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Pornographic objectification of women through Kwaito lyrics

Maud Blose

abstract

This *Profile* discusses the portrayal of women through Kwaito music and their frequent pornographic objectification in the popular township music genre. It considers the apparent shift away of Kwaito from its roots in the moment of popular expectation of the liberated South Africa and its desire to be an expression of the voices of the townships, both democratic, indigenous and controversial. The *Profile* draws on research to enquire into opinions of fans on the representation of women and asks whether the musicians have strayed from the track which has brought them into the limelight, popular support and success. While not representative of the whole genre, the *Profile* reviews a sample of lyrics and asks if there is another direction where popular music might go, particularly, whether gender equality and women's sexual exploitation will continue to exist in tension and contradiction. It is argued that popular music as an example of township music culture that embraces the ideas of post-apartheid freedom and that speaks to the democracy, and of non-racism and gender equality, may have been overtaken by a more compelling commercial pull: that as long as it sells on the streets, anything goes. It is argued that gendered cultural values hold importance both in how women are represented by men and women in a male-dominated music industry and in a culture that must increasingly be aware of the crisis posed to women of uncritical acceptance of cultural messages that accept gender violence and abuse as a necessary ingredient for success.

keywords

Kwaito, women musicians, sexism, pornographic objectification, popular culture

Introduction

This research offers a gender perspective on the South African music genre Kwaito which features prominently in post-apartheid youth culture. The research seeks to contribute to an understanding of how black women are represented by males and how women artists represent themselves in Kwaito lyrics and performance in the increasingly commercialised marketplace in which Kwaito thrives. It argues that there has been a shift in the music genre from one that has celebrated liberation, making the promise of the post-apartheid freedom in

township life a reality, to one where values of post-apartheid freedom by township youth is closer to being one where 'anything goes' so long as it is 'hot', in its celebration of post-apartheid township freedom. The vast transformation of this genre, ie from shaping South African politics to diverting to a path where women are used in parallel, often represented in derogatory words and pasted as pornographic objects, is highlighted in this research. Listeners interviewed for this research, aged between the ages of 16 to 50 and who live mainly in townships south of Durban, reflect the opinion that the lyrics often have little

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meaning and that women are often exploited as pornographic objects or sold short in Kwaito. The Oxford Dictionary describes pornography as:

“printed or visual material containing the explicit description or display of sexual organs or activity, intended to stimulate erotic rather than aesthetic or emotional feelings.”

I argue that when it comes to the pornographic portrayal of women through Kwaito music lyrics and music videos, this definition holds. In the latter, women’s clothes seem to shrink as the performers appear to be wearing less and less with every new release.

It could be said that Kwaito, historically speaking and from a feminist perspective, in its desire to be an expression of the voices of the townships, as both democratic and indigenous and controversial, followed the national trend in a ‘new’ South Africa; however, it generally maintained women in their usual subordinate position through its lyrics and visual representation. Much of the sexist baggage of the ‘old’ South Africa was carried over into the ‘new’ and the new gender-sensitive Constitution did not lead to an immediate eradication of prior patriarchal outlooks and attitudes. Despite the fact that the South African Constitution stipulates that women and men have equal rights, women have now fallen into the trap of being visually objectified and valued only for their physiques. The *Profile* argues that women’s representation is most often either in their value as back-up to the male artists, as sexual objects in male lyrics which have been known to be offensive and even violent, or in women’s performances where sexuality and bodies are the agency which expresses their power as women on stage. Women aren’t seen as the talent behind the music but are seen more as ‘highlighters’ adding colour to the song through the explicit pornographic representation of their bodies. While it can be argued that the objectification and commodification of women’s bodies in Kwaito performance have nonetheless given women the opportunity to find identity and also attract mass audiences, this can be seen against their exploitation in a culture where women are negated by the values of the marketplace and commercialisation.

Thus the saying ‘sex sells’. But does it really? Or is it only feeding men’s historical acceptance of women’s inequality?

