to commence a personal exploration of a potential anticolonial white identity.

In Ninja’s souped-up car—its license plate reads ZEF666 and has an upside-down cross hanging from the rearview mirror—she speeds out of her gated, conservative, white Afrikaans reality and together, the duo is off into the night (Die Antwoord, 2016). While Ninja drives menacingly towards Western Cape Town, Yolandi opens the car’s glove box to discover a handgun. Ninja proceeds to laugh hysterically, rolls down the car’s window, and then shoots the gun at a security camera fashioned as a streetlight. Yolandi looks increasingly terrified, a fear which reaches its pinnacle as Ninja slams on the breaks to arrive at a raucous house party that has spilled out onto the front lawn and street. Upon Ninja’s exit from the car, it is revealed that, like the once celebrated South African paralympic star and now convicted murderer Oscar Pistorius, he is a double leg amputee wearing the same iconic prosthetics that Pistorius sported

during his races. Undoubtedly, Die Antwoord is implementing these prosthetics, which once represented tenacity and glory, and now symbolize anger and violence, as simulacrum to communicate the status of postcolonial whiteness in South Africa.

The prosthetics are not Die Antwoord's (2016) only direct reference to Pistorius in this scene. Ninja shooting his gun from the car is a denotative of the accusation by one of the sprinter's previous romantic partners that Pistorius was an egomaniac who felt he was above the law and would recklessly fire his guns outside of the car windows for his own amusement. Audaciously, under the security camera that Ninja shoots towards is a small sign that reads "Reeva wil my nie in tronk he," which translates from Afrikaans to "Reeva doesn't want me in jail"; a brazenly detached statement from Pistorius as he stood on trial for shooting his girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp to death through the bathroom door. This quote has become symbolic of white entitlement (Perry, 2013) in South Africa. By using the unmistakable image of Pistorius's Cheetah Racer prosthetics, Die Antwoord is reminding international audiences of the violent, uncomfortable, and ultimately embarrassing and culturally damaging South African whiteness that was thrust onto the global stage by Pistorius's murder conviction. Once again, in this portrayal, Die Antwoord is employing their own white bodies to reorient whiteness. As Ninja explained, they are "becoming the enemy" (Marchese, 2015, para. 2) to whiteness by threatening the myth of white superiority that helps it maintain lingering white colonial power in South Africa.

In the third scene of *Banana Brain*, Ninja begins to rap about Yolandi's appearance as he smokes a joint surrounded by people from all races and cultures (Die Antwoord, 2016). Yolandi is then led to a private room with a similarly aged Coloured woman and flashing red strobe lights. They drop acid together (which has an image of a banana on it) and then proceed to dance

and passionately kiss. Ninja aggressively cuts in to break up the hook-up and then furiously pulls Yolandi to yet another private room which is rather dark but illuminated by black light drawings of children.

This scene is another signal that Yolandi is engaged in a process of shedding her conservative white Afrikaans sensibility. By taking hallucinogenic drugs, she is altering her state of mind, and thus facilitating new perspectives, including sexual exploration. Although the drugs and socializing with people of all racial backgrounds are steps towards her evolved state of zefness. Ninja, by angrily grabbing Yolandi from the embrace of another woman and claiming her as his own, remains within traditional segregated, repressive conservative Afrikaans behaviour. Upon arrival to the second private room, Ninja violently tears off Yolandi's dress. Unsurprisingly, he once again frightens her, and so she crawls to the back corner of the black-lit room (Die Antwoord, 2016). At this point in the video, the camera shifts to Yolandi's first-person perspective and, as Ninja begins rapping while waving his gun, his entire body turns a glossy black, lips red, and a large phallus is exposed from his pants. This turn in consciousness for Yolandi is a demonstration that, as a white Afrikaans conservative, she cannot conceptualize the dangerous whiteness in front of her that is Ninja. So instead, her deeply colonially informed consciousness transforms his white body into the white-imagined, stereotypical, and scapegoated *swart gevaar*, which is an Afrikaans phrase for the Black threat (Obbard & Cork, 2016, p. 422). Once again, this was the veiled, but foundational concept argued by Pistorius's defense team—that whiteness cannot be evil, but that the true threat (Blackness) always lurks and is the trigger for white violence (Obbard & Cork, 2016).

To escape the imagined Black threat presented by Ninja, Yolandi sprints to the washroom and slams and locks the door behind herself (Die Antwoord, 2016). When she turns around, she

catches her reflection in a mirror, but instead of her young face, she sees the reflection of an old, dirt-ridden, rotten-toothed white man. She screams in horror and begins to desperately pray before erratically cutting her blonde hair with an old pair of scissors. Meanwhile, on the other side of the locked door, Ninja begins to chaotically thump and scream, demanding entry into the bathroom. When he is not granted access, reminiscent of Pistorius, he raises his gun and points it at the door that Yolandi stands directly behind. At the last moment, as his fingers tense on the trigger, Ninja lowers his weapon and then his head in shame. Once he gathers his bearings, he shakes his body to communicate the preposterousness that, even for a second, he considered making a fear-based decision to shoot blindly through a door. Instead, he kicks the door open with his prosthetic legs to find a deeply distressed and hair-hacked Yolandi. Ninja quickly reassures her and picks up the scissors to begin styling Yolandi's once traditional hairstyle into something new—something zef. The pair blissfully reemerge from the bathroom to join the rapturous party crowd. Yolandi, sporting her iconic spikey neo-mullet, begins to dance with an older, poor-looking Afrikaans man who is dressed in a banana suit. He looks similar to the person she saw in the bathroom mirror (Die Antwoord, 2016).

The crowd picks Ninja off the ground and begins to pass him around on his back (Die Antwoord, 2016). As he crowd surfs, Ninja rhythmically thrusts his Cheetah Racer prosthetics towards the sky to the beat of their song. The video for *Banana Brain* ends with Ninja dropping Yolandi off at her parents' home in their gated community. As she runs up the driveway towards her front door, Yolandi comes to halt, and says, "Oh fuck, my hair," realizing her parents will see her startling new zef style. She dashes back to Ninja's car, where he places his banana beanie on her head to conceal her fresh, subversive haircut. With the banana beanie tightly on her head,

Yolandi hustles back indoors to her segregated, colonial reality. The sun begins to rise as she waves goodbye to Ninja (Die Antwoord, 2016).

For those informed of Die Antwoord's origins, art and mandate, this last scene may seem a bit heavy-handed in communicative inference and subtext. Still, not a single media critic who reviewed the video decoded or even recognized the intensely political, very South African message. For the sake of comprehensiveness, this case study will close with a brief parsing of the conclusion of *Banana Brain* (Die Antwoord, 2016).

