

The promise of a Utopian Home, or Capitalism's commoditisation of blackness

(DRAFT)

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The promise of black music lies in a non-place and non-time. One of those fantastic places and marvellous-real times that oppressed people imagine in an effort to both assert their worth and will a non-oppressive world. Amidst all the noise of misogyny and *bling-bling* talk that “Good Friday anthropologists” rightly draw our attention to, black music also asserts the need for a utopian home. A home where black, brown, and white (the way we currently understand these markers) will be no more. Instead a new meta-ethnicity, *urban blackness*, based on one's love of black music and not upon the colour of one's skin, will render older racial categories obsolete. In this characterisation black music can be identified as the primary product and producer of urban blackness: an assertive anti-bourgeoisie and anti-racial identity usually linked to the sounds and songs of New World blacks living in cities.

Nowadays, however, with the exponential rise of the culture industry, this utopian dream is incorporated into the global flows of corporate capitalists (the most powerful agents in our capitalist world). As a global system of exchange capitalism¹ has no need for naturalised social identities, and their exclusive cultural properties, if these cannot be made interchangeable. In other words, capitalism needs “standardised customers.” It is on the basis of this process of homogenisation that niches and seemingly heterogeneous identities are marketed. To do so much research on specific subcultures is conducted, often employing persons affiliated to these, in order to transform these styles of being

¹ I willingly subjectivize capitalism and capital in this essay to speak more freely about this process. In the end I am following the lead of Peter Berger who after Marx poignantly alerted us to the Objectivation of man-made cultural products and arrangements (the process of things taking on human features) that in a dialectical process become a coercive and forming force upon humankind.

into profitable commodities for corporate interests. This does not imply an orthodox Marxist reading of a transformation of non-commoditised goods and services based on use value, to their commoditisation for exchange value. Instead I suggest, following Baudrillard's post-Marxist critiques, that we understand use value as a bourgeoisie fiction Marx and other 19th century thinkers imbibed and projected to the so-called 'natives' and the wretched in the West who supposedly lived in a world dominated by use value. A thorough analysis demonstrates however that use value was always the alibi of exchange value, grounding the capitalist ideology of a hierarchy of needs and humans, whereby those who could afford it seemingly had superior needs. "The poor only wanted bread while the well-to-do needed chardonnay. The poor who dared say he or she needed that expensive French wine was alienated; the rich were simply behaving according to their station in life." What this mode of distinguishing occludes is that exchange value is foundational to every society and social group since the last 500 years of Western imperialism.

What we are witnessing today however is a *shift* towards a newer form of commoditisation known as sign value: "I shop therefore I am" as Braidotti (2005: 3) puts it, whereby my purchased goods are supposed to define me primarily or ideally without remainder (the older ideology of exchange value with use value as its alibi remains, but nowadays it becomes the alibi of sign value). The longer discussion in the U.S. of Elvis and Buddy Holly stealing black music should be conceptualised as belonging to an earlier moment of commoditisation whereby their artistic identity was subordinate to their politico-racial identity of white men. This was their essence, the rest was style; imitation.

Today things are qualitatively different. Eminem must be able to Hip Hop, as Amy Winehouse must be able to croon. These superstars show allegiance to the so-called authentic owners of these musical genres, i.e. have dark skinned producers and fans, to sooth the existing nationally induced sensibilities of *race* and culture. They must also vehemently speak out against anti-black racism and be anti-bourgeois. Once they comply with these prerequisites they can win MOBOs without being bearers of the right amount of melanin. Similarly, white youngsters can become *urban blacks*. Their entrance ticket is the continued consumption of black music, the spin-off of urban merchandise, and the acceptance by *real* blacks who have also succumbed to this capitalist logic. They also

have to renounce/denounce their politico-racial identity of being white, a synonym for a version of respectable middle class bourgeoisie culture that looks down on others (Essed & Trienekens 2007, Patterson 2005: 96-104).

