CHAPTER 14

Slave Orchestras and Rainbow Balls: Colonial Culture and Creolisation at the Cape of Good Hope, 1750–1838

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Music is often regarded as an important medium for performing a cultural identity. Whereas music is not so much a reflection of the shared ideas and desires of one particular group, it is a way for individuals to align themselves with and act out a certain cultural identity.[1] As such, the study of musical production and reception in a historical context offers scholars an exciting view on identity formation in the past. Particularly music in a colonial setting offers us an intriguing perspective on the role of music as a medium through which a cultural identity can be performed. In the colonial setting music can be studied to investigate on the one hand the scope and effect of cultural imperialism and the politics of culture, and on the other the persistence of Diaspora music cultures or the development of hybrid music cultures. The colonial context thus offers us the chance to examine the process of musical borrowing and adaptation and the ways in which such musical developments were used to create, negotiate and advocate a collective aesthetic and perhaps ethical consciousness, in other words a cultural identity.

The Cape Colony and specifically Cape Town as the port-town of this colony at the most southern tip of the African continent, harboured such a multicultural community with a wide range of musical styles and diatonic scales. Often referred to as the 'tavern of two oceans', Cape Town in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century was a place where people and cultures of East and West met and mingled. One could find Dutch East India Company (hereafter: 'The Company') officials from the Netherlands, sailors from Scandinavia, soldiers from Germany, settlers from France and Great Britain, slaves from Mozambique, Madagascar, Indonesia, India and Sri Lanka, and of course the original inhabitants of the Cape, the Khoisan. Social status and cultural

1 Simon Frith has argued that music does not express the cultural identity of a group, rather that a group finds and understands their identity through performance. He states: 'Making music isn't a way of expressing ideas, it is a way of living them'. Frith S., "Music & Identity", in Hall S. – Du Gay P. (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: 1996) 111.

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identity was important in such a multicultural colonial town and was emphasised in various ways, music being one such medium through which status and identity could be performed and displayed in a colonial society.[2]

I am specifically interested in the place occupied by slave music and slave musicians in the Cape Colony. The resident slave community, brought to the Cape by the Company from Indian Ocean coastal regions in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, lived and worked in close contact with European settlers. This led them to voluntarily and involuntarily adopt some European cultural practices as well as languages. Music formed an important part of this cultural transfer, as slaves were expected to sing for the entertainment of their masters, thereby learning European folk songs and music genres in their masters' homes. Moreover, since this slave community was denied most rudimentary rights to personal development and expression, music and song offered one of the few opportunities for slaves to create and perform a sense of self.

In his influential work *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy argues that investigating music in colonial and Diaspora studies is important because 'music unseats language and textuality as pre-eminent expressions of human consciousness'.[3] He states:

> Examining the place of music in the black Atlantic world means surveying the self-understanding articulated by the musicians who have made it, [. . .] and the social relations which have produced and reproduced the unique expressive culture in which music comprises a central and even foundational element.[4]

Gilroy's approach to the Black Trans-Atlantic world, I argue, is valuable for investigating the formation of cultural identities and social status at the Cape of Good Hope. The development of musical production and reception within this slave community presents a clear case study of the confrontation of different music cultures and the process of merging cultures and communities (creolisation) at the Cape of Good Hope in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[5] This article will focus on the role of music in this colonial

2 Wilson K., *The Island Race. Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London – New York: 2003) 3. Quoted in Worden N. (ed.), *Cape Town Between East and West. Social Identities in a Dutch Colonial Town* (Hilversum: 2012) xii.

3 Gilroy P., *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge Mass.: 1993) 74.

4 Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* 74–75.

5 Between 1750 and 1850, the Cape Colony witnessed major political and social change. The Cape Colony, founded by the Dutch in 1652, was occupied by the British during the

society as a cultural indicator of status and identity. I will address both the European as well as the Diaspora musical influences at the Cape and aim to answer the question what role music played in creating, negotiating and advocating a cultural identity.

