

THE BIOPOLITICS OF GUGULECTIVE AGAINST NEOLIBERAL CAPITALISM

by

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Dissertation submitted for the degree of

PhD in Visual Studies

in the

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

at the

University of Stellenbosch



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March 2017

DECLARATION

By submitting this thesis, I declare that the entirety of the work contained herein is my own original work, that I am the authorship owner thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any other qualification.

Signature:

Date: March 2017

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writing of this thesis owes a great deal to a number of people. Firstly, I am grateful to my supervisor, Prof. Lize van Robbroeck, for her generous support and guidance. I would also like to thank the Graduate School, Arts and Social Sciences for funding my doctoral studies. Prof. Elizabeth Gunther, chair of the Visual Arts and Visual Studies department, deserves special mention for the support she provided during my studies. Special thanks and appreciation to the amazing Gugulective for sharing critical insights into their work and also for permission to use the images. I am also very thankful to Marianne Komissar for providing her valuable unpublished research on Huit Facettes. I appreciate the dedicated support rendered by Yumna Williams. I also appreciate the contribution of the staff in the library at Stellenbosch University. Thanks to Grammar Guardians for editing and formatting the thesis. Thanks also to Pastor Anthony Ishaya for his technical assistance during thesis submission and examinations.

My special thanks also goes to my wife, Gina Lemu, daughters, Mayla and Ndongwa, and my family for their undying love, patience, and support during my long academic journey. Thanks to Ledelle Moe for her support as a friend in Stellenbosch and colleague in the Arts department. I also thank Vuli Nyoni for academic support and friendship. This thesis also owes a lot to José Cardoso and María Fernanda Garcia Freire for the inspiring ideas during those nocturnal conversations.

Lastly, thanks to George Jawali, Lawrence Mwangonde, William Mwanza, Felix Chillumpha, Francis Ndende, Jjinga Caesar, and Gift, Mada, and Ernest of Ikhaya for the fun that made it all possible.

DEDICATION

For Ndongwa, Syeto, Nambewe, Nandau, and Nanzunga.

And for Duncan Lemu, who gave me my first library membership card.

ABSTRACT

In critical and museological practices, a focus on diaspora has not only limited the scope of African art but also neglected a whole discursive field and practical corpus that challenges neoliberal globalisation on the continent. While highly critical, most gallery-bound practices from Africa tend to get privatised and absorbed in inaccessible enclaves of the global art world. However, this study demonstrates that the art of Gugulective has potential to escape privatisation. Within the South African context, Gugulective's socially engaged collaborative aesthetics contests neoliberal privatisation and co-optation through subject-centred immaterial production. In Gugulective's biopolitical production, artists and non-artists collaborate in transformative aesthetic projects that contest neoliberal capitalism in South Africa. My term "biopolitical collectivism" describes this collective life-forming artistic practice whose products are immaterial rather than material gallery-bound objects. In a context of neoliberal capitalism, which intensifies inequality, pauperisation, and precarisation of life for profit, Gugulective, among other contemporary African art groups, seeks to transform dehumanised subjectivities through collaborative art production, subjective interchange, and sharing. By decentring the object in subject-oriented art, Gugulective's biopolitical collectivism confronts biocapitalism on the terrain of life itself. This is particularly evident in projects such as *Indaba Ludabi*, *Akuchanywa Apha*, *Titled/Untitled*, and *Siphi?* in which Gugulective confronts issues of place, space, and race by deploying a cross-disciplinary and interstitial aesthetic practice which situates itself between the art institution and the non-art world, between aesthetics and activism, the township and the city, the shebeen and the gallery, affects and the art object, art, and life.

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INTRODUCTION

I have vehemently opposed the attempt to position Diaspora Africans as representatives of African cultural practice. This project is no less colonialist in nature than the Western attempt to speak for Africa. There is undoubtedly a need for interlocutors and no one can argue against the good that has come [sic] out of the curatorial work done by Okwui Enwezor and others like him. However, I watched in amazement as museums in the West use works of Diaspora African artists to fill their collections of ‘contemporary African art’. This endeavour effaces Africans from the site of their own creativity and continues to sanction Western preferences over the actual practice of African artists. – S. Ogbechie (in van Robbroeck, 2008)

In a number of articles and online platforms, the African art scholar Sylvester Ogbechie notes an overemphasis on diaspora artists in the promotion, critical discussion, and exhibitions of contemporary African art and asks what this imbalance implies for artistic production and consumption *in* Africa. Ogbechie (2010b; 2011) queries whether the overemphasis on diasporic African artists renders Africa redundant as a location for engaging globalisation.¹ According to Ogbechie, discourse on contemporary African art tends to emphasise artists in the diaspora, while neglecting a whole field of critical practices on the continent. In her book, *This is not art: Activism and other ‘not-art’*, Alana Jelinek (2013) described how, through its adoption of neoliberal market values such as privatisation, liberalisation, and deregulation, the global art world is increasingly monopolistic and monoculturalistic in its art fairs and biennales, to the detriment of artistic practices on the “fringes”. Through various market mechanisms, the neoliberal art world sifts, selects, and valorises only those few artists deemed market-worthy and safe.

This thesis builds on Ogbechie’s critical observations to question whether a focus on diaspora not only limits the scope of African art but also neglects a whole discursive field and practical corpus that challenge neoliberal globalisation.² In this study I attempt to locate and highlight

¹ See also van Robbroeck (2008) in “Africa’s interlocutors: Lize van Robbroeck in conversation with Sylvester Ogbechie”.

² In this study, neoliberalism, which I discuss in detail later, is understood as a globalised Western political economic doctrine with foundations in liberal principles of individual rights and freedoms that champion “individual entrepreneurial freedoms ... private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005:2).

an aesthetic that contests neoliberal globalisation on the continent. I demonstrate how the collectivist biopolitical projects of the South African art collective Gugulective exemplify critical work that contests capitalist globalisation on the continent. Informality, cross-disciplinarity, pedagogy, nomadism, and affects are some of the biopolitical tools of the aesthetics of resistance of the group – an aesthetic shaped by the concrete lived experience of the postcolonial circumstances in which it is situated.

Gugulective adopts the township shebeen, a historically loaded space that was at the centre of anti-apartheid struggles, as a hub for its artistic activism. The collective was established in 2006 by a group of young artists, writers, and intellectuals based in the Gugulethu township of Cape Town, South Africa. The members, Athi Monjezeleli Joja, Zipho Dayile, Lonwabo Kilani, Dathini Mzayiya, Khanyisile Mbongwa, Kemang Wa Lehulere, Unathi Sigenu (deceased), Themba Tsotsi, Loyiso Qanya, Ayanda Kilimane, and Gabi Ngcobo, were motivated by the need to use art as a form of activism and for community engagement. They adopted the name “Gugulective” to refer to the group’s place of origin and base of operation – the township of Gugulethu, which itself means “our pride” in isiXhosa (Teppo & Houssay-Holzschuch, 2013). The name mixes the isiXhosa word “*gugu*”, which means “pride”, with “lective”, from the word “collective”. Gugulective can be compared to the martyred Gugulethu Seven, young men who were members of the military wing of ANC, Umkonto weSizwe, who were ambushed by apartheid forces in 1986. Like the Gugulethu Seven, Gugulective fights for social justice through culture. Denied access to art world infrastructure such as studios, galleries, art schools, and museums, the group decided to occupy and repurpose an operational shebeen in Gugulethu called kwaMlamli, owned by a local businessman called Mlamli Nyathela. For several years since it was established, Gugulective operated as a group based in this Gugulethu shebeen, engaged in art activism that features work ranging from installation to performance (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Gugulective installation at KwaMlamli in Gugulethu

For several years since it was established, Gugulective operated as a group based in this Gugulethu shebeen, initiating and completing projects collectively. However, rather than functioning as a cohesive unit, the group can be described as a loose network of individuals working independently; cooperating and collaborating with each other or with other agents and communities in diverse projects when the need arises. For instance, Athi Monjezeleli Joja, a writer and intellectual recently based in Johannesburg, is now involved in active politics as a member of the newly formed Black First Land First Movement. Khanyisile Mbongwa is an artist and curator who also works in a non-governmental organisation for youths based in Cape Town. Zipho Dayile is an artist and also an administrator at Greatmore Studios in Cape Town. Lonwabo Kilani is an artist and writer who also participates in grassroots activism. Dathini Mzayiya is a solo artist. Kemang Wa Lehurere, who also works as a solo artist, won the 2015 Standard Bank Young Artist Award in the Visual Arts category.

Bearing in mind Ogbechie's observations, in this dissertation I seek to "return to place" (to borrow from Geeta Kapur, 2007:295) and to ruminate upon critical practices on the continent such as Gugulective, with the intention neither to provincialise the practices, nor to dispense

with the African diaspora, but to locate an aesthetic with a sense of place in an increasingly deterritorialised world.

It needs pointing out that Gugulective is not the only South African contemporary black art group to focus on local constituents and to address issues such as lack of access to art infrastructure. The Black Arts Collective (BLAC), founded by Zayd Minty in Cape Town in 1998, similarly sought to address the issues of the marginalisation and invisibility of black artists. “For five years, BLAC provided a forum for discourse building and explored issues of race, power, and identity through workshops, seminars, articles, public art projects, and a website. Intentionally temporary in its duration, BLAC aimed to address specific, local moments and concerns, sidestepping larger ‘grand narratives’ about race relations. The loose collective of artists, working across media, met regularly to discuss contemporary black identity, even at times questioning the use of the term at all” (Thompson, 2012).

However, while the group intervened in the public space, in such places as the township of Langa, with graffiti, billboards, and also held seminars and workshops, they did not hold a sustained engagement with and within the marginalised communities. Gugulective, on the other hand, established its operational base in the shebeen in the township of Gugulethu, where it launched most of its campaigns. It also has to be pointed out that BLAC was a one-man initiative by Zayd Minty, who described it on his LinkedIn webpage as “a discussion forum and a website.” Also, other Cape Town based contemporary art collectives with similar concern include Chimurenga and Burning Museum. However, due to insufficient literature and critical mass about these collectives this study mainly focuses on Gugulective.

I regard a collective as a group of artists and/or other creative persons working together with communities in short- or long-term aesthetic production. In these practices, the aesthetic meets the social in art that seeks to directly engage everyday life. To put it simply, artists collaborate with other experts such as researchers, teachers, musicians, politicians, chefs, etc. in the aesthetic production of subjectivities. Rather than group projects in which a number of art specialists together produce objects in isolation and exhibit them in public, thereby maintaining the traditional distinctions of artist and viewer, I focus on projects that critically question this distinction by actively involving the viewer as a participant in the art-production process. I am aware, nevertheless, that there is nothing peculiar about collectivist art practice per se; in fact, collectivism is as old as art itself. However, the immaterial processes of aesthetic production

through which the new groups respond to contemporary capitalist exploitation is what draws my interest.

My interest in contemporary African collectives such as Gugulective stems from my own practice as an artist whose art has developed from object-based to concept-based work. I was attracted to realistic painting at a very young age in primary school. I entered university to study for a degree in Humanities Education in 1999. While in college, a spirit of experimentation to find the most apt expressive medium was awakened in me after being exposed to various art styles and movements, ranging from traditional African sculpture to modern African painting, from Surrealism to Abstract Expressionism. Then, as now, the broader Malawian visual art scene was dominated by tourist-oriented commercial arts and crafts – what in the Malawian/African academic circles is called “airport art”. However, the university offered a rare haven for experimentation and exposure to a broader range of ideas. Between 2000 and 2001, while I was still an undergraduate student, Macha Roseink (a curator from the Netherlands), taught in the department as a visiting lecturer. Roseink brought with her a collection of contemporary art texts which updated our archaic library and significantly transformed the syllabus. By the time I graduated in 2003, not only had I experimented with a wide range of modernist styles, but I had also dabbled in conceptualism.

The quest for the best aesthetic idiom intensified when I entered Savannah College of Art and Design in Georgia, USA, in 2007 to study for a master’s degree in painting. In an art department that heavily favoured traditional painting, I embarked on in-depth research about avant-garde movements, experimented with conceptualism, and read extensively about post-modernism and critical theory. Conceptualism, combined with Marxist, post-structuralist, and postcolonialist theory, offered me an avenue to critically re-examine my former artistic perspective and aesthetic choices. Henceforth, anything became a potential medium for artistic expression.

News of xenophobic violence by South Africans against migrants of African origins that erupted in 2008 reached me while I was a graduate student in Savannah, Georgia. This xenophobia led me to re-examine my own subjectivity as an African student in the “Deep South” of the United States. The result was my thesis project, “Visa Worries / Wither Queries”, which dealt with some of the experiences of a third-world migrant in the First World through performance and installation. Since graduate school in 2009, the main body of my art practice

has consisted of text-based work, ephemeral installations, and street performances, which have continued to tease out issues of migrant mobility and precarity in globalisation.

A spirit of artistic experimentation was rekindled when I joined the CORE Program of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, in 2010 to study criticism and write on contemporary African art. While in the programme, a great deal of self-reflectivity and valuable feedback from colleagues led me to re-examine my fraught position as an individual author in neoliberal capitalism. Personal visits and intense studio conversations with various prominent theorists such as Huey Copeland, Douglas Crimp, Brian Holmes, Alison de Lima Greene, and Katy Siegel led me to deeply consider a “deskilled”, “post-studio” praxis. Such an art de-emphasises mastery of technical skill situated in the social domain, rather than the exclusive art world. My regular visits to Rick Rowe’s Project Row Houses, a socially engaged cultural project that transformed a neglected African-American neighbourhood into a vibrant art centre, and my sojourn as an artist-in-residence at Alabama Song, a centre for collaborative art projects founded by Gabriel Martinez and Kelly Sears, both in Houston, intensified my curiosity in a cross-disciplinary, socially engaged art. Later, this was shaped tremendously by my reading of Foucault, Hardt and Negri, and Mbembe. In this thesis, what I call biopolitical collectivism, i.e. a collaborative practice that focuses on the production of subjectivities rather than gallery-bound objects as the final aesthetic product, has been the logical conclusion of this critical artistic and intellectual journey. By terming the practices biopolitical collectivism, I do not intend to posit transcendental African collectivist aesthetics. Rather, I seek to highlight the subject-centred and collectivist approach of Gugulective, which contests the intensified privatisation and concurrent pauperisation wrought by neoliberal capitalism.

The contestation of neoliberal capitalism is a personal battle due to the fact that as a child I was a direct victim of the rampant restructuring and privatisation of public assets that escalated in the 1990s when the euphoric global “wind of change” blew through Malawi. The country changed from Kamuzu Banda’s dictatorship to a “democracy” in 1994. The new government, led by Mr Bakili Muluzi, implemented wholesale the structural adjustment programmes of international money-lending institutions. The massive currency devaluations, deregulation, and denationalisation that followed had devastating consequences on the weak Malawian economy. My father, Mr Duncan Lemu, who worked as an accounts clerk in the national airline, was a victim of retrenchment when the new government decided to restructure and sell this national asset. The meagre package that he received upon his job termination vanished quickly due to the devaluation and inflation in the economy at the time. Mr Lemu, who never found another

decent job, never recovered from this shock and died penniless and homeless. This blow on the breadwinner had very devastating effects on the welfare of the family, which sunk in the mire of poverty. Considering that restructuring, privatisation, and the consequent massive job losses occurred in almost all public assets at the time – in telecommunications, transport, forestry, etc. – my family’s ordeal was shared by many Malawian households (Magalasi, 2008). Currently, the existing airline is crippled, the once vibrant railway line is almost defunct, and the postal service is half dead. The country as a whole is rat-trapped in debt with its citizenry mired in abject poverty.

Aims and objectives

This study investigates how the collectivist practices of Gugulethu of South Africa contests neoliberal capitalism. It examines how the collective works against neoliberal capitalist dispossession and dehumanisation to create autonomous subjectivities with the capacity to shape their own social reality. The study focuses on post-1989 collectives that were established after the end of the Cold War, when neoliberalism entrenched itself in the West and also expanded globally. Free market capitalism has had deleterious political and socio-economic effects on the African continent, mainly through its facilitation of the transference of public resources into private hands (Hall, Massey & Rustin, 2013). By facilitating redistribution from the poor to the rich, neoliberalism has led to the dispossession, pauperisation, and dehumanisation of Africans. In this thesis I argue that socially engaged, cross-disciplinary, and activist collectivism can reverse this state of affairs. I differentiate between contemporary African collectivism and traditional collectivism and other non-object-based collectivist practices such as Relational Aesthetics, while also noting the continuities and inter-linkages between these various forms of collectivism. I argue that Gugulethu strives to redeem the dehumanised through grassroots-based, subject-centred, and life-forming aesthetics. In the work of the group, objects do not completely vanish from the realm of artistic production but rather they no longer hold primacy in aesthetic meaning-making. Traditional art products such as paintings and installations, if there are any, occupy the same position as and form part of the whole range of ordinary objects employed in subjectivation processes which include performances, recitals, debates and conversations. Intensified privatisation makes it urgent to critically assess the fraught position of art objects as commodities in neoliberalism. It is in this light that biopolitical collectivism, which decentres the art object and prioritises the viewer as participant, holds critical potential. While traditional artistic practice centralises the art object

as the locus of aesthetic meaning-making, crucial to Gugulective is the production of subjects with critical agency.

Rationale

This study is an attempt to clear artistic and cultural pathways to artistic and cultural lines of flight (to borrow from Deleuze and Guattari, 1980) from neoliberal dispossession and pauperisation. In comparison to traditional mono-authorial, object-based practices, I regard the aesthetic methods employed by Gugulective and other collectives such as Huit Facettes of Senegal and Le Groupe Amos of The Democratic Republic of Congo, which I also discuss in detail in this study, to have far-reaching effects on the transformation of individuals and societies within neoliberal globalisation. The choice of the collectives under discussion is therefore guided by their objectives under neoliberal capitalism on the continent, particularly since its globalisation and entrenchment in the 1990s. This not only provides scope and context but also helps us understand the socio-economic and political issues with which contemporary African artists are grappling. Cognisant of the dominant essentialist art-historical discourses that have sought to tie current African cultural practices to a static past, I maintain that rather than constituting a return to the past, this form of collectivism seeks contemporary aesthetic solutions to contemporary problems. I understand contemporary simply to mean “of belonging to our times” or “being of the moment and sharing presentness with others” (Smith, 2011:9). With the entrenchment of neoliberalism, no cultural practice can claim to be outside the vagaries of globalisation. However, common among Gugulective and other contemporary anti-capitalist art groups such as Huit Facettes, and Le Groupe Amos is their shared political goal to empower marginalised subjects through collaborative artistic projects.

My study on Gugulective focuses on five projects titled *Ityala aliboli* (2010), *Indaba ludabi* (2010), *Akuchanywa apha* (2007), *Titled/Untitled* (2007), and *Siphi?*(2008). *Ityala aliboli* is a series of photomontages in which an image of the eight members of the collective lined up in a queue is overlaid on apartheid banknotes bearing the face of Jan van Riebeeck who was the founder of Cape Town. In *Indaba ludabi*, members of the collective do a performance which involves borrowed advertisement techniques of South African traditional healers and witchdoctors (*sangomas*). *Akuchanywa apha* featured discussions, performances, hip-hop, poetry, and installations hosted at kwaMlamli shebeen in Gugulethu. Just like *Akuchanywa apha*, *Titled/Untitled* was an event which involved discussions, dub poetry, music, and performances (Figure 2). In *Siphi?* the members of the group stormed the opening of their

exhibition in balaclavas, simulating the hijack of their own art to instigate debates about the politics of exclusion in art world spaces in South Africa. The discussion also centers on projects by Huit Facettes and Le Groupe Amos which seek to address issues of marginalisation of the postcolonial subject under neoliberal capitalism.



Figure 2: Gugulective, *Titled/Untitled* at Blank Projects, Cape Town, 2007

By selecting practices that seek subject empowerment by collaborative art-making, I do not completely negate all object-based mono-authorial practices. Rather, while I argue that African object-based mono-authorial practices get absorbed by the neoliberal market relatively easily, compared to collectives' immaterial products which tend to evade capitalist expropriation, I take into account the coexistence and even interrelationships between biopolitical collectivist practices and object-based mono-authorial practices. I note, for example, how some group members within the collectives have continued with object-based practices such as painting individually, thus maintaining a fluid relationship between the two approaches. Most importantly, I also note that in biopolitical collectivism, physical labour is involved in the production of objects such as videos, placards, and other ephemera. While these objects are

subordinate to a larger artistic project such as a demonstration or pedagogy, they help sustain interaction, exchange, conviviality, and communication.

In the colonial and postcolonial past, numerous collectives, workshops, and community arts initiatives flourished in different parts of Africa. Examples of these include the Oshogbo workshop of Nigeria, the Poto-Poto of Congo's Brazzaville, the Frank McEwen initiative in Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia), Laboratoire Agit-Art of Senegal, the Crystallist Movement of Sudan, the Mihwar Group of Egypt, and the Polly Street Art Centre and the Nyanga Art Centre in South Africa, among others. Other collectives have been established and operated after 1989, such as the Eye Society of Nigeria or the Dimension Group of Ethiopia (Deliss, 1995; Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009). However, it has to be noted that the main differences between contemporary biopolitical collectivism and the workshops and community arts practices, past and present, lie in the fact that traditional collectives entailed artists working individually in the collective space, usually under the supervision of a patron of the workshop, while in independently organised biopolitical collectivism, the artists collaborate on a single project. The fact that in some of the workshops artists "graduated" after spending some considerable time there, gives one the impression that the workshops were preparatory grounds (like colleges) for future careers rather than professional groups. In addition, as has been stated, while the old collectives based their practices on gallery-bound objects, the contemporary collectives critically re-examine the position of the object under capitalism.

The visible effects of neoliberal capitalist globalisation on the contemporary African economic, political, and cultural terrain two and a half decades after its entrenchment at the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s gives us pause for critical reflection. Thus, this study heeds the call for a "reterritorialisation", or a return to place, to reclaim political agency in a field that has suffered muzzling and crippling discursive "deterritorialisation". Rather than focus solely on who left, I turn to who remained on the continent to cope with or contest these political and economic deprivations and marginalisations (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009). This is not in order to depreciate the immense value of the contribution of diasporic artistic practices and their attendant critical discourses to the knowledge of the continent. Rather, spatially, upturning the traditional top-down approach, the study takes a localised approach, borrowing from the Foucaultian concept of the specific intellectual who engages in politicised and localised struggles rather than in universal truths. Basically, the study tries to respond to the crucial question of how contemporary artists on the African continent are reacting to neoliberal capitalist globalisation on the continent. Contextually, this question is posed with the awareness

of the appearance, in the broader contemporary art discourses, of what the art historian Angela Dimitrakaki (2011) identified as “an economic subject”, which has emerged due to the global dominance of neoliberalism and the consequent transformations of the ontology of labour and its products. Biopolitical collectivism is one of the most appropriate aesthetic approaches for dealing with this new global configuration.

To concentrate on neoliberal capitalist globalisation is to deal with a constellation of factors that have informed the present. Okwui Enwezor, who traces the origin of globalisation to the age of the voyages of discovery, calls the postcolonial constellation “the new geopolitical configuration, its post-imperial transformations” (in Condee, Enwezor & Smith, 2008: 208). The entrenchment of neoliberal globalisation dovetails with the great paradigmatic transformations in global economic production from a material-based era referred to as Fordism to an immaterial-based economy called post-Fordism, all of which have great ramifications on what constitutes the postcolonial or even the neocolonial present. To understand these transformations, my thesis is broadly informed by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s theoretical analyses of capitalism, which build on Marx, Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari. According to Hardt and Negri (2001), in contemporary capitalism value accumulation shifts from material to immaterial goods such as information, images, and services. As capital shifts from material to immaterial goods, it increasingly becomes flexible and mobile. In Africa, the increasing flexibility and mobility of capital have resulted in the precarisation, dispossession, and dehumanisation of millions of people. In addition, contemporary capital has colonised and permeated life to profit from life itself. Within this context, therefore, the tendency of Gugulective towards autonomous biopolitical production in socially engaged collectivist praxis is not only anathema to capitalism but also has the potential to escape absorption into neoliberal capitalist globalisation.

Expanding the theories of biopolitics by a group of Italian Marxists called the Workerist/Autonomist movement, Hardt and Negri (2000: 290) defined immaterial labour as “labour that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication.” The authors (2000:30) elaborated what they regarded as the three primary aspects of immaterial labour, namely “the communicative labor of industrial production that has newly become linked in informational networks, the interactive labor of symbolic analysis and problem solving, and the labor of the production and manipulation of affects.” Placing primary value on the third aspect, Hardt and Negri stated that “with its focus on the productivity of the corporeal, the somatic is an extremely important element in the contemporary networks

of biopolitical production” (Ibid). Gugulective engages in immaterial practices that are geared towards the formation of autonomous subjects through collaborative community empowerment projects that prioritise communication, cooperation, interaction, and exchange. It is this focus on the production of affects that forms the basis of a biopolitics of resistance of this collective.

However, following Hardt and Negri, Ray (2004a) perceived that “from a biopolitical perspective, Empire controls bodies by controlling the production of desires or ‘imaginaries’.” Immaterial labour itself and the production of affects are thus already involuntarily subsumed within neoliberal capitalism in a highly flexible and hybrid service-oriented economy which expropriates affective products for profit, or as the American theorist Lane Relyea (2006:69) put it, the “neoliberal appropriations of the artist as an idealisation of entrepreneurial subjectivity”. Writing within the context of a highly technologised West, Relyea questions what the affinities and interrelationships between contemporary, relational, services-based aesthetic projects and post-Fordist modes of production such as networking, mobility, and flexibility mean for contemporary artistic production. According to Relyea, “with the spread of instrumentalised and instrumentalising communications technology, social exchange is increasingly ensnared within the logic of commodity exchange” (Ibid). Contemporary capitalism is not as advanced in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), in South Africa, or Senegal, as it is in the United States. However, in light of Relyea’s observations, this study examines how the collectives in question have the potential to evade this post-Fordist instrumentalisation, co-option, and exploitation. In other words, considering that even affective production gets subsumed in capital in post-Fordism (Hardt & Negri, 2000), the task of this thesis is to investigate how the collectives – whose products are also affects – evade this subsumption. I argue that through nomadic, informal, and extra-disciplinary³ aesthetics, Gugulective is able to contest capitalism and create autonomous subjects. I investigate the processes of the expropriation of affects, desires, and imaginaries of the labouring subjects in Empire and the methods with which subjects empower themselves, intervene in processes of alienation, and elude this expropriation on the African geopolitical terrain. The study asks questions such as how does capital absorb living labour in Africa; and, how do African subjects evade alienation in what Hardt and Negri diagnosed as “real subsumption” (i.e. total integration of labour in capital)? To paraphrase Ray (2004a), how do the works of Gugulective manage to

³ “Extradisciplinary” is a term borrowed from Holmes (2012), who used it in his essay “Extradisciplinary investigations: Towards a new critique of institutions” to refer to recent forms of activist practices in the public realm that cross over disciplines such as art, new media, anthropology, sociology, etc.

re-appropriate productive capacities that refuse reduction to the system of waged commodity production?

‘Aesthetics’ versus ‘activism’

Within the current debates (led by the American art theorists Grant Kester and Clair Bishop) on the position of collaborative art practices and social activism, I situate contemporary African collectivism in between the opposing rubrics of “aesthetics” and “activism”.⁴ The “aesthetics” school of thought, led by Bishop, charges that activist art is inadequate and ineffectual both as art and activism, while Kester’s “activist” or “ethical” school challenges that the art world, due to a lack of the necessary critical tools, has been reluctant to recognise and acknowledge the ethical contributions of collaborative art. In what he termed “dialogical aesthetics”, Kester (2006; 2013) promoted collaborative practices such as the Austrian collective *Wochenklausur*, *Park Fiction* in Germany, and the Brazilian *Ala Plastica*, which work with communities to improve their lot through prolonged dialogue and exchange. This is in contrast to Bishop, who focuses on work by artists such as the Briton Jeremy Deller, the Spanish Santiago Sierra, and the French Thomas Hirschhorn, who use collaboration for critically antagonistic work aimed at disrupting or uncovering systems of oppression (Bishop, 2012a).

In work such as *Indaba ludabi*, *Akuchanywa apha* and *Titled/Untitled*, art fuses with activism in projects that feature painting, performance, debates set in non-art spaces. As we will note, such projects illustrate how *Gugulethu* involves both ethical practices geared towards ameliorating the material human conditions *and* disruptive aesthetics rooted in critical theory that is geared towards unveiling the structural “determinants that pattern social behavior” (Allen, 2011:219). Bishop emphasised that she “believes in the continued value of disruption, with all its philosophical anti-humanism, as a form of resistance to instrumental rationality and as a source of transformation” (Ibid:221). According to Bishop,

without artistic gestures that recalibrate our perception, that allow multiple interpretations, that factor the problem of documentation/presentation into each project, and that have a life beyond an immediate social goal, we are left with pleasantly innocuous art. Not non-art, just bland art – and art that easily compensates for inadequate government policies (Ibid:221-222).

⁴ See *Artforum*, 2006, 44(9 & 10).

While Bishop's emphasis on shock and destabilisation is based on assumptions of the viewer's cognitive naïveté, Kester proposes that "in dialogical practice production and reception co-occur, and reception itself is refashioned as a mode of production ... Dialogical practices can unfold over weeks, months, and even years" (2013a). I show in Chapter 3 that the work of Gugulective straddles these two poles between activism and aesthetics. While I promote "artistic gestures that recalibrate our perception" and "allow multiple interpretations", it should be noted, however, that I distance contemporary African collectivism from the philosophical anti-humanism championed by Bishop. At the heart of contemporary African art collectivism is the redemption or formation of subjectivities under dehumanisation, not its negation. Also, the practices favoured by Bishop fall within the traditional mono-authorial structure whereby a single artist conceives the works and subsequently engages collaborators. I argue in this thesis that this is antithetical to the collectivist ethos. The collectives I study work with communities, and intervene in crises in transformatory long- or short-term projects that simultaneously critique the systems that create these social crises. Cognisant of the broader socio-political context within which these collectives are situated, I assert that these practices cannot be biopolitical without recognising the biopower machinery of subjugation.

This in-between praxis forms the core of the aesthetics of recent African groups, among which are Gugulective of Cape Town, South Africa, which has involved a critical engagement with the predominantly white neoliberal South African art institution in collaborative works that tackle black marginalisation and empowerment staged not in the gallery space but in a shebeen in the slums (see Figure 2). Huit Facettes-Interaction is a collective of Senegalese artists whose main mission was to empower (through the sharing of skills such as weaving, carving, batik, and dyeing) the rural villages of Senegal that were side-lined in official development agendas. And lastly, Le Groupe Amos is an artist-activist group from the DRC which, employing similar pedagogical and activist tactics as groups such as the ACT-UP coalition, works with the grassroots in community development projects. It publishes books, produces radio broadcasts, theatre, audio, and short video documentaries, and employs a variety of other media strategies to reach the wider public in its pedagogic campaigns. The core of the mission of Le Groupe Amos is to uplift the vulnerable and the marginalised, especially women.



Figure 3: Gugulective performance at kwaMlamli in Gugulethu, 2007

Literature review

Despite tremendous changes in the past two decades in the way African artists are represented in discourses of contemporary art, and also despite a significant increase in the amount of literature in terms of critical reviews, and theory on the subject broadly, there exists a dearth of in-depth literature on collectivist practices active on the continent. Some of the major publications on socially engaged practices include Miwon Kwon's *One place after another: Site-specific art and locational identity* (2004), Stimson and Sholette's *Collectivism after modernism: The art of social imagination after 1945* (2007), Grant Kester's *Conversation pieces: Community and communication in modern art* (2004) and *The one and the many: Contemporary collaborative art in a global context* (2011), Gregory Sholette's *Dark matter* (2011), Claire Bishop's *Artificial hells: Participatory art and the politics of spectatorship* (2012), and Nato Thompson's *Living as form* (2012). Out of this list only Stimson and Sholette (2007) and Kester (2011) examine collectivism in Africa. Thompson's catalogue includes synopses of a number of public art projects in different parts of the continent. However, as brief

synopses, these entries do not offer in-depth analyses of the structure, philosophy, and aesthetics of the collectives discussed.

While decrying the reterritorialisations of curatorial and critical discourses onto the diaspora, one should note that there have been concerted efforts by some scholars to record and examine the contemporary artistic developments on the continent. The most recent major survey of the history of modern and contemporary African art by Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Contemporary African art since 1980* published in 2009 is an indispensable text on the topic. The book features an essays on art and politics which discusses examples of collectivist activism on the continent as exemplified by groups such as Laboratoire Agit-Art and Set Setal of Senegal, and the Sisi kwa Sisi group of Kenya. Also, the book offers synopses of a broader range of collectives in African art, including Gugulective, in its index. The text, while limited in detailed information about the groups, has been valuable as a reference resource on the history of collectivism in modern and contemporary art.

The *Nka Journal of Contemporary Africa Art*, which is one of the few journals on the subject of contemporary African art, has dedicated its issue number 34 of 2014 to black collectivism. Only one article in the special issue, by the Cameroonian writer and curator Elvira Dyangani Ose, is focused on collectivism in Africa. The essay, entitled “Enthusiasm: Collectiveness, politics, and aesthetics”, offers critical insights into new African collectivism and raises important issues to reflect upon the collectivist social projects of the Bessengue City Project in Douala, Cameroon, and the Chimurenga Library in Cape Town, South Africa. Due to their social praxis, these projects can be considered as examples of biopolitical collectivism in Africa. In my discussion, Dyangani Ose’s text also provides valuable insights for understanding how affects are central in the politics of contemporary African art collectivism.

In his seminal book entitled *Conversation pieces: Community and communication in modern art*, first published in 2004, with an updated edition published in 2013, Kester lists Huit Facettes-Interaction among other recent international collectives such as Ala Plastica in Buenos Aires, Superflex in Denmark, MuF in London, Maurice O’Connell in Ireland, Ne Pas Plier in Paris, Ultra Red in Los Angeles, and Temporary Services in Chicago. However, Kester postpones discussion of the African collective to his recent publication, *The one and the many*, in which he dedicates a section to an examination of the work of the group. In the book, Kester provides a detailed account of the genesis of Huit Facettes within the NGO network in Senegal. Noting how Huit Facettes set their practices in rural southern Senegal, Kester observes that the

collective seeks to upset the dominant top-down mode of international cultural, political, and economic exchange in which Africa is positioned at the subordinate receiving end. The group seeks to balance the skewed “core/periphery logic of globalisation” in North-South relationships and thereby establish the South as an important node in this relationship (Kester, 2011). Rather than maintain the West as the locus of cultural exchange, Huit Facettes challenges “the geopolitical privilege of the North ... by rooting these exchanges in the proximate conditions, spaces, and protocols of Dakar or Hamdallaye, for example, rather than London or New York ...” He also points out how this decentring operates across the divisions between rural and urban, rich and poor, within Senegal. However, although Kester noted the subject-empowering processes of Huit Facettes, he did not investigate or expound upon how these practices have the potential to slip through and free the pervasive neoliberal net; this in light of the fact also noted by Kester that the group was founded and operated on the international NGO substructure. In this study I use this reading of Huit Facettes’ decentring practices as biopolitical critique of neoliberal capitalist globalisation.

Stimson and Sholette’s (2007) *Collectivism after modernism: The art of social imagination after 1945*, perhaps the most significant anthology on the history of modern collectivism, features an important chapter on the African collectives Huit Facettes and Le Groupe Amos, written by Enwezor, entitled “The production of social space as artwork: Protocols of community in the work of Le Groupe Amos and Huit Facettes”. Situating collectivism in the DRC and Senegal within the politics and crisis of the subject in neoliberalism on the continent, Enwezor also emphasises the subject-forming and empowering procedures of these groups and recognises their capacity to redeem political agency and sovereignty for the marginalised and the dispossessed. Thus Enwezor (2007:234) states that “Structural Adjustment Programs put into place the inability of a host of Africa subjects to properly conceptualize and formulate their own futures, that is, to speak as true social subjects”.

For Enwezor, the modern collectivist praxis of Le Groupe Amos and Huit Facettes is critical because of their radicalisation of the modern concept of the author as an individual genius which is rooted in the romantic tradition. In addition, the collectivisation of production vexes the status of the art work within the politics of the market. But most importantly, Enwezor has faith in the potential of these collectives to boost sovereignty within the dilapidated postcolonial state under neoliberalism. Like Kester, Enwezor observes how the collective subverts the hierarchical modes of operation of NGO development work in a bid to stimulate subjective agency. Other writers such as Costandius and Rosochacki (2013), Van Niekerk

(2007), and N'Landu (2004) have provided introductory reviews of contemporary African collectives such as Gugulective, Huit Facettes, and Le Groupe Amos in the aftermath of Enwezor's *Documenta 11* of 2002, an international show that placed these collectives under a global spotlight. However sparse, this literature has been vital for the present study to examine the different aesthetic techniques and methods the groups have adopted to counter neoliberal capitalism on the African continent.

Methodology

In his article entitled "The device laid bare: On some limitations in current art criticism", Kester (2013) exposes the inadequacies and discrepancies of current methodologies of art criticism and art-history for analysing socially engaged art. According to Kester, traditional critical methods are appropriate for object-based rather than immaterial, durational, and dialogical practices. Kester therefore proposes new research methodologies which are interdisciplinary, field-based, durational, discursive, haptic, and which also take into account the spatial and temporal rhythms of the conditions within which the art in question is or was produced. Kester's new methodology is in agreement with other authors who have written on the topic (Askins & Pain, 2011; Papastergiadis in Condee *et al.*, 2008; Papastergiadis, 2012; Parfitt, 2004). Cognisant of these critical debates on the methodology for socially engaged practices, my initial plan was to conduct participatory action research in which I would be an active participant, collaborator, as well as observer in ongoing art projects by the collectives under study (Askins & Pain, 2011; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; O'Neill, 2008; Papastergiadis, 2002). However, I could not secure funding to enable field research in the different locales in the duration of my research timeframe. Therefore, due to time constraints, it became imperative to opt for an alternative method of data collection, despite my recognition, throughout the thesis, of the crucial aspects of embodied experience and embeddedness in collaborative knowledge production. . I therefore acknowledge that such missed opportunities for direct contact could have constituted a valuable contribution to this research (Billo & Hiemstra, 2013). Consequently, the study took on a reflective character. I undertook qualitative research by combining a post-modernist and post-structuralist interpretation and critique (Merriam, 2002). In particular, post-structuralism was important for its scepticism towards metanarratives and also its critique of essentialist and reified notions of subjects in relation to identity and difference – a difference that is critical to neoliberalism's depoliticised and corporatised diversity (Cameron & Gibson, 2005; Revel, 2009; Salem, 2016). This aided in the

understanding of the genealogy of contemporary African collectives and the nature of subjectivities that constitute the collectives. My usage of the concepts of biopolitics and multitude is situated within this postcolonial and Marxist-inflected strand of post-structuralist reading of subjectivation and difference. The post-modernist and post-structuralist analytical method was also appropriate for analysing the cross-disciplinary and heterogeneous aesthetics of the collective and also for examining the nomadic and networked character of the collective. The Deleuzian concept of the rhizome, which was proper for understanding the criticality of the collective in its project of subject empowerment, exemplifies this strand of post-structuralist reading.

Data collection within the collective in South Africa comprised using structured and unstructured oral and written interviews. This method was preferable to others such as observation because the collective was not producing work at the time of research. Information was also gathered through numerous e-mail correspondence and telephone calls with different members of the collective. This information was supplemented by extant literature and documents on the collective such as books, journal articles, online magazine reviews, and photographs. A retrospective analysis poses limits, considering that the main focus of study is the immaterial (therefore ephemeral and temporary) dimension of the aesthetic process, i.e. the contingent, the performative, the experiential, and the affective. However, descriptions of the art-making processes by the members of the collectives and curators of the projects, videos, photographs, and site visits helped to formulate reconstructions of the aesthetic production by the collectives. Data collected from interviews were analysed from a self-reflexive (intimate outsider)⁵ perspective using a post-structuralist critical analysis as mentioned above. The interviews were conducted with each individual member of the collective separately. So, in keeping with my understanding of contemporary African art collectivism as that which does not suppress singularities and individualities, I did not collectivise the responses of the interviewees but individualised each particular respondent.

Since Gugulective had no plans to produce art as a collective for the duration of my field research timeframe of a year (the duration of my studies was three years, within which I needed to undertake proposal writing, field research, data analysis, and thesis writing), it became imperative to opt for an alternative but equally feasible method of data collection.

⁵ Oguibe (2004: 15) uses this term to describe a researcher who is strongly attached to the topic but who does not come from the same social background as the producers.

As mentioned previously, I recognise that consideration of crucial aspects of embodied experience and embeddedness in collaborative knowledge production (such as language, utterance, gesture, movement, and affects) could have critically contributed to this research (Kester, 2013a; 2013b). Thus, examining work that had been executed in the past, the study took on a reflective character. Rather than as a participant and interlocutor of ongoing projects, the study has taken on the shape of a retrospection of completed projects (Papastergiadis in Condee *et al.*, 2008). This retrospective mode of analysis poses limits considering that my main focus of study is the immaterial (therefore ephemeral and temporary) dimension of the aesthetic process. However, to avoid the pitfalls of preconceptions, and what Nicodemus and Romare (1998) call self-assertion and wishful thinking of “what one wants to see there”, conversations with the members of the collective and curators of the projects, videos, photographs, and repeated visits to important sites helped to formulate imaginary reconstructions of the aesthetic processes by the collective and to refashion images of the formal and thematic aspects of its projects.

In Chapter 1 I propose that due to strategies such as collectivisation of authorship, blurring of the boundary between artist and spectator, and also extra-disciplinarity, the contemporary collectives under study can be distinguished from colonial and modern collectives, which, even while engaged in participatory and collaborative projects, still largely maintain a traditional object-based mono-authorial praxis. Unlike the old collectives, the new collectives are freely formed, self-organised networks of anti-capitalist resistance. An in-depth investigation of the different methodologies of two contemporary African collectives other than Gugulective is offered in Chapter 5.

Chapter layout

The first three chapters of the thesis offer a historical background and theoretical framework for studying contemporary African collectivism. The last two chapters are sustained analyses of three case studies. In Chapter 1, I offer a brief history of collectivism in African art, starting from the pre-colonial period to the present in order to provide a background of the development of collectivist practices on the continent. I also offer a definition of collectivism within the contemporary African art context. To set the parameters for understanding the nature of the practices under study, I examine the structure and philosophy of colonial and postcolonial workshops, as well as modern and contemporary community arts initiatives which also had a

collective ethos. I also look at contemporary collectivist practices globally, before examining the social and political context in which the contemporary African art collectives under study are set.

In Chapter 2, I offer a theoretical framework for analysing the biopolitics of Gugulective within Hardt and Negri's Foucauldian concept of biopolitical production in post-modernity, which I link to Deleuze and Guattari's theories of the rhizome. I provide an analysis of the concept of biopolitics as articulated by Foucault and subsequently adopted and employed by Hardt and Negri in their examination of the transformations occurring on the global political and economic terrain. While direct reference is made to Foucault's biopolitics, I mainly base my theoretical framework on Hardt and Negri's interpretation of the concept as they apply it on the broader contemporary global terrain. For Hardt and Negri (2009), who distinguish between biopower and biopolitics, biopower colonises and exploits life, while biopolitics resist this colonisation and exploitation and creates alternative forms of subjectivity. Biopower and biopolitics therefore offer a theoretical backdrop for understanding the ontology and epistemology of contemporary African collectivism within capitalist globalisation. Mbembe's (2001) re-examination of the postcolonial subject sheds light on the subject of biopolitical production.

Chapter 3 examines the artistic practices of Gugulective, a collective that has been at the forefront in the contestation of the continual marginalisation of black people by the neoliberal biopower in post-apartheid South Africa. It specifically investigates how the collective has dealt with issues of the economy of place, space, and race, particularly looking at the shebeen – an informal drinking place with its attendant histories of black criminalisation and radicalism – and the township – as a reserve of apartheid and post-apartheid labour and also black revolutionary politics – as loci for engaging with black exploitation, dispossession, and dehumanisation in post-1994 South Africa. I tie the notion of biopolitical collectivism, discussed in the preceding chapters, in which I locate the practices of Gugulective to theorist Gene Ray's (2004b) concept of nomadic/catalytic art. By examining projects such as "*Ityala aliboli / Debt don't rot*", "*Akuchanywa apha / No urinating allowed here*", and *Titled/Untitled*, the chapter demonstrates that Gugulective contests issues of black commodification and exploitation by reclaiming and redeploying township images and affects in a liminal and interstitial aesthetic practice, which situates itself in between the art institution and the non-art world, between aesthetics and activism, between the township and the city, between the shebeen and the gallery, art and life. Through a "catalytic" practice that seeks to rupture the art

frame, the group is able to engage in biopolitical collectivism, which includes conversations, screenings, exhibitions, and performances. These reclaim what I call “the domain of township affects” to redeem the exploited and dehumanised black subject.

Chapter 4 surveys transformations in global capitalism. I argue in this chapter that biopolitical collectivism is contemporary because it confronts contemporary capital, i.e. biopower, on its contemporary terrain of immaterial production. Rather than relocate contemporary African art in the diaspora, I argue that we should focus on biopolitical collectivism in Africa as the front on which the struggle against capitalism is waged. However, while proposing that contemporary African collectivism adopts post-Fordist methods, i.e. immaterial/biopolitical production to counter neoliberal capitalism, I bear in mind that capitalist exploitation and resistance on the continent dates far back to the earliest stages in the history of the development of capitalism. In this discussion I therefore examine (perforce very briefly) the historical development of capitalism from the early mercantile origins through industrialisation to post-industrialisation, before focusing on its nature and manifestation in 21st-century Africa.

Lastly, Chapter 5 examines the work of the Huit Facettes-Interaction of Senegal and Le Groupe Amos of the DRC as examples of biopolitical collectivism beyond Gugulective in South Africa. In the chapter I argue that through training workshops that foster interrelationships and dialogue, and also through pedagogic practices that feature video documentaries, radio broadcasts, posters, paintings, and poems that are produced collaboratively, Huit Facettes-Interaction and Le Groupe Amos engage in an aesthetics which helps redeem postcolonial subjects in crisis. The collectives engage in what I would call an aesthetics of resistance, borrowing from the concept “an economy of resistance”, in which a variety of survival strategies are employed by the marginalised against poverty and dehumanisation in contexts where supportive structures have been wrecked by capitalist globalisation. The aesthetics of resistance is shaped by and harnesses the critical potential of an economy of resistance, which involves improvisation, inventiveness, creativity, and communal self-help. Informality, cross-disciplinarity, grassroots activism, pedagogy, nomadism, and affects are some of the tools of an aesthetics of resistance, an aesthetics rooted in concrete variegated postcolonial lived experience. However, while an aesthetics of making-do through acts of borrowing, sharing, reuse, assemblage, and *récupération* – of techniques more so than materials – form the core of Huit Facettes and Le Groupe Amos, the collectives seek to contest rather than affirm the status quo.

I examine Paolo Freire's liberatory pedagogy in order to understand the pedagogical methods employed by the collectives. These groups are studied within their different socio-political, postcolonial, and neoliberal contexts in Senegal and the DRC.

CHAPTER 1

A HISTORY OF COLLECTIVISM IN AFRICAN ART

The current moment is defined by a complex and contradictory mixture of cultural and geopolitical forces. The last two decades have witnessed the rise of a powerful neoliberal economic order dedicated to eliminating all forms of collective or public resistance (institutional, ideological, and organisational) to the primacy of capital – G. Kester (2011: 5)

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I offer a brief history of collectivism in African art, starting from the pre-colonial period to the present, in order to provide a background of the development of contemporary collectivist practices on the continent. I also offer a definition of collectivism within the contemporary African art context. To set the parameters for understanding the nature of the practices under study, I examine the structure and philosophy of colonial and postcolonial workshops, as well as modern and contemporary community arts initiatives which also have a collective ethos. I also analyse global contemporary collectivist practices in order to situate contemporary African art collectives in their broader cultural and socio-political contexts. I provide this historical outline in order to differentiate between traditional collectivism as it manifested in workshops and community initiatives in the colonial and post-independence contexts and contemporary collectivist practices in the 21st century. Rather than tie contemporary collectivism to the essentialist notion of a collectivist African past, this chapter regards contemporary African collectivism as a response to the economic, political, and cultural transformations in the African contemporaneity.

In this light, the history of collectivism as it pertains to this study is not offered in the form of a teleological or continuous, linear narrative that traces the subject back to its roots in pre-colonial communalism; rather this history is formulated in terms of Foucault's conception of Nietzschean genealogy as an "anti-science" in which there is a recognition of the non-linear, illogical, fragmented, and discontinuous nature of the historical narrative.

In the essay “Nietzsche, genealogy, history”, Foucault wrote the following:

Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things; its duty is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present, having imposed a predetermined form on all its vicissitudes. Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species ... on the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion ... (in Rabinow, 1984:81).

Foucault’s genealogy helps us recognise that contemporary collectivism results from the accidents of the present, rather than from the actualisation of a predetermined and essential communalism. Also, Foucault’s conception enables a self-reflexive attitude towards my subject as a researcher and writer on African collectivism. Cognisant of my own enunciatory position as a politically and ideologically vested subject eager to locate what I deem the most critical responses to capitalist globalisation, I neither seek to ground contemporary African collectivism in a particular temporal episteme nor promote the practices I focus on as having attained an ideal state of teleological aesthetic perfection. Mine is an attempt to understand collectivism – particularly what I term biopolitical collectivism – as a praxis that offers appropriate aesthetic methods for engaging neoliberal globalisation.

1.2 Collectivism: A definition

According to the online *Oxford English Dictionary* (2016), the noun “collective” has origins in late Middle English from the Old French *collectif*, or Latin *collectivus*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers two broad definitions of collectivism: the practice or principle of giving a group priority over each individual in it, and collectivism as the ownership of land and the means of production by the people or the state, as a political principle or system. The online *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2016) defines a collective as a number of persons or things considered as one group or whole. According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, “collectivism” is a political or economic theory advocating collective control especially over production and distribution.

Scruton's (2007) *The Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Political Thought* offers three definitions of the term:

1. The theory that the economy should be owned and controlled collectively, so that all major decisions are the result of collective choice rather than individual preference.
2. Any socio-political system in which, whether or not there is collective control in sense 1, individuals act collectively in social, cultural, or productive activity, perhaps under the directives of a party, but in the name of a "collective".
3. Sometime the term "collective" is used to denote any view which allows that a collective may have rights that can override the rights of individuals. For example, some think that the state has rights; others think that lesser forms of association, such as institutions of education, religion, or recreation, also have them. A theory which holds that these rights are not always defeasible in favour of the rights of the individuals may, on this usage, be called "collectivist".

The first *Palgrave* definition focuses on collectivism as it pertains to the economy as a central facet of life. The second definition ventures beyond the economy to include all other realms of human life, but the collectives operate under a hierarchy of power subjected under the party, for example. The third definition focuses on the rights of the collective vis-à-vis the individual with the implication that the collective overrides the individual. David E. Lowes' (2006: 39) *The Anti-Capitalist Dictionary* offers a useful summary definition of collectivism as "theory and practice – goals and procedures – that relate to the organisation and decision making of a freely formed and self-governing association or group of cooperating individuals." This definition particularly grasps the ontology and epistemology of the contemporary collective practices that I examine in this study. The definition has political import on two levels: firstly, it emphasises the idea of a collective as an independently formed and self-governing group rather than externally motivated and non-autonomous, without suppressing the individual; secondly, it captures the idea of collectivism as communitarian or group ownership and control – collectivism as sharing.

In the *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology*, Triandis and Gelfand (2012:49) state that in contrast to individualism, which places great importance on the individual, "the recognition of individuals as being interdependent and having duties and obligations to other group members are defining attributes of the cultural construct that we call collectivism." Collectivists emphasise equality and need in the distribution of resources among group

members. Also, collectivists value cooperation, while individualists value competition. In the *Encyclopedia of Identity*, Jackson and Hogg (2010) also noted the group specificity in collectivism, stressing that the group is the primary focus and the individual is secondary in contrast to individualism, which is self-specific. According to Jackson and Hogg, collectivism is associated with interdependence, whereby group members share responsibilities, roles, and relationships with others within the community in order to accomplish a particular goal or task, while individualism is associated with independence. In contrast, in individualism each person is an independent unit. Jackson and Hogg (2010) also defined it as being holistic, i.e. it seeks balance and harmony due to interdependent interaction, while individualism is linear, dichotomous, and hierarchical. Ideally, liberalism had positively sought to protect the rights and freedoms of the individual. However, as it will be seen in this study, neoliberalism perverts this concept of individualism for profit. The cooperative interdependent, holistic, and non-hierarchical nature of collectivism is in contrast to neoliberalism's overriding emphasis on the primacy of the individual and the private. Thus artists who seek to contest neoliberalism's intensified individualism have adopted collectivist strategies. With this definition of collectivism in mind, I would like to turn to an examination of a number of global artists who work with a group ethos to respond to contemporaneity.