During this process women are often seen to have become willing participants in their own exploitation. Some might say that they do it for the money and others for the fame, regardless of the societal impact of their actions which result in social generalisations about women in some people’s minds. The writer suggests that because Kwaito is still popular among the youth, the genre should move in the direction of social development and a culture which recognises women’s strengths instead of perpetuating their degradation. Despite democracy, youth in townships still struggle with socio-economic issues in which this genre could play a pivotal role in engaging both young and old people on such issues with the aim to bring about change and development. It is recognised that Kwaito as a popular cultural form does not thrive on an axis where it might engage with social development values as such. I argue however that social engagement might draw back some fans to analyse the content of the lyrics, following Kwaito’s rapid rise to popularity in the 90s as one form of popular township music culture.

women are often seen to have become willing participants in their own exploitation

Looking at the current status of the Kwaito genre and its neglect of gender equality leads us to look more closely at popular culture. Popular culture can be understood as:

“a standardised, formulaic, repetitive and superficial culture, which celebrates trivial, sentimental, immediate and false pleasures at the expense of serious, intellectual, time honoured and authentic values” (Strinati, 2000:14).

Mass produced and consumed popular culture therefore can begin to define social reality for the mass public; currently it is a culture which “lacks intellectual challenge and stimulation, preferring the undemanding ease of fantasy and escapism”

(Strinati, 2000:14–15) According to McQuail (1994:118):

“The most widely disseminated and enjoyed symbolic culture of our time (...) is what flows in abundance by way of the media of films, television, newspapers, phonogram, video, and so on.”

Kwaito, with its platform, has failed dismally to create awareness about women’s rights and gender equality. Instead it has served as a platform to perpetuate society’s misconceptions and ignorance about gender inequality and about sexual rights. My research shows that Kwaito songs often degrade women to position them as objects of sexual pleasure. Generally in the music videos, women are portrayed in eroticised ways, skimpily clothed, designed to elicit male desire. In L’vovo’s song, *Njalo nge-weekend*, women are portrayed as party-animals who are to be intoxicated with alcohol and thereafter sexually exploited. Bosch (citing Stephens 2006:88) notes the trivialisation of women in Kwaito when she says:

“women’s inclusion in Kwaito music can be seen as the deliberate use of superfluous ‘singing and dancing girls’ as a marketing ploy. Artists seem to think that the more less-dressed women they have on their music videos, the more the viewers will relate to and like a particular song.”

on the one hand Kwaito is criticised for being demeaning of women, on the other, enabling women to act out the symbols of their sexual objectification

Often the music is criticised as having no substantial lyrical content, and is reliant on the sexualised images of women to keep its audience listening.

Angela Impey (2001:44) writes that while the sexual objectification of women in Kwaito may be interpreted as ongoing male hegemony, Kwaito also offers women some agency in self-representation in post-apartheid South Africa. While on the one hand Kwaito is criticised for being demeaning of women, on the other, enabling women to act out the symbols of their sexual objectification, it has provided a platform through which a new set of young black women artists have been able to make their presence

known in the music industry. Artists like Chomee and the late Lebo Mathosa burst into the music scene and remained infamous for their dress code. These women embraced their bodies; it comes as no surprise that the majority of their fans were males.

Chomee has been featured dancing provocatively in barely-there clothing in Arthur Mafokate’s controversial music video *Sika Lekhekhe*. The song which literally means ‘cut the cake’ and figuratively means ‘have sex with me’, was so steamy and sexually explicit that it was banned by an SABC radio station (UKHOZI FM) in 2005. The self-proclaimed Kwaito King Mafokate also had to re-shoot the video after viewers complained about its explicitly sexual content. In the music video of her own runaway hit ‘Jiver Sexy’, Chomee is seen performing confidently, and delivering sex appeal. She and her dancers, clad either in hot-pants or ultra-short mini-skirts, perform slow, sensual moves that are supposed to send ‘temperatures’ high. Commenting on the sexual register of Kwaito videos, Sbonelo Ngcobo, a fan, during an interview with the writer, says of the explicit sexual content, “Honestly, some of these music videos arouse certain feelings from within because they leave nothing to the imagination”. In actual fact, males in the music industry are not all to blame for the pornographic objectification of women; women have played a role in their own sexual exploitation to advance in the music industry.

