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South Africa is known for having accomplished the world's first heart transplant, in 1967, during the apartheid years. But before the operation could be conducted, and under the pressure of a ticking clock, the hospital had to turn down the heart of a coloured donor to comply with the regime's policies <Heart of Cape Town 2015>. This is how literally the system was designed to operate. But despite the efforts to keep groups apart, music was the loophole in the system, allowing musicians to blend and exchange across racial boundaries. *Sounding the Cape: Music, Identity and Politics in South Africa* by Denis-Constant Martin is a story of connectedness, built on 'the apparent contradiction between what the history of music and the perceptions of musicians reveal about exchanges and blending that occurred at all times in the history of the Cape' (vii).

Published by African Minds under a Creative Commons licence, the book is a significant contribution, in length and quality, to the understanding of Cape Town's music and society. Three main topics are covered in detail: (1) music and identity, (2) the history of Cape Town's music, and (3) an analysis of 42 interviews conducted with musicians in Cape Town. Drawing from extensive research on these subjects, a great deal of effort has been invested in exploring

the ways in which social identities were built through networks of exchange.

Throughout much of its history, Cape Town acted as a cultural hub for the rest of the country and has been a privileged site for cultural mixing. Aware of the conflicting literature on the subject, the author devotes much of his attention to expanding the notion of creolisation, described as a process of cultural interweaving, 'the coming into contact of several cultures' (Glissant 1997, cited on 129), most often associated with colonial and post-colonial confrontations. But despite the violence, these encounters were also creative and provided ways for restoring dignity and humanity under conditions of slavery and segregation. Dominant and subaltern societies were thus 'intimately entangled' (88), threading cultural elements into new forms of creative expression. However paradoxical, it is from this perspective of violence and intimacy that the author is able not only to recompose Cape Town's music history, but also *through it* reflect on contemporary social and political issues.

As one of the means to bypass constitutional segregation, music allowed individuals to collaborate beyond discriminatory conventions, ultimately 'invalidat[ing] the ideological principles on which racism and apartheid were founded' (172). The circulation of music,

while giving musicians the opportunity to blend and borrow from one another, also hindered the attempts to separate South Africa's diverse populations. However optimistic, this position should not obscure the unfortunate consequences that repression had on music-making, nor underplay the cruelty to which all blacks have been exposed, but hopefully challenge the mechanisms that continue to create uneven opportunities, given 'the divisions that still characterise South Africa in the 21st century' (vii).

There is in Martin's interpretation a clear objection to the privatisation of culture. Cultural policies, he says, 'cannot be reduced to boosting private businesses and "selling" South Africa to tourists' and adds that '[c]ommercial interests are not easily compatible with freedom of creation' (375). Having conducted extensive research on the Minstrel Carnival, and acknowledging the social and historical significance of the event (Martin 1999), the author is likewise firm in *Sounding the Cape* in asserting his opposition towards the Cape Town Carnival, which he considers to be a 'totally artificial event' (273). The contradiction, however, is that the latter carnival is (or is at least attempting to be) socially inclusive by encouraging different groups, many of which are from working-class suburbs and townships, to showcase their performances and mix with socially and geographically separated groups, while the Minstrel Carnival is largely based on the activities of one ethnic group. This raises an interesting question about whether commercially driven initiatives can boost creative expressions or have any implication in fostering creolisation. Nevertheless, the

challenges faced by musicians as South Africa moves towards a global economy are many, and the balance between financial sustainability and creative ownership may not be easily attained.

One solution proposed is the integration of music into education and cultural policies. The *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* (2001), cited in this book, for example, has indicated a first step forward. It highlights the effects of music in 'promoting tolerance through exposure to, and a sharing of, diverse cultural traditions and experience' (Department of Education 2001, cited on 371). What some of the more recent studies have done is to suggest ways to create 'opportunities for all citizens to interact with each other more and to engage in intercultural activities [...] that cross their usual boundaries of communication' (Minty 2008:34). The benefits of music are many. From some of the more recent musical trends in South Africa, Martin cites Capetonian rap as having a positive influence in '[tying] local imaginations to global innovations', and empowering musicians to take action in 'the correction of inequalities, the rehabilitation of stigmatised people and the enhancement of independent creativity' (300). Conscious hip-hop is also described as having a central role in articulating social and political struggles within the community and helping to expand 'creative and critical skills in ways not afforded to them by the formal education system' (Haupt 2008, cited on 300). What becomes apparent in the discussion is that, to ensure social cohesion, more attention should be given to cultural policies.

In addition to rethinking policies more closely connected to marginal interests, a central focus of the book has been to recompose the past in ways that would help shape the future. This is done by drawing attention to how music in South Africa has played a central role in creating bridges with the outside world, establishing networks that ultimately ‘spurred creation’ (210), and helping to redefine previously assigned identities. He goes on to cite the emergence of *langarm*, *moppies*, *nederlandsliedjies*, *marabi* and other musical styles that originated in Cape Town, which attest to the creolising processes experienced in South Africa. While it may be difficult to trace (or even speculate on) musical genealogies, Martin makes convincing assertions about how the development of musical styles has helped transform identity formations. In the case of the *Kaapse Klopse*<sup>1</sup> music tradition, ‘importing songs and impersonating international stars were used as means of signifying Cape Town: it meant that the underprivileged victims of racism and apartheid were not imprisoned in their townships and cut off from the rest of the world, but very much attuned to it, in permanent contact with its most modern and creative fields’ (117). There is a reason, though, why the author insists on presenting the history of music in Cape Town as a

history of creolisation: it demonstrates ‘the processes through which original musics were created [and] the impact that putting them in direct light could have on social relations in contemporary South Africa’ (67).

As a final remark, much of the discussion in the book stems from major concerns in the anthropology and sociology of music in ways that challenge deterministic views about South Africa. Creolisation, in particular, has been key in the discussion. It attempts to describe the processes of cultural mixing in relation to how identities are formed, but considering the extent to which cultures have been mixed, creolisation, like hybridisation, *métissage* and so forth, is always on the verge of being too wide. This is not to say that studies about cultural mixing are unproductive, but that different forms of mixing should be taken into account in ways that can help distinguish what makes the process relevant to the culture under investigation. What Martin does in this direction is to show how musical developments in Cape Town were the ‘outcome of a dialectics of internal and external dynamics that operate even in conditions of oppression’ (380). The argument is profound. ‘It shows that the desire to create a “united South African nation” [...] is not an unrealistic wish, but that this new South African nation can be erected on foundations which have been laid in the past, amidst the torments and sufferings caused by racism, segregation and apartheid’ (380–381). As an original examination of the history of Cape Town’s music, the book provides fruitful discussions and critical insights for further research.

1 The *Kaapse klopse* is a carnival expression in Cape Town influenced by American blackface minstrelsy that dates back to the 19th century. Today the main participants of the festival are members of the mixed-race community identified as *coloureds* by the apartheid regime, most commonly belonging to working-class Muslim families living on the outskirts of Cape Town, known as the Cape Flats.

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