1.3 Collectivism in a global perspective

In recent discourses on global contemporary art, a plethora of terms and catchphrases have emerged to describe a variety of aesthetic practices that seek to connect art and life and have an impact in the public domain, most of which identify and place their roots in the old avant-garde practices of Dada in the early 20th century. The German artist Joseph Beuys (1980) coined the term "social sculpture" to describe a form of art that seeks to shape lives rather than objects. "Relational aesthetics" was coined by the French curator Nicholas Bourriaud (1998) to classify a group of practices that appeared in the 1990s, which celebrated conviviality, generosity, and human interrelationships. The Danish curator Lars Bang Larsen (2000) used the term "social aesthetics" to describe the emerging work that engaged the social sphere. "Dialogical aesthetics" was coined by the American theorist Grant Kester (2004) to refer to practices that are based on conversation and dialogical exchanges (Thompson, 2012). Similarly, "tactical media", and the American artist Susanne Lacy's (1995) "new genre public art", "socially engaged art", or "social practice" are all terms that try to give sense to an explosion of new practices that involve collaboration and participation in a bid to transform the

passive viewer into an active participant, regard the public arena rather than the gallery as the primary space for engaging the social, and focus on human interaction and exchange rather than the art object as of primary importance in the aesthetic process.

While my primary focus is on collectivist rather than mono-authorial practices in art, it is not to posit that all group-based practices are fundamentally critical and effective. Artists in the recent history of contemporary art have employed forms of collaborative practice for different ends. It is therefore important for my study to single out the forms of collaboration that I deem to have critical potential. While artistic collaboration is as old as art itself, some theorists (such as Clair Bishop, Nato Thompson) tend to trace a resurgence of collaboration as it manifests on the global art scene to the French curator and critic Bourriaud's movement, "relational aesthetics", which appeared in the 1990s in which artists strove for the replacement of the art object with convivial encounters, interpersonal exchanges, and sharing. However, as critics have noted, most relational projects such as Rikrit Tiravanija's "Live and Eat, Eat and Die" (1993), which involved cooking and sharing Thai cuisine in the gallery space, or Thomas Hirschhorn's "Chalet Lost History" (2004), which features collaboratively produced massive eclectic installations, were conceived by a single artist within the mono-authorial tradition, to be shared by the usual coterie of Western art world citizenry (Terraroli, 2010). Other artists in the relational category include Vanessa Beecroft, who, in works such as "Navy Seal" (1999) and "VB48" (2001), engages groups of male or female models who stand or sit in various poses in the gallery space in autobiographical performances that refer to the politics of the body; Santiago Serra, whose projects such as "250 cm Line Tattooed on 6 Paid People" (2000) involves tattooing a line on six people paid a minimum wage; and Francis Alys, whose work "When faith moves mountains" (2002) involved 500 participants who engaged in a project to move a 1 600-foot-long sand dune about four inches from its original location (Smith, 2011).

The foregoing are examples of interdisciplinary strands of collaboration in which artists engage participants in various projects that expand the vocabulary of the visual arts. One notes the expropriatory nature of the work of some of the artists mentioned. Although involving a number of participants, the work is fundamentally authorial, with the artist as the sole initiator. The participant is not integral to the production process. In addition, the work remains confined within the spaces of the neoliberal art market. In this light, the study asks: What strand of collaboration transcends object-based mono-authoriality? Which collaborative practices contextualise capitalism? To redeem themselves from the pervasive commodity culture, especially its exploitative nature, some artists – informed by Marxist critique of the commodity

culture and also by notions of art as ideology, and post-modernist and post-structuralist critiques of institutional and artistic autonomy (particularly Foucault's critique of the autonomy of discourses, Barthes' critique of the author/subject, and also the revolutionary pedagogy by educational theorist Paolo Freire) – eschewed object making for politically conscious collective practices devoted to a total reconceptualisation of art.⁶ Some of this work drew from the 1950s and 1960s practices of the Situationists International, a group of artists, writers, and anarchists active in Europe, who sought to revolutionise art to critique the spectacular media culture and its hypnotisation and alienation of the masses in collectivised practices which called for “*détournement*” – a form of repurposing of the signs and symbols of power for subversive artistic ends (Foster *et al.* 2011).⁷

Other influences have come from the AIDS activism of the 1980s in America in which art collectives such as Gran Fury, DIVA TV, Fierce Pussy, Testing the Limits, and Little Elvis (all of which coalesced into ACT-UP), enraged by governmental negligence, became activated and undertook “direct action to end the AIDS crisis” (Crimp, 2005:144). Reviving situationist aesthetics mixed with Dadaist photomontages, graphic art, activism, and performance, these groups staged their interventions in the public to address the big chasm of negligence on a crucial issue.

To untangle themselves from the intricate web of capital that pervades the art institution, contemporary collectives have sought to eschew the gallery space and to take their actions to the public realm in forms of art-making variously referred to as “social practice”, “socially engaged practices”, “new genre public art”, “new situations”, or “dialogical aesthetics” (Rodenbeck, 2011; Thompson, 2012). This critique of capitalism has seen a proliferation of practices with an activist edge, which seek to displace the art object with direct social praxis. What has resulted is an evolution from an object-based aesthetic to what in the study I refer to

⁶ Marxists such as Gyorgy Lukacs and Louis Althusser regard art as ideology or “false consciousness” legitimating the ruling class (Foster, Krauss, Bois, Buchloh & Joselit, 2011:27). Post-modernists critique artistic autonomy – central to modernist ideals – which they charge as a highly instrumentalised notion that serves capital or the ruling powers. Post-structuralists’ deconstruction of not only texts but also other symbolic systems led to the critique of art institutions as politically or ideologically driven. According to Hal Foster *et al.* (2011:41), “post-structuralism grew out of a refusal to grant structuralism its premise that each system is autonomous, with rules and operations that begin and end within the boundaries of that system.” Foucault argued that discourses are not autonomous and are always charged “by power relations and even by the exercise of force” (Ibid:42). Barthes argued that “meaning in a text is not derived from authorial intention but from the network of relations” of texts, each text “only understood in relation to other texts” (Emerling, 2005:71-72). All these theories had a great impact on the visual arts from the 1960s onwards.

⁷ For example, as we will see in Chapter 3, *détournement* is one of the central aesthetic strategies adopted by Gugulective.

as an “immaterialised” socially oriented practice – an eschewal of art for its own sake in preference for radical criticality.

1.4 A brief history of collectivism in Africa

1.4.1 Collectivism in pre-colonial African societies

Anthropologists, ethnologists, historians, and politicians of various shades and origins have celebrated the existence of forms of collectivist and communitarian practices in different parts of the continent since prehistory. These writers have promoted the idea of collectivism, or communitarianism, as the central organising principle of political existence in most pre-colonial African societies (Nkrumah, 1967; Nyerere, 1961; Rodney, 1981). In the cultural arena, western museological and art-historical practices have placed as central the role of collectivism and communitarianism in traditional art forms such as masks, sculptures, and paintings. According to this discourse, before colonisation aesthetic expression used to be integral to the organisational structure of the whole community; to cement and celebrate its communality. Collective expression in traditional societies manifested in ritual, magic, and animism, all of which were for the benefit of the community. The whole community was part of the aesthetic process from conception through production to consumption. But colonisation, through its agents of education and religion, drastically altered this structure and African art became “contaminated” by Western modernisation. It has to be pointed out, however, that this emphasis on the essentially collectivist nature of traditional African societies perpetuates rather than challenges colonialist categories. This essentialist ideology was adopted in the postcolonial context, where it was employed in the service of authoritarian regimes in processes where the individual’s voice was suppressed by the masses, whose powers were then delivered into the hands of the autocrat.⁸ By transferring political agency into the hands of the collective rather than the individual, some of the postcolonial leaders could easily manipulate the masses, who were unfamiliar with the democratic process.

In addition, the typical anthropological view of pre-colonial African artistic practice – which the late Malawian philosopher Didier Kaphagawani called “romanticised representations of

⁸ As Karp and Masolo (2000:7) argued in their critique of this school of African philosophy categorised as ethnophilosophy, “by emphasizing the collective nature of thought and the importance of the social leader who embodies this thought, ethnophilosophy reproduces colonial domination in a new form of authoritarianism. It gives voice to the leader but stifles the individual voices of the masses, who have not yet mastered this new cultural discourse.” Karp and Masolo argued that the idea that traditional knowledge is or was collectively produced and appropriated implies that the individual cannot be free and that religious, social, or cultural criticism is impossible.

African worldviews” (2000:75) – however, is reductive and potentially damaging to the study of contemporary collectivism because it threatens to suggest a continuity of practice and an essential and enduring collective African impulse which can be contrasted to modern Western individualism. Kaphagawani (2000:73) wrote that for African ideologues such as Leopold Sedar Senghor, Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda, and Kwame Nkrumah,

African communalism presented a desirable alternative to the Western framework of individualism, which, in their view, was the underlying premise of exploitative and conflictual Western capitalism. Communalism was thus not only a metaphysical principle of social existence but also a sort of critique of the social order, one derived from the European Enlightenment.

However, Kaphagawani (Ibid:74) argued,

The scholars of difference were so much steeped in articulating the ideological divides between African and Western worldviews that they lost the real self in their analyses in pursuit of something else, perhaps an esteemed value such as community. The concepts of the self adopted by these scholars ... are concerned not with what concept best captures the manifold experiences of the self but with what concept best allows them to both promote difference and derive the ontological values of the vital forces as well as communalism.

This form of collectivism is insidious not only because it denies individual agency but it also eternally locks Africa in a binary relationship with the West, in which episteme it is the negative Other. By perpetually positing Africa in a dialectical relationship as Europe’s Other, the continent is securely clutched in the throes of colonial domination.

A number of authors have questioned the origins and implications of the concept of African collectivism. Argyle (1969), for example, notes the proliferation of writing on this topic among European missionaries, administrators, and anthropologists, whose literature in turn influenced a number of African writers and ideologues such as Julius Nyerere. Argyle traces the source of this dogma in the 19th-century Continental and English-speaking sociologists, ethnologists, political philosophers, and jurists who sought to counter the individualistic philosophy of the Enlightenment, which was blamed for inspiring the French Revolution. In search of an alternative to the debilitating individualism of the Enlightenment, the adherents of this philosophy looked to the feudal societies of mediaeval Europe, the ancient Teutonic tribes, and

the “primitive” societies of Africa which were regarded as “organic” and connected “of innate necessity” (Argyle, 1969:40). Argyle, who notes the catastrophic effects this discourse has had on the development of African societies, indicated that underlying this discourse was a paternalistic desire to preserve the “primitive” African society, and separate it from “individualist”, “capitalist” European society.

In the realm of art, the concept of collective tribal authorship in traditional African arts has been critically debated by African writers who questioned the motives and implications of colonial anthropological studies on authorship and artistic production in pre-colonial Africa (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009; Oguibe, 2004). Rather than the paternalism exposed by authors such as Argyle, recent writers have noted that emphasis by colonial anthropologists and historians on collectivist and tribal production meant an automatic devaluation of African art in comparison to individually authored art of the West. Hall (2003:33) notes that “individuation, after all, was understood as the gift of the Enlightenment to Western modernity. African art, being ‘less evolved’, was supposed to be, by definition, more anonymously collective.” Also, as Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu (2009:20) note

... precolonial African art under the lens of colonial interpretation was a carrier of a collective unconscious, as the intercessor between tribe and ancestors. The diminution of authorship gave us the category of tribal art, for it was hardly perceived as art in the sense meant by Gombrich; i.e. art as products of individual genius.

Pre-colonial collectivism in African art is therefore a Western construct, a product of colonial discourse that defined the Other as different and therefore inferior in order to conquer and colonise him/her. As Bhabha (1994:101) observed, “the objective of colonialist discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.” In the Western epistemology, African art had to be collective and hence anonymous and underdeveloped in contrast to the individuated and therefore more ideal Western art. Since pre-colonial collectivism is a colonial fabrication, this study seeks to distinguish it from contemporary African collectivism. Therefore, rather than return to seek its origins in the past, this study regards contemporary African collectivism as a product of the present.

I follow Enwezor, who, rather than grounding the strain of contemporary African collectives in an essentialist communal African past, situates modern African collectivism within the

broader global history of activist praxis. Enwezor (in Stimson & Sholette, 2007:224) locates the roots of contemporary collectivism in disparate political formations in

the Paris Commune of the 1860s, the socialist collectives of the Russian Revolution in the 1917, the subversive developments of Dada, the radical interventions of neo-avant-garde movements such as the Situationist International, and activist-based practices connected to issues of class, gender, and race.

In addition, Enwezor includes the anti-colonial liberation movements that emerged on the continent in the mid-20th century, and lastly, the anti-globalisation movement that has congregated in different major global cities such as Seattle or Genoa (in Stimson & Sholette 2007:224-225). All these cultural and political factors have shaped modern artist groups in Africa. At this point, it is important to examine some colonial and postcolonial artist groups in order to highlight some contrasts and disconnections between these groups and the collectives under study.

1.4.2 Collectivism in colonial and post-independence Africa

During the colonial period and also in the independence era, various formal and informal workshops sprouted in different parts of the continent (Kasfir & Förster, 2013). The most well-known of these are the Margaret Trowell school founded at Makerere in Uganda in 1935, the Hangar Workshop by the Belgian Pierre Romain-Desfosses in Zaire in 1946, the Poto-Poto School organised by the French Pierre Lods in Congo-Brazzaville, in the 1950s, the Shona workshop founded by the British Frank McEwen in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in 1957, and the Oshogbo workshop of Nigeria set up by the German Ulli Beier and the British Georgina Betts in the 1960s. Established by colonial expatriates, the workshops were founded all over the continent largely to intervene in what these individuals saw as the erosion of the authentic traditional African native by forces of Western modernisation and therefore to preserve this “purity and authenticity” through the promotion of “untutored craftsmanship” (Oguibe, 2004:57). Writing about European art patronage in colonial Zimbabwe, the art historian Elizabeth Morton (2013:237) states that “each of these patrons promoted a distinct style, which they usually claimed to be ‘African’ in nature, although in truth each patron had arrived in Africa with a clear vision about what this art should look like.” On this note, it is sufficient to point out that these workshops were top-down colonial interventions, vertically and

hierarchically organised by expatriate patriarchs with an agenda to preserve “the authentic native”. For example, Trowell, an English artist and educator who started the first art classes at Makerere in Uganda, “was convinced that Africans had a unique way of seeing, and that the European model of art training was completely ill suited to their creative pursuits” (Sanyal, 2013:256). Sharing a similar perspective, the adventurer and artist Romain-Desfosses started the Hangar workshop (*atelier du Hangar*) in Zaire to “facilitate the invention of ‘authentic African’ painting” (Deliss, 1995:299). Likewise, Frank McEwen waxed lyrical about Shona art (which he “invented”) in Zimbabwe: “Here is an authentic art, vibrating with vital energy, that thanks to its extension through time and space is not yet contaminated by the sterile and indoctrinating ‘triviality’ that often rules our Western lives” (Morton, 2013:247).⁹ In a tone reminiscent of the Conradian description of “the heart of darkness”, Lods, the founder of the Poto-Poto Workshop, wrote about the early days of his workshop:

I brought everyone to my house, to my hut-studio in Poto-Poto. At first there was a glut of talent, a squandering of ideas, a breath-taking flowering of inspiration, a paradise of colours, joy, and song. Paper, cardboard and canvas, a sacrificed sheet, boards, walls, windows, and doors were all covered with gesticulating people, hunting, dancing, at the market, fishing, in battle ... to assuage my guilt I promised myself that I would devote myself to protecting this art, or at least its living spirit (in Deliss, 1995:220).

An insidious paternalism underwritten by a colonial racist mentality can be traced in these words, which reveal a discourse of the West as progressive, equipped with the tools to save the African from himself. This discourse, which the Dutch anthropologist Johannes Fabian calls “denial of coevalness”, i.e. “a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referents of anthropology in a time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse”, attempted to fix and freeze the African in a temporal frame belonging to the primitive past (Fabian, 1983:31). According to this pernicious discourse, the African’s achievements lay in a static pre-colonial past, while Western civilisation marched on in progress. Whatever the African produced after encounters with European civilisation could only be debased or derived, and an inferior imitation of the great Western achievements. Therefore, according to this

⁹ In her essay “Patron and artist in the shaping of Zimbabwe art,” Morton wrote that McEwen’s “Workshop School” was a fiction he created to sustain the commercial success of stone sculpture which had overtaken his short-lived painting workshop. According to Morton (2013:246-247), “in this mythical stone sculpture workshop, untrained artists were brought together and encouraged using the methods of Gustave Moreau.”

primitivist logic, the authentic African who was to be saved, preserved, or reconstructed was untutored, spontaneous, and sensuous – an antithesis of the rational man of Western civilisation. As Oguibe (2004:57) notes, “the product of this reconstruction was a fetish, an object of European fantasy and containment.” For the European, the authentic native was not only a fetish – an object of control – but also the inferior other that engendered and reinforced the notion of the superior self. Within the colonial context, this discourse was employed in order to condemn and subjugate (Sanyal, 2013). This is the logic that promoted the proliferation of workshops in colonial and postcolonial Africa.

The independence period of the 1960 and 1970s saw the mushrooming of numerous collectives and schools across the continent. Some examples include the Zaria Art Society of Nigeria (1958), Laboratoire Agit-Art of Senegal (1970s), the Vohou-Vohou of Cote d’Ivoire (1970s), Crystallist of Sudan (1970s), the Axis group of Egypt (1981), Afrapix of South Africa (1982), Sisi kwa Sisi (which means “for us by us” in Swahili) of Kenya (1983), Eye Society of Nigeria (1989), and Dimension Group of Ethiopia (1994). Most of these groups set out to stimulate artistic exchange and to promote the formulation of a postcolonial identity through highly developed aesthetic philosophies within the context of the socio-political transformations occurring during the transition period from colonisation to independence. For example, Bruce Onobrakpeya, a former member of the Zaria Art Society, indicated that the group was formed by students who sought to “examine how their study of academic art related to their society, which was emerging from the traditional to the modern, from the colonial to independence” (Deliss, 1996:195). Likewise, Jacob Jari, a member of the Eye Society, wrote in the manifesto of the group that the society “believes that the visual arts provide the forum whereby the dynamism of culture can be appreciated” (Deliss, 1996:212). From such cultural reassessment emerged the aesthetics of “Natural Synthesis” of the Zaria Art Society, for example, which fused the best of old African traditions with those of the West to create a new postcolonial expression. One cannot overemphasise the role these groups played in laying the foundations for modern and contemporary African art. However, their contributions were predominantly within the domain of the politics of postcolonial identity. Arguably, with the exception of South African artists of the period, only a few examples from this era such as the work of Obiora Udechukwu, Olu Oguibe and Tayo Adenaike of Nigeria, and Etale Sukuro and Lee Karuri of Sisi kwa Sisi in Kenya engaged in social commentary and addressed the issues of the crisis of the postcolonial state with urgency and poignancy (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009; Deliss, 1996). Except for Sisi kwa Sisi and Laboratoire Agit-Art (which I discuss in detail below),

whose groups shared an activist ethos to communicate about their social realities, one can observe that the artists of this period who tackled economic and socio-political issues did so out of individual volition rather than from a collectively shared philosophy.

During this period, certain African states intent on founding or rebuilding a national identity in the aftermath of colonisation outlined elaborate programmes to promote cultural ideologies. A notable example of such pan-Africanist nation-building efforts can be found in the Negritude policy promoted by Leopold Senghor, the first president of Senegal. Negritude – first used by Aime Cesaire (1935) – was a philosophy that celebrated an essentialist African character defined in contrast to Western rationalism (Harney, 2004). To promote this ideology, Senghor established cultural and educational institutions that were geared towards the articulation and advancement of its central values and ideals through cultural and artistic products. L’Ecole des Arts was such an institution, out of which a style of painting emerged which championed a modernist primitivism and glorified an idealised essential Africanity, in line with Negritudist ideals (“a negro style of sculpture, a negro style of painting”, in Senghor’s words [Deliss, 1996]). The Dakar School was a group of artists which formulated and championed this visual aesthetic, characterised by rhythmic line, vibrant colour, and shallow depth.¹⁰ However, it is worth pointing out that only those artists who subscribed to and visually interpreted the dogmatic Negritudist ideals enjoyed lavish state patronage (Grabski, 2013; Harney, 2004; Komissar, 2000). Therefore, due to this state support, an institutionalised aesthetic dominated and foreclosed artistic autonomy in terms of individual experimentation, expression, and criticality (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009). The art historian Elizabeth Harney (2004:108) charges that the availability of generous state patronage and support produced “bureaucrats rather than artists” who thought they had “the status of a national treasure”. According to Harney (2004:108), “this attention left them relatively unconcerned about the lack of informed criticism given to their work, and the resulting absence of a critical eye stifled artistic growth and innovation.” Likewise, writing about the Dakar School, the Senegalese critic and artist Issa Samb stated the following:

... when it is a matter of getting to the heart of society’s problems, the Dakar School, in its self-styled apolitical minority, has not set any participatory or courageous act in motion, but instead hypocritically has several strings to its

¹⁰ The term “*Ecole de Dakar*” is attributed to French minister of Cultural Affairs, André Malraux, who is said to have proclaimed that “just as one cannot deny the Renaissance, the masters of the Middle Ages, Cubism, Impressionism, Expressionism, Neoclassicism, one cannot deny the *Ecole de Dakar*” (Grabski, 2013:288).

bow, which are both deceptive and misleading. Its activity is dangerous in so far as this attempt aims, while claiming to be representative of Negritude, to pass itself off as a fighting force for fashionable political activity (Deliss, 1995:223).

By preoccupying itself with the project of visually representing the official ideology of Negritude, and fuelled by the material rewards that were promised by this endeavour, the Dakar School aesthetically cut itself off from the day-to-day realities of Senegalese society. For the sake of this study, it has to be pointed out that the Dakar School was not a collective per se. The artists did not regard themselves as consciously belonging to a collective, although critics, writers, and other commentators regarded their work as such. As Grabski (2013:288) noted,

Significantly, among the artists associated with the Ecole de Dakar, not one of them discussed identification with this group on the basis of shared style or ideological point of departure. Rather than asserting that they worked within the conceptual or stylistic framework of a unified movement or *ecole*, each artist narrated an artistic trajectory by way of practice-oriented issues such as personal inspiration, artistic vision, and the development of an individual style.

However, Laboratoire Agit-Art was formed in this context in response to a stifling dominant cultural narrative of state-sponsored art and ideology, particularly as it manifested in the practices of the Dakar School. Born in 1974 in the political debates at Café Terrasse in Dakar where civil servants, artists, and intellectuals met regularly, Laboratoire Agit-Art was a group of artist, philosophers, poets, and critics who used experimental workshops, theatrical performances, and installations to address issues concerning the cultural, political, and economic situation in Senegal. In contrast to groups discussed above, which were formed by paternalist expatriates or by the state cultural machine, Laboratoire was self-organised and autonomous. In its multidisciplinary practices, Laboratoire was highly critical of art in service of the official ideology of Negritude. Laboratoire set to “shake up or agitate the existing institutional framework, to question the tenets of Negritude, and to encourage artists to adopt a new approach toward their work” (Harney, 2004:106). Drawing inspiration from the modernist avant-garde such as Dada and surrealism, the philosophical writings of Russian Marxist critic Georgi Plekhanov, the dramaturgy of French playwright Antonin Artaud, as well as local artistic practices, Laboratoire was anti-aesthetic in its deskilled practices and disavowal

of the decorative art object (Harney, 2004).¹¹ For instance, Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu (2009:31) wrote that,

against l’Ecole de Dakar’s flirtation with modernist primitivism, its racial and national idealism, the Laboratoire combined collectivist aspirations – as in its argument for the communal rather than the individual basis of art production – with Marxist theory and European avant-garde theatre to create radically new environments, forms, and performances meant to completely disentangle contemporary art from stifling state control.

Commenting on its legacy, one of the members of the group, El Hadji Sy, wrote that due to its “non-bureaucratic, anti-official, and rather informal nature”, Laboratoire was able to set the pace for a new generation of critical and socially engaged practices such as Huit Facettes and Set Setal which emerged in Dakar later in the 1990s (in Deliss, 1995:92).¹² I can add that beyond Dakar, the critical collectivist ethos found in Laboratoire was later to inform other politically oriented collectives across Africa.

Besides the brand of workshop practice discussed above, a certain category of workshops which needs our attention has flourished in Africa since the 1980s. This group of post-independence workshops which has precedents in the old colonial workshops discussed above but is structurally different include the Thupelo workshop in South Africa (1987), Pachipamwe in Zimbabwe (1988), Thapong in Botswana (1989), Tenq in Senegal (1995), and Rockston Studios in Zambia (1985). Modelled on English artists Anthony Caro’s and Robert Loder’s idea to create retreats for artists and critics in order to foster creative exchanges, this particular brand of collectivism is founded independently by artists for artists to work in isolation (Deliss, 1996). Mostly short-term and usually lasting only two weeks, these workshops are “designed to stimulate creativity and encourage experimentation ... and are held if possible in a remote location to contain the energy of the occasion and remove day-to-day distractions” (Deliss, 1996:296). These workshops have aesthetical and political significance in that they are established to help improve the social conditions for artists, to create public awareness of art,

¹¹ According to Foster *et al.* (2011:25), an anti-aesthetic practice involves the destruction of “a work’s aura and the contemplative modes of aesthetic experience and replaces these with communicative action and aspirations toward simultaneous collective perception. The anti-aesthetic ... defines its artistic practices as temporary and geographically specific (rather than as a unique emanation of an exceptional form of knowledge). The anti-aesthetic also operates as a utilitarian aesthetic ... situating the work in a social context where it assumes a variety of productive functions such as information and education or political enlightenment ...”

¹² Huit Facettes and Set Setal are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

and also to help the artists attempt to operate outside the vagaries of the market. Nevertheless, these groups share the structures of traditional workshops. The workshops promote individual authorship in the production of traditional art objects even where collaboration and sharing are encouraged. They also maintain the hierarchical distinction between the artist and the viewer in the meaning-making process. In addition, since artists work in isolation, the only linkage with their audience is through the exhibition, which thereby reconnects the artists to the market. As we will see next, contemporary collectives seek to depart from this mode of artistic production.

1.5 Colonial and apartheid-era community arts initiatives

Community arts centres have existed in different parts of Africa but they were more prevalent in South Africa during the colonial and apartheid dispensations. In her study of the history of community arts in South Africa, Lize van Robbroeck (2004) distinguished between two kinds of community arts initiatives. According to Van Robbroeck, the first category comprises early community arts centres such as the Polly Street Art Centre (founded in 1949 by Cecil Skotnes) and the Rorke's Drift Arts and Crafts Centre (1962), which was established by white missionaries and government officials who sought to foster creativity in black communities. Two observations have to be made regarding the organisational structure and objectives of the community centres. Firstly, in community arts centres, artists congregate in a space but work on individual projects, usually under the supervision of the founder who encourages creative direction in a classroom fashion according to his or her artistic agenda. In this manner, these centres operate like the workshops discussed above, i.e. as hierarchically organised and paternalistic institutions. Secondly, although teaching was informal, minimal, or discouraged, most of the workshops were established on teacher and student relationships whereby the artists worked under the supervision or tutelage of the founder (Deliss, 1996; Rankin, 2011). In fact, in some of these workshops, after spending a considerable amount of time there, students "graduated" into professional art careers (Rankin, 2011). This is not to underestimate the significance of community arts centres as forums for creative exchange; however, in this pedagogical setup the workshops can be seen primarily as preparatory grounds for later careers rather as spaces for collective artistic production or political agitation. While not suggesting that no significant intellectual or political output can emerge from a traditional pedagogical setup, one can argue that shared authorship and collective social engagement were not the central objectives in these establishments. In addition, in lieu of the basic definition of

collectivism offered above, one finds that the groups as hierarchical structures do not fit the model of collectivism as the organisation and decision making of a freely formed and self-governing association or group of cooperating individuals.

The second category of community arts initiatives discussed by Van Robbroeck includes independent community arts movements that were established later in the 1970s and 1980s, such as at the Community Arts Project of Cape Town (1977), the Katlehong Art Centre (1977), the FUBA (Federation Union of Black Artists) Academy (1980), the Community Arts Workshop of Durban (1986), Alexander Arts (1986), and the Dakawa Art and Craft Project (1992). These centres were established by politically driven artists and intellectuals who were largely influenced by the Black Consciousness Movement and other working class and mass political movements. The community arts projects played a crucial role in the struggle against apartheid misrule by “realising some of the cultural ideals of the broader democratic movement for change” (Van Robbroeck, 2004:50). The workshops also tremendously contributed to the advancement of art in South Africa by facilitating communication and networking between artists (Van Robbroeck 2004; Rankin, 2011). However, despite the artistic contributions of these workshops to the South African cultural and political landscape, and perhaps due to their success, they were subject to political co-option. Writing about the fate of the international community arts movement, Bishop (2012:39) noted its susceptibility to state manipulation and instrumentalisation:

From an agitational force campaigning for social justice (in the early 1970s), it became a harmless branch of the welfare state (by the 1980s): the kindly folk who can be relied upon to mop up wherever the government wishes to absolve itself of responsibility.

1.6 Contextualising contemporary African collectivism

1.6.1 Neoliberal capitalist globalisation and the crisis of the postcolonial African state

Collectivist practices encompass a broad range of creative local responses by ordinary people who contest global neoliberal capitalist economic and political policies that, as I demonstrate below, have had deleterious effects on postcolonial societies. I discuss the character of contemporary capitalism and its effects on the continent in detail in Chapter 4; however, a cursory glance of the topic is needed before I outline the shape of contemporary African collectivism. My understanding of neoliberalism is shaped by David Harvey’s Marxist diagnosis of neoliberalism as “accumulation by dispossession,” as a “political scheme aimed

at re-establishing the conditions for capital accumulation and the restoration of class power” (2005:29). Harvey’s concept of “accumulation by dispossession” captures the processes in global capitalism whereby public resources are transferred from the poor into the private hands of the wealthy. This is facilitated by a perversion of liberalist beliefs in the sacredness of individual liberty and freedom whereby corporations enjoy the same rights and freedoms as human beings. Harvey (2007:22) defined neoliberalism as a “theory of political economic practices proposing that human wellbeing can be advanced by the maximisation of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterised by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade.” Neoliberal capitalism promotes the idea of individual liberty, a free market system, privatisation of public assets, and less government control of trade.¹³ However, as Massey (2013:4) notes, “the privileging of self-interest, market relations, and choice in each sphere of economic and social life leads inexorably to increased inequality.” In this setup, corporations profit on the backs of disempowered individuals who cannot compete. Hall *et al.* (2013:11) write that “neoliberalism’s project ... is a reassertion of capital’s historic imperative to profit – through financialisation, globalisation, and yet further commodification.”

Harvey (2007:32) writes that “the purge of Keynesian economists and their replacement by neoliberal monetarists in the International Monetary Fund in 1982 transformed the U.S.-dominated IMF into a prime agent of neoliberalisation through its structural adjustment programmes.” These neoliberal Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs), which required states to privatise their public resources, to free up or liberalise trade, to deregulate, i.e. to cede control of their markets, and devalue currencies, have had a deleterious effect on developing nations. Developing countries or those undergoing economic crises often turn to global financial institutions such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for loans. For these loans to be approved, the borrowing country or a defaulting country must agree to the above-mentioned SAPs, which generally require the devaluation of the country’s currency against the dollar, the loosening of import/export restrictions, the halting of state-funded economic subsidisations, and the implementation of balanced state budgets (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009). Neoliberal SAPs on indebted postcolonial African states in the 1980s and 1990s undermined these states and further weakened their economies, which resulted in

¹³ As noted in the introduction to the study, neoliberalism can be traced back to the Reagan and Thatcher regimes which adopted the economic theories of the Chicago Boys at the University of Chicago in the 1970s.

rampant unemployment and sent most Africans into the informal and underground economic sector.

However, rather than lamenting the victimhood of dispossessed Africans, this study stresses the people's capacity to fight dehumanisation. Arguing that contemporary collectivism is ontologically and epistemologically an artistic response to the present shaped by its circumstances, the study therefore seeks to demonstrate how Gugulective contests capitalism in post-apartheid South Africa.

1.6.2 Contemporary African collectivism and the neoliberal art world

Neoliberal capital has affected all aspects of the contemporary African sphere, from education to religion, politics to culture. Authors taking account of the effects of the devastation wrought by the SAPs on the African art scene have focused on the mass migrations to the West of artists escaping the impoverisation of the cultural field, thereby fuelling the deterritorialisation of Africa's cultural discourses. For instance, in 2002, Holland Cotter of the *New York Times* wrote in his review of *The Short Century* blockbuster exhibition, "Africa is everywhere. It is far more than just a continent. It's a global diaspora, an international culture." In the same year, Susan Blier lamented in her article entitled "Nine contradictions in the new golden age of African art", which appeared in the *African Arts* journal, that due to the political and socio-economic problems that have plagued many parts of the continent, most artists and intellectuals have left Africa to train and establish their careers elsewhere, and that their successes in their new homes have had little impact on Africa.

Hall (2003) also examined the shattering effects of neoliberal capital's SAPs on the African cultural field. Hall wrote that the SAPs shrunk the power and role of the state in order to allow in private investors. Only those states which restructured this way received international loans. Hall observed that the massive debt that many postcolonial states accrued through these neoliberal loans crippled these states, which consequently had a devastating impact on the educational and cultural infrastructure. One result was the massive migration of the continent's intellectual elite, who emigrated to escape these socio-economic woes. While reflecting on the debates on the location of contemporary African art, Blier's comments and Hall's observations were reiterated by Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu (2009) in their diagnosis of the devastating effects of neoliberal capitalism on the African economic and cultural landscape. Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu provided an account of the catastrophic impact of neoliberal policies on the

African contemporary art world, noting the economic destabilisation of African art institutions and the resultant mass exodus into the diaspora by African practitioners. In his essay, “Rethinking cosmopolitanism: Is Afropolitan the answer?” Hassan (2012:17-18) celebrates the emergence of an “Afropolitan” generation of artists:

... a new breed of diasporic, culturally or ethnically mixed Africans who came of age or grew up outside Africa but continues to move in and out of the continent. It speaks of cosmopolitanism and a sense of belonging to the metropolis. At the very least, *it foregrounds the Western metropolis as a key site for the expression of African concerns* [author’s italics].

It must be cautioned, however, that Hassan’s celebration of a new breed of diaspora art comes in the wake of the economically induced exodus to the West. The destabilising impact of neoliberalism on African cultural institutions thus dislocates and deterritorialises contemporary African art onto the diaspora, a cultural drain that arguably leaves the continent even more impoverished. As a result of the deterritorialising effects of neoliberalism, most contemporary museological and discursive practices have tended to focus on diaspora artists to the detriment of critical practices on the continent. Only until recently, when curatorial and critical practice turned to Africa, it tended to focus mainly on commercial and the arguably less critical practices. What effect does this deterritorialisation have on cultural practices on the continent?

In an interview with Van Robbroeck (2008), Ogbechie notes how Western cultural institutions, in what he calls the “Pigozzi Paradigm”, limit what is to be expressed or shown by African artists; for example, how the critical is repressed in favour of the naïve in the form of traditional and tourist art (or curios), which ideologically and commercially benefit the Western collector much more than the African artist. Critics such as Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu (2009), Oguibe (2004), and Ogbechie above have critiqued predominant Western museological practices and art-historical discourses that neglect critical modern and contemporary African artistic practices in favour of pre-colonial African sculptures. These museological practices ontologically and epistemologically fix the African in a primitive and “authentic” past. Oguibe (2004) recorded the trend whereby Western patronage favours the promotion of work that traffics in a debased post-coloniality (similar to what others have called an “Afro-pessimism”). Examples of this pessimist art abound in the work of popular Congolese painters such as Cheri Samba and Moke, whose compositions have depicted postcolonial scenes of abject poverty, disease, and corruption. According to Oguibe (2004:27), the dangers of this practice lie in a

“wilful postcolonial complicity that issues from a damaged psychology that readily identifies with the postcolonial as imagined by the West.” The postcolonial artist thereby internalises and perpetuates this imposed image of him or herself. Oguibe adds that

Western insistence on a set vision of post-coloniality is nestled in an economy of meaning and praxis, a game of difference in which the postcolonial artist is precariously situated. By yielding to this economy of Otherness, postcolonial culture jeopardises the possibility of constructing autonomous subjectivities (Ibid:32).

This study posits that such Western museological practices suppress artistic agency on the continent, and argues that in instances where African artists are presented on the global cultural arena, the market limits the boundaries of expression. The study also argues that the largely object-based mono-authorial practices promoted by the neoliberal patron, collector, or critic get relatively easily decontextualised and subsumed by capital. In this light, the study examines how collectivism creates forms of agency and constructs empowered subjectivities under cultural, socio-economic, and political marginalisation, without resorting to trafficking in a fossilised “authentic” primitivism or in Afropessimism.

Rather than promoting a universal or transcendent collectivist practice that can be traced in Gugulethu, and other anti-capitalist contemporary collectives such as Huit Facettes-Interaction, Le Groupe Amos, or Chimurenga as the guaranteed solution for social problems faced on the continent, the study investigates how Gugulethu’s aesthetic tactics – broadly categorised within what I call the biopolitical collectivist rubric – have been effective in its particular networked struggles. An ontological study of the collective is therefore sensitive to the particular structural formation of the collective, as well as its peculiar methodologies. This means a critical awareness of how the group effectively reflects upon its contemporaneity through community-based, collaborative practices which not only involve traditional fine art methods but also engage research, media, pedagogy, and activism. In particular, the study examines how Gugulethu responds to capitalism as it expresses specifically within the post-apartheid South African neoliberal art establishment but also in the slums of Gugulethu, Cape Town. Beyond South Africa, the study also surveys how Huit Facettes engages the Western art world – represented by curators, critics, collectors, and academics – and the donor community as they both operate in rural and urban Senegalese contexts; and also how Le Groupe Amos

strives to empower marginalised Congolese communities in a country devastated by violent forms of capitalist extraction.

The practices that I will refer to as collectivist in this study share some of the descriptions of these terminologies but also depart from them where necessary. For example, we will note that these collectives share an interest in exchange and interpersonal relationships that is at the core of what Bourriaud (1998) termed “relational aesthetics”, but is critical of the latter’s uncritical celebrations of relations¹⁴ and its short-term, mono-authorial, and gallery-centred approach (Bishop, 2012a, 2012b; Miller, 2016). While making use of the advantages of new media such as the Internet when the need arises, the collectives in question neither define themselves by media technology nor are they restricted by them. It is important to indicate that this study notes that the collectivist practices of Gugulective correspond to what Kester (2004) referred to as dialogical aesthetics, and also what Helguera (2011) and Thompson (2012) categorise as a socially engaged practice. Helguera (2011:2) defines socially engaged practice as those works which depend “on social intercourse as a factor of its existence”, while Thompson (2012:31) defines it as “explicitly local, long-term, and community-based.” However, despite these aesthetic parallels, rather than the term “socially engaged practice”, in this case “collectivism” is important as a descriptor for the groups under study, rather than the typology “socially engaged art” or “dialogical aesthetics” for its direct anti-capitalist connotations. As I demonstrate in the following chapters, what I call biopolitical collectivism captures what constitutes a front for contesting the dispossession and dehumanisation under neoliberal capitalism. This collectivism responds to the atomisation by capital that Kester describes in the epigraph above.

1.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I set out to offer an outline of the history of collectivism in African art, starting from the pre-colonial period to the present. This is in order to provide a background of the development of collectivist practices on the continent and for understanding contemporary collectivist practices. I defined collectivism as the theory and practice that relate to the

¹⁴ Human relations can be good or bad. As Miller (2016) writes, “it is one thing to champion relationality as a conceptual tool for making sense of art works that don’t necessarily seem like art work: a hammock slung in the MOMA garden, storytelling in a public square in Copenhagen, mock weddings, recorded interviews, televised game shows, literacy workshops, or even chickens getting drunk on whiskey. But it is quite another to praise relationality as a good in itself, given that exploitation, humiliation, and physical or psychological abuse are also human relations, but presumably not the sort that relational artists want to endorse or enable.”

organisation and decision making of a freely formed and self-governing association or group of cooperating individuals. To set the parameters for understanding the nature of the practices under study, I examined the structure and philosophy of colonial and postcolonial workshops, which were established by expatriates with a colonial mission to save what to them was a dying breed of the “authentic African”. I also examined the collective ethos of modern and contemporary community arts initiatives, some of which were set up in the traditional hierarchical pedagogic model which departs from the horizontally structured contemporary collectives. Rather than a continuation of the pre-colonial, colonial, and some post-independence collectivist aesthetic practices, contemporary African collectives such as Gugulective adopt contemporary methods for contending with the economic, political, and cultural transformations in contemporaneity. In the next chapter, I outline the theoretical framework for studying Gugulective, in which I propose – following Foucault, Hardt and Negri, and others – that the biopolitical practices of the group have the potential to evade capitalist appropriation and also to create autonomous subjectivities.

CHAPTER 2

BIOPOLITICAL COLLECTIVISM

Theory is always a detour to something more important – Hall (1996: 42)

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 specialised 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? – M. Foucault (in Rabinow, 1984: 350)

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I outline this thesis's theoretical framework for studying Gugulective as biopolitical collectivism against neoliberal capitalism. I call this collectivism biopolitical because it is a subject-centred and life-forming art rather than an object-based aesthetics. My theoretical proposition is therefore that the subject-centred and life-forming collectivist practices of Gugulective have the potential to resist capitalism. The Foucaultian concept of biopolitics illuminates the ontology and epistemology of the aesthetics of this and other contemporary African collectives. It also helps to shed light on the figure of the economic subject central to contemporary artistic production.¹⁵ My analysis rests on the understanding of biopolitical production, i.e. “the production and government of new forms of life”, as antithetical to biopower, which is “the art of governance” or the control of bodies (Lazzarato: 2002:110). I advance that while contemporary capitalism, as biopower, infiltrates and colonises

¹⁵ Marco Scotini (2010:301-302) wrote that the consolidation of the neoliberal capitalist system in the 1980s after the collapse of the socialist bloc led to a “non-traditional character and origin of the movement of global resistance: web-like, intermittent, non-centralised, kaleidoscopic, multitudinous, and irreducible to unity ... the movement's identification of cultural production and political struggle, creative experimentation in the use of the media, attaching of importance to the creation of individual and group subjectivity as a mechanism of resistance, and demand for autonomous spaces for knowledge and action led to rapid assimilation of these attitudes in the sectors of contemporary aesthetic and artistic debate as well as proposals of structural alliance between art and activism.” In agreement, Angela Dimitrakaki observed in her essay “The spectacle and its others: Labour, conflict, and art in the age of global capital”, featured in Harris (2011), a new figure has taken centre stage in contemporary artistic production, what she termed a turn to an economic subject in art due to the global consolidation of post-Fordism in the world capitalist economy. Contemporary capital has led to the turn to a new subject in artistic production. My examination of Foucaultian biopolitics as articulated by Hardt and Negri therefore helps us recognise this economic figure particularly as it manifests in contemporary African collectivism.

all aspects of life, from the economic to the political and the cultural, biopolitical production consists of life-forming tactics within and against capitalism (Revel, 2009).¹⁶ Whereas capitalism controls, manipulates, and exploits bodies, biopolitical labour works within capitalism to evade this exploitation. Moreover, not only can biopolitical labour contest capitalism, it also has the potential to create new subjectivities.

The biopolitical collectivism of Gugulective shatters aesthetic boundaries by decentring the art object so that the participant is not only the author and consumer but also, and most importantly, the product of the aesthetic process. This is the crux of biopolitical artistic production. While traditional artistic methods centralise the art object, such as a painting, photograph, video, installation, or performance, as the locus of aesthetic meaning making, crucial to biopolitical collectivism is the production of subjectivities in the non-art public domain. From a Marxist perspective, an art work as a commodity substitutes human interaction and exchange (Emerling, 2005: 21). Biopolitical production in art therefore restores the displaced human interchange. Considering that the collectives in question act in the material world and that they thus involve material objects, it is important to note that aesthetic objects do not completely vanish from the realm of artistic production but rather that they occupy the same position as and form part of the whole range of ordinary objects employed in the subject-forming process.¹⁷ I read this not as a repudiation of objects in art but rather as a recognition of their fraught relationship to the market, and their marginal role in contemporary struggles. From a theoretical perspective, I regard mono-authorial object-based practices as analogous to the modernist/Fordist production paradigm, which was geared towards the production of material commodities. While mono-authorial object-based practices can enlighten and elevate the mind, they easily get absorbed into the market. Numerous contemporary African artists such as El Anatsui, Romuald Hazoume, Kendell Geers, Bathelemy Toguo, Zanele Muholi, Emeka Ogboh, Jane Alexander, Nandipha Ntambo, and others are involved in critical mono-authorial practices that engage contemporaneity. To reject such practices is to do grave injustice to work that has

¹⁶ My usage of the vocabulary of biopower and biopolitics as theoretical tools is not an unreflexive importation of political theory into art. In his essay, “Art and culture in the age of empire”, Antonio Negri (2007) reflected on contemporary artistic production to propose that under biopower meaningful art-making involves the construction of a new being.

¹⁷ I use the word network to describe, in Bruno Latour’s (2005: 131) sense, not a material object, but a trace of associating human agents. Also, as Boltanski and Chiapello (2005:xxiii) described it, “the space of the network, constituted by those who compose it, is not the same as a geographical space: it is open, indeterminate, and shifting.”

a significant cultural impact. However, while highly critical, the gallery-bound practices tend to get absorbed in the inaccessible private enclaves of the global neoliberal art market.

The Nigeria-based Ghanaian, El Anatsui, is an example of an artist based on the continent but whose work is highly sought after by Western collectors and institutions.

In this light, I posit that ontologically, rather than prioritising the creation of objects for the art world, these collectives stimulate living labour for the creation of new subjectivities through networked collectivist practices within their different localities in South Africa, Senegal, and the DRC. As is noted in later chapters, these collectives do so in collaboration with constituents who are already engaged in daily life struggles and various forms of resistance.

2.2 The origins of biopolitics

Foucault (1976), who coined the term, defined biopolitics as techniques of power for the regulation of bodies and the generation of life. According to Foucault, in a period he termed the “classical age” – which roughly corresponds to the period from the middle of the 17th century to the French Revolution – sovereign power transformed from a “deductive” power exercised through seizure of life, or the power to grant life or death, to “biopower”, which tended to monitor, control, reinforce, and optimise life in European society (Foucault, 1976:141). Biopolitics are thus the techniques for this optimisation of life. Writing about the ontology of biopower as it emerges in the classical age and beyond, Foucault departed from traditional Western metaphysics and its transcendental perspectives of power and argued that instead of the vertical view of power emanating from top to bottom, from its centre to permeate bodies; instead of regarding power as transcendent originating from the sovereign; we must focus on its local points of manifestation and actualisation. Foucault (in Gordon & Foucault, 1980:102) suggested that, rather than the top-down traditional Hobbesian view of power,

...we should direct our researches on the nature of power not towards the juridical edifice of sovereignty, the state apparatuses, and the ideologies which accompany them, but towards domination and the material operators of power, towards forms of subjection and the inflections and utilisations of their localised systems, and towards strategic apparatuses.

From a Hobbesian perspective, by entering civil society through the social contract, each individual gave up their right to life and death in the hands of the sovereign. The sovereign had

the power to take away life particularly in such circumstances as when its own life was threatened, for example in times of war or in assassination attempts. For example, in war times, the sovereign commanded death indirectly by sending its subjects to die for him, in order to protect his own life, or the sovereign commanded death directly through the death penalty when his own subject committed a crime that deserved such punishment. Foucault, who departed from such a transcendentalist view as Hobbes, called this form of power “deductive”. Great changes occurred in the classical age when, according to Foucault, power transformed from being deductive, i.e. when it stopped to impede life and to command death, and became generative, i.e. when it started to promote life. While the old regime possessed the right of death, commanding life through its deduction, the new form of power tended to control, monitor, reinforce, and optimise life. Contrary to the old power, which served to protect the life of the sovereign by disposing that of its subjects (punishment), the new power was invested in and promoted the life of the entire social body (discipline). Observing the evolution of this two-pronged power machinery that effectively invested the entire social body, Foucault (1976:139) wrote:

In concrete terms, starting from the seventeenth century, this power over life evolved in two basic forms; these forms were not antithetical, however, they constituted, rather, two poles of development linked together by a whole intermediary cluster of relations. One of these poles – the first to be formed, it seems – centered on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimisation of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterised the disciplines: *an anatomo-politics of the human body* [author’s italics]. The second, formed somewhat later, focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births, and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy, and longevity ...

For Hobbes, each individual who enters the social contract relinquishes his rights to govern himself to the sovereign, who holds absolute power. This sovereign, which can be a prince, a dictator, or the state, is the source of all power and all law (Stumpf & Fieser, 2003). For Foucault, in our search for power we should shift our gaze from the sovereign to the specific points of its articulation where it touches life.

In his essay “Necropolitics”, Mbembe (2003:12) summarised Foucault’s concept of biopower as “that domain of life over which power has taken control”. But how does this power infiltrate and colonise life? Foucault’s five methodological steps for the analysis of power offer a useful guide for understanding biopower and biopolitics in the contemporary sphere. The first methodological step emphasises a decentralised view of the location of power to focus on the marginal points of its expression, rather than on how it is articulated in its points of origin; for example in the state institutions (in Gordon, 1980). Secondly, as power decentralises, it is appropriate to shift from a study of power from its intention at its point of origin to concentrate on its myriad effects on its targets where it infiltrates bodies. Thirdly, Foucault shifted from the traditional view of power as an object that can be possessed and regarded it as a network of relations. Therefore, as a network, power

must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation (Ibid:98).

Fourthly, instead of conducting a descending analysis of power starting from its transcendental origins in the hands of the sovereign, the king, or the prince, one must study power from below, in the manifold details of its actualisation. Lastly, Foucault stressed an understanding of power in terms of discourses which in turn bolster power. “What has occurred in the field of power,” wrote Foucault, “is the production of effective instruments for the formation and accumulation of knowledge – methods of observation, techniques of registration, procedures of investigation and research, apparatuses of control” (Ibid:102).

Foucault’s method has great bearing on this study primarily because it is a reconceptualisation of power from a materialist to an immaterialist perspective, which, as shall be noted, the collectives in question assume in their artistic production. Power is not an object possessed or wielded by an individual but exists as a network of social relationships. This conceptualisation of power is important for understanding its manifestation in the contemporary era - a post-Fordist political and economic dispensation - which is fundamentally immaterial, i.e. in which social relations are increasingly displacing commodity objects at the centre of capitalist accumulation. Also, rather than bestow absolute power in the sovereign, since it regards power as a social relation, Foucault’s method invests bodies with political agency and recognises that subjects are not passive and powerless but always resist domination. Since capitalism as

biopower colonises life, and Gugulective engages in a subject-centred aesthetic approach, Foucault's theory not only helps to recognise forms of capitalist colonisation of life but also recognise individuals' capacity to resist this colonisation. As Scotini (2010:303) observed, after Foucault's abandonment of the traditional vertical view of power based on its institutions,

Contemporary artistic strategies seek to generate dissent and resistance to the forms of biocapitalism by adopting a transversal approach in such a way as to run all the way through the time of life, since it is a peculiar characteristic of biocapitalism ... to shift the exercise of power from the 'time of work' to the 'time of life' as such.

In other words, as biocapitalism or biopower invests in all life, contemporary artists shift their resistance onto the terrain of life itself. Through Foucault's method we are therefore able to recognise the different modes of critical agency in contemporary aesthetic production and define their characteristic features.

According to Foucault, as power infiltrates and invests in the body politic, it is firstly geared towards disciplining and optimising its potential. Thus, power concentrates on controlling and regulating life in order to enhance it so that it can profit from it. Foucault recognised that this form of power was "without question, an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population and economic processes" (Foucault, 1976:140-141). Biopower and its different techniques and apparatuses facilitated capitalism's expansion of man's productive capacities for the accumulation of profit.¹⁸ Population growth was regulated and promoted for economic purposes. Rather than an understanding of power as transcendent, Foucault's method shed light on its immanent and specific character. Consequently, it illuminated the details of a network of counter-power that emerges within this colonised social body, at the local point where bodies resist this colonisation.

¹⁸ Foucault (1976:141) wrote that "the adjustment of the accumulation of men to that of capital, the joining of the growth of human groups to the expansion of the productive forces and the differential allocation of profit was made possible in part by the exercise of biopower in its many forms and modes of application. The investment of the body, its valorisation, and the distributive management of its forces are at the time indispensable."

2.3 Biopower versus biopolitics

Foucault's observations on the historical development of power and how it works on bodies focused on transformations in the West up to the 19th century. He interpreted modernity through important transformations that occurred in the classical era. Maurizio Lazzarato, whose theoretical reinterpretation of Foucault focused on contemporary reality, described Foucault's biopower as "a new political theory" and "a new ontology" to outline the new power relations expressed in the global political economy (2002:100). Lazzarato (2002:103) highlighted the immanent nature of biopower, and pointed to the liberatory potential of the biopolitics:

In effect, biopolitical *dispositifs* are first grafted and then anchored upon a multiplicity of consensual relations, relations between forces which power 'coordinates, institutionalizes, stratifies, and targets', but that cannot be reduced to the pure and simple projection of power upon individuals.