Impey, looking at the historical development of Kwaito, has focused specifically on the interpretive disparity between the representations of women as recklessly acquiescent to patriarchal expectations, and:

“women whose voices have gained credibility expressly because they engage so provocatively with prevailing cultural discourses about gender, power and pleasure in post-apartheid South Africa” (Impey, 2001:44)

Kwaito as a post-apartheid genre

Kwaito took centre stage simultaneously with the momentous developments which ushered in South Africa’s first democratically elected government in 1994. The emergence of Kwaito coincided with the election of

Nelson Mandela as the first democratically elected president of South Africa. Previously there was little room for black artists in the mainstream South African music business. Commercially produced music began in South Africa in 1912, and for many years industry labels were owned mainly by whites. Kwaito, more than most other local popular music style, has entered into a complex alliance with global musical, cultural and technological trends.

In the new democratic South Africa where individuals were now free to express themselves, fans and non-fans alike adopted the township slang that is used in the songs in their daily vocabulary. Although the songs are sung in African languages, predominantly Zulu and Sotho, the slang tends to use mostly Afrikaans words and phrases such as “*ek se*” (I say), “*eintlik*” (actually), “*jou*” (yours), and “*nou*” (now). To some extent this reflects the cultural and linguistic hybridity of the country. In other words, *tsotsitaal* (thug language) and *iscamtho* (streetwise) combined, gave birth to the name ‘Kwaito’. On another level, apart from the linguistic and cultural hybridity of the country that this might reflect, given the spirit of Kwaito, it reflected an appropriation of the ‘language of the oppressor’ in order to define a ‘new order’. The Soweto uprising came through the youth’s resistance to being taught through Afrikaans in schools. However, the youth over the years redefined the language, and turned it around to something that they could relate to. And, as much as it was the ‘oppressor’s language’, in its new incarnation it undoubtedly was part of the liberation struggle.

According to Peterson (2003:197), the more “rough-and-ready” Kwaito artists were simultaneously “uneasy with and celebratory of their ghetto origins”, and regarded themselves as “quintessential hustlers (*olova, oguluva, majimbos, izinja* – masters of marginality)”.

Besides dancing and music, having fun in Kwaito culture primarily revolved around sex. Although central to youth culture all over the industrialised world since the 1960s, explicit references to sex did not occur in South African popular music until the early 1990s. Protected from world trends by apartheid censorship, many older township people were shocked by the sexual excess valorised in Kwaito.

The degree to which this was found offensive is also likely to have been increased by the extensive commitment to Christian morality amongst the country’s black population. Public outrage tended to be a response more to the language used than to the subject matter. Kwaito song texts were born of the streets, and their transition from street to studio to living room was sometimes exceptionally unmediated. Kwaito lyrics frequently incorporated the intensive swearing typical of township street parlance and, as *Iscamtho* is a language of double entendre, many words had provocative, sometimes obscene, secondary meanings.