Slave Orchestras and High Culture at the Cape of Good Hope

From studies focusing on the colonial world in the Americas we know that slaves were often employed as musicians, providing entertainment for their masters.[6] It seems a similar situation existed at the Cape. Numerous accounts of visiting travellers to the Cape as well as memoirs of settlers inform us about so-called slave orchestras, assigned to entertain their masters. For instance in 1781 Francois Le Vaillant, a French naturalist and zoological collector travelling through the Cape Colony, witnessed how his host for the night, Hendrik Cloete Senior, owner of the Groot Constantia estate, was awakend in the mornings by a band of fifteen slaves playing for him and his wife.[7] Similarly in 1803 Commissary-General of the Cape Jacob Abraham de Mist and his travel companion Heinrich Lichtenstein reported having been musically entertained by a slave orchestra while resting for a day on the farm of a settler family in the countryside.[8] Visitors to the Cape Colony were often surprised to find, that 'at a nod the cook exchanges his saucepan for a flute, the groom quits his

Napoleonic wars, from 1795 till 1802, after which Dutch control over the colony was briefly restored. Only four years later, in 1806, the British again annexed the colony to the British Empire, however this time it remained under direct British rule until the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910. In 1834 slavery was abolished in the Cape Colony. However, the emancipation was not completed until 1838, as freed slaves were expected to work for their former masters as 'apprentices' for four more years. In those tumultuous times, social rank and cultural status became more important than ever. To understand the colonial culture of the Cape, it is important to investigate what role music played in advocating a cultural identity in the colonial social hierarchy.

6 Examples of studies on the music culture of the slaves in the Americas are: Epstein D.J., *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals. Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (Champaign, IL: 1977); Abrahams R.D., *Singing the Master. The Emergence of African American Culture in the Plantation South* (New York: 1992); Southern E., *The Music of Black Americans. A History* (New York: 1997).

7 Vailliant Francois Le, *Travels from the Cape of Good Hope into the interior parts of Africa: including many interesting anecdotes; with elegant plates, descriptive of the country and inhabitants*, transl. E. Helme (London: William Lane, 1790).

8 Godee Molsbergen E.C., *Reizen in Zuid Afrika in Hollandse* Tijd, vol. 2*, Tochten naar het Noorden 1686–1806* (The Hague: 1916) 172.

curry-comb and takes his violin and the gardener throwing aside his spade sits down to his violoncello'.[9]

Eighteenth-century Cape Town was still a small and modest European settlement. Its role was that of an outpost in the larger and much more profitable Dutch trading empire, whose centres were in Amsterdam and Batavia. Cape Town's society was nothing compared to the grandeur and high society lifestyle that travellers could find in larger Indian Ocean ports like Batavia.[10] 'They have no kind of public amusements', writes a visitor to the Cape in 1797, 'except occasional balls; nor is there much social intercourse but by family parties, which usually consist of card playing or dancing'.[11] The home orchestras, consisting mainly of slave musicians, were thus precious possessions for the settlers at the Cape as they were virtually the only form of entertainment available, so much so that musical skills were occasionally required when slaves were purchased. For instance, a European settler by the name of Joachim von Dessin bought on the 30th of April 1756 an enslaved individual named Jason van Madagascar (Jason from Madagascar). Von Dessin was quite content with his purchase, as he says in his memoirs, because besides being a good cook 'he can also play the flute, hautboy and French horn'.[12]

In the Cape Colony those slave orchestras were also used by Company officials and successful settlers to display their wealth and good taste by hosting grand parties where slave musicians performed. Studying the musical life in French colonial Martinique, ethnomusicologist Dominique Cyrille notes that 'during the slavery era, music became a potent social marker in the complex system of social classification initiated by the French planters'. 'Music', she says, 'signalled racial origins, social status, and level of education'.[13] Similarly, in the small European colony at the Cape, social status was in part performed through music. The Company elite accentuated their status through public rituals and grand displays of wealth and refinement. Thus, 'the Governor gave

9 Lichtenstein H., *Travels in Southern Africa, in the years 1803, 1804, 1805 and 1806* (London: 1812) 28.

10 Ross R. – Schrikker A., "The VOC Official Elite", in Worden N. (ed.), *Cape Town Between East and West. Social Identities in a Dutch Colonial Town* (Hilversum: 2012) 35.

