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The Empire of Sheep review



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"We're living in a world that's upside down. Where the exception has become the rule. Where the margins have become king. The aesthetics of the carnival are all around us: the spinning, the spurning, the entertainment mode — anything about our world is carnivalesque. And usually it is the fool [or sheep] that brings us to that moment. It's the fool, the clown, all of these types of characters that bring us into this upside-down world of spinning and entertainment and excess."

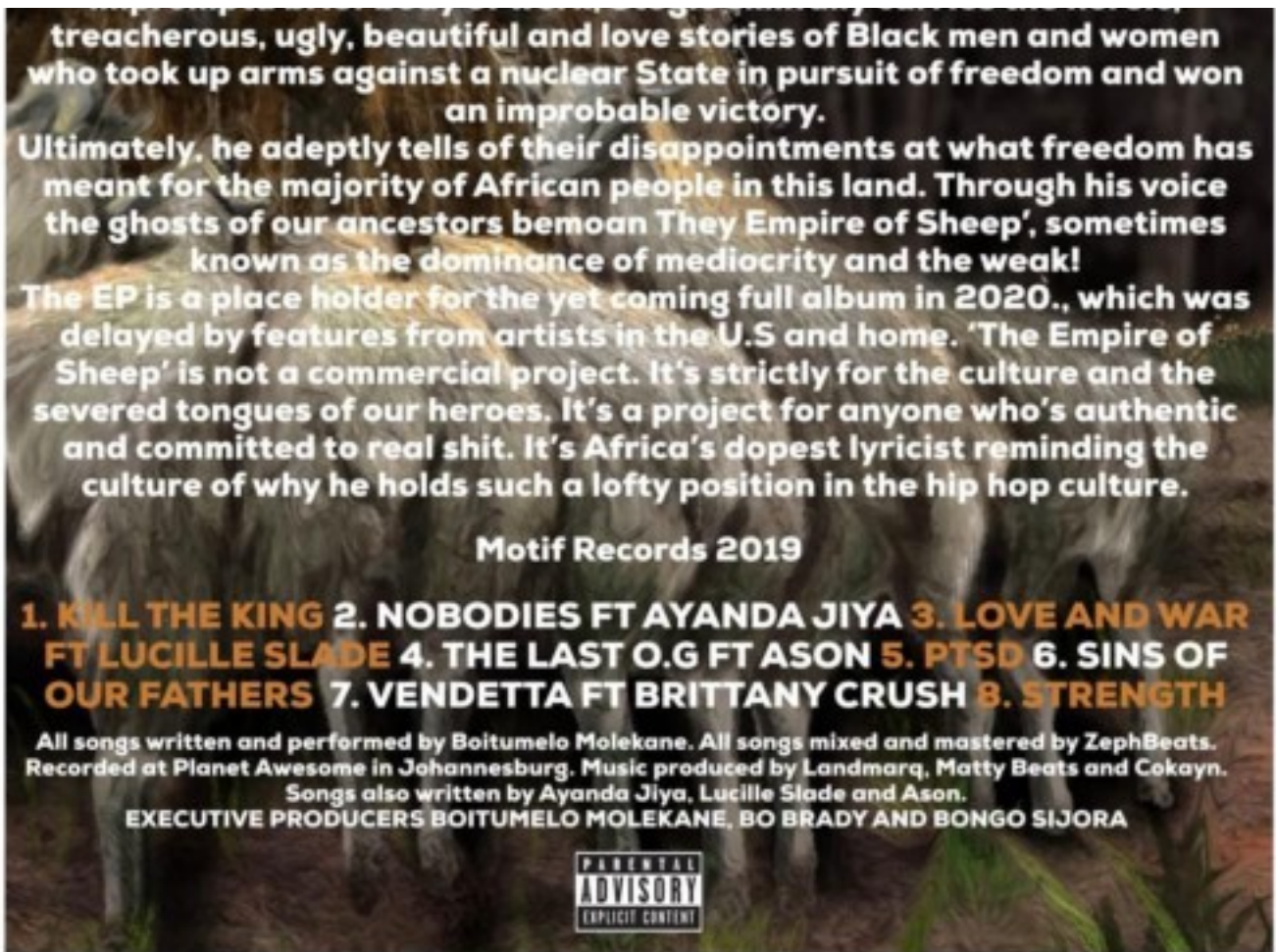
During the annual carnivalesque and hyper-consumerist event that is Black Friday, the 29th of November this year, we welcomed an eight-track EP from seasoned hip-hop artist and Motif Records label head, Stogie T, formerly known as Tumi from Tumi and The Volume, *a sorry for the wait* project while we wait for his forthcoming full album in 2020. He said in an pre-EP-release Instagram post that his upcoming album was delayed due to both local and international features' contributions being finalised on what will be his fifth solo studio album after *Music From My Good Eye* (2007), *Whole Worlds* (2009), *The Return of the King* (2015) and the self-titled *Stogie T* album (2016). The latter served as his re-introductory album under his rebranded moniker, Stogie T. What needs no re-branding is the richness of literature, literary culture and critical theory in his music, broken down in his raps but not reduced in its magnitude. An example of this is the consideration of Michel Bhaktin's carnivalesque theory in *The Empire of Sheep*. The EP, like the theory, explores the celebration of equality, abundance/excess and freedom in a given socio-cultural and economic environment, the relations between seemingly disjointed events that have cause and effect links within a cyclical time domain in place of a linear temporality.



