

CHOREOGRAPHING CAPE TOWN THROUGH GOEMA MUSIC AND DANCE

by

FRANCESCA INGLESE

Each January, members of Cape Town's sixty-plus minstrel troupes take over the city center with a sweeping wave of sound and color in the annual Minstrel Carnival.¹ Known as *Tweede Nuwe Jaar* (the Second of New Year) — and more controversially as the “Coon Carnival” — the Minstrel Carnival's origins are often linked with the December 1st emancipation processions of the mid-to-late 1800s that celebrated the abolition of slavery in 1834 and also to the annual slave holiday, the one day a year slaves could take off work. The parading of troupes, called *Kaapse Klopse* (Clubs of the Cape) in Afrikaans, on Carnival is also the culmination of a week of celebrations that begins on Christmas Eve with the parading of Christmas Choirs (brass bands) and is followed by the Malay Choir or *Nagtroepe* (night troupes) parade on New Year's Eve (Bruinders 2006-7: 109). Together, these multiple practices announce the New Year in Cape Town.²

On the day of Carnival, *klopse*, that once gathered outside their homes in the bustling streets of District Six and the Bo-Kaap, travel to the city center from their *klopskamers* (clubhouses) in the dispersed townships on the Cape Flats and suburban areas beyond Cape Town's City Bowl. Together they traverse the downtown, beginning from the edge of District Six, from which many troupe members and their parents and grandparents were forcibly removed under apartheid's Group Areas Act (1950). From 2012–2014, I paraded with The Fabulous Woodstock Starlites, a forty year old troupe located in Woodstock, one of the older suburbs close to town. In 2013 our parade took

¹ This article was originally presented as a conference paper at the 2013 annual meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM). It constitutes one aspect of a larger dissertation project on contemporary *Kaapse Klopse* practice and performance in Cape Town, South Africa. This project has been supported by SEM, the Ruth Landes Memorial Research Fund, the American Association of University Women, and the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women at Brown University. I am grateful to The Fabulous Woodstock Starlites who welcomed me into their troupe and homes with open arms, to the tireless support of Melvyn Matthews, and to feedback from Henry Trotter, Sylvia Bruinders, Shamil Jeppie, Kiri Miller, and participants in the Mellon Dance Studies Summer Seminar.

² The focus of this article is only on the Minstrel Carnival, not the parading of Christmas Choirs or Malay Choirs. I do not address the competitions of *Kaapse Klopse* during the month of January, a rich topic that is beyond the purview of this article. Throughout I refer to minstrel troupes as most members themselves do, as “*klopse*,” though members also sometimes described them as “troupes” or “teams.”

us from Woodstock to the city center, then to Eerste River, Elsie's River, Manenberg, Bonteheuwel, Mitchell's Plain, and finally Salt River.³ After a full day of parading in the hot sun, our white, blue, and yellow silk gear was sweat-stained and torn and our white *takkies* (sneakers) were covered in dust. At 3 a.m. the troupe piled onto buses to return home, dropping members off in Bellville, Salt River, Woodlands, Rocklands, Tafelsig, Beacon Valley, East Ridge, Bonteheuwel, Heideveld, Facreton, Grassy Park, Delft, Belhar, and Woodstock. Our bodies, whether dancing or sleeping shoulder to shoulder on the bus, traced apartheid removals and relocations, remapping the city along historically silenced cartographies. "I'm beat, man!" one member said as she slumped over in the seat beside me. "My head! My legs! My feet!" Then she smiled with a sense of satisfaction. You must participate with your body to fully experience *klopse* she told me. It's not until you "hear the *goema* drum" and move with it that you "get that *lekker* [cool or sweet] *klopse* feeling."

Despite its status as an officially sanctioned event that receives financial support from the government, many South Africans, of all backgrounds, continue to hold a great deal of class and race-based prejudice against the celebration, as my numerous interviews revealed. Some view it as mere mimicry of a racist American practice, blackface minstrelsy, that fed colonial and apartheid stereotypes of coloured people.⁴ Others warn that it is a dangerous activity connected to gangs and criminality, and others, especially middle-class coloured Capetonians, contend that it is a degraded practice with little or no cultural value. Historical and contemporary popular media representations of the Minstrel Carnival often reinforce this perception, depicting it as a mere "street party" or "release valve" for working-class coloured Capetonians. Such attitudes, as this article reveals, belie the tremendous agential labor participants undertake as they challenge spatially-grounded inequalities through expressive practice.

In this article, I address the distinctive spatial practices of Minstrel Carnival participants, exploring the ways in which paraders use their bodies to collectively lay claim to Cape Town and access urban space through sonic and embodied performances. Recent scholarship has called attention to the central narratives of slavery and emancipation contained within the Minstrel Carnival, as well as the symbolic significance of the Carnival's re-appropriation of city space in relation to the coloured community's colonial and apartheid experiences of dispossession, forced removals, and social dislocation (Martin 1999; Mason 2010; Davids 2013).

I expand this line of argumentation in two ways. First, I engage with the participants themselves to explore how troupe members narrate their affective sonic and embodied experiences of parading in relation to their memories of the past and contemporary everyday experiences of the city. Popular and academic writings on parading practices have tended to privilege the ocular, often unintentionally emphasizing the perspective of observers and downplaying the experiences of paraders themselves. Although visual

³ These are all neighborhoods with high concentrations of coloured South Africans, the local population that participates in Carnival in the highest numbers.

⁴ I address the origins and contemporary usage of the term "coloured" below.

impact and spectacle are key to Carnival participants' reclamation of the city, I found that troupe members more often express their experiences of appropriating Cape Town via references to sounding and moving one's body. Rather than theorize the parade as a symbolic act by emphasizing what the parade as a whole represents to participants and observers, I focus my attention on the sonic-kinetic mechanisms through which participants live the parade — the sensory, embodied, and affective layers of experience as they move through the city. Therefore, I take seriously Mikhail Bakhtin's statement: "Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it" (Bakhtin 1984: 7).