Musician Thami Thekwane explained that the double entendre in Arthur’s hit ‘Vuvuzela’, for example, was a reference to the artist’s sexual prowess, and to the fact that he had a reputation for being extremely rough in bed (Allen and Mus, 2004). Sex was often described from a particularly aggressive male point of view, and in some cases artists were openly misogynist, employing violent sex and physical abuse: a key feature inspired by ‘gangsta’ rap in the United States. The lyrics were not unnoticed and have generated mixed reaction, some quite resistant to the message and meaning of the lyrics. For example, lyrics which offended some of the subjects interviewed by the writer were often berated by people who said that they generally championed Kwaito culture. Soweto Community Radio, for instance, carefully monitored incoming albums and Twala (one of the people involved in the radio station) explained (Allen and Mus M, 2004: 82), “If there are those lyrics which are not needed then the song is not going to be played on air.” Furthermore, the obscenities for which Kwaito artist Oscar became notorious eventually became too low even for his fans and ruined his career. One of his biggest hits ‘*Isdudla ses’ febe*’, may roughly be translated as meaning ‘fat whore’, indicates the crudeness of his language in addressing women and audience enthusiasm for him at festivals waned once his live performances started including such pronouncements as “I am Oscar. Where are all those bitches? Bring them here. I wanna fuck all of them!” (*ibid*).

An example of one of the Kwaito songs that had provocative lyrics is ‘Bantwana’ by Bob Mabena, set out below:

“[spoken by male chorus]
Eish ‘ma ujay’va baby (Ooh when you jive baby)
Eish uyangijova uyazi (Ooh you inject/paralyse me)
Eish ‘ma ujay’va baby (Ooh when you dance baby)
Uyazi uyangifunca ‘yazi (Ooh you soak me up)
Eish nes’gcebhezana (Ooh your mini-skirt)
‘Yazi soyangidonsa ‘yazi (You know it really pulls me)
Maar ngiyakutshela baby (But I tell you baby)
Mina ngiyavaya nawe (I am going with you)
Ntla ho rekela banana (I will buy you a banana)
Ka wena ngoana ka O njeesa mahala (It’s you, my baby) (- you let me eat for free)
Ao vaya kea hana (I will not let you go)
Kea o bona kea gafa (When I see you I go crazy)
Le mama oa gafa (My mum is also crazy about you)
Ao ntshware ka li tsebe (Hold me by the ears)
Ao ntshware ka li café(x2) (Hold me by the curves)
Hey abo baby siyabancanywa (We like these babies)
Hey abo nunu siyabathanda (We love these babies)
Abo sisi bayasi verstaan ‘a (The sisters understand us)
Eyi abo baby bayasihlanyisa (These babies drive us crazy)
[male voice rap]
Bantwana niyangibona (Babies do you see)
Awungitshela ungangikhona (Tell me can you handle me)
Ungibize ngedollar (Call me dollar)
Futhi ngivaya nge-Corolla (I drive a Corolla)
And ngiphethe iMotorolla (I carry a Motorola)
Yebo baby ungangithola (You baby, you can get me)
Kanti vele ngiyahola (I also earn)
Manje woza sophola(x2) (Come now let us chill)
[female singing repeatedly]
Siyabathanda (We love them)
Se a barata (We love them)

Siyabafuna (We want them)
Se a ba batla (We want them)’’

Mabena’s lyrics evoke an image of women in Kwaito, as sexually and politically persuadable, and is an example which I argue is reflective of women’s relegation in performance as an echo to male sexist lyrics.

Despite the various South African and street township languages in which Kwaito is sung, it unifies the people that relate to this genre. The majority of South Africans are blacks who speak either one or more of the indigenous languages in which Kwaito is sung. Clearly, this genre owes it to the public to convey the social messages that will build a better South Africa for all. Kwaito artists (both young and old) need to appreciate the platform that this genre has and utilise it positively. Artists like Mdu Masilela and Brenda Fassie, to name a few, sang songs about the need for political freedom in South Africa. It is through such songs that much of the original and arguably authentic meaning that drove the Kwaito genre in its inception, can be found. A struggle against oppression, racism and *baaskap* and for township political, economic and social development was embedded in the meaning of much of the lyrics.