According to Lazzarato, biopolitics, which operate within biopower, are counter-tactics internal to biopower. Lazzarato's biopolitics built on Foucault's conception of power as "flow", as a network of immanent rather than transcendent relationships; as transactional energy rather than as a possession. According to Lazzarato (2002:103), "The fundamental political problem of modernity is not that of a single source of sovereign power, but that of a multitude of forces that act and react amongst each other according to relations of command and obedience."¹⁹ Both biopower and biopolitics optimise life, but while biopower governs and dominates bodies, biopolitics perpetually seek freedom from domination (Lazzarato, 2002; Revel, 2009). In other words, biopower objectivises while biopolitics subjectivise. In this thesis I therefore regard biopower, i.e. capitalism, as the control of bodies, while biopolitics are acts of resistance to this control, since, as Lazzarato put it, "to establish a conceptual and political distinction between biopower and biopolitics is to move in step with Foucault's thinking" (2002:110). Socially engaged artistic practices, such as those of Gugulective, that seek to transform societies and subjectivities within capitalism are instances of biopolitics. A note of caution must be raised here, however, on how Lazzarato's dichotomisation might simplify complex social relations which involve interconnections, entanglements, and overlaps. Such neat theoretical categories

¹⁹ In his analysis of power, Foucault observed how freedom and resistance are central to power. Rather than projected from above and exercised on passive individuals, Foucault defined power as a strategic relation between active subjects who have the capacity to resist. Inherent in power is freedom. In fact, Foucault argued, resistance comes prior to power. Foucault (1982:789) argued that power is "a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions ... Power is exercised over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free."

particularly do not pertain to the complex postcolonial African reality where the formal is inextricably imbricated with the informal, the public is mixed up with the private, and biopower is continuously subverted by biopolitical tactics. For example, as it shall be noted in Chapters 3 and 5, manifestations of what is known as informal economies in the post-colony (due to the demotion of Africa on the world market by capitalist globalisation) shape artistic resistance on the continent. Hardt and Negri (2001; 2004; 2009), for instance, recognise the transformations in capitalist production from commodity objects in Fordism to immaterial production in post-Fordism generally as biopolitical, but also recognise the emancipatory power of biopolitical production. In this study, cognisant of these distinctions, it is important to emphasise that biopolitics operate inside, rather than outside, of biopower. With such a subtle conception of biopolitics, a more sophisticated and flexible model of resistance can be formulated.

Within his ontological framework of power, Foucault posed questions that are crucial for understanding the biopolitical collectivism of Gugulective. In the same way that he asked such questions as “How are we to seize these infinitesimal, diffused, and heterogeneous power relations so that they do not always result in phenomena of domination or resistance?” or, “How can this new ontology of forces open up to unexpected processes of political constitution and independent processes of subjectification?”, we are challenged to find out how forms of biopower, i.e. infinitesimal, diffused, and heterogeneous power relations of domination, operate on the continent, and how these are contested by biopolitical forces of resistance, whether political or aesthetic (Lazzarato, 2002:106). Cognisant of Foucault’s important observation of the subject’s prior capability for freedom in biopower, this study examines the forms of ethical and aesthetic action taken by the collectives in question in the contestation of biopower.²⁰

2.4 Capitalism as biopower

The theorist Gene Ray observed that the current world order is a capitalist one. As Ray (2004a:566) noted, “the old territorial outside has disappeared under the real subsumption of all societies under capital.” There is no longer an outside of capitalism. Geo-politically, with

²⁰ Lazzarato defined ethical action as maneuvers and techniques which subjects employ in strategic relations (in, for instance, biopolitics) to negotiate and avoid domination (i.e. in forms of biopower) and also to enhance and create new subjectivities. According to Lazzarato (2002: 100), “ethical action, then, is concentrated upon the crux of the relation between strategic relations and governmental technologies, and it has two principle goals: 1. To permit, by providing rules and techniques to manage the relationships established with the self and with others, the interplay of strategic relations with the minimum possible domination, 2. To augment their freedom, their mobility and reversibility in the exercise of power because these are the prerequisites of resistance and creation.”

the defeat of socialism at the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, capital occupied all socialist markets that were previously out of reach. All terrain that was outside of capitalism is therefore now subsumed under it. Socially, and this is the core meaning of the real subsumption, capitalism brings all aspects of life under its realm. Ray (2004a:567) wrote that “from the biopolitical perspective, Empire controls bodies by controlling the production of desires or ‘imaginaries’.” Capitalism is a form of global biopower that orders, governs, enhances, and exploits life for the maximisation of profit through *dispositifs* that objectify bodies.²¹

As biopower, capitalism promotes life only in order to extract the maximum profit from it. According to Lazzarato (2002:101), Foucault described biopolitics as “the emergence of a multiple and heterogeneous power of resistance and creation that calls every organisation that is transcendental, and every regulatory mechanism that is extraneous, to its constitution radically into question.” Biopolitical power relations resist capitalism, which works to control and dominate them.

In agreement with fellow Workerist theorist Lazzarato, Hardt and Negri (2001; 2004; 2009) analyse the epochal political, economic, and cultural transformations taking place at a global scale due to crises internal to capitalism. Hardt and Negri argue that in the post-Fordist era of immaterial production, the production of ideas, images, affects, and subjectivities rather than objects pervades all aspects of contemporary life and is assuming hegemony over other forms of production.²² Worker struggles, social struggles, and other internal crises force capitalism to restructure and abandon the old Fordist model of production, which was based on mass production of consumer objects.²³

²¹ Hardt and Negri translate Foucault’s concept of *dispositifs* within the context of capitalist sovereignty, or in Foucaultian language, what they call the “society of control” as “mechanism, apparatus, or deployment” of power (2001:330). “*Dispositif* is the general strategy that stands behind the immanent and actual exercise of discipline ... the immanent exercise of discipline – that is, the self-disciplining of subjects, the incessant whisperings of disciplinary logics within subjectivities themselves – is extended even more generally within the society of control” (Ibid).

²² According to Hardt and Negri (2004:108), immaterial labour takes two principal forms. The first form refers to intellectual or linguistic labour such as symbolic and analytical tasks and linguistic expression. Products of this labour are images, ideas, symbols, codes, and texts. The second form of immaterial labour is called “affective labour”, which produces or manipulates effects such as a feeling of ease, ill-being, satisfaction, etc. Examples of affective workers are nurses, flight attendants, and waiters.

²³ Fordism is a commodity object-based economic model pioneered by the American vehicle manufacturer Henry Ford in the early 1900s, which was characterised by work organisation and mass production in factories (Blyton & Jenkins, 2007). Ford adopted F.W. Taylor’s disciplinary principles and methods for the maximisation of human labour productivity and reliability and to increase mass production for mass markets (Blyton & Jenkins, 2007). Theorists have argued that since the 1970s we are now in the post-Fordist era in which economic production is based on immaterial products such as services and images (Harvey, 1990; Hardt & Negri, 2000; 2004; 2009).

Like Lazzarato, Hardt and Negri adapted elements of Foucault's theory of biopower to make sense of the tremendous changes occurring on the concrete contemporary global political terrain. Within the emerging form of post-modern global political dispensation called Empire, the authors argue that biopower is a form of power "that regulates social life from its interior, following it, interpreting it, absorbing it, and rearticulating it" (Hardt & Negri, 2000:23-24). The Fordist period (where society is structured according to the model of the factory) corresponds to what Foucault termed the disciplinary society. In the disciplinary society, order is accomplished through disciplinary institutions such as the family, the school, the factory, and the prison, which regulate customs and habits and ensure obedience. In contrast, "the society of control" is a term Deleuze (1992) used to describe a political situation which differs from the disciplinary society but which superimposes itself on and dovetails with it, which corresponds to the emergence of the post-Fordist period. In the society of control, capitalist control flows out of the specialised disciplinary institutions mentioned above onto the domain of everyday life. In the society of control, "mechanisms of command become more democratic, ever more immanent to the social field, distributed throughout the brains and bodies of citizens" (Hardt & Negri, 2000:23). Biopower becomes effective as domination in the society of control only when immanent. "Power", according to Hardt and Negri (2000:24), "can achieve an effective command over the entire life of the population only when it becomes an integral, vital function that every individual embraces and reactivates of his or her own accord."²⁴

Contrary to disciplinary power, power in the society of control

is now exercised through machines that directly organize the brains (in communication systems, information networks, etc.) and bodies (in welfare systems, monitored activities, etc.) toward a state of autonomous alienation from the sense of life and the desire for creativity (Hardt & Negri, 2001:23).

Power within this new political configuration of Empire is not transcendental (emanating from above as in sovereign rule), but rather tends to be immanent, rising from and permeating all aspects of society. This is possible through the media, the Internet, police surveillance, and, as

²⁴ Ray (2004:566) succinctly summarises Hardt and Negri's concept of Empire as "a new emerging order" in which "the integration of global markets, intensified by the thickening of global communications and transportation networks, means that the whole planet has come under the 'biopolitical horizon' of a single society – a single and global social given in which differences and the production of differences are organized and managed as one planetary system of control and reproduction." One important feature about Empire that is crucial to this study that Ray highlights is the tendency in this new global configuration for power "to operate increasingly across and indeed without regard for national borders, which as a result will continue to be progressively weakened" (Ibid).

it will be seen in Chapter 5 in my discussion of Huit facettes and Le Groupe Amos, other seemingly innocent forms of control such as aid and humanitarian organisations. In other words, in the post-modern era, the form of rule called biopower infiltrates, colonises, and alienates bodies through a myriad of technologies, apparatuses, and mechanisms of control such as media, information technologies, and the police. Transformations occurring on the economic front drastically impact developments on the political terrain, whereby biopower promotes profit, and profit buttresses biopower.

On the economic front, crises that rocked Fordist production in the late 1960s and the 1970s (mainly due to proletarian and other anti-capitalist struggles) led to transformations into what is now characterised as post-Fordism. Such struggles that undermined capitalism included the general refusal to work by the industrial working class; liberation struggles in the colonies of Africa, Latin America, and Asia; the women's movement; and the student and worker revolts of 1968 in Europe, America, and Japan (Hardt & Negri, 2000). Other scholars attribute these epochal shifts to various other factors such as technological advances in communications and information technology, competition faced by Western capitalists from Asia, consumer demands, and other challenges posed by trade unions, academics, and workers (Hopper, 2003). However, Hardt and Negri (2000:263) observed that due to this "accumulation of struggles", which put pressure on and undermined capitalism, production has shifted from the old Fordist paradigm, which was characterised by industrial production in the late modern era in which material objects were central, to a new Post-Fordist paradigm in postmodernity in which the production of immaterial goods such as images and affects becomes hegemonic. According to Hardt and Negri (2000:269),

A paradigm shift was needed to design the restructuring process along the lines of the political and technological shift. In other words, capital had to confront and respond to the new production of subjectivity of the proletariat. This new production of subjectivity reached ...what might be called an ecological struggle, a struggle over the mode of life that was eventually expressed in the developments of immaterial labour.

The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2000) termed the old Fordist model, in which the production of objects was confined to and rigidly defined by the factory, as solid, while the emergent post-Fordist model, in which production is fluid, i.e. not confined to the factory and

is geared towards immaterial objects, as liquid. For Bauman, liquid modernity is immaterial, fluid, and therefore precarious. Quoting Bauman, Papastergiadis (2012:68) writes that

the goals of capital have thereby shifted, from the concentration of energy into a unified system to the generation of multiple platforms for the dissemination of energy flows. The place of production and the determination of a company culture are no longer fixed to the territory or norms of a specific place, but have been unleashed into a global field of perpetual reinvention. In this field no one has the promise of being a lifelong cog in the machine.

As Papastergiadis (following Bauman) notes, due to this fluidification of economic production, the entire gamut of modern (or post-modern) life becomes fluid. While Fordism or modernity was characterised by unity, wholeness, and coherence, the post-Fordism of post-modernity is defined by flows. Deleuze (1992) took this comparison further by characterising the society of control or post-Fordism as gaseous. Contemporary reality is therefore characterised by flows or movement rather than stability.

On the political front, we notice the adoption of neoliberalism by powerful regimes such as Reagan and Thatcher's governments in the 1970s in response to the crisis in capitalism briefly outline above. Neoliberalism, which promotes "free markets", can therefore be seen as the politics that create and sustain the environment for post-Fordist capitalist practices (Stiglitz, 2002). In Chapter 4 I demonstrate how neoliberalism is the globalisation of post-Fordist capitalist production. However, in the interest of this thesis, it is important to stress that within post-Fordism it is not material goods but immaterial products such as information, images, and affects that are central to capitalist value accumulation. This form of economic production influences and infiltrates cultural production and shapes the nature of artistic production of socially engaged groups such as Gugulective. What I call biopolitical collectivist production is therefore an example of cultural expression under Neoliberal, post-Fordist economic production.

Biopolitical production, therefore, not only offers a picture of the political and economic context within which the collectives in question are operating but it also presents a way of understanding the aesthetics of the collectives themselves. In biopolitical collectivist production, not only is the participant part of the art-making process, but he/she is also the product. This will be seen in the ways in which the different collectives seek to transform individuals through collaborative production. As Hardt and Negri (2004:146-148) observe, in

biopolitical production “what is produced ... is not just material goods but actual social relationships and forms of life ...” Hardt and Negri (2004:148) add that “labour itself tends to produce the means of interaction, communication, and cooperation directly”, without capitalist control. According to Hardt and Negri, this is where biopolitical production holds critical and emancipatory potential. Considered within capitalist relations, biopolitical production is therefore immeasurable because it cannot be quantified in traditional economics’ fixed units of time, and also because it is “always excessive with respect to the value that capital can extract from it because capital can never capture all of life” (Hardt & Negri, 2004:148). Due to its immeasurability, biopolitical production has the potential to escape capitalist expropriation.

Fundamentally, labour in biopolitical production has the potential to escape capitalism in four ways: through its immateriality, through its inherent autonomous character, spatially, and finally, temporally. Firstly, labour production in post-Fordism is immaterial; in other words, it is characterised by productivity without a necessary end product – what Virno (2004) called “virtuosity” or “performance without end product.”²⁵ Secondly, while in Fordist production the capitalist ordered and controlled labour production, in post-Fordism labour is autonomous since it is immaterial and can happen without capitalist control. Ideas do not need capitalist activation in order to be conceived and implemented. Thirdly, while in the Fordist era production was confined within the spatial boundaries of the factory, in post-Fordism it spills over these boundaries so that production happens within and outside factory limits. Subjects continue to produce outside the bounds of capitalist control. Finally, the regular Fordist worker’s productive day was divided into eight hours of factory production, eight hours of leisure, and eight hours of sleep. Immaterial production in post-Fordism exceeds these temporal boundaries so that work can happen at any time of the day (Hardt & Negri, 2001; Virno, 2004). As Virno (2004:100) put it, “the tendential pre-eminence of knowledge makes of labour time a miserable foundation.”

The revolutionary capacity of biopolitics against biopower lies in the autonomy of labour and the immeasurability of biopolitical production in capitalism. The concept of living labour to which I turn below explains this autonomy and immeasurability of biopolitical production. It

²⁵ Virno’s (2004) concept of virtuosity or “performance without end product” succinctly captures this idea at the most fundamental theoretical level. Capitalism fails to capture living labour, a performance without end product which directly reproduces itself. However, not only can biopolitical labour escape capitalist control, it also has the potential to create new subjectivities. Biopolitical production rests on Virno’s concept of virtuosity, which proposes that only in biopolitics is life itself the end product. By colonising and exploiting bodies, which always seek freedom, biopower itself sows the seeds of revolution.

needs to be observed, however, that while the Workerist/Autonomist political theory on which our framework rests – which I regard as crucial for understanding the global contemporaneity - has European origins within a specific Italian context, I apply it bearing in mind the different spatio-temporal, and cultural and socio-political circumstances and varied African contexts of rural and urban Senegal, in Kinshasa and its periphery in the DRC, and in the township of Gugulethu in Cape Town, South Africa. At the heart of my theoretical propositions is the recognition that human beings respond to peculiar circumstances and take action according to how capital manifests within their different locales. So, guided by Foucault’s (1980) concept of the “specific intellectual”, who, rather than being preoccupied with the universal, engages with the particular and the political, I ask: What consists of biopolitical production in the work of the collectives in question in Cape Town, Dakar, or Kinshasa? How do these practices evade expropriation within these different contexts? Against the charge that African artists do not understand contemporaneity – which is rooted in discursive practices the anthropologist Johannes Fabian called “denial of coevalness”, which freezes the time of the other in the past, or completely denies the other history (like Hegel who called Africans “people without a history”) – I demonstrate that the biopolitical collectivism of Gugulethu critically responds to globalisation as it pertains to the contemporary African context.²⁶

When Foucault wondered, in an interview entitled “On the genealogy of ethics” (quoted in the epigraph), why in our society art is only related to objects, and asked if it was possible for everyone’s life to be art, I interpret that as a revolutionary call for the “biopoliticisation” of art, rather than a mere desire for the integration of art into life. Foucault called for an art of life, i.e. an art that creates subjectivities rather than objects. This corresponds to Franz Fanon’s (1963:169) assertion, within the context of anti-colonial struggles, that “culture grows deeper through the people’s struggle and not through songs, poems or folklore.” Fanon’s statement is not a repudiation of objects in art but rather a recognition of their fraught relationship to the market, and their marginal role in contemporary struggles.

In their book entitled *Civic agency in Africa: Arts of resistance in the 21st century*, Obadare and Willems (2014) observe a shift of focus in scholarship on African societies from an overemphasis on formal structures of resistance against power (such as the civil society,

²⁶ In his article entitled “Katie Robinson Edwards’ Mid-century Modern Art in Texas Offers a Definitive Take on an Overlooked Era” (2014), the Texan art critic Harbeer Sandhu quoted Simon Njami who, at a panel at the 55th Venice biennale 2013, spoke about his art peers’ perception of African artists. According to Njami, a French colleague once remarked to him, “Yes, but Simon, the Africans don’t really understand contemporaneity.”

including non-governmental organisations, political parties, pressure groups, rebel movements, etc.), to alternative forms of resistance – to the grossly overlooked, subtle yet powerful informal practices and modes of resistance adopted by the so-called “powerless” or “weak”. These forms of resistance might include what Mbembe (2001) categorises as Bakhtinian carnivalesque, grotesque and obscene humour as refuge from and resistance against tyranny, or Michel de Certeau’s (1984:25) “*la perruque*” or “making-do” by pilfering, graft, and other survival and subversive tactics within the capitalist order. As will be seen in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, the emasculation of postcolonial economies by neoliberal capitalist globalisation has greatly contributed to the proliferation of informal practices and tactics of survival. Some of the collectives in question are inspired by and adopt these everyday tactics employed by the “powerless” against power. However, rather than focusing on the informal, i.e. the outside, the collectives also employ those aesthetic practices that slip in between the formal and the informal, the inside and the outside; adopting the tactics of everyday life and appropriating the strategies of power to counter colonisation and co-option.²⁷

2.5 Contemporary collectivism in rhizomatic networks

The above was a presentation of the theoretical framework for analysing the epistemology of the biopolitical collectivism of Gugulective. I now turn to a theoretical exploration of the nature of collectivist aesthetic practices with the view that an examination of the reviews of critical contemporary collaborative practices as they emerge on the global terrain helps to understand the nature of political practices on the continent. In his recently published all-important catalogue of socially engaged art, arguably the most comprehensive on the topic to date, Thompson (2012) wrote about the ontology of collaborative practices; noting its emphasis on participation, its anti-representational aesthetic, its critique of politics, its situation in the social realm, its media manipulation, and its critique of neoliberalism. Thompson’s analysis is significant as an introduction to collaboration and collectivism. However, my critique departs from his when he posits, based on De Certeau’s (1984) theory, that the import of contemporary critical practices rests on their appropriation of official strategy – what he called a strategic

²⁷ Here I evoke Hardt and Negri (2001; 2004; 2009), Hou Hanru (2009) and others who have stated that there is no outside to the present global order and therefore no effective outside position of resistance. Relyea (2006:70, 74) argues that “staking a position outside and opposed to ‘the system’ is definitely no cinch these days – especially when the system feeds off segmentation and diversity (if not diversification) ... to claim the authenticity of a position ‘outside’ no longer automatically translates into resistance. As with subjects and objects, so too does the distinction between inside and outside get voided by the network structure.” According to Relyea, “to be ‘inside’ the network already means being outside” (Ibid:74).

turn.²⁸ Following De Certeau, Thompson observes that “if the tactical is a temporary, interventionist form of trespass, the strategic is the long-term investment in space” (Thompson, 2012:31). For Thompson, however, the strategic turn is long-term and has the potential to evade institutional co-option. While I share a sustained and long-term view of a collaborative aesthetic practice, I opt for a tactical aesthetic that hovers between the formal and the informal, rather than a strategic turn. I posit that while strategy belongs to the language of biopower, tactics are congruent to a biopolitical aesthetic. It needs to be pointed out, however, that while I mainly situate biopolitical resistance in tactics, the relationship between domination and resistance is much more complex. The Foucauldian reading of power employed in my analysis complicates De Certeau’s conceptualisations. In a situation where power descends from its lofty institutions – which De Certeau (1984) termed “proper” spaces of domination – to infiltrate life in processes of domination termed governmentality (Hardt & Negri, 2000), domination and resistance are intermeshed and intertwined in complicated antagonisms involving both strategies and tactics, rather than merely locked in a simplistic binary relationship (Pile & Keith, 1997).

In his 2012 essay, “Eventwork: The fourfold matrix of contemporary social movements”, Brian Holmes deconstructs the contemporary collectivist aesthetic observing how, at the core of these practices, there are four critical pillars, namely an employment of research strategies, an engagement with media techniques, an incorporation of traditional and new artistic models, and finally, politics in the form of activism. Holmes’ analysis specifically focuses on practices within contemporary collectivism that place great faith in new media technology to combat capitalist globalisation. Holmes’ model, which he refers to as “eventwork”, involves an interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary ethos he calls “extradisciplinarity” (because rather than restricting itself to the traditional boundaries of art, this model of practice crosses over boundaries and mixes disciplines), is important to my analysis of a heterogeneous collectivist aesthetics which, as examined in Chapters 3 and 5, adopts a multiplicity of tactics and strategies of resistance to counter complex forms of domination.

²⁸ De Certeau (1984:36) defined strategy as “the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated ... as in management, every ‘strategic’ rationalisation seeks first of all to distinguish its own place, that is, the place of its own power and will, from an ‘environment’.” According to De Certeau (Ibid:37), a tactic is “a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus ... a tactic ... must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organised by the law of a foreign power ... A tactic is an art of the weak.”

Lazzarato (2009:114) notes using the Foucaultian term of counter-conduct as resistance:

... counter-conducts and the processes of subjectivation ... are as multiple and differentiated as the *dispositifs* of power that are meant to control them. They are expressed in different ways: flight, deflection, ruse, attempts to overturn the situation of domination, direct confrontation with the *dispositifs* of power, etc., without these means coming into conflict with each other.

However, considering that these collectives operate in a relatively less advanced technological environment, it is important to mention that technological media and cyberspace, which also form the core of Holmes' critical aesthetic focus, are not central to the work of Gugulective.

Papastergiadis also provided four characteristics of contemporary collaborative art. According to Papastergiadis (2012:164), collaboration involves a shift from the traditional spaces of engagement such as the museum into the public realm, a heightened resistance to the "perils and polarisations accentuated by neoliberalism", a loose network of collective authorship, and cosmopolitanism and global mobility. In certain respects, Papastergiadis' analysis shed light on the aesthetics of the contemporary African collectives under study; for instance, his focus on the spatial shift from the museum to the public as the central forum for political engagement, his focus on the critique of neoliberalism, and also on the recognition of networked collective authorship. We will also note later that his concept of mediation, i.e. world-building in collectivism, rather than representation as the core of aesthetics, is significant to the concerns of the groups under study. However, Papastergiadis' focus on what he calls vernacular cosmopolitan practices that also enjoy global mobility overlooks those groups that are local and which do not have access to global mobility such as numerous groups on the African continent. This is not to say that contemporary African collectives are naïve or oblivious to globalisation, but rather that their critique of the global is grounded on their local social milieu. In addition, while recognising and emphasising mediation, Papastergiadis' aesthetics do not capture what I would like to call those minute, synaptic moments of biopolitical transformation that I explore in the African collectives in question.

All the aforementioned authors define the general characteristics of contemporary collaborative practices. They successfully describe the central object of its political critique, its networked nature of collectivist authorship, its focus on the public sphere rather than the art institutional context, its extra-disciplinary character, its employment of research techniques, etc. However, none of these analyses succinctly captures biopolitical aesthetic production at the monadic

level. Therefore, considering the specific rather than general, immanent rather than transcendent nature of Foucaultian biopolitics, it is the challenge of this investigation to locate a theoretical framework that defines the biopolitical collectivism of the groups in question in their most specific and immanent character and at the minutest level of engagement, at the level where bodies respond to power.

It is important to note that Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome spreads its roots in and around biopolitical collectivism. In their concept of the rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari undertake a deconstruction of rigid "arborescent" structures. Arborescent systems of communication are centred and hierarchical but the rhizome, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987:21) in the ultimate post-structuralist sense, "is an a-centred, non-hierarchical, non-signifying system without a General ...". The rhizomatic system comprises fluid subjectivities linked, communicating, and cooperating in networks. Deleuze and Guattari offer the best ontological definition of the liminal character of the rhizome, stating that

a rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb 'to be', but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and...and...and...' (Ibid:25).

A rhizome is therefore an anti-capitalist "machine" that is fluid rather than solid, an open-ended rather than a closed system, and a non-hierarchical network rather than a hierarchical structure. Contemporary capitalism is flexible, mobile, and networked. Thus, by assuming the internal characteristics of capitalism such as its open-ended, non-hierarchical, and deterritorialised nature, the rhizome uses contemporary capitalism's own techniques to counter it. While traditional object-making practices resemble radicle and arborescent structures deeply rooted within the institution, the rhizome describes the "a-centered" or rather the "uprooted" and "nomadic" character of contemporary African collectivism. I have to point out, however, that in contrast to the global cosmopolitanism championed by Papastergiadis and others, this nomadism occurs in between spaces, i.e. between traditional and non-conventional forms, the formal and the informal, collective and mono-authorial authorship, inside and outside the institution, activism and aesthetics, between biopower and biopolitics (and even between markets). In Deleuzian terms, the mono-authorial arborescent system operates in a transcendent manner in which the artist-genius transfixes and bedazzles his audience by transforming raw matter into valuable objects, while the collectivist practices operate as

immanent rhizomatic processes connecting “any point to any other point” (Ibid:21). The collectives operate as a rhizomatic and synaptic network. Lives are transformed in those moments of poetic dialogue and exchange. Rather than descending on communities as heaven-sent saviours, the collectives connect and work with people as what George E. Marcus called “epistemic partners” (in Papastergiadis, 2011:159). This is in recognition of the fact that hierarchical modes of participation only advance the status and careers of the artists who initiated them.

In Chapters 3 and 5 I demonstrate how some of the collectives (Gugulective, Huit Facettes and Le Groupe Amos) collaborate with different communities and connect aesthetic production and social practice as rhizomatic networks of collective anti-capitalist production. Networking between individuals and communities with divergent knowledge, creative intelligences, skills, and expertise forms the core modus operandi of the groups, which seek ways in which art can impact and improve lived experience. These groups form networks that catalyse poetic exchange for political goals. “The network,” notes Relyea, “privileges casual, weak ties over formal commitments so as to heighten the possibility of chanced-upon associational link-ups that lead outward from any one communicational nexus or group” (2006:73). These practices benefit from such weak ties that facilitate interventions in real life. They also profit from chanced-upon encounters that nourish subjectivities. It has to be pointed out that my emphasis on collectivism is not a complete disavowal of mono-authoriality and object making in aesthetic production. Even the rhizome has some arborescent moments. Within these collectives, collaboration and mono-authoriality are imbricated, whereby some members of collectives maintain individual artistic practices and also shift back and forth between material and immaterial production.

To be specific, biopolitical aesthetics include such practices as community-based collaborative performances, pedagogy, dialogical practices, demonstrations, and different forms of skills-sharing geared towards the promotion of autonomous subjectivities. While this theorisation is a distillation of praxis to its most abstract and philosophical element, in its concrete form biopolitical collectivism includes a range of practices such as networked collaborations and interventions in the public domain, happenings, demonstrations, media campaigns, cross-disciplinary experimentation, and pedagogical projects which involve the sharing of ideas and skills and the creation of artistic objects. This sharing of ideas, skills, and knowledge harnesses and activates living labour for biopolitical production. In the following chapters I examine in detail how these collectives employ performative strategies rooted in critical collaborative

learning and production, such as Freire's (1970) liberatory pedagogy. A significant ethos underlying these practices is the displacement of the object, and the replacement of "the production of man by man", i.e. the creation of subjectivities as central to aesthetic production (Hardt & Negri, 2009). This is an art that is life-forming rather than representational.

2.6 Immaterial versus dematerialised aesthetics

The concept of an immaterialised aesthetic adopted in this thesis is rooted in political theorisations of the Italian Autonomist School, which diagnosed economic transformations from Fordism to post-Fordism, from modernism to post-modernism. According to the Autonomists, in post-Fordism/post-modernism, capitalist production has shifted from material to immaterial goods. Images, information, knowledge, and affects, rather than commodity objects such as cars and vacuum cleaners, are the main source of capitalist profit. In this economy, capital colonises and exploits the entire gamut of life. This is the realm in which immaterial art operates (Lillemose, 2006; Grammatikopoulou, 2012). According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary* (2016), the adjective "immaterial" has roots in Medieval Latin *immaterialis*, which means "not consisting of matter, spiritual". This immaterialisation means a shift of focus away from the corporeal or material art object similar to conceptual art's dematerialisation, which stems from a critique of the commodity object.²⁹ The term "dematerialisation of the art object" was coined by Lucy Lippard (1973) to describe the conceptual aesthetic practices of the 1960s, which de-emphasised unique art objects in favour of an engagement with ideas and concepts. In conceptual art, the idea rather than the material art object is the main focus of artistic production. Dematerialisation refers to this decentering or displacement of the art object and the foregrounding of the concept in aesthetic production.

The immaterialised aesthetic also shares conceptual art's attempt at the Duchampian de-retinalisation, i.e. a decentering of the visual in art,³⁰ its democratisation of artistic production

²⁹ In her essay entitled "Shades of the immaterial: Different approaches to the 'non-object'", Christina Grammatikopoulou (2012) defined immaterial art as "the realm of the physically imperceptible; it can either be used to describe elements that need to go through different processes in order to be perceived or to shift the focus from the object to the process of creation and the ideas behind it." Grammatikopoulou's definition captures the figure of immateriality in art that is distinguished from the technological and digitalised practices, also called new media practices, which proliferated due to the advent of information technologies such as the Internet, with which this term is generally associated.

³⁰ Marcel Duchamp, who greatly influenced conceptual art, is recognised as the first artist to embark on an actual decentering of the visual to focus on the intellectual in art-making. According to David Craven in *Oxford Art Online* (2012), "in 1913, Duchamp abandoned the tools and techniques of painting, prompted by his desire to elevate art and the art-making process beyond the purely visual or 'retinal', as he later called it; his adoption of an overtly intellectual approach was in conscious opposition to the French expression '*etre bete comme une peintre*', which

and consumption, its critical concern over the commodification and sacralisation of the art object (i.e. the notion of the artwork as a rare, highly valuable, sacred object on a pedestal), and above all, its desire to rupture the institutional frame.³¹

However, despite these commonalities, there are aesthetic differences in their strategic approaches. First, while conceptual art strives for a democratisation of art, the form of the participatory model employed by conceptual artists such as Lawrence Weiner and Sol LeWitt that attempts to decentre the artist is rather a delegation of roles than a radical democratisation of aesthetic production, distribution, and consumption. Weiner's production involves the artist writing statements in past participle such as "One hole in the ground approximately 1'x1'x1'. One gallon water based white paint poured into this hole." The action in Weiner's statements could be performed by anyone. Within a strictly Barthesian reading, participation involves the delegation of meaning-making to the "reader". Weiner attempts to diminish the role of the author by delegating to the reader whom, it is assumed, creates meaning by engaging the work through reading or by physically realising the stipulated action in the statement. I observe, however, that while transferring artistic responsibility into the hands of the spectator, delegation maintains and valorises the sole authorship of the one who delegates. The author does not "die" to give birth to the reader. The locus of valorisation and meaning lies not in the interaction between the statement and its reader. As has been the fate of most conceptual art works, any linguistic or material trace of the artist's concept assumes a central position and becomes the object of valorisation and commodification. The statements remain the author's brainchild. In delegation, authorship resides in the conception rather than the execution of the work (Godfrey, 1998). Weiner remains the singular author and producer of meaning.

Secondly, although linguistic processes form the core of both dematerialised and immaterialised art, in contrast to contemporary African collectivism (which uses language to connect art to life), conceptual art's recourse to language was solely as a tool for self-reflexivity (for example Kosuth's [1969:137] conclusion that "Art's only claim is for art. Art is the definition of art") within a highly cognitive late modernist aesthetic based on Immanuel Kant's

presumed that painting was a mindless activity. Concerns such as these led Duchamp to investigate complex theories of geometry and to adopt mechanical techniques of drawing generally reserved for more scientific disciplines such as physics and engineering. Such preoccupations led Duchamp to ask himself in 1913 whether it was possible for an artist to make works that were not works of art in the sense of being motivated by aesthetic considerations."

³¹ Broadly, conceptual art, particularly in the work of Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, and all the artists who have been categorised under the rubric of institutional critique, sought to critique and expose the logic and politics of the institutional frame that named, judged, and legitimised art works.

analytic propositions (exemplified by the work of Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, and the Art & Language group). In conceptual art, “there is no blurring of the boundaries between art and life ... blurring was anathema, and everyday life of little interest except as a setting for ordinary language use” (Smith, 2010:35). This disconnection from life highlights conceptual art’s anti-humanism.

Lastly – and this is in connection to the anti-humanist element – while the dematerialised aesthetic places emphasis on logic and cognitive processes rather than the emotional and intuitive (“The idea becomes the machine that makes the art ... a logical operation that eliminates the arbitrary, capricious, and the subjective as much as possible”, LeWitt, 1967), immaterialised practices include both intellectual processes and affects; ideas, cognition, feelings, and emotions all form part of the repertoire of the immaterialised aesthetic. The immaterial aesthetic is informed by conceptual art’s de-retinalisation, but it does not eschew other dimensions of subjective experience.

While certain forms of conceptualism tried to phenomenologically purge not only the artist who conceived the work but also the viewer – examples can be found in the work of LeWitt, who argued that “the elimination of the perceptual object in favour of an emphasis on the conceptual process was a way of dismantling myths of integrated subjectivity” (in Alberro *et al.*, 2007) – in immaterialised processes the viewer is integral to an heuristic aesthetic production. In attempts to escape the confines of the art institution, Land art, a form of conceptualism practiced by artists such as Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson, Richard Long, and others, involved creating temporary site-specific interventions in remote and inaccessible landscapes. Immaterial practices rupture the institutional frame, but, rather than shun the viewer, they engage the public as site (the Dia Foundation’s patronage of Land artists Richard Smithson and Walter deMaria point at Land art’s failure to escape the long arm of the institution). At the core of the dematerialised aesthetic is the intellectualisation of art and a rigorous critique of art’s foundation in the material object, its commodity status, and its position within the institutional frame. However, the relationship between author and viewer remains intact. The immaterial aesthetic departs from this traditional mono-authorial practice demarcated by strict hierarchical categories of author and viewer.

Critiquing the history of conceptualism in the context of authenticity, Enwezor (2007:228-229) noted the ambivalent relationship between conceptualism and subjectivity. He observes that

in relation to the spectator, the historians of conceptual art have been largely silent ... the operation of conceptualism still predicated itself on the hinge of the modernist dialectic of the object and gaze. As such, the shift in the role of the traditional spectator within the structures of hegemonic institutions of power such as museums and Western gallery systems were not substantially articulated in the operations of conceptual art.

As Enwezor observes, it is only with the emergence of postcolonial discourse, with writers such as Fanon, that the spectator enters the spotlight within critical discourses. Ray (2004a:568) noted Negri's emphasis on the collective character of living labour which "can only be realised with other people." My conception of an immaterialised aesthetic therefore centrally positions the postcolonial subject, who is part and parcel of the production process. In fact, as noted in the succeeding chapters, this is the core of biopolitical art production, whereby subjectivity itself is the end product of aesthetic production. As I will show in Chapters 3 and 5, the collectives invest hope in networks of people working together and sharing ideas, skills, knowledge, and experiences, as against capitalist dispossession and dehumanisation. I evoke Dina Ibrahim (2012), who, in describing Tino Sehgal's work, summarises immaterial art as a form of art which

resides in the bodies and voices of the people who execute it: in its reception, in memory, and in the time and space it occupies. It is more about dematerialisation than conceptual closure. It is close to dance, acting, speech, or song, and yet it is clearly concerned with the art context, with its modes of production, circulation/mediation, and consumption, with art's history and concepts.

Considering that the collective operates in a material world, it is important to reiterate that in immaterial art, aesthetic objects do not completely vanish from the realm of artistic production. As Latour asks in recognition of the agency of material objects that populate our milieus in shaping or "mediating" our actions: "What would happen if inter-subjectivity was obtained for good by removing, one after another, all traces of inter-objectivity?" (2005:195). So, rather than vanish completely, the art objects diminish in value and occupy the same position as and form part of the whole range of ordinary objects employed in the subject-forming process (Simon, 2013).

So far, I have undertaken a brief theoretical analysis of the ontology and epistemology of biopolitical collectivist aesthetics. At present it is imperative to examine what constitutes the atoms of these collectives. This is in order to undertake a deeper examination of the constitution, or rather the “constituent” nature, of the collectives in question.

2.7 The multitude as unbounded mixture

To approach this issue, I turn to the biopolitical concept of the multitude, which captures the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the collectives and their participants and also provides a picture of the kind of living labour activated in biopolitical production. Rather than the quantitative connotations of the term, signifying a large number of people, I am drawn to its qualitative, ontological elements. I propose that the biopolitical concept of the multitude is in contrast to traditional collectivism discussed in Chapter 1 in which the individual is subordinated to the group. Biopolitical collectivism is what Nancy (1991) called a “community without essence”. The traditional view of collectivism conceives of a community as individuals who sacrifice their identities, needs, values, etc. for the group. Different identities merge to form one. In contrast, the multitude is composed of different races and ethnicities, gender and sexualities, creeds and classes, and operates in common. It has singularities in common (Revel, 2009). In political and economic terms, the multitude includes all who labour under and against capitalist rule (Hardt & Negri, 2004). Difference exists and produces in community without being homogenised.

In contrast to terms such as the mob, the mass, the people, or the nation, concepts which homogenise and flatten difference, multitude maintains a non-hierarchical, networked composition of heterogeneous elements. Unlike the people or the nation, the multitude “is not unified but remains plural and multiple” (Hardt & Negri, 2004:99). Hardt and Negri (2004:99) write “the multitude is composed of a set of singularities – and by singularities here we mean a social subject whose difference cannot be reduced to sameness, a difference that remains different.” Each singularity is a unique social being capable of metamorphosis, “a social becoming” (Hardt & Negri, 2009:112). Virno (2004:76) concurred with Hardt and Negri by saying that “the multitude signifies: plurality – literally: being-many – as a lasting form of social and political existence, as opposed to the unity of the people. Thus multitude consists of a network of individuals; the many are a singularity.” The idea of singularities cooperating in aesthetic and ethical action without sacrificing difference is the best approach within the

heterogeneous and multiplicitous composition of contemporary post-modern and postcolonial African society, a product of the Mazruian triple heritage.³²

“The crucial point,” according to Virno (2004:76),

is to consider these singularities as a point of arrival, not as a starting point; as the ultimate result of a process of individuation, not as solipsistic atoms ... the individual of the multitude is the final stage of a process beyond which there is nothing else, because everything else (the passage from the one to the Many) has already taken place.

With origins in the global transformations on the economic terrain, the idea of multitude as proposed by Virno, Hardt and Negri, and others is not confined to the category of race only. Included in its ranks are the precarious classes of the unemployed, migrant workers, economic or political refugees, etc. Thomas Hobbes’ concept of the people as a unified subject suppresses difference in the name of unity (in Hardt & Negri, 2009). Similarly, the concept of nation – “an ideal abstraction” – eliminates difference (Hardt & Negri, 2001:106).³³

A multitude is therefore “an irreducible multiplicity; the singular social differences that constitute the multitude must always be expressed and can never be flattened into sameness, unity, identity, or indifference” (Hardt & Negri 2004:104). In contrast to the Hobbesian concept of the people, which not only suppresses difference but also transfers power onto the transcendental sovereign, the multitude is a self-organising mixed and an unbounded body. In this light, biopolitical collectivism recognises difference rather than flattening and suppressing it. I propose, therefore, following Hardt and Negri, that Gugulective activates a rich resource of living labour by singularities communicating and working in common. Only as heterogeneous rather than homogeneous, immanent rather than transcendent, non-hierarchical rather than vertical, constituent rather than constituted, and as rhizomatic networks rather than

³² Ali Mazrui (1986) described modern Africa as a hybrid of indigenous cultures, Western and Asian culture. Mazrui called this a triple heritage.

³³ Hardt and Negri (2001:106) have particularly noted the ambiguities of the nation-state as simultaneously progressive and regressive in its modern form, stating that “the nation is progressive strictly as a fortified line of defense against more powerful external forces. As much as those walls appear progressive in their protective function against external domination, however, they can easily play an inverse role with respect to the interior they protect. The flipside of the structure that resists foreign power is itself a dominating power that exerts an equal and opposite internal oppression, repressing internal difference and opposition in the name of national identity, unity, and security.”

arborescent structures, are these practices capable of harnessing and activating the living labour in biopolitical production.

Here my ruminations on the biopolitical projects of Gugulective are influenced by Ray's optimistic vision of the multitude's revolutionary potential in *Empire* (2004a:567):

Counter-Empire ... would direct the force and energy of globalisation toward the empowerment of living labour as a constituent power, that is, as a capacity to desire, imagine, and create new forms of community and cooperation ... systemically produced forms of conformist and obedient subjectivity are not fail-safe or entirely stable; oppositional constituent power contests domination on the biopolitical level by exposing and constructively empowering the alternative subjectivities lurking negatively within the gaps and interstices of official subjectivities.

Rather than homogeneity, difference prevails, co-exists, and collaborates in anti-capitalist production of autonomous subjectivities (this, of course, takes into account the fluid and contingent nature of identity itself). The multitude in the postcolonial African context includes all those mixtures that have resulted from the earliest encounters on the continent, from prehistory to coloniality, from pre-modern to post-modern, from the era of slavery to contemporaneity. In its quest to redeem the most disenfranchised and dispossessed, the constitution of this multitude includes all genders, sexualities, races, creeds, and classes.

So far I have examined the form of biopower that alienates labour, the biopolitical practices that wrestle control of this labour against biopower, and the multitudes that activate living labour for the production of autonomous subjectivities. A full discussion of the practices of Gugulective will be offered in the subsequent chapters. At this point, however, it is important to describe what constitutes autonomous subjectivities under capitalism in order to gain a clear picture of the central aim of biopolitical production.

2.8 What are autonomous subjectivities in capitalism?

Foster *et al.* (2011) attributed to Jurgen Habermas the philosophical conceptualisation of the bourgeois public sphere and the origins and construction of bourgeois subjectivity in the public sphere. According to Foster *et al.* (2011), in the public sphere, the bourgeois individual engages in self-determining and self-governing processes of social differentiation that result in the

construction of self-identity. This conceptualisation regards the public sphere as a politically neutral space. However, as observed above, capital encroaches all aspects of life so that public space is itself privatised.³⁴ In this light, a Foucaultian understanding of power sheds light on the nature of subjectivation within capitalist subsumption. As noted above, Foucault unseats power from its lofty realms in the institutions of the state and seeks to study it in its minute details as it permeates everyday life. Foucault conceived of power as action upon the actions of other free-willing individuals. Power is exercised over free individuals with the capacity to resist. For Foucault (1982:790), for instance, “slavery is not a power relationship when man is in chains.” Freedom and resistance are in fact prior to the exercise of power. Foucault (1982:790) therefore bestowed subjugated individuals with agency when he wrote the following:

In this game freedom may well appear as the condition for the exercise of power (at the same time its precondition, since freedom must exist for power to be exerted, and also its permanent support, since without the possibility of recalcitrance, power would be equivalent to a physical determination) ... at the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom.

Within this context, biopower has colonised and seeks to privatise the entire public sphere as the space for political action. But since power exercises over free and resisting subjects, there is always room for resistance, even within this colonised space. Hardt and Negri (2004:153) built on Foucault’s theory of subject formation in power relationships to argue that in biopolitical production, subjectivities are formed in antagonisms when subjects resist capitalist domination:

What we humans are at base is general possibility or general productive capacity. This double character of poverty and possibility defines the subjectivity of labour increasingly clearly in the immaterial paradigm. The wealth it creates is taken away, and this is the source of its antagonism. Yet it

³⁴ My understanding of the subject is influenced by Kristeva’s conceptualisation, which goes as far back as Nietzsche. This is not in order to import wholesale a European conception of the subject, which is itself specific, parochial, and particular, but these philosophers have shown how it is a complex and heterogeneous subject who is not fixed and stable but is in a continuous process of being shaped and reshaped by his/her biological and cultural context (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012). This is “a subject in process”, constituent and not constituted (McAfee, 2004).

remains its capacity to produce wealth, and this is its power. In this combination of antagonism and power lies the makings of a revolutionary subjectivity.

As it will be noted in the study of the different collectives, subjugated individuals will naturally revolt against the system that oppresses and dehumanises them. Domination is therefore a catalysis and also a possibility for political action; for redemption. Inflected by Foucault, Hardt and Negri (2009:53) recognise the potential that is always already invested in bodies; the authors argue that “humanity is never naked, characterised by bare life, but rather always dressed, endowed with not only histories of suffering but also capacities to produce and the power to rebel.” This is also in agreement with Hall (2003:35), who wrote that

Spinoza’s new multitudes of the displaced – economic migrants, refugees, illegal aliens, and asylum seekers, the fallout from extreme situations of displacement and exclusion everywhere – are also paradoxically, its advance party, its avant-garde.

The poor and dispossessed will always struggle to redeem themselves from their present material circumstances. In this way, they are the torch bearers to liberty and freedom. A contemporary example of capitalist biopower working to co-opt biopolitical resistance is its adoption of precarious modes of creative labour such as flexibility, mobility, and networking that are part of the repertoire of survival skills honed by those who no longer enjoy the long-term benefits and privileges offered by the old Fordist mode of economic production. Capital has appropriated flexibility, mobility, and networking as part of its ideology for creativity (this topic is discussed at length in the following chapter). “Mobility and transgression,” according to Papastergiadis (2012:162),

were, for most of the twentieth century, considered to be the critical features of the avant-garde. However, in the neoliberal context, the aim of ‘going beyond’ the boundaries of convention is no longer seen as a radical gesture but as part of a managerial mind-set for negotiating the opportunities of the global world.

Commenting on the co-option of contemporary avant-garde aesthetics by capital, Relyea (2006:73) added that “as with every other form of labour under the New Economy, so too has value production in the consumer marketplace become relational, dialogical, networked ... The network is, after all, the exemplary figure of post-Fordism ...” In this scenario, the capitalist transition from a material-based to an immaterial-based economy can be seen as a form of

exploitation of creative labour. This is what Lazzarato (2002:103) meant when he stated that “biopower coordinates and targets a power that does not properly belong to it, that comes from the outside. Biopower is always born of something other than itself.” Due to transformations in capital, labour becomes precarious, i.e. more and more people find themselves in temporary rather than permanent job situations. Due to the fluidity of capital, labour too has to be constantly on the move (Standing, 2010). In a bid to escape co-option, labour consequently fashions creative techniques of survival under precarity such as flexibility, mobility, and networking. Capital moves in to co-opt and profit from these creative forms of precarious labour. Analysing the antagonisms and internal crises that spark economic transformation, Hardt and Negri (2009:144) note the following:

On the one hand, workers’ and social struggles determine the restructuring of capital, and on the other, that restructuring conditions the terms of future struggles. In each era of capitalist development, in other words, with each transformation of the technical composition of labour, workers use the means at their disposal to invent new forms of revolt and autonomy from capital; and in response to this, capital is forced to restructure the bases of production, exploitation, and control, transforming once again the technical composition; at which point once again the workers discover new weapons for new revolts; and so forth.

Mbembe (2001) sketched the figure of an autonomous subject in the postcolonial context. For Mbembe, certain historical and contemporary socio-political factors such as slavery, colonisation and, more recently, market forces, have corrupted and militated against the formation of the independent African subject. However, even under such dire circumstances, Mbembe optimistically searches for and grasps positive moments of self-redemption and also the traces of the processes of resilient subjective individuation in concrete postcolonial reality. He (2001:6) thus advances the concept of the autonomous African subject

as a self-reflexive subject also involves doing, seeing, hearing, tasting, feeling, and touching. In the eyes of all involved in the production of that self and subject, these practices constitute what might be called *meaningful human expressions* [italics by author]. Thus the African subject is like any other human being: he or she engages in meaningful acts ... The second observation is that the African subject does not exist apart from the acts that produce social reality,

or apart from the process by which those practices are, so to speak, imbued with meaning.

According to Mbembe (2001), the autonomous subject is therefore a self-determining and self-governing individual with the capacity to shape his or her own social reality; his or her own destiny. In this study I demonstrate, following Mbembe, how Gugulective, by exciting living labour in its collective production of subjectivities, is involved in such biopolitical practices that escape artistic alienation within the art institutional setup and strive to redeem the dehumanised African subject and endow him/ her with the capacity to see, feel, taste, and think; they help forge a self-determining and self-governing subject with the capacity to shape the present and the future.

2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I outlined the theoretical framework for examining the aesthetic and ethical practices of contemporary collectivism. Broadly shaped by the Foucaultian and Italian Autonomist theories of biopower and biopolitics, I argued that the biopolitical practices of these collectives, by energising living labour for political action, have the capacity to counter capitalist exploitation and alienation and restore humanity in dehumanised subjectivities in postcolonial Africa. The following chapter examines the biopolitical practices of Gugulective, a collective that has been at the forefront of the contestation, through an activist aesthetics, of the colonisation, exploitation, and the dispossession of black bodies by neoliberal biopower in post-apartheid South Africa.

CHAPTER 3

AFFECTS AND ACTIVISM AS BIOPOLITICAL WEAPONS IN THE CONTESTATION OF NEOLIBERAL CAPITALISM: THE CASE OF GUGULECTIVE

Hence acting efficaciously requires that one carefully cultivates an extraordinary capacity to be simultaneously inside and outside, for and against, and to constantly introduce changes in the reading and usage of things, playing, in this way, with the structures and apparatuses, capturing them where possible and eluding them where necessary... – Mbembe and Roitman (1995:340)

Art is capable of mobilizing sensory forms of engagement and tapping into affective economies of meaning that can enable subjects to imagine difference, to encounter diverse others and respond to them. Arguably, art can develop our “response-ability” in such a way as to (re)connect us with (very different) others in the world – it can interpellate subjects as embodied and materially located or “enworlded”. – Marsha Meskimmon (2011:193)

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I examine the artistic practices of Gugulective, a collective that has been at the forefront of the contestation of neoliberal capitalism in post-apartheid South Africa. I investigate how the collective has dealt with the economies of place, space, and race; particularly focusing on the shebeen as the locus for engaging the politics of black exploitation and dehumanisation in post-1994 South Africa.³⁵ I argue that an emphasis on Gugulective’s projects as concerned solely with the material deprivation of black bodies overlooks and occludes recognition and examination of the marginalisation and dispossession of the black body on the immaterial domain. By this I do not mean to exclude bodies in production and underplay their material dispossession. I recognise that the material dispossession of blacks in contemporary capitalism is real and intense. I also realise that affects are products of material

³⁵ According to Ngcobo and Kabwe (2008), the term “shebeen”, which means an illegal drinking place, is of Irish origin.

bodies which affect other material bodies. However, I seek to show how bodies resist abjection on the immaterial terrain by deploying affects as subjective consciousness and experience. I tie the notion of biopolitical collectivism, discussed in the preceding chapters, to Holmes' extradisciplinary eventwork and Ray's concept of catalytic art. By examining projects such as "*Ityala aliboli / Debt don't rot*", "*Akuchanywa apha / No urinating allowed here*", and *Titled/Untitled*, I argue that Gugulective contests issues of black exploitation by reclaiming and redeploying affects in an extradisciplinary, liminal, and interstitial aesthetic practice which situates itself in between the art institution and the non-art world, between aesthetics and activism, the township and the city, the shebeen and the gallery, art and life. Through an "extradisciplinary" and "catalytic" modus operandi that ruptures disciplinary borders, and which reclaims what I call "the domain of affects", the group deploys a biopolitics of black subjectification.³⁶ I argue that in a context where power is diffuse and infiltrates life through an ensemble of techniques and apparatus, an extradisciplinary practice takes a multipronged approach to resist power in its complexity.