11 Barrow J., *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa in the years 1797–1798* (London: 1801) 48.

12 Cape Archive, Aanwinste A1414 (56) (c) J.N. von Dessin, *Memoriaal van mijne huiselijke uitgaven en verrigtingen*, 1 January 1754–December 1757. I am much obliged to Dr. Katie Mooney for referring me to this source. Original text in Dutch: 'ook kan denselven op de fluijt, hobooij en waldhoorn speelen'.

13 Cyrille D., "Popular Music and Martinican-Creole Identity", *Black Music Research Journal* 22, 1 (2002) 67.

sumptuous dinners and balls, particularly when important visitors, notably returning Governors-General, called at the Cape'.[14]

In most colonial societies, public entertainment was aimed at supporting and confirming the status of the colonial elite and the European culture to which it adhered. Not only Dutch officials used music to display their social status: the British equally used music to define and perform their social status. For example Lady Anne Barnard, wife of the first British Colonial Secretary of the Cape, habitually invited the upper class of the colonial community for house parties during which her guests could 'talk or hop to half a dozen black fiddlers'.[15] Similarly, Dutch settler Pieter van Breda, owner of the Oranjezicht estate, was known to regularly invite the colonial social elite to enjoy his home orchestra. As the account states: 'a music tent stood in one of the gardens of his estate. When Mr van Breda was to have his slaves play music there, he raised the flag so that music lovers in the city knew that they were welcome at Oranjezicht'.[16] The musical performances conducted by these larger slave bands were naturally impressive and customarily shared with neighbours, friends or high-ranked officials. As such, orchestra performances became a way for settlers to display their wealth and success and to emphasize their (European) cultural identity.

But what was the social status of the slave musicians forming those slave orchestras? In colonial Martinique 'music became a symbol of power and social elevation for slave or Creole musicians'.[17] By learning and performing the music of the politically and culturally dominant group in colonial society, these musicians managed to obtain a higher status themselves. For the Cape Colony, we do not have any evidence that supports the idea that a similar situation existed. We do know that regardless of their social position, the supposed natural musical aptness of the slave musicians at the Cape was much admired. Heinrich Lichtenstein noted that the slave musicians he encountered at the Cape 'all play entirely by the ear. This practice receives great encouragement from the natural inclination that the slaves, particularly the Malays, have to music'.[18] Christian Ignatius Latrobe, a missionary visiting the Cape in 1815 and 1816, described the non-European community at the Cape as a 'smooth

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14 Ross – Schrikker, "The VOC Official Elite", 35.

15 Wilkins W.H., *South Africa A Century Ago. Letters written from the Cape of Good Hope by Lady Anne Barnard* (*1797–1801*) (London: 1910) 60.

16 Martin D.C., Coon Carnival. New Year in Cape Town, Past and Present (Cape Town: 1999) 59.

17 Cyrille, "Martinican-Creole Identity", 67.

18 Lichtenstein, *Travels in Southern Africa* 28.

throated nation', noting that 'nothing would be more easy than to form a chorus of the most delightful voices'.[19]

Whereas slaves held the lowest social position in a colonial society,[20] teaching a slave to perform European music was not in contradiction with their social status. In Europe, musicians were equally seen as servants.[21] The audience of slave orchestras appreciated the professionalism and talent of slave musicians, who were mainly admired for performing European music pieces. British missionary John Campbell remarked for instance, when visiting the Cape in 1815 and 1816, how 'the slaves sung as well as the people called Christians, which means in South Africa, white people'.[22] Most overseas visitors were impressed by the efforts slave owners made to create an experience of orchestra performances which resembled those of European music culture. Dutch visitor to the Cape Marten Douwes Teenstra wrote in 1825:

> We were pleasantly surprised by the music of sixteen musicians, who were all slaves of Miss Colijn; they performed a most perfect piece of field music (military music played by a brass band), with all the appropriate wind and other instruments, such as clarinets, flutes, trumpets, bassoon, percussion, cymbals and two large drums, and they played this all so well, as the best English corps in Cape Town could wish to perform.[23]

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19 Latrobe C.I., *Visit to the Cape of Good Hope in 1815 & 1816* (London: 1818) 68–69.