Using the body and story of Oscar Pistorius as a vehicle to interrogate resonating postcolonial white maliciousness, the scene depicts the ascension of two insulated whites towards a status of divine post-racial, postcolonial becoming and belonging. Yolandi and Ninja tell their story of accomplishing becoming and belonging through shedding their white skin and achieving nonracially informed identities. Audiences watch as Yolandi sees the ugly face of provincial whiteness staring back at her. She sees this reflection at this moment because she is ashamed of her hedonistic behaviour at the party—behaviour which she prejudicially believes will relegate her whiteness to something equivalent to other races, poor and unrefined. Instead of running away from the visage of the poor white Afrikaaner, Ninja guides her to let go of the false white exquisiteness held up by the colonial institution and instead embrace the truth that whiteness is the very same as Blackness or Colouredness—envelop it, make it powerful, and make it unabashed. Make it zef. This message is told through her haircut, and the subsequent joyous reaction to her new style. The pair return to the diverse party with the weight of their shameful race visibly lifted (Die Antwoord, 2016). This communication harkens back to Baudrillard's (2000) simulation theory, which states that modern societies are constructed on falsehoods—a simulation of a nonexistent reality overwhelmed by signs and symbols that

function to hide the fact that experience, meaning, and ideology have no basis in truth; instead, individuals live in an objective hyperreality. “When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a plethora of myths of origin and of signs of reality—a plethora of truth, of secondary objectivity, and authenticity” (Baudrillard, 2000, p. 83).

In *Banana Brain* (Die Antwoord, 2016), I argue that Ninja and Yolandi aim to subvert these signs and symbols to discover and display truth through their own signs and symbols, such as constructing rich, transgressive connotative meaning for a specific hairstyle. Once again, simulation is not only the loss of reality but also its very possibility. In facing an objective, unintelligible, problematic, and powerful hyperreality created through colonialism, the task is clear for Die Antwoord: through their conceptual art, they must make that world even more unintelligible, even more enigmatic (Smit, 2015, p. 3). And they do so by using objective culture as a found object to renegotiate. As seen in *Banana Brain*, they subvert objective hyperreal ideological conceptions of South African identity and strategically destabilize the desire for the objective real through the creation of their own zef reality (Die Antwoord, 2016).

Smit (2015) wrote that Die Antwoord do not present audiences with a representation of politics, but instead, with a politics of perception:

They are disinvested in an objective or rational world; rather they work within a simulated world, where they are attached to the world of appearances. Die Antwoord’s strategy is not subtle and they push this simulated world of zef appearances to its nth degree. This rap outfit gives you more, but more than more, by supplanting signs of the “real” as their real. They abuse the rules of simulation and do not attempt to simulate an objective reality, but to create their very own. (p. 8)

Smit (2015) continued:

So, in their own unsubtle and unstable manner, they cross into opacity—into a form which seems to lack coherence or meaning. But as Baudrillard observes, we are never identical or present to ourselves, and that the impossibility of reducing the meaning making process, is to embrace a “radical alterity” Die Antwoord is an embrace of alterity and the confusion and discomfort that exist within the notion of difference. (pp. 8–9)

The *Banana Brain* video (Die Antwoord, 2016) is essentially telling audiences the story of how they achieved their very own reality—remnant colonial ideals are drugged to sleep, a new free will and autonomy are established, the apartheid ugliness of their whiteness is wrestled with, accepted then renegotiated and expressed with new cartoonish and culturally distinguishable signs and symbols. Yolandi and Ninja have become part of a their own zef reality even if they continue to traverse a contemporary world established through an inauthentic colonial hyperreality. In *Banana Brain*, they use signs of whiteness and transform these symbols into a new whiteness, a noncolonial whiteness, rendering themselves white as the “other” and unhinged from South Africa’s racially composed landscape. Both the banana beanie and the title of the song are meant to represent the ludicrousness of colonial hyperreality and the joke that is the veneer of sophisticated whiteness. Recall that Yolandi puts on the beanie as she simultaneously reenters her parents gated home and the objective world of colonial appearances (Die Antwoord, 2016).

On Die Antwoord’s song “Hey Sexy” (Die Antwoord—Topic, 2021a), Ninja rapped, “In my own zone, my sweet reality, Got fuckall to do wif yor bleak reality, in souf afrika I’m da boss of da game, In da overseaz shit’s like fuckin insane” (0:44), which is adequately representative of both Die Antwoord’s Western reception and their Baudrillardian, hyperreal, postmodern philosophy. A theme in *Banana Brain* which is also evident in the preceding and concluding case

studies (and through most of their work), is the notion that they are able to become and belong in very short order and through no more than their own reconceptualization. In other words, they have designated themselves as the sole arbiters to realize the synapse and achieve the status to be ‘truly’ amongst. Once again, this is another example of the inherently insulated, entitled and utterly faulty logic that has been surveyed all throughout this analysis.

Umshini Wam: More Real Than Real, More Human Than Human

In 2012, Die Antwoord released a 16-minute short film titled *Umshini Wam* (VICE, 2012), written and directed by Harmony Korine, who was once heralded as a child prodigy for his raw and uncensored depiction of vagrant and explorative New York City teens in the film *Kids*, Ohio trailer park ‘white trash’ in *Gummo*, and the ephemeral recklessness of partying college students in *Spring Breakers*. Given that Korine’s curiosities almost impeccably dovetail with those of Die Antwoord, it is no surprise that they collaborated on a film project.

Umshini Wam (VICE, 2012) has been chosen as the final case study because of all Die Antwoord content, it most distinctly denotes Die Antwoord’s perception of what life is like for a young white person in post-apartheid South Africa. This is again a lesser-known creation from the group, as the film has only 6.3 million views, a number which pales in comparison to some of their more popular conceptions. Despite its relative unpopularity, this film richly captures and distills so many of perspectives, theories and themes that have formulated the thrust of this analysis

Perhaps less relevant to the focus of this analysis, but worth noting, is that this film came out only shortly after Die Antwoord had arrived in America, meaning *Umshini Wam* (VICE, 2012) was produced and released at a moment when they were still many hipsters’ and industry stalwarts’ newest crushes. At this time, they very much remained as a confusing but compelling

mystery for their audiences. Seemingly, this film was released at a moment when they remained true to their esoteric South African mandate and before they realized any comfort in their newfound fame. And while there is no way to prove the hypothesis (beyond perhaps asking the unreliable members of Die Antwoord themselves), it would be a reasonable to understand *Umshini Wam* as a production which occurred at an ephemeral junction of their career when they first had access to Western industry resources but were still making their art for exclusively their South African context, meaning the film was created when they still felt overwhelmed and imprisoned, justifiably or not, by their lives in South Africa.