Arthur Mafokate’s 1995 song *Kaffir* is considered to be one of the very first Kwaito hits. This song is significant, not only as a musical milestone, but also in terms of the lyrics. The lyrics are an illustration of the freedom of expression that Kwaito sought to voice as a result of the political change, in the newly democratic South Africa. In this song Mafokate says:

“Boss, No.
 Boss, don’t call me kaffir.
 Can’t you see I’m trying my best?
 Can’t you see I’m moving around?
 I don’t come from hell.
 You would not like it if I called you a baboon.
 Even when I try washing up, you still call me a kaffir.
 Boss, don’t call me a kaffir.”

Mafokate protests the use of the word “kaffir” to address black people. The subject is treated in a satirical and burlesque way, but this only heightens the discontent

against the atrocities of the past and presumably the present. The song comprises a repetition of these words. A female singer comes in at regular intervals between Arthur's rhythmic speech and repeats the words that Mafokate has just recited (Mhlambi, 2004). Here Kwaito is a voice of reaction to the colonialism and the apartheid oppression of black men and women in households who in apartheid terms are kitchen 'boys and girls'.

Kwaito has created an identity for young post-apartheid black South Africans as it is perceived by many as the style and music of the streets. Like much rap in hip hop, Kwaito lyrics are often filled with misogyny, sex, money and some violence. It can be argued that Kwaito has a unique meaning and role in the lives of young black South Africans, indeed for all South Africans, since it re-arranges the hierarchy of dominance, by including those who have been previously excluded and by shifting the balance of economic power (Steingo, 2005).

Women in Kwaito

McClary's (1991) interpretation of Madonna's uninhibited and overtly sexualised mode of self-representation is useful to generate an oppositional reading of women in Kwaito. McClary argues that Madonna's image enables girls to see that the meanings of feminine sexuality:

"can be in their control, can be made in their interests, and that their subjectivities are not necessarily totally determined by the dominant patriarchy" (McClary, 1991:148).

She claims that Madonna's agency in her own representations is a powerful response to the tendency to dismiss her as a 'mindless plaything' acting out male fantasies. Her highly publicised and visual assertion of her sexuality can be seen as the entry and articulation of a whole new set of subject positions for women artists and performers (McClary, 1991).

I would argue that Kwaito has offered women a new kind of agency in self-representation in post-apartheid South Africa. However, as McClary cautions, this agency does not operate in isolation, but is pro-

duced within a variety of social discursive practices, and draws on globally circulated media images. Nevertheless, like Madonna, Kwaito female artists have learned to effectively navigate within a repressive discourse to create their own liberatory musical images and language. A brief analysis of Lebo Mathosa of the band Boom Shaka serves as a useful example.

From the outset, the dynamic two-male, two-female group, Boom Shaka, superficially appeared to trade almost entirely on the sexuality of their female members. However, a closer analysis of a range of media reviews suggests that the focus of the Boom Shaka act is not predominantly the boldly sexualised representations. The skimpy dress, the gyration of hips and the simulated sex act on stage promote a variety of socially apposite concerns. McClary (1991) described their ground-breaking act which drew attention to women Kwaito performers' expression of agency in performance which fused sexuality with gender and national identity in freedom and the liberation from apartheid as follows:

"Stylishly clad in the deepest blue velvet suits over lacy bras and flimsy white blouses – held in place by at least one button – Boom Shaka's Thembi and Lebo (had) walked to the front of the large Civic Theatre stage and then stopped, each raising a clenched fist in the air. A pounding beat kicked in, sending a sensual wave of motion down the girl's lithe bodies, and so began their house-beat homage to a tune that, they say, represents their freedom to sing whatever songs they choose in a liberated nation; and an acknowledgement of those who have fought for their freedom" (McClary, 1991:149).

The description refers to Boom Shaka's Kwaito rendition of the national anthem (*Nkosi Sikelela*), which provoked a national outcry. The media had a frenzy with the provocative pictures of the half-naked Boom Shaka group singing something as respected as the national anthem.