I am not implying by way of this analysis that *race* is completely subsumable by class. Racist somatic norm images of how an ideal human being should look do play a role (see the work of Wekker 2007; 2001, Jones 2007, Gilroy 2004, Essed 2001; 1984).² Nonetheless, colonial derived interpretations of somatic norm images is not the main way most whites in Western Europe historically identified themselves. For a long time, with the exception of Spain and Portugal, there were hardly any blacks in this part of the world. The American one drop rule or other no less insidious forms of racism found in the other (ex) colonies did not play a major role in how white Northern Europeans identified themselves. Class, place of birth, religious affiliation, and political choice, mattered most, with racist interpretations somatic differences operating as a less acknowledged mechanism. With the arrival of blacks from the ex-colonies however insidious forms of existing racial attitudes—the unconscious mechanism that made many white Northern Europeans think and see themselves as more ideally human than the black colonized (never a real point of discussion)—did surface. The dominant form it has taken on is the culturalist type—“their culture is incompatible to ours”—rather than the naked biological variants. Once cultural compatibility is established, negative attitudes based on racist interpretations of somatic differences diminish (the ideal can be relinquished). There is also the factor of whites desiring the culture of newcomers. Wanting to be black in this case, for *urban blackness* offers a style of being to contest the bourgeoisie norm of respectability and privilege.

The manner in which black, brown, and white youngsters in European metropolises are taking on the new identity of *urban blackness* is the main theme that I will explore in this essay. As such it contributes to a growing body of work in Cultural Studies (Hall 1991, Mercer 1994) and Anthropology (Nassy Brown 1998, Cornips & de

² The term somatic norm image is borrowed from the late Harry Hoetink. However in my usage of the term I distance myself from the naturalizing tendencies of Hoetink who presupposed the existence of a psycho-social metaphysical mechanism through which so-called racial groups *necessarily* construct their ideal norms of physical beauty and ideal human beings according to racist ways of categorizing humanity. For me all somatic norm images, if we treat them as ideal types that possibly exist in the minds of anthropologists and lays, are racist or racialist until we collectively do away with the fiction of race. See Mintz (1971) in this matter

Rooij 2004) that alerts us to the role of black popular culture in the construction of new ethnicities and concomitant racial categorisations in the urban settings of Western Europe. In Great Britain the black identity marker can encompass the British born descendants of Afro-Caribbeans, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Indians, black and North Africans, and the mixed descendants of African slaves brought to Liverpool (Nassy Brown 1998, Hall 1991). Once stretched this far, it can be stretched even further, as Hewitt's study (1986) reveals that amongst their black friends whites in the UK can also don the black label.

Most of the innovative work in this area has been conducted in the UK. Similar studies in the Netherlands, which is the country I will focus on, have not gone that far in investigating the malleability of blackness in urban settings. Nor have they seriously addressed the impact of the commoditisation of blackness on rendering less adequate our conceptual and commonsensical vocabulary of *race*. Most Dutch anthropologists have contented themselves to focusing on how a new lingua franca, *straat taal*, a hybridized Dutch that incorporates and is modified by Sranan Tongo, Berber, Turkish, and Papiamentu, spoken primarily by urban youths with a working class background is creating a new meta-ethnicity. Its connection to capitalism and what this does to racial categorisation is less explicitly addressed. This study seeks to fill this lacuna. Also instead of focusing on the Big Four—the Dutch metropolises of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, and The Hague—where almost all research on urban culture is conducted, this paper investigates this phenomenon as it takes place in the southern industrial city of Eindhoven. This shift of location responds to critiques that the urban phenomenon is limited to the Big Four and that in the rest of the Netherlands everything remains the same.

The breakdown of paper is as follows: 1) I begin by presenting the case of young men of various hues in the city of Eindhoven who have succumb to this new capitalist logic, 2) thereafter I entertain the manner in which this case contributes towards the deconstruction of our taken-for-granted ways of understanding biological and cultural notions of ethnicity, cultural property, gender, and multicultural living.

How whites and blacks become urban blacks

No *urban black* is born cool. They have had to spend a considerable amount of money and do a lot of hard work to become *dogs* and *chickies* (as the male and female species of the urban tribe are called). So it is with Koen. Koen used to be the laughing stock of Geldrop a suburban town adjacent to Eindhoven. The one other teenage boys abused to potlatch their surplus of testosterone. The “not if he was the Last Man on Earth” figure that young teenage girls talk about when fantasising about sex. Everybody’s football: ‘kick him as hard as you can.’ He used to be all these things, but not anymore. Today he is suave, cool, and stoned. Koen sits staring at nowhere, the ecstasy that comes from smoking pot and belonging to the in-crowd. All those days of listening to American Hip Hop, trying to be like the ghetto youths, while living in white suburbia, were finally paying off.