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Russian theorist Michel Bhaktin coined the term *carnavalesque* and described some of the key characteristics of the carnivalesque to include a reversal and a subversion of (old) hierarchies, 'eccentric' behaviour and a non-linear form of narration, within the backdrop consideration of the birth to death spectrum of all modalities and the transitional liminal space and interregnum reality of the in-between space between these two political epochs: pre-1994 fascist, Afrikaner-nationalism dominated South Africa and the democratic Republic of South Africa of post-1994 that was governance by majority rule.





The Empire of Sheep tracklist

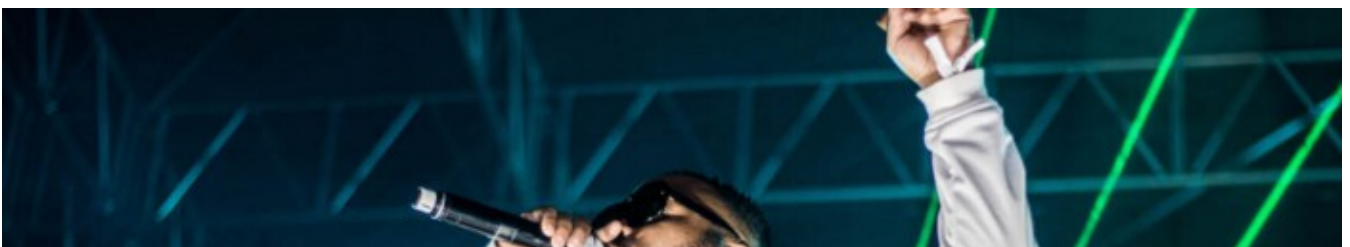
The Empire of Sheep EP opens with the DJ P-Kuttah assisted “Kill The King”, with a haunting Nas sample from the *Illmatic*’s “The Message”, with the Queens MC reminding us that “there can only be one King,” a bold dare to all those barking in the shadows to step to the light and to Stogie for the SA Hip-Hop throne. He invites a subversion of the existing hierarchy of rappers in the country by even giving a formula on how to kill the king/him: “When you kill the king, you don’t stab him in the dark, you kill him where the entire court and his subjects can watch him die,” a sample from the cult classic film *Gangs of New York* (2002) by Amsterdam Vallon (Leonardo DiCaprio). Punchlines are plenty from the Redbull line: “You giving wings to that lame energy that’s a lot of bull”; to a nod to the return of Tiger Woods to the peak of golf with his fifth Master’s title after four back surgeries and personal scandals had toppled him from the summit for with the masterful bars “Cats out the bag/Can’t tell the woods from the master’s stroke.”