Umshini Wam is the story of two homeless, Pokemon suit wearing, wheelchair using, South African rap enthusiast loners, (Ninja and Yolandi), who are desperate to upgrade their decrepit wheelchairs (VICE, 2012). The characters view new chairs as an avenue to achieve the respect of their compatriot peers. The film begins with a voiceover monologue from Yolandi, in which she asserted:

Now listen to me fucking nicely, Ninja. We need to stop fucking around, yeah. It's time to step up our fucking game, my bru. It's time to get the fucking respect we deserve on the streets. I don't want to roll around like a fucking drowning rat for the rest of my life. It's time for some action, my bru. It's now or fucking never, Ninja. If you want to be next level, we need to fucking roll next level. Nothing is fucking happening for us, 'cause look how we're fucking rolling. No one takes us seriously, and I'm fucking sick of it. We need to keep it gangster, my bru. We need to fucking make a movie, or we're fucked. It's time to bump up the fucking bass and take the shit to the next. Fuck everyone. Seriously, Ninja, fuck everyone. Let's do this, my bru; let's fucking do this. Fucking lazy ass. Get up. Get up, Ninja. (0:25)

“Umshini wam,” which translates from Zulu to “bring me my machine gun,” was a popular song used by the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC) during its struggle against apartheid (Young, 2016). The song articulated the message for Black liberation and justice at any cost. To this day, it has continued to function as an empowering chant for followers of the ANC, thanks in large part to ex South African President Jacob Zuma’s continuing use of the song at his political rallies. The song was so popular that in 2006, it was made available as a cellular phone ringtone on the ANC’s defence website (Young, 2016, p. 115). In 2008, Zuma had to publicly express his disappointment that the song was being used by xenophobic mobs who were responsible for the murder of several migrants (Young, 2016). Die Antwoord’s appropriation of the song title for their first professionally produced short film is significant because it communicates their belief that they are in a racial struggle themselves, one which they need to escape using all means necessary. It is also essential to consider that innately, the song itself is an overt and violent threat to colonial whiteness through artistic communication. Before continuing any further, it is important to call attention to what will become obvious – that Die Antwoord and Korine equating disability with deficit as metaphor is a highly offensive and deeply ignorant tactic and one which again illustrates Die Antwoord’s shameless negligence towards understanding the lives of others, all while still feeling entitled to appropriate experience for their own gain.

Throughout the film, Ninja and Yolandi roll around what is meant to be suburban South Africa but looks to have been shot in a suburb of working-class California (VICE, 2012). They sleep, freestyle rap, shoot their machine guns, and smoke weed in the forest. Ninja’s character in the film repeatedly and haphazardly keeps falling to the ground, becoming totally despondent in a state of deep depression over his apparent idle existence. The only thing that keeps him alive is

Yolandi's encouragement to not to give up for no other reason than she needs him to survive herself. Both the wheelchairs and Ninja's despondency are commentary on the group's sentiment that they live in a state of purgatory where they have been impeded, disadvantaged, and bestowed as unnecessary. This has rendered Ninja completely woebegone. His identity and lack of community has made the world feel inhabitable and so he aims to check out.

Particularly discordant for Ninja is that he has grand and meaningful intentions to make it in the rap industry, but no one takes him or Yolandi seriously based on the deteriorating wheelchairs which they very problematically use as metaphor of their white skin. Through the video (VICE, 2012), Yolandi attempts to combat Ninja's cultural agony, but he becomes more and more disconsolate. It is not until Ninja scavenges some shiny red ribbon from a filthy old dumpster that he displays any vitality or energy. He ties the ribbon to his fingers and then asks Yolandi to check out his 'bling' before vigorously moving his hands to the rhythm of his own beatboxing. Yolandi demands that Ninja give her one of his new rings. This is Die Antwoord's storytelling of the zef adage coming to life: a person can make something meaningful, powerful, and appealing, even if that something comes from the trash – all that is required is a reconceptualization. The denotation of signs, jewelry in this case, are easily manipulated, meaning that reality—which has been forged on such symbols—is pliable. While admiring his new rings, Ninja says aloud, “Zef to death” (VICE, 2012, 7:08).

Following this moment of transcendence, the now more confident duo is seen sitting on a park bench (VICE, 2012). While on the bench, they spend some time encouraging each other, for what is going to be a reality transforming mission to take what they feel is theirs. Soon after, they arrive at a posh home and the knock on the door. A stereotypical mustached, khaki short–

sporting, stern-looking, middle-aged, non-disabled Boer man answers. “You here to check the wheelchairs?” he asks Yolandi and Ninja in suspicious cadence.

They head to the garage, which is opened to reveal two luxurious new electric chairs with helium balloons attached to the back of them. Ninja and Yolandi unsuccessfully attempt to conceal their excitement. The rich Boer begins his sale pitch in a thick Afrikaaner accent:

So these are the wheelchairs. They’re the ultimate in wheelchairs. Pure leather seats.

Wide rims, spoked mag wheels. Even got seat belts. Ground footrests. Arm rests. Heated arm rests. Got a hooter and power steering. This thing is so tight it can turn on a ticket.

And fast! And the ride is smooth, like a Rolls Royce. In fact, this is the Rolls Royce of wheelchairs. But very expensive.

Yolandi proceeds to ask how much they cost. The following dialogue unfolds:

“Poppy, maybe a little too expensive for people like you.”

“What do you mean, ‘People like us?’ Fuck you, wormy!” responds Yolandi as she and Ninja pull out their machine guns, preparing to take what they feel they are entitled to and by any means necessary.

“No. Fuck you,” says the Boer. “You’re a waste of a white skin. White kaffirs.” (VICE, 2012, 9:40–9:44)

Yolandi and Ninja close their eyes and pull their triggers, killing the man before stealing the swank wheelchairs from his garage (VICE, 2012). As is the case with most things Die Antwoord, this scene is rich in chaotic, symbolic and, I argue, deliberate messaging. The extravagant electric wheelchairs, as described by the racist Boer, represents the still-present opportunity for whites—despite the deterioration of apartheid and in spite of the inconceivable damage they have caused to other races—to not only continue to wield power, but to coast within

a lavish post-apartheid space. And although, according to Die Antwoord, liberal whites may be perpetually bound to trekking their national realities in a wheelchair (an ignorantly perceived affliction by Die Antwoord and Korine) due to the baggage of their colonial history, the extravagant chairs, if one has access to them, offer a form of impunity through their potential to nurture a more vital life.

The Boer quickly and impudently distinguishes that Ninja and Yolandi, in their beat-up old chairs, do not belong to his class of non-disabled whites—the whites who possess the means to acquire such privilege and profligacy. Instead, as poor liberal whites, Die Antwoord are explaining to their audiences that they must bear the weight of apartheid consequence, with no paved, or even visible road ahead of them to travel on towards a brighter future. They certainly do not have the means to acquire a vehicle equipped to navigate what they view as such rugged cultural terrain.