20 This is pointed out by Nigel Worden in "Public Brawling, Masculinity and Honour", in idem (ed.), *Cape Town Between East and West. Social Identities in a Dutch Colonial town* (Hilversum: 2012) 207.

21 For instance orchestral musicians in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Germany were treated as musicians and servants at the same time. Mahling C.H., "The Origin and Social Status of the Court Orchestral Musician in the 18th and 19th century in Germany", in Salmen W. (ed.), *The Social Status of the Professional Musician from the Middle Ages to the 19*th *Century* (New York: 1983) 249.

22 Campbell J., *Travels in South Africa, undertaken at the request of the Missionary Society* (London: 1816) 25.

23 Teenstra M.D., *De vruchten mijner werkzaamheden*, ed. F.C.L. Bosman (Cape Town: 1943) 284. Original text in Dutch: 'Aardig werden wij verrast door de muzijk van een zestiental muzikanten, welke alle als lijfeigenen aan mejufvrouw Colijn toebehoorden; zij voerden eene volmaakte veldmuzijk (Militêre musiek deur middel van 'n 'brassband') uit, met al de daartoe benoodigde blaas- en andere instrumenten, als klarinetten, fluiten, trompetten, fagot, slagwerk, bekkens en twee groote trommen, en bespeelden dit alles zoo wel, als het beste Engelsche korps in de Kaapstad durfde denken'.

Slaves often played instruments imported from Europe or constructed at the Cape by European settlers. The import and production of European music instruments in the Cape Colony intensified in the eighteenth century with a peak in the nineteenth century.[24] The following account of Heinrich Lichtenstein as well as the account of Marten Douwes Teenstra quoted above show the large assemblage of European musical instruments available for slave orchestra performances at the Cape:

> They [the slaves] played first a chorus, and afterwards several marches and dances upon clarinets, French horns and bassoons. The instruments were good, and there was great reason altogether to be pleased with the performance, though much was wanting to render the harmony complete. They afterwards played upon violins, violoncellos and flutes, on which they performed equally well.[25]

The social context in which these slave orchestral musicians performed at the Cape suggests that music performances were conducted in a state of subjugation. Slave musicians were bought and assigned to entertain their masters, thus they portrayed through their performance the taste and status of their masters rather than a cultural identity of their own. In order to investigate a performance of cultural identity as endorsed by the slave community one needs to look at accounts describing the music performances of slaves in their spare time.

Diaspora Slave Music and the Development of Creole Subculture

Several accounts illustrate the rich and lively music culture slaves had in their own, limited spare time. These sources recount how slaves made music together on the farms or on the outskirts of the city of Cape Town. As Richard Renshaw, an officer in the British army on an expedition to South Africa in 1796, described:

> On Sundays they [the slaves] are allowed some degree of liberty, which they use in indulging themselves in their amusements; such as cock fighting and dancing. [...] Those slaves who prefer dancing generally assemble on a small plain under the Table Mountain; and to the beat-

24 Boshoff A., "Slawe-orkeste en musiekinstrumente aan die Kaap", *South African Cultural History Museum Bulletin* 8 (1987) 50.