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The soulful meditation on the plight of subaltern members of South African society — majority Black poor people on “Nobodies” who are found “between the bottle store and the house of God”, either abusing alcohol and drowning their blues in booze or using religion as an escapism from their harsh material realities, projecting poverty on an external locus of control as they deal with a failed government and a failing state unable to care of its most vulnerable people. The stereotypes associated with the downtrodden as being a wishful group that attempts to pray their problems away but “no matter how hard the nobodies summon they will starve alone” come through with a satirical tone against those who articulate it, a socioeconomic group depicted as being lazy (hence their poverty as far as the classist opinion goes) just watching low quality content on TV like *Uyajola99* — “but with no bite they woof woof / they end up watching JubJub.” Neoliberal, hyper-consumerist capitalist culture sees the proletariat class as “human resources, work force” and “not human beings” who have inherent value as humans and whose value is not determined by how much they contribute to the economy, which is why crimes like the Marikana Massacre happened, because poor, Black humans are seen and treated as disposable labour due to the lack of jobs for the many jobless.





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Stogie T returns with a new chapter for his growing audio thesis, with the research aimed at being a repository for the stories of South Africans in the contemporary space and in the inflections/reflections of the past in the present as we navigate toward the future through his raps. This chapter considers why as a nation we are regressing and degenerating at such an alarming rate; why there is a dominance of the weak and how mediocrity and low art has become the order of the day in South Africa, in what Stogie T dubs as *The Empire of Sheep* (2019) — a leaderless mass, going nowhere slowly — an apt description of the our nation: a flock of sheep with no shepherd and left to be food for the lions. The disappointing and underwhelming feeling felt by a majority of African people in the land over what freedom has meant and not meant in contrast to the promise it had in 1994 is portrayed vividly by T, ultimately saying “Strength to [our] country” as we live in in this carnival with no life outside of it, with no difference drawn between actors and spectators, because it is not seen by all alike.





Front cover art: The Empire of Sheep EP

The cover art for the EP illustrates a flock of sheep seemingly hypnotised by a spectacular bonfire, while one sheep in the flock (or a lion in a sheep's skin) quite uncharacteristically looks away from this spectacle, breaking sheepish uniformity, in an action suggesting an awareness of its immediate environment and the dangers that might lurk in the lion-ridden lands with a shepherd that nods off untimely as symbolised by the suggestive ominous black bird suspended above like the inevitable mortal fate of all the “fucking clowns [that] claim the [SA Hip-Hop] crown like [they were] born it in” that wait in the shadows, who “don't know the price [paid by the veterans for SA Hip-Hop]” to exist and thrive — the thorns in the crown, and similarly the personal and group sacrifices made by ex-guerilla fighters of ANC's then active militant wing “uMkhonto weSizwe” amongst other freedom fighting groups in the armed struggle against the illegal Afrikaner nationalist and fascist apartheid state. In the culture of the carnivalesque, animism is equipped in a fable-esque fashion to tell human tales from the distance vantage point of animals, which are widely considered less creatures than ourselves, sheep specifically with the connotations of them being a cognitively wanting species, with no leadership but a blanket of unquestioning followers. “It takes in reality only one to make a quarrel. It is useless for the sheep to pass resolutions in favour of vegetarianism while the wolf remains of a different opinion,” contends William Ralph Inge, an English prelate noted for his pessimistic sermons and articles (1860–1954).



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An interregnum (plural interregna or interregnums) is a time of irregularity or “hole” in an administration, association, or social request. Ideally, it was the timeframe between the rule of one ruler and the following, originating from Latin between; “between” and rēgnum, “rule” and the ideas of interregnum and regime along these lines cover. Generally, the more extended and heavier interregna were normally joined by across the board agitation, common and progression wars among warlords, and power vacuums filled by outside attacks or the rise of another power. A failed state is typically in perpetual interregnum. The term additionally alludes to the temporal periods between the term of another parliament and the foundation of another administration from that parliament in parliamentary majority rules systems, typically ones that utilize some type of corresponding portrayal that enables little gatherings to choose huge numbers, requiring time for arrangements to shape a legislature. This period in SA has been extended since 1994 till now, a failure to concretize a substantive democracy for all. He has kept true to his commitment to never missing a seasoned, having offered us this balanced project, an effort rolled out as a mixtape in terms of its commercial vision, but its premier soundscape is the usual top-tier, luxury rap standard that we have grown accustomed to hearing from one of the pioneers of the game locally.