The Boer gazes at the whites in front of him with utter disgust. Not only do Ninja and Yolandi not meet his class standards, but their very existence as unrefined, unproud whites threaten his fragile ideology of white purity. If these ugly, poor, crass whites exist in the same world as him, then the myth of angelic whiteness upon which he has built his unabridged comprehension of himself and his reality is revealed as mythmaking. This possibility is simply too much. Feeling so disgusted and so jeopardized, he bares his thinly veiled racism and declares the pair as a “waste of white skin” (VICE, 2012, 9:40). He cannot square that he belongs to the same race as the duo before him, so he relegates them to what he believes are lower categories of people—Blacks. The Boer’s entire conceptual beingness hinges on this very moment and the power of his cognitive dissonance is revealed as he impulsively recategorizes the people before

him to fit within his doctrine of human hierarchy. In a telling play of cowardice, desperation, and hate, he calls Die Antwoord “white kaffirs,” the vile and racist Afrikaans term for Blacks.

By murdering the Boer, I maintain Die Antwoord are depicting a few of the steps they feel are required before becoming zef. First, they are unmasking and slaying the dragon of persistent white power in a colonized nation. The Boer represents the privileged and hate-filled model of the racist white South African that has persisted and thrived long after the fall of apartheid, holding, in Die Antwoord’s perspective, well-intentioned and often feckless whites back. Second, they intend to exterminate race stratification. Die Antwoord yearns for their audience to understand, as they believe they do, that the idea to raise oneself above another based on race or class is utterly false and exponentially detrimental to attaining a genuinely democratic space.

The violence of this scene (the fatal use of machine guns) communicates that the hateful but mighty ideology of colonialism must be exterminated with any means necessary. Apartheid continues, so just like the Mandela-led revolution 30 years prior, Die Antwoord believe that machine guns are required. As Ninja and Yolandi roll away from the crime scene in their new electric chairs, which they suppose they will use for democratic good and will assist them in their process of becoming, and eventually belonging, they laugh and celebrate their victory (VICE, 2012). They are off to their next destination, and now they have a taste for blood.

The next stop for Yolandi and Ninja is a car accessories shop. Upon arrival they ask the clerk if they have “hologram mags” for their wheelchairs (VICE, 2012). When the man responds, “Yes, we have everything,” they gun him down without hesitation. As they apply their new hologram wheels to their wheelchairs, Ninja’s mags feature a glowing alien head and Yolandi’s feature a glowing marijuana plant, they both make fun of the Boer’s posh Afrikaans accent

through impersonation— “Rrrrrlllllss Rrrroyceee,” repeats a giggling Yolandi. The pair shoot their machine guns into the sky as they drive off into the night.

Before the short film ends, Yolandi and Ninja talk quietly while lying on the street in shabby-looking sleeping bags. They are looking up at the stars as they try to fall asleep, when Ninja mutters:

I once had this fucking dream. A dream that I was like the greatest rapper in the whole fucking world. Like in the whole fucking universe, actually. And like I drove through the hood, my electric wheelchair. I got grand rims and shit, like beats bumping off your fucking face. Everyone would know me. Like, everyone would love me and shit. (VICE, 2012, 12:19)

Before I dissect these ruminations from Ninja, I evoke the relevant passage from Krog’s (2012a) book *Begging to be Black*, in which she asked the white respondent about the personal evolution to which she aspires. Invoking the passage allows a deeper understanding of Ninja’s desperate dream of becoming and then acceptance and belonging from his fellow South Africans:

Krog: But are you saying: because you lived in this apartheid bubble which tried to keep itself whites-only and Western, that this has stunted your own changing and becoming?

Respondent: Yes. So, I am not necessarily interested in African philosophy versus Western philosophy, but rather in what kind of self I should grow into in order to live a caring, useful and informed life—a “good life”—within my country in southern Africa.

Krog: Are you talking about a kind of entanglement?

Respondent: No. It’s not about mingling, or the entanglement of roots, but how one root can become or link to another. A synapse.

Krog: Perhaps that is the word. (Krog, 2012a, p. 95)

If Ninja's abundant cursing is disregarded, his introspective speech aligns almost precisely with Krog's (2012a) white respondent. By stating that he wishes he could venture through Black and Coloured neighborhoods, acting Black, listening loudly to Black music, and that they would know, love, and accept him, Ninja is also after a racial and cultural synapse into a form of Ubuntu intersubjectivity.

Through eccentric usage of simulation and symbols such as their hologram rims, peculiar haircuts, and hand-poked tattoos, they believe they are overriding the invisibility which white people in South Africa have thrived on for so long. Through these actions, Die Antwoord hope to verify to these communities, by being more real than real, that they have become one of them; that they belong with and amongst them. After all, their model of zef identity encompasses the mores and customs of those groups they want to join and navigate. I argue that Die Antwoord presume that, just like these groups, despite being poor (not an actuality) and looked down upon, they too are also persecuted, creative, strong, rebellious, and most of all, authentic. In the fictional *Umshini Wam*, Die Antwoord have *taken* respect against all odds and in doing so, believe they threaten colonial power structures that conservative whites, such as the Boer, fight so hard to uphold (VICE, 2012).

Yolandi responded to Ninja's fantasy by stating, "That's fucking gangster, my bru," and then cautiously cogitated, "I think that God's forgiven us." Ninja replied, "Yeah, God's a good guy. Don't worry, everything's going to be fine." Yolandi then tries to convince Ninja to not fall asleep, because she was not yet ready to call it a day (VICE, 2012, 12:53). The film ends with a shot of the two souped-up wheelchairs and the loud sound of machine gun shots (VICE, 2012).

The final exchange in the film is especially poignant because it at least somewhat proposes that Die Antwoord contemplate the righteousness and virtue of "becoming the enemy."

By warily stating that she thinks God has forgiven them, Yolandi was acknowledging that their tactics towards zefness warranted being forgiven. Through this admission, they recognized that by claiming their postcolonial identity through any means necessary, they are engaging in immoral behaviour. Ninja's response that "God is a good guy" (VICE, 2012, 12:55) indicates that God understands the larger stakes: God knows that the democratic end justifies the violent and unsavory means—the means being their embrace of antagonism. And perhaps in the minds of Ninja and Yolandi, God forgives them for, in their becoming, appropriating from others to superficially disempower a particular category of people. Furthermore, they feel entitled to autonomously declare to the world their status of belonging without nurturing any authentic alliance.

Chapter 6: The Immorality of Die Antwoord and the Central Role of Cape Flats Coloured Culture in The Answer

In the preceding chapter, I examined three examples of Die Antwoord content to clearly display the group's intentional artistic production and communication and to lay bare their perspectives and ambitions of South African becoming and belonging. Through this interrogation, Die Antwoord's entitlement and insulation was further revealed. This chapter will be dedicated to broadening the understanding of Die Antwoord's arrogance and prejudice by further analyzing their intentions and implementations. In doing so, the racist and egotistical soul of their regressive gospel of zefdom will be exposed as a hypocritical ideology that has made Die Antwoord very rich and famous while simultaneously causing considerable damage to many, particularly the most vulnerable. Consequently, Die Antwoord are to be best understood as influential agents of colonial solidification.