25 Lichtenstein, *Travels in Southern Africa* 28.

> ing of an instrument which sounds like a struffled drum, they caper and jump with an astonishing degree of agility.[26]

During such informal musical performances, slaves played on their own crafted instruments, such as the *ramakienjo*[27] and the *ghoema* [see fig. 14.1].[28] Lady Anne Barnard indeed observed in 1799 how groups of slaves in Cape Town 'danced to their own musical accompaniment on the Sundays'.[29] In his memoirs, local resident Petrus Borcherds similarly recalls some musical performances by the slaves who, in the evenings, when they were relieved by some hours of rest, 'indulged in gossip in their own quarters or listened to the music of the ramakienjo on which one of them was greatly expert'.[30] The account of a British visiting civil servant to the Cape, William Bird, gives us another example of such a slave music culture. He writes in 1822:

> The grand display is in the outskirts of the town, to which the black population rush, on a Sunday, and go through their various awkward movements in quick or slow time, according to the taste of the dancers. The Sunday dance is accompanied by native music of every description. The slave boys from Madagascar and Mozambique bring the stringed instruments of their respective tribes and nation from which they *force* sounds, which *they* regard as melodious.[31]

Despite the condescending colonial perspective in these accounts, they do suggest that slaves performed the sounds, senses and culture of their

26 Renshaw R., *Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope and up the Red Sea with travels into Egypt, through the Desert, in the course of last war* (Manchester: 1804) 32–33.

27 The *ramakienjo* or *ramkie*, is a stringed instrument known to belong to the Khoi, the native people of the Cape, but also found to be adopted by slaves.

28 The word *ngoma* is the Swahili word for drum and used by many Bantu peoples living in the South Eastern parts of Africa. A linguistic link between the word *ghoema* used by the Cape slaves, of whom some had Mozambican roots, to describe their drum and the South East African word *ngoma* thus suggests a cultural cross-over from the east coasts of Africa to the Cape.

29 Cordeur B. Le – Lenta M. (eds.), *The Cape Diaries of Lady Anne Barnard, 1799–1800*, vol. 2 (Cape Town: 1999) 283 in Harries P, "Making Mozbiekers. History, Memory and the African Diaspora at the Cape", in Zimba B. – Alpers E. – Isaacman A. (eds.), *Slaves Routes and Oral Tradition in Southeastern Africa* (Maputo: 2005) 105.

30 Borchers P.B., *Autobiographical Memoir* (Cape Town: 1861) 178. These recollections are from the time when he lived at his family farm in Stellenbosch from 1786–1801.

31 Bird W., State of the Cape of Good Hope in 1822 (London: 1823) 166. My italics.

FIGURE 14.1 *Charles Bell, The Tom Tom dance—Mozambiques and mixed race. Watercolour. 13.5 × 22 cm. Cape Town, University of Cape Town Library, Bell Heritage Trust Collection,* BC *686 C14.*
IMAGE © UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN LIBRARY.

ancestral homelands, thus presenting and advocating a Diaspora cultural identity. The cultural transfer from the African continent to the New World often consisted of music and song, as melodies and rhythms were easily transportable.[32] This is true for the Trans-Atlantic World but equally for the Indian Ocean World. 'Folkways such as music, song and dance were the principle vehicle for African memory and identity in the Indian Ocean world', argues Edward Alpers.[33] Africans who migrated within the Indian Ocean world, voluntarily or involuntarily, transported their music and songs with them.[34] It seems a similar cultural transfer occurred in the Cape Colony. African and Asian slaves, transported to the Southern tip of Africa, could have taken their music and rhythms with them as well. Contemporaries, at least, suggested and believed that this was the case. As Heinrich Lichtenstein noted in 1803:

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32 Segal R., *Black Diaspora. Five Centuries of Black Experience Outside Africa* (New York: 1995); Manning P., *The African Diaspora. A History Through Culture* (New York: 2009).

33 Alpers E.A., "Recollecting Africa. Diasporic Memory in the Indian Ocean World", *African Studies Review* 43, 1 (2000) 90.