Second, I attend to the political dimensions of participants' embodied re-appropriations of the city, contributing to scholarship that addresses how individuals and groups actively use music and movement to mediate and shape relationships between memory, place, sociality, and structures of power (Feld and Basso 1996; Stewart 1996).⁵ Despite the increased formal recognition the Carnival has received in recent years as an important "heritage" practice, participants' embodied claims continue to be undermined, contested, and policed. I posit that through their affective sonic-kinetic experiences participants memorialize places of significance and occupy the city. Far from a form of escapist revelry, these sonic and embodied acts are practiced and disciplined choreographic moves that pose a challenge to Cape Town's contemporary spatial order.

My findings are grounded in ethnographic fieldwork conducted during the extended festive seasons spanning 2011-2014. I conducted fieldwork at the central sites of *klopse* activity: the rehearsals and social events at troupe *klopskamers*, the annual Minstrel Carnival and parades throughout December and January, and the series of formal staged troupe competitions that take place in the month following the Carnival. During my fieldwork, I observed the rehearsals of several troupes and conducted over 70 semi-structured interviews with leaders and members from six troupes, and various city officials and arts and culture brokers. The bulk of my time was spent with members of one troupe, The Fabulous Woodstock Starlites (FWS). In 2012, I officially joined the FWS and paraded with them in costume for two consecutive years. By joining the FWS my access to other troupes became limited as I was no longer considered an outside observer, but I was rewarded through the sense of camaraderie and friendship I experienced as an official "Starlite" or "coon". "She goes with the *klopse*," I would overhear people say as I walked to rehearsal in Woodstock. It is through my interviews, informal conversations, social engagements, and my own embodied parading experiences with the members of the FWS that I came to the conclusions presented in this article.

Background

Kaapse Klopse have their roots in the expressive practices of Cape Town's creolized slave population, who incorporated European, indigenous African, and Asian

⁵ Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso write of "the experiential and expressive ways places are known, imagined, yearned for, held, remembered, voiced, lived, contested, and struggled over" (1996: 11).

influences to create a style of music called *goema*, named for the single-headed wooden barrel drum and its syncopated beat (Martin 1999: 74-5). Slaves formed dance bands, performing music for slave owners and for their own edification and enjoyment (*Ibid.* 58). A vibrant street culture developed, along with New Year celebrations grounded in Khoikhoi, Christian, and Muslim practices (*Ibid.*, 62-3). By the latter part of the 19th century, former slaves and their descendants annually paraded through Cape Town to celebrate Emancipation Day and the New Year.

Minstrel tunes circulated informally long before English colonists introduced the Cape Colony to the minstrel show in the 1850s (Martin 1999: 78). Beginning with the 1862 performances of the Christy Minstrels, minstrelsy became the “dominant form of popular white musical and theatrical entertainment in South Africa” for the following three decades (Erlmann 1991: 31). Following the successful tour of the Christy Minstrels, a handful of white, and later black, American minstrel troupes and jubilee choirs toured South Africa and left lasting marks on a range of practices, such as ragtime, gumboot dance styles, and *isicathamiya* (Cockrell 1987: 420; Erlmann 1991: 30-2; Muller 2008: 139).⁶ In the 1880s South African troupes formed, such as the Kaffir Christy Minstrels in Natal (Erlmann 1991: 32). The sounds and styles of blackface minstrelsy and African American spirituals were later refracted through the consumption of globally circulating sheet music and Hollywood films. Cape Town’s urban ex-slave population — eventually forming part of the population categorized as “coloured” — formed troupes of their own, commencing the earliest parades and performances that would eventually become the Minstrel Carnival. Transnational studies of American blackface minstrelsy (Cole 2001, 2013; Lane 2005) have shown the ways in which cultural symbols can radically change meanings as they move across national borders. In Cape Town, these musicians revised and remixed American minstrel repertoires with local musical practices to speak to their own experiences in a culturally heterogeneous, but racially stratified society as well as to their complex (dis)identifications with an emerging Black Atlantic consciousness (Muñoz 1999).⁷

Over a century since its inception, the Minstrel Carnival has undergone vast transformations in repertoire, style, and meaning. Troupes once made up almost exclusively of men now include large numbers of women and children. Black tailcoats, top hats, wooden canes, and burnt cork makeup have been replaced by brightly colored satin suits, panama hats, umbrellas, colorful face paint and glitter (see Figures 1 and 2).

Large sixty-plus person brass bands with trumpets, trombones, saxophones, bass and side drums have joined the once-standard *houte* (wood or timber) band comprised

⁶ *Isicathamiya* is an *a capella* choral style, most often performed by Zulu men, which developed in the 1920s and 30s in coal mining communities of KwaZulu-Natal.

⁷ See Muñoz, José Esteban, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, 1999. Working against revisionist scholarship on minstrelsy (Cockrell 1997; Lott 1993; Lhamon 1998, 2003; Mahar 1999), Chinua Thelwell argues that the minstrel show “may have been the major discursive institution working to construct racial difference in late nineteenth century South Africa” and was “...foremost a vicious cultural production of racial denigration” (Thelwell 2012: 6). See (Gilroy 1993).

of banjos, guitars and cellos, tambourines, shakers, *tamboor* (small frame drum) and *goema* drums (typically called *gammie*) (see Figure 3).

Contrary to some people's expectations that the event would fade away in the years following the transition to democracy, *klopse* has rapidly expanded, signaling



Figure 1. Member of FWS in *klopse* gear, 2012. Figure 2. Member of FWS in face paint, 2014. Photos by author.



Figure 3. Member of the FWS with *goema* drum, 2014. Photo by author.

its continued relevance to younger generations. Denis-Constant Martin notes that in 1907 seven troupes participated in the Carnival (1999: 99); in 2014 over 60 troupes paraded through Cape Town, estimated to comprise over 40,000 people. Troupes were once smaller, with twenty-plus members; now there are troupes with as many as one thousand members.

It has been noted that the Carnival, perceived today as a predominantly working-class “coloured affair,” was once a more racially diverse event with an eclectic array of performance repertoires (Jeppie 1990: 10).⁸ Zimitri Erasmus (2001: 21) defines coloured identity as the product of the “colonial encounter between colonists (Dutch and British), slaves from South and East India and from East Africa and conquered indigenous peoples, the Khoi and San,” which created “a highly specific and instantly recognizable cultural formation — not just ‘a mixture’ but a very particular ‘mixture’ comprising elements of Dutch, British, Malaysian, Khoi and other forms of African culture appropriated, translated and articulated in complex and subtle ways” (2001: 21).