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The ethereal vocals by singing sensation Ayanda Jiya on “Nobodies” layers the album with a depth that continues on social commentary cuts like “Broke People” from *The Return of the King* album with Samthing Soweto. This 26-minute-long effort showcases some of the best of T’s upper-echelon penmanship and makes a case once more for his great ear for production, the songs are encased in diverse sonic aesthetics that gave each cut high replay value for different reasons. From the catchy hooks and trap-influence on “The Last O.G.” featuring the youngin’ Ason, which uses the carnivalesque feature of humour to point out the ridiculousness of repetitive trap lines that rely on ad-libs to carry songs to quotable bars with substance on “Love and War” featuring Lucille Slade, a fan favourite on social media and seemingly the most likely to be released as a single. With Tumi possibly being the last O.G. still rapping, with HHP and PRO having transcended, and ProVerb having retired, he takes it upon himself to embrace the youth for the culture to live on without losing the rules of the game. More than that, Africa’s dopest lyricist continues the literary tradition of hip-hop of making you research, read, read, and read again after listening as you search for all the double and triple entendres, it dispels the myth that Black people cannot design high art and culture beyond labour intensive “hand crafted souvenirs”, in humanising and giving value to Black people’s lived experiences and culture “ain’t culture it’s folklore”, in sharing the “heroic, treacherous [and] ugly” traumas of the freedom fighters both in

SA and in exile on "PTSD" which is dark and heavy, with an urgent tone that suggests a necessary healing must happen, mirroring "Stop The Violence" from *The Return of The King*; where the latter was a demand, this reads as the aftermath of the continues systematic violence in an anecdotal fashion. "Sins of our fathers" pulls out all the skeletons from Tumi's closet as he considers the lineage of accountability for generational wrongs, of "getting cozy violence" and thus internalising problematic ways of being such as infidelity, misogynoir and compromising the family structure in the process from the sanitization of male figure identities — "Mum selling me dreams, cleaning the image/ I love her for that" for men who have "three different women, splitting the children" and the "conflict [and] dysfunction" for the children as a result of those "trauma[s] [we carry] in our back pockets" like condoms in so doing escape any accountability.



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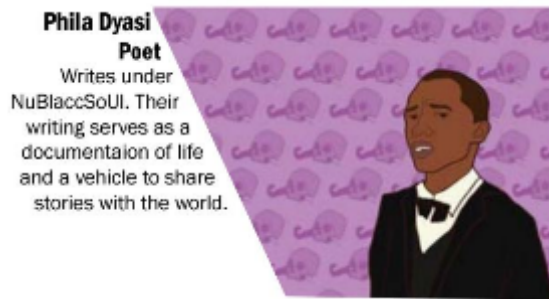
The penultimate song "Vendetta" featuring Brittney Melvin, served as the score for the promotional videos leading up to the release, is a hard thumping boom-bap single where T talks his shit, on his unapologetic braggadocio steez, "Send a messenger, the bouncer like a wrestler/ Kick 'em out with the VI they out there with the regulars/ Vendetta, I'm petty they gotta learn a lesson/Fuck 'em forever" whilst being equally reflective on the paradox of an unequal country like ours, "My Guerilla niggas beat the army in them skirmishes/ MK veterans, armored truck co-conspirators/ Eat a sirloin steak at the Saxon with the minister/ Black business off the books, no written shit/ Colonial pillaging call 'em crooks but don't give 'em shit" and the hypocrisy of the same people who benefitted from the criminal neo-colonial Apartheid

throwing stones at the corrupt when they are the same kind of morally bankrupt clownish sheep who live in unethical excess and eccentric behaviour fuelled by the 'above the law' mentality facilitated by having money. The EP closes on a hopeful note with "Strength" wishes us all good fortunes.

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this is ancestral, past-life reading; this is meditation & prayer; this is future telling. always becoming. the undying soul in a decaying case.

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