As has been displayed, Die Antwoord claim to be striving towards some conception of a raceless utopia by overriding the (ongoing) separate worlds of Blacks and whites through their zef journey. Yet this quest is undeniably complex and perhaps even impossible. If the ultimate goal is harmony, Blacks and Coloured people must also want to tear down social structures to let whites in; but why would they? What has whiteness done to cultivate trust after centuries of violent betrayal? When Die Antwoord appropriate their culture and wish to become and belong with Blacks and Coloureds it is a zero-sum negotiation. Simply, they are doing it for their own social and emotional benefit. They take and they profit, and in doing so, prove and further fortify the colonial invulnerability of whiteness. I maintain that they believe they are partaking in some righteous cosmic quest of love, community and colonial subversion through an egocentric act of signs and song is another clear exposure of monumental white insulation,

entitlement, and privilege. That their ardent fan base can partake in this colonial zef journey and not have to be aware of what has been stifled and taken by whiteness is further validation of the dynamism of racial hegemony.

If looked at closely, *Umshini Wam* (VICE, 2012) promptly denotes the contradictions of the zef ideology in several ways. Yes, they murdered the evil Boer and took his wheelchairs, but that expeditious transfer of power went from one white to two others. Given the Boer's racism, would a less powerful person of Colour even be afforded the chance to look at these wheelchairs? Likely not. Die Antwoord's mostly self-imagined racial struggle is in no way or form anything equal to the struggle of Black apartheid liberation (as they suggest by naming their film *Umshini Wam*) and no amount of self-reflection and collaboration has occurred for them to arrive at any Ubuntu belonging or becoming to community. Instead, Die Antwoord saw what they desired—Black acceptance, Black culture, and street authenticity—and they snatched this validation from another white person (much as they are doing with their nearly all white fanbase) that they self-righteously killed to pave an avenue for them to smoothly roll forward. The film depicts them taking a shortcut to maintain their white power and forging a new and improved authoritative white identity that, in their minds, allows them to criss-cross through cultures taking what they want; all while feeling conceptually fulfilled and comfortable without having relinquished any privilege or achieving any equitable bonds or coalition, as Ndebele (2011) rightfully demanded. Die Antwoord have not put themselves at any cultural risk, nor have they come out from under the umbrella of whiteness to repudiate it. They do not share the vulnerability of compatriot bodies, and their storytelling in *Ushimi Wam* and beyond consistently exposes them as having completely self-righteous incorrect and distorted views of race and culture in South Africa and beyond. Despite this core deficiency, they have become rich, famous

and powerful, instructively serving their model of unconfined whiteness to the masses. Additionally, audiences should not forget that the group is only acting within its manufactured model of zefness (poor whiteness) while engaged in their artistic communication performance. They are not poor and their struggle, contextual to South Africa, is limited. They may not be afforded the cultural validation they feel they deserve, but there exist many structural reasons for this reality. Die Antwoord have tried to do the theoretically impossible: that is, to truncate their way to becoming and belonging, and thus their journey towards Ubuntu was corrupted from the very start. I argue that the conclusion of *Ushimi Wam* makes clear that based on what they feel has been an arduous racial reckoning, Die Antwoord feel they have earned the right to appropriate from other South African cultures, and justify this behaviour by claiming a false utopian ideology which sanctions them to become and to talk Black. That is the true gospel of zef. As their success has proven, they have been afforded the ability to blatantly steal and monetize such cultures thanks to the retained global potency of their white skin—all while effectively diverting attention from ongoing white racism, colonial power structures and systems, and the daily hardships and indignities caused by whites endured daily by people of colour.

Die Antwoord serve as a reminder that whiteness continues its colonial function as the golden passport for cultural, financial, and creative privilege and ascendancy as colonialism continues. By operationalizing the culture of others, the group is fortifying themselves as the invisible baseline for all other races (see Frankenberg, 2004), serving the very much intact borderless colonial empire. Die Antwoord's behaviours offer verification that a continued mistrust of whiteness in South Africa and abroad is warranted.

As raised consistently throughout this thesis, within South Africa, Die Antwoord are often received with great contempt. Much of this disdain centres on the fact that the group is arguably

the country's most popular export, who purposefully look to embarrass their nation. Examples can be read in popular articles from the national tabloid *News 24*, which has featured stories entitled “Die Antwoord’s Ninja ‘Is Pure Evil’” (Channel24, 2014), “Die Antwoord—National Embarrassment” (as cited in Jagernauth, 2015, para. 3), and “Die Antwoord—South Africa’s Worst Nightmare” (as cited in Jagernauth, 2015, para. 3) over recent years. But also, more deliberate scorn has been directed at the group by a select few South African journalists and academics, many of whom have penned journal articles and think pieces lambasting the group as disgraceful, exploitative, and vigorously racist (Haupt, 2012a, p. 1). Upon the release of Die Antwoord’s 2012 video *Fatty Boom Boom* (Noisey, 2012), which saw Yolandi dressed in glossy head-to-toe black paint, Haupt (2012a) wrote in *The Guardian & Mail*:

This video is not so different from *Enter the Ninja*, only this time they go beyond the appropriation of black dialects and prison gang tattoos and literally blacken up. Is it offensive? This depends on whether you believe that the perpetuation of racial stereotypes and rubbing salt in the wound of racialized class inequities in a supposedly democratic South Africa is a problem. Personally, I am troubled by the ways in which these decontextualized, distorted and racist representations will be taken up globally. (p. para. 10)

Haupt (2012a) also cited Ninja’s remarks in a 2010 American interview in which he claimed: “God made a mistake with me. I’m actually black, trapped in a white body” (p. 87). Haupt (2012a) argued that these words are consistent with many of the group’s storytelling and lyrics, including in their song “Never le Nkemise”: “Ninja, die wit kaffir/Ja, julle naaiers/Skrik wakker,” which translates to “Ninja, the white kaffir/Yes, you fuckers/Wake up” (Die Antwoord—Topic, 2021b, 1:15). Haupt (2012a) noted that, regardless of whether Ninja is being

conceptually ironic or postmodern in his communication and performances, he is objectively reproducing racially problematic language that signals white, racist projections of Blackness even if it is an articulation of some distorted attempt towards becoming and belonging. Haupt (2012a) reminded audiences of the massively uneven power differentials that continue to exist through the historical production of imperialism and colonial domination in post-apartheid South Africa and questions these resonate power interactions in relation to marginal communities' contribution to cultural expression on a global scale. He asked:

What does it mean, for example, to borrow from the cultures of more vulnerable social groups? What forms of accreditation and recompense are ethically desirable when engaging in such borrowing? These questions are important in any consideration of modern music because, for a variety of social and historical reasons, including the denial of literacy to slave populations, relatively dispossessed peoples have had a proportionately large influence on global popular music. (Haupt, 2012a, p. 100)

Ninja has a long history of stealing from a variety of South African cultures that face continuing histories of oppression. Bearing this context in mind, in the following and final paragraphs of this paper I examine Die Antwoord's attempted shortcut towards becoming and belonging through unapologetic cultural poaching and confabulation from the people they most incessantly steal and appropriate from: Coloured, unimaginably poor, gang-affiliated boys and men who live in the townships of the Cape Flats. Ninja insolently rapped in "Fish Paste," on the group's first album, *\$O\$*, "I am a fuckin' Coloured, cos I am a fuckin' Coloured. If I want to be a Coloured. Hoss. My inner fuckin' Coloured just wants to be discovered" (Colorful Collective, 2010, 1:33).