We are at Judmar’s place, an Antillean Adonis. Debonair, Judmar has just arrived from Curaçao where as a *don dada*, with the right family connections and brains, he owned the world. The Netherlands is a new world to conquer. So many girls to love. A technical college degree to obtain. Judmar had his work cut out for him, but he wasn’t complaining. There is only one problem: his proficiency in the Dutch. He trips and stumbles all over himself when speaking the tongue. In Curaçao his Dutch was above average, the language of those who do well at school, but here he was just another Dutch Antillean who didn’t know the difference between particles and pronouns like *die* and *dat*, *hem* and *haar*, and *het* and *de*.

Both lacking what it takes to feel completely comfortable and confident, both attending the same school, both aspiring wannabe engineers, Judmar and Koen offered each other a gift that sealed their friendship. Since his skin coincides with the older ideas of the ownership of black music, Judmar gives Koen a bit of the ghetto flavour. It matters not that he is middle class and has never set foot in a North American ghetto. Koen in his turn carries the coveted title of autochthon and though his *Algemeen Beschaafd Nederlands* (standard Dutch) is of the provincial Brabants type, he becomes Judmar’s unofficial Dutch language tutor.

What binds Koen and Judmar is the fact that they are into Hip Hop. Well at least Judmar loves Hip Hop, but he is also into his Rasta and what he terms his *cos crioullo*

(Antillean Salsa). Koen is also beginning to get into these other forms of black music. He is becoming *black*. At one of the private fetes of Antillean students he even met Lydia whom he worships. The fact that he seduced such a beautiful girl as Lydia raises his status. Koen feels like a king now that other Antillean and Surinamese guys shake his hand and are willing to accept him as one of the pack. He is a *dog* now, a member of the self-proclaimed dog pound of horny urban youths in Eindhoven, always on the lookout for *chickies*. They do their best to conquer as many *chickies* as possible, for this enhances their status. But the *chickies* are not waiting to be conquered. They are difficult preys who often prey upon predators. The *chickies* have as much bravado as the dogs and proclaim their sexual and psychological independence like R&B superstars Beyonce and Mary J Blige taught them too. Koen's dog stature does not make him Lydia's pimp and uncontested lover. He knows this. But he has got to keep keeping on: keep up the appearance that Lydia wants him more than he wants her.

At first Koen's parents weren't too happy with his new friends and his new found dog status. That is until Judmar had made an example of one of the Geldrop boys who thought he could still mess with Koen and get away with it. Judmar felt that cuffing Koen's assailant was too much of a respectful gesture, after all such a clean-cut fellow was no match for him, so instead he slapped him a couple of times. Judmar's opponent bawled like a little child, pleading for mercy, as Judmar grabbed Koen and made him *batije cu skopi* (kick him sick) with his brand new Timberlands.

News of this event spread like wildfire: Koen had become part of a gang of *buitenlanders* (allochthons) that were into heavy crime. To please his parents, Koen invited Judmar over. Being middle class, Judmar knew how to behave. Judmar explained that since Koen was his friend, he could not stand by idly and watch him being abused. It was his duty to assist. That day Judmar did everything right. He had even offered to do the dishes. What a dapper and well-mannered young man Koen's parents must have thought. They told their son that he could take an example of this *Antilliaanse jongen* (Antillean young man) who was living so far away from family and relatives. Judmar

could come around at Christmas, Sinterklaas³, and other such Dutch holidays. Koen's parents were pleased that their son was never again going to be the *pispaal* (the loser) of Geldrop.