I firstly present an overview of the exclusionary politics of the apartheid system in which I situate the history of the township and the shebeen. Thereafter, I investigate Gugulective's biopolitical practices within and outside the spaces of the township and shebeen in post-apartheid South Africa. I argue that extant analytical and critical discussion of Gugulective dwells only on the group's installations and photomontages which have featured at kwaMlamli shebeen and in various galleries in the country and abroad, cursorily mentioning the collaborative exchanges, performances, hip-hop sessions, and poetry recitals which form part of the group's repertoire of practices (Blank Projects, 2007; Goodman Gallery, 2010; Ngcobo & Kabwe, 2008; Sloon, 2007). This, understandably, stems from the paucity of documentary evidence of non-object-centred practices. Additionally, part of the reason is the art world's old fixation with images and objects tamed and deposited within the comforts of the well-lit white cube, the underside of which is the lingering discomfort with increasingly prevalent immaterial collectivist practices. I demonstrate below how affects are central in the subjectification aesthetics of Gugulective.³⁷ Since it is impossible to completely eschew the material in

³⁶ In the Foucaultian concept of objectification (or dividing practices), the individual is politically determined, categorised, and given a social and a personal identity from without. Subjectification (or subjectivation) is the opposite process of self-redemption and self-constitution whereby "a human being turns him-herself into a subject" (Rabinow, 2010:11). According to Rabinow, subjectification "takes place through a variety of operations on [people's] own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct" (2010:11).

³⁷ In her essay "Enthusiasm: Collectiveness, politics, and aesthetics", Elvira Dyangani Ose (2014) recognises the centrality of affects in contemporary African art collective production when she refers to the Kantian concept of enthusiasm as a crucial force driving the aesthetics of several African collectives such as the Bessenge City

immaterial production, I recognise the agency of objects such as furniture, stationery, video cameras, computers, etc. in aesthetic production. I also regard aesthetic objects such as installations and photomontages as traces of the processes, relationships, experiences, conversations, and other exchanges among the artists and their participants in subjectification processes. Although I offer descriptions and analyses of art objects such as photomontages and installations as products of the collective's various projects, my focus is not on the objects per se, as has been the tradition in art-historical writing, but on each project as a totality which encompasses other dimensions such as performances, conversations, and various other intersubjective exchanges.³⁸ I conclude the chapter by situating the group's projects within the major debates on collaboration, art, and activism, as exemplified by the theorists Grant Kester and Clair Bishop.

Gugulective is motivated by the need to use art as a basis for interrogating the social and for interactive engagement with the public. In Gugulective, diverse talents joined together to operate as a collective because they saw that their aesthetic and ethical objectives and goals would be easier to achieve as a collective. The members asserted that a black collective was needed to deal with black issues in townships. The group was born out of the need to take matters into their own hands and was motivated by the simple belief that something positive happens when two or more people come together to interact and to share (Interview with Mzayiya, 2015).

As Ngcobo (2015), who was a conversation partner, instigator, and curatorial advisor to Gugulective, wrote to me in an e-mail conversation:

... things were fluid, ideas came because collective members spent a lot of time with each other, having heated critical conversations, walking, writing, eating, drinking, smoking, etc. Collective members often worked on one collective project or at times each created a project in conversation with other members. Both these approaches were successful in demonstrating how a variety of voices can archive [sic] a collective voice without cancelling each other's urgencies.

Project in Douala, Cameroon, and Chimurenga in Cape Town, South Africa. Dyangani Ose's recognition of the centrality of affects in contemporary African collectivist production is shared by this study.

³⁸ According to the members of the collective, it is not the art objects but the intersubjective exchanges that produce the art objects that are the central locus of meaning.

So, for the group, collectivism is crucial to individual subject-formation rather than the dissolution of subjectivities.³⁹ There was an urgent need to come together, to mobilise as a collective as a necessity to respond to the socio-political and economic conditions of black people in South Africa. They also saw a need for a shared space for the articulation of their artistic and political ideas. Thus, the kwaMlamli shebeen offered an alternative intellectual hub and a shared space for interaction. It became a strong collective intellectual space without a mediator (Interview with Kilani, 2015).

The group's projects consist of performances, public interventions, music and poetry, installations, and photomontages which "highlight, on the one hand, the critical and artistic potential of the everyday social processes and, on the other, the lingering unfulfilled promises of the post-apartheid Rainbow nation" (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009:347). The group contests neoliberal capitalist exploitation and the marginalisation of blacks by drawing from the old anti-colonial and anti-apartheid movements such as the Black Consciousness Movement and various forms of contemporary grassroots activism in South Africa and beyond. While most of the projects engage the non-art public, the group also contests the marginalisation of black artists within the South African neoliberal art world (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009; Makhubu & Simbao, 2013). According to Gugulective, the problems afflicting black South Africa within and beyond the art institution are deeply rooted in its apartheid legacy. Thus, in order to fully grasp the specific socio-political realities that concern the group, it is important to outline a schematic history of the apartheid system in South Africa, which determined the spatial and economic logic of the contemporary South African life-world.

3.2 The apartheid system: A brief history

Apartheid is a system of racial segregation, oppression, and exploitation backed by a crude race theory of white supremacy.⁴⁰ This system of rule was established in South Africa by the Nationalist Party in 1948. Upon coming to power, the Nationalist Party intensified exclusionary policies against non-European groups that were implemented in the early 20th century (and earlier) by colonisers (Maylam, 2004). Apart from promoting separate existence of the races,

³⁹ In Chapter 1 I engaged with the historical Western ethnographic otherising strategy to "read" African cultures as collective and de-individualising to contrast between the concept of contemporary African biopolitical collectivism from this racist and essentialist view of Africans as collective rather than individual.

⁴⁰ Gordon (1980) defined Race Theory as involving "(a) the definition of race, (b) the determination of policies in response to the definitions at hand, and (c) the viability of thought and justifications for the reasoning dominating race definitions and policies." The apartheid system was supported and justified by various theories of racial distinctions and inequality, and white superiority and black inferiority.

apartheid policy sought to solidify the dispossession of land and the expropriation of other resources that had started with the conquest and colonisation of the area in 1652 by the Dutch settlers, later joined by the British in the 1800s (Brewer, 2008; Meriwether, 2007).⁴¹ The era of the establishment of segregationist Settler rule, the segregation era, spanned the years 1910 – when the South African Union was established – to 1948 – at the dawn of apartheid. This period saw the implementation by the government of British and Dutch minority settlers of a number of draconian policies which aimed to limit the political rights of Africans while integrating them into subservient positions in the white-dominated economy.

Apartheid rule in South Africa offers a classic example of Wright's (2004) definition of exploitation as the interdependency of the rich and the poor. Apartheid exploitation involves (1) the interdependency of the rich and the poor, whereby the rich depend on the poor for their material well-being, (2) the exclusion of the poor from ownership or control of resources, and (3) the appropriation of resources by the rich from the poor (Keucheyan, 2013). In the apartheid system of exploitation, class and race were conflated so that the white settlers exploited the labour of black Africans. The apartheid system not only dispossessed Africans of their land and expropriated their resources, it also exploited African labour through repressive laws supported by a brutal police and military machine (Van der Vyver, 2005).⁴² One of the earliest of such oppressive laws and policies was the 1913 Native's Land Act, which restricted African ownership of land to designated areas comprising only 6% of the total land area (Clark, 2004). In addition, the Union state implemented various taxes that forced Africans into the cash economy. This is an important development as regards the destruction of indigenous cultures and economies, because it forced young men in particular into mine and farm labour. Also, the few rights afforded Africans in the Cape Colony as regards political representation were eroded under the Union.

Upon coming to power in 1948, the Afrikaner Nationalist Party, led by D.F. Malan, intensified the abovementioned policies and also implemented a series of new oppressive legislative acts. In the period spanning 1948 to 1994, judicial, military, religious, and educational apparatuses

⁴¹ A detailed discussion of colonisation is presented in the next chapter.

⁴² According to Van der Vyver (2005:48), to consolidate the exploitation of Africans, apartheid was structured on the bases of *separation* of sections of the population along racial lines (segregation); *exploitation* of persons of colour for the benefit of a privileged white elite (discrimination); and *repression* of opposition to the policy seeking to implement the above (persecution)" [Author's italics].

were mobilised in full force to solidify segregation and exploitation. To describe the machinery of oppression and domination, Brewer (2008) offered the following summary:

This system of laws was underpinned by the militarisation of policing and other forms of social control, and by a cultural and religious critique that justified inequality and injustice on racial and scriptural grounds. Biology and the Bible were thus in collusion to support apartheid.⁴³

As part of the ideological apparatus of domination, the Bantu Education Act of 1953 ensured the segregation of education and established a racially differentiated syllabus to “retribalise” Africans and to prepare them for subservient roles as docile unskilled labour (Chapman, 2001; Du Toit, 2008).⁴⁴

In addition to the Native’s Land Act of 1913, the apartheid government passed the Group Areas Act in 1950 to restrict African residence and mobility and to keep the black population separated from the white population, both in the rural and urban areas (Du Toit, 2008; Van der Vyver, 2005). This piece of legislation restricted African residence to peri-urban areas called “townships” or “locations”, which were planned residential areas for black labour-power. While the township functioned as the depository of expendable black labour for urban white convenience, the rural “homeland” served as dumps for the unemployed and as reservoirs of migrant labour – particularly women – whose movement between the rural and the urban areas was heavily restricted, monitored, or criminalised (Du Toit, 2008). Townships such as Soweto and Alexandra in Johannesburg, and Khayelitsha and Gugulethu near Cape Town, which were notorious for heavy police surveillance, overcrowding, lack of social amenities, and extreme poverty, were established on such a system of black labour segregation, exploitation, and disposal (Nieftagodien, 2012). As Bond (2008:406-407) wrote, “Townships originated from

⁴³ Maylam (2004) observed that the apartheid system was supported by four pillars. The first was the system of racial classification, which sought to clearly define the racial identity of each person. The 1950 Population Act, which designated individuals as belonging to one of the four racial groups – white, native, coloured, and Asiatic – was designed for this purpose. The second was the system of repression which was used to subjugate and crush opposition. The 1950 Suppression of Communism Act was one such measure to suppress dissent. The courts, the police, and the army were often used to intimidate and to brutally silence any resistance. The third pillar was the extensive authoritarian bureaucratic apparatus manifested in the Ministry and Department of Native Affairs. The fourth pillar was the ideological justification of the apartheid system, which emphasised white superiority and black inferiority through crude notions drawn from scripture and science, and a myriad of other *dispositifs*.

⁴⁴ Van der Vyver (2005:51) quoted Verwoerd, Minister of Bantu Affairs, speaking on the education of Africans on the occasion of the introduction of the Bantu Education Act of 1953: “The school must equip the Bantu to meet the demands which the economic life ... will impose on him ... What is the use of teaching a Bantu child mathematics when he cannot use it in practice? ... Education must train and teach people in accordance with their opportunities in life.”

South Africa's unique economic requirement for inexpensive migratory labour, and they were managed using brutal policing systems as well as British municipal administrative traditions." Thus, through land dispossession, apartheid policy ensured the exploitation and abjection of the labouring black body.

It is important to note from the outset, however, that this systematic oppression, exploitation, and dehumanisation was met with black resistance from the days of its institution. Black resistance assumed both formal and informal guises. Formal resistance was represented by political parties and organisations such as the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan-African Congress (PAC), and workers' unions, which officially sought to restore the dignity of disenfranchised blacks as rights-bearing citizens. Other examples of protest included the Black Consciousness Movement led by Steve Biko, the pass protests of the 1950s and 1960s, the Soweto Uprising of 1976-1977, the insurrection of 1985, and also the anti-apartheid pressure of the 1990s (national and international), which culminated in apartheid's decline (Bond, 2008; Ralinala, 2004). Informal acts of resistance were performed by individuals in their day-to-day existence, particularly in the public and private spaces of the home, the street, the school, the church, and most important to this study – the shebeen. In fact, as we will see below, the shebeen as an illegal alcohol-selling space, is one example of informal resistance. These minute, diffuse, and heterogeneous acts of insubordination can be seen as a form of attrition which contributed significantly to the eventual decline of the vicious behemoth of apartheid. I locate my study of Gugulective in these informal acts of resistance. Below I shortly sketch the shebeen before I discuss the work of the group as situated within the legacy of apartheid resistance.

3.3 The shebeen under apartheid

According to members of Gugulective, the move to occupy the shebeen and operate from the township was inspired by the desire to reach out to marginalised communities and also to tap into the politics of this social space (Interview with Khanyisile Mbongwa, 16 July 2015). Gugulective sought to tap into the rich history of the shebeen as an informal space for black radical politics and intellectual exchange. When the Suppression of Communism Act was passed in 1950, which outlawed any form of political activism, blacks could not congregate openly to discuss politics or to talk about their socio-political and economic conditions. Under these circumstances, places such as the shebeen and the church offered ready-made spaces for clandestine meetings and discussions by politicians, intellectuals, and ordinary people.

According to Lonwabo Kilani (Interview, 2015), during apartheid and afterwards, in the township there are two main contrasting political spaces, which are the church and the shebeen.⁴⁵ Kilani noted that for members of Gugulective, the church was historically associated with the subjugation of blacks, while the criminalised shebeen – a space deemed for outcasts, misfits, and criminals – offered the ideal base from which to reach out to marginalised audiences who could not access official institutions.⁴⁶ Therefore, rather than the usual homogeneous discourse of the shebeen as a space for alcoholism and criminality, Gugulective sought to repurpose it as a form of “contact zone”, as a space of debate and contestation, consensus and dissension, where anger and frustration are quelled, knowledge and information are shared, and hope and the courage to fight on are fuelled.⁴⁷ Shebeens were mostly run by tough and enterprising women (referred to as “shebeen queens”) for whom it was almost impossible to find employment in the urban areas and who therefore resorted to brewing liquor to support their families (Nieftagodien, 2012). Usually small, intimate, and homely, with the furniture arranged like a living room, “the convivial space of the shebeen” (to borrow from Daya & Wilkins, 2012) was not only a place of entertainment and escape but also offered a secret meeting point for intellectuals to engage in political conversations and debates during apartheid. Gugulective was therefore attracted by the idea of the shebeen as one of the few places in which criminalised black radical intellectual thought could secretly find its articulation and flourish. Thus, through the township shebeen, Gugulective sought to tap into and situate itself in the black radical politics of the apartheid era.

⁴⁵ It is important to note that in order to control the proliferation of illegal shebeens, the apartheid state introduced legal beer halls which were supposed to undermine and criminalise the shebeen, while also reaping profits from black people. However, unlike the shebeens, these controlled and monitored spaces were notoriously soulless, often referred to as “drinking in a cage”. In the beer halls, drinkers who were sold tickets in queues moved through turnstiles to collect their beer cans. There were no cultural activities in the beer halls. Because they were predominantly populated by male migrant labourers, women felt alienated in these spaces (City Press, News24, 2014).

⁴⁶ One can argue, however, that while the church, as a disciplinary institution promoting protestant values or docility and hard work, was a quintessential institution of subjugation in colonialism and industrial capitalism (of course, contemporary neoliberal evangelism as a form of capitalist domination should be taken into account), the shebeen represents subjugation in the society of control in which disciplinary power leaks out of institutions, in the era of the real subsumption in which capitalism exploits not only productive labour but also “unproductive labour” such as drinking and leisure. In the colonial context, however, both drinking and church could play unexpected roles. In the 1950s onwards, liberation theology inspired by Latin American activist priests and also the Black Theology of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. played a major role in South African resistance politics through figures such as Beyers Naudé, Trevor Huddleston, and Desmond Tutu, while a culture of drinking was deliberately cultivated in the Western Cape via the “dop system”, whereby farm workers were partly paid in alcohol. This deliberately induced alcoholism-fuelled dependency on the farmer (Ramphele, 2008).

⁴⁷ Pratt described contact zones as “social spaces where different cultural groups meet and interact, often in conflict, emphasising how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other” (see Askins & Pain, 2011:805).

3.4 The significant ‘*Drum* Decade’

The “*Drum* Decade”, which spanned the years 1951 to 1960, corresponds to the first decade of the institutionalisation of apartheid. Khanyisile Mbongwa, a member of Gugulective, refers to this as a period of cultural and political achievements that inspired Gugulective. Inter alia, this period is associated with the flourishing of *Drum* magazine to which is connected the prominent careers of writers such as Henry Nxumalo, Es’kia Mphahlele, Casey Motsitsi, William “Bloke” Modisane, and Can Themba. The short stories of these writers engaged with the everyday experience of urban black South Africans, focusing particularly on the “freehold” suburb of Sophiatown in Johannesburg.⁴⁸ The stories explored in detail the social and moral predicaments of the township life (Chapman, 2001:183).

Due to the significance of Sophiatown, this period of cultural efflorescence is also called the Sophiatown Renaissance in reference to the American Harlem Renaissance.⁴⁹ Evoking Harlem, Chapman (2001:217) described the *Drum* era thus:

The literary precedents are Langston Hughes’ *Simple Speaks his Mind* and Damon Runyon’s threatened bar-room worlds of America, where authority is outwitted and the challenge to grey uniformity erupts in drink and laughter. As the ‘fabulous decade’ entered the grimmer repressions of the 1960s, Motsitsi’s shebeen characters suggest, simultaneously, the resilience and the fragility of the black urban culture which seemed to be symbolically battered into the ground by the bulldozing of Sophiatown ...

In the visual arts, painters such as Gerard Sekoto and George Milwa Pemba depicted the sometimes dark and gloomy or sometimes lively and glowing scenes of shebeen interiors in

⁴⁸ It is important to mention that “freehold” suburbs such as Sophiatown and District Six in Cape Town were cosmopolitan, mixed-race, and mixed-class enclaves that were finally destroyed after the Group Areas Act was promulgated and forced removals implemented. Sophiatown was therefore not a proper township. It was predominantly black, but also had a large Jewish and Greek population. After its destruction by the apartheid state, it was turned into a white working class suburb, shamelessly called “*Triomf*”, or “Triumph”, which formed part of the apartheid state’s affirmative action scheme to “uplift” urban poor white Afrikaners (Chapman, 2001).

⁴⁹ However, in some respects the *Drum* Decade can also be compared to the democratic Weimar Republic of Germany. The republic, which as a brief period of cultural efflorescence only lasting 14 years, which ended with the rise of Hitler and the Nazi regime in 1933, is associated with Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, Georg Grosz, and also the Bauhaus (Strecker, 2011). Although the *Drum* Decade did not share the democracy of the Weimar republic, both were brief periods of hope and optimism preceding long darkness and barbarity. To Lewis Nkosi, one of the *Drum* writers, “the *Drum* Decade” was “the fabulous decade”, a time of “infinite hope and possibilities... it was a time when it seemed that the sound of police gunfire and jackboot would ultimately become ineffectual against resolute opposition and defiance from the ‘fringe’ society. But: Alas, we didn’t realize how small and powerless we were” (in Chapman, 2001:184).

stylised yet evocative compositions which also sought to capture in images the psychology of the shebeen patrons, heavily burdened by oppressive structures or deeply engaged in conversations. Paintings such as Sekoto's *Figures in a shebeen* (c. 1941) exemplify such images.⁵⁰

Perhaps a film that epitomises the great cultural achievements of the decade is the docu-fiction *Come Back, Africa* produced in 1959 by American independent filmmaker Lionel Rogosin, who co-wrote it with the *Drum* writers Lewis Nkosi and William Modisane. *Come Back, Africa* summarises black experience in the townships at the dawn of apartheid. The film is about a black man's struggles and misfortunes as he travels from the rural area to find work in the gold mines of Johannesburg. The man, Zachariah, a rural isiZulu-speaker who settles in poor Sophiatown, is continuously frustrated, and eventually breaks down in despair due to the system's restrictive pass laws, white racial discrimination, and township crime, which result in the murder of his wife. However, despite all the travails and the ill fortunes met upon him, in one scene, Zachariah still catches a lighter moment of camaraderie when he joins some inebriated intellectuals (played by the *Drum* writers) in a lively philosophical debate flavoured with Miriam Makeba's live performance in the intimate atmosphere of a shebeen. As can be glimpsed from Chapman's comparison of the *Drum* literature with Harlem, in various compositions by visual artists of the period such as Sekoto, and from a scene in Rogosin's *Come Back, Africa*, during the *Drum* Decade the shebeen features extensively in and contributed significantly to a thriving black culture and politics.

The shebeen played a central role as a space for this collective mobilisation against continual black immiseration. However, by reclaiming the township and the shebeen, Gugulective is not only reconnecting to the cultural and political histories of the spaces but they are also tapping from their affective domains. It is this resilience under the yoke of oppression, the political will, and the intellectual accomplishments of the decade, which inspired Gugulective. According to Mbongwa, the *Drum* era, whose anxieties still resonate with contemporary South African township concerns, "offered a model for collective mobilisation" (Interview, 2015). In this light, I argue that humanity, togetherness, resilience, laughter, courage, and hope are the biopolitical weapons for contesting the post-apartheid neoliberal order. I start by firstly examining a project entitled "*Ityala aliboli / Debt don't rot*", which addresses the lingering

⁵⁰ Recent visual art examples that represent the shebeen or depict its scene include Kay Hassan's *Shebeen* (1997), a multimedia installation that was exhibited at the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale in 1997 (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009).

economic disempowerment of black people that has arguably been intensified in post-apartheid South Africa.

3.5 ‘*Ityala aliboli* / Debt don’t rot’

Ityala aliboli (see Figure 4), which is isiXhosa for “Debt don’t rot” is a collaborative project which was presented at the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg in 2010.

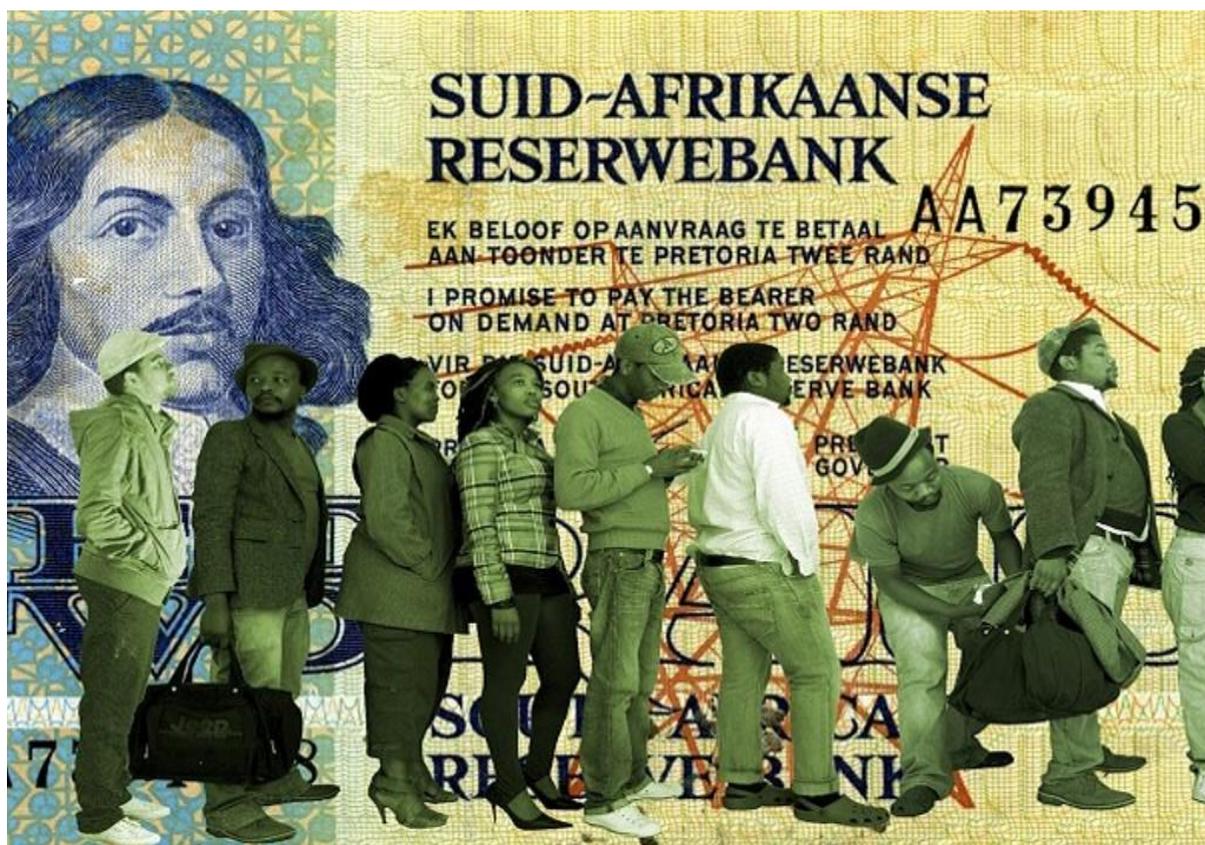


Figure 4: Gugulective, *Ityala aliboli*, Photomontage, 2010

In *Ityala aliboli*, a collaborative and “extradisciplinary” ethos (to borrow from Holmes, 2012), photomontages made from *détourned* signs of power, and vitrine and wall-bound installations form a total work of art – a *Gesamtkunstwerk* – for contesting black marginalisation.⁵¹ These

⁵¹ In his essay “A genealogy of participatory art”, Groys (2012) traced theories of participatory art to Richard Wagner, the German master of Romantic opera. Groys wrote that Wagner issued a call in the post-revolution climate of 1849 for the amalgamation of the different atomised genres. This, Wagner proposed, would unify and synthesise diverse skills and intelligences into a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (participatory art), which would be a step towards the death of individual egoism and the means towards the creation of a communist society. In modern art, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* – the total work of art – has been associated with Bauhaus projects in which the object, whether as a painting or a piece of furniture, was designed to be part of the architecture (Strecker, 2011). Groys (2012), however, listed the all-encompassing theatrical ensembles of Futurism, Dada’s Cabaret Voltaire, and

aesthetic devices are not deployed as fashionable tropes because, as I will demonstrate, in these projects they are always shattered from within in a practice that is continuously self-reflexive.

A prominent feature of *Ityala aliboli* is a series of photomontages⁵² in which an image of nine members of the collective lined up in a queue is overlaid on apartheid banknotes bearing the face of Jan van Riebeeck, who was the founder of Cape Town. Commenting on this banknote series of photomontages, Mzayiya observed that just as in the old system, in the new dispensation “you are always on a queue for everything” (Interview, 2015). According to Gugulective, in the new neoliberal dispensation, the poor and the unemployed are perpetually queueing for social welfare grants, bread, and voting. By recycling and re-deploying an old sign and montaging it with new imagery, Gugulective seeks to show that “ridding the South African note of the image of Jan van Riebeeck has been meaningless and that the legacy of inequality that began with colonisation remains” (Goodman Gallery, 2010). In cultural production, it becomes important to bear in mind, as Thompson (2012:30) argued, that “without understanding that the manipulation of symbols has become the method of production for the dominant powers in contemporary society, we cannot appreciate the forms of resistance to that power that come from numerous artists, activists, and engaged citizens.” In this light, we note that through their appropriation and re-use of the apartheid banknote, the series of photomontages deployed the aesthetic technique of *détournement* to comment on the politics of apartheid and continual black disempowerment in post-apartheid South Africa.⁵³ In *détournement*, old signs and symbols are appropriated and re-used in a way that subverts their established meanings. According to Foster *et al.* (2011:785), a *détournement* “is where an artistic or non-artistic production ... is reworked so that the new version has a meaning that is antagonistic or antithetical to the original.” By operating on the domain of images,

Fluxus in which objects, speeches, noise, action, the stage, the audience, and even the street formed part of the artwork.

⁵² Photomontage is an aesthetic tradition of combining and layering different photographic imagery and textual signs, and is marked by juxtaposition, rupture, fracturing, and fragmentation in a single composition. It has a long critical tradition that can be traced back to early 20th-century avant-garde artists such as John Heartfield, Georg Grosz, Gustav Klutis, Aleksandr Rodchenko, and El Lissitzky (Foster *et al.*, 2004; Strecker, 2011). The technique was invented as a response to the oversaturation of society by mass media images and as a critique of commodity imagery and advertising. But also important to our discussion is the ephemerality of photomontage. As Foster *et al.* (2004:170) wrote regarding the reasons for the development of the technique, “Photomontage represents the shared desire to construct a new type of art object, one that is ephemeral, one that has no claim either to innate worth or transhistorical value, one that is instead located within the perspective of intervention and rupture.” The ephemerality of photomontage attests to the marginal position of the object in Gugulective projects.

⁵³ *Détournement*, a French word for “deflection, diversion, rerouting, distortion ... hijacking”, is itself an aesthetic practice invented by the Situationists in the 1950s, which involves the appropriation, re-fashioning, and re-deployment of signs and symbols of power such as logos, trademarks, adverts, and official portraits for new significations (Foster *et al.*, 2011:785).

détournement therefore confronts a spectacle power on its own terrain of images. This appropriation and re-use of a symbol of power for subversive ends is also exemplified in a wall-mounted installation, which literalises the central theme of *Ityala aliboli* in which an apartheid government insignia is embossed in red ink on wooden mousetraps. Represented by its *détourned* insignia, the old apartheid regime thus features as a trademark manufacturer of eternal political and socio-economic traps. This gesture of recycling and montaging of old signs of power not only signifies that humanity is still haunted by the old apartheid ghost and traumatised by its inhumanity but also that those who benefitted from apartheid still owe its victims.

In a similar act of appropriating and repurposing of signs entitled *Indaba ludabi* (2010), an isiXhosa expression which roughly translates as “the issue is the war” or “the news is the war”, members of Gugulective, Khanyisile Mbongwa and Athi Monjezeleli Joja, borrowed advertisement techniques of South African traditional healers and witchdoctors (*sangomas*), who in their own right engage in a certain form of life-politics – a biopolitics – within a broken system by promising quick remedies to the socio-economic problems that afflict those “populations victimised by elite capital” (to borrow from Ndi, 2007), ranging from illnesses, financial woes, distressed marriages, to abortion, lost love, and erectile dysfunction. The *sangomas* advertise their healing powers through flyers distributed in the streets and posted in newspapers or magazines, as well as through stickers pasted on public transportation such as trains. However, in a form of parody and satire, the group replaced the language of the *sangoma* with political messages that addressed issues of black marginalisation. The members distributed these flyers in the streets. One such flyer reads:

For black men only
No circumcision based essentialism, just bring your patriarchal soul.
In fact black patriarchy reinforces white supremacy...

Another one reads:

The Dessalines Power Clinic.
White supremacy is a creator of our catastrophic lives.
Land distribution: No more shacks.
No more RDP!!! Etc. By any means necessary.
Are you desperate? Don't be late, let your problems be solved.

Free consultation.

Guaranteed for black people only.

Try our plan toward radical emancipation

(Black unity method)

Problems

Does your body still feel like it's in apartheid?

Do your eyes see the lies of post 1994?

Are you tired of the current ANC lies?

Do you feel cheated, both by policies, political practices and premise of a rainbow nation? ...

(Goniwe, 2012:115)

By borrowing from the traditional healer's language and publicity techniques, Gugulective draws from the multitude's biopolitical struggles. In the leaflets reference to Jean-Jacques Dessalines (1758-1806), the leader of the Haitian Revolution and founding father of Haiti who defeated the French army in 1803, has very significant political meaning in regards to Gugulective's politics of black empowerment. Thus, projects such as *Ityala aliboli* and *Indaba ludabi* address the contemporary neoliberal realities by way of the past, a past that persists in and threatens to rupture the present – to borrow from Mbembe (in Shipley, Comaroff & Mbembe, 2010). According to Dathini Mzayiya, a member of Gugulective, in *Ityala aliboli* the collective attempted to show how, in the post-apartheid dispensation, “nothing goes away ... we are still confronted by the old system of money” (Interview, 2015). Racial discrimination, governmental neglect, unemployment, growing poverty, the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor, and escalating crime are some of the major issues which haunt black communities – problems linked to the dark apartheid past. With certain entrenched apartheid norms, values, systems, and structures persisting, life largely continues to follow the geographical, social, and economic patterns of apartheid. This is deepened by the adoption of the neoliberal capitalist economic model by the post-apartheid ANC regime, an economic model which, as I have argued, serves to protect the interests of the wealthy minority at the expense of the impoverished black majority. In short, the old debt owed to the black population has not been repaid after the negotiated transition. It is within this light that Comaroff and Comaroff (2012:112) summarised the South African neoliberal predicament thus:

Processes of democratization bespeak a historical paradox, namely, that ‘the people’ are being empowered in the politics of state at the very moment when ... the politics that count are moving elsewhere – to global processes and institutions, into the corporate world and non-governmental organizations, the media and the law, new social movements, ‘grassroots’ coalitions, and other domains of civil society.

South Africa adopted the neoliberal capitalist system upon its transformation from apartheid to democracy in the 1990s (Carmody, 2002; Cheru, 2001; Williams & Taylor, 2000). Although there was much optimism during transformation, the picture remains grim. Jean Comaroff succinctly put it that “with the end of apartheid, liberation ran headlong into liberalisation” (in Shipley *et al.*, 2010:667). While nationalisation and redistribution of the country’s resources had been the main goal of the liberation struggle, “redistribution through growth” rather than “growth through redistribution” became the economic mantra of the post-apartheid ANC regime (Lesufi, 2005, in Zegeye *et al.*, 2005: 22). According to the discourse legitimising the “redistribution through growth” model, economic growth would be achieved by deregulation and liberalisation of markets and the privatisation of national assets, rather than through nationalisation and redistribution of wealth to the poor. State deregulation and liberalisation of the market and excessive privatisation rather than nationalisation of state assets became the norm after the transition in 1994. Despite the fact that the South African economy was registering record growth, the majority continued to sink deeper into the muck of poverty (Bond, 2013; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012; Lesufi, 2005). The rise of a black middle class sharing a part of the spoils does not seem to lighten the picture.

Gugulective’s *Gesamtkunstwerks* such as *Ityala aliboli* therefore incorporate research into the histories that have shaped the present, a multiplicitous repertoire of recycled images and the appropriation of signs spawned and permeated by a participatory aesthetics to address this state of affairs. In his examination of the work of the Argentinian collective, Group of Avant-Garde Artists, in particular their main project, “Tucumán Arde”, which translates as “Tucumán Burns” (1968), Holmes (2012) called “eventwork” a four-pronged socially engaged artistic practice which the group mobilised, featuring research, participation, media, and politics to

counter government disinformation and propaganda amidst economic restructurings that led to sugar factory closures and massive job losses in the province of Tucumán.⁵⁴

Holmes combined the words “event” and “work” to emphasise the process-based nature of the global anti-capitalist happenings, the high points of which can be located in the alter-globalisation movements such as “Occupy Wall Street”, Genoa in 2001, Seattle in 1999, the Zapatistas of Mexico, the Piqueteros of Argentina, and also the “We are the poors!” movement of Durban, South Africa (2001) (Desai, 2002; Hardt & Negri, 2004).⁵⁵ Thus Holmes’ eventwork helps us to place Gugulective within the constellation of groups that comprise the global anti-capitalist movement, whereby a local movement is implicated in and affects the global. One can also apply this concept to analyse contemporary collectivist and activist approaches such as Chimurenga of Cape Town, and also decolonisation movements such as OpenStellenbosch, #RhodesMustFall, Decolon I sing Wits, and #Feesmustfall (at the core of whose struggles is the neoliberal privatisation of tertiary education) that have recently rocked the South African university campuses of Stellenbosch, the University of Cape Town, and Witwatersrand respectively, in which research, picketing, and *toyi-toyi*,⁵⁶ the media, and collectivism were used in decolonisation campaigns.

⁵⁴ At the core of Holmes’ eventwork is a cross-disciplinary aesthetic practice he called extradisciplinary because, rather than restrict itself to the traditional boundaries of art, this model crosses over boundaries and mixes disciplines in order to heighten its critical and transformative potential (Holmes, 2007). Extradisciplinary emphasises the outside and the beyond of disciplines. It also emphasises addition and inclusion. This rupture of disciplinary frames and intermixture is not driven merely by the desire to heighten the spectacle. It is inflected by an acknowledgement of the significance and strength of sharing. The extradisciplinary *modus operandi* is motivated by the two notions of tropism and reflexivity. Whereas tropism “conveys the desire or need to turn towards something else, towards an exterior field or discipline”, reflexivity “indicates a critical return to the departure point, an attempt to transform the initial discipline, to end its isolation, to open up new possibilities of expression, analysis, cooperation, and commitment” (Holmes, 2007). Thus tropism and reflexivity form a dual practice of extroversion and self-critique in which different genres form a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a comprehensive or total work of art. An extradisciplinary practice shatters disciplinary frames in order to facilitate interaction and cross-sharing of expertise and knowledge. Apparent in these multi-pronged extradisciplinary projects is the urgent need for art to meaningfully situate itself in the social, not only to engage and challenge forms of exploitation and alienation but also to redeem communities and foster the production of autonomous subjects. Behind this is the belief that sharing nourishes and enhances being. As Holmes wrote, in a somewhat prescriptive tone, “As living conditions deteriorate ... one pressing question is how artists, intellectuals, media makers, and political organizers can come together to change the course of collective existence. The answer lies in a move across institutional boundaries and modernist norms” (in Thompson, 2012:79).

⁵⁵ In 2001, when black and Indian residents of Chatsworth in Durban, South Africa, were threatened by evictions and water and electricity cut-offs, they organised a movement and marched against local authorities, grabbing the opportunity at the 2001 UN World Conference Against Racism chanting “We are not Indians, we are the poors!” “We are not Africans, we are the poors!”

⁵⁶ *Toyi-toyi* is a South African war dance which is usually performed in demonstrations, protests, and also at celebrations such as weddings. The dance dates back from the colonial period. In *toyi-toyi*, dance, in the form of stomping while wielding clubs or sticks and chanting, expresses anger, pain, or joy.

Recently, we have seen on the political front a corresponding approach mobilised by movements of disaffected and disenchanted students such as #RhodesMustFall, OpenStellenbosch, Decolon I sing Wits, and #FeesMustFall. The student movement fought to decolonise and decommmodify the increasingly neoliberal South African university and also to end institutionalised racism to turn the university into a more Afrocentric and inclusive space. These campaigns incorporated art as a tool for communication in the form of placards, banners, videos (such as *Luister* [2015], and *Die Vlakte: What the Soil Remembers* by José Cardoso [2016]), performances, installations (such as #Shackville in which students at University of Cape Town erected shacks and portable toilets on campus to protest against discriminatory practices of residence space distribution by university administration), and other symbolic gestures that sought to speak truth to power. Social networks such as Facebook and Twitter were used as a tool for networking and the mobilisation of allies, as well as for the dissemination of crucial information. The movements engaged in social research in order to expose the underlying systems of political and economic domination and to reveal the names of individuals benefitting from and supporting such systems of oppression. An example can be found in tracts such as the OpenStellenbosch's Outsourcing Fact Sheet in the #EndOutsourcing campaign that listed private contractors with stakes in university outsourcing and its destabilising and precarising effects on university workers. Student activism manifested in demonstrations, *toyi-toying*, and other gestures, some of which intersected with artistic performances and symbolic gestures such as occupying and renaming buildings by replacing colonial names with those of anti-apartheid heroes and heroines at Stellenbosch University, or burning portraits and defacing the statue of British imperialist Cecil Rhodes with faeces at the University of Cape Town. Similar to the practices of Gugulective, these student movements include aesthetic production, media technologies, social research, and political activism in their struggles against the status quo. This shows the degree of the symbiotic relationship in which the strategies and tactics by biopolitical collectives are shared by popular movements in struggles against political and economic domination (McFee, 2016; Rosler, 2012; Sholette, 2016).⁵⁷ It also shows how political and artistic movements cross disciplines in order to strengthen themselves.

⁵⁷ This interaction and interdependence between art and politics whereby art collectives and social movements share tactics and strategies in their fight against neoliberal capitalism is not peculiar to the South African context. In his controversially entitled essay, "Occupy and the end of socially engaged art", McKee (2016) argues that the work of art collectives such as 16 Beaver and other art activists of New York fed into the Occupy Wall Street protests of 2011. Rosler (2012) wrote that "the artists and artist-run groups, and others belonging to the creative-class demographic – which often overlaps with the group of those who identify as grassroots activists, whether or

According to Holmes, “critical research is fundamental to today’s movements, which are always at grips with complex legal, scientific, and economic problems” (in Thompson, 2012:72). Secondly, “participatory art is vital to any group taking its issues to the streets, because it stresses a commitment to both representation and lived experience” (Holmes, in Thompson, 2012:72). Thirdly, in regards to the incorporation of media technologies and tactics, networked communications and strategies of mass-media penetration are important because they guarantee communication in embodied struggles (Holmes, in Thompson, 2012:73). Finally, political activism is important for collaborative coordination or self-organisation, gathering forces, and orchestrating efforts (Holmes in Thompson, 2012:74). I am thus using Holmes’ concept of extradisciplinarity as the lens through which to examine *Ityala aliboli*, in which a monolithic art object is displaced and replaced by a multiplicity of cross-disciplinary practices that respond to the socio-political circumstances of the black subject in contemporary capitalism. My argument is that in a situation in which power employs a multiplicity of technologies of control, and domination is multifaceted and complex, resistance needs to be equally complex. Cross-disciplinary practices thus offer an example of complex resistance.

In *Ityala aliboli*, Gugulective deploys different media and techniques not as a closed totality but as an opening up of a multiplicity of iterations. It is important to mention – as members of the group have emphasised in various interviews – that even in their object-making projects, the conversations, dialogues, and interpersonal exchanges that ensue while producing such objects as installations were more important than the final artworks themselves. According to Kemang Wa Lehulere, a member of the collective, even where objects such as installations featured in the projects, meaning lay more in their immaterial, conceptual, and relational aspects rather than in the objects per se (Interview with Wa Lehulere, 2016; see also Ngcobo above). It also needs to be pointed out that for the group, it is not only discrete art objects but also the totality of the material and immaterial that form the complete project. In this light, although critical discussion of the work of the group has focused on a series of valorised photomontages and installations, I argue that if questions of form are at all imperative, this is the form through which the projects are to be judged: as a rhizomatic totality opening up in other iterations. I understand that the paucity of documentation makes a critical discussion of the immaterial aspects of socially engaged collectivism difficult. In addition, as Bishop (2012) remarked, textual or pictorial documentation of participatory or relational events can look

not they have been to art school – have been at the center of instituting, strategizing, and energizing the Occupy Wall Street movement at New York’s Zuccotti Park – renamed Liberty Park.”

awkward when presented retrospectively.⁵⁸ Issues of this scarcity or incongruity of documentary material for immaterial practices have been widely discussed. However, there is great potential to recognise that socially engaged participatory art, in which the subject and not the object holds primacy in aesthetic meaning-making, can generate a diverse range of affects which have to be taken into account as part of the ensemble.⁵⁹ Below I demonstrate how the biopolitics of Gugulective strives to redeem the exploited subject in projects that move beyond objects to incorporate conversations, performance, and activism. While in *Ityala aliboli* focus dwelt on photomontages and installations, I argue that it is not only by recourse to object production that Gugulective seeks to contest capitalism, but also through the displacement of the object by an immaterialised practice through the synthesis of a diversity of media and techniques, collaboration, and activism in which the non-art public, comprising the old and the young from the kwaMlamli neighbourhood, and students brought in from various high schools and universities, are engaged as participants, interlocutors, and viewers.⁶⁰

3.6 The affects of ‘*Akuchanywa apha* / No urinating allowed here’

Another project by Gugulective which takes up the issues of black abjection and dehumanisation is entitled *Akuchanywa apha*, which is isiXhosa for “No urinating allowed here”. The project was part of the X-CAPE event organised by the Cape Africa Platform in 2007 (Ngcobo & Kabwe, 2008).⁶¹ *Akuchanywa apha* was a combination of discussions, performances, hip-hop, poetry, and installations made from materials such as beer bottles found at kwaMlamli shebeen. The title, appropriated from a sign in the kwaMlamli shebeen, references the lack of adequate social amenities such as toilets in shebeens in particular and other public conveniences in the townships in general. Sticks were planted around groups of sofas and chairs to form *kraals* into which people would walk and sit to have conversations over a beer. According to Mzayiya (Interview, 2015), when members of Gugulective were

⁵⁸ In addition, in his essay entitled “Art in the age of biopolitics: From artwork to art documentation”, Groys (2002) recognised the complexities of documenting art. He argued that in a situation where art intervenes in the domain of life, documentation of such art engages in the problematic act of presenting the unrepresentable.

⁵⁹ For example, the members of the group have repeatedly emphasised the importance of conversations amongst participants during and after the execution of a project.

⁶⁰ E-mail conversation with Ngcobo (2015).

⁶¹ In black abjection, the black body as an “other” is consumed and expelled by the white self in order for this white self to constitute itself. In the chain of dependency between exploiter and exploited, the black body is exploited/consumed as indispensable labour-power (and as a voyeuristic object) but is also cast out or excluded through segregation. As Kristeva (1980) noted, however loathsome, the abject is internal to the subject and cannot be completely expelled. Abjection is thus a repetitive, endlessly reified and ongoing process rather than a once-off event. That is why, in the logic of exploitation and abjection, the abject black body exists simultaneously internally and externally as the other of the white self.

fetching the sticks for the *kraal*, a curious group of Gugulethu inhabitants approached them to find out why they were cutting down branches. In the townships, people cut down branches to use at funerals or protests. When the group explained the intended use of the sticks, the people came to see the performance. In fact, as Kemang Wa Lehulere pointed out, there were always neighbourhood kids hanging out at the shebeen, ready to help pack or unpack stuff, install exhibitions, or join in on the conversation (Interview with Wa Lehulere, 2016).⁶² In one performance, members of Gugulective in collaboration with the youth of Gugulethu painted over a scratched “*Akuchanywa apha*” sign on a wall in red paint to highlight it and simulated acts of urinating on this sign (see Figure 5).



Figure 5: Gugulective, *Akuchanywa apha* performance, 2007

As an assisted ready-made that had been scratched on the wall, the act of highlighting it in red and the urinating performance pointed at the issues surrounding the sign. Due to the lack of toilets in the shebeens, drunk patrons usually resort to urinating in hidden corners or openly in

⁶² In an interview, Wa Lehulere (2016) mentioned that one time while the collective was busy installing an exhibition at kwaMlamli, a young man from Gugulethu came up to them and said, “Okay, what is dialectical materialism?”, which started a debate among the amazed members of the group.

public. Health risks plus the stench emanating from such spots led township residents to post “*Akuchanywa*” signs to discourage these unhygienic acts.

In their article, “Gugulective is now!”, published on the occasion of the *Performing South Africa* festival, Ngcobo and Kabwe (2008) wrote that

the Gugulective launched itself by appropriating a ready-made sign that was prohibiting what would normally be a private act, from occurring in public. This negotiation of the public and private is one that is particularly complicated in the case of the township, where the daily realities of living alongside apartheid’s legacies may mean that the system that did not cater for public resources such as toilets for black people prevents more discrete attention to this natural urge.⁶³

As I demonstrate below, to regard *Akuchanywa apha* solely as a comment on the material deprivation of black bodies overlooks and occludes recognition and examination of the intensified dispossession and abjection of the black body by an exploitative system on the immaterial domain. Regarding black dehumanisation in apartheid South Africa, Biko (1978:29) wrote that “all in all the black man has become a shell, a shadow of man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity.” In discussing *Akuchanywa apha*, I use the term abjection both in the ordinary sense to denote dehumanisation and degradation, but also in the psychoanalytical sense as used by Kristeva (1982) to describe a process of identity formation and self-preservation which involves the expulsion, through revulsions, of a threatening other by a subject in order to constitute itself. In black abjection, the black body as an “other” is consumed and expelled by the white self in order for this white self to constitute itself. In the chain of dependency between exploiter and exploited, the black body is exploited/consumed as indispensable labour-power (and as a voyeuristic object) but is also cast out or excluded through segregation. Correspondingly, and most important to my study, in his lecture “Society must be defended”, Foucault (2013) argued that in economies of biopower, racism is used to justify killing for self-preservation (Foucault explained that killing is not limited to direct murder but also to other forms of indirect killing such as rejection, exclusion, and expulsion. Likewise, in abjection, in the Foucaultian sense, the death of the other makes one stronger).

⁶³ Ngcobo and Kabwe (2008) wrote that women, who are the most disadvantaged in this scenario, find themselves needing to provide an alternative, such as keeping a bucket for convenience.

Gugulective launches biopolitics against the debasement of the black body by situating its aesthetics on the signs and symbols of material deprivation.

For Gugulective, the convivial kwaMlamli shebeen became a space where biopower was disarticulated, and rearticulated. The collective responded to the site-specificity of the shebeen, repurposing the space and *détourning* its histories, signs, and symbols. For example, while prevalent media discourse characterises the shebeen as a site of “illicit and illegal activities”, foregrounding “the ‘otherness’ of black identity by representing black people within them as drunk, sexually lecherous, lazy, dangerous, and deviant” (Ellapen, 2007:126), for Gugulective the shebeen was a place of “social belonging, conversation and shared activity” (to borrow from Daya & Wilkins, 2012:372). It needs to be pointed out, however, that rather than fight rampant alcoholism in the township, the group challenged the real corporate cause of this social malaise. In *Akuchanywa apha*, a *détourned* brand of one of the cheapest beers, Carling Black Label, which is ubiquitous in the township bars and taverns, was turned into “Bantu Label” to refer to the classifying and tribalising politics of apartheid (see Figure 6).



Figure 6: Gugulective, “Bantu Label”, *Akuchanywa apha*, 2007

Another beer, Castle Lager, which is popular among whites, was turned into “Baas Lager” to comment on the asymmetrical power relationships manifest even in leisure (*Baas* means Boss

in Afrikaans).⁶⁴ Thus *Akuchanywa apha* questions the narratives behind seemingly mundane signs such as beer labels. The replacement of “Bantu” for “Black” mines the racial discourses and objectification that underpin the ubiquity of Carling beer in South African townships. But above all, the project posed such pertinent questions as “Who erects large beer billboards hovering above the townships?”, “Where do they get the authority to do so?”, and more significantly, “For whom are these commercials intended?” and “Why?”

As in *Ityala aliboli*, an extradisciplinary ethos permeates the biopolitics of *Akuchanywa apha*, in which collaboration, performance, screenings, installation, and other intersubjective exchanges that Gugulective set at kwaMlamli shebeen sought to contest the dehumanisation of black bodies by a capitalist biopower. Under the new neoliberal ethnicisation and exoticisation, Gugulective saw the need to draw from the black pride and “conscientisation” tactics of Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement of the 1970s which sought to forge black identity politics of self-worth and dignity and to raise awareness of and against apartheid’s racist politics of white supremacy. Biko (1978:21), in regards to black self-assertion and empowerment, wrote:

... it becomes clear that as long as blacks are suffering from inferiority complex – a result of 300 years of deliberate oppression, denigration, and derision – they will be useless as co-architects of a normal society where man is nothing else but man for his own sake. Hence what is necessary as a prelude to anything else that may come is a very strong grassroots build-up of black consciousness such that blacks can learn to assert themselves and stake their rightful claim.

An understanding of affects as critical subjective consciousness ties together the conscientisation politics of Black Consciousness and Foucault’s subjectivation, in which subjects engage in processes of self-redemption and formation against objectification, to Gugulective’s biopolitical collectivist ethos, raising and harnessing collective pride, courage, resilience, and hope in refashioning subjectivities amidst material and immaterial deprivation. Overdetermined from the outside – by oppressive and exploitative structures of white supremacy and capitalist biopower – the black subject fights to become “a man among men”, in Fanon’s words (1967:92). Through collaborative intersubjective exchanges, Gugulective deployed affects to contest a biopower that colonises and exploits bodies and affects. As Fanon

⁶⁴ Bantu Beer was a brand of beer manufactured solely for the black population during apartheid.

(1967:178) recognised, “the black problem is not just about Blacks living among Whites, but about the black man exploited, enslaved, and despised by a colonialist and capitalist society that happens to be white.” The group uses performance, which, to borrow from Stiles (in Nelson & Shiff, 2003:76), has “constructed a transpersonal visual aesthetic, which functions as an interstitial continuum linking subjects to subjects through mutual identification”. Against a discourse of biopower that colonises, fixes, freezes, and frames bodies for profit, Gugulective’s performances question essentialist notions of the black subject.

The radical element in performance art called “breaking the frame” helps us understand why this art form is integral in the biopolitical participatory practices of Gugulective (Kelly, 2007). Firstly, performance “breaks frame” in the theatrical sense by eradicating the proscenium, or “the fourth wall”, between stage and audience, between the artist and viewer. Thus performance complicates single authorship whereby “authorship and collectivity are blended” (Helguera, 2011:70). Secondly, it substitutes the artist’s body as the medium or object for aesthetic expression, i.e. the body becomes the canvas. The boundary between artwork and experience is thus blurred.

Stiles (in Nelson & Shiff, 2003:75) wrote that

in performance the artwork is an artist, an animate subject rather than an inanimate object, whom viewers see as both the subject and the object of the work of art. Performance, unlike conventional art, asserts embodiment and interconnection in time, space, and place as the basis of human experience, and representation ...

This embodiment of artist as artwork and the interconnection between artist and viewer/participant lies at the core of the life-forming collectivism of Gugulective. Subjectivity becomes of prime importance in aesthetic production. Thirdly, performance shatters the frame of the body as the site for the integrity of the individual and his/her subjective identity. As we will see below, notions of a coherent subject have been undermined by the recognition of the instabilities and the multiplicities that form the tenuous self. Lastly, “the centrality of the body in performance work breaks down the boundary between public and private, invoking the relation between the individual and state laws or national ideology” (Kelly, 2007). Stiles agreed that

performance affirms the inextricable interrelationship between private, biographical experiences and public, social practices in the production of art. It raises the ethical and political stakes of aesthetic engagement by positioning artists as a cultural force in and for social change (in Nelson & Shiff, 2003:76).

