Sound of Africa! Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio by Louise Meintjes
Review by: Andrew Eisenberg
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the medical beliefs and practices of the Semai and the Malays. I would recommend the book to scholars of Southeast Asia, particularly Malaysia and Indonesia, as well as to scholars interested in comparative medical systems.

M. Cameron Hay
U.C.L.A.


It has been the impressive achievement of ethnographers of African popular music (Christopher Alan Waterman, Veit Erlmann, and more recently Kelly M. Askew and Louise Meintjes) to position sociomusical analysis as a means toward understanding the dialogic connections between local subjectivities and supralocal (national, continental, and global) systems of political economy in contemporary Africa. Louise Meintjes’ Sound of Africa! may well represent the finest of what this tradition has to offer. She employs the same textured approaches to the social history of musical practices and the performative nature of social identities that have become the hallmark of the ethnomusicology of African popular music. At the same time, her attention to the interplay of poetics and politics and the semiotics of musical sound allows for unique insights into the ways social actors position themselves and are positioned within discursive formations.

Meintjes’ research site is a music recording studio in South Africa of the early 1990s. She integrates herself as a participant-observer during the production of an album of mbaqanga music, a local popular music genre that has also found a foothold in the international world music market. Her interlocutors—the musicians, recording engineers, and producers involved in the production—are all important players within the South African popular music scene. Her principal concern is with the social world of the studio as a site of articulation, where ideas about race, ethnicity, and nationality are negotiated, embodied, and performed.

Meintjes holds the studio as a privileged space for examining the political in late apartheid South Africa precisely because the musicians, producers, and engineers are primarily concerned with personal and aesthetic—not political—positioning. She richly describes her interlocutors’ discursive/performative engagements with musical (especially timbral) style and stereotype, which she reveals as processes of (re)figuring notions of blackness, Zuluness, and Africaness. Dialogic interactions over sound are shown to be interactions over deeply held values and experiences of the social world outside the studio. They are “wholly aesthetic and deeply political” (p. 143), and they offer a “prism into late capitalist, late apartheid experience and into how global culture flows are activated within the context of local politics” (p. 9). In the end, what Meintjes is able to glean from her

analysis of the social world of *mbaqanga* production is a sense of how apartheid oppression is lived and felt, “how South Africa’s ruthless politics are infused with feeling and embedded in the struggles of daily living” (p. 9).

Meintjes’s theoretical leitmotif is *mediation*, which she describes as a process of both transference and transformation (p. 8). The studio is a place where sounds are mediated technologically: they are manipulated and encoded in a physical form fit for dissemination, “making other new . . . experiences possible” (p. 256). At the same time, the fact that this process is going on makes the studio a place where sound is mediated *symbolically*. In other words, what is also being “produced” in the studio is *meaning*. The technological manipulation of sounds is only one part of this process. Mediated sounds act as sign vehicles with referents that are also manipulated, though through more complex and fluid social processes in which power (another mediating element) is always implicated.

The studio of Meintjes’s field research is also the site of yet another process of mediation—ethnography. As her interlocutors work through the production of their album, Meintjes works through the production of her thesis. Both processes are full of starts and stops, reversals and insertions. The book is thus conceived in the form of a recording session, with “cuts” instead of chapters, “tracks” instead of subheadings, etc. It is not at all an empty gesture, but a way beyond the constraints of linear argument and closer to the associational character of ethnographic inquiry. The form works best in the pages that describe and parse the interactions within the walls of the studio. The iconicity of object and representation work to offer both a visceral sense of the studio experience and a powerful reminder that ethnography and ethnographers are (and should be) fully complicit in keeping local conversations on the move.

Meintjes’s fine-grained approach to musical significance and symbolic mediation should be enough to make *Sound of Africa!* required reading for all ethnomusicologists. Scholars of media and popular culture, and those interested in the problem of subjectivity in contemporary Africa, will also find much of value in this monograph.

Andrew Eisenberg
Columbia University

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*Street Children in Kenya: Voices of Children in Search of a Childhood* is written by a team of rural sociologists and anthropologists, two of whom are Kenyans. Street children are related to, and equated with, the working poor and homeless populations in Nairobi, Kenya. Hence, street children and their life circumstances