Expressions of Cape Flats gang culture are ubiquitously rendered throughout the performance of Ninja, in language, accent, clothing, and music style. Ninja's appropriation is most explicit through the copious tattoos that mark his body. For instance, Ninja's most infamous tattoo, the phrase "Pretty Wise" inked on his neck, translates in Afrikaans to *raak wys*. It alludes to a common phrase used by the Coloured western Cape-based gang The Americans that instructs an individual to become streetwise and/or get with the program (Haupt, 2012c, p. 111). In fact, this specific tattoo, in design and placement, is a direct copy of a Coloured man named Erefaan Jacobs, who was featured in an obscure early 2000s South African cable television documentary about Pollsmoor Prison, which Ninja must have certainly watched at some point in his personal history (MarvelousMarkAVP, 2007, 4:35).

In a body aesthetic which is quite obviously an imitation of the makeshift prison tattoos so prevalent in Cape Flats gang culture, Ninja attempts to overwhelm his white skin (as discussed, a purposeful tactic) by crude tattoos of typical and meaningful iconography. From a distance, it is clear to see why Die Antwoord chose to steal and employ the distinct and evocative facets of this particular enclave in their communication to their fans and audiences.

As mentioned, "Coloureds" is used as a catchall term for any South African of mixed heritage, and thus they wholly personify the harmonious conceptualization of the Rainbow Nation—a paradigm which the group has ironically embraced and employed in their messaging. Die Antwoord, whose introductory message in *Enter the Ninja* was a listing of races and peoples ("fucked into one person") all of which they claim to embody as a representation of South Africa (DieAntwoordVEVO, 2010), doubtlessly perceives Colouredness as the incarnation of South African racial, cultural, and religious diversity. The Cape Flats gangster archetype also conveniently provides Ninja with an identity that pragmatically projects a particular model of

highly aestheticized African poverty for his international persona in a musical genre that often demands the street-hardened authenticity that Die Antwoord is so desperate to capture and embody. As presented throughout this analysis, Haupt (2012a) and others have argued that Die Antwoord's international success, all while wielding a paradigm of Cape Flats culture to demonstrate their own authenticity, creativity, and subcultural coolness, is yet another example in white South Africa's long history of dismissing and exploiting the lives, rights, and dignity of Coloured people.

Their endeavoured shortcut to becoming and belonging without paying mind to the voices and experiences of others and by stealing from Coloured (and Black) people has (tragically) paid off for Die Antwoord. In their personal racial reckoning, instead of doing meaningful or constructive work and putting forth meaningful reflection, renegotiation, and collaboration towards alliance, Die Antwoord (who are undeniably intelligent and socially aware people) have uncritically donned blackface costumes. Ambiguously declaring that one has "become the enemy" (by exposing racial injustice), is not an earnest rationale. In fact, it is a self-celebratory justification for their ongoing performance of false sacrifice and agony while solidifying white power by continuing to pulverize the other. Die Antwoord are private-school-attending white people from middle class backgrounds who believe they are being persecuted, and so they pilfer from the bleakness of gang-ridden township life faced by Coloured young men and boys for their own gain. Concurrently, they religiously trust their personal arrogant and insulated mythmaking about their own becoming and belonging and thus believe they are entitled to anything from anyone in their self-perceived grand quest as the administrative torchbearers of racial harmony.

By providing an abbreviated historical discussion on Coloured township lives and culture, I hope that readers (particularly their fans from the West) will be reminded of the unrelenting indifference and white nepotism that continue to exist in an unjust colonial world. I also aspire to widen understanding of the vapidness and extreme insulation of white “exquisite agony” and unravel the unfluctuating egomaniacal nature of Die Antwoord’s rise to fame (or infamy) by appropriating from one of the world’s most persecuted peoples.

Coloured Culture and Die Antwoord’s Appropriation

Likely understood by the members of Die Antwoord, often lost in the narrative of a Black and white duality is the story and place of South Africa’s Coloured peoples. *Coloured* is a longstanding, official, racially defined designation by the South African government for those of mixed heritage (a common phenomenon in colonized regions), with hybrid roots of Black, South Asian, and white. According to a 2011 census, Coloured people made up the same amount of the country’s population as whites—8.9% (South Africa Gateway, 2018). Coloured people are genealogically and religiously diverse and have faced some of South Africa’s harshest racist regulations which, systemically, they still suffer from long after the fall of apartheid. Due to their mosaic genealogy in a country that long suffered from the rule of racist British imperialism, Coloured people have endured an extensive history of torment. This anguish predates apartheid by centuries, was augmented and reinforced during the apartheid era (1948–1994) and continues today in post-apartheid South Africa. Coloured people are also up against the prominent and ambidextrous racism directed towards interracial people. Early apartheid ideologue Cronje (1947, as cited in Steinberg, 2010) referred to racial mixing as a degenerate disease and stated that the very existence of Coloureds was a cruel reminder that the founding fathers of the Afrikaaner volk had practiced widespread miscegenation, that the volk had been contaminated at

its very roots. Other ideologues saw Coloureds as sympathetic beings—lost between Black tribalism and white civilization (Steinberg, 2010b, p. 120). Cronje called Coloureds *n kultuurlose massa*—a cultureless mass—that had been swallowed up by the process of Westernization (as cited in Steinberg, 2010b, p. 120). These sentiments persist today.

For centuries, South Africa’s Coloured population “experienced enslavement, dispossession, genocidal extermination and apartheid degradation” (Trotter, as cited in Adhikari, 2009, p. 49). Of note, Trotter (2009) has written that although the historical experience of the Coloured population has been fraught with difficulty, generally, Coloured people are not heavily invested in this remote past. Instead, Trotter (2002) suggested (alongside other scholars) that the Coloured community suffers from a type of historical amnesia (p. 49), but only to a point. Rather, it is the horrors of apartheid that weigh exceedingly heavily on the collective mindset of Coloured people. “Most Coloured Capetonians instead focus upon a painful experience within living memory: the forced eviction of 150,000 Coloured people from their natal homes and communities in the Cape Peninsula between 1957 and 1985” (Trotter, 2002, p. 49). This segregation was legislated under the Group Areas Act, which was enforced by the authors of apartheid, the governing white supremacist National Party that ruled South Africa from 1948–1994.