The term coloured gained currency in the early 19th century amongst British segregationists and was further crystalized in the late 19th century when “assimilated colonial blacks” sought to assert a distinct identity in the face of increasing integration of Bantu-speaking Africans (Adhikari 2009: ix). The term officially hardened under apartheid policies, such as the 1950 Population Registration Act, that created legal definitions for racial groups. Historically constructed as a residual, in-between identity, “better than black African, but not quite white,” today colouredness as a social category remains contested, viewed by some as a reminder of an apartheid past, but predominately as a “lived reality,” “comprising detailed bodies of knowledge, specific cultural practices, memories, rituals, and modes of being” (Erasmus 2001: 21).

During the course of my research, the majority of *klopse* participants whom I interviewed proudly self-identified as coloured. Although many recognize the historically-constructed and lived fluidity of *all* racial categories, they conceptualize the term as an important means by which they navigate their relationships to history, place, and to one another, and recognize that it continues to be a lens through which others view them in their day-to-day lives.

Spatial politics of the Minstrel Carnival

Colonialism, apartheid, and ongoing structural inequalities have made and kept Cape Town a deeply segregated city. The dispossession of land from indigenous people, the enforcement of strict curfews on slaves with laws against congregation and noise-making, and the forced removals of residents as early as 1901, ensured white control of public space in the colonial city (Bickford-Smith 1995; Field 2001). During apartheid, international logics of modern city planning coincided with racialized population

⁸ Martin notes that by 1907 “New Year masks, choirs and bands had become the preserve of coloureds” with the Carnival advertised as the first “Grand New Year Coloured Carnival” (1999: 99). Today, there are a small minority of non-coloured participants, including one troupe based in the historically African township, Gugulethu.

control in the Group Areas Act, enacted in 1950. Laws assigned racial groups to different homogenous residential sections of the city, excluding non-whites from living in the most desirable areas, and subjecting blacks to humiliating Pass Laws, which required them to carry identification cards when outside their homelands and designated areas.

In 1966, South Africa's apartheid government initiated the systematic destruction of the racially-mixed, dense, cosmopolitan area known as District Six. It declared the land whites-only, forcing over 60,000 inhabitants from their homes, which were subsequently bulldozed. Nadia Davids (2013: 94) has described it as "the final gesture in a series of attempts to lay total claim to and control of the city center and to ensure that Black Capetonians were city visitors, not dwellers, and that their relationship to its center was always peripheral, itinerant, and never rooted."

In rapidly transforming post-apartheid Cape Town, many formerly excluded Capetonians daily claim the right to occupy urban spaces once off-limits. When I traveled to the formerly whites-only Camps Bay on Boxing Day or sat at a cafe beside the prime beach strip in Muizenberg, the sandy beaches were filled with black and brown bodies picnicking, swimming, and surfing. Yet despite the possibilities for economic upward mobility — and with it the freedom to move out of townships and into once white neighborhoods — economic and social inequalities (no longer quite as tightly bound to race) keep many Capetonians in place (Besteman 2008; Fassin 2007; McDonald 2006). Moreover, contemporary urban "restructuring" and "beautification" projects are all too reminiscent of apartheid evictions, such as those in preparation for the 2010 FIFA World Cup in which homeless people were "removed" from the city center and residents of an informal settlement were sent to Blikkiesdorp (Tin Can Town), a temporary relocation area in the far-flung township of Delft as part of the cleanup of the N2 Gateway, a high visibility corridor linking Cape Town International Airport to the city center (COHRE 2009).

On-going senses of spatial separation grounded in intersections of race, class, and gender were evidenced in a range of informal conversations that I had throughout my fieldwork. For example, many members of the FWS lack the necessary funds or access to transportation that would enable them to travel twenty-five kilometers from their homes to the city center to take advantage of its offerings. Without a car, minibus taxis offer the cheapest option, but these are often dangerous and pose added risks for women traveling at night. Some members also told me that they felt uncomfortable and self-conscious in parts of the city, such as the V&A Waterfront or Camps Bay, or that they had been turned away by downtown clubs and bars because they were not dressed appropriately.

The linguistic construction of the "Cape Flats" as a singular entity ignores the diversity of areas it encompasses and reinforces the perception of a binary division between the inside and the outside, the center and the periphery, the haves and the have-nots. But these divisions, suspicions, and fears exist even within relatively small neighborhoods such as Woodstock. For example, according to one troupe member, a friend and Woodstock resident, "I'm too afraid to walk in my own area at night..."



Figure 5. FWS parading past the Slave Lodge, 2014.

first-hand the destruction of District Six talk of emotions of return and a renewed sense of ownership when traversing the city center. In conversation, Valmont Layne, former director of the District Six Museum, described the gathering of troupes as a “coming home,” a kind of diasporic return, and a process of “mourning the remains of District Six,” a landscape often considered to be an “apartheid scar” and “constant reminder of loss” (Interview 10 January 2012). Over a cup of milky rooibos tea, prominent troupe owner Anwar Gambeno characterized the Group Areas Act as effectively “turning the city inside out.” He called the Minstrel Carnival the one day a year when the city “turns itself right again,” when those pushed to the periphery reclaim the center (Interview 20 September 2012).

Interestingly, Anwar used the Afrikaans term *deurmekaar*, meaning “mixed-up” or “backwards,” to describe the effects of the Group Areas Act — a word often used in the context of Carnival to refer to a sense of freedom and enjoyment experienced on the day of the parade (it also conveniently rhymes with *Tweede Nuwe Jaar* as can be heard in numerous song lyrics). In a conversation explicitly about Carnival, Anwar’s unexpected use of the term to refer to the apartheid government’s acts of spatial/social re-engineering implied that it was the apartheid policies that were truly “mixed-up” and the Carnival that set things straight.