In his book, *The emancipated spectator*, Jacques Ranciere (2009) critiqued forms of performance which claim that by breaking the proscenium these practices actively engage the participant, who had hitherto been an ignorant and passive spectator/voyeur. According to Ranciere, the move to break the proscenium is driven by the presumption of the inequality of intelligence between the knowledgeable and active actor and the ignorant and passive spectator. Through what he calls the “distribution of the sensible”, which “consists in a world view underlying and legitimating the social order”, Ranciere questioned the discourses that order the binary oppositions between viewing/knowing and activity/passivity (Keucheyan, 2013:173). According to Ranciere (2009:13), “the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing, and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection.” For Ranciere, the spectator always possesses prior knowledge and has always been actively involved in the acts of selection, comparison, and interpretation in the meaning-making process. This is a cogent argument. However, in seeming distrust of the efficacy of action, dialogue, and direct engagement, Ranciere introduced “the third thing” in the form of a book or “some other piece of writing”, and located it as the medium of meaning-making between artist and spectator. Ranciere thus takes us back to object-based aesthetic practices as central to the formation (or emancipation) of the subject. Ranciere (2009:15) wrote,

It is not the transmission of the artist’s knowledge or inspiration to the spectator.
It is the third thing that is owned by no one, whose meaning is owned by no one,
but which subsists between them, excluding any uniform transmission, any
identity of cause and effect.

Ranciere, who believes in the equality of intelligence between the artist and viewer, seems to be fixated on images and resigned to spectacle: “Being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity. It is our normal situation” (2009:17). In addition, as Kester (2012:91) observed,

If Ranciere is eager to do away with the hierarchical distinction between teacher and student, he is less prepared to sacrifice a spatialized concept of authority per se. Whether in the form of catalyst or content, agency must

always be located somewhere else. Thus the teacher is displaced by the book
 ... authority as such ... is not challenged but displaced.

By emphasising performance and conversation as central to *Akuchanywa apha*, I do not wish to foreclose on the agency of the object – fabricated, found, or ready-made – upon subjects as well as other objects (Askins & Pain, 2011; Latour, 2005).⁶⁵ A constellation of material objects – pens, paper, chairs, desks, computers, projectors, clothes, and even buildings such as the shebeen – form the material support of immaterial performances, crucially impacting how subjects interact with them and also with other subjects. Thus, objects impress upon and have an impact on lived experience. Moreover, affects are themselves products of material bodies affecting other bodies. As Jackson (2012:14-15) noted in a critical essay on performance, “the immaterial effects of theatrical labor still involve an intense degree of materiality ... the immaterial experience of theatre and dance require the highly material training of performers’ limbs, voices and faces.” Thus, my emphasis on immaterial affects does not mean to promote and foreground disembodied subjectivity. In the African political and socio-economic sphere, it is important to bear in mind that spectacle is deployed alongside brutal forms of material capitalist extraction and accumulation. I wish to highlight that in the age of the valourisation and exploitation of immaterial products such as affects, affects themselves seem the ideal space for contesting this exploitation. In light of this, in examining Gugulective projects, for instance, I displace and replace Ranciere’s (2009) “the third thing” with affects, or perhaps it exists in the interlocking and overlapping of images and affects in the three-dimensionality of lived experience, in intersubjective exchanges. The immaterial aesthetics of *Akuchanywa apha* are not only homologous to biocapitalism. Virno’s (2004) concept of virtuosity, which describes performance without product, illustrates the ontology of immaterial biopolitical collectivism. In virtuosity there is no object separate from the act of production. “The product is not separable from the act of producing” (Jackson, 2012:16). In virtuosity the subject is the product of the aesthetic process. This subject is not homogenous but multidimensional and continuously refashioning the self.

To describe what he calls “new ethnicities”, Hall (1996:444) stated that “the question of the black subject cannot be represented without reference to the dimensions of class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity.” Parallels can be drawn to Hardt and Negri’s (2001) concept of the

⁶⁵ In Chapter 2 I quoted Latour (2005:195), who, in recognition of the agency of material objects in everyday life in shaping or “mediating” our actions, asked: “What would happen if inter-subjectivity was obtained for good by removing, one after another, all traces of inter-objectivity?”

multitude in biopolitical production. Just as Hall's new ethnicities destabilise the essentialist and monolithic constructs of nation or race such as "black" or "English" within the struggles for self-representation, Hardt and Negri's multitude, which is composed of a multiplicity of singularities producing in common, problematises all-encompassing and homogenising political notions such as class, "the masses", "the people", or "the nation" in the fight against capitalist globalisation. Both perspectives are useful for uncovering suspect ideologies behind the deployment of such taken-for-granted narratives as nationhood, the race, or the people. At a time when representation is increasingly a tool for the exploitation of difference, both concepts are crucial for understanding the politics which Gugulethu engages, as well as the tactics the group employs in its life-forming practices within the heterogeneity of Gugulethu township, of which the population is composed of a multiplicity of ethnicities, nationalities, and classes.

The Gugulethu township is a product of the Group Areas Act of 1950 which was put in place to ensure the dispossession of land, and the segregation and control of black labour. Established in 1958, 18 kilometres southeast of Cape Town, the township of Gugulethu was founded to accommodate migrant workers who moved to Cape Town from the rural Eastern Cape province. The township was also established to absorb some of the inhabitants of Langa township, which was the only black township in Cape Town at the time (South African History Online, 2014; Teppo & Houssay-Holzschuch, 2013). With a population of over 100 000, the vibrant township is home to Africans, coloureds, and Indians. Also included in the demographics are migrants of various national origins such as Malawi, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Congo, Nigeria, Somalia, and Ethiopia.

Within this context, the group uses such art forms as performance to foreground the objectification of blacks and as a tactical tool to lay bare the fact that black is not flat but is heterogeneous and composed of plural, diverse, and hybrid mixtures of classes, creeds, genders, sexualities, and ethnicities – all of which are not permanent but always contingent, always shifting. This heterogeneity is to some extent reflected in the core composition of the group, which, as I indicated, features painters, poets, hip-hop artists, males, and females, all from different backgrounds within the township. However, it needs mentioning that the gender imbalance of the group – composed of six men and two women – sometimes negatively impacted the operations of the group. According to Mbongwa (2015), sometimes women's voices were suppressed by the dominant male voice. In light of this, one can propose that a more transversal and intersectional approach to collectivist production which cuts across

gender, race, class or creed and challenges and decentres patriarchy would add greater critical valence for Gugulective (Raunig, 2007; Salem, 2016). As noted above, performance breaks the frame of the body itself as the presumed site for the integrity of the individual and his/her subjective identity. But this occurs not in isolation but through generous encounters and interaction with the other. Meskimmon (2011:193) noted in recognition of the central role of affective social interchange in subject formation that “differentiation need not be a brutal isolation of the self from the other, but a mutual recognition of difference that includes generosity and intercorporeal interdependence.” Generosity here assumes and highlights the selflessness and openness of the participants in aesthetic production, with affects being the gift of these corporeal interchanges.⁶⁶ In performances and collaborative exchanges such as *Akuchanywa apha*, open and affective selves affect and are affected by other open and affective selves (Diprose, 2002; Kester, 2013b). As Diprose (2002:102) paraphrased Merleau-Ponty (1961) “I perceive and feel, because I am perceived and felt by the world of the other, because I am given in my corporeal difference to a common physical and social world of other beings who see and touch me.” It needs mentioning that people of all walks of life, who would not otherwise attend an art exhibition, came in numbers to participate in, listen to, or to just watch these performances and conversations (see Figure 7).

⁶⁶ This is not a generosity that perpetrates power inequalities (“the transformation of others into objects of our feeling”, as Ahmed [2004:38] put it), but a generosity moved by the ethical responsibility towards the other (Ahmed, 2004; Butler, 2004).



Figure 7: Gugulective, *Akuchanywa apha*, 2007

Gugulective thereby attempted to mobilise intersubjective exchanges between and among the genders⁶⁷ and sexualities that patronised kwaMlamli shebeen, and the heterogeneous ethnicities – the multitudes – to counter objectification and the consequent alienation of individuals (multitude is understood not in the quantitative form of a great upheaval of the masses, but multitudes in the form of multiplicity and diversity of identities and difference).⁶⁸ It does so by realising the agency these singularities and ethnicities possess and their capacity to resist domination and dispossession. I expand on agency and subjectivity below.

As I noted in Chapter 2, rather than espousing a transcendental approach to power, Foucault (in Gordon & Foucault, 1980) drew us to its immanent and specific character, i.e. in the fact that power as a network of relations infiltrates bodies through infinite *dispositifs* or minute

⁶⁷ Considered within the history of apartheid subordination of black women and also taking into account the enterprising and self-empowering figure of the “shebeen queen” as described, the shebeen becomes a space for articulating issues of gender and women empowerment within a neoliberal dispensation which continues to subordinate and exploit the bodies of black women.

⁶⁸ Hardt and Negri’s reference to the biblical parable of the Gerasene Demoniac in the New Testament illustrates my point. According to this parable, Jesus met a man who was possessed by devils. When Jesus asked the man his name for exorcism, the man replied, “My name is Legion; for we are many.” In Legion, Hardt and Negri (2004:138) find a prime example to illustrate their concept of the plural in the singular and the singular in the plural, i.e. the heterogeneity that is the multitudes. Psychoanalysis and post-structuralism have a lot to say about the plurality of identities that form the tenuous self.

techniques and apparatuses which inscribe it in the materiality of lived experience.⁶⁹ While Foucault's conception of power vis-à-vis individuals sounds disempowering (Diprose, 2002), this method of analysis actually invests bodies with political agency and recognises that within these processes of political articulation subjects are not passive and powerless but always resistant. In fact, for Foucault (1982), power operates on free and always resisting beings. Foucault (1982:790) said,

Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individuals or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions, and diverse compartments, may be realised.

In this Foucaultian light, acts of resistance manifest in speech and song and in the myriad ways people “make do” (to borrow from De Certeau, 1984) within different spaces of the township.⁷⁰ The home, the street, the school, the church, the shebeen, and the body become politicised spaces within and against biopolitical objectification (the shebeen intellectual debate dramatised in the movie *Come Back, Africa* is a poignant example).⁷¹ The political circumstances that require a great deal of creativity, improvisation, making-do, and negotiation in contemporaneousness are what led Mbembe and Roitman (1995:340) to write in “Figures of the subject in times of crisis” that in the post-colony “every law enacted is submerged by an ensemble of techniques of avoidance, circumvention, and envelopment, which, in the end, neutralize and invert the legislation.” Mbembe and Roitman added:

The ensuing conduct ranges from pure infractions to violations, evasion, avoidance, deviation, figuration, use of circumlocutions, improvisation, tossing the dice, and turning things inside out ... In constructing the frameworks of

⁶⁹ An example of such *dispositifs* can be found in mass media images, in advertising, and branding. In *Akuchanywa apha*, this imagery is *detoured* in the “Bantu Label” and “Baas Lager” beer brands.

⁷⁰ It is with the same understanding of the materialisation and banalisation of power in the sinews of everyday life that Mbembe and Roitman (1995:325) wrote that “it is in everyday life that the crisis as a limitless experience and a field of the dramatisation of particular forms of subjectivity is authored, receives its translations, is institutionalized, loses its exceptional character and in the end, as a ‘normal’, ordinary and banal phenomenon, becomes an imperative to consciousness.”

⁷¹ Elsewhere, in his examination of power and forms of its negotiation in lived experience in the Cameroonian post-colony, Mbembe (2001:157-158) has described the politics of drink as such: “When evening comes, the men may meet up in the corner bar. In this masculine world – albeit not always – men don’t come simply to quench their thirst. They also come to laugh: ‘when something gets too much for me I just laugh’. They talk endlessly, too. They pour out their feelings, and sometimes they fight. They borrow money. They give way, the better to take advantage. They make themselves understood from what is not openly said or shown. They endeavour, as it were, to make visible what, a priori, does not possess visibility.”

everyday life, these now common practices destabilize the referents once considered intrinsic to the constitution of order and hierarchy. One of the consequences of this is the corrosion of long-standing conceptions of causality and responsibility, or the dissolution of authority itself (1995:342-343).

As conduits of survival in precarity (or in the condition of *fiscality*), these “micro acts” of survival are necessitated by the precarity induced by neoliberal capitalism (Jackson, 2012). These various forms of subversion, such as manipulation of the electricity meter or the illegal reconnection of disconnected electricity, are the results of capitalism on African societies (Kirsch, 2012).⁷² Thus, even as it infiltrates life, biopower is not total but is resisted and subverted. These forms of everyday resistance inform the aesthetics of socially engaged collectives such as Gugulective. As biopower infiltrates all life, Gugulective deems it appropriate to shift its battles to the terrain of life where it shares and harnesses for various purposes the creativity, resourcefulness, and “the dissident affects” (to borrow from Sholette, 2011:188) of township inhabitants in their day-to-day struggles. *Indaba ludabi*, which appropriates the methods of the *sangoma*, the squatter aesthetics of *Titled/Untitled*, and *Siphi?* below, which borrows its imagery and posture from the *tsotsi* (thief), are some of the obvious examples of such works.

Ngcobo and Kabwe compared the affective politics of *Akuchanywa apha* with South African artist Thembinkosi Goniwe’s interventions of 2003 called “Parties in different spaces”⁷³ set in Johannesburg and Cape Town which explored “human contact, social interaction, personal experience, and direct engagement with local people in different spaces” (Ngcobo & Kabwe, 2008). As Ngcobo and Kabwe noted (2008: n.d.), “defined by what they see, hear, smell, touch, and experience on a daily basis, the members of Gugulective create works that are immediate products of challenges and contradictions of their realities.” Ngcobo and Kabwe echoed Mbembe (2001:6), who described self-reflexive subjects in the language of affectivity as those

⁷² The Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) is an activist movement which fights for the rights of poor blacks of the city, particularly focusing on electricity. Due to exorbitant electricity bills fuelled by the neoliberal ‘free-market’ policy, many poor blacks who cannot afford to pay face electricity cut-offs. SECC, which was founded in 2000, engages in a campaign to illegally reconnect the disconnected households. “At its heart, the objective of the SECC’s social and political critique is the free-market logic that drives electricity supply in today’s South Africa – a logic that, as one SECC press release puts it, ‘contradicts the spirit of the country’s constitution, which seeks to guarantee access to basic services’” (Kirsch, 2012:276).

⁷³ According to the website <http://www.veryrealtime.co.za>, Goniwe’s “Parties in different spaces” (2003) sought “to explore human contact, social interaction, personal experience, and direct engagement with various local people in difference [*sic*] spaces” through “partying, casual gathering, and unstructured conversations” in places such as Nyanga, Gugulethu, Langa, Observatory, Woodstock, and Cape Town. Through social gatherings, the artists and ordinary people had “the opportunity to share and exchange (unmediated) experiences”.

who do, see, hear, feel, and touch. Thus Gugulective's projects involve "a privileging of the lived experience" (Thompson, 2012:21). Referencing Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) in which art and life merged in a urinal presented as an artwork, in *Akuchanywa apha* a banal signpost became the departure point for contesting the objectification and abjection of the black body. However mundane the physiological need to pee may be (at the level of *zoe* or "bare life" in Giorgio Agamben's terms [1995]), it becomes a starting point for addressing larger issues of dehumanisation. However, this struggle does not remain at the material level but is brought onto the immaterial affective domain. Where a "small act" is charged with revolutionary potential, the feminist expression "the personal is political" has great significance. It succinctly captures the gist of Gugulective's biopolitics. In the context of capitalist marginalisation and abjection of the black body, taking a pee conjures metaphors for addressing the issues of the consumption and expulsion of the black body as abject, and the despoliation of the township as a whole.

3.7 The catalytic aesthetics of *Titled/Untitled*

At the end of April each year since 2007, multitudes flock to the Karoo near the town of Tankwa, South Africa, to congregate to make art, music, or hold performances, animated by a spirit of togetherness, creativity, gifting, and co-dependence. Eleven principles hold this lively community called AfrikaBurn together. These principles include radical inclusion, gifting, decommodification, radical self-reliance, radical self-expression, communal effort, civic responsibility, leaving no trace, participation, immediacy, and each one teach one.⁷⁴ To show a commitment to the anti-capitalist ethos of gifting, nothing, except ice, is sold during this excursion. The biopolitical collectivism of Gugulective shares in this anti-capitalist outlook of AfrikaBurn, particularly in the latter's emphasis on inclusion, decommodification, communalism, and democratic participation. However, AfrikaBurn, which can be compared to certain Land artists of the 1960s who sought to evade institutional co-optation by withdrawing into remote and inaccessible areas (Causey, 1998), can be seen as a form of "disengagement from capitalist life" (Martin, 2007:379).⁷⁵ Also, predominantly white demographics of AfrikaBurn are a sign of its elitist underpinnings. However, to be effective, critique of capitalism needs to be staged in the realm of the social. As Martin argued in his critique of

⁷⁴ See <http://www.afrikaburn.com>.

⁷⁵ The recent concession by IMF economists that neoliberalism has failed is long overdue. See J.D. Ostry, P. Loungani & D. Furceri, 2016, Neoliberalism: Oversold? *Finance & Development*, 53(2):38-41.

relational aesthetics, which he charged of a Romantic utopianism, “without an immanent critique of the capitalist formation of life, dreams of an alternative are prone to be harmless or unwittingly mimetic” (Martin, 2007:379). In contrast, Gugulective stages its critique in the city. Rather than withdraw into the desert, Gugulective sets its aesthetic and ethical struggles in and around the neoliberal urban spaces of the shebeen, the township, the gallery, and the city. It is within this contested spaces that the group is able to engage the multitudes in an activist art that seeks to empower subjectivities. The term “multitude”, which is critical to neoliberalism’s depoliticised multicultural diversity, describes the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the collectives, but beyond that it generally captures the hybrid character of the postcolonial demographics with which the group operates.

Titled/Untitled (see Figure 8) is the last project by Gugulective I would like to examine. The project stages a critique of the spaces of exclusion in Cape Town, South Africa. This project was curated by Gabi Ngcobo in 2007. Consisting of two parts, at kwaMlamli shebeen in Gugulethu and at Blank Projects, an artist-run gallery and artist residency in the art district of Woodstock Cape in Town, the project can be seen as a diptych of sorts. *Titled/Untitled* was a one-day event which involved discussions among artists, curators, and the general public on the accessibility of cultural institutions. The project involved dub poetry, music, and performances. In one such performance, Unathi Sigenu, a member of Gugulective, sat quietly in a gallery corner sending self-incriminating cell phone messages such as “arrest the art” to patrons. In the project, kwaMlamli shebeen furniture such as tables and chairs were installed at Blank Projects where the group sold “Bantu Label” and “Baas Lager” to patrons, thereby transforming the art space into a temporary shebeen.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Blank Projects is an independent art space founded in 2005 and located in the arts district of Woodstock in Cape Town. Blank Projects has an exhibition programme, a residency programme, and an internship. The space is supported by Pro Helvetia, Africalia, and the Goethe Institute.



Figure 8: Gugulective, *Titled/Untitled* at Blank Projects, 2007

On the occasion of the opening of the exhibition, the gallery, Blank Projects (2007), wrote on its website that *Titled/Untitled* aimed

to challenge the pre-conceived visual representation of shebeens in institutional and gallery spaces. In recent years, the shebeen has been portrayed as a negative and loud space, covered with wall paper, filled with people sitting on beer crates, and lacking aesthetics and recreational values. This piece is symbolic of absence in many ways: the absence of black artists and audience in gallery spaces, and also the fact that mobility structures hinder accessibility to institutional spaces and the city center itself for individuals residing in Khayelitsha and Gugulethu.

By presenting the same project simultaneously at the shebeen in Gugulethu and in the gallery in Woodstock, Gugulective engaged in a nomadic and interstitial aesthetic that the art theorist Gene Ray (2004b) called catalytic. Members of Gugulective have indicated that one issue that prompted the formation of the group and its establishing in the shebeen, was the unavailability and inaccessibility to black artists of art institutions and resources (Interview with Mbongwa,

2015). Nevertheless, the group did not shun institutions completely.⁷⁷ In fact, it recognised that a complete eschewal of the art world would be tantamount to self-obscurtion, to suicide. In this respect, the institution not only becomes a platform for voicing the persistent concerns of the group, but, challenged and engaged from within, the art world is also implicated in the group's subversive practices. This drive to splinter discursive, disciplinary, and institutional frames from within forms the modus operandi of the collective's catalytic aesthetics.

In his examination of critical contemporary art, Ray (2004b) offered an analysis of three models for anti-capitalist art practices. Ray identified the first model as "institutional critique", which he described as critically affirmative of art's autonomy.⁷⁸ Ray's second model features avant-garde practices of the early 20th century such as Dada, Futurism, and Surrealism, whose highly charged practices sought a radical disconnection with worn-out artistic traditions and bourgeois values and attempted a reconnection of art to life.⁷⁹ "Nomadic" or "catalytic" art practices fall into Ray's third model, lodged on the threshold between the alternatives of institutional integration and exile." Ray (2004b:570) wrote:

A catalytic structure is a model for new forms of collaborative activity across social fields and cultural disciplines. It typically involves an openly inclusive or non-hierarchical network structure, risky cross-disciplinary role-shifting, and the production of new discourses in multiple fields and on multiple levels.

Ray argued that the fluid character of nomadic art practices and their flexible relationship with the art institution make them potentially anti-capitalist. According to Ray, a catalytic aesthetic offers possibilities for rupture, for splitting the kernel from within and thereby spreading the

⁷⁷ Considering that Mbembe (2010) suggested that the current South African situation can be compared to a war zone, the usage of the word "battle" offers an appropriate metaphor to describe Gugulethu's initiatives.

⁷⁸ A number of artists in the 1960s and 1970s such as Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, Michael Asher, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles, and, later in the 1990s, Fred Wilson, engaged in practices which sought to unravel the political and market structures underneath the seemingly autonomous art institution. As Kwon (2005:34) wrote in an institutional critique, "the modern gallery/museum space, for instance, with its stark white walls, artificial lighting (no windows), controlled climate, and pristine architectonics, was perceived not solely in terms of basic dimensions and proportion but as an institutional disguise, a normative exhibition convention serving an ideological function.

For example, in his work *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Board of Trustees*, Haacke (1974) revealed in panels containing information about board members of the museum how some of the members were connected to private mineral extraction companies that worked secretly with the government of the United States of America to overthrow a democratically elected government in Chile in order to institute a brutal regime that promoted their own interests (Craven, 2011, in Harris, 2011).

⁷⁹ Examples of such avant-garde practices are Dada's scheduled excursions such as the one at the church of Saint Julien-le-Pauvre or its riotous Cabaret Voltaire (Bishop, 2012a).

seeds of new iterations in multiple directions. By reaching beyond the confines of the art institution, the catalytic aesthetic practice corresponds to the contemporary situation which Deleuze (1992) called the “society of control”, described in Chapter 2, in which capitalist control spills out of specialised disciplinary institutions such as the school, the prison, or the barracks onto the domain of life.⁸⁰ The parallels with Holmes’ (2012) descriptions of extradisciplinary activist art cannot be overemphasised. Transcending disciplinary boundaries for cross-disciplinary interaction and sharing is also the aim of catalytic art. This is a far cry from the reductionist, exclusionist, hyper-modernist self-referentiality promoted by Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried, American modernist art critics who promoted medium separateness and specificity and who argued for pure and apolitical abstract compositions which abandoned references to life such as certain forms of abstract expressionism. From a different perspective, theatricality can be read in a positive light as the starting point of the extradisciplinary of catalytic art. The work of Gugulective cannot be simultaneously postcolonial (i.e. hybrid, heterogeneous, pluralistic, and subject-centred) and reductionist and exclusionary. This is why the catalytic and extradisciplinary lens is important for understanding *Titled/Untitled* and other Gugulective projects that transcended the shebeen and gallery spaces, such as *Scratching the surface, Vol. 1*, which took place in 2008 at the AVA gallery in Cape Town and at kwaMlamli (E-mail conversation with Ngcobo, 2015).⁸¹

Holmes’ term, “extradisciplinary”, emphasises the outside, the beyond, but also inclusivity. For example, the transformation of an art space into a shebeen might be seen merely as a trope

⁸⁰ Writing about the movement of collaborative practices which emerged and swept across the art world in the 1990s in the Americas and in Europe such as the GALA Committee, Critical Art Ensemble, Superflex, and Raqs Media Collective, Ray (2004a:572) noted how they mixed experimentation with collectivism and forms of public interventions to deal with real social issues in “catalytic”, i.e. “a cross-disciplinary and rhizomatic practice that aims at local actualisations of ... constituent power.” For Ray (2004a:569), “it is no exaggeration to say that they produce models of collective subjectivity and that these models are their real public.”

⁸¹ Curated by Gabi Ngcobo and Mwenya Kabwe of Manje-manje projects with the assistance of Lerato Beren of Cape Africa Platform Young Curator, *Scratching the Surface, Vol. 1* (2008) “was a Manje-manje initiative which combined new and re-visited visual and performance work by artists creating individually and in collaboration. As the first curatorial initiative of Manje-manje projects, selected artists and their work employed a play on the contemporary that is as current as it is elusive. ‘Manje’ is a Nguni word meaning ‘now’. Said once, the word has an urgency that becomes ambiguous once it is repeated. Thus, *manje-manje*, in relative terms, refers to the immediate past, the present, as well as time to come. Triggered by a desire to obliterate/reveal/satisfy/mark/damage, *Scratching the Surface, Vol. 1* facilitates the performance of hip-hop rituals, mapping skin conditions, repeated memory repeated, uncontrollably itchy feet, and marks made by sound. *Scratching the Surface, Vol. 1* served as experiential experiment in exhibition-making across continuously blurring artistic disciplines. Much like the dated experience of writing lesson notes onto a slate, the curatorial process became a loop of scratching, re-remembering, learning, and erasing.” (Gugulective Blogspot, 2008). Apart from Gugulective, other artists who participated include Dineo Bopape, Bandile Gumbe, Julia Jonker and Garth Erasmus, Donna Kukama, Simone Leigh, Thando Mama, Zanele Muholi, Kalinosi Mutale, Robin Rhode, Ruth Sacks, Sean Slemon, Alude Mahali, Katy Streek and Penny Youngleson, Ernestine White, and Mlu Zondi.

borrowed from relational aesthetics. But when considered together, the *détourned* “Bantu Label” and “Baas Lager”, and the various nomadic performances between Blank Projects and kwaMlamli, the work opens to a kaleidoscope of catalytic meanings.

Van Niekerk (2007:4) described certain contemporary critical practices on the African art scene as a “threshold aesthetic of the trickster ... an interstitial aesthetic of thirdness, of in-betweenness and resistance.” As van Niekerk (2007:5) noted,

the trickster is master of the threshold as he actively seeks out or creates boundaries, since borderlands are the site of ambivalence, ambiguities, contradiction, paradox, opposition, and crossings. This interstitial positioning is shared by the artist who approaches art production as nomadic activity.

The interstitial dimension is shared by Ray’s catalytic practices that locate themselves in the threshold and the borderland of aesthetics and politics, art, and life. They benefit from while also critiquing the art institution. As I observed, the fiscal conditions in the post-colony make a trickster, nomadic, and interstitial praxis imperative. Once again Mbembe (1995:340) described a form of interstitial, borderline, or catalytic subjectivity when he wrote:

Hence acting efficaciously requires that one carefully cultivates an extraordinary capacity to be simultaneously inside and outside, for and against, and to constantly introduce changes in the reading and usage of things, playing, in this way, with the structures and apparatuses, capturing them where possible and eluding them where necessary, and in any event, amputating them and almost always emptying them of their formal and designated functions so one can better restore them with those that correspond best to desired goals and expected gains.

Fake work permits facilitate access to otherwise inaccessible jobs for undocumented migrants. Pilfering supplements the shopkeeper’s meagre salary. Sorcery and Pentecostalism help people to orientate themselves and get their bearings in a terrain defined by uncertainty, vulnerability, instability, entropy, and precarity (Simone, 2004). In this respect, Mbembe’s “creativity of practice”, which captures the myriad tactics of struggle and survival in deepening neoliberal crisis in the post-colony, informs my understanding of such works as *Title/Untitled*, which involves an in-between, nomadic, and squatter practice that also aims to re-appropriate spaces (Mbembe, 2010:654). Also, what Foucault called “counter-conducts”, which are subjectivising

acts including ruses, deflection, or flight, describe Gugulective's aesthetics (Lazzarato, 2009:114). Violations, evasion, avoidance, deviation, figuration, graft, De Certeau's (1984) "*la perruque*", involve this "creativity of practice" or counter-conducts, which, as heterogeneous acts of resistance, correspond and respond to the complex nature of domination.⁸² In this light these diverse practices have potential for political transformation. "Creativity of practice" or what can also be called "bricolage" (i.e. adoption, adaptation, and reuse of objects, tools, spaces, etc.) underpins Van Niekerk's trickster aesthetic which evades co-optation by inhabiting the threshold between methods, approaches, styles, and disciplines.⁸³

Because of its catalytic and rhizomatic character, a biopolitical collective such as Gugulective tends to be short-lived and temporary. This is not dissimilar to what Mbongwa (2015) meant when she lamented that art collectives "eat themselves". According to Mbongwa, power politics, ego, pride, conflict of interests, and financial problems gnaw the heart of the collective to death.⁸⁴ However, rather than being a weakness, this temporariness is a tactical advantage for escaping co-optation. The group can dissolve out before or right at the moment of co-optation only to re-emerge right and well in a different form in a different spatio-temporal context. For instance, Gugulective no longer operates from kwaMlamli regularly as a group, but, presently, with the different members collaborating among themselves and with other groups, the collective has not died but became rhizomatic. In fact, the Deleuzian rhizome, whose shoots can die out on one spot and sprout in another, remains an apt metaphor for describing biopolitical collectives such as Gugulective.

As I noted at the beginning of the chapter, and as indicated by the members of the group, Gugulective was founded on a spirit of sharing between individuals with different knowledge, methods, expertise, perspectives, and attitudes (Ngcobo, 2015). On the Geochange blogsite (2007) it is stated that *Titled/Untitled* sought to reconceptualise the space of the shebeen which

⁸² In South Africa, to this list of subversive acts of the multitudes can be added the power of direct contestatory political acts such as the wildcat strike and picketing tradition. The Marikana strike, which met with brutal police repression, is a notable example. In 2012, 34 striking miners at the Marikana platinum mine owned by Lonmin Company in the North West province were killed by the South African Police (Van Graan, 2013). Also, the recent decolonisation movements such as #RhodesMustFall at the University of Cape Town or OpenStellenbosch at Stellenbosch University and Decolon I sing Wits at Witwatersrand University share their roots in long tradition of anti-apartheid struggles which have Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement as the source of political, intellectual, and moral inspiration.

⁸³ Similarly, in his essay, "Geopolitics of sensing and knowing: On (de)coloniality, border thinking, and epistemic disobedience", Walter D. Mignolo (2013) proposed and promoted a border thinking, sensing, and doing which are connected to what he called an "immigrant consciousness" as a praxis of decolonisation.

⁸⁴ Interview with Mbongwa (2015). Other members of the group, Kilani and Mzayiya (2015), shared the same sentiments in separate interviews.

previously “lacked aesthetic and recreational values” so that it acquired “political and cultural significance”. In accordance with what the members of the group have said in regards to their motives to occupy an operating shebeen and repurpose it as a ready-made shared space of artistic interaction and as a space for sharing, I argue that besides aestheticising the shebeen to wrestle the histories of this space from the subjugatory grip of dominant representation, with *Titled/Untitled*, Gugulective sought to share the shebeen’s history and affects in order to politicise their art (Geochange, 2007).

Ranciere’s (2009) *sensus communis* helps to describe my conception of the shebeen as both context and subject in Gugulective’s projects, inasmuch as the projects responded to the site-specificity of the shebeen. Ranciere (2009:57) defined a *sensus communis* as a sense community or community of senses, which is a combination of sense data such as words, forms, and rhythms. According to Ranciere, this aggregate of senses – a sensory reality – can take the form of an artwork, but it can also refer to the person or scene which inspired the artwork. For Gugulective, the ambience (i.e. the architecture, the noise, the smells, the smoke, the stories, etc.) of kwaMlamli shebeen offered a rich tapestry of affects and a sense of community for addressing issues of black marginalisation in *Titled/Untitled*. As Ahmed (2004) recognised, affects do not originate from within the subject but outside and penetrate, move and shape the subject, the “appropriated” shebeen affects of togetherness, anger and laughter, consensus and dissensus, and its associated histories moved subjects to contest precarisation, objectification, and abjection. Through appropriation and aesthetic redeployment in collaborative and performative projects of *Titled/Untitled*, these affects were not celebrated for their own sake but harnessed for their biopolitical potential. Before I conclude the chapter, I would like to situate Gugulective’s aesthetics within the major debates on activism and aesthetics in socially engaged art.

3.8 Between Kester’s activism and Bishop’s aesthetics

The tendency in current discourse has been to categorise participatory art practices under two poles: one favoured by the theorist Grant Kester under the rubric of “activism”; the other one grouped under art historian Claire Bishop’s classification as “aesthetics” (Allen, 2011). In his critical discussions, Kester (2004; 2011) promoted collaborative practices such as the Austrian collective Wochenklausur, Park Fiction in Germany, the Senegalese Huit Facettes-Interaction, and the Brazilian Ala Plastica, all of which work with communities to improve their circumstances through prolonged dialogue and exchange. Kester termed this dialogical

aesthetics". In contrast, Bishop (2012) focused her art-historical analysis on a Eurocentric roster of artists such as the Briton Jeremy Deller, the Spanish Santiago Sierra, and the French Thomas Hirschhorn who use collaboration for critically antagonistic work aimed at disrupting or revealing systems that presumably underlie and order society. In what he termed an orthopaedic aesthetics,⁸⁵ Kester (2013) criticised Bishop for promoting a form of negative disruptive aesthetic which is driven by the presupposition of the inequality of intelligence between the intellectually superior artist and the benumbed viewer, in which the artist – informed by a post-structuralist textual analysis prevalent in the Western contemporary art world – shocks the viewer into an awareness of concealed truths. Kester (in Allen, 2011:219) charged:

In addition to naturalizing deconstructive interpretation as the only appropriate metric for aesthetic experience, this approach places the artist in a position of ethical oversight, unveiling or revealing the contingency of systems of meaning that the viewer would otherwise submit to without thinking. The viewer, in short, can't be trusted [according to] Bishop's deep suspicion of art practices that surrender some autonomy to collaborators and that involve the artist directly in the (always already compromised) machinations of political struggles.

Meanwhile, Bishop (2012:18) criticised Kester for promoting a positivist activism at the expense of "aesthesis", which she described as "an autonomous regime of experience not reducible to logic, reason, or morality".

Bishop (in Allen, 2011: 222) retorted as follows:

I believe in the continued value of disruption, with all its philosophical anti-humanism, as a form of resistance to instrumental rationality and as a source of transformation. Without artistic gestures that recalibrate our perception, that allow multiple interpretations, that factor the problem of documentation/presentation into each project and that have a life beyond an immediate social goal, we are left with pleasantly innocuous art. Not non-art,

⁸⁵ According to Kester (2013:87-88), an orthopaedic aesthetic "conceives of the viewer as an inherently flawed subject whose perceptual apparatus requires correction."

just bland art – and art that easily compensates for inadequate government policies.

Amidst this critical pugilism, it is important to bear in mind the tendency for art-historical discourse to create sharp distinctions where the edges are blurred, where there are similarities and dissimilarities, continuities and discontinuities, and also interaction and interpenetration. Similarities, continuities, and interpenetration can be found in the different spheres of aesthetic production advocated by Kester and Bishop. As Charnley (2011:42) noted, “both Kester and Bishop advocate politicized collaborative work: for Kester it is the politics of activism, for Bishop it is the politics of provocative criticality combined with an element of collaboration.” Charnley (2011:15) added:

Collaborative artwork is fascinating because it is a nexus of contradictory claims where the political potential of art directly confronts its institutional character. Work that explores and thrives on this dissensus neither needs to abandon ethics, nor should it relinquish the tradition of avant-garde confrontation. A ‘recalibration of the senses’ is impossible in an ethically neutral space, just as dialogue is weak if it avoids conflict.

The catalytic work of Gugulective, such as *Titled/Untitled* and, as we have seen, *Akuchanwya apha* and *Ityala aliboli*, bestrides polarities and exists in the interstices between activism and aesthetics, collectivism and mono-authorship, art and life. Gugulective did not eschew aesthetics by moving into the shebeen. Rather, it took art into the realm of lived experience and brought mundane everyday acts into the realm of aesthetics. As Ranciere (2009:17) observed, “Everywhere there are starting points, intersections, and junctions that enable us to learn something new if we refuse, firstly, radical distance, secondly, the distribution of roles, and thirdly, the boundaries between territories.” In a form of radical refusal of distance, politics inflects aesthetics and vice versa in the subjectivising work of Gugulective.

The gallery transforms into the shebeen while the shebeen becomes a space for aesthetic intervention and subversion.

It is in this light that I argue that, while it is driven by an activism that is geared towards ameliorating material human conditions, the work of Gugulective also involves unravelling the social systems of domination, not by shocking the spectator into wakeful enlightenment but by working in collaboration with the public as epistemic partners. That is why the group values

conversation with participants in their projects. In addition, however, in Kester's sense, through its collectivist activism, performance, *détournement*, and/or what I can call an aesthetics of *la perruque*, the group engages in subjectification against capitalist objectification. In addition, sharing Bishop's strand of deconstructionist aesthetics, Gugulective seeks to expose the exclusionary machine still operational in the South African neoliberal art establishment. Thus, while Gugulective's turn to galleries such as the Goodman in Johannesburg and Blank Projects in Cape Town might be seen as capitulating to the art market, I regard this as a strategic move of the politicisation of aesthetics (Corrigall, 2010). By politicisation of aesthetics I mean the foregrounding of the veiled politics behind the seemingly neutral and autonomous domain of aesthetics, which I contrast with the aestheticisation of politics which neutralises politics by foregrounding visual pleasure (Groys, 2014). I argue that this politicisation of aesthetics – rather than the aestheticisation of politics – is the only meaningful way for the group to sustain an effective critical praxis. I make this argument cognisant of the fact that the fate of some photomontages by Gugulective has been their commercialisation on the art market. And also that the group has featured in major art shows in traditional venues such as the controversial survey *1910-2010: From Pierneef to Gugulective* curated by Riason Naidoo at Iziko South African National Gallery (2010) in which the collective contributed an installation. Nevertheless, instead of regarding this capitulation as the final co-optation of Gugulective by market forces, I show that the politicisation of the gallery space, rather than the depoliticisation of the group's aesthetics, is the group's main aim. It is in this light that Ngcobo wrote that to collaborate with the collective, she was attracted by the group's approach of "rooting themselves within a context outside of the established canon and how, if they chose to, they engaged with those spaces without 'letting go' of the context from which they operated" (E-mail conversation, 2015). This is a form of reflexivity with the "arrest the art" messages featured in *Titled/Untitled* offering a case in point.

In another case of what I can call "a catalytic reflexivity", in a performance titled *Siphi?* (2008), which translates in isiXhosa as "Where are we?", the members of the group arrived on the scene of the opening of their exhibition donning balaclavas to the surprise of those in attendance, thus simulating the hijack of their own art, and by extension the takeover of an art world infrastructure that had hitherto denied them access.⁸⁶ As a form of head dress that covers most of the face except the eyes, the balaclava is popular among criminals because it conceals the identity of its wearer. For Gugulective, in a country where beneficiaries of an unjust system

⁸⁶ Interview with Gugulective member Dathini Mzayiya, 2015.

retained their privileges while the victims were not compensated, it becomes imperative for the victims to reclaim what belongs to them, by any means necessary (as suggests the flyer in *Indaba ludabi*). In *Siphi?* the balaclava-donning artists proceeded to play children's hand-clapping games with art patrons.

These hand-clapping games, which are usually accompanied by song with a gradually increasing tempo, are intimate and require a great deal of eye, mind, and hand coordination. As Gugulective (2008) expressed,

Siphi? raises issues of place and space, of our individual and collective identity, and interrogates notions of self not only as individuals but our collective position ... what does it mean to work collectively? What does it mean to be South African? What does it mean to be black? *Siphi?* aims to ask questions and to interrogate issues of identity, place, space, dislocation, and otherness.

In this performance, as well as in *Titled/Untitled*, the group sought to highlight the politics of ownership and access, of the public and the private. They raised questions about how people make claims to spaces: about who is "titled" and who is "untitled"; who is entitled and who is not; who belongs in the gallery or the township and who does not. As Makhubu and Simbao (2013:300) suggested in reference to collectivism in South Africa,

By examining the ways in which space and time are regulated through economic and political processes, artists can undermine historically repressive configurations. Themes increasingly invoke issues of access and dispossession, movement and migration, as well as criminalization and security. Not only do these works address the spatial arrangement of place along racial and economic boundaries but also the movement of people in and out of the city as units of labour and within the continent and from other parts of the world to South Africa's economic centers.

In the neoliberal dispensation, borderlines are drawn or perpetuated in terms of economic class, demarcating the private and the increasingly eroding public domain, and creating sharp distinctions between wealth and squalor. It remains, however, that the economic boundaries of the new order still preserve and maintain the racial boundaries of old apartheid (Makhubu, 2013; Makhubu & Simbao, 2013). In the case of the art world, only a few black artists have gained access to the white dominated galleries, museums, art schools, and other discursive

spaces. The nomadism in *Titled/Untitled* attempts to disrupt this continual of zoning restrictions and segregation of certain segments of the population in the new dispensation. As Cruz (in Thompson, 2012:57) pointed out, democracy “is defined by the co-existence with others in space, a collective ethos ... that unconditionally stands for social rights”. *Titled/Untitled* questions the polarisation and inequality of access within the new “democracy”. *Titled/Untitled* also questions the so-called liberal art world in its complicity in the perpetuation of social asymmetries. By straddling the polarised spaces of the lofty and sanitised gallery, and its outlier, the humble, impoverished, and criminalised shebeen, *Titled/Untitled* (as well as *Siphi?*) highlights the existing asymmetries in the art world and echoed in society at large. Cruz’s (in Thompson, 2012:61) aesthetics of “radical proximity” in which “artists are responsible for imagining counter spatial procedures, and political and economic structures that can produce new modes of social encounters” illuminates the ethics and aesthetics of *Titled/Untitled*. Cruz’s proposal of an aesthetics of critical proximity in which art and activism merge, finds resonances in Ranciere’s refusal of radical distance, and also in what I have termed the catalytic biopolitical collectivism of Gugulethu, which is motivated by a participatory, life-forming ethics – a politics of autonomous self-determination. So, it is as a totality – in both its iterations at kwaMlamli and at Blank Projects and in its engagement with diverse participants – that *Titled/Untitled* engages the aesthetic and ethical issues of race, space, and marginalisation that continue to haunt contemporary black South Africa.

A point needs to be made, however, that as totalities, these projects are not closed entities because each of these iterations further manifests in more open-ended projects as acentred and non-hierarchical rhizomes which comprise fluid subjectivities interlinked, communicating, and cooperating in networks. Therein lies the beauty of this art. That is why it is possible to find individual members of the collective such as Mbongwa returning to Gugulethu to curate independent collaborative projects.⁸⁷ Other examples are Kilani and Joja, who are actively engaged in grassroots activism with other political entities. This is also why the members assert that the group is intact a number of years after their last project together.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ See Mbongwa’s (curator) *Demonstrations: Performing being black*, which ran from 18 October to 2 November 2013, which involved poetry recitals intermeshed with collaborative performances in Gugulethu.

⁸⁸ In his essay “Spatial aesthetics: Rethinking the contemporary,” Papastergiadis (2008) outlined ten characteristics of contemporary art collectives which I would like to adopt as a summary of the nature of Gugulethu praxis: 1. Artistic practice is defined through, not in advance of, collaboration. 2. Collaboration is the socialisation of artistic practice. 3. Identification of common needs is the politicisation of artistic practice. 4. Critical engagement with the specificity of place involves more than using it as a stage for new ideas. 5. Mobilisation of communicative networks extends and implicates both local and transnational domains. 6. Artistic

3.9 Conclusion

As I have demonstrated, installations and photomontages form part of *Ityali Aliboli*, *Akuchanywa apha*, and *Titled/Untitled*. However, these art objects do not constitute the entirety of the group's aesthetic oeuvre. An immaterial dimension constituting collaborative exchange, dialogue, performance, and affects has also to be taken into account. A focus on this immaterial dimension of Gugulective's aesthetic production contributes to a greater understanding of the deepening material and immaterial exploitation of black bodies in neoliberal capitalism and also how the collective has worked to contest this exploitation. In light of this, I argued that the biopolitical aesthetics of Gugulective are not only homologous to post-Fordist capitalism. Post-Fordism is a condition of possibility and existence for immaterial practices of the collective in the Marxist sense that the economic base determines the superstructure. However, I also recognise the impact of the superstructure upon the base in that, by operating on the terrain of immaterial production, Gugulective deploys shebeen affects to contest the objectification and abjection of the black body. Gugulective works in solidarity with marginalised communities in the contestation of the systems that foster this marginalisation. I showed that its projects such as *Ityala aliboli*, *Akuchanywa apha*, and *Titled/Untitled* expose that, in the new post-apartheid South Africa, not only are bodies exploited in material and immaterial economies, but they are also marginalised in increasingly privatised spaces. The group therefore seeks to raise consciousness of the socio-political conditions of blacks and thereby redeem subjects in this new abjection. In the following chapter I examine the transformations of global capitalism and how they have shaped the continent. This is in the belief – following from observations that the nature of capitalist oppression determines the character of resistance – that a deeper understanding of capitalism on the continent not only provides a clearer picture of the context within which contemporary collectives such as Gugulective operate, but also reveals the cracks and fissures, the weak points, upon which these practices can concentrate their offensive.

practice is inserted in the same time-space continuum as everyday life. 7. Institutions are not external objects, but resources critical for the material production of art. 8. Critique of the sovereign position of the artist in creative direction leads to a redistribution of social responsibility. 9. Horizontal modes of cultural and social engagement are created. 10. Institutions shift from singular destination to a transitional platform for dissemination. To highlight the biopolitical character of the projects of the group to this list should be added that subject formation rather than the production of objects is the main goal of art practice. This repertoire of characteristics should not be considered as an established canon for the work of Gugulective but as a brief summary of the aesthetical and ethical outlook of the group.

CHAPTER 4

THE DYNAMICS AND CRITIQUE OF CAPITALISM

In returning to the moment when things were decided, and making it clear that they could have taken a different turn, history represents the quintessential tool for denaturalising the social; as a result, it goes hand in hand with critique. – Luc Boltanski & Eve Chiapello (2005:xliv)

4.1 Introduction

In order to demonstrate how biopolitical collectivism is critical of neoliberal capitalism, it is necessary to examine the transformations in global capitalism which led to the establishment of neoliberalism as we know it today. A deeper understanding of the nature of contemporary capitalism provides a clearer picture of the context within which Gugulective operates. This view is based on the Foucaultian observations outlined in Chapter 2 that the nature of oppression determines the character of resistance. Anti-capitalist critique influences transformations in capitalism and vice versa.

In this chapter I demonstrate that neoliberalism and post-Fordism are two concepts which describe different aspects of the same major transformation in contemporary capitalism. This helps us to understand the economic climate in which biopolitical collectivism operates. Biopolitical collectivism mobilises affects in its contestation of neoliberalist biopower, and thus confronts neoliberal capitalism on its own terrain of immaterial production. This makes it a particularly contemporary form of resistance. Rather than relocate contemporary African art in the diaspora, as has been the fashion in contemporary discourses on African art, I suggest that we should focus on biopolitical collectivism as the front on which the struggle against capitalism is waged. This is not to denigrate diaspora aesthetic forms but rather to focus on a neglected terrain of aesthetic practices. Bearing in mind that capitalist exploitation and resistance on the African continent date back as far as the earliest stages in the history of the development of capitalism, I examine capitalist transformation from the early mercantile origins through industrialisation to post-industrialisation before focusing on its nature and manifestation in the 21st century globally and in Africa in particular. This helps to contextualise my study of the concrete practices of Gugulective as an activist art collective.

The nature and history of capitalism are too complex to be exhausted within the limited space of a thesis chapter, therefore I can only discuss it in the broadest sense. In itself, the history of capitalism in Africa is complex, because it is imbricated with slavery and colonialism. Colonialism is itself complicated by differences between settler and exploitation colonies, and historically complicated because of differences between early colonial settlements such as South Africa, which was driven by mercantile capitalism versus the wave of colonial settlement following the late 19th-century scramble for Africa, which was driven by industrial capitalism. This history is also complicated by the fact that there were many different pre-colonial indigenous cultures and economies – each interacting and reacting differently to the imposition of foreign capitalist systems. In the chapter, I discuss global capitalism and how it pertains to Africa simultaneously because, even though it chronologically originated in Europe and then spread to the rest of the world, per definition, capitalism was a global phenomenon from its inception.

4.2 What is capitalism?

In my discussions of capitalism I adopt a Marxist definition not only because it describes the ontology of the capitalist system, but also because it reveals the possibilities for change inherent in the system (Hardt & Negri, 2004). For instance, due to its recognition of the radical potentiality in capitalism, Marx's analysis is the theoretical foundation upon which strong critiques of neoliberal capitalism are built. Note, for example, that Hardt and Negri's (2000; 2004; 2009) post-Fordist theoretical framework, which I briefly outlined in the previous chapter, and Harvey's (2005) critique of Neoliberalism, which I examine below, are based on a re-invigoration of a Marxist critique of capitalism. The proposition that biopolitical collectivism can contest neoliberal globalisation has Marxist overtones; a Marxism which, as articulated in the previous chapter, is inflected by the Foucaultian understanding of power.⁸⁹ In other words, my argument has roots in a sophisticated Marxist determinism which, however, is tempered by a recognition of the role of critique and contingency in shaping politics.⁹⁰ In this light, while recognising that conditions of economic production determine the nature of social relations, this study also takes into account what is known as the "voluntarist" theory of

⁸⁹ It is important to note that the Foucaultian conception of power as horizontal and immanent complicates or departs from the traditional Marxist perspective, which regards power as vertical and transcendent and emanating from above, i.e., from the owners of the means of production who control the propertyless below.

⁹⁰ A number of theorists such as Raymond Williams (1977), Louis Althusser (1971), Julia Kristeva (1980), and Jacques Derrida (1987) critiqued the concept of economic determinism and recognised and emphasised the revolutionary and transformatory potential of art (Nelson & Shiff, 2003).

capitalist crisis, which, removed from the constraints of economic determinism, “maintains that the crisis derives not from the objective contradiction of capitalism, but from the degree of combativeness of those contesting it” (Keucheyan, 2013:90). The voluntarist approach is therefore important because it emphasises the transformatory potential of critique, i.e. the capability of individuals to change their situation. By recognising the contestatory potential of biopolitical African collectivism against neoliberal globalisation, this thesis shares in the voluntarist perspective.

In his essay, “How capitalism got its name”, Michael Merrill (2014) searches for the origins of the term capitalism in the texts of the first generation of European economists such as Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill up to the second generation of Karl Marx and Alfred Marshall. Merrill notes that the word “capitalism” first appeared in print in 1788 in a pamphlet entitled “‘Capitalism’ Unveiled” by the French agronomist and Physiocrat François Ébaudy de Fresne. According to Merrill, while these authors used the word capitalism sparingly, it was the socialist journalist Louis Blanc who popularised it in his condemnation of the unfair economic practices associated with the term in a published dispute in 1849. Blanc differentiated capital from capitalism, arguing that while capital was a term for the resources for the creation of wealth, capitalism was a system for the monopoly of capital. Capitalism referred to the way in which capital was monopolised by the rich, in what Blanc and his associates called “the aristocracy of money” (in Merrill, 2014:88). Merrill (2014:89) notes that, for Blanc, “capitalism, a politically constituted financial monopoly, actually restricted access to capital, creating an artificial scarcity and keeping otherwise available resources out of the hands of those who could use it productively.” Capitalism was therefore “the appropriation of capital by one to the exclusion of others”.

Merrill distinguishes between what he refers to as the political anti-capitalists and the economic anti-capitalists of 1848. According to Merrill (2014:89), Blanc belonged to the former, while Marx belonged to the latter:

To the political anti-capitalists of 1848, capitalism was a system of power that gave the capitalists a bargaining advantage, because of which they were able to charge more for their services than they could otherwise. As such, it not only fostered exploitation, it was undemocratic. To the economic anti-capitalists in the Marxist tradition, in contrast, capitalism was a system of production and exchange that necessarily produced inequality as a by-product of its normal mode of operation ... From an economic anti-capitalist perspective, therefore, exploitation was neither a malfunction of the market nor only true of one variety of market economy but not another. It was an effect of *all* [author's emphasis] market economies, each of which inevitably disadvantaged and exploited those who had only their labour to sell.

For the political anti-capitalist, certain corrupt elements in the system exploit the system to their advantage: the system is rigged to the advantage of exploitative capitalists. For the economic anti-capitalists, on the other hand, the system is inherently corrupt. While the political anti-capitalists are therefore eager to reform a malfunctioning system to make it work for the betterment of all, for the economic anti-capitalists the system as a whole is flawed and therefore has to be crushed. In the classical Marxist teleology, for example, the bourgeoisie are overrun by the revolutionary proletariat, who take over the means of production and thereafter replace the capitalist system with socialism. The theories to which this study subscribe propose a complete overturning of the system, which is to be replaced by an alternative.