Koen's gift helped Judmar's confidence to blossom. He was learning two kinds of Dutch: the standard kind one needs to be able to make it in the educational system, and the *straattaal* variant that is a must for the urban cool. Although Koen wanted to only speak *straattaal* to him, Judmar made sure that he remained faithful to his duty as his friend-tutor. He also kept Koen on the right path. It was alright to hangout with the dog pound from time to time, but studying hard to get good grades was more important. The same was the case for weed. Judmar was making sure that suburban Koen was not to become a *koffie shop bewoner* (an addict who spends most of his waking hours in a coffee shop smoking pot). The middle class respectability—deemed the primary indicator of whiteness in Europe—was part of the bi-cultural heritage of Antilleans such as Judmar. For Antilleans, European bourgeoisie culture was not exclusively tied to skin colour. It was also a class thing. In the Caribbean European bourgeoisie culture had been creolised, but it remained distinctly connected with the powerful who in the past were exclusively white. Ideally one had to balance the reputation culture (the Afro-Creole complex) with the respectability culture (the Euro-Creole complex). Judmar was simply learning a new variant of the reputation culture, but he was not completely giving up on respectability. It was alright for Eminem to be anti-bourgeois. He was an American. He was rich. Koen however had to be anti-racist without renouncing his middle class sensibilities. He had to be bad and respectable, knowing when to display which.

Becoming versed in *straattaal* was quite a revelation for Judmar. Being born Dutch Antillean and black wasn't enough to claim ownership of black music. He had to know when and how to spice up Dutch with primarily Papiamentu and Sranang Tongo. If he didn't he was just another *zwarte antilliaan* (black Antillean), instead of an *Ántilliaan*. And it is the *Ántilliaan* that gets the girls while the *antilliaan* has to hope someone someday would look his way. Moreover the *Ántilliaan* is the one who dedicates his hard earned cash to buying the latest fads to look ghetto fabulous.

³ Sinter Klaas is the Dutch equivalent of Santa Claus. Instead of elves he has black helpers said to be Moors. While racist in origin (as the maroon helpers were usually depicted as buffoons) today it has become a festivity that is more attune to multicultural sensibilities.

An important avenue in socialising and transforming himself into an *Antilliaan* is for Judmar the web community of Youtube. Whenever he was at home he downloaded the video clips of the Dutch Hip Hop stars The Opposites, Ali B, Yesir, Party Squad, DJ Chuckie, and his favourites, de Jeugd van Tegenwoordig. By listening and watching these clips he learned how to say *schatje* in a sonorous bad boyish way. He learned to play with the language and utter *wie denk je wel niet wat je bent* (who do you think you be), instead of the grammatically correct *wie denk je wel niet dat je bent* (who do you think you are). He even learned how to aggravate his Antillean accent in the urban way. *Je Wwweet het zelfve* (you know it). He also learnt facial expressions, dance moves, and how to wear his baseball cap.

To claim ownership of black music he had to become black in the phantasmal capitalist way of being black which was not exclusively reserved for the offspring of enslaved Africans. Whites and browns could also don the black label. As I mentioned before *urban blackness* was a commodity. Many Dutch urban groups that featured on Youtube are multi-racial. The super star *dogs* and *chickies* look as much like Judmar and Koen. Both could identify. Both could be black even if Judmar's hue was deemed more authentic. Capitalism sold it as a bit *realer*; the motherland. Yet without purchasing the appropriate goods, he would just be black of a *zwarte antilliaan*.

Attracted, some would even say heavily hooked on the commoditized black of black music, Judmar and Koen spend many hours singing along and decoding the messages of the clips. Often these are the misogynist clips that cultural studies experts and civil society groups judge to be totally immoral and dangerous to the civics of gender equality and nonviolence. Cultural expressions that we are told no self-respecting leftist should endorse.

It is at such an occasion, as Koen sits stoned, that *Voor Je Kijken Doorlopen* (just keep walking and don't look back) the clip of the multiracial band the *Jeugd van Tegenwoordig* (the Youth of Today) is being played on Youtube. It is one of those clips that are symbolic of the fact that in this urban world violence and immorality are poetically rendered. The Jeugd Van Tegenwoordig's *Voor Je Kijken Doorlopen* actually begins with animation figures, *Spuut*, *Oliebol*, and *Flesje*—Heroine Needle, Beignet, and Vodka—these vices are supposed to represent the three rappers of the group. While

Sputje, Oliebol, and Flesje stand enjoying a pizza, they are disturbed by a pink skinned junkie who asks them for money to buy food. He speaks with a typical Antillean accent and assures them that he won't use the money to buy drugs. He wants to feel *Llekkers* (nice). *Sputje, Oliebol, and Flesje* react with profanities and after throwing 20 cents at the drug addict begin to manhandle him.