Needless to explain, poverty and oppression go hand in hand with crime. In 2012, the West Cape’s government estimated there existed approximately 130 separate gangs comprising nearly 100,000 members in the province. In Goga et al.’s (2014) article “A Network of Violence: Mapping a Criminal Gang Network in Cape Town,” the authors resolved that 39% of gang members were of violent coercion (p. 19). The Americans and gangs cut from a similar ilk have been spreading throughout South Africa for decades but, as *The Economist* (2012) put it,

They are particularly virulent in the Western Cape. They first appeared as a result of the apartheid government's forced removals of Cape Town's Coloureds, as South Africans of mixed race are called, from their old districts near the city centre to townships in the Cape Flats. (para. 5)

Die Antwoord's lucrative wielding of the racist gangster paradigm in their parody is yet another example of Coloured people's long history of being forgotten or neglected in favour of those with white skin. Around the world, the realities of poverty for boys and young men almost always include isolation, shame, crime, high incarceration, and absentee fathers. The reflexive responses, as these disenfranchised young men slog along on an elusive search for identity, are typically performances of hyper-masculinity and extensive gang involvement and activity. South African author Pinnock (2016) explained in his book on the Cape Flats, *Gang Town*, that

boys everywhere have a need for rituals marking their passage to manhood. If society does not provide them, they will inevitably invent their own. In much adolescent gang action, can be sensed a certain naive wildness, an unplanned theatricality, which seems to place more value on ritualistic performance than on the apparent goals of the action.

There are initiations, dares and improbable tasks. To understand this, we have to remember something important about our own adolescence: young teenagers, above all else, are mythmakers. (p. 20)

The visual results of this mythmaking in the Cape Flats are highly refined body and clothing aesthetics informed by American media intending to connote vitality, hardness and gang affiliations which can be necessary for survival. Gold and missing front teeth, many gang-related tattoos, street names, and American clothing are all bold signifiers of masculinity within the Cape Flats that signal the inner turmoil for those living with profound hardships in their quest for

dignity (Jensen, 2008, p. 4). All of these elements are predominant features of Watkin Tudor Jones's Ninja character.

For many inside South Africa but outside of the townships of the Cape Flats, these symbols signal the racist stereotype of the skollie. Pinnock (2016) traced the origins of the term to discover that it comes from the old Dutch *schoelje*, meaning scavenger or scoundrel:

Dutch sailors, so the tradition goes, shouted *schoelje* at the seagulls which swooped to snatch up ship kitchen detritus from the waters of Table Bay. The name came to be used for vagrants who picked at city refuse dumps or begged on the streets and, generally, for troublemakers. Skollies were considered by residents of District Six to be people from "outside" the area. (p. 299)

Due to the dovetailing of poverty and crime, skollie has more recently come to infer thuggishness and violence.

Jensen (2008), senior researcher with the Rehabilitation and Research Centre for Torture Victims in Copenhagen and research affiliate with the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research in Johannesburg, explained the power of the skollie construct by referencing Hall (2001) who defined a stereotype as the reduction of someone to a few essential characteristics and then to exaggerate and simplify them by stating they have no hope for development (p. 258). So authoritative is the skollie model, Jensen explained, that it has become a governmental category. Colonial and apartheid governments defined and named the skollie in particular ways; they did not invent him, nor was he the prime motive behind interventions with regard to Cape Town's Coloured lower class. However, successive governments took the skollie and made him real, or objectified him, in ways that allowed intervention. In the eyes of the government, he destabilized families and committed crimes, was unemployable, and threatened white

populations. The calculated production of identities was a sinister and sadly efficient method of the apartheid government. Jensen wrote:

When the regime forcibly removed thousands of Coloureds from the inner city, it also produced coloured spaces; when it put generations of men behind bars, it produced a particular form of delinquency; when it removed children from their parents and put them into foster care and reformaties, it promoted certain forms of morality. (2008, p. 5)

This form of world-shaping colonial dominance suppresses populations at a nuclear level by determining who has dignity, who has value, and who is moral or immoral. Thus, the skollie construct was manufactured and deployed as a biological threat. The shrewd categorization of peoples in South Africa is key to understanding the ongoing post-apartheid hegemony. While the overt bureaucratic tools to enforce the removal or oppression of people based on the colour of their skin no longer exists, categorizations such as the stereotype of the skollie as an evil, biologically compromised entity maintain their potency to reify colonial dominance and animate understandings that strip people of their dignity. Not only in the ways they are treated in the external world, but also how they coerce core internalizations that contaminate one's soul.

In *Gang Town*, a book on the Coloured gangs of the Cape Flats, Pinnock (2016) is taken aback by the hostility towards the manufactured concept of the skollie. He encountered this viciousness from whites and Blacks in his interviews. Here is a response he received when asking about young Coloured men connected to gangs:

I don't know what you can do—except maybe Nazi-style line them up and shoot them. But that's not in the law... even the public think sentences are too soft. You should remove skollies from society to solve the problem. But then where would you put them? Perhaps you could send them to help Britain in the Falklands! But I say you cannot solve

the problem according to the law.... You need to drag them in here and give them all hangpaal [death sentences]; you need public hanging or something. (as cited in Pinnock, 2016, p. 71)

Jensen (2008) received a similar response from a Cape Town police officer he interviewed while writing *Gangs, Politics & Dignity in Cape Town*, Jensen (2008): “The townships are full of skollies and if they want to kill each other, they should just go ahead and do it. Here people live like cockroaches and they breed like cockroaches” (p. 92).

How are these persecuted young men meant to thrive when these widely accepted stereotypes strip them of their agency? There is little social opportunity, and so, once of their responses to intergenerational and systemic destitution is the development of their own distinct aesthetic that communicates a necessary hardship for the very hard world they face every day. The very aesthetic Ninja has harvested for zef for his own profit.