In their book, *A new spirit of capitalism*, Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) defined capitalism as the unlimited accumulation of capital for profit. While this minimalist definition succinctly captures the “essence” of capitalism, it does not take into account the dynamics of the capitalist system of accumulation. Marx’s dialectical definition provides a framework for understanding the force behind the historical transformations of capitalism. Although, as Merrill (2014) notes, Karl Marx used the word capitalism sparingly; a definition of the term can be gleaned from his writing and theoretical propositions on the subject. Marx defined the capitalist system as an economic relationship of production in which the capitalist exploits the labour-power of others for profit. According to Marx, in the capitalist economic system, capitalists are simply the

owners of the means of production (such as money and land), who are eager to increase their wealth, and who therefore buy the labour-power of other people who do not own property or capital in order to make profit from it and thereby increase their wealth. According to Marx, in capitalism

two very different kinds of commodity-possessors ... come face to face and into contact; on the one hand, the owners of money, means of production, means of subsistence, who are eager to increase the sum of values they possess, by buying other people's labour power; on the other hand, free labourers, the sellers of their own labour-power, and therefore the sellers of labour (in Zeitlin, 1967:36).

The capitalist exploits labour-power, which, in Marx's terms, refers to "the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description" (in Zeitlin, 1967:38). Exploitation in capitalism carries the potential for its own dissolution since the exploited will surely rise against this exploitation. Therein lay the radical politics of the Marxist definition. The voluntarist perspective of capitalist crisis and transformation which I adopt in this study hinges upon this Marxist viewpoint, which highlights the exploitative nature of the capitalist system and recognises the contribution of critique to emancipation. Below I discuss the different stages of capitalist transformation.

4.3 Mercantile capitalism

Capitalism emerged in the period after the end of the Middle Ages between 1450 and 1650, but its practices accelerated from the 1600s to the 1800s. The economic and political organisation of pre-capitalist Europe was basically feudal. In the feudal system, the lords appropriated the products of the labour of the serfs, who in turn were provided protection by the lords. During this period, economic relations were generally based on agricultural production and underdeveloped forms of manufacturing in cottage industries. Upon the decline of the feudal system in England, the majority of the population, who had been serfs, became peasants and agricultural wage-labourers ready to sell their labour for subsistence. The old feudal lords contributed to the growth of the population of agricultural wage-labourers by evicting the peasants and "by the usurpation of common lands" (Zeitlin, 1967:37). This process of land dispossession is referred to in Marxian terms as proletarianisation – the transformation of peasants into proletarians (Keucheyan, 2013). The mass of landless, free proletarians was then

hurled onto the labour market. Through the process of proletarianisation, which Marx called primitive accumulation, a rising bourgeoisie emerged as the dominant class, which replaced the feudal lords as owners of the means of production such as land. While the old lords had appropriated labour for use, the capitalist bourgeoisie appropriated it for profit – what Marx referred to as “surplus value”.⁹¹ The bourgeois manufacturing system pushed aside the lords, guild masters, and their feudal system of agriculture and industry (Du Plessis, 1997; Marx, 1884). This period, which saw the rise of the bourgeoisie as an economic class, is called the mercantile stage of capitalism.

In mercantile capitalism, agriculture and the extraction of raw materials dominated the economy (Moulier-Boutang, 2011; Hardt & Negri, 2000). Unlike the old guild system which it replaced, where craftsmen worked in smaller groups, mercantile capital gathered a large number of labourers to work in one place under one capitalist. According to Marx, “a greater number of labourers working together, at the same time, in one place, in order to produce the same sort of commodity under the mastership of one capitalist, constitutes, both historically and logically, the starting point of capitalism” (in Zeitlin, 1967:46). Binding the production process was cooperation between master and labourer, and also between labourers. Cooperation involved the hand-production of commodities similar to the old handicraft production in the former guilds (Zeitlin, 1967:46).

Scholars such as Max Weber attributed the transformation from feudalism to capitalist modernisation to the Enlightenment and the increased centrality of rationality in men’s affairs, to Protestantism, to secularisation, and to the break with tradition (Zeitlin, 1967). However, for Marx, the foundations of capitalism lay in practices of primitive accumulation in the form of outright dispossession, slavery, and colonisation. Writing about the origins of English capitalism, Marx stated that “the treasures captured outside Europe by undisguised looting, enslavement, and murder flowed back to the mother-country and were turned into capital there” (in Hardt & Negri, 2000:257).

⁹¹ To understand the theory of surplus value it is important to note that in capitalist relations of production “the value of labour-power and the value of the product created by the worker during the production process are two different quantities. The difference is what the capitalist appropriates and typically invests in the expansion of capital” (Zeitlin, 1967:40).

In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx (1848) wrote that

the discovery of America, the rounding of the Cape, opened up fresh ground for the rising bourgeoisie. The East-Indian and Chinese markets, the colonisation of America, trade with the colonies, the increase in the means of exchange and in commodities generally, gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry, an impulse never before known and thereby, to the revolutionary element in tottering feudal society, a rapid development.

Early bourgeois capitalist accumulation led to the search for new markets, labour, and raw materials. This search was facilitated by the technological advances in sea navigation, which led to the so-called “Voyages of Discovery” at the dawn of globalisation between the 15th and 16th century. This resulted in the exploitation of Africa through the trans-Atlantic slave trade from the 15th to the 19th century and later through its colonisation in the 19th and 20th century.⁹² The slave trade and colonisation emerged early on the African continent in this capitalist era of primitive accumulation.

While the slave trade involved the abduction of African men, women, and children to sell them off as slaves in American sugar and cotton plantations, colonialism involved the partitioning of the continent among the major capitalist European countries for unhampered expropriation of both raw materials and labour (Hobsbawm, 1987; Rodney, 1972). Plundering was not limited to raw materials and other resources but also included cultural artefacts such as masks, sculptures, ceramics, and other decorative objects which were deposited in European museums. Commenting on the dialectical relationship between Africa and Europe in the early developmental phases of capitalism, Rodney (1972), who charted in great detail how Europe underdeveloped Africa through the slave trade and colonisation, observed how the industrialisation of Europe was achieved at the expense of Africa. This expropriated labour and other resources and the accumulation and concentration of capital contributed to the rapid industrialisation of European countries at the end of the 18th century, particularly the growth of

⁹² The history of colonisation in Africa is too complex to be covered in the limited space of this chapter. However, it is important to mention that colonisation was done in waves and took different forms. For example, there was the early colonisation in the 15th and 16th century to secure trade routes. The major colonisers were Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, France, and Great Britain. The second wave of colonisation in the 1800s was driven by the search for raw materials in mercantile capitalism. The main colonisers included Belgium, Italy, Germany, Russia, Japan, and the USA. The third wave of colonial settlement was the late 19th-century scramble for Africa, which was driven by the search for more raw materials, “cheap labour”, and markets in industrial capitalism. Scholars distinguish between two different types of colonies: settler colonies, in which Europeans established a settlement to extract raw materials, and exploitative colonies where surplus was extracted from the indigenous population by force (Veracini, 2010). Apartheid South Africa discussed in the previous chapter is an example of a settler colony.

such cities as Liverpool in England, which was at the centre of the trans-Atlantic slave trade matrix (Rodney, 1972; Venn, 2009). The trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonisation of Africa contributed tremendously to the development of European and American capitalist economies, but led to the great impoverishment of Africa and the destruction of its existing political and economic structures.

The formation of the modern bourgeois state in the imperialist countries facilitated capitalist accumulation. In the mercantile stage of capitalist production, the modern state became a political instrument to protect the economic interests of the bourgeois. Marx and Engels saw the modern state as a product of capitalism. As Marx noted (in Zeitlin, 1967:74), “the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeois.” The state was a “product of social development at a certain stage and emerges together with private property in the means of production, the crystallisation of classes, and class conflict”. The inequalities and the social stratifications and conflicts brought about by private property led to the formation of the bourgeois state. Engels (in Zeitlin, 1967:74) observed that

the state is admission that this society has involved itself in insoluble self-contradiction and is cleft into irreconcilable antagonism which it is powerless to exorcize. But in order that these antagonisms, classes with conflicting economic interests, shall not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, a power, apparently standing above society, had become necessary to moderate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of ‘order’; and this power, arisen out of society, but placing itself above it and increasingly alienating itself from it, is the state.

Thus, the bourgeois state was created to protect bourgeois property and interests and keep in check the proletariat. As I note below, this role of the state as guardian of capital is maintained in contemporary capitalism, even in the post-colony where, caught in the tight grip of neoliberalism, it increasingly assumes the position of facilitator of dispossession, regularly resorting to violence and repression (Kieh, 2009; Monbiot, 2016; Venn, 2009).

4.4 Fordism / Industrial capitalism

During the mercantile stage of capitalism, the concentration and mobilisation of labour-power under one roof in a workshop overseen by one capitalist led to the division of labour for

maximisation of production. This division of labour led to the emergence of specialised or “detailed labourers” (Zeitlin, 1967). “Manufacture,” Zetlin wrote, “rested on the decomposition of handicrafts, the specialisation of the instruments of labour, the formation of detail labourers, and the grouping and combining of the latter in a single productive organisation.” Furthermore, “The newer social division of labour now allowed for the production of more commodities with a given quantity of labour-power, hence for the cheapening of commodities, and for the acceleration in the accumulation of capital” (Zeitlin, 1967:74). Since production had hitherto been limited by hand-production, machinery – facilitated by the invention of the steam engine by Watts – was introduced into the workshop to accelerate the processes and also to lower the cost of production. According to Marx (1846), as capitalist production increased, markets grew with the demand of consumption. Slavery, however, was at the core of the development of industrial capitalism, contributing to the revolutionisation of industrial production:

The slavery of the blacks in Surinam, in Brazil, in the southern regions of North America ... is as much the pivot upon which our present-day industrialism turns as are machinery, credit, etc. Without slavery there would be no cotton, without cotton there would be no modern industry. It is slavery which has given value to the colonies, it is the colonies which have created world trade, and world trade is the necessary condition of large-scale machine industry (Marx in Hardt & Negri, 2009:73).

It has been argued that, as capitalism advanced, slavery was deemed unnecessary and even technically and strategically detrimental to economic growth, mainly due to increased anti-slavery revolts. Later on, in the 19th- and 20th-century colonisation of Africa, the Americas and Asia took over as the mode of exploitation for surplus. As Walter Mignolo (in Hardt & Negri, 2009:67) argues “there is no modernity without coloniality, because coloniality is constitutive of modernity.” Colonisation contributed greatly to modernisation and the advancement of industrial capitalism. During this period, Africa continued to provide a source of labour and raw materials such as agricultural products and precious metals, which fed the European manufacturing industries (Crowder, 1987; Hobsbawm, 1987; Rodney, 1972; Kieh, 2009). On the continent, capitalism has historically manifested in various forms. In his book, *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*, Rodney (1972) recorded how, historically, colonialism classified and positioned different races at different levels of economic production, distribution, and consumption. For example, the colonialists occupied the top of the capitalist hierarchy, extracting surplus profit as the owner of the means of production; the Asians were positioned

as the relatively well-off intermediaries and distributors in the distribution chain; and the large population of Africans occupying the base served as the exploited proletarianised labourers. But not only was Africa a source of labour and raw materials, it was also a market for manufactured products from the Western metropolises.

The American industrialist Henry Ford's vehicle manufacturing practices stood at the core of industrial capitalism in the 1920s. The Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci is believed to have coined the term "Fordism" to describe industrial capitalism, which was characterised by mass production of standardised consumer goods in huge factories.⁹³ Ford, founder of the Ford Motor Company, was influenced by Frederick Winslow Taylor's strict disciplinary and scientific method for the organisation of human labour to reduce its unpredictability and to maximise its productivity. Taylor discovered that, in industrial production, maximum output could be accomplished by the separation of the planning of work from its execution (Blyton & Jenkins, 2007). Managers did planning, while workers did execution. Managers, who were central in the factory production hierarchy, employed scientific methods of analysis to determine the best ways that tasks should be performed. Following from these principles, Fordism incorporated a wage system that consisted of "a standardised daily rate", which was intended to mitigate the alienation and discontent due to the labour conditions in the factories. One of the main features of Fordist factory production was the assembly belt, which was highly successful in increasing production, and which "ensured that the pace of work was determined by the speed at which managers set the production line, in accordance with managerially determined rules and targets" (Blyton & Jenkins, 2007:82). According to *The Blackwell Dictionary of Political Science* (1999), the assembly line facilitated "the manufacture of interchangeable parts, the disconnection of tasks and processes, the assignment of specific work to specific workers and the elimination of craftsmen from the workforce." Thus, through the mechanisation of production, the Fordist assembly line regulated the speed of production and ensured that labour-power was fully utilised. It needs to be pointed out that although there was an increase in the usage of machinery in industrial production, human labour still played a central role in the factory – to oversee production, to control and operate, and also to repair and maintain the machines. Within the Fordist system, wage workers held contracts of indefinite employment in stable companies, and climbed in position within the hierarchy of the

⁹³ My emphasis on the centrality of consumer objects in Fordist industrial capitalism neither infers the inexistence nor the insignificance of informational and service production within this economy, but rather that material objects assumed a hegemonic position in capitalist valorisation.

company, for instance from labourer to manager. Means of production, both human and machine, were concentrated and organised in the factory to maximise the mass production of standardised consumer goods, as epitomised by the automobile and ship-building industries.

Within the industrial/Fordist regime of capitalist production, the state took on the role of economic regulator. Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) wrote that the capitalist state was created in response to critiques of the anarchic nature of mercantile capitalism. In industrial capitalism, the modern bourgeois state transformed itself into a welfare state to suit the political role of facilitator of capitalist production. In the 1930s the United States of America became the first exemplary disciplinary society (or “a factory-society”) through its adoption of the New Deal model under Franklin D. Roosevelt, as a response to capitalist crises after the First World War (Hardt & Negri, 2000:243). The New Deal was a model of economic, political, and social reform that synthesised Taylor’s principles of the organisation of labour, Ford’s wage regime, and Keynes’ theories of the welfare state (Hardt & Negri, 2000; Moulier-Boutang, 2011). With the marriage of Taylorism, Fordism, and Keynesianism, the whole of society became disciplinary, i.e. governed by and modelled in the form of the Fordist factory. The disciplinary society therefore modelled the strictly regimented patterns of the factory. According to Hardt and Negri (2000:243),

in this new factory-society, productive subjectivities are forged as one-dimensional functions of economic development. The figures, structures, and hierarchies of the division of social labour become ever more widespread and minutely defined as civil society is increasingly absorbed into the state: the new rules of subordination and the disciplinary capitalist regimes are extended across the entire social terrain.

With the successful implementation of the New Deal, the United States emerged as the dominant world power, as the weakened old colonial powers lost their colonies in World War 1 and 2. Decolonisation followed and the American mode of disciplinary capitalist production spread across the globe. Hardt and Negri (2000:247) write that

in the postcolonial countries, discipline required first of all transforming the massive popular mobilisation for liberation into a mobilisation for production. Peasants throughout the world were uprooted from their fields and villages and thrown into the burning forge of world production. The ideological model that was projected from the dominant countries (particularly from the United States)

consisted of Fordist wage regimes, Taylorist methods of the organisation of labour, and a welfare state that would be modernising, paternalistic, and protective.

With the establishment of American global hegemony at the end of the Second World War, the disciplinary phase of capitalism – infused with Taylorist, Fordist, and Keynesian principles – spread across the globe and was instituted even in the socialist countries. In this process, trans-national corporations played a central role with the blessing, protection, and guidance of the United States (Hardt & Negri, 2000). It needs to be pointed out that this globalisation of industrial capitalism was not uniform across the globe. French economist Yann Moulier-Boutang (2011) notes that in the asymmetry of industrial development between the global North and the South, the South became bound in iron chains of continual subjugation and impoverishment. Moulier-Boutang (2011:17) writes

The vast majority of the countries of the South remained as ‘developing’ countries, because their resources were used to lower the cost of manufactured goods in the North rather than to build self-reliant economies – economies based on the development of their own domestic consumption. As a result, decolonisation was very soon replaced by economic dependence, which very soon turned into bondage to external debt.

In Fordism, the North advanced industrially, while the South, which remained largely rural, played the subservient role of producer of raw materials. Any industrialisation of the South was done to serve Northern economies.⁹⁴

Industrial mass production of commodities for mass markets and mass consumption was exported from the United States across the whole world in the age of industrial capitalism.⁹⁵ These great transformations in material production greatly transformed cultural production in all societies affected. Critics of modernity have examined how capital reaches down to the ganglia of society in a variety of ways. To put it broadly, the Western metropolis’ cultural and artistic responses to modernisation (i.e. industrialisation, urbanisation, and secularisation) included critiques of the perceived effects of modernity, such as alienation (due to exploitation

⁹⁴ Walter Rodney (1967) observed how industrial and market infrastructure such as roads and railways in the colonies of Africa were established, not in order to develop those regions, but solely for the purpose of extracting raw materials from the hinterland and to transport them to the ports. Therefore, although Africa entered the world industrial economy in the 19th and 20th century, it was only for the benefit of the colonising countries.

⁹⁵ In this light, contemporary capitalist globalisation was therefore born in the cradle of the New Deal.

in capitalist production) and loss of autonomy and authenticity. In regards to authenticity and autonomy, the Frankfurt School, led by Theodor Adorno, analysed some of the ways the mass media is employed as a weapon of “massification” of individuals, and as an instrument of mass deception, distraction, and subjugation (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005:440). In addition, Marxist critics argue that the superstructure, i.e. religion or education, not only legitimises and justifies the engagement of individuals in capitalism, but also shapes (or produces) these subjects for commodification. Ideology disciplines and trains bodies for the workforce. Louis Althusser’s (1970) concept of interpellation, i.e. hailing and positioning, has shed light on how capitalist ideology shapes the subject by positioning it in particular discourses. As hailed subjects, “we assume our interpellated position, identify with received social meanings, locate ourselves within these meanings, and act as if we had the freedom of choice in the first place” (Emerling, 2005:61). These incisive critiques of autonomy and authenticity in industrial capitalism were subsequently internalised by capitalism and led partly to its transformation into the post-industrial and immaterial state examined below.

In aesthetic production, bourgeois ideology and its maintenance of the capitalist status quo were subverted by tackling of issues of authenticity, and also through the two poles of an autonomous and contingent aesthetics.⁹⁶ Through painting, sculpture, collage, photography, and photomontage, the *petite bourgeois* artist pondered his complicit class position, alliance, and agency within the struggles of the proletariat (Foster *et al.*, 2011). Of particular importance, however, is Dada, an aesthetic movement, which, in its disparagement of the material object, heralded the dematerialisation of culture right at the dawn of the Modernity in the early 1900s. The dematerialised practices of the modernist avant-garde such as Dada, and later the conceptualists who inherited the Dada legacy, thus prefigured immaterial capitalism by decades.

4.5 Post-industrial/post-Fordist capitalism

The current globalisation has to be seen in the light of the emergence, since 1975, of a third type of capitalism. This capitalism has little similarity to industrial capitalism, which, at its birth between 1750 and 1820, broke with mercantilist capitalism and slavery.

⁹⁶ Examples of a modernist aesthetics of autonomy include cubism and abstract art. The avant-garde practices of futurism, surrealism, and Dada exemplify the contingent aesthetics.

These words by Moulier-Boutang (2011:9) briefly describe the great transformation that is taking place in capitalism; a transformation that is tremendously altering global social and political patterns. In the 1960s and 1970s, capital underwent crises of over-accumulation and profitability. Contributing to such crises were a number of factors, including industrial working class antagonisms; liberation struggles in the colonies of Africa, Latin America, and Asia; the women's movement; the student and worker revolts of 1968 in Europe, America, and Japan; and the continuation of forms of critique examined in the discussion of industrial capitalism above (Hardt & Negri, 2000). To respond to such crises, capitalism transformed by integrating and internalising the criticism, such as that of autonomy and authenticity, levelled against it.⁹⁷ Boltanski and Chiapello termed these capitalist dynamics “cycle of recuperation”. According to the authors (2005:425),

capitalism attracts actors, who realise that they have hitherto been oppressed, by offering them a certain form of liberation that masks new types of oppression. It may then be said that capitalism ‘recuperates’ the autonomy it extends, by implementing new modes of control. However, these new forms of oppression are gradually unmasked and become the target of critique, to the point where capitalism is led to transform its *modus operandi* to offer a liberation that is redefined under the influence of critique. But, in its turn, the ‘liberation’ thus obtained harbours new oppressive mechanisms that allow control over the process of accumulation to be restored in a capitalist framework. Cycles of recuperation thus lead to a succession of periods of liberation by capitalism and periods of liberation from capitalism.

For example, individual autonomy, which was central to the anti-capitalist critiques of the industrial period, has been recuperated and integrated into the mechanisms of contemporary capitalist accumulation, but this has been granted at the expense of security.

Another factor that contributed to capitalist transformation is technological advances in communications and information technology (Hopper, 2003). Technological advancement was

⁹⁷ An example is the demand for autonomy and authenticity (even as the notion of the “authentic” was itself being challenged from a number of post-structuralist and post-colonialist perspectives), in which demands for autonomy in the increasingly oppressive factory society led to the liberation of the mass worker at the expense of security (as we will see in a detailed discussion below). Likewise, calls for authenticity due to the mass standardisation of individuals and products that resulted from industrial production resulted in the commodification of difference in capitalism, for example as seen in what is capitalism's exploitation of “authentic” exotic cultures (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005).

geared towards solving labour problems and minimising costs of transportation, but also to respond to consumer demands for better commodities (Keucheyan, 2013). Consequently, capital has had to change from the old industrial mode of production, which was centred on the production of commodity objects, to a new model focused on immaterial products, such as information, images, and affects. Moulier-Boutang (2011:34) declares that

we are leaving an old world where the production of material goods took up the bulk of investment (a lot of capital for machinery, and a lot of low-skilled labour) and was the basis for the accumulation of profit. And we have very much entered a world in which the reproduction of complex goods (biosphere, noosphere or cultural diversity, the economy of the mind) and the production of new knowledge and innovations – and also of the living (*le vivant*) – require a shift of investment towards intellectual capital (education, training) and a large quantity of skilled labour, set to work collectively, through the new information and telecommunications technologies.

Whereas mass production of consumer goods took centre stage in Fordist capitalism, which then structured whole societies in the model of the factory, contemporary capitalism now structures society around the production of immaterial goods. Hence Boltanski and Chiapello (2005:73) described the structure of new post-Fordist corporations as “*lean firms working as networks with a multitude of participants, organising work in the form of teams or projects, intent on customer satisfaction, and a general mobilisation of workers ... [author’s italics].*” The network, which was a marginal form of resistance within the hierarchical bureaucratic structures of industrial capitalism, is now the characteristic mode of organisation and accumulation.

In addition, rather than being confined to the factory, immaterial production “tends to blur the distinction between work and non-work, with work extending over the whole day – which signifies that ‘work’ is now synonymous with ‘life’” (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005:93). As noted in Chapter 2, Foucault called the societal structure of industrialism the disciplinary society. In the new system – which Deleuze calls “the society of control” - capitalist domination permeates the entire social body (Deleuze, 1995; Hardt & Negri, 2000; Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). In the disciplinary society, policing, monitoring, and control tend to be visible, external, and from above, while in the society of control, besides the external repressive state apparatus

such as the police, the intelligence agency, and the army, policing and control are also internalised by bodies through self-surveillance.

It needs to be reiterated, however, that the dominance of information, images, and affects in capitalism does not mean the total elimination of the industrial production of material goods;⁹⁸ rather, immaterial production assumes hegemony as the main source of capitalist accumulation. Critics of the new paradigm refute the idea of the hegemony of immaterial goods and charge that since the production of material goods remains predominant, industrial production is still hegemonic (Keucheyan, 2013). However, proponents of the new paradigm argue that immaterial production is dominant qualitatively and not quantitatively (Hardt & Negri, 2000). This point is important for understanding the nature of artistic production in contemporary capitalism. Immaterial goods such as images, knowledge, and affects become the primary source of surplus value in post-Fordism. Moreover, immaterial production tends to have transformative effects on material production. As Moulier-Boutang (2011:57) puts it in his description of new capitalism, which he calls cognitive,⁹⁹

The mechanical transformation of matter by means of a twin expenditure of energy and labour power does not disappear, but it loses its centrality in favour of a cooperation of brains in the production of the living by means of the living, via the new information technologies, of which the digital, the computer, and the Internet are emblematic in the same way in which the coal mine, the steam engine, the loom, and the railroad were emblematic of industrial capitalism.

Moulier-Boutang's phrase, "production of the living by means of the living", captures what is called biopolitics. If industrial capitalism invested in commodity objects, the new capitalism invests in life in the sense that life becomes the direct source of capitalist rent. Hence, this "life-enhancing" character of biopolitical production does not imply that the new capitalism is not exploitative.¹⁰⁰ Foucault's concepts of biopower and biopolitics help us understand this contradiction in economic relations; immaterial capitalism is biopower, i.e. it controls and

⁹⁸ Theorists of Fossil Capitalism argue that capital would not have developed without the exploitation of fossil energies, and assert that capitalism is as materially based as it has ever been (Keucheyan, 2013). However, this does not foreclose on the fact that immaterial goods are assuming a hegemonic role in capitalist profit accumulation.

⁹⁹ According to Moulier-Boutang (2011:57), "by cognitive capitalism we mean, then, a mode of accumulation in which the object of accumulation consists mainly of knowledge, which becomes the basic source of value, as well as the principal location of the process of valorisation."

¹⁰⁰ This is exemplified in the capitalist exploitation of affects in the service industry or the exoticisation of ethnicities in the culture industry.

exploits life for profit. The form of resistance to this exploitation is biopolitics. Contemporary capitalism can also be defined in Marxist terms as a form of relations of production. Like all preceding forms, contemporary capitalism is a form of accumulation of wealth – accumulation is understood, variously, as investment, a mode of production, and also as a form of exploitation of labour (Moulier-Boutang, 2011). In contrast to industrial capitalism, in which accumulation was based on materials such as machinery and the organisation of manual labour, cognitive or post-Fordist capitalist accumulation exploits knowledge and creativity.

In post-Fordism, the primary source of surplus value comes from immaterial investments such as knowledge. As a mode of production, Moulier-Boutang (2011:57) adds that cognitive capitalism “is based on the cooperative labour of human brains joined together in networks by means of computers.” Hardt and Negri (2000) distinguished between three types of immaterial labour, namely informationalised industrial production, which describes the incorporation of computer technologies such as car manufacturing; analytic and symbolic tasks such as computer coding and graphic design; and the production and manipulation of affects which involve human contact and are usually corporeal and exemplified by the work of nurses and entertainers. While all these transformations have had an impact on culture, this study focuses on how capitalism has specifically impacted upon human contact as it relates to cultural production in Africa.

4.6 Post-industrial/post-Fordist capitalist exploitation

The American sociologist Eric Olin Wright defined exploitation as the interdependency of the rich and the poor, whereby the rich depend on the poor for their material well-being (“the wealthy are wealthy because the poor are poor”), the exclusion of the poor from ownership or control of resources, and also as the appropriation of resources by the rich from the poor (in Keucheyan, 2013:221). In a system of capitalist exploitation, the rich and the poor sustain each other. Systematic exclusion of the poor and expropriation of their resources form the dominant modes with which the poor are exploited and dehumanised. As I will note below, privatisation, whether of material or immaterial resources, is one of the dominant modes through which the poor are dispossessed in contemporary capitalism.

The precarisation of labour, which is based on processes of exclusion, is a technique of exploitation in immaterial production. Capitalist control uses a strategy of “the imposition of precarity” by temporarily excluding or expelling labour-power from production, which in turn

leads to the devaluation of this labour-power (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). For Boltanski and Chiapello (2005), exclusion means being temporarily or permanently delinked from networks of production in contemporary capitalism.¹⁰¹ If, in the old model, the wage earner enjoyed a permanent contract in a stable company with the promise of security and pension benefits, in post-Fordism, the permanent contract has lost its normative power, since jobs are structured on a temporary basis (Keucheyan, 2013). In the contemporary job market, “workers are increasingly forced to move among multiple jobs, both over the course of a working career and in the course of a working day” (Hardt & Negri, 2009:147). Therefore, according to Hardt and Negri (2009:147),

A central aspect of precarity, then, is that it imposes a new regime of time, with respect to both working day and the working career – or to put it another way, precarity is a mechanism of control that determines the temporality of workers not to work all the time but to be available for work.

As a form of exploitation, capital creates a reserve army of precarious temporary workers, freelancers, part-timers, and the unemployed who are eager to grab the next job for a measly wage. While industrial capitalism sapped dry the permanent worker, who spent long hours on the factory floor, the new capitalism exploits the freedom of the labourer. Liberated from the grip of dreary factory life, the wage worker now finds himself in a position of job insecurity.¹⁰²

Producers of knowledge and affects in cognitive capitalism are called the *cognitariat*, but perhaps *precariat* describes accurately the figure of the worker in the new capitalism (Standing, 2010).¹⁰³ If proletarianisation involved the dispossession of the peasants of their land in mercantilism and industrialisation, precarisation is the exploitation and dehumanisation in post-industrial capitalism.¹⁰⁴ Processes of precarisation include reductions (in numbers of

¹⁰¹ According to Boltanski and Chiapello (2005:365), in the “connexionist world”, “extreme forms of exploitation are expressed in an increasingly drastic privation of links, and a gradual emergence of an inability not only to create new links, but even to maintain existing links (separation from friends, breaking of family ties, divorce, political absentism).”

¹⁰² As Boltanski and Chiapello (2005: 369) wrote, “the mobility of the exploiter has as its counterpart the flexibility of the exploited.”

¹⁰³ The British economist Guy Standing (2010) coined this term by combining the words “proletariat” and “precarious” to describe an emergent class of precarious labourers.

¹⁰⁴ Hardt and Negri (2009) gave an example of a man called Mohammed who organises and deploys former Sierra Leonean and Liberian combatants for a variety of informal jobs, such as in illegal diamond mining in Liberia and even as mercenaries in different wars in the region. To this group of stevedores and mercenaries can be added the ever-growing number of slave and sex workers teeming the metropolis of the continent, and those who get smuggled to America, Europe, or Asia.

workers), distinctions (between skilled and unskilled labour), reclassification, differentiation, labelling, and demonisation – all of these to intensify inequality and insecurity, and incite competition (Lazzarato, 2009).¹⁰⁵ This is besides the financialisation of the economy in post-Fordism, which also greatly contributes to the insecuritisation and precaritisation of wage earners by overturning the relations of risks and protections between wage earners and their employers (Lazzarato, 2009).¹⁰⁶ Precaritisation does not imply the end of primitive forms of accumulation and dispossession, which, as I note below, have intensified in new capitalism.

In addition, migration is a form of expropriation and dispossession of populations from their resources such as land or labour, which leads to precaritisation and pauperisation (Lazzarato, 2009; Treacher, 2005). For example, on the African continent, capital has contributed to internal migrations to places offering faint glimmers of employment and market opportunities; between the rural and urban areas of a country, between one country to another, and between and across regions (Somalis, Nigerians, Malawians, and Zimbabweans who flock to take up low-paying service jobs in the metropolises of South Africa are an example of such labour migrations), and externally, from the continent to other parts of the world.¹⁰⁷ The thousands of distraught migrants who are rescued daily or who drown desperately trying to cross the Mediterranean in unsafe boats into Europe from North Africa are victims of such capitalist-induced global migrations. Most of these are refugees from deindustrialised zones and territories that have been “demoted from the world market” (to borrow from Mbembe, 2001).

¹⁰⁵ As Lazzarato (2009:119-120) argued, “contemporary policies regarding employment ... are policies that introduce degrees of insecurity, instability, uncertainty, economic, and existential precarity into the lives of individuals. They make insecure both individual lives and their relation to the institutions that used to protect them. It is not the same insecurity for everyone whatever the level and conditions of employment, yet a differential of fear runs along the whole continuum.”

¹⁰⁶ In financialisation, the wage earners “must rely on their earnings alone, often blocked or eroded because of the systematic reduction in social expenditures, whilst the latter can shift risks onto the stock market or insurances” (Lazzarato, 2009:124).

¹⁰⁷ Another strategy related to precaritisation involves the control of the migration of labour. Due to its increased nomadism, and through its strategies of control, capital sanctions movement of labour-power (Keucheyan, 2013). Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) argued that control of migration is a form of exploitation in contemporary capitalism in which in order for the rich to be mobile, the poor have to be immobile. In contemporary capitalism, “some people’s immobility is necessary for other people’s mobility” (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005:362). Mobility is empowerment in contemporary capitalism. The immobility of the poor sustains the stability of the privileged mobile class in networks of accumulation. Boltanski and Chiapello (2005:363) wrote that “by remaining *in situ*, little people secure the presence of the strong there – the latter cannot be everywhere at once – and maintain the links they have cultivated for them. Thanks to them, the temporal (natural) limits to the expansion of social capital can be overdone. We shall say that in a connexionist world, the little people are stand-ins.” For instance, on a global scale, the highly mobile financial markets and multinational corporations are the privileged ones. These global financial entities can transfer their capital to and from any country of their choice and withdraw this capital to invest it in more potentially profitable terrains at any time they wish, potentially wreaking havoc on the economy of the countries involved.

According to Hardt and Negri (2009:147-148), “erecting barriers takes place not only at national borders but also and perhaps more important within each country, across metropolitan spaces and rural landscapes, segmenting the population and preventing cultural and social mixture.”¹⁰⁸ Rather than empowering individuals, this control of the flow of labour-power leads to the dehumanisation of those subjects who are involuntarily grounded, or who are constantly forced to move in search for jobs. For instance, forms of dislocation that migrants experience result in what Papastergiadis (2012) termed “the zombification of the other”. Referring to the anthropological accounts of post-apartheid neoliberal South Africa by Comaroff and Comaroff (2002), Papastergiadis wrote (2012:68):

The process of zombification that the Comaroffs observed in post-apartheid South Africa is used as a metaphor for the pattern of dehumanisation that characterises the neoliberal world order. As mobility and uncertainty become the dominant features of everyday life, the Comaroffs argue that society tends towards an apocalyptic scene in which there is a total rupture of the symbolic bonds and the reduction of humans to senseless zombies. This process of dislocation is presented as if it were of a different order to migrants’ experience of alienation in the era of industrial labour. As a consequence, the counter-reactions are wilder. Unlike the wogs that turned the cogs ... the zombie has the potential for demonic and unpredictable reaction against the machine.

Zombification is a form of dehumanisation due to dislocation and precarisation, which in conditions of uncertainty and desperation lead to alienation and, consequently, a loss of humanity. As Papastergiadis (2012:68-69) suggested, “zombification becomes a metaphor for the neoliberal order because in this era the migrant has no hope of being permanently resettled, and the global economic forces have severed any link between productive energy and cultural meaning.” Xenophobia and violence are symbolic of this zombification, which result from extreme alienation and dehumanisation.¹⁰⁹

At this point, an examination of the character of neoliberalism and its role in the new economy is needed to draw the figure of biopolitical cultural resistance on the continent. An examination of both post-Fordism and neoliberalism offers a clearer picture of the ontological and

¹⁰⁸ The idea of internal national borders in the form of airports, seaports, and roadblocks as points of inclusion and exclusion is also shared by Nicholas De Genova (2013).

¹⁰⁹ Marxist geographer David Harvey (2005) and sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2007) have also examined in detail the social crises that arose out of capitalist segmentation and exclusion.

ideological aspects of contemporary capitalism, which in turn helps us to understand the forms of cultural resistance in Africa.

4.7 The origins of neoliberalism

While the New Deal, with its institutionalised disciplinary regime of production, spread the American brand of industrial capitalism across the globe, neoliberalism is regulating the globalisation of post-Fordist capitalism. This is not to imply that capitalist globalisation emerged in the 20th century along with industrialisation, or later at the dawn of the new century with post-industrialisation. Tracing the history of capitalist globalisation, Hall (2003) located its origins in the age of European exploration and conquest, at the end of the 15th century. The subsequent age of navigation and trade supremacy was the second phase of globalisation. The age of colonisation “in which trading enclaves were consolidated into colonial possession” was the third (Hall, 2003:36). The century of the Berlin conference, of the “imperial carve up”, was the fourth phase (Hall, *ibid*). The inter-war period was the fifth, and the age of decolonisation after the Second World War was the sixth phase. The Cold War, “when conflicts indigenous to Africa were subordinated to the wider geopolitical and military polarisation between two rival models of development”, was the seventh (Hall, 2003:36); while the mid-1970s onwards, with “global interdependencies, massive financial investment, technological flows, and trans-national production, climaxing with the era of neoliberal globalisation and American superpower hegemony” is the eighth phase of globalisation (Hall, 2003:36).¹¹⁰

Reagan and Thatcher’s governments adopted neoliberalism in the 1970s in response to the crises of profit and over-accumulation in capitalism outlined above. According to Hall *et al.* (2013), neoliberalism has its roots in 18th-century liberal political and economic theory. However, the formulation of its present manifestation is attributed to a group of economists called “the Chicago boys”, who, led by the prominent economist Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago, were summoned to help revive the Chilean economy under Augusto Pinochet (who had usurped leadership in 1973 in a CIA-backed coup). When this neoliberal experiment was seen to “work” in Chile, which recorded a cosmetic economic growth, it was

¹¹⁰ Offering a more or less similar historical account of the origins of capitalist globalisation, Moulner-Boutang (2011:13) wrote that “our present globalisation is not the first that the world has seen. In the sixteenth century in the first place, then at the end of the eighteenth century, and subsequently from the end of the nineteenth century until 1914, world-spaces were being created, starting from the western hemisphere. The first and last of these spaces involved the creation of colonial empires, the second came at the height of slave-owning mercantilism, at the time of its collapse under the blows of the American, French, and Haitian revolutions. Globalisation today is generally framed in terms of ‘neoliberal financialisation’.”

adopted by Reagan and Thatcher's regimes in the United States and in Britain respectively during the global economic crisis of the 1970s (Harvey, 2005; Stiglitz, 2003). Neoliberalism was globalised with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the decline of socialism in 1989 – the year which marks the temporal threshold of this study.¹¹¹

4.8 The neoliberal globalisation of post-Fordism

In this section I demonstrate how neoliberalism and post-Fordism are two concepts that describe different aspects of contemporary capitalism. While post-Fordism describes the post-industrial and knowledge-based modes of capitalist accumulation, neoliberalism can be seen as the ideology or “governmental rationality” (in Foucault's terms) that creates and sustains the environment for post-Fordist capitalist accumulation (Brown, 2015; Jelinek, 2013; Monbiot, 2016; Stiglitz, 2003; Venn, 2009). This is clearer when we consider neoliberalism as what Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) called the new spirit of capitalism, which globally justifies and legitimates individuals' engagement in the new modes of profit accumulation. Mobilising a whole range of *dispositifs* (i.e. diffuse apparatuses, technologies, and mechanisms for the infiltration and political control of bodies, for example through education, religion, and the media, besides direct policy imposition by global financial institutions) to entrench itself, neoliberal ideology facilitates profit accumulation in contemporary capitalism whether through material or immaterial resources (Lazzarato, 2009).¹¹² The deregulation and flexibilisation of

¹¹¹ In *After Neoliberalism? The Kilburn Manifesto*, writing in the context of the United Kingdom, Hall *et al.* (2013) noted a plurality of factors that have contributed to the formation and entrenchment of neoliberalism. These factors include “class and other social interests, new institutional arrangements, the exercise of excessive influence by private corporations over democratic processes, political developments such as the recruitment of New Labour to the neoliberal consensus, the effects of legitimising ideologies and a quasi-religious belief in the ‘hidden hand’, and the self-propelling virtues of ‘the market’” (Hall *et al.*, 2013:12). In summary, Harvey (2005) saw the motive behind the globalisation of neoliberalism as the restoration of class power which the rich had lost due to capitalist crises of the 1970s.

¹¹² According to Lazzarato (2009:111), *dispositifs* are both discursive and nondiscursive. “... nondiscursive *dispositifs* or practices intervene on what one does (possible or probable action), whilst discursive practices or *dispositifs* intervene on what one says (possible or probable statements).” Nondiscursive *dispositifs* include those organisations managed by the state, trade unions, and employers' associations, which “register, file, call-up, distribute allocations, decide upon expulsions and sanctions, organise the monitoring (interviews, training) of unemployed workers” (Lazzarato, 2009:112). Discursive *dispositifs* “function and produce statements in different ways – for example, legislative bodies such as parliament draft laws, employment agencies specify norms, other agencies establish regulations, universities produce academic classifications and reports, media construct opinions, and experts make informed judgements (Lazzarato, 2009:112). In the essay, “Neoliberal political economy, biopolitics and colonialism: A transcolonial genealogy of inequality”, Venn (2009:224) listed among the *dispositifs* of global capitalism the “discursive (say, liberalism, political economy), institutional (colonial governors, the Banyans in India in relation to banking), material/technical (sugar plantations and refining, mines, currencies), administrative/legal (colonial administration, taxation, property laws, rules of exclusion, the joint-stock company, etc.), material/ technical (factory production, navigational instruments, slave ships, plantations, military technology, etc.).”

economies, which have been promoted by imperial Western governments since Reagan and Thatcher, are all part of what is called “neoliberal financialisation” (Moulier-Boutang, 2011). To put it another way, neoliberalism is the globalisation of post-Fordist capitalist production.

While, in the interest of this thesis, it is important to stress that within post-Fordism it is not material goods that are central, but immaterial products such as information, images, and affects, it will be seen that neoliberalism facilitates both material and immaterial capitalist expropriation at a global scale. Besides the expropriation and redistribution of material assets such as land and lakes, contemporary capitalism also appropriates immaterial resources such as genetic materials from seeds and herbs, as well as cultural products and knowledge. Neoliberalism as biopower therefore facilitates expropriation of the whole range of resources, from the material to the immaterial: the complete exploitation of the entire gamut of life. This form of economic production influences and infiltrates cultural production. What I call biopolitical collectivist production is an example of cultural expression under Neoliberal capitalism and post-Fordist economic production.

To describe neoliberalism as the spirit that drives post-Fordist accumulation, I refer back to Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu (2009:341), who characterise the neoliberal flexibilisation of indebted economies as follows: “A core part of SAPs involves the orientation of developing economies towards free trade, privatisation of public assets, reduction of state subsidy, eradication of central planning, and devaluation of currency.” In neoliberalism, “the deregulation of financial markets and exchange control liberalisation have been effected to allow the free movement of capital in pursuit of profitable avenues” (Lesufi in Zegeye *et al.*, 2005: 24). This flexibilisation of national markets, which promotes temporary/short-term contracts and nomadic investments, is central to post-Fordist production. As a result, Moulier-Boutang (2011:15) notes:

Work has de-materialised: the foremen have disappeared, the contours of the company have become uncertain and ephemeral. Where previously white-collar workers and managers were accustomed to placing their working lives in the framework of a long-term relationship, now the growing trend of redundancies and dismissals from companies have removed much of the confidence that employees used to have in their chances of internal promotion ... Where states and local authorities believed that they were dealing with stable interlocutors, they now find they have been dealing with nomad investors whose commitment

is directly proportional to the institutional possibilities of a quick get-out and not simply to guarantees of a medium- or long-term profitability.

This passage succinctly describes the consequences of the total structural transformation of the post-Fordist firm, and the intensified nomadism of contemporary capital and how they affect developing national economies. Whereas the Fordist factory was a long-term investment fixed in one location with a large part of production taking place under one roof, the post-Fordist firm is “dematerialised” or “gaseous” (in Deleuze’s terms), in the sense that the production of small component parts of a single product is done in multiple locations. In addition, contemporary multi- and trans-national companies do not hesitate to relocate capital investments where there is a guarantee of maximum profit (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). Neoliberalism facilitates these processes of economic reorganisation. As noted above, indebted countries are forced by neoliberal financial institutions to privatise their assets and deregulate their markets, besides cutting government expenditure and consumption to create new avenues for profit. Through the forced privatisation of firms and the deregulation of markets, neoliberalism enables the transfer of national assets into the hands of local or global private corporations which do not have any mandate with the public at large, and which – depending on the existence or inexistence of cheap labour, raw materials, and market – are at liberty to relocate capital investments to more profitable territories (Hall, 2011; Harvey, 2005). The two concepts of neoliberalism and post-Fordism thus describe different aspects of the same capitalist trend. On the African continent, therefore, the post-Fordist precarisation of labour-power is accompanied by neoliberal dispossession. Below I introduce the character of artistic production in biopolitical production, but before I do so, I turn to a brief discussion of cultural responses to colonisation and modernisation.

4.9 *Fiscality: Neoliberal globalisation and the postcolonial African state*

Neoliberalism is based on liberalist beliefs in the sanctity of individual liberty and freedom. It promotes the idea of individual liberty, a free market system, privatisation of public assets, and less government control of trade (Harvey, 2002). While neoliberalism legitimates itself through its beliefs in the sacredness of individual liberty and freedom, in reality it masks class power through dispossession. As Massey (2013:4) noted, “the privileging of self-interest, market relations, and choice in each sphere of economic and social life leads inexorably to increased inequality.” Jelinek (2013:18) shared this view and pointed out that “neoliberalism equates to hierarchy and systemic exclusion, mediocrity, private monopolism, and monoculturalism

cloaked in values of freedom and a distorted idea of individual responsibility.” In various ways, rather than promoting individual freedom and equality, neoliberal policies have been deployed to facilitate the transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich. This section is dedicated to an examination of how neoliberalism has wreaked havoc on the postcolonial African state.

The postcolonial state is modelled on the modern bourgeois Western state. In particular, the postcolonial African state is founded upon and modelled on the colonial state (Crowder, 1987; Kieh, 2009). From day one, the state was an agent of capitalist accumulation. This has greater ramifications on the shape of the African state in neoliberalism. As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, in the biopolitical paradigm there is a decentralisation of the focus of power from its origins in state institutions to its points of actualisation. This does not mean that the state is completely emasculated and therefore has no power over its citizenship; rather the point is to recognise the potential for resistance in the subjugated populations. The Workerist distinction between power as *potere* and power as *potenza* helps to shed light on the concept of domination and resistance under capitalism. *Potere/pouvoir* refers to power as “power over” or to act upon, and *potenza/puissance* refers to the capacity to act or “power to”, connected to Aristotle’s concept of *potentiality* as capability for becoming (Keucheyan, 2013). As power over, *potere/pouvoir* is biopower, while power to act, *potenza/puissance*, is biopolitical (Lazzarato, 2009; Revel, 2009). The state as an agent of biopower holds the “power over”, while its subjects hold the “power to” resist and create life. However, as I have observed above, under neoliberal globalisation state sovereignty has been compromised, and capital – through the state or without it – now permeates the domain of life. Rather than being a melancholic exegesis of the loss of postcolonial state sovereignty, since by no means has the state been completely destroyed, this picture aims to reveal the loci and networks of power in neoliberal globalisation.

Indebted countries of the developing world or those undergoing economic crises often turn to global neoliberal financial institutions such as the World Bank or IMF for assistance in the form of loans (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009). To guarantee the loans, these neoliberal institutions prescribe to the indebted states policies which require the states to privatise their public resources, to free up or liberalise trade, to deregulate, i.e. to cede control of their markets, and to devalue currencies. According to Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu (2009:341),

For these loans to be approved by international banking institutions, the borrowing countries, and other indebted countries that default, must agree to the above-mentioned Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs), which generally

require the devaluation of that country's currency against the dollar, the loosening of import/export restrictions, the halting of state-funded economic subsidisations and the implementation of balanced state budgets.

To describe the precarious condition of indebted nations in neoliberal globalisation, Moulier-Boutang (2011:14) stated that “when you have debts, it is quite natural that the bankers who have funded you invite themselves in to manage your accounts, or at least to offer an assessment of the likelihood of bankruptcy.” The money lenders have the power to impose policies on such bankrupt countries that force them to liberalise, deregulate, and privatise. Due to the liberalisation of markets, devaluation of currencies, and privatisation of state assets, national wealth falls into the hands of private entrepreneurs whose main mandate is profit. Neoliberal SAPs on indebted postcolonial African states thus undermine these states, further weaken their economies, and result in the dispossession and impoverishment of millions of Africans. As I have demonstrated, debt is the wedge with which capitalism splinters and thereby raids national economies. Noting the machinations that lie behind the capitalist debt system, Harvey (2007:37) observed that “debt crises were orchestrated, managed, and controlled both to rationalize the system and to redistribute assets during the 1980s and 1990s.” In agreement, Hardt and Negri (2004:249) pithily observe that

one of the contradictions of the global system today is that the poorest countries, including most of sub-Saharan Africa, suffer from the burden of national debts that they can never hope to repay. Debt is one of the factors that keeps the poor poor and the rich rich in the global system.

The IMF and its sister institution, the World Bank, in chorus with donors and non-governmental organisations, impose SAPs on national markets to create space for capitalist accumulation of profit. Through these imposed policies the global financial institutions wrestle whole economies out of the control of indebted nation-states. Thus lost national economies end up in the control of private entities. In this light, recognising the real motives behind the new system, Harvey (2005:29) offered a Marxist diagnosis of neoliberalism as “accumulation by dispossession”, i.e. as a “political scheme aimed at re-establishing the conditions for capital accumulation and the restoration of class power”.¹¹³ Accumulation by dispossession refers “to

¹¹³ According to Harvey, accumulation by dispossession is achieved by privatisation of public resources, by migration, whereby peasants are expelled from their land, and by wars, which destroy old infrastructural investments in order to create space for new capital (in Keucheyan, 2013). In this study I focused on privatisation and migration, but in the African context wars feature as a mode of accumulation by dispossession.

cases where a non-capitalist sector is more or less brutally transformed into a capitalist sector. This assumes a ‘dispossession’ of populations, for the private logic of the market expels the older, generally more ‘collective’ mode of social organisation” (Keucheyan, 2013:107). Accumulation by dispossession transforms non-capitalist sectors of society into capitalist sectors for the accumulation of profit. This is undertaken through processes of deregulation, liberalisation, and privatisation, which transfer control of national economies into the hands of internal and external private corporations. The SAPs are prescribed as a panacea for a country’s economic malaise, when in reality they facilitate capitalist access to national resources. These observations therefore confirm that the primary aim of neoliberal policy is to facilitate the transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich.

Most postcolonial African states briefly enjoyed economic growth and autonomy in the years after decolonisation in the 1960s. However, most of these economies started to crumble due to the world economic crises of the 1970s before neoliberal globalisation in the 1980s and 1990s. During the brief period of relative wealth and economic growth, state management of economies guaranteed a decent livelihood for their citizens (Harris & Lauderdale, 2002; Mbembe, 2001). This state of affairs drastically changed due to the capitalist crises of the 1970s and the establishment of the new global order. Mbembe’s (2001) examination of subjectivity in the postcolonial “contemporaneity” shaped by diverse historical socio-political and economic factors such as slavery, colonisation, and the recent neoliberal capitalist globalisation, provides a detailed picture of the complex spatial-temporal environs that catalysed contemporary collectivism. Mbembe also offers a detailed local account of the negative effects of the SAPs on postcolonial African economies and states. Privatisation of public assets and companies and free market policies imposed by the neoliberal order led to the emasculation of governments and drastically reduced the living standards of millions across the continent.

Mbembe’s (2001) concept of fiscalism captures the complex systems of economic restructuring and the emasculation of the postcolonial state, which resulted in new forms of extraction and appropriation of resources and the distribution and allocation of profits. Lowered prices of minerals such as copper and agricultural products such as coffee on the world market, growing debt, and rampant corruption, followed by the imposition of the neoliberal logic of free trade, liberalisation of markets, currency devaluation, and privatisation of assets, led to a complete reorganisation of the economic structure of the continent and the devastation of its social structure – sometimes leading to conflicts such as the case of the Rwandan genocide (Renton,

Seddon & Zeilig, 2007). As imperialist states, multinational corporations, and other internal and external private entities gained more control of national resources, postcolonial states were robbed of their economic and political muscle, in some cases resulting in what are called “failed states”. Capitalism’s increased flexibility and mobility in search of new markets and profit resulted in massive deindustrialisation (Carmody, 2002). The precarisation and loss of job security of the factory worker in post-Fordist production are echoed in the economic and political insecurity of the neoliberal postcolonial state, which similarly results in the precarisation of the state.

According to Mbembe (2001:86),

Symptomatic of these economic changes is what appears to be the exhaustion of the model of the ‘territorial state’ ... The dogma of the ‘inviolability of the borders inherited from colonialism’ is being flouted – not in the sense of uncontrollable outbreaks of separatist fever leading to an irreversible break-up of the territorial framework of the postcolonial states ... but in the sense that identity pressures, dynamics of autonomy and differentiation, various forms of ethno-regionalism, migration pressure, a rising salience of religion, and the accelerated shift of African societies into the so-called parallel economy are profoundly altering the continent’s spatial and social organisation, population distribution, and the way markets actually work – and in so doing, are displacing the material bases of power.