Through a perfect camera shot we, the onlookers, come then to realise that it is two young white Dutch boys about the age of ten that are watching this clip. Their tattooed father enters the room with a can of cheap beer and yanks the remote control from their hands and zaps to another channel. Angrily, one of the boys screams in a stereotypical Surinamese accent *Vader, wie denk je wel niet wat je bent!* From that moment on we are entertained to the boys stealing, smoking cigarettes, beating up elders, teasing whores, etc. At the end of the clip there is a typical lower class overweight pink skinned grandma in her jogging suit who also speaks with a Surinamese accent informing us how she actually let one of the young *buitenlanders* (foreigners) know that they should not mess with her.

Again we notice that the clip we have been watching is actually being watched by a TV audience consisting of members of the *Bond Tegen het Vloeken*, the Dutch League Against Cursing. As the TV presenter asks a representative of this group to react to the clip, we witness that he has difficulty finding the appropriate words to describe his disgust. He is rendered unintelligible without the use of profanities, which is an important resource of *straattaal* and the urban lifestyle. It is as though he is speaking a language on the brink of extinction, or only understandable by certain groups in society. ABN is presented as but one of the many types of Dutch spoken in the Netherlands.

Koen related the character playing the representative of the *Bond Tegen Het Vloeken* to what he deemed the boring and hypocritical people who reside in Geldrop. Judmar simply could not get over the rudeness of the two boys. He began talking about his mother who never spared the rod. The other Antillean and Surinamese boys also start talking about their mothers and fathers. No way could they think about being so misbehaved at such a young age (at least not in front of their parents). *Ta makamba so por* (it is only the children of white Dutch who can do so). *Nan no tin respect* (they haven't any respect for their parents). One of the other Antilleans tapped Koen on the

shoulders and asked him *hoe komt het jongen; hoe komt het dat jullie zo lau zijn* (what makes you people so crazy).

One would expect Koen to feel driven in a corner. This was not the case. He simply stated *ik ben een Marokaan, Surinamer, Antilliaan, Fuck de huidskleur homie ik heb Oranje aan*, I am a Moroccan, Surinamer, Antillean, Fuck skin colour my friend can't you see I have on Orange (an allusion to the uniform of the Dutch soccer squad that stands symbolic of an encompassing multiracial and multicultural Dutch identity). To which Judmar replies, *niks multicultureel ik ben gewoon hutspot*, forget that whole multicultural business I am just Dutch. The two begin to laugh pleased with how they skillfully quote Hip Hop texts to deconstruct racism. The others join in. One of the guys says *Koen ta konio*, Koen is a real badass.

By appealing to the urban world created by the commoditized black music, Koen can always lay claim to the phantasmal black identity of capitalism. This identity can unite young men of different ethnicities, but the question is can it do the same of for young women? In other words is the urban blackness gendered? And if so how do we explain its appeal to the *chickies*? Another pertinent question is whether *urban blackness* can stand the weight and power the older essentialist constructions of race and cultural property? Before addressing these important reservations, let us first appreciate what this phantasmal black identity is actually about.

Urban black: the marketing of a phantom identity

One of the most innovative extensions of Karl Marx's ruminations on capitalism is that this global mode of production and obliterator of incommensurables is about producing *the real* where no *real* exists. About luring customers to think that there are things in life that still have exclusive value, while all the while being part and parcel of exchange and sign value (Baudrillard 2001). Black music is part of this chimera. This is the true promise of black music and its phenomenal crossover success. I did not think this way yesterday (in my less reflexive youthful years).

There was a time in which I, and other New World academics who look like me, the offspring of the enslaved Africans, thought that black music belonged to us. Reggae. Bachata. Calypso. Hip Hop. Soca. Salsa. Meringue. Kompa. Zouk. Garage. House. Jazz.