For many, the Carnival is an ambiguous practice hovering between a sense of somber memorialization, dutiful remembrance, and powerful, exuberant reclamation. According to Valmont Layne, the urban area that “created [Carnival], generated it,

gave it its shape, and its tradition, its memory, is gone. But every year the Carnival comes to its own graveyard and it goes through a mimesis of what the carnival was” (Interview, 10 January 2012). This sense that the Carnival principally functions as an act of memory is echoed by participants who link the physical experiences of parading to personal recollections of dispossession and broader public memories of slavery. Ardielah Daniels, a member of the FWS, told me on the day of Carnival, “This is where you want to be. You can go to any area, but once you get to town, you’re home.” Later she stated:

They actually took us out of our areas and they pushed us to the fields basically. We had to move out of the city and where everybody else was pushed out, it was fields. There were no schools at the time, maybe one school in the whole area...and we were all pushed out of all that comfort, so we take it back. That time of year, we take it back. This is our city, so we take it back! We go there and we use those streets because they’re our streets!” (Interview 23 December 2012).

Anwar Gambeno, owner and coach for the Nokia All Stars, told me:

[The apartheid government] took the people out of the city...so now it has to go back. Now the Carnival in the city is all about reclaiming the city for that short while, you understand. We are now back in District Six and back in Sir Lowry Road where the market used to be and back on the way to Greenpoint” (Interview 20 September 2012).

Melvyn Matthews, CEO of the *Kaapse Klopse Kaarnival Assosiatie* (KKKA) said:

We came [to the Cape Flats] with our food and our culture and our children and our families and all our troubles and our grandmothers that we had to look after. All of them died because their hearts were broken because of what happened. On the Cape Flats, they all died, quick! They came out of the city and they had to die here because they couldn’t understand what happened here: ‘We’re 20 kilometers out of the city. We want to go down to the city and get something quick. We want to go to the Fish and Chips and get whale meat.’ They couldn’t understand it...The people gave them 2,000 Rand for their house and you must go. And they bulldozed it...On Carnival, we remember this (Interview 20 September 2012).

Karriem Johnstone, member of the FWS told me:

The parade brings people back to town, you understand. [Under apartheid] people were put so far on the outskirts that there is hardly time for them to come to town. So when the minstrels come, there’s opportunity for them to come to town. We come back to the roots, where it starts and we need to be back, we need to be here” (Interview 12 December 2012).

Andrew Edwards, musician and one-time coach for the Pennsylvanians troupe said:

It’s always nice for us to march through Cape Town, especially District Six. Then you get that feeling again. That *old* feeling. If you walk up Wale Street towards the place where slaves were staying in the yesteryear, it’s a nice feeling. But in order to complement that feeling you must play *goema* because that’s how the slaves did it (interview 3 January 2013).

The experience of memorialization is balanced by an urgent sense that paraders are “storming the city” through sound and acts of what Cornel West (1989: 93) might call

“passionate physicality.”⁹ Drummers playing *goemas*, bass drums, and side drums, the whistles of troupe captains, children with tambourines, one hundred-member brass bands, the occasional strum of a banjo player, and the electric dancing of drum majors envelop the street in sound and movement. Rather than the weight of a memorial or a “muted lament, mourning dispossession” (Baxter 1996: 2), the parade’s energy promises a renewed ownership of the city center.

Goema as sonic-kinetic motif

The *goema* (or *ghoema*) beat is central to the parading of *klopse*, as well as the other interconnected Western Cape musical practices, the Christmas Choirs and Malay Choirs.¹⁰ To view FWS parading *klopse* go to [DVD track 1]. The basic beat (see Figure 6) is subjected to numerous mutations creating subtle variations on this fundamental rhythmic groove.



Figure 6. Foundational *goema* beat.

In *klopse* music, this syncopated pattern is played on the *goema* drum, a single-headed wood barrel drum, by alternating hands. In *klopse* parades, this beat is also played on the bass drums and side drums, enunciated by the tambourine, *tamboor*, and shaker.¹¹ Together these instruments create a dense rhythmic texture as the band plays its “*pad* numbers” (road tunes) along the parade.¹² When played at faster tempi, the *goema* beat is sometimes referred to as the *klopse* beat, as these faster speeds are most closely associated with the *Kaapse Klopse*’s approach to parading and to singing comic songs, known as *moppies*. In *Sounding the Cape*, Denis-Constant Martin (2013) investigates

⁹ Writing about the importance of “kinetic orality” amongst post-slave populations, West states: “By passionate physicality, I mean bodily stylizations of the world, syncopations and polyrhythms that assert one’s somebodiness in a society in which one’s body has no [perceptible] public worth, only economic value as a laboring mechanism” (1989: 93; Quoted in Gaunt 2006: 5).

¹⁰ Sylvia Bruinders labels these three practices the “*ghoema* musical complex as all three are characterized by a particular syncopated rhythm, which has become emblematic of Cape Town” (2012: 2). The *goema* beat is also an important element of Cape Jazz, and as Denis-Constant Martin has noted, is closely related to the *vastrap* rhythm used in *boeremusiek* and *langarm* (2013: 352).

¹¹ Minstrel participants diverge on whether or not the *goema* beat is only effective when played by the *goema* drum (with its wood and goat skin) or if it can produce the same musical feeling when played by bass drums, side drums, or even djembes. A firm believer in the value of the *goema* drum, drum-maker Boeta Achmat Sabera told me that the goatskin leather of the *goema* shrinks and expands in the hot sun and in the colder nighttime temperature affecting the sound and transforming the kinds of sounds and speed at which drummers can play (conversation 15 January 2014).

¹² Sylvia Bruinders states that, within the Christmas Bands, this “sound density masks individual performers and allows for members at various performance levels to participate in the ensemble” (2012: 75).

the etymology of the word *goema* and explores its relationships with other rhythmic motifs found in *vastrap*, *langarm*, *marabi*, and *mbaqanga*. He suggests its relationship to rhythmic patterns found in Indian, Muslim or Arabic musics and writes that the “*ghoema* beat amalgamated and fused these rhythmic sensibilities and practices to provide a unifying creole pulse that pervaded most Cape Town musics” (2013: 352–3). The *goema* beat’s flexibility encourages “participatory discrepancies” (Keil 1987) and enables the incorporation of heterogeneous musical material refracted through its rhythmic propulsion. This can be heard in the diverse array of musical sources from which bands derive their repertoires, from portions of folksongs called *goemaliedjies* to the latest Beyoncé hit, and the playful ways in which musicians and dancers improvise along the parade route.