34 Ibidem.

'The numerous slaves from different nations, such as the Mozambicans and Madagascans and especially the Malay and Buganese[35] all have their own melodies and other intervals, which do not correspond to our diatonic scale'.[36]

Through performing this Diaspora musical heritage, it seems slaves were culturally distancing themselves from the European community, particularly as European colonists were usually puzzled and sometimes less taken by the non-diatonic scales of the slave music.[37] Perhaps caused by European misunderstandings of non-western musical tones or by a general dismissal of non-western musical forms, those slave dances or music performances were often described in negative phrasing. For instance the British settler Samuel Hudson, who arrived at the Cape in 1796, reported in his diary how slaves enjoyed themselves on free Sundays, describing their music as 'rude'.[38] British civil servant William Bird, quoted above, noted how slaves '*forced* sounds [from their stringed instruments], which *they* regard as melodious' (my italics).[39] In 1821 British traveller Edward Blount reported how such slave music performances led English observers 'to watch with fascination as they [the slaves] gyrated to an almost hypnotic rhythm beaten on a homemade drum, all at other times sinking into a low querulous murmur'.[40]

Such negative assessments of slave music culture can be found in many other colonial spheres where European settlers were confronted with non-European cultures.[41] Settlers' objections to slaves' supposedly 'rude' music or 'querulous' songs were not only based on an uneasiness with respect to

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35 The Bugis of southern Sulawesi.

36 Lichtenstein, *Travels in Southern Africa* in Godee Molsbergen E.C., *Reizen in Zuid Afrika in Hollandse Tijd*, vol. 2, *Tochten naar het Noorden 1686–1806* (The Hague: 1916) 250. Original text in Dutch: 'De talrijke slaven uit de onderscheidene natiën, zoo als de Mosambiquen, Madagaskers, doch inzonderheid de Maleijers en Bugonezen, hebben allen eigene melodieën en andere intervallen, die op onze diatonische toonladder niet voegen'.

37 'The use of Diaspora identity was often used as a separating marker from others in the same geographical colonial space', says James Clifford. Clifford J., "Indigenous Articulations", *The Contemporary Pacific* 13, 2 (2001). Quoted in Gqola P.D., *What is Slavery to Me? Postcolonial/Slave Memory in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Johannesburg: 2001) 137.

38 Shell R. (ed.), "'Slaves,' an essay by Samuel Eusebius Hudson", Kronos 9 (1984) 44–70.

39 Bird, State of the Cape of Good Hope 166.

40 Blount E., *Notes on the Cape of Good Hope* (London: 1821) 107.

41 Shane and Graham White argue that 'there is a striking uniformity in white's [European settlers] reactions to African and African-American vocal [and instrumental] music not only in the United States across time, but also in the diaspora'. White S. – White G., "'Us Likes a Mixtery'. Listening to African American slave music", *Slavery & Abolition. A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 20, 3 (1999) 37.

non-western musical tones, but were also founded on differing expectations and ideas on the role of sound in musical performance and of the function of music per se. Instead of regarding music as an art form, meant for entertainment, music in many African societies is seen as a communication tool used to express every aspect of life.[42] This communication aspect becomes apparent in the popular 'call and response' style which is so typical of many African music cultures as well as slave music cultures. Instead of a pleasingly harmonic performance, musicians intentionally created differences in tone and rhythm as to mimic the different strings of speech within one conversation, thus creating space for a 'conversation' or exchange of thoughts and sounds.[43]

Paul Gilroy has argued that this musical exchange, borrowing and combining different Diasporic sounds, has led to the creation of a Creole culture. He states:

> The musics of the black Atlantic World were the primary expressions of cultural distinctiveness which this population seized upon and adapted to its new circumstances. It used these separate but converging musical traditions [...] to create itself anew as a conglomeration of black communities.[44]

The account of William Bird quoted above, as well as other accounts, suggest that slaves at the Cape performed their own Diasporic sounds during combined performances, converging these musical traditions from the Indian Ocean world into a combined, Creole slave music culture. Whereas the concept of creolisation was first introduced and used in the context of the Trans-Atlantic world, in particular the Caribbean, several scholars have argued that the concept can also be used to investigate and explain the development of hybrid communities and cultures in other parts of the World, for instance in

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42 Bebey F., *African Music. A People's Art* (London: 1975) 2–3. Quoted in White G. – White S., "African American slave music", *Slavery & Abolition. A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 20, 3 (1999) 31.