Due to deregulation of national economies and liberalisation of markets, states have been deprived of much of their power and territorial control, which causes crises to abound. According to Mbembe (2001), a large part of Africa’s economic structure has generally become informal and underground, resulting in the tremendous reorganisation of the geopolitical terrain. Due to the loss of old territorial control, vast areas of their countries are at the liberty of unscrupulous profiteering elements, lawlessness, banditry, and strife.¹¹⁴ Where states still possess a degree of sovereignty and maintain cohesion, they have intensified the old role of facilitator of capitalist accumulation through neoliberalism. Where states have been seriously weakened, tribalism, ethno-regionalism, separatist movements, and violent rebellions proliferate. In any case, in both scenarios capital holds sway through global financial

¹¹⁴ As we find out in Chapter 5, violence and strife in The Democratic Republic of Congo form the core of the issues that concern Le Groupe Amos.

institutions, external imperialist states, multinational corporations, and other diverse private entities (Harris & Lauderdale, 2002; Hardt & Negri, 2009; Mbembe, 2001). Mbembe (2005:75) summarised the process of the neoliberal reconfiguration of state power as follows:

... by doing everything possible to dismantle the state intervention in the economy ... without making the state more efficient and without giving it new, positive functions, the result has been that the state's (already very fragile) material base has been undermined.

In his assessment of neoliberal economic policy in South Africa, Lesufi concluded that neoliberalism is a concerted attack on the role of the state in the economy (in Zegeye *et al.*, 2005:24). This incapacitation of the state also entails the devastation of the social structure and the marginalisation of its subjects – including the suspension of citizenship rights. It follows that under these dire circumstances, scarcity, corruption, extortion, confiscation, violence, and migration are the order of the day. But violence and migration have not been the only tactical response to these socio-economic changes; creativity, making-do, dissimulation, vending, recycling, recuperation, cooperation, collaboration, and sharing include some of the strategies and techniques that the multitudes in the post-colony employ to survive. This study shares with Mbembe the view that neoliberal capitalist globalisation tremendously altered the continent's economic and political pattern. However, like Mbembe, I hold that the texture of these multiplicitous and heterogeneous shifts, rifts, and drifts vary from place to place, country to country, and region to region: “The failure of structural adjustment policies is not the same everywhere; at least it does not produce the same effects everywhere” (Mbembe, 2001:68). When we turn to post-apartheid South Africa in the next chapter, we note that in this country a variant of neoliberalism with a markedly different shape emerges.

4.10 Artistic responses to colonisation and modernisation in Africa

It is important to highlight here that European colonialist mercantile oppression and exploitation did not remain uncontested. Africans were not passive victims of European colonialism. Some of the well-known examples of uprisings against colonisation include the Maji in German East Africa (now Tanzania), the Herero in South West Africa (now Namibia), the Satiru revolt in Nigeria, and the Mau Mau in Kenya (Crowder, 1987). Resistance to colonisation took the form of political agitation and direct confrontation, but it was also enacted on the cultural front through songs, plays, and other types of oral traditions. In the visual arts,

the impact of colonisation is seen, *inter alia*, in how it shaped traditional masquerade, which was a dominant form of cultural expression in pre-colonial and colonial Africa. Due to contact with the West, mask-making not only formally incorporates industrial materials such as paint, nails, and cloth, but it also becomes a channel for addressing coloniality. Masks and sculptures ridiculing agents and institutions of colonisation such as the governor, the police, and the missionary, were also ubiquitous in this period (Blackburn, 1979). In short, political and cultural resistance to proletarianisation in the “mother countries”, as well as broad anti-slavery and anti-colonial struggles both on and off the African continent, precipitated crises and led to the birth of a new capitalism (Moulier-Boutang, 2011).

Transformations in economic relations and conditions of production in the era of industrial capitalism greatly shaped the material culture of African societies, which, although peripheral to capital, were nevertheless integrated into this mode of capitalist accumulation. While it is impossible to trace all the complex cultural forms produced in response to colonialism in Africa in detail, postcolonial African art engaged in various ways with postcolonial identity and concomitant discourses of subject- and nation-hood, as well as dispossession and dehumanisation in a neocolonial global sphere (Deliss, 1996; Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009). In the visual arts of the early period of decolonisation, for instance, work predominantly took the form of hybridisation and/or “creolisation” of indigenous African aesthetic forms with Western materials and techniques. The artistic practices of the Zaria Rebels,¹¹⁵ the Dakar School,¹¹⁶ the Eye Society¹¹⁷ (discussed in detail in Chapter 1), and numerous other groups and artists throughout the continent predominate in this discourse of African modernism as a syncretic mix of Western and African forms. While some artists sought to salvage, recover, and celebrate an essential pre-colonial African identity (for example the Negritudist Dakar School of Senegal discussed in detail in Chapter 1), others sought to recognise the syncretic identities emerging from the clash of the coloniser and colonised cultures. The concept of “natural synthesis” formulated by the Zaria artists in Nigeria, in which artists pondered the character of modern African identity through the fusion of indigenous and Western aesthetic

¹¹⁵ The Zaria Rebels, also known as the Zaria Art Society of Nigeria, was formed by students who sought to “examine how their study of academic art related to their society, which was emerging from the traditional to the modern, from the colonial to independence” (Deliss, 1996:195). In their art, the group mixed traditional forms and techniques with Western materials and styles to create a postcolonial aesthetics.

¹¹⁶ The Dakar School of Senegal was a group of artists which championed the philosophy of Negritudism, which celebrated an essential pre-colonial African identity through a visual aesthetic characterised by rhythmic line, vibrant colour, and shallow depth (Grabski, 2013; Harney, 2004).

¹¹⁷ Like the Zaria Rebels, the Eye Society experimented with traditional and Western materials and forms to create an aesthetic that responded to their changed environment (Deliss, 1996).

tools, exemplifies this postcolonial project of identity construction (Deliss, 1996). Some of these postcolonial movements were state-supported, for example the Negritudist Dakar School of Senegal.¹¹⁸ Others were founded and supported by Western expatriates such as the Oshogbo in Nigeria, Shona sculpture in Zimbabwe, and Poto Poto in Cameroon.¹¹⁹ Yet numerous others were independent movements, such as the Mihwar (Axis) Group of Egypt, the Crystallist movement of Sudan, the Dimension Group of Ethiopia, the Sisi kwa Sisi of Kenya, and individual artists working in different parts of the continent who respond to modernisation through painting, sculpture, and ceramics (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009). These practices predominantly shaped the aesthetics, critical, and art-historical and museological practices of African art in the 1980s and 1990s. These artistic, discursive, and museological practices continue in the present. However, global economic and socio-political transformations at the dawn of the 21st century discussed above have necessitated shifts in the way some African artists view and respond to their environment. I introduce these artistic practices below.

4.11 Biopolitics against neoliberal globalisation

Neoliberalism facilitates the exploitation of the entire gamut of life, which results in the emasculation of economies and the dehumanisation of individuals on the African continent. The emasculation of African economies by neoliberal globalisation has led to the devastation of the cultural sector and consequently to emigration of the continent's cultural elite to the West. However, this should not foreclose on the fact that artistic critique of neoliberal globalisation exists on the continent. This thesis counters those critical and museological discourses that, due to the debilitating effects of neoliberal globalisation on the African socio-economic sector, have dislocated and relocated contemporary African art. I note, following

¹¹⁸ Leopold Senghor, the first president of Senegal, avidly supported Negritudism through the arts and culture. Negritude, coined by Aime Cesaire in 1932-1933, was a philosophy that celebrated an essentialist African character endowed with rhythm, emotion, and imagination, and defined in contrast to Western rationalism (Harney, 2004). To promote this ideology, Senghor established cultural and educational institutions that were geared towards the articulation and advancement of its central values and ideals through cultural and artistic products. L'Ecole des Arts was such an institution, out of which a style of painting emerged which championed a modernist primitivism and glorified an idealised essential Africanity in line with the Negritudist ideals ("a negro style of sculpture, a negro style of painting" in Senghor's words [Deliss, 1996]). Not only did Senghor support the L'Ecole through state budget allocation but also as a patron and as collector of the work made by the artists of the school.

¹¹⁹ The Poto Poto of Cameroon was established by the French Pierre Lods in the 1950s, Shona sculpture in Zimbabwe was launched by Frank McEwen in the 1950s, and the Oshogbo workshop of Nigeria was set up by the German Ulli Beier and the British Georgina Betts in the 1960s to preserve authentic traditional African native aesthetics which these expatriates saw as threatened by modernisation (Oguibe, 2004:57). South Africa also saw the establishment of arts centres such as the Polly Street Art Centre (founded in 1949 by Cecil Skotnes) and the Rorke's Drift Arts and Crafts Centre (1962). I discussed these initiatives in detail in the Chapter 1.

Ogbechie (2008; 2010b), that by neglecting contemporary practices on the continent, such neoliberal discourses continue to muzzle a whole discursive field and practical opus against neoliberal globalisation. The biopolitical practices of contemporary collectives such as that of Gugulective therefore should be highlighted as exemplifying critical artistic practices on the continent. As biopower is immaterial, biopolitical collectivism, which confronts biopower on the immaterial terrain, is thus not only homologous, but also critical of biopower (Roberts, 2004; Wright, 2004). This is not to imply that collectivism is peculiar to the post-modern era. Rather, while the collectivist practices of modernity are fundamentally object-based mono-authorial practices, contemporary collectives are immaterial and therefore invest in and value the production of subjects rather than objects.

Diverse forms of contemporary aesthetic expression exist on the continent, ranging from painting to sculpture, video, and installation. However, in the following chapters I demonstrate that while object-based mono-authorial practices get appropriated by capital relatively easily (for example through the privatisation of art objects which limits public access), biopolitical collectivism evades this appropriation and privatisation. A beautiful art object can uplift and edify, but its privatisation and deposition in collections, galleries, and museums limit its accessibility – particularly in Africa where infrastructure for public display is scarce. As we note below, even in South Africa, where such art-world infrastructure exists, accessibility to these resources is difficult for most black artists. Due to its social engagement, biopolitical collectivism, however, is not limited to art-world spaces.

In addition, there is no prime art object for economic valorisation in biopolitical art. In biopolitical production, individuals produce collectively in independent networks of communication and cooperation. The goal of this production through communication and cooperation is subjectivation. These biopolitical acts do not operate on hapless subjects passively suffering their lot, but are inspired by and collaborate with these individuals, who are already engaged in daily life struggles. The ultimate product of biopolitical production is therefore not knowledge, images, and affects, but subjectivities which exceed traditional capitalist methods of expropriation. Biopolitics activates the general intellect or living labour for the production of life. We can say, paradoxically, that the immateriality of biopolitical production enhances material existence. Nevertheless, since it involves the creation of life by life through immaterial products rather than objects, this intangibility, intractability, and immediacy pose difficulties for capital. Biopolitical production therefore contests capital on two fronts: on the one hand, since biopolitical production is independent of capitalist command,

it thwarts the precarisation of labour-power. On the other hand, the immeasurability and intangibility of biopolitical production evades capitalist expropriation and privatisation of labour, i.e. the products of labour-power (Hardt & Negri, 2009). This is due to the fact demonstrated in the preceding chapters that biopolitical products pose problems for capitalists because the traditional methods of economic measurement which work on tangible objects do not apply to these intangible products (Hardt & Negri, 2009). In Hardt and Negri's (2009:145) words, "biopolitical products ... tend to exceed all quantitative measurement and take common forms, which are easily shared and difficult to corral as private property." This immeasurability provides opportunities for autonomous production against the colonising, exploiting, and privatising tendencies of biopower. By thwarting privatisation and precarisation, biopolitical collectivism reverses dispossession and dehumanisation in the neoliberal order through artistic activities which subordinate the art object for a heuristic experience. Not only does biopolitical production evade capitalist appropriation, but it also forms autonomous subjectivities. Through its production of the living by the living, it works directly to create subjectivities. These arguments, which describe the general transformation in the economy, can also be applied to the aesthetical and ethical practices of contemporary art practice. In recognition of the fact that conditions of economic production determine social production, we see politically engaged artistic practices being modified by and also modifying economic forces.

4.12 Conclusion

To summarise, this chapter has surveyed the transformation of capitalism from the agricultural and industrial to its contemporary post-industrial stage. In the chapter I demonstrated that neoliberalism functions as the ideology driving post-industrial capitalism. It can therefore be said that biopolitical collectivism, which deals with neoliberal capitalism, is contemporary in the sense that it responds to contemporary concerns using contemporary means. While modernist artistic production deals with the materialism of industrial modernity through material artistic objects, biopolitical collectivism confronts biopower on its terrain of immaterial production. If contemporary capital now valorises and exploits life, contemporary African collectivism shifts its struggles to the biopolitical terrain. Biopolitical collectivism can thwart both the precarisation of labour-power, and also accumulation by dispossession (of both material and immaterial goods). My argument is therefore that biopolitical practices of contemporary African collectivism contest neoliberal globalisation, i.e. biopower and reverse capitalist dehumanisation. In the next chapter I offer analyses of Huit Facettes-Interaction of

Senegal and Le Groupe Amos of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as other earlier examples of biopolitical collectivism on the continent.

CHAPTER 5

INFORMALITY, PEDAGOGY, AND ACTIVISM AS BIOPOLITICS IN LE GROUPE AMOS AND HUIT FACETTES-INTERACTION

Listen to this, you that trample on the needy and try to destroy the poor of the country. You say to yourselves, “we can hardly wait for the holy days to be over so that we can sell our corn. When will the Sabbath end, so that we can start selling again? Then we can overcharge, use false measures, and tamper with the scales to cheat our customers. We can sell worthless wheat at a high price. We’ll find a poor person who can’t pay his debts, not even the price of a pair of sandals, and we’ll buy him as a slave.” – Amos (*Good News Bible*, Chapter 8, Verse 5:635)

If production possibilities are limited in African cities, then existent materials of all kinds are to be appropriated – sometimes through theft and looting; sometimes through the “heretical” uses made of infrastructures, languages, objects, and spaces; sometimes through social practices that ensure that available materials pass through many hands – AbdouMaliq Simone (2004:214)

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines – drawing from existing research – two of the earliest biopolitical collectives that have contested neoliberal capitalist globalisation on the continent. Through these collectives I also seek to shed light on anti-capitalist art in different parts of the continent. I focus on how the collectives Huit Facettes-Interaction of Senegal and Le Groupe Amos of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have employed an informal, activist, and pedagogical collectivist practice in their contestation of neoliberal capitalism. For instance, I show how Huit Facettes hacked into the bureaucracy of humanitarian organisations not only to sustain its socially engaged art but also to subvert the culture of these organisations; and how Le Groupe Amos incorporates the languages and economic practices of “the weak” in its art of resistance. I argue that through training workshops that foster communication and dialogue, and also through pedagogic practices that feature video documentaries, radio broadcasts, posters, paintings, and poems, Huit Facettes and Le Groupe Amos engage in a subject-centred

aesthetics geared towards the redemption of postcolonial subjects under crisis. The collectives adopt what I would call an aesthetics of resistance in which a variety of survival strategies such as improvisation, inventiveness, and communal self-help are employed by the marginalised populations against poverty and dehumanisation in contexts where supportive structures have purportedly been wrecked by the globalised free market economy. Inspired by local survival strategies to overcome economic hardships, an aesthetics of resistance involves the empowerment of subjects such as the illiterate and those living in rural areas, particularly women, who are left out of official development policy (N’Landu, 2004).¹²⁰ Informality, cross-disciplinarity, grassroots activism, pedagogy, nomadism, and affects are some of the tools of this aesthetics of resistance; an aesthetics rooted in concrete variegated postcolonial lived experience. However, as will be shown below, while an aesthetics of making-do through acts of borrowing, sharing, reuse, assemblage, and *récupération* – of techniques more so than materials – form the core of Huit Facettes and Le Groupe Amos, the collectives seek to contest rather than to affirm the status quo.

5.2 Le Groupe Amos

Le Groupe Amos was founded in 1989 in Kinshasa in the DRC (then Zaire). The core members of the group include Jos Das, José Mpundu, Thierry N’Landu, and Flory Kayembe Shamba. Le Groupe Amos adopted the name of the biblical prophet Amos, who fought for social justice. Their main focus is on finding creative solutions to the economic and socio-political problems that have rocked the country since the 1970s. The group “emerged out of the political and economic crisis of the last decade of Mobutu’s corrupt, dictatorial misrule as Congolese civil society began a process of realignment” (Enwezor, 2007:236). Thus, Le Groupe Amos is part of the social and political movement that fought for democracy in Zaire in the early 1990s. It emerged at the time of cataclysmic geopolitical shifts in Africa in the aftermath of the Cold War in 1989 (Seddon & Zeilig, 2005). With the fall of Soviet socialism, long-standing

¹²⁰ Within the crisis of the postcolonial state induced by globalisation, which broke down the existing formal economy and thereby eroded structures of social support, those excluded or marginalised in the world market participate in informal economies that involve peddling, hustling, experimentation, improvisation, adaptation, recycling, and making-do with the available meagre resources. Simone (2004:24) suggested that the informal sector involves “heterogeneous activities, including, for example, street hawking, the petty production of products such as cooking utensils, and furniture repair. It also includes a broad group of services such as letter typing, transport, urban agriculture, and even large-scale production and trade that falls outside of conventional organisation and regulation of firms.” Lack of employment, healthcare, education, and security leads people to find alternative methods of production and survival. This does not mean that the formal economy completely disappears, but that it is reshaped by the informal economy with which it coexists and is interlinked (Roitman, 1990).

dictatorships such as Mobutu's in Zaire or Banda's in Malawi, which had been supported by capitalism as a Cold War strategy, fell out of the grace of their Western backers. The long dictatorships crumbled, ushering in a new era of "democracy".

Le Groupe Amos, which was formed in this whirlwind of global political transformation that swept the continent and spurred numerous revolutions, emerged as part of the internal protest movements that sprung up during that time (Renton *et al.*, 2007). But its character was also shaped by the particular Congolese social and cultural conditions of the time. Mobutu's controversial nationalist cultural programme of *authenticité* or *Mobutisme*, which sought to reverse the effects of colonisation by promoting an "authentic" Congolese culture rooted in traditional African values, but which the authoritarian leader co-opted to bolster his own political image (particularly through his employment of the flourishing Congolese music to promote his image), cannot be said to have had a direct influence on later cultural movements such as Le Groupe Amos (Malaquais, 2012).¹²¹ Nevertheless, the group's hybrid aesthetic character seems to have been forged as a form of resistance in the wake of an era of authoritarian cultural imposition in a postcolonial society shaped by Western, Latin American, and indigenous African influences. For example, the DRC has a long tradition of art workshops that can be traced back to the colonial period. The group's workshop aesthetics has a precedent in the Atelier du Hangar (Hangar Workshop) initiated by Pierre Romain-Desfosses in Elizabethville (now Lubumbashi) in colonial Zaire in 1946. However, Le Groupe Amos does not share the foreign paternalistic origins and the object-centred and visually oriented approach of the Hangar Workshop (see Chapter 1). The socially engaged art of the group is informed by Catholicism, Latin American liberation theology and pedagogy, and Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Junior's ethics of civil disobedience and non-violent action.¹²² In addition, the group is also shaped by the culture of activism and resistance predominant in contemporary

¹²¹ Mobutu ruled the Democratic Republic of Congo, then known as Zaire, from 1965 until 1997, when he was ousted by Laurent Kabila.

¹²² In the midst of the struggles against Mobutu's waning but increasingly brutal dictatorship, José Mpundu described one of the earliest meetings by the group as follows: "During a second meeting, held on 4 December 1989 at Saint Joseph, we had the opportunity to listen to the experiences of the struggle for justice in other parts of the world. Sister Pétronille shared with us what she had seen and lived through in Latin America, and the lessons that she had drawn from this experience ... We gained another image of the church: a church which is united with humanity in its struggle ... and one that raises the consciousness of the people. Sister Marie told us about her experiences in Cameroon and the Commission for Justice and Peace, which was composed of laymen and the religious community. This commission denounced injustices and sought to construct a new, just order in society." (in Renton *et al.*, 2007:160).

Congolese society. It has also been influenced by other international collectives fighting for the rights of the marginalised and the underprivileged. As N'Landu (2004:644) wrote,

The work of the Groupe Amos aims at providing artistic tools to people at the grassroots level, in order to sustain the necessity of having their knowledge transferred to others. Strongly influenced by Latin American Liberation Theology, and the Argentine Avant-garde group Tucumán Arde, active in the 1960s, Groupe Amos promulgates an African conception of art that acknowledges an equilibrium between art for art's sake and the utilitarian arts.

It needs pointing out that the masculine-biased composition of the group has negative implications for a socially engaged collective geared to the multitudes. However, Le Groupe Amos has collaborated with women in projects dealing with gender issues and other women's concerns. The church, academia, civil society, and art networks intermesh and converge in the biopolitics of Le Groupe Amos, which contests capitalism and seeks to create new subjectivities. In Chapters 2 and 3 I demonstrated how contemporary capitalism is biopower, i.e. it penetrates and colonises life. Le Groupe Amos, as a socially engaged art collective with the aim to transform subjectivities, counters capitalist colonisation and exploitation of life on the biopolitical terrain through a networked, multidisciplinary, and subject-centred aesthetic practice. Due to its heterogeneous, multidisciplinary, and activist character, Le Groupe Amos is a precursor to the numerous collectives that emerged in Congo in the 2000s. This generation includes groups such as Yebela, Librisme Synergie, Eza Possibles, Studios Kabako, Solidarité des Artistes pour le Développement Intégral (SADI), and Mowoso. It is mainly composed of young graduates from the Academie des Beaux-Arts, Kinshasa, some of whom work with photography, video, sound, computers, performance, and installation to respond to the current social situation in the neighbourhoods of Kinshasa (Pinther, Förster & Hanussek, 2012; Magnin, 2015).

Particularly, Le Groupe Amos can be compared to its contemporary, the Congolese multidisciplinary collective called Ghetto Kota Kola ("Ghetto enter now" in Lingala), which originated in the Ngbaka neighbourhood of Kinshasa in 1994 and which operated for ten years before disbanding in 2004. Ghetto Kota Kola was founded by multimedia artist Bebson Elemba (a.k.a. Bebson de la Rue) and his brother, musician and filmmaker Dicoco Boketshu, who later founded the Mowoso collective. As a grassroots experimental undertaking located in a family compound at the heart of Kinshasa's toughest neighbourhood (Ngbaka is one of the poorest

neighbourhoods in Kinshasa, home to refugees, the homeless, prostitutes, gangs, and drug dealers), Ghetto Kota Kola emerged out of a confrontation between local and Western cultures such as hiphop (Sparck, 2016).

Le Groupe Amos shares the multidisciplinary activism of Ghetto Kota Kola. The group has engaged in educational projects in collaboration with various grassroots Congolese groups, particularly women, in the form of video documentaries, plays, and radio broadcasts, which have mostly been produced in Lingala. For example, Le Groupe Amos focused on the plight of women with short video documentaries such as “The two faces of the Congo” (1997), “The stubborn hope of a people” (1997), “Woman with a thousand arms” (1997), “In the name of my faith” (1997), and “And your violence made me your woman” (1997).

In the essay “The production of social space as artwork: Protocols of community in the work of Le Groupe Amos and Huit Facettes,” Enwezor (2007) recognised four principles which shaped the work of Le Groupe Amos and that foreground its activist character; namely the prioritisation of vernacular languages, the critique of institutions of power, the usage of media technologies of communication, and the role of intellectuals in collaboration with the multitudes. Below, I refer to these principles in my discussion of various projects by the group to highlight the strategies through which the group effects a socially engaged and subject-centred life-forming art practice. In addition, I highlight pedagogy as a core element in the biopolitical aesthetics of the group. The Hardt and Negrian political concept of multitude, which I discussed in detail in Chapter 2, is important because it emphasises the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the social group which contrasts with the concepts of people or the masses, which suppresses difference and places emphasis on unity and sameness. According to Hardt and Negri (2004:99), “the multitude is composed of a set of singularities – and by singularities here we mean a social subject whose difference cannot be reduced to sameness, a difference that remains different”.

5.2.1 *And your violence made me a woman*

In its focus on the empowerment of women, Le Groupe Amos launched a critique of Congolese laws, customs, and traditions that oppress women and keep them in marginal positions in a number of videos and documentaries (Enwezor, 2007). According to N’Landu (2002b), “‘Your violence made me a woman’ is a video in Lingala, a vernacular language from Kinshasa, which celebrates the power of Congolese women who struggle for rights in a context where traditions,

customs, religion, and even existing laws do not facilitate equality.” Violence against women is also the topic of a cycle of paintings and poems *such as ‘Stations of the cross of the Congolese woman*, which is presented as a tour that the viewer can follow. One of Le Groupe Amos’ original recorded theatre projects invited housekeepers to be actors in their limited leisure time. This allowed women to record didactic materials for sessions that they organised, and encouraged them to talk candidly about taboo subjects such as sexuality and violence (N’Landu in Fietzek, 2002). N’Landu (2002a:192) lamented the violence in Kinshasa:

Violence, injustice, extortion, the systematic abuse of human rights, the extra-legal actions of police and private guards are entrenched features of life in Kinshasa. Military violence is difficult to contain in this urban setting, where weapons and military experts come from different countries and for various interests. In this world dominated by impunity, army and police violence, and abusive tribunals, hope for a better future becomes increasingly dim.

In order to reach out to the ordinary Congolese, the work of the group takes a didactic format, and (as mentioned earlier) is produced in Lingala, the language of everyday discourse. Since language can be a tool for empowerment as well as disempowerment, as a form of violent silencing, it figures as a very significant tool for political action by Le Groupe Amos. It is in awareness of the criticality of vernacular that Enwezor noted (2007:241):

... with a large segment of the population being illiterate, Le Groupe Amos is aware that for its work to have a direct consequence within the field into which it intervenes, it would need to be conscious of the language of its discourse. In this case their work maintains a critical awareness of the social and class divisions perpetuated through the mastery of the colonial language. Its tactic is not to disavow French, which is the language of official discourse, but rather to empower the vernacular languages (e.g. Lingala, Swahili) as a tool of popular discourse.

Wa Thiong’o (1986) insisted on the use of vernacular languages in cultural production as a tool of decolonisation and resistance against Western imperialism. However, a complete disavow of foreign languages would be regressive and disadvantageous in the hybrid context of the post-colony. Therefore, while Le Groupe Amos seeks empowerment through vernacularisation of aesthetic production, it also recognises the significance of a foreign language such as French, a language that has been Africanised and is spoken by millions in the postcolonial DRC.

That is why French remains as a language of didactic communication (Enwezor, 2007). Thus, through the democratisation of language through direct communication in the languages of its general audience, Le Groupe Amos challenges those who hold monopoly over discursive authority, such as the intellectuals and politicians, and empowers the voiceless, such as women and the poor. This people-centred approach exemplified in the democratisation of language defines the biopolitics of the collective. The vernacular becomes a tool for empowerment in subject-building projects.

5.2.2 The activist intellectual and resistance

The cross-disciplinary practices of Le Groupe Amos see the group oscillating between art and activism in fields far removed from art world institutions. For instance, the group networks with humanitarian organisations such as the Congolese Association of Moralists, the International Human Rights Law Group, the Congolese Network for Action on Small Arms (RECAAL), and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), which form part of the democratic movement for social change in Congo. This level of extradisciplinary activist networking distinguishes Le Groupe Amos from the other Kinosis art collectives mentioned above – most of whom remain within the domains of conventional understandings of art. The emasculation of the postcolonial Zairean state by instruments of neoliberal capitalism saw the proliferation of civil society and non-governmental organisations which sought to take over where the state had failed (Mbembe, 2001; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002; Renton *et al.*, 2007).¹²³ However, in a global economy where capitalism permeates the domain of life, humanitarian organisations proliferate as *dispositifs*, or arms and instruments of capitalist domination.¹²⁴ While some of these organisations are well-intentioned, in most cases their strategies and procedures tend to facilitate and perpetrate capitalist domination. Thereby, by networking with such aid organisations, Le Groupe Amos transfers its subject-forming practices from the domain of art onto the domain of life itself, thereby countering biocapitalism on its own terrain of production and accumulation. For instance, in an address to the 2006 UN prepcom entitled “I am the voice of others”, Shamba Kayembe, a professor and member of Le Groupe Amos, raised the issues of the proliferation of small firearms due to the incessant wars in the country,

¹²³ I discuss in detail in Chapter 3 how contemporary capitalism destroys the postcolonial state through debt and other strategies.

¹²⁴ I discuss the critique of neoliberal aid in detail below in my analysis of the work of Huit Facettes.

the plight of child soldiers, maimed victims, and victims of rape. Kayembe poignantly raised the issue of the plight of victims of gun violence:

Those who carry on their skin, in their bodies and in their souls the wounds of abuse from small arms which still circulate without any control.

They are numerous.

They are of all ages.

They are members of different families.

They come from different backgrounds, urban or rural.

They belong to various social strata.

They are brothers and sisters, citizens of the world.

They are as anxious and as we who are gathered here, to see their conditions change.

In his moving words, Kayembe sought to add a voice and a human face to the anonymous victims of the war for precious minerals that has devastated the DRC. Kayembe recognised that one crucial step towards effective action is the awareness of the humanity of those in suffering. Thus, in the speech, he set out to restore this humanity in the dehumanised. In regards to the plight of demobilised maimed and traumatised child soldiers, torn from their families or orphaned, Kayembe added:

I am thinking of three young men I met in Kinshasa. One was then seventeen years, the second fourteen, and the third eleven. They were all in school, where they were taken by force by the group led by the late President Laurent Kabila and recruited in the troops.

Without any previous training, and having no knowledge of the type of weapon they were called to use, yet they are at the frontline.

What happened?

They manipulate rocket launchers without protection and without protective helmets to protect the ears.

Initially, according to them, it was fun and exciting. The sounds of explosions and the smell of powder made them feel invulnerable.

Alas, it was only a children's illusion.

Today, they are all sick and cannot count on anyone's help, their families have been decimated by the conflict.

Some have lost sight and hearing irreversibly, others suffer from mental trauma.

According to Kayembe, there was an urgent need for immediate action to assist thousands of such Congolese children and women, whose names do not even appear in the statistics of victims of violence. Kayembe's urgent calls for action mark a starting point for a biopolitical mission to redeem fractured postcolonial subjects. Kayembe's is an example of the hands-on approach that some Congolese intellectuals have taken to transform their society.

Under the changed economic and socio-political circumstances marked by fiscal austerity and the collapse of governance, the alienated intellectual who used to hold a privileged position detached from the everyday life of Congolese society, has finally recognised his marginality and has to descend from his ivory tower to join the popular struggles in what is known as the "convergence of forces" (Zeilig, 2009:64). This is not to imply that the Congolese intellectual had never been involved in political and social struggles. Mobutu's tyrannical repression of dissenting voices, particularly in academia, such as the student massacres of 1969 and 1990, had muzzled the country's intellectual elite. Some were banished and others went into exile (Nkinyangi, 1991; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002; Zeilig, 2009). Those who remained were alienated and withdrew into the ivory towers of academia. However, the transformations in the country at the dawn of the 21st century placed new challenges and demands on the academic, who had to rearticulate his precarious position in the destabilised socio-political circumstances (Nkinyangi, 1991; Zeilig, 2009).

Regarding the changed condition of the intellectual in Kinshasa, N'Landu (2002a:187-188), who is a professor of American literature at the University of Kinshasa, wrote:

Torn between his old and new worlds, this collage of personalities redefines the intellectual's identity. This is the condition necessary to achieve a healing encounter with other city dwellers. He gradually becomes a city dweller among other city dwellers, no longer obliged to adapt his identity to the divided environment like a chameleon. The intellectual is finally returning to a simpler lifestyle with less emphasis on material and academic success. He no longer considers himself a failure. He has faced the obvious: that his social climbing and diploma were nothing but a mirage. Consequently, he is willing to reject the illusion that succeeds only in widening the gap between himself and his urban identity and mode of life.

Thus the intellectual, who descends from the transcendental position of knowledge and power, identifies with the multitudes in everyday life. The intellectual's identification and solidarity

with the struggles of the multitudes stem from his or her recognition of the superiority of the multitude's resistance. This recognition of the changed state of affairs drives the intellectuals of Le Groupe Amos – exemplified in Kayembe above – who now assume what Foucault (in Gordon & Foucault, 1980) called the status of the specific intellectual inspired by the need to transform life locally.¹²⁵

The group joins the multitudes in their daily struggle against the myriad figures of oppression such as debt collectors, landlords, policemen, soldiers, bureaucrats, political parties, rebel movements, the church, and the state. Beyond, its projects also seek to emancipate the multitudes from the subjugatory grip of Euro-American neoliberal capitalist interests that, alongside corrupt local leadership, have greatly contributed to the Congolese crisis. Neoliberal capitalism in the guise of structural adjustment programmes promoted by the IMF and the World Bank has contributed significantly to the destruction of postcolonial African economies and the consequent emasculation of states –the DRC is no exception. Poverty, disease, war, and starvation that wreak havoc on the continent have been aggravated by these policies. As critics from a wide range of disciplines argue, the devastating effects of structural adjustments are not an accident but the result of a calculated plan to plunder the wealth of indebted nations (Harvey, 2005; Hall *et al.*, 2013; Bond, 2011; Moyo, 2009). It is in this light that Enwezor (2007:243) argued that recognition of the direct linkage between neoliberal policy and postcolonial crises is necessary for redemption:

Throughout the discourse of the crisis in Africa, the identification of the mendacity of forces of production with external powers has become deeply entrenched and not without foundation. These forces in the name of a number of abstract concepts connected to the greater liberal trinity of democracy, free market, and human rights are often believed to be a kind of third force that has to be fought before the sovereign African subject can emerge.

Thus, a whole body of literature connects the postcolonial urban dweller's minute acts of survival to the macro-economic policies of global neoliberal institutions. In a context defined by scarcity, the urban slum dweller finds alternative modes of survival, defined by a hand-to-

¹²⁵ According to Foucault (1980:128), the specific intellectual is in contrast to the universal intellectual, who was the transcendental figure of justice and law, “the bearer of values and significations in which all can recognise themselves.” The specific intellectual is “the person who utilises his knowledge, his competence, and his relation to truth in the field of political struggles.”

mouth existence. *Je me débrouille* or “I cope” has become the common expression on the street (Renton *et al.*, 2007). As Demissie (2007:136, 138) wrote,

The inhabitants of Kinshasa were responding to fundamental changes in their material and economic circumstances, which were set in motion by the artificial depression created by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank through structural adjustment programmes during the 1980s in tandem with the rising price of oil, soaring interest rates, falling commodity prices, as well as the disappearance of formal employment, falling wages, and collapsing revenues. IMF and World Bank policies, particularly privatization, cost recovery through charging public-service users’ fee in health and education, and slashing public subsidies for food which drove millions of urban residents into destitution.

To survive in a condition of fracture and decay, and to resist domination and oppression, the inhabitants of Kinshasa had to harness their creative potential as well as available material and immaterial resources. Again, to quote Demissie (2007:139),

In the urban landscape of Kinshasa, the inhabitants are engaged with modernity, constantly reworking, adopting, and reinventing a new urban order in a space characterised by the absence of a state and its local institutions, but also under conditions of poverty, environmental degradation, and non-existent urban services.

Subjects have to rely on a wealth of strategies and tactics, which involve experimenting, improvising, bricolage,¹²⁶ moonlighting, and making-do with what is available. N’Landu (2002a:194) listed self-managed workshops, small retail stores, food co-ops, soup kitchens, production workshops, charity institutions, small repairs, etc. as some of the activities that the Congolese engage in as part of an “economics of resistance”. As I demonstrate below, the activist aesthetics of Le Groupe Amos is shaped by some of these popular strategies and tactics.

¹²⁶ An all-encompassing term that describes these activities of the adoption of signs, symbols, gestures, affects, spaces, etc. in processes of struggle and resistance is bricolage. Bricolage involves “taking the raw materials we have to hand and putting them to alternative uses by adapting and combining objects through improvisation to create new meanings” (Procter, 2004:91).

5.2.3 Popular radio as resistance

Committed to the struggle of the multitudes, Le Groupe Amos has also produced educational documentaries, booklets, and picture books on various topics such as free and democratic elections, local history, and culture. A further means of distributing materials and information on these topics is the production and distribution of radio programmes, produced under the auspices of the Catholic radio station Radio Elikya of the Archdiocese of Kinshasa, and made both in French and the vernacular.¹²⁷ Furthermore, tapes of these radio programmes are distributed and listened to all over the country (N’Landu in Fietzek, 2002). Kinshasa has numerous community, religious, news, sports, and entertainment radio stations. On its website, Radio Station World (n.d.) lists 81 radio stations broadcasting in the entire DRC, 37 of which operate in Kinshasa. However, Le Groupe Amos’ radio programmes can best be understood within the context of the Congolese traditions of *radio-trottoir* and *radio tableau*. *Radio-trottoir* (“radio sidewalk” or “the story on the street”) is the Congolese rumour-mongering machinery that broadcasts the details of the private lives and misadventures of Kinshasa’s elite and celebrities such as musicians and politicians. Radio gossip and rumour have corrosive effects on the power of dominant personalities of the Congolese society by chipping away at their reputations (to borrow from Scott, 1985). Apropos the power of gossip and rumour in the hands of the “weak”, Mbembe (2001:158) wrote: “If, to repress the population, the autocrat uses water cannon, tear gas, and guns, then he is resisted as best possible with the help of the ‘poor person’s bomb’, rumour.” Prominent musicians and politicians are not the only victims of malicious gossip. A whole list of societal figures are subjected to its wrath. De Boeck (2002:273) commented on the power of *radio-trottoir*:

Often a weapon of the weak, it enters the scene from the margin and takes over the whole city, pumping its words like blood through the veins and arteries of this giant urban body. The motor of Kinshasa’s public life, the capillary biopower of this *radio-trottior* ... punctuates the city’s heartbeat and constitutes its public eye.

¹²⁷ It is important to mention that the church plays a significant role in Congolese politics. The Catholic Church had been a supporter and collaborator of Mobutu for most of the duration of his rule. However, the March of Hope of 1992, a massive demonstration organised by the church against Mobutu’s dictatorship and corrupt misrule, which resulted in the massacre of the Christian demonstrators, marked a turning point in this relationship and is an example of the church’s active role in Congolese oppositional politics (Ngozola-Ntalaja, 2002; Gondola, 2002). Since then the church has rendered a critical voice against the political leadership. Le Groupe Amos, which participated in the march (José Mpundu was one of the organisers of the march) was closely tied to the church.

On the other hand, *radio tableau* focuses on serious news and ongoing local and international current affairs. In *radio tableau* (“radio blackboard”), international news from radio stations such as the BBC, RFI, and Channel Africa is written out on a blackboard and debated and commented upon by portable radio owners on the street, “while the whole neighbourhood contributes batteries to keep the radio working, as a way of escaping and redirecting interpretations and representations imposed upon them from elsewhere” (De Boeck, 2002:273). These excited debates create what are locally known as *parlementaires debout* or “politicians of the street”. As a Catholic broadcaster, Radio Elikya (*La voix de l’espoir* or “The voice of hope”) can be located somewhere in between *radio-trottior* and *radio tableau*, spreading religious dogma; however, through Radio Elikya, Le Groupe Amos has sought to harness the biopolitical potential of popular radio.

As can be seen, the group employs media techniques of production and dissemination of its projects in order to reach a wider social base. Radio broadcasts and audio and video documentaries are employed in information dissemination campaigns targeted at the broader Congolese populace. Cross-disciplinary methods seem the most suitable for engaging the complexity of contemporary social problems which originate from multiple sources. Where power infiltrates life and controls bodies through diverse technologies and tactics, resistance also has to be equally sophisticated, multidimensional, and complex. This is why Le Groupe Amos adopts a heterogeneous artistic and grassroots activist approach involving workshops, pedagogy, intervention, media, and theatre. This cross-disciplinarity corresponds to what Holmes (2012) characterised as eventwork or extradisciplinarity. In eventwork, socially engaged contemporary collectives such as the Argentinian Group of Avant-Garde Artists, well known for their project *Tucumán Arde* (1968),¹²⁸ the American Critical Art Ensemble, or the Belgian Superflex, fuse participation, research, media, and politics in order to maximise the political potential of their work. Basically, in a context where power is mobilised through a

¹²⁸ Amidst the intensified authoritarian rule by a military government, which took over by coup in 1966, in 1968 a number of Argentinian artists from Rosario, Santa Fe, and Buenos Aires formed the collective Grupo de Artistas de Vanguardia (Group of Avant-Garde Artists), in conjunction with a labour movement, the Argentinian General Federation of Labour, which set out to counter government disinformation, censorship, and repression. Their main project, for which they are known, is *Tucumán Arde* (or *Tucumán Burns*), in response to the degenerating conditions in the sugar production town of Tucumán, particularly the closure of the sugar refinery, in which “they set out to create an ‘informational circuit to demonstrate the distortion that the activities in Tucumán suffer from a mass media that holds official power along with the bourgeois class.’ Gathering facts about both the situation in Tucumán and its media coverage, with the help of the labour movement, the group staged a series of events, including a press conference, the distribution of posters and fliers in union halls, cultural centres, and among students, and a large multi-media exhibition in Rosario and Buenos Aires (Osborne, 2002:38). The exhibition was closed down by police.

multiplicity of institutions, technologies, and apparatus such as the church, the media, political institutions, education, and/or culture, effective resistance has to take on a correspondingly multipronged approach to confront domination in all its different manifestations. In this vein, Le Groupe Amos is informed by the diverse forms of resistance by the so-called weak, adopts them, taking a multipronged approach that draws from art, the media, culture, politics, and religion.¹²⁹ As Scott (1985) argued, the everyday tactics of the weak are effective in their gradual yet corrosive effect on power.

5.2.4 A Liberatory Pedagogy

In Le Groupe Amos, the artist assumes the role of social educator on wide-ranging topics such as sex and reproduction, men and women's health, and HIV/Aids. "Zaire: Beyond chaos" (1996), "The two sides of the Congo" (1997), "Woman with a thousand arms" (1997), and "In the name of my faith" (1997) are some of the didactic projects that seek to uplift and empower the marginalised in order to transform Congolese society. In these various projects, art is used as an educative tool for empowerment, particularly among women, who are the most side-lined and most vulnerable in a traditionally patriarchal society. Le Groupe Amos acknowledges the influence of Freire's (1970) humanist and liberatory pedagogy, which recognises the student as an active subject of self-liberation, rather than a passive object in the learning process. In contrast to what Freire called the "banking education", in which the student is a passive receptacle of the teacher's values, ideas, and knowledge, in liberatory pedagogy the learner is an active participant who critically intervenes and seeks to transform his or her condition. In Le Groupe Amos, the intellectual, who has descended from his ivory tower, recognises the equality of intelligence between him- or herself and the multitudes. He or she is thereby a collaborator rather than a sole instigator in an education process that is collaborative, dialogical, problem-posing, and self-reflexive. As Freire (1970:80) wrote,

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow.

¹²⁹ It needs to be mentioned that the hybrid character of Congolese postcolonial society, which features Western, Latin American, Asian, and indigenous African cultures, also has a bearing on the character of the work of the collective.

Subjectification is the objective behind these practices; defined by N’Landu (2004: 641) as the “creation of neighbourliness, rationality, sensitivity, active participation, and a didactic of hope, thus creating a space and opportunities for the Congolese subject (‘I’) to be aware of and deal with problems in their struggle for equality, justice, and liberty.” As Freire (1970:84) indicated:

Problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming – as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality ... in this incompleteness and this awareness lie the very roots of education as an exclusive human manifestation.

By infusing its activist aesthetic programme with a critical, humanist pedagogy, Le Groupe Amos engages in a subject-centred and life-forming artistic mission which simultaneously contests capitalism through a critique of its institutions of domination and exploitation.

Thus, in its biopolitical projects, Le Groupe Amos joins the ranks of the downtrodden of the Congolese society to say,

No, to an economy that reduces men and women to mere hands. No, to a civil war the victims of which are the innocent Congolese children. No, to monetary reforms that aim at filling the pockets of those who initiate them. No, to political solutions imposed from the outside and that refuse to consider the needs and will of those people who have suffered ... No, to Western partners whose actions reveal their permanent selfish interests while promising us a bright new future (N’Landu, 2004:638).

These shouts of protest are inspired by the biblical prophet Amos’ indictment of the rich in their bid to subjugate and exploit. According to Amos (Chapter 8, Verse 5:635), through their exploitative schemes the rich say, “We’ll find a poor person who can’t pay his debts, not even the price of a pair of sandals, and we’ll buy him as a slave.” For Le Groupe Amos, these acts foretell the neoliberal debt trap that enslaves Africans under neocolonisation.¹³⁰ In the DRC,

¹³⁰ It needs pointing out that the modern Congolese economic crisis is not a recent phenomenon wholly attributable to recent IMF and World Bank policies. The crisis dates back to the 1970s and originated in the former president Mobutu Sese Seko’s style of political and economic rule in which hurried yet calculated radical programmes of nationalisation and the “Zairianisation” of 1973 were used to mask a massive plunder of foreign businesses and the country’s abundant wealth to be shared between Mobutu’s cronies and his Western allies. Mobutu’s long-time autocratic kleptocracy was toppled by Laurent-Désiré Kabila’s forces in 1997. However, the pillage, exacerbated by a protracted civil war, has continued and the deterioration of Congolese society has worsened since then (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002; Gondola, 2002; Renton *et al.*, 2007).

for instance, imposed neoliberal policies on the indebted country such as the deregulation of the national economy and the liberalisation of its markets have led to the deprivation of the state's power and territorial control, which led to its degradation as a "failed state". The country's wealth has been transferred from the hands of the poor into the hands of the rich. A large part of the country's economic structure has generally become informal and underground, leaving vast areas of the country at the liberty of unscrupulous national and international profiteering elements, lawlessness, banditry, and strife (Mbembe, 2001). This incapacitation of the state in the DRC and the devastation of the country's social structure only facilitates neoliberal plunder of the country's economy. Under these dire circumstances, scarcity, corruption, extortion, confiscation, violence, and migration have been the order of the day. The quotation that prefaces this chapter by the prophet succinctly captures the theology of emancipation that commits the projects of Le Groupe Amos to a biopolitics of the downtrodden multitudes under neoliberalism. Below I turn to Huit Facettes-Interaction, a collective that has focused its art on the transformation of the lives of the rural poor of Senegal.

5.3 Huit Facettes-Interaction

Huit Facettes-Interaction (eight faces-interaction) is a Senegalese collective of painters and sculptors that was formed in 1994. The members of the collective include Abdoulaye Ndoye, Mustapha Dime, El Hadji Sy, Fode Camara, Serigne Mbaye Camara, Cheikh Niass, Kane-Sy and Jean-Marie Bruce. In 1994, with the initiative of a Belgian NGO, Vredeseilanden, the Flemish arts centre in Turnhout organised a show comprising the work of eight established Senegalese artists regarded as representing Dakar art at the time. Most of the artists in this group had exhibited extensively in major exhibitions in Senegal and abroad, such as in Dakar and Venice Biennales. The show, which toured Belgium and the United Kingdom, was organised as part of an initiative by Vredeseilanden to build cultural exchange between Senegal and Belgium. When the artists returned from this exhibition, they decided to continue working together to collaborate as a group and chose Huit Facettes as their name (Komissar, 2000). As a complex, postcolonial city, Dakar is composed of African, Western, and Muslim cultural traditions. The city is populated by eight different indigenous African ethnicities, with Wolof, which is the national language of Senegal, being the largest. Also inhabiting the city are communities of Lebanese, Mauritians, and French. This postcolonial cosmopolitan complexity is reflected in the composition of Huit Facettes as an art group. The collective does not represent a distinct artistic movement or style, since the eight members, who had developed

their professional careers working individually as painters and sculptors, had been brought together from a diverse community of artists.¹³¹ What unified them when they decided to form a collective, however, was the idea of a cultural practice motivated by social interaction, collaboration, and exchange that involved and benefited the marginalised and powerless. Like Le Groupe Amos, the absence of women in the group can be a stumbling block in dealing with gender issues. However, Huit Facettes also collaborated with women in projects that dealt with their concerns. The name Huit Facettes seeks to emphasise the dynamic interaction of the diverse personalities in the group. As Komissar (2000) noted, “The vision of Huit Facettes, then, is to use their specific experience and knowledge as artists working and living in a pluralistic city like Dakar to cultivate dialogues among diverse communities by organising exhibitions, workshops, and group performances.” In this light, Huit Facettes can be compared to the earlier Senegalese collective Laboratoire Agit-Art, which was founded in 1974 and which was composed of painters, multimedia artists, sculptors, politicians, philosophers, and writers. Both groups adopted a collectivist and activist ethos to deal with their contemporary cultural and political challenges. However, while Laboratoire was highly self-reflexive and conceptualist in an aesthetic outlook that was critically entangled in the legacy of Senghor’s Negritudist cultural project, Huit Facettes sought to venture beyond both the Negritudist and conceptualist traditions to engage in an aesthetic that directly responded to the political condition of the postcolonial subject. As Harney (2004:106) wrote, the main goal of Laboratoire Agit-Art

was to shake up or agitate the existing institutional framework, to question the tenets of Negritude, and to encourage artists to adopt a new approach toward their work. Its agenda, then, was based on a series of critiques of Negritude and its institutionalisation which mirrored those of Wole Soyinka, Ousmane Sembene, Stanislaus Adotevi, and others in the literary world whom Bennetta Jules-Rosette has labelled anti-Negritudinists.

¹³¹ Describing the complex makeup of Huit Facettes as a group, Komissar (2000) wrote that “The group ... reflects the religious and cultural complexity of the city [of Dakar] in the way that non [*sic*] of the six artists have the same ethnic background and while the majority are Muslims, one member is Catholic. All members speak French and Wolof fluently (and also have some knowledge of English and/or other national languages) and often alternate between the two languages in one and the same occasion ... And although the members highly evaluate the creative dynamique [*sic*] the cultural disorders [*sic*] create within the group, when they present themselves as artists they usually point to their urban backgrounds or how they consider themselves formed by a combination of Western, Muslim, and African cultural traditions rather than pointing to their ethnic specificities. Or they make it clear how this *multiplicity of identities* [author’s italics] makes it possible for them to switch or use different identities in creative ways whenever this is most advantageous or needed.”

Thus, while Laboratoire was deeply engaged in a critique of the Negritude-saturated Dakarois art world of the 1970s, which they were trying to subvert through a deeply esoteric idiom of conceptually driven work exemplified by improvisational performances and multimedia installations of recycled materials in the courtyard of group's leader Issa Samb (see Figure 9),¹³² Huit Facettes sought a more socially engaged aesthetics that could resonate with non-art audiences – particularly in the rural areas.



Figure 9: Laboratoire Agit-Art Installation at Issa Samb's Courtyard, Dakar

Despite these differences, however, it is important to regard Huit Facettes as building upon rather than completely negating the aesthetic legacy of Laboratoire since both collectives sought to redeem art from exclusivist Senegalese cultural institutions and reconnect it to the

¹³² Upon visiting them in the 1990s, Deliss (2014) described the avant-gardist work of Laboratoire thus: “The dilapidated objects lying around the courtyard in which we first met also fascinated me. Their seemingly careless presentation not only contravened any notion of museological conservation but also suggested a defiance of the market – of being purchased as single artworks or recouped as part of an ethnographic collection. Hanging from strings or pinned to crumbling walls and covered with layers of sand, dirt, and dead leaves, these heteroclitic artefacts were in effect part of a wider web of interdisciplinary enquiry connected to Laboratoire Agit-Art. They weren't the production of just one person, but the result of a dialogue between many, and had been used to punctuate a specific moment in collective and performative time.”

praxis of life in productions conceived through collaboration and exchange.¹³³ Also, as Laboratoire was the first to introduce the concept of the artistic workshop (*atelier*) in Senegal, it is a direct predecessor of Huit Facettes (Harney, 2004).

The Village des Arts can be regarded as another important precursor to Huit Facettes. The Villages des Arts was an arts community which was initiated by the painter and member of Laboratoire, El Hadji Moussa Babacar Sy (known as El Sy) in 1977 when he decided to squat in an abandoned military camp and turn it into an arts centre. Sy was soon to be followed by other artists, including painters, sculptors, poets, cinematographers, and actors, most of whom brought their families with them. Included in this village, which reached over 80 participants, were some of the members of Laboratoire Agit-Art. As Harney (2004:142) wrote,

The atmosphere was one of exchange and community involvement. The ‘villagers’ (*villageois*) were concerned not only with obtaining a degree of artistic freedom vis-à-vis the official structures but also with creating an arena for experimentations and a means through which to reach a larger audience through their work.

The Village was suffused by a spirit of experimentation with different ideas and media, interpersonal exchanges, and community involvement. El Sy’s gallery called Tenq (“articulation” in Wolof), which he opened in 1980, was used as an exhibition space by the Village. The Village thrived as an arts centre until it started to run into friction with President Abdou Diouf, Senghor’s handpicked successor in 1980. As a technocrat, Diouf shifted governmental priority from culture to the economy. In addition, his government was increasingly intolerant, particularly towards the arts and culture. The Village was finally destroyed by Diouf’s troops in 1983 (Harney, 2004). Deliss (2014) wrote that

until it was ambushed by the military in 1983, the Village des Arts, with its project space Tenq, run by El Sy and Ali Traore, provided the main site of experimental development for around forty artists from different disciplines, including the Laboratoire Agit-Art, the Nouveau Toucan theatre troupe, musician Baaba Maal, and the N’Guelewar Jazz Band de Banjul.

¹³³ In his critique of Negritudism, Issa Samb is quoted as saying that in the heydays of Negritude “people had confused the solitary nature of creation with the need for solitude of the creator ... without collaboration and artistic exchange, the arts could not flourish” (in Harney, 2004:107).