In the context of *Kaapse Klopse* practice, the *goema* beat almost always generates movement, whether on the parade route or in the synchronized gestures of choirs in staged performances. Troupe members refer to their acts of parading as *jolling*, from the South African colloquialism *jol*, meaning a “party” or “good time.” The term is frequently used in casual conversation, such as “Which team are you *jolling* with this year?” or as troupe *voorloper* Allerik Kopman told me, “I practice my *jolling*,” a comment that calls attention to the copious amounts of rehearsal time that go into performing a “good time” (Interview 11 January 2014). The term is also frequently used in troupe chants that are sung on buses and at competitions — “*Wie maak die jol vol? Starlites maak die jol vol?*” (meaning “Who brings the party? Starlites bring the party!”).¹³ Importantly the term *jol*, which eschews strict divisions between walking and the more practiced dance moves of *voorlopers*, links movement with experience in that it refers both to one’s embodied performance and to “having a good time.” When discussing her role as a captain, Lorna Wiener told me that part of her job involves ensuring that paraders stay in rows of four and that their bodily movements and displays of enjoyment do not get in the way of others: “You must *jol* with respect” (Interview 23 December 2012). You can move/enjoy yourself, but not at the expense of those around you.

When parading, the *goema* beat appears in both music and movement, particularly as a way of *jolling* that participants of all ages perform. When I joined my first parade, I was immediately struck by how the music insisted on a very particular embodied response, which was reinforced by the movements of other paraders. The syncopated asymmetry of the *goema* beat implied a certain way of moving, a quick off-beat shuffle, alternating one’s weight from side to side, knees slightly bent, grounded (see Figure 7). The quickness of the tempo combined with the requisite constant forward movement of the parade necessitated a particular orientation to space. Artist Rod Sauls linked this embodied practice directly to the Cape’s history of slavery when he told me these

¹³ “*Wie Maak Die Jol Vol*” is also the title of a song by South African rave-rap group Die Antwoord. The “*Klopse Jol*” is also a category of performance for which troupes compete during competitions. It constitutes a parade through the stadium in a manner similar to the Minstrel Carnival itself.



Figure 7. Woman dancing on parade in Delft, 2012. Photo by Shareeqah Collins.



Figure 8. Young member of the FWS dancing on parade, 2014. Photo by author.

grounded, shuffling movements of participants referenced the shackles of slaves (Interview 21 January 2013).

Although paraders can, and quite often do, embellish the basic movement in individual and innovative ways, they almost always return at various intervals to this particular way of moving.¹⁴ In some moments paraders held hands with one another, thus rhythmically entraining their bodies in space (Black 2010). This created a sense of communal effort, an intersubjective experience, but also reinforced the movement as individuals aligned their motions with others.

Troupe members discussed feeling “sucked into the rhythm” or “called out” from their darkened homes at night by the sound of the *goema* beat of a passing troupe: “You can hear the drums from *far* already and you stay awake just to hear the sound of those drums. When you hear the sound of those drums, it’s like your *whole* body starts reacting. You want to be outside, you want to dance” (Ardielah Daniels, Interview 23 December 2012); “Whenever I hear a *goema* and a banjo, it’s like this thing gets in my stomach and I just get excited!” (Andrew Edwards, Interview 19 December 2012). This embodied response even occurred outside the context of the street parade, such as when troupe members immediately began *jolling* down the aisle of the moving bus as soon as a band’s *goema* music became audible from a distance, which caused quite a lot of pleasurable chaos. In another instance, when a friend and I came home to her house to find her brother watching personal videos of one of our earlier parades on his laptop, she broke into a *jol* in the hallway, before even reaching the living room and seeing the computer screen.

In these examples, *goema* becomes linked to bodily movement through parade practice, consolidating participants’ affective and embodied dispositions that are often recapitulated in everyday life. The many informal street parades throughout the festive season and the in-troupe circulation of parade sound recordings and videos (mostly taken on mobile phones) means that parade music can be re-played and danced to throughout the year, further strengthening these connections. Repeatedly listening and moving to music with others trains (and entrains) the body, creating a shared “habitus” that structures action (Bourdieu 1977). Though participants do not use the term *goema* to refer to a particular dance move, the conversations and experiences I had convinced me that for many Carnival participants, at least within the context of *klopse*, the rhythmic groove of the *goema* beat was linked to a particular kinetic practice, or “habitus,” best captured by the notion of *jolling*. *Goema* is more than a rhythmic pattern; it functions as a sonic-kinetic motif, and an important structure linking music to the body in the context of the Minstrel Carnival¹⁵

¹⁴ Many older participants, who take up the rear of the parade, walk for most of the time, while younger participants dance more vigorously while carrying shakers towards the front of the parade. Sometimes groups of teenagers, particularly girls, create smaller circles within the parade line and incorporate various popular social dances into the mix.

¹⁵ Similarly, Sydney Hutchinson describes the “limp” or *cojo* in *merengue típico* dance, carnival movement, and *merengue típico* rhythm as a “kineto-rhythmic motif” (2012: 90).

Sonic–kinetic appropriations of space

In *The Spectacular City: Violence and Performance in Urban Bolivia*, Daniel M. Goldstein (2012: 17) writes of the ways in which urban migrants lay claim to the city through folkloric street festivals and vigilante lynching of criminals. For marginalized individuals, spectacle is a vehicle for overcoming invisibility and a way to constitute themselves as a public. Goldstein is primarily focused on the intensely visual nature of spectacles and the political implications of “being seen.” Yet, as noted previously, for participants, the experiences of sounding and moving of one’s body are fundamental to the affective nature of the parade.¹⁶ Participants describe their pleasures in occupying Cape Town through acts of embodied practice.