A dialogue between a man and a woman is a very common feature in Kwaito music, but the salient characteristic is that women are a chorus line or an echo to the men whose part carries the performance. Women repeat or agree or are simply

performers with no voice, as is common in many other genres of music. The man usually does the rhythmic speech, which often forms the central part of the song and has more words than the woman's lyrics do. I argue this can be seen as one of the representations of the sexual subtexts present in Kwaito music where the woman's acquiescent role is merely to reiterate what the man has said. It is possible that in this industry as in many others, that "female roles are limited through male notions of female ability" (Firth and McRobbie, 2000:65).

With the newest Kwaito music swept into the mainstream, there's a fear that all that's unique to the genre will be distilled into vapour or emptiness.

In his paper on Kwaito music, musicologist Simon Stephens takes features present in many other urban music genres, such as that of sexual semiotics, and tries to identify their presence in Kwaito and other genres of the African Diaspora. His work suggests that Kwaito (and African music in general) is prejudicial and condescending to women. He questions the effect that the "representation of the African female body and sexuality have upon...women" (Stephens, 2000:256–273). Stephens raises the question of what the possible repercussions are of the exploitation of women as performers and in the construction of lyrics and whether popular culture is critically received by audiences.

The positioning of women in Kwaito is a question which raises the tensions between women's participation in the post-apartheid music industry against the history of exploitation of black musicians in the preceding apartheid era and the urge to find equal expression and freedom for their talent. The history of Kwaito music is therefore impossible to separate from the recent political history of South Africa.

Kwaito today

With every success comes controversy. Today, purists claim that Kwaito artists have begun to rest on their laurels, exploiting the easy formula that has been the ticket to their

success. They argue that the industrial house blend of Kwaito that's played increasingly today has arrested the political energy that had been so vital to the genre in its infancy. With the newest Kwaito music swept into the mainstream, there's a fear that all that's unique to the genre will be distilled into vapour or emptiness. There's also the fear that an infusion of gimmicky marketing will exploit Kwaito's exploration of a country beginning an era of democratic government and self-rule – notably, one of the last emancipated in the post-colonial world. It's understandable, then, that globalisation, dominated by northern capitalist commercialisation and often inappropriately hypersexualised and classist values, can be seen as a threat rather than an ally in the construction of Kwaito culture.

As with any burgeoning subculture, however, there are parts that are appreciated and those that are criticised. Some claim that Kwaito's newest acts are over-sexed, absent of thoughtful lyrical content, and infused with vulgar industrialised sexual clichés in dance style, dress and melodies. Some female artists and/or their dancers leave nothing to the imagination. This has led to others fearing that Kwaito's newest records are mixed specifically for foreign appetites like the United States, forcing the music's roots to be ignored. Pre-fabricated cultural branding poses a real threat to Kwaito – a genre that has always been about spontaneity. Worse, the music prepared for foreign markets paints a falsified picture of what life is really like in South Africa.

In a song by Professor and T'zozo, one of Durban's dynamic Kwaito duos, gender division in terms of vocalisation and the bland lyrics suggest the desire to please an unthinking audience. Again it is men's voices that lead, whilst the females follow. An analysis of lyrics found in this song clearly tells us that the male voice(s) dominate the song. The man is the one in command and all that the female does is agree. What the male is requesting is that the female come to a party at his friend's place where he'll be her provider. The only thing that she has to say is "Yes yes". The interpretation would be supported by the

prevalent representations of women in Kwaito music videos:

“in which they are frequently draped over a man (centrally located and driving the latest BMW convertible), their bodies represented as lithe, sensual and readily available to the whims and fancies of the male object of their attention” (Impey, 2001:44).

The lyrics compel girls to accept men (often described as sugar daddies) as providers of material gifts in exchange for sexual pleasure. This song also refers to women as ‘chicks’; women are not equal, but are there for their men’s pleasure. Hidden in the lyrics is the pornographic representation of women. But often this expression is hidden in the beat.