Blues. All mine; all ours. Our special property. A magical music containing an authentic core that could not be commoditized.

I, we, were fools. Like the conquerors of old and all those in between, we had succumbed to the lure of property rights. John Locke grinned in his grave teasing Karl Marx that nowadays even “property” believed in property. Ownership is an attractive poison. If the great-grandchildren of those who refused to be other people’s human chattel wanted to drink from this poisonous chalice, then the term revolutionary subject needed to be removed from the Social Science encyclopaedias. There is no group completely renouncing private property. Despite the passing of times, revolutions, and post-modern philosophical upheavals, property remains an important pillar of the capitalist logic. And in our age of rampant consumption, property becomes part and parcel of the production of *the real*. It hurts me to admit it, but nowadays we are all conscripts of capital.

Wait a minute! You are jumping the gun I hear an Afro-centrist who gets paid to teach white and black kids about authentic black culture interject. You are a postmodern-nihilist-deranged-black skin-white mask-no good-misinformed—“brother” who needs to have his head checked. Who ever said *we* used to think that black music was ours. Black Music *is* ours. It is African. Authentic. Haven’t you heard of African retentions in the New World! Eminem and those others are stealing our stuff. Koen is a wannabe. We are the Wretched that Capital, which is white power, oppresses. Haven’t you read Molefi Asante (2006). You need to be schooled boy. You’ve been reading too much Paul Gilroy (that Black-Brit who believes that black culture has always been hybrid incorporating the hegemonic time-scape of modernity together with its counterpoints).

I confess. *Mea culpa*. I care nothing about the story of African retentions (read African ownership) unless I can employ it as a tactic to irritate hyper-nationalists in the New World who claim this or that genre of black music as exclusively national. Then I counter and say no, it is not solely American, it also has African roots. However whenever I encounter Afro-centrists almost ejaculating/getting an orgasm when they encounter African retentions in black music, I strategically murmur loud enough for all to hear that “my only inheritance is that elemental noise of the windward, unbroken

breakers, Ithaca's or Africa's, all joining the ocean voice, because this is the Atlantic now, this great design, of the triangular trade." (Walcott 1990: 129-130)

If we think black music from the point of view of the triangular trade—Africa, the New World, and Europe—a new story about this cultural expression and postcolonial history can be told. Black music can then be understood as creolising music predominantly performed by blacks, which nevertheless alerts us to the social fact that despite our ethnic histories with their corresponding time-scapes we exist in common: without blacks, no whites and browns; without whites and browns no blacks. All our cherished cultural properties and naturalised social identities are actually relational and inter-subjective products.

We all live in the transmodern time born of colonial exploitation and capitalism. Colonialism had need for the naturalisation of race and culture (Gilroy 2004; Quijano 2000). The same can be said for its offshoot nationalism (ibid). For Capitalism this rigid naturalisation process is not absolutely necessary. "Capitalism neither loves nor hates social differences. Rather, it exploits them in the short run and erodes them in the long run" (Brown 2005: 106). After their erosion however they may continue to live as fabricated phantoms that sell well. The phantoms that Judmar and Koen desire. Phantoms in this case that obfuscate the bloody cross-cultural genesis of black music.

Let me state this perspective in plain English. When we pick up an LP of Charlie Parker, we are enticed by the packaging to think of an Afro-American genius filled with the soul of an enslaved African rhapsodically blowing his sax. What is obfuscated however is the fact that Parker's saxophone and the range of sounds it makes were originally designed by the Belgium Antoine-Joseph Sax. In Parker's rhapsodies the spirit of an enslaved African is accompanied by that of European proletariats and a Belgium businessman. To contest capitalism the workers of the world had to use the products that enriched a select few. Similarly Aretha Franklin's ecstatic R.E.S.P.E.C.T, owes as much to the black experience as to the Anglo-Saxon dialect learned in bondage that makes her who she is. Next to Europe meeting Africa, we cannot forget the Asian input of the *dholak* and *tabla* rhythms of the indentured labourers that are integral to that sweet black Caribbean music known as Soca.