The parade itself is a physically exhausting affair that can last until the early hours of the morning. Extensive travel on overcrowded buses, the hot summertime temperatures, and the full-coverage of costumes and hats make bodily discomfort a frequent topic of conversation, and create a kind of sympathetic physicality amongst participants. Despite discomfort, paraders seem to relish the exhaustion and find ways to ameliorate it through movement. Among troupe members there is a general consensus that until you get the feel of the *goema* beat that compels you to dance, you have not fully participated in the parade.¹⁷ A few troupe members use the term *tariiek*, possibly from the Arabic *tariqa*, meaning a Sufi order that is derived from the word for “the way” or “path to God,” to describe the trance-like feeling one accesses while dancing in the parade. *Tariiek* captures that deeply felt experience of “being carried away” that comes from long hours of repetitive physical exertion (Martin 1999: 40).

The experiential links between the city’s geography, *goema* music, and movement were highlighted when paraders described the final stretch of the parade — the long ascent up Wale Street. As Melvyn Matthews told me: “You get that feeling of *tariiek* when you’re dancing, when you go up Wale Street to the Bo-Kaap and the music gets faster and faster to give people energy to climb the hill, and you just go mad” (Interview 4 January 2012). In these moments, the city’s physical geography becomes translated by the music, which transmits energy to the dancing body as participants move along the parade route.

The sound of the *goema* beat, and its relationship to place, features centrally in troupe participants’ memories of the parade. They discussed the excitement and anticipation created from hearing the troupe approach from afar before actually seeing the members on the street. As Andrew Edwards told me, “You hear the team coming. You hear the *goema* sound. The band plays, the team is coming from District Six and they move down into Adderley, past the Castle of Good Hope, right in front of the City

¹⁶ An emphasis on the body might be particularly pertinent in the context of South Africa, as several scholars have noted the body as an important means of asserting presence and value after state-sanctioned dispossession (Hamilton 2009; Meintjes 2004; Nuttall 2004).

¹⁷ I am reminded of Susan McClary’s writing on Wilson Pickett’s crossover hit “In the Midnight Hour”: “For the duration of the song at least, the body and even subjectivity itself are organized by its rhythmic impulses” (1994: 36).

Hall. The people standing at City Hall can already hear from far, ‘doof doof, doof, doof doof, doof’ [making the sound of the *goema* beat]” (Interview 3 January 2012).

For some, the *goema* beat is considered to be the “sonic marker” of the city itself with its history of slavery and cultural cross-fertilization. One day, Melvyn Matthews told me a beautiful story about meeting Nelson Mandela in 1996. Mandela told him that during his time in prison on Robben Island, each year on *Tweede Nuwe Jaar* he could hear the music of the Carnival, of the *goemas*, washing over the ocean from across the water and into his cell, bringing him to tears. There were times when he could not hear the music because of the direction of the wind, but he always listened for it as it reminded him of the people of the Cape. The veracity of this account is less important than what it represents to Melvyn and what it reveals about *goema* as a “sensual bridge” linking the body to the city of Cape Town in personal memory and historical imagination (Stoller 1989: 121).

Melvyn’s comment also call attention to the political dimensions of sound in its ability to bring forth forgotten memories and histories, and in so doing provide renewed experiences of ownership over place in contexts where individuals have been excluded and their movements so tightly surveilled and violently policed. Sound can be unruly and difficult to contain, enveloping spaces and threatening boundaries (such as prison cell walls), travelling in ways that bodies and spectacles cannot. The experiences of occupying place generated by the *goema* beat and its accompanying embodied practices become important mechanisms that shape paraders’ senses of ownership and belonging in the city.

Contestations over Cape Town city space

In present-day Cape Town, *klopse* participants’ claims to space are frequently contested. Fierce debates persist between *klopse* organizations, downtown residents, religious groups, and city officials, revealing the Carnival’s sounds, and the bodies attached to them, as sources of deep social anxiety. In fact, it was not until 2012 that the city’s Democratic Alliance (DA) government officially recognized the Carnival as an annual event and set aside a budget for it. Until then, Carnival associations were expected to apply for permission to parade and financial support from the city and provincial governments each year revealing the contingency and marginality of the practice (Melvyn Matthews, Interview 14 September 2012).

Despite the government’s recent recognition of carnival as a valuable heritage practice — unsurprisingly coupled with a desire to capture its tourist potential — discourses of respectability, religiosity, and safety are often used by bureaucrats and downtown residents to counter troupes’ spatial reclamations. Residents complain about noise disturbances, property damage, and lewd behavior, such as public urination on mosque walls, creating tensions between residents, city officials, and Carnival participants. This is particularly true in the case of the Bo-Kaap, a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood that has seen an influx of wealthier South Africans as well as foreign travellers, who patronize hostels, bed and breakfasts, and international language

schools. The Bo-Kaap has a complex and multifaceted past with links to the history of slavery, the spread of Islam, and the development of Afrikaans. Today, newcomers to the Bo-Kaap have brought economic development, dramatically increased housing prices, and displaced many long-term residents.

In a 2013 editorial in the *Mail and Guardian*, an opinion columnist took a typical tone towards the carnival, describing it as both an important historical event and an “annoying, if not illegal, activity” in which a “cacophony of brass horns blown fervently and drums beaten methodically” “disrupt” the “usual calm” and “quiet religiosity” of the Bo-Kaap (Kardas-Nelson, 4 January 2013). With the growth of participants in Carnival and with it larger and larger brass bands and increased numbers of bass and side drums capable of producing a greater volume of sound than the *goema*, the Carnival has indeed become louder. With more (and larger) troupes, the Carnival and post-competition parades last longer, often into the early morning hours.

Due to complaints in 2008, the city banned troupes from marching in the Bo-Kaap, apart from a few resident troupes that were allowed to march back home after the Carnival. In 2011, Carnival organizations banded together and took the city to court. The city drafted an official agreement stipulating that it would permit troupes to march in the Bo-Kaap only with the promise that they would immediately board buses and depart the city center after the parade. Head of the Bo-Kaap Civic Association, Osman Shaboodien, told me,

We felt that the unilateral decision to ban a tradition that stretches out so long from entering Bo-Kaap [was] not only an indication of the lack of understanding of the history of the city they are supposed to govern, but also a total disrespect of the democratic rights of everybody...[When the city government banned the troupes] it was like looking at a river that has been diverted and you're sitting here and all the seeds and the trees to be watered (Interview 26 September 2012).