To once again quote Kozain (as cited in Jason, 2015), “Cultural appropriation captures the un-equal dynamic where originators are ignored and neglected, and the copycats get the fame and money” (para. 12). Die Antwoord’s zef is concomitantly erasing its Coloured originators and perpetuating the white gaze on Coloureds as “other.” Through their postmodern “car crash,” over-the-top, arrogant, and ignorant parody rap, they reinforce the skollie stereotype without themselves actually having to confront or experience the tragic hardship of township life under the shadow of gangs (Haupt, 2012a). Consequently, irrespective of their self-righteous postmodern intentions to relinquish the festering power of whiteness and other racial constructs, Die Antwoord must be understood as contemptible oppressors themselves who intentionally preserve South African white authority. Over and over, the Die Antwoord phenomenon

epitomizes the ongoing, strategically maintained, and incredibly deceptive global power of whiteness.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This analysis of the South African rap group Die Antwoord has demonstrated how white colonialism endures in South Africa and abroad. Additionally, after thoroughly examining white identity, aspirations to become and belong, and how models of whiteness function to reify hegemony through art and communication (overtly and covertly), Die Antwoord should now be understood as an example of the complex versatility of white power in contemporary postcolonial space. In so many ways, the members of the group epitomize much of the discourse in the cultural zeitgeist of the 2020s (so far) and their behaviour as suave communicating individuals who live very online lives. From their false racial virtue signaling to their constant complaints of cancel culture, they have come to represent a very familiar ugliness. In South Africa, they have proved correct many of those who have criticized them from the start – they are racist, they are entitled, and they are illustrative of the ongoing inequities of the country. Meanwhile, in the West, their fandom helps reveal some of the wildly racist and erroneous perceptions of Africa abroad.

Through the 10 years Die Antwoord have enjoyed international fame, I argue that they have proven themselves to be something loathsome and detrimental, yet their superficial intentions to disrupt a fraudulent system are, at least, somewhat and/or ostensibly commendable. Having moulded their very existence into their art, even though their content is objectively and deeply problematic, Ninja, Yolandi, and to a lesser degree, DJ Hi-Tek, are creating artistic communication at its most mystifying and persuasive, and arguably, of the highest order (despite its pitfalls). In Foucault's (1984) final years, as he turned most of his attention towards the ethics of self-governance, he wrote:

What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That Art is something which is specialized, or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life? (p. 350)

Die Antwoord have transformed their lives into something that commands scrutiny. Their living art can remind audiences that reality is contestable, and one's possibilities are expandable. In a Baudrillardian manner, they communicate that "objective" truths are a lie told by the powerful to remain powerful.

In a sense, their ethos of becoming the "enemy" has yielded dividends even if it has occurred in a way they did not intend and despite their cruelty and vanity. Undeniably, Die Antwoord has spurred necessary discussions on the more latent and thus more complicated forms of ongoing white colonialism. The enquiries to which they originally claimed to offer a solution to—"How does South Africa truly move forward from apartheid?" and "How and where do white people fit in South Africa?"—are questions that merit discourse. The racial violence sculpted by apartheid remains in their home country. The quixotic declaration of South Africa as the idealistic Rainbow Nation is absurd and worth the ridicule Die Antwoord provides as they have attempted to pull at the threads of this false utopian narrative with their dystopian postmodern depictions of the abomination of whiteness; whiteness at its most repugnant (but in concert with others). In the end, Die Antwoord did provide an example of whiteness at its most repugnant, but not in the satirical and harmonious way they intended, but inadvertently (and inevitably), in the ignorant and vicious way white colonialism continues to govern the real world.

Assembling a comprehensive and verifiable decrypting of Die Antwoord has been challenging not just because of its scope but because one can never be entirely certain whether Ninja or Yolandi were communicating something they truly felt or if they had some grander artistic objective by making a completely injudicious ‘in-character’ proclamation. Take these quotes from an interview at a music festival in New Zealand (Damolay, 2011) as a final example of the complexity of understanding Die Antwoord. The interviewer asked the duo if racism is still a problem in South Africa:

Ninja: It’s much worse in other places. Racism is like a million times worse in the UK but they, like, don’t talk about it. It’s like a more silent, violent thing. And America is much worse than South Africa. For South Africa, it’s [racism] like that thing was kind of like an 80s thing. It’s like an old thing that’s not really relevant.

Yolandi: It’s like an old-fashioned thing. It’s like not a cool thing anymore. [Yolandi tries to stifle a smile as she says this.]

Ninja: There’s a bit of racism but it’s run by black people towards whites a little bit, but it’s like whatever, it doesn’t matter. But it’s also like the cultures are very merged. When I said I represented all those cultures [referring to his introductory message in “Enter The Ninja”],... I think everyone got all pumped up about that because South Africa is synonymous with racism. Like it used to be until recently.... A funny thing, when you asked people until recently what was the first thing that came to mind would be like apartheid or racism, but now when you ask, they say zef, which is a nice transformation. And when I say I represent all those things, it’s because South Africa is like a merger of all those, when before it was forcibly kept apart. But now it’s all together and it kind of works... in a dysfunctional kind of way... we love it there. (Damolay, 2011, 6:25)

Trying to interpret statements sometimes felt like an impossible task because it was regularly unclear where the Ninja and Yolandi characters end and where Tudor Jones and Du Toit begin.

Does Tudor Jones really believe white people face a racism problem in South Africa, or is he trying to demonstrate through his vulgar Ninja character that white people actually believe they contend with racism, while Black and Coloured people no longer face such prejudice in post-apartheid South Africa? Does Du Toit truly think racism in her home country is worth joking about it, or is flippantly saying racism is not cool anymore part of her Yolandi character?

For a long time, I struggled with these questions. But then the confidential recordings of Tudor Jones and Du Toit were released (Zef TV Worldwide, 2019), their racism and racial entitlement were exposed, and so, too, were my biases. I was affording these white artists far too much unwarranted credit. This was a personal life lesson.

Likewise, many fans and critics did not notice colonial entitlement as it stared them in the face. The truth is, these are two delusional white people travelling the world proclaiming themselves patron saints of the South African streets by manipulating uneducated audiences to understand Die Antwoord as crass antiheroes serving truth to power. This was an international display of predatory, wounded, and frightened whites amidst an identity crisis. Individuals who recoiled at the notion that something (like other cultures) was not theirs for the taking and profiteering. As power slowly began to balance in South Africa, they began to feel persecuted against, as have many whites. As noted in Chapter 1, “You should say ‘[n-word]’ if you want to say [n-word], cause you’ve got freedom of speech, bitch.... Ninja’s more like a [n-word] than a [n-word],” declared Yolandi when she thought the cameras were off (Zef TV Worldwide, 2019, 0:21).

Unfortunately, the politics of Die Antwoord tell a typical story for white populations around the world in postcolonial contexts. One needs to look no further than the election of Donald Trump, or the greenlighting of Brexit, for proof. Many white people are simply hateful and terrified that they are losing their grip of power.

I hope that this thesis contributes to shedding more light on the phenomenon of Die Antwoord and contemporary white power in the age of the internet. But also, and more important, alongside the guiding wisdom of postcolonial and postmodern authors, I hope it has offered further illumination on the frequently unsound standing of white sensibilities, convictions, and considerations in postcolonial contexts. Ultimately, I hope the exposure this analysis provides will help to combat continuing white power by offering insight into how whiteness continues to resourcefully centre itself. Decolonization must be hastened.

As a final parting note, I would like to mention that it would be tremendously powerful to read more perspectives on the Die Antwoord phenomenon from members of the various cultures from which the group relentlessly appropriates.

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