This deconstruction and unveiling of trans-racial power asymmetries do not change the fact that black music is sold under an exclusively black label. The fabricated phantom of exclusive racialised difference is still employed by the fat cats in the cultural industry. For the meanwhile they package these phantoms as contiguous with the older nationally induced constructs of race and culture. But capital would not be capital if it did not seek to penetrate other markets and broaden existing ones. Capital must innovate. Today whites are not solely summoned to be consumers of black music or producers of a virtually indiscernible spin off called pop. The success of Gentleman, and Amy Winehouse, demonstrate that in the logic of phantom differences whites can be black too. *Urban blacks*. Similarly the so-called black authenticity of *real* blacks—according to the older colonial and nationalist induced constructions of race and culture—only matter if they too succumb to the phantasmal black sold as urban. Koen and Judmar are concrete examples of how this works. Still what must be addressed is how it works in relation to gender.

Urban Blackness in relation to gender and older constructions of race

At first sight urban blackness can be read as privileging young men. However this is a reading that completely conflates gender with cultural constructions of sex. Gender is about cultural-linguistic constructions of masculinity and femininity that do not equal physical phalluses or vaginas (Kristeva 2002: 229-247; Lacan 1996: 311-322). This is not to deny that often women are feminized and femininity is linguistically subordinated to the masculine position usually reserved for men (Van Driel & Davids 2005: 7).

Though this social fact, backed up by numerous studies, seems undeniable, I think we must begin to recognise that ‘there is nothing in sexed bodies or even in gender subordination that capitalism cannot live without’ (Brown 2005: 106). Moreover building on my explorations on urban blackness, I argue that we are witnessing a shift. Many young women that are into the urban display a form of masculine bravado and do not feel interpolated to identify themselves as the weaker sex. Their role models, Amy Winehouse, Alison Hinds, Gwen Stephani, Lady Saw, capitalist friendly divas, are neither Victorian or a-sexually feminist. They are women in control of their own

sexuality and in their songs they often depict men as not being able to handle them intellectually or in bed.

In recognition of this style of being woman, we often hear the critique that this is a generational thing. As these *chickies* grow up, especially the middle class ones, they will succumb to the housewife or part-time overworked syndrome. The question is not whether this is true, but whether this is true all of the times. Due to the expansion of the culture industry, as capitalism recognises that there is a niche market of the urban middle-aged, we must recognise that *urban blackness* is slowly becoming a trans-generational phenomenon. I posit this based upon my observations of a multi-ethnic group of parents in Rotterdam who organised a Halloween party for the youngsters in their neighbourhood. After the kids, dressed as Hollywood horrors, went from door to door collecting candy, the evening culminated with a *kinder disco* (a children's disco). From Jantje Smit to K3 to Ali B to DJ Chuckie came out of the speakers. It was then that I recognised the urban middle aged amongst the mothers and fathers. They took their daughters and sons and begun gyrating in a manner that betrayed their *urban blackness*. When I engaged them in conversations I was told that they still loved urban. One even alerted me to the fact that once a month urban parties are held for older men and women who want to relive their youthful years. These parties were conducive of the formation an urban tribe of style that was multi-ethnic and multi-religious.

These parents and their offspring, often though not always inter-racially mixed, constitute the unclassifiable that do not fit into the neat logic of the autochthon and allochthon divide. They beckon us to 'be more alive to the ludic, cosmopolitan energy and the democratic possibilities so evident in the postcolonial metropolis' (Gilroy 2004: 140; see also Baumann 1996). They are at home in the subcultures of the autochthons who idolise native-Dutch folkloric pop songs of Jantje Smit and Frans Bauer as well as those who *seem* exclusively loyal to the cultural expressions of their former *heimats*. This urban tribe, young and middle-aged, signals us to recognise that no matter what the mediatic, statutory, or vernacular discourses of exclusive difference proclaim in many of the metropolises in Netherlands we are mixing and always in the mix (Guadeloupe 2007). The manner in which the product of this mixing, this multicultural conviviality, which is intimately connected with capital, clashes with stately and vernacular discourses of

exclusive difference and their naturalised notions of race and gender deserve our ethnographic attention. So too as a paroxysm, of the end of the essential black, which type of black—the urban commoditised ones with pink hues or the equally commoditised ones of black African descent—can occupy the centre of the *really real*.

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