After banning troupes in the Bo-Kaap, the city government solidified its control over the Carnival in 2012 with a multimillion-rand deal to hire an outside event organizing company, ZA Fanzone, to manage the event. Though they increased their financial support for the Carnival, the move was met with considerable protest as it underscored the government's lack of trust in the managerial abilities of an allied group of troupes that had also submitted a competing proposal to manage the Carnival. Increased security and police presence, the placement of metal fencing between Carnival participants and spectators, and the banning of informal parades and activity in the Bo-Kaap were considered by many troupe members to be weapons of control, meant to keep paraders out of the city center, and “in their place.” Kevin Momberg, Director of Administration for the Cape Town Minstrel Carnival Association (CTMCA) elaborates: “They are now controlling our Carnival. We must just pitch up to do our act like we are in the circus, get out of town as soon as we can, and the city is the ringmaster” (Van Der Fort, 30 December 2009). In 2013 the Carnival was again the subject of much media attention when the city again hired an event company to manage the parade, despite previous

protests from troupe participants; “*Klopse se march in gedrang*” (Minstrel’s march in jeopardy) proclaimed the Afrikaans-language tabloid, *Die Son*.

In January 2013 the South African Muslim Judicial Council (MJC) issued a *fatwa* on *klopse* practice, prohibiting Muslims from participating in troupes and watching the parade. The MJC’s statement, which referred to troupe participants as “coons,” banned participation on the grounds that “it is generally degrading and undignified for Muslims to dance around in public with painted faces and colourful clothing” (Williams, 4 January 2013; Majavu, 17 January 2013). Though it did not come as a surprise nor did it impact participation, for members of the FWS, the statement was interpreted as yet another attempt to marginalize their cultural practices as well as an expression of middle-class hostility on the part of “uppity” coloured Bo-Kaap residents.

Troupe members have also been vexed by the recently inaugurated Cape Town Carnival, a Rio-inspired parade in March invented by a media company as a way to create social cohesion and showcase South Africa’s diversity for tourists. The siphoning of governmental support and funds to the infant Cape Town Carnival, while long-standing local troupes struggle to stay afloat, has angered many. Together, these actions have created a general sense that city officials and culture brokers are using the Minstrel Carnival to present an image of Cape Town as diverse and inclusive, solely for touristic purposes, while marginalizing the needs and goals of the actual resident-participants themselves. The ambiguity between celebration and sanitization highlights the tension between the DA government’s outward support for expressions of difference in its effort to represent itself as tolerant and diverse and acts that discipline bodies in public displays of culture, thus making them legible to outsiders through recognized forms of management.

Participants push back against both historical and contemporary geographies of control. Yet troupe leaders and officials also seek recognition, approval, and support. After the hiring of ZA Fanzone, the head of one of the largest associations of *klopse* troupes threatened to stop his over 30 troupes from parading for the Carnival. However, they eventually complied. In 2013, after parading on January 2nd, The Fabulous Woodstock Starlites dutifully climbed on buses as directed and left the city center. At the end of January, we travelled from a stadium in Athlone to the Bo-Kaap to parade in celebration of our competition win. We poured out of three buses onto Rose Street, turning the corner to march down Wale Street. There was a shared euphoric feeling as we carried enormous trophies and performed our “bragging rights,” as troupe owner Jamaldien “Boeta Dienie” Jumah calls them. After just a few minutes of celebrating we were stopped in our tracks by several policemen who ushered us back onto our buses and forced us out of the city center. Heading to *jol* in Lentegeur in the Cape Flats, troupe members commiserated about the current state of affairs: “*Klopse* was born in the Bo-Kaap!” they told me.

Conclusion

In this article, I have sought to examine the ways in which Minstrel Carnival participants use sound and their bodies to appropriate urban space, choreographing it according to

their own imaginations. The *goema* beat is critical to this process, as it serves to link the sonic-kinetic and symbolic, creating deep experiences of emplacement for many troupe members. Deborah Wong (2004: 5) notes that “performance constructs new critical realities.” Yet it is often challenging to pinpoint exactly how the empowering experiences of ownership produced within the context of the Carnival translate into the everyday social and political spheres of participants’ lives. The contentiousness of Carnival as participants fight for the “right to the city,” even through legal measures, reveals just how the sensorial experiences of emplacement, ownership, and belonging are not bounded to the “second world” of Carnival, but bleed into other arenas of life (Bakhtin 1984: 6). Carnival participants’ choreographies of the city represent more than a memorialization of the past: they assert contemporary access to the city and perform their claim to citizenship.

References

Adhikari, Mohamed

- 2009 *Burdened by Race: Coloured Identities in Southern Africa*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.

Bakhtin, M. M.

- 1984 [1965] *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Baxter, Lisa

- 1996 “History, Identity and Meaning: Cape Town’s Coon Carnival in the 1960s and 1970s.” MA Thesis: University of Cape Town, Cape Town.

Bickford-Smith, Vivian

- 1995 *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town: Group Identity and Social Practice, 1838–1910*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Black, Steven

- 2010 “Facing HIV/AIDS Stigmatization in South Africa Through Language and Music.” Ph.D. Dissertation: University of California, Los Angeles.

Bourdieu, Pierre

- 1977 *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bruinders, Sylvia

- 2012 “Parading Respectability: An Ethnography of the Christmas Bands Movement in the Western Cape, South Africa.” Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana.

- 2006–7 “‘This is Our Sport!’: Christmas Band Competitions and the Enactment of an Ideal Community.” *SAMUS* 26(27): 109–126.