Another movement that arguably influenced Huit Facettes is Set Setal, which emerged in response to state dysfunction and urban decay in Senegal between 1988 and 1989. Set Setal (Wolof meaning “be clean/make clean”) was a youth movement that set out on a campaign to clean the filthy streets and neighbourhoods of Dakar. Due to Structural Adjustment Programmes, President Diouf’s government had disengaged from its social programmes such as health, education, and sanitation and relegated them to ill-funded, ill-equipped, and corrupt local authorities (Diouf, 1996; Harney, 2004). Under these conditions of social decay, influential personalities such as Youssou N’Dour encouraged their countrymen and -women to clean up the physical, social, political, and economic mess.¹³⁴ Inspired by the impatient spirit of *Sopi* (Wolof for “change”), which was growing under Diouf’s long-standing autocratic regime that refused to relinquish power, the disaffected youth heeded this call to political action.¹³⁵ When not being co-opted as party cadres, thugs, hooligans, or mercenaries by politicians, the youth on the continent have traditionally been excluded from politics and development despite the fact that they constitute the majority of the African population (Diouf, 2003, 2005; Harrison, 2001; Simone, 2004). Due to this marginalisation, the youth has tended occasionally to intervene in the public sphere and to take matters into their own hands and express their political will through city clean-ups, demonstrations, strikes, and even violence. Set Setal is an example of such youth self-mobilisation to reclaim and clean the city of Dakar of its physical and moral filth (Diouf, 1996:243).¹³⁶ In their sanitary efforts “to stamp out the filthiness of Dakar, a result of government neglect, the youth took to their streets to sweep up, burn trash, and gather funds to rebuild and repaint decrepit structures” (Harney, 2004:205). The movement funded their symbolic gestures through music festivals, dance parties, demonstrations, and even direct solicitation from motorists.

One main feature of the Set Setal clean-up campaign was murals which adorned walls and buildings of Dakar *quartiers* (neighbourhoods), which featured local and international historical figures, political heroes, traditional and religious leaders, popular musicians,

¹³⁴ In his song “Set”, N’Dour sings, “Cleanliness in your spirit; cleanliness in your acts. Thus, I urge you, cleanliness, oh, cleanliness. Cleanliness in your soul, cleanliness in your body, cleanliness in your speech, cleanliness among your friends” (cited by Harney, 2004:206).

¹³⁵ *Sopi* took the form of urban riots in February 1988 in which disgruntled high school and university students and other unemployed youths took to the streets to contest the elections of that year. The students went on a rampage, destroying symbols of the state such as buildings, buses, and cars. The state responded with the deployment of heavily armed police throughout Dakar (Diouf, 1996).

¹³⁶ Unlike its antecedents, the voluntary clean-up campaigns, called *set weec* (Wolof term celebrating human potential and capacity) or *Augias* (from the Augean stables of Herculean legend), which originated in the nationalist movement and which were organised by politicians for their own political gains, Set Setal was an independent community initiative (Diouf, 1996).

sportsmen, etc. Such inspirational figures drawn from diverse realms of social life included Lat-Dior, the Wolof warrior who resisted French colonisation, Cheikh Anta Diop, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Mao Zedong, Lenin, Bob Marley, Jimi Hendrix, and Muhammad Ali. By adorning neighbourhood walls with portraits of their heroes drawn from a diverse pantheon of local and international personalities, the youth sought to reclaim and rewrite their histories (Diouf, 1996). Other murals addressed topical social issues, carrying focused messages such as “Stop the deforestation” or “Speak of AIDS Aids in the school” (Harney, 2004). Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu (2009:31) wrote that

Set Setal was an act of refusal of the ennui that had cloaked the city and the nation, an assertion of both the agency of disenfranchised youths and the value of communal and popular artistic interventions in contemporary Senegalese social practice and political discourse.

Notable in Set Setal’s aesthetics is its post-modern combination of high and low culture, its eclectic iconography, and its communal and socially engaged praxis (Harney, 2004). Thus, by situating its practice in the neighbourhoods of the city, the movement, which was composed mainly of non-art groups of high school and university youths and other unemployed people, managed to relocate art from its cloistered institutions into the public realm, where they employed its various forms of expression for public intervention, as political voice, and also as resistance.¹³⁷

A golden thread connects the activist aesthetics of Set Setal and Huit Facettes. As will be shown below, interaction, dialogue, and exchange for individual and social transformation form the main objective of Huit Facettes, which it shared with Village des Arts and Set Setal more than with the largely autonomous and avant-gardist Laboratoire.¹³⁸ Subject formation drives the projects of the group in a postcolonial context where economic and political crises have rendered systems and institutions dysfunctional and societies and individuals precarious.

¹³⁷ The Senegalese historian Mamadou Diouf (1996:247) observed that “Set Setal presents itself as an indigenous appropriation of the city. The human investment, the rehabilitation of neighbourhoods, and the murals express a political challenge by the youth and their demand that the political class rethink its actions and its modes of intervention. Through a radical refutation of the modes of political framing, the young have enunciated a new sociability, contradictory to the norms that have presided over the postcolonial compromise.”

¹³⁸ Comparing Laboratoire with the more socially engaged practices of Huit Facettes and the Village des Arts / Tenq, Deliss (2014) notes: “In the 1990s, Tenq and Huit Facettes provided what many politicians were unable to at the time: they set up links between art and developmental politics, attempted to break down hierarchies within art practice, initiated space and structure for new work to be made and relayed artistic positions across the African continent through the networking effects of international workshops. In contrast ... the Laboratoire Agit-Art was less evident as a public collective; it practically cultivated autonomy from formalised cultural or social initiatives.”

The group achieves these ends by organising projects that cross the boundary between art and development, workshops and exhibitions, the international art world and the local populations – particularly in the rural areas. Skills in various crafts such as batik, tie and dye, glass painting, ceramics, and pyro-engraving are taught in these social exchanges. Below, I examine the group's major projects at Hamdallaye in 1996, in Joal-Fadiouth in 1998, and The Art-Bridge workshop in Mbour in 1999.

5.3.1 The workshops of Hamdallaye

While in Belgium, the group learned that Vredeseilanden, which was involved in sustainable agricultural projects in 14 countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Belgium, was also engaged in projects in Senegal. They arranged to visit Hamdallaye Samba Mbaye, a rural village south of Senegal in the Kolda region near the border of Gambia, where the NGO was active (see Figure 10). For Huit Facettes this was necessary in order to find out if they could initiate NGO projects themselves (Komissar, 2003).

The workshops of Hamdallaye were initiated in collaboration with Vredeseilanden in 1996 when the group learned that, besides clean water and a clinic, the villagers expressed a need for cultural infrastructure (Komissar, 2003). The Fulani are the major tribe of the region, with the Wolof and Madinka in the minority. It was the minority groups who requested assistance to hold cultural festivals to express and assert themselves culturally in the region. This proposal for cultural festivals fitted well with the aims of Vredeseilanden, whose object was “to engender projects in which African and foreign partners can take part on equal terms” (Komissar, 2003). In addition, Huit Facettes' wish to hold workshops in Hamdallaye augured well with the idea of cultural festivals proposed by the villagers, although the people were sceptical of the artists' intentions at first. When the villagers later understood the artists' intentions, they welcomed them with a proverb which says that “when someone acknowledges your existence by coming to you, eat and drink with you, that is, to live with you, this someone is giving you a priceless gift” (Komissar, 2003).

Artists and filmmakers from Flanders, Belgium, Rwanda, Dakar, and southern Senegal were invited to take part in the workshop, which lasted two weeks. Together they developed site-specific and multidisciplinary projects, which were intended to foster dialogue among the

visitors from urban Senegal and beyond and the inhabitants of the region¹³⁹ A cultural centre was built in the village which acted as the locus of the main activities of the workshop. Once the members of Huit Facettes arrived in Hamdallaye, they could not help but notice the poverty and harsh living conditions. In response to this situation, they decided to include activities that could help improve the livelihoods of the villagers.

As in most rural parts of the continent, the people of Hamdallaye depend on subsistence agriculture. A series of workshops were therefore devoted to glass painting, fabric dying, sculpture, soap-making, and animation. The skills earned from these different workshops could supplement the people's agricultural earnings, which were insufficient. The members of Huit Facettes found out that there was a painter in Hamdallaye called Maat Mbaye. Mbaye was a cattle herder who belonged to the lowest stratum of society and who used to spend his private time painting murals inside his hut using earth pigments. Dazzled by Mbaye's beautiful compositions, which they found to equal contemporary paintings made on the Dakar art scene, Huit Facettes decided to use the designs and motifs in other compositions done collaboratively at the workshop.

The cultural centre as well as other huts in the village were decorated in Mbaye's design, which raised the cattle herder's status among his people. Therefore, due to the workshop, Mbaye, who had been despised and looked down upon by the villagers, transformed from being the village fool to a respected creative person.

¹³⁹ Enwezor (2007:245) described the Hamdallaye project as follows: "Each year since 1996, the project with the villagers in Hamdallaye begins with a series of public discussions that then move into the phase of workshops. The workshops are designed to transform basic skills into professional skills – for example, in underglass painting, ceramics, batik dyeing process, carving, weaving, embroidery. Depending of the level of work needed to accomplish the training at hand, the workshops are normally conducted over a period of one to two weeks. The concentration on specific kinds of skills is arrived at based on their utility and creativity, but also on dialogue with members of the community."



Figure 10: Huit Facettes-Interaction, Workshop with Hamdallaye Villagers, 1996

Atelier Graphoui, a Belgian animation group, made some animated films in collaboration with the women and children of the village which addressed issues of inter-ethnic conflict. As Aline Moens (1998), a member of Atelier Graphoui wrote:

Senegal has a long history of different ethnic groups living together. Kinship between ethnic groups, and an open way of speaking about it are also customary. In a meeting with the two Rwandese in the village, the young people expressed this point of view from their experience and the vision of life that they would draw from that. And thus the subject matter for the animated film they made was chosen.

The film, entitled “Message to our Rwandan Brothers” (1996), was based on a Wolof saying, “There is no misunderstanding, there is only a lack of working together.” The film was conceived in response to the genocide that had happened earlier in the countries of Rwanda and Burundi. The film was made using stop-motion object animation. The characters, in the form of chairs, quarrel but end up resolving their issues around a table. The chairs and table were made by the villagers using natural materials such as earth and straw (Moens, 1998). “Message to our Rwandan Brothers” was accompanied by a chant: “Friends from Rwanda, if I

could get a ticket to go visit you and comfort your troubles, I would come right away ...” Also, the film featured a dialogue between a young villager and a Rwandan musician:

*We here, in our studio, we have chosen a proverb
To send to the Rwandan people, so that peace may return.
We made up this proverb,
Which we count on expressing through chairs.
These chairs represent the people.
At first there is misunderstanding.
For us, there isn't misunderstanding,
Only a lack of cooperation.
I'm taking the example of the Rwandan:
If among them they don't avoid words,
There will never be war.*

*As far as the Rwandans
Who are now in Senegal
I can tell you my point of view:
It's just the cooperation,
It's good, and we've tried it too.
Once you're together
Around the same table
There's what is said,
But there's really what is thought.
When someone doesn't tell the truth,
When someone doesn't really say what he thinks,
There the cooperation fails.
And there, a terrible war begins again,
Despite the negotiations.
And that's what happened to the Rwandans.*

The younger villager:
*What I can add in reference to the word
Is that if you cooperate, work together,*

*At least you have to speak the truth.
So everyone respects what you say,
And sense at the depths of himself the truth that is said.*

The dialogue encapsulates the central themes of the film, including communication, cooperation, and understanding. In particular, the empowering and transformative value of dialogue is affirmed in this animation. While its message was directed at a broader audience, particularly the Rwandans, the film offered an educative experience to the women and children of Hamdallaye (see Figure 11). The exchanges between the rural and the visiting urban, Senegal and Rwanda, and between Africa and the world, that occurred during the production of the film opened new horizons for viewing and understanding the world. This is an instance of what Meskimmon (2011:193) called a mutual recognition of difference that includes generosity and intercorporeal interdependence whereby the selflessness and openness of the participants constitute the gift of these corporeal interchanges. Commenting on the film's production process, Seydou Wane, the head of Vredeseilanden at Kolda (in Komissar, 2003) said,

Things went very quickly. The first day when we started working on the material, the women were still looking for a television set. They went towards the refrigerator to ask if it was there. A week later you could see women and children in the process of editing a film. What an extraordinary leap between just recognizing the equipment and being able to use it in order to make a film!

Other films were also produced by the women in which they filmed their shadows and drew, coloured, and filmed the frescoes frame by frame. The central theme of these films was encouragement among the hardworking women to “gather their strength up to face their daily tasks” (Moens, 1998). In this instance, one can evoke Freire's liberatory pedagogy discussed in the context of Le Groupe Amos which encourages the learner's active participation, consciousness of, and intervention in their lived experiences in order to facilitate self-liberation. According to Freire (1970:85), liberatory pedagogy stimulates a deepened consciousness of one's situation, which leads one to comprehend that situation as possible for transformation. Through filmmaking, which helps them view their circumstances in a new light, the women of Hamdallaye call upon one another to unite in strength and to take up the responsibility to emancipate themselves.

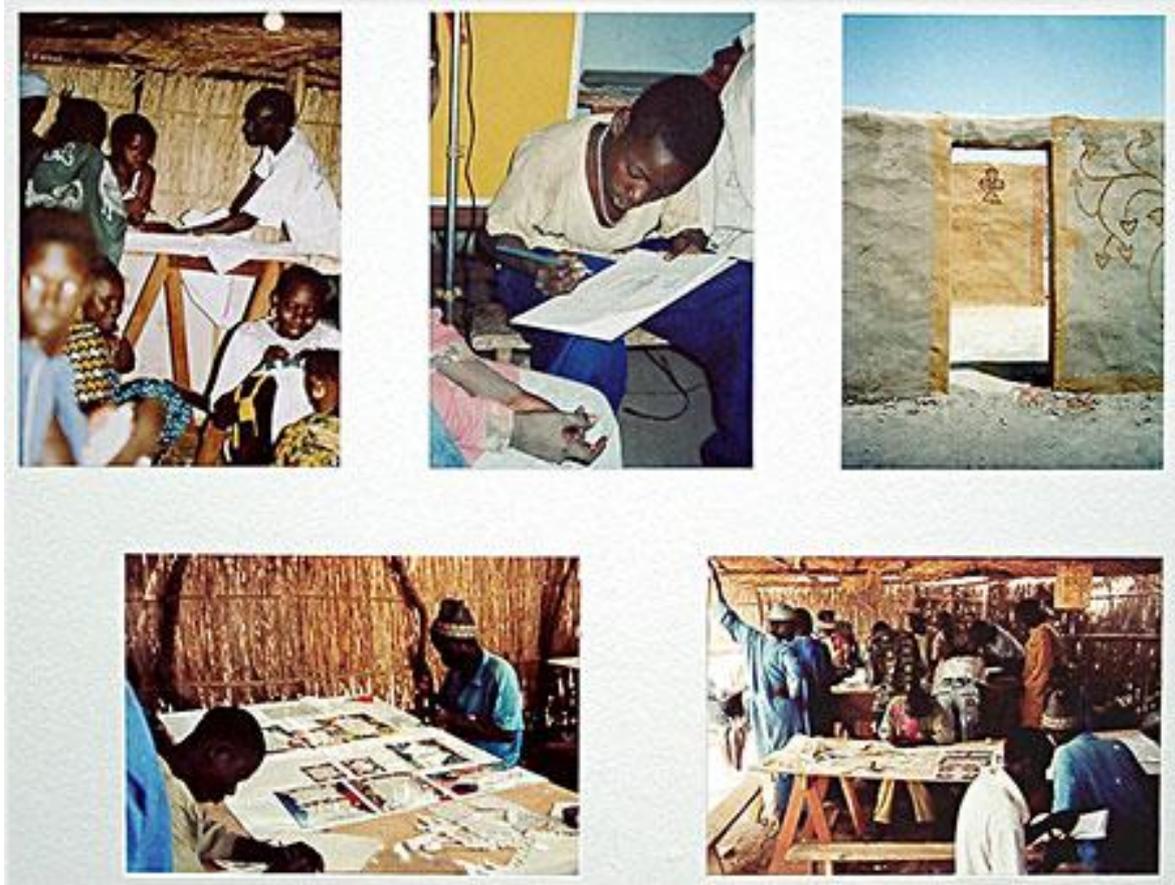


Figure 11: Huit Facettes, Hamdallaye Villagers engaged in various activities at the Hamdallaye Workshop, 1996

Each of the four Belgian artists made a site-specific project either individually or in collaboration with the villagers. For example, Marc Roover, who was fascinated by the huge termite hills in the area, invited villagers to help him create huge sculptures using the yellow soil of the termite hills. Phillippe Aguire created a tower from metal junk and other detritus found in the area. Fik van Gestel, who believed that the villagers would appreciate abstract art due to their knowledge of Islamic decoration, made abstract compositions inspired by the Islamic decorative motifs found in the region. Daniel Dewal tried to connect the village to the rest of the world by faxing the ongoing activities at Hamdallaye to museums across the world. Dewal had to travel 120 kilometres by car to the nearest town of Kolda to fax the messages. He then mounted the responses from the museums on a huge map together with photos of the villagers (Komissar, 2003). While each of these works has artistic significance, their greater aesthetic and political import lies in the fact that the Hamdallaye project as a whole constitutes a single work of art – a total artwork – by Huit Facettes in collaboration with Vredeseilanden.

As Kane Sy (in Kester, 2011:96-97), one of the members, noted, the workshop was initiated as a way of bringing together contemporary urban artists, a village community, and a nongovernmental organisation. The issues faced in the project could be traced to relationships and ties within precisely demarcated social territory – a rural one – since the workshops fostered interaction between spheres that are traditionally alien to one another.

In her unpublished essay on the work of Dakar artists titled “Dakar visions of art”, Mariann Komissar (2000) defined recuperation as a process “where artists use whatever new and old materials and objects they can find in their immediate surroundings: interrogating, putting together, transforming, and giving these objects new life in art works.” In her discussion of the improvisational and innovative use of found objects in Issa Samb’s multimedia installations and also of the work of other Dakar artists, Harney (2004) connected the processes of recuperation to prevalent informal economies in postcolonial Senegalese society. For Harney, the recycling of used commodity objects and ephemera by these artists speak to the broader capitalist condition, particularly as it manifests in the post-colony. Not only artists but the society at large has to contend with the deluge of cheap imported goods and commodities – brand new or used – which have replaced locally made products and thereby altered the structures of society. Old products that cannot be replaced or thrown away such as cars, motorcycles, or radios are dismantled and the parts are resold or put to other good uses. As Simone (2004:214) observed:

If production possibilities are limited in African cities, then existent materials of all kinds are to be appropriated – sometimes through theft and looting; sometimes through the ‘heretical’ uses made of infrastructures, languages, objects, and spaces; sometimes through social practices that ensure that available materials pass through many hands.

Bricolage is a term that describes such cultural activities as the adoption and reuse of signs, symbols, gestures, affects, spaces, etc. A term well known in Cultural Studies, bricolage involves “taking the raw materials we have to hand and putting them to alternative uses by adapting and combining objects through improvisation to create new meanings” (Procter, 2004:91). Bricolage is critical as an aesthetic of resistance because, like what Foucault called counter-conducts, it seeks to evade co-option by inhabiting the threshold between approaches, methods, styles, and disciplines. Subjectivising Foucaultian counter-conducts are “multiple and

differentiated as the *dispositifs* of power that are meant to control them. They are expressed in different ways: flight, deflection, ruse, attempts to overturn the situation of domination, direct confrontation with the *dispositifs* of power, etc. ...” (Lazzarato, 2009:114). However, another term that has been extensively used to describe the practices by artists in West Africa is recuperation. However, considering that recuperation of discarded materials as a trend has now congealed into a school, and that the term is now employed as an academic label to strait-jacket some African artists, I seek to venture beyond the established usage of the term “recuperation” and its meanings (Grabski, 2008). I attempt to renew the term in a form of recuperation to include, as Simone (2004) suggested, the re-appropriation of methods, techniques, and ideas, whether from the economic realm, politics, NGOs, or the media, and the incorporation of these methods, ideas, and techniques in artistic production. In my discussion of Le Groupe Amos, I noted how the collective infiltrates civil society and aid organisations in order to contest biocapitalism on its own terrain. I noted, however, that between the two groups, Huit Facettes is more incisive in its critique of neoliberal aid and development structures. Huit Facettes hacks into neoliberal aid and development structures and recuperates their strategies as a form of internal critique of neoliberal capitalist globalisation in which the group uses these methods in its extra-disciplinary practices in order “to reverse the process by which cultural institutions in Europe and North America, by virtue of their economic resources, exert a centripetal influence as nodal points of production, exchange, and discourse in the global art world” (Kester, 2011:98).¹⁴⁰ As Kester (2011:98) noted, the goal of this reversal or recuperation

isn't to curtail international exchange, but to decentre it. Rather than Senegalese artists meeting in Belgium, for example, they will organise events that bring artists together in the countries of the global South, challenging the geopolitical privilege of the North. By rooting these exchanges in the proximate conditions, spaces, and protocols of Dakar or Hamdallaye, for example, rather than London or New York, the character of the interactions will be transformed, responding to an African context rather than the (naturalised) Euro-American framework of the international art scene.

Huit Facettes seeks to challenge the top-down interventionism of neoliberal NGOs which facilitates capitalist domination and perpetuates poverty (Parfitt, 2004; Williams, 2004).

¹⁴⁰ Deliss (2014) referred to this artistic practice as “infrastructural engineering” connected to the effects of the global economic situation of the 1990s.

While some of the humanitarian organisations have good intentions, most of them serve as various instruments of neoliberal biocapitalism; facilitating its penetration and permeation of life on the African continent. By perpetrating capitalist domination, these NGOs are associated with the subjugatory arms of biopower. For example, Hardt and Negri (2000) and Lazzarato (2009) regarded civil society and NGOs as part of the moral force of imperial intervention, which also includes news media and religious organisations. Thus, as a discourse of white paternalism, neoliberalism masks imperialism as cultural and economic philanthropy. NGOs provide the moral grounds for Empire to police the globe. But beyond that, Hardt and Negri (2000:313) argued that working from below in their humanitarian campaigns in war-torn or drought-ridden regions, NGOs represent “the capillary ends of the contemporary networks of power, or ... they are the broad base of the triangle of global power.” Thus more or less connected to Empire, the NGOs are direct agents of governmentality as the infiltration of power throughout society (Lazzarato, 2009). It is within this light that James Ferguson (quoted in Williams, 2004:564) argued that

by uncompromisingly reducing poverty to a technical problem, and by promising technical solutions to the sufferings of powerless and oppressed people, the hegemonic problematic of ‘development’ is the principal means through which the question of poverty is de-politicised in the world today. At the same time, by making the intentional blueprints for ‘development’ so highly visible, a ‘development’ project can end up performing extremely sensitive political operations involving the entrenchment and expansion of institutional state power almost invisibly, under cover of a neutral, technical mission to which no one can object ... if the ‘instrument effects’ of a ‘development’ project end up performing any kind of strategically coherent or intelligible whole, this is it: the anti-politics machine.

Discussing Huit Facettes’ critique of the developmental discourse as it pertains to the minutiae of lived experience in postcolonial Africa, Enwezor (2007:246) observed the following:

The top-down, donor-client model of NGOs and development agencies from wealthy Western countries has been perceived as undermining Africa’s ability at nondependency. Often times, development organisations, through donor institutions, operate on the assumption of economic and socio-political templates that can be domesticated within an African context, transforming the

templates as it were into substrates of an authentically African ideal. As such there is a preponderance of support for an aesthetics of recycling, the make-do, makeshift, and bricolage, rather than invention, sophistication, and technologically sound transfer of knowledge.

Huit Facettes is not alone as a West African artist collective that critiques Western interventionism. The Beninese Solidarity with Endangered Westerners (NGO SBOP) seeks to reverse the top-down trend whereby the citizens of “underdeveloped” countries could realise their potential to uplift themselves by helping others. The members of the collective include founders Joël Lokossou, Sophie Mètinhoué, Luc Aimé Dansou, artist Romuald Hazoume, and honorary members musician Anjelique Kidjo, songwriter Danialou Sagbohan, performer Zeynab, comedian Elephant Mouille, and guitarist John Arcadius. In a situation where Benin is flooded with NGOs of Western origin, some with dubious intentions, the group asks:

Why not start an NGO whose goal would be to assist Westerners affected by crisis and poverty? The underlying idea is to show Africans that if they can assist others, then they can help themselves. And if they can love others, then they can love their continent ... (NGO SBOP, 2013).

SBOP artistic projects feature videos that document fundraising activities by the collective, pamphlets articulating the organisation’s mission and objectives, and installation. An installation, which was featured in the *Progress of Love* exhibition at the Menil Collection in Houston in 2013 was constructed out of jerry cans to highlight the intricate relationship between commerce and aid (Lemu, 2013).

The donor-driven economy promotes a hand-to-mouth existence characterised by the temporary, the makeshift, experimentation, and make-do, rather than permanent and lasting solutions. In this scheme of things, NGOs are capillary nodes through which neoliberal biopower infiltrates and saturates the terrain of life and also the means through which capitalism subjugates and controls the poor.¹⁴¹ Therefore, by inserting themselves in NGO

¹⁴¹ In reference to the broader politics of aid in “independent” postcolonial Africa, Moyo (2009) indicated that “for the west, aid became a means by which Britain and France combined their new-found altruism with a hefty dollop of self-interest – maintaining strategic geopolitical holds. For the US, aid became the tool of another political contest – the Cold War.” Since aid in all its various manifestations is not really designed for long-lasting positive transformation, it tends to have an adverse impact on the recipient communities. Thus, in regards to the effects of aid on the continent, Moyo (2009) concluded that “donors, development agencies, and policy makers have, by and large, chosen to ignore the blatant alarm signals, and have continued to pursue the aid-based model, even when it has become apparent that aid, under whatever guise, is not working. Even when aid has not been stolen, it has been unproductive ... Given Africa’s current economic state, it is hard to see how any growth

structures, SBOP and Huit Facettes seek to infuse their practices in the capillaries of power in order to contest neoliberalism within its own paternalist institutions. However, collaborating with an NGO is also a move to enhance the social relevance of the group's aesthetic practice.¹⁴² In order to release itself from modernist contradictions of self-reflexivity and social relevance such as which Laboratoire could not disentangle itself from, Huit Facettes had to formally register itself as an association with the name Huit Facettes-Interaction: Dynamique, Artistique & Culturelle. The association was hierarchically structured, featuring the position of president (Abdoulaye Ndoye), vice president (Fode Camara), general secretary (Kan-Si), secretary of international relations (El Hadji Sy), and financial secretary (Cheikh Niass) (Komissar, 2003). While this hierarchical "arborescent" structure (to borrow from Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) runs counter to the idea of a biopolitical collective as rhizomatic, non-hierarchical, and horizontal, it can be regarded as a strategic manoeuvre: Huit Facettes hacked into European bureaucratic thinking to facilitate their own anti-hierarchical objectives. It is important to note that Vredeseilanden could donate a yearly sum to Huit Facettes due to its formal registration as an association (Komissar, 2003).

By assuming the character of a non-governmental organisation, an informal art collective infuses itself in the bureaucratic structure of a development organisation to enhance its own effectiveness. It is important to bear in mind that Huit Facettes as an art collective was born inside the discipline of donor-driven development. Moreover, despite its hierarchical structure, the collective did not follow hierarchical procedures in its projects. In fact, as will be seen in the discussion of the politics of the Art Bridge workshop below, the reversal rather than consolidation of power hierarchies form the modus operandi of the group.

Following Enwezor, who directly linked the pervasive informality in postcolonial Africa to the subjugatory effects of the top-down, donor-client model, I add that the collective seeks to replace an insidious dependency culture with meaningful and far-reaching practices of the redemption of the postcolonial subject. One of the major pitfalls of developmental or humanitarian aid organisations has been to overlook the power differentials and dynamics within the societies in which they operate. Consequently, dominant groups such as the middle-

registered is a direct result of aid. If anything, the evidence of the last fifty years points to the reverse – slower growth, higher poverty, and Africa left off the economic ladder." It is in the same light that N'Landu (2004:637) concluded within the context of Congo that "Colonisation, Globalisation, Cooperation, Technical Assistance, Aid-project, Aid-programme, modernity' are all illusions sold to the Congolese people with the complicity of their own intellectual sons and daughters."

¹⁴² As Rottner (2002:114) indicated, this is also in a bid "to disentangle modernism's historical contradiction between art's claim to aesthetic autonomy and its ambitions for social relevance."

aged and the rich tend to benefit more from the projects at the expense of the weaker and subordinates such as children, women, the very old, and the poor (Parfitt, 2004). Huit Facettes has been working to reverse this trend by directly engaging women and children in production. By reversing the hierarchies of development or aid organisations Huit Facettes sets the groundwork for subject empowerment in which individuals become what Freire (1970) called “beings for themselves”, who are able to shape their own destiny rather than being welfare recipients perpetually fixed in a beggary position on the margins. In other words, Huit Facettes stimulates

the agency and subjective capacity of each participant in the workshop, to help them establish an individual expression. But above all it is to avoid at all cost the possibility of dependency. By paying critical attention to the idea of subjectivity, Huit Facettes works in the interstices of development and empowerment, whereby in the end the participants are able to set up self-sustaining practices as non-dependent citizens (Enwezor, 2007:245).

One would argue that an unintended consequence of these workshops is the perpetration of state irresponsibility for its citizens, who are left to fend for themselves. However, in a situation where the state is already incapacitated, and in which a myriad forces work to subjugate and exploit the poor, it is not only the enhanced creativity but also the criticality shared in the workshops that are crucial for individual self-redemption. The dialogues, skill sharing, and other subjective interchanges during the workshops restored a sense of self-esteem and pride among some marginalised groups of the region. As Kane-Sy (in Kester, 2005:35) noted,

In Senegal, as elsewhere in Africa, greeting someone, being conscious of the presence of the other, as interlocutor, is to bear witness to their existence as a human being in the truest sense of the word. The one who feels that you exist (by respecting you) legitimates to some extent your humanity.

Through collaborative exchanges, subjectivities were positively affected by other subjectivities. As Diprose (2002:102) put it, “I perceive and feel, because I am perceived and felt by the world of the other, because I am given in my corporeal difference to a common physical and social world of other beings who see and touch me.” The workshops had two related effects: First, the exchange of craft skills facilitated some degree of economic empowerment for the village women, who were able to actively participate in what had previously been male-dominated circuits of crafts production and sale (see Figure 12).

Secondly, collaboration and interchange before and during the cultural festivals encouraged intertribal and interethnic dialogue. Kester (2011:97) confirmed that the festivals “have come to play an important role in maintaining the social ecology of the region and are credited by many with the relative absence of significant interethnic and intertribal conflict among village communities in the area around Hamdallaye.” It is for this reason that at the end of the workshop, as Seynou Wade revealed, the people of Hamdallaye were more satisfied and happier with Huit Facettes’ cultural projects than with the other projects they had received from Vredeseilanden (in Komissar, 2003).

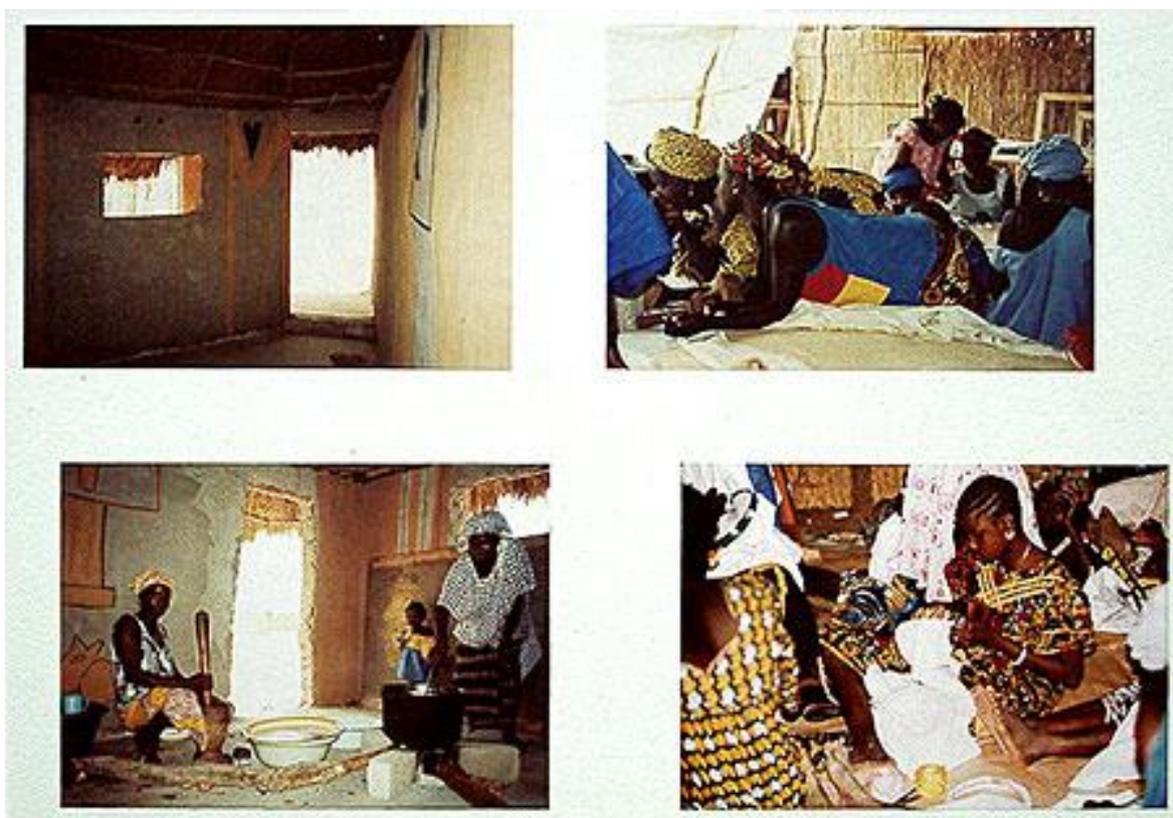


Figure 12: Huit Facettes, Women of Hamdallaye engaged in different activities at the Hamdallaye workshop, 1996

5.3.2 The Joal-Fadiouth workshop

Huit Facettes travelled to Hamdallaye several times between 1997 and 1998 to follow up on the workshops. During this period, they also held workshops in another village close to Dakar called Ndem. Later in 1997, Huit Facettes and Vredeseilanden arranged a collaborative workshop between the two villages of Hamdallaye and Ndem in the form of study trips between the two villages (Komissar, 2003). Other projects done in this period include the concert *Carrement pour la paix*, an artistic performance involving painting in front of an audience of

10 000, which was an event to show solidarity with refugees from Rwanda and Burundi residing in the country. The event featured musicians such as Positive Black Soul, Daara-J, and others. This performance was followed by another in 1998 in support of the television campaign to stop poverty and world hunger called Telefood 98. Telefood 98 was a 24-hour fundraising campaign by the Food and Agriculture Organization. In this performance, the group painted a mural which was later used as backdrop to a musical concert before finally being donated to Elizabeth Diouf, the wife of President Abdou Diouf (Komissar, 2003).

Perhaps the most significant project after Hamdallaye was the *Ici et maintenant* workshop (“Here and now”) at Cheikh Niass’s hangar outside of Dakar, near the village of Joal. The workshop, which took place from 20 April to 2 May 1998, occurred at the same time as the biennale Dak’Art 98. Twelve artists from Belgium (including the four who took part in the Hamdallaye workshop), France, the Ivory Coast, and Senegal participated. As in the Hamdallaye projects, the main objective of “Here and now” was the decentralisation of development and empowerment through the democratisation of art (Komissar, 2003). As Kester (2011:98) noted, in Joal the process of geopolitical decentring was extended beyond the relationship between Africa and Europe to cross the divisions between the rural and the urban, and the rich and the poor, in Senegal itself. Joal, the birthplace of former president Leopold Senghor, is larger and more prosperous than Hamdallaye. It is also a tourist destination. The workshop, however, targeted people who lived in impoverished conditions on the margins of urban society.

In Joal the workshop involved both individual and collaborative projects in which the artists created sculptures, paintings, and installations. For example, Cheikh Niass, Kane-Sy, and Jean-Marie Bruce made site-specific sculptures and installations which materially or conceptually responded to the local surroundings (Komissar, 2003). The workshop also featured performances by local dancers and musicians. In addition, the village painter of Hamdallaye, Maat Mbaye, was invited to take part in the Joal workshop and work side by side with international artists from the Ivory Coast and Europe. At Joal, Huit Facettes donated artworks to the local library in contribution to the museum of Leopold Senghor. However, as I argue, the value of the projects reside in their immaterial rather than material dimensions as spaces of dialogue, interaction, and social exchange aimed at subject formation.

Kane-Sy (n.d.) emphasised this point when he stated,

The most important question for Huit Facettes-Interaction is: How does one provide access to a medium or human activity that is not immediately quantifiable, outside of the conventional commercial routes, but instead in the form of a conceptualization and implementation of solutions in respect of questions a society poses itself in accordance with quite disparate moorings?

The significance of these projects does not lie in the objects that were produced for display; rather it lies in the social exchanges and interchanges, and the communication and dialogue that was catalysed or facilitated by the processes of object production. In fact, as Deliss (1999:56) observed, in reference to the work of Huit Facettes which she has described as infrastructural engineering,

The role of the exhibition to convey the work of these pioneering artists remains emptied of objects ... Their work lies now more than ever before, within the ambivalent field of the aesthetics of existence, bringing them closer to engineers than producers.

Offering a background description of the bleak postcolonial scenery, the marginal societies within which the projects of Huit Facettes are set, Enwezor (2007:244) wrote:

On the vast outskirts of the urban rim, forgotten communities in the villages that are the historical link between the past and the present, the local and the global, live on the edge of official amnesia, on the dark side of a politics of invisibility. Though massive in population and visible through the meagre, deracinated social amenities that can barely cope with their demands, the poor in Africa have become the disappeared of globalization. In broad daylight African are short-circuited between development and underdevelopment, between the third world and the first world. The poor are invisible because official discourse long ago stopped seeing them. Instead they have become a blind spot in the neoliberal catechism of the move toward market economy. They have become the ghosts in the political machine of late modernity.

Enwezor's synthesis of the postcolonial state of affairs reminds us of what Mbembe (2001) described as the situation of "fiscality", in which economically emasculated postcolonial African states, demoted on the world market by neoliberal capitalism, no longer have the

capacity to provide social support to and ensure cohesion among their citizens, which leaves populations impoverished, precarious, and distraught. However, all is not lost in the post-colony, since, as Enwezor (2007:244) noted, despite all the travails, the post-colony is still “a fertile soil for new possibilities of being.” The postcolonial subject is not passive under these circumstances but is an active agent continuously creating. It is in such precarious yet fecund social environments that Huit Facettes inserts its nomadic, pedagogical aesthetics. Noting the transformative potential of Huit Facettes’ nomadism, Deliss (1999:56) stated that

A further tactic of camouflage would be to engage in areas that have been left behind, to move from one elite to another located in the very place that has been the source of anti-intellectual projection onto art in Africa: the village. The subtle infrastructural formations that the group of Senegalese artists, Huit Facettes, have been experimenting with in rural areas over the last four years are significant in that they bring forth the communicative complexities between city and country elites. The eight artists ... are not merely vectors of the urban keen to adopt rural graphic registers for their own work, but act as transformers, hinges, and generators of creative activities in transition that are complex, and yet wish to remain modest.

Within this frame, one could understand the gift offered to the wife of the president mentioned earlier as merely symbolic and fundamentally less meaningful than the interactions of subjectivities that are fostered by the creation of the painting. This is how and why the work of Huit Facettes can be categorised as an art of social reproduction – a biopolitical art.

5.3.3 The Art-Bridge I workshop in Mbour

The Art-Bridge I workshop took place in 2000 at Jean-Marie Bruce’s property, which he had bought and developed as a local *village des arts* called A.R.T Tripanno (Art-Bridge, 2001). Inspired by Cheikh Niass’ hangar in Joal, Jean-Marie Bruce, in collaboration with American artist Poppy Wechsberg, decided to hold an international workshop which would feature local artists as well as artists invited from Austria (Josef Baier, Heide Breuer, Margit Petrak-Diop, Manfred Schöller, and Inge Winopal), Nigeria (Tonie Okpe), Norway (Ranghild Rod), Switzerland (Betty Weber), and the USA (Poppy Wechsberg) to connect Mbour to the global community and vice versa (Komissar, 2003). Like the Joal event, the workshop was planned to coincide with the 2000 Dak’art Biennale. However, unlike in the preceding projects in which

Huit Facettes as a collective was involved as partners with the NGO and the local community in the process from conception to realisation, at Mbour they found out that the event had already been planned unprofessionally beforehand by Jean-Marie Bruce and American and Austrian artists who were not interested in making a social impact (Komissar, 2003). Despite their experience in and vast knowledge of socially engaged collaborative practices, and also despite their vast knowledge as locals, Huit Facettes were not involved from the beginning. This repeated the top-down approach that the collective was challenging. According to Komissar (2003),

Huit Facettes found there was no real concept chosen for the workshop, the foreign artists were not very interested in Huit Facettes' wish to make a social impact on the local community with their artistic interventions, they did not know anything about the professional level of the invited artists, a lot of practical problems that follow from accommodating many people in a small town like Mbour were not taken care of, etc.

In addition, the insensitivity to the dynamics of the context of engagement coupled with the parachuting of ready-made ideas onto a site ran counter to the principles and objectives of Huit Facettes. One can conclude that this could have been due to a conflict of interests considering that Art-Bridge's approach differed from that of Huit Facettes.¹⁴³ Due to these irreconcilable differences, the group decided to withdraw their partnership as a collective. In the end, only Jean-Marie Bruce, Cheikh Niass, and Kane-Sy participated in the project as individual artists.

5.4 Conclusion

As was noted in the preceding discussion, decentralisation and the democratisation of art play an important role in Huit Facettes' empowerment programmes. The top-down approach to art-making adopted by the organisers of the Art-Bridge workshop went against Huit Facettes' commitment to a socially engaged subject-centred art. For the collective, the project would have been really effective only if the multitudes were involved as participants in all stages of production. Huit Facettes' critique of a top-down approach to art-making extends to the domain of humanitarian aid and development in which the collective hacks into the bureaucracy of

¹⁴³ On its website, the Art-Bridge describes itself as "a residence for artists, a link between Senegal and the rest of the world through the means of art, right next to the sea in the Tripanno neighbourhood. It is a place which offers individuals or groups to spend their time in Senegal actively involved in some artistic activity."

NGOs in order to counter neoliberalism and empower the multitudes. This approach is also shared by Le Groupe Amos, who employs the language of the multitudes in broadcasting media and technology and pedagogy in their activist campaigns. Training workshops that foster communication and dialogue, and pedagogic practices that feature video documentaries, radio broadcasts, posters, paintings, and poems characterise Huit Facettes' and Le Groupe Amos' art. The marginalised and the dehumanised are the subject of this immaterial humanist art. Particularly women and children are at the heart of the collectives' biopolitical aesthetics, an aesthetics rooted in concrete variegated postcolonial lived experience.

CONCLUSION

Join the resistance and the insurgence of imagination! Evacuate corporate spaces, liberate your works and visuals (poster, sticker, stencil, etc.) for the streets of the resistance days. Let's produce together, not within the white cube, but in the streets and squares during resistance week! Creativity belongs to each and every one of us and can't be sponsored. Long live insurrection! – The Resistanbul Commissariat of Culture (in Rosler, 2010)

This study demonstrated that in the biopolitical production of contemporary African art collectives such as Gugulective, Huit Facettes and Le Groupe Amos, a diverse mixture of classes, races, creeds, languages, and genders collaborate in transformative and life-forming aesthetic projects that are embedded in the social. During this study, preliminary research on global contemporary art practices drew my attention to various forms of collaborative practice which aim at the production of subjectivities rather than gallery-bound objects as the final aesthetic product. It emerged that art collectives in different parts of the African continent were increasingly adopting such immaterial-oriented practices that seek to transform lives. I termed these practices “biopolitical collectivism” as a descriptive term that situates the practices in their broader socio-political context. Biopolitical collectivism is not the only form of politically conscious contemporary art, neither does it describe a universal collectivist aesthetic. As demonstrated in the study, I used the term to describe certain forms of socially engaged collectivism that is homologous to yet critical of contemporary capitalism. The rubric is crucial for appreciating the critical agency of socially engaged art in the African context, which, as I have shown, is tremendously shaped by neoliberal capitalist globalisation. As revealed in the study, by decentring the object and by being subject-oriented, biopolitical collectivism confronts capitalism on the terrain of life itself. In a context of biocapitalism, which intensifies inequality, pauperisation, and precarisation for profit, Gugulective and other contemporary African art groups seek to redeem corroded and dehumanised subjectivities through collaborative art production. Biopolitical collectivism counters capitalist alienation through collaborative artistic production, subjective interchange, and sharing. A study of Gugulective and other art groups demonstrates that through inter-human relationships, and co-dependence and collaboration in art production that challenges the status quo, subjectivities can be fostered, which gain autonomy, self-worth, esteem, and political agency. Thus the aesthetic product of biopolitical collectivism is a sovereign, independent human being with dignity and agency.

As shown in the study, while highly critical, most gallery-bound practices from the continent tend to get privatised and absorbed in inaccessible enclaves of the global art world. In most cases, the best instances of African art tend to disappear into Western collections. This is not a new phenomenon but an age-old practice which can be traced back to the plundering of African cultural artefacts in the colonial era. The socially engaged practices of the collectives in question challenge this privatisation through subject-centred immaterial production.

Within this context, therefore, the tendency of Gugulective and other socially engaged groups towards autonomous biopolitical production in subject-centred collectivist praxis is not only homologous to transformations in capitalism but also has the potential to escape absorption into neoliberal capitalist globalisation. These collectives are not merely new fads, but as I showed in the thesis, they are deeply rooted in and shaped by the critical traditions of their different origins. For example, to energise its activist art which questions continuing black marginalisation in post-apartheid South Africa, Gugulective has tapped into the history of the clandestine shebeen politics of what in South African literary circles is known as the *Drum* era in the 1950s, and also from the conscientising mission of the Black Consciousness Movement of the 1970s. Huit Facettes was shaped by the anti-negritudist discourses of Laboratoire Agit-Art and Village des Arts, both collectives of the 1970s Senegal and the Dakarois Set Setal movement of the 1990s. Le Groupe Amos was inspired by forms of popular resistance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, whether this originated from the dominant Catholic Church or was fuelled by the informative and potent sidewalk radio traditions such as *radio trottoir*.

As shown in the study, Gugulective challenges capitalism through nomadism, informality, and a cross-disciplinary praxis that responds to a capitalist biopower that is flexible, mobile, and networked. By being nomadic and flexible, Gugulective counters biopower with its own strategies and tactics. However, it has to be mentioned that the nomadic and catalytic practices of such groups as Gugulective have been decried. Due to their catalytic and rhizomatic character, biopolitical collectives tend to be short-lived and temporary. To some, the short lifespan of these groups is an impediment to their critique of capitalism. As was seen in the study, egos, personal interests, politics, and financial issues can curtail the life of a collective. However, from a positive perspective, rather than being a weakness, this temporariness can be seen a tactical advantage for escaping ossification, co-optation, and instrumentalisation, particularly in an era where social practice is increasingly getting commercialised and integrated in the mainstream (Rosler, 2010; 2012). The Deleuzian metaphor of the rhizome remains apt for describing the nature and critical valence of biopolitical collectives.

Capitalist globalisation informalised postcolonial economies by emasculating existing formal economies and thereby corroding structures of social support. Consequently, the demoted and excluded of the world market engage in alternative economies of survival that involve vending, peddling, improvisation, recuperation, adaptation, recycling, and making-do. These heterogeneous activities have tremendously shaped the aesthetic vocabulary of numerous art collectives on the continent, which adopt the tactics of the weak in recognition of the corrosive effects of these tactics on power. In this thesis I argued that Gugulective exemplifies one of the collectives in whose practices the techniques of the weak are translated and manifested as appropriation, recuperation, *détournement*, parody, hacking, and bricolage – among other techniques.

Where multi-pronged biopower infiltrates life using a myriad *dispositifs* in its insidious mission to subjugate and exploit, and where domination and resistance are intermeshed and intertwined in complicated antagonisms, critical cultural production responds through a varying ensemble of techniques and strategies. In the study I noted how Gugulective engages in a heterogeneous collectivist aesthetics which adopts a multiplicity of tactics and strategies of resistance to counter complex forms of domination. Installations, photomontages, leaflets, film screenings, performances, affects, beer drinking, and discussions form the repertoire of Gugulective's aesthetics. This cross-disciplinarity transects a variety of disciplines such as art, the media, research, and activism.

As noted in the thesis, affects are central in the aesthetic arsenal of biopolitical collectivism. Because biocapitalism exploits affects as a domain of accumulation, affects themselves seem the ideal space for contesting this exploitation. The perpetuation of fear, hatred, and disgust, or the promotion of sympathy and benevolence in order to control, neutralise, and depoliticise a society exemplifies the mobilisation of affects for domination in contemporary capitalism (Lazzarato, 2009). One such affect of control is racism.¹⁴⁴ The rise of the pan-African and decolonisation movement among South African students and also #BlackLivesMatter in America attest to intensified systemic racism in neoliberalism (Okeke-Agulu, 2015). As we saw in the thesis, Gugulective counters racism as an affective strategy of neoliberal domination.

¹⁴⁴ Lazzarato (2009:130) wrote, "Racism (internal, against immigrants, and external, directed against civilisation) is one of the most powerful phenomena operating through disgust and animosity that contribute to the constitution and fixing of territories and 'identities' and which 'capital' lacks." Lazzarato mentioned Berlusconi of Italy and Sarkozy of France as some of the leaders who have relied on racism as a governmental technique. But one can also add Donald Trump of the United States, who is riding on the wave of neoliberal racism to woo desperate American voters in the ongoing 2016 elections.

For example, we saw that sensing, seeing, feeling, joy, anger, and laughter were integral in Gugulective's art-making processes. As we saw in the study, in Gugulective's projects, the conviviality of a shebeen becomes crucial for the redemption of subjectivities in capitalism. In addition, the group taps on Steve Biko's black pride in its own conscientisation projects. Beyond this, the thesis also argued that biopolitical collectivism has potential to evade capitalism through affective production, which in itself exemplifies the ultimate dimension of immaterial artistic production, since there is no object separate from the act of production because the subject is the product of the aesthetic process.

The study sought to provide an ontological and epistemological study of the biopolitical collectivism of Gugulective as critique against neoliberalism. However, it needs to be pointed out that due to its limited scope, the study did not deal with a number of issues which are crucial to the efficacy of collectivism as critique. Firstly, the issue of gender imbalance in the predominantly male collectives remains largely unchallenged. As was noted in the study, some of the collectives, including Gugulective, Huit Facettes, and Le Groupe Amos, have tended to be dominated by men, which marginalises women's voices. Such power dynamics have negative implications for the kinds of artistic production by the groups. A more inclusive, transversal, and intersectional approach to collectivist production which cuts across the categories of gender, race, and class and decentres patriarchy would have greater critical valence. Therefore, addressing the issue of gender imbalance in collective cultural production would not only contribute to women empowerment but also contribute to the growth of these art groups.

Secondly, there is a need to conduct in-depth research into the processes of collective and collaborative production. This entails a close examination of the messiness of encounter and interaction in collective production. Collectivism in and of itself is not a foolproof solution against capitalism (Gritzner, 2011). Collaboration is a complex endeavour that has to take into account individual differences, attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and preconceptions which may result in arguments, disagreements, and frustrations. Collaboration can involve consensus but also uncertainty, indeterminacy, awkwardness, friction, antagonism, animosity, and dissension. A study of the messiness of interaction in collaboration would shed light on the processes of collective aesthetic production in contemporary African art. Such a study would not only provide insights into how conflicts are resolved, it would also shed light on how dissension might positively contribute to collaborative aesthetic production. In this vein, a study of aesthetic collaboration as a model of democratic participation as it pertains to Africa can have

significant implications on broader politics and ethics. A few articles and papers exist that examine art works by some collectives in Africa. However, no literature exists that studies in-depth the actual processes of collaborative production at its nodal points of interaction.

In a letter to his friend, the art critic and theorist Khwezi Gule, Kemang Wa Lehulere, a member of Gugulective, wrote that while he was studying at Wits University, a lecturer charged that Gugulective made work that had no meaning in the communities the work was intended for. However, according to Wa Lehulere (cited by Gule & Obrist, 2015:35), community responses to Gugulective exhibitions “have been the most spontaneous and exciting I have ever encountered, unlike the snobbish art audiences who always have to ‘know’.” Wa Lehulere’s words confirm the significance of the work of the collective and reveals the extent to which it resonated with the communities in its original locale of the township of Gugulethu. The words, which not only apply to Gugulective but also to other contemporary African art collectives sharing similar concerns and strategies, bear witness to the central argument of the thesis that biopolitical collectivism has transformative potential beyond the exclusivist ivory towers of the neoliberal art world and therefore that the proliferation and growth of this art form would have significant implications on the African cultural, political, and economic landscape.

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