What the people think: Interviews on Kwaito

In wanting to find out what people thought of the Kwaito genre, the lyrics contained within its history and its possible future, I conducted a month-long research in January 2012 in various townships around Durban which involved interviews with about 50 Kwaito fans: 25 males and 25 females ranging between the ages of 16 and 50. Most of my interviewees said that they have listened to Kwaito music and others even grew up on it. However, 90% of those interviewed agreed that Kwaito music has lost its original concept, ie being a platform to voice young people’s socio-economic and political issues. “It might be the times we live in, but Kwaito music has lost its plot since it is now all about materialism and sex!” exclaimed Cybil Nde-lu, an African female in her mid-30s.

My hypothesis is that the Kwaito music genre could prove to be an effective medium for building social awareness around gender equality, women’s rights, and social development, leading to the empowerment of the society it speaks to. Kwaito is widely popular and it is presented in radio stations, on television and mobile technology gadgets. Thus, carrying a social development message through this genre could surely reach many people and indeed have the expected positive results in the individual

lives of its fans. Ironically, this genre is most popular in the townships where many people suffer from socio-economic deprivation and are in dire need of upliftment. Kwaito was initially about the unity of people in the townships and the celebration of African cultures. Listening to Kwaito music in the taxis, social gatherings or events is therefore different than listening to the genre alone.

From the interviews conducted, the majority of participants (95%) agreed that Kwaito lyrics show little or no thought about their messages. However, all agreed on the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the Kwaito identity. The interviews with the ‘older’ generation, summarise the following agreement that:

“Kwaito used to possess meaningful messages mainly about fighting for freedom and politics. It used to encourage the victims of the apartheid regime that things will one day be alright. The lyrics of the songs in those days used to raise emotions such that people would literally cry because of the pain they experienced in those times.”

Brenda Fassie was one example cited as a Kwaito artist whose music was initially about the empowerment of black people. Her lyrics addressed Nelson Mandela firstly as a prisoner, and then as a free man thus summing up his long road to freedom which we all now rejoice in. Her lyrics address complex themes dealing with African culture and life. In another one of her positive songs, called ‘*Sum’bulala*’ (translated as ‘Do not kill him/her’), she asks taxi operators in the provinces to end their violent rivalries. Fassie was known as one of those women who spoke her mind regardless of where she was. Apart from racial, social, political, and economic development issues, she also tackled woman-related issues through her music. In her song titled ‘Weekend Special’, Fassie talks about how she will not be used and abused by her man who doesn’t acknowledge her existence during the week but only calls her whenever he is bored on weekends (Allen, 2006). Her focus was on how many women continue to struggle through the imbalance in their relationships.

Kwaito did not originally aim to show a South Africa happy in its urbanity, espe-

cially because urban life has been exploited by foreign commerce. For these reasons, Kwaito's best moments become those that deliver a chorus of black voices opposing a legacy of bureaucracy and racism, and anticipating a new identity and mobility on its own terms. Kwaito was touted as part of a South African renaissance, but it's also part of a South African revolution – one that does not pretend to suffer misinterpretation lightly (see http://www.southafrica.info/what_happening/news/features/kwaitomental.htm)

One older black woman interviewed stated that she thought that Kwaito had lost some direction, raising the issue of black women and gender equality:

"...The lyrics nowadays do not reflect South Africa's gender ideologies. Women are used for marketing purposes, and to my surprise, others (women) actually enjoy it."

Another interviewee felt that some of the lyrics in the Kwaito songs lacked a social message for youth as they:

"tend to do a lot of repetition. In most cases, they underestimate the intellectual capacity of our society, especially women. Women are often disrespectfully portrayed as sexual objects on the music videos wearing half to nothing. The dance moves are seductive and contain lots of sexual innuendos. Kwaito music does not contribute to South Africa's gender ideologies. Since it is targeted to the youth, it should only have positive social messages because it is these young people that are constantly troubled."