COHRE

- 2009 “N2 Gateway Project: Housing Rights Violations As ‘Development’ in South Africa.” *Online*: <http://westerncapeantieviction.files.wordpress.com/2009/09/090911-n2-gateway-project-report.pdf> [accessed 22 September 2014]

- Cockrell, Dale
1997 *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
1987 "Of Gospel Hymns, Minstrel Shows, and Jubilee Singers: Toward Some Black South African Musics." *American Music* 5(4): 417–432.
- Cole, Catherine M.
2001 *Ghana's Concert Party Theatre*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Cole, Catherine M. and Tracy C. Davis
2013 "Routes of Blackface." *TDR* 57(2): 7–12.
- Davids, Nadia
2013 "It is us': An Exploration of 'Race' and Place in the Cape Town Minstrel Carnival." *TDR* 57(2): 86–101.
- Erasmus, Zimitri, ed.
2001 *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town*. Colorado Springs: International Academic Publishers.
- Erlmann, Veit
1991 *African Stars: Studies in Black South African Performance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Feld, Steven and Keith H. Basso
1996 *Senses of Place*. Seattle: School of American Research Press.
- Field, Sean, ed.
2001 *Lost Communities, Living Memories: Remembering Forced Removals in Cape Town*. Cape Town Centre for Popular Memory, University of Cape Town.
- Gaunt, Kyra
2006 *The Games Black Girls Play: Learning the Rotes from Double-Dutch to Hip-Hop*. New York: New York University Press.
- Gilroy, Paul
1993 *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Goldstein, Daniel
2004 *The Spectacular City: Violence and Performance in Urban Bolivia*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hamilton, Carolyn
2009 "Uncertain Citizenship and Public Deliberation in Post-Apartheid South Africa." *Social Dynamics* 35(2): 355–374.
- Hutchinson, Sydney
2012 "A Limp with Rhythm': Convergent Choreographies in Black Atlantic Time." *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 44: 87–108.

- Jeppie, Shamil
1990 "The Class, Colour and Gender of Carnival: Aspects of a Cultural Form in Inner Cape Town, c. 1939–1959." Paper presented at the History Workshop, 6–10 February, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Kardas-Nelson, Mara
2013 "Kaapse Klopse still march to their own beat." *Mail and Guardian Online*: <http://mg.co.za/article/2013-01-04-00-kaapse-klopse-still-march-to-their-own-beat> [accessed 12 May 2014]
- Keil, Charles
1987 "Participatory Discrepancies and the Power of Music." *Cultural Anthropology* 2(3): 275–83.
- Lane, Jill
2005 *Blackface Cuba, 1840-1895*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Lhamon, W.T.
1998 *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
2003 *Jump Jim Crow: Lost Plays, Lyrics, and Street Prose of the First Atlantic Popular Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard University.
- Lott, Eric
1993 *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mahar, William
1999 *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Majavu, Anna
2013 "Muslim Judicial Council Fatwa against Minstrels Highlights Cape Town's Class Problems." SACSIS Online: <http://sacsis.org.za/site/article/1539> [accessed 12 May 2014]
- Mason, John Edwin
2010 *One Love, Ghoema Beat: Inside the Cape Town Carnival (Reconsiderations in Southern African History)*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.
- Martin, Denis Constant-
1999 *Coon Carnival: New Year in Cape Town, Past and Present*. Cape Town: David Philip Publishers.
2013 *Sounding the Cape: Music, Identity and Politics in South Africa*. Cape Town: African Minds.

- Meintjes, Louise
2004 "Shoot the Sergeant, Shatter the Mountain: The Production of Masculinity in Zulu Ngoma Song and Dance in Post-Apartheid South Africa." *Ethnomusicology Forum* 13(3): 173–201.
- Muñoz, José Esteban
1999 *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and The Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Muller, Carol Ann
2008 *Focus: Music of South Africa*. New York: Routledge.
- Nuttall, Sarah
2004 "Stylizing the Self: The Y Generation in Rosebank, Johannesburg." *Public Culture* 16(3): 430–452.
- Sakakeeny, Matt
2010 "'Under the Bridge': An Orientation to Soundscapes in New Orleans." *Ethnomusicology* 54(1): 1–27.
- Stewart, Susan
1996 *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an "Other" America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Stoller, Paul
1989 *Fusion of the Worlds: An Ethnography of Possession Among the Songhay of Niger*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Thelwell, Chinua
2011 "'Nothing Now Goes Down But Burnt Cork': Blackface Minstrelsy and Ethnic Impersonation in South Africa, 1962–1968." Ph.D. Dissertation: New York University, New York.
- Van Der Fort, Fouzia
2009 "Kaapse Klopse banned in Bo-Kaap," *IOL News Online*: <http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/kaapse-klopse-banned-in-bo-kaap-1.469080#.U3D58K1dWuo> [accessed 12 May 2014]
- West, Cornel
1989 "Black Culture and Postmodernism." In *Remaking History* (Discussion in Contemporary Culture, vol. 4), eds. Barbara Kruger and Phil Mariani, 87–97. Seattle: Bay Press.
- Williams, Murray
2013 "MJC issues fatwa on minstrels." *IOL News Online*: <http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/mjc-issues-fatwa-on-minstrels-1.1447535#.U3D6Za1dWup> [accessed 12 May 2014]
- Wong, Deborah
2004 *Speak it Louder: Asian Americans Making Music*. New York: Routledge.
2013 "Klopse se march in gedrang" *Die Son* 18 December.

Interviews by author

Daniels, Ardielah. Cape Town, South Africa. 23 December 2012.

Edwards, Andrew. Cape Town, South Africa. 3 January 2013; 19 December 2012.

Gambeno, Anwar. Cape Town, South Africa. 20 September, 2012.

Hartley, Waheed. Cape Town, South Africa. 5 January 2014.

Johnstone, Karriem. Cape Town, South Africa. 12 December 2012.

Kopman, Allerik. Cape Town, South Africa. 11 January 2014.

Layne, Valmont. Muizenberg, South Africa. 10 January 2012.

Matthews, Melvyn. Cape Town, South Africa. 4 January 2012; 20 September 2012; 14 September 2012.

Sauls, Rod. Cape Town, South Africa. 21 January 2013.

Shaboodien, Osman. Cape Town, South Africa. 26 September 2012.

Wiener, Lorna. Cape Town, South Africa. 23 December 2012.