Another interviewee who enjoyed the music explained that she listens to the beat but that the lyrics were often bad:

"...they have nice beats to dance to. But with Kwaito, even if the beat sounds good, the song will still contain rude or vulgar lyrics. Women are portrayed as good-for-nothing...loose. The dance moves may be sexy and simultaneously provocative...they become popular at social gatherings. The lyrics perpetuate

some of the negativity which is dominant in our society."

The single concept of 'mass culture' has commonly been used to refer to many diverse forms of media. Mass culture also has had a wider reference to the tastes, preferences, manners and styles of the majority of people. It also had a generally pejorative connotation, mainly because of its associations with the assumed cultural preferences of the 'uncultivated' or non-discriminating. However, in socialist discourse, mass culture could refer positively to the 'culture of the masses', taking its value from the idea of the mass of ordinary people as the main agents of progressive social change. In such cases the reference has to be to the 'culture of the people' rather than culture for the people (as mass consumers) (McQuail, 1994). Thus the opinions expressed in the interviews reflect that Kwaito is seen as slipping from having meaning as 'culture of the people'. A male interviewee for example felt let down:

"The dress code of women and their dance moves in the Kwaito music videos is unacceptable! The lyrics are a huge contribution towards moral decay in our society. They portray a society without values. I wish the lyrics and dance moves would change in favour of social development."

Another informant saw Kwaito as informing his opinions about life, seeing it as:

"a (kind of) freedom of speech because it talks about and relates to the issues that are happening in society at that particular time..."

Freedom is a condition, rather than a criterion of performance, and does not readily lend itself to either prescriptive or proscriptive statements. It refers primarily to rights to free expression and the free formation of opinion. However, for these rights to be realised there must also be access to channels and opportunities to receive diverse kinds of information (McQuail, 1994). Freedom comes with responsibility. Although Kwaito artists and producers have freedom to express themselves in their lyrics, the responses suggest that they have to be

responsible in singing songs that contribute towards freedom which builds social awareness and development. The lyrics should be original and talk to the audience and create a critical understanding with which the townships and streets identify.

Conclusion

Stephen's (2000) concerns on whether audiences critically receive Kwaito lyrics and how they respond to the degradation and trivialisation of women were explored in research with fans of Kwaito. While musicians may claim they are merely entertaining society and not necessarily yielding to social responsibility and the societal outcomes of their 'art', responses from the interviews showed there is a perception that Kwaito lyrics fail to stimulate the listeners intellectually. Suppressed by the power of images, most males interviewed felt that it was the pornographic representation of women through Kwaito lyrics and music videos that has contributed to how they perceive most women in general. The responses showed that the male and female interviewees had similar opinions: the male interviewees generally commented that the dance moves in the music videos should be "done away with", while female interviewees said that listening to lyrics that degrade women in society emphasised how vulnerable women are and questioned why they accepted their labelling.

The older female interviewees acknowledge that listening to 'early Kwaito' made them feel powerful to an extent, as they felt that the experiences reflected were shared as other women had the same feelings and experiences. So they weren't alone in experiencing the social injustices. Women in the past were united for a common cause ie women's empowerment. But, currently they are being divided by how the other gender, men, view them. All the interviewees agreed that the women who enter the Kwaito industry must seek to change the sexism and anti-social habits of the artists and that Kwaito lyrics must not only contribute to social development, but to the empowerment of women as well. As it stands, the pornographic representation

of women has potential to add to social woes, be it HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence, illiteracy and unemployment, etc. Clearly women need to be respected for who and what they are in the post-apartheid township, so a genre like Kwaito must relate to women's post-apartheid agency and existence - not recreate oppression in new guises to play to the global market. The genre won its appeal on the streets because it sang the messages of change – now it may need to engage with and reflect on the sexism that it generates. While a few fans' responses may not unsettle the sexist values that Kwaito as a popular music genre reproduces it may encourage more debate on the centrality of women's equality in a liberatory popular culture, one that embraces the equal right to freedom of women as well as men.

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