43 Shane and Graham White argue that this call and response music style can be found in many slave music cultures. They state: 'Differences in the pitch and timbre as between the drums and the other instruments [as played by slaves] would have made the rhythms of those musical instruments audible, allowing both dancers and other participants to hear and respond to the exciting musical conversations that were taking place'. White S. – White G., *The Sounds of Slavery. Discovering African American History Through Songs, Sermons, and Speech* (Boston: 2005) 145.

44 Gilroy P., "Sounds Authentic. Black Music, Ethnicity, and the Challenge of a Changing Same", *Black Music Research Journal* 11, 2 (1991) 115.

the Indian Ocean region.[45] Such hybrid or Creole cultures are regarded in the Trans-Atlantic and Indian Ocean world as oppositional cultures opposed to a dominant colonial culture. Creole culture was seen as a means 'to cement relations between the different ethnic components of the slave society, and, in all situations, united them as a group against their common slave masters'.[46] This also seems to apply to the slave music culture as it developed at the Cape. This Creole music culture appears to have functioned as a separating marker as it stood in sharp contrast to the slave orchestra performances, enjoyed and stimulated by slave masters, and because it was predominantly performed in the slave community's own time, thus signalling a preference for this musical style.

Rainbow Balls and a Cape Creole Music Culture

However this musical conversation was not limited to an exchange of the Indian Ocean Diaspora sounds alone. As was said before, eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Cape Town was seen as a 'tavern of *two* oceans' and a place where cultures from East and West met and mingled. Much the same can be said for the Cape music culture. As described before, slaves were extensively exposed to European music styles and tones through the orchestra performances. Particularly the influence of the Dutch and British colonists is undeniable. However, most of those encounters were characterized by the unequal power relations between slave and slave master. Yet in the many taverns of this colonial port town a truly mixed music culture emerged, merging the Diaspora sounds from the Indian Ocean world with European music styles and diatonic scales. In contrast to the slave orchestra performances described above, the so-called rainbow balls (mixed dancing parties) were frequented not by the colonial elite but by Cape Town's lower classes. William Bird visited such a rainbow ball when he stayed at the Cape in 1822. He observed that:

> Whilst the public and private balls of the upper classes are going on, there are continual dances amongst the other orders, denominated rain-

45 For example: Martin D.C., "A creolising South-Africa? Mixing, hybridity, and creolisation: (re)imagining the South African experience", *International Social Science Journal* 58, 187 (2006) 165–176; Martin D.C., *Sounding the Cape Music, Identity and Politics in South Africa* (Somerset West: 2013) or Medea L., "Creolisation and Globalisation in a Neo-Colonial Context. The Case of Re'union", *Social Identities. Journal of the Study of Race, Nation and Culture* 8, 1 (2002) 125–141.

46 Medea, "Creolisation and Globalisation" 126.

> bow balls, composed of each different hue in this many coloured town. The females are chiefly slave girls of the first class, and girls who have acquired their freedom; and amongst the men are seen officers, merchants, and young Dutchmen.[47]

At such popular balls, slave musicians performed side by side with European musicians for an equally mixed audience.[48] The rainbow balls took place in dancing halls, or in the absence of such facilities mixed dancing parties could be found in the many taverns near the harbour. These were places where slaves, freed slaves, lower class colonists and sailors could meet, drink and dance together.[49] A local resident of the Cape in the late eighteenth century, Otto Mentzel, observed such mixed gatherings in Cape Town's harbour and noted how 'soldiers and sailors are readily given a few days leave to recuperate from the hardships of the voyage'. After having consumed some wine, 'these young men speedily part with their spare cash in visiting merry houses of entertainment in the company of female slaves'.[50] The Dutch sailor song "Oost-Indische Venus-Liedt" ("East-Indian Venus-song") speaks of such meetings between sailors and local girls in a Cape Town tavern.

> At the Cape, hear and understand,
> There the girls reside daily
> All in the house 'The Blue Rooster'[51]
> where we converse with them daily.
> A fresh rummer of Cape wine
> Will taste well for those who have money

47 Bird, State of the Cape of Good Hope 165–166.

48 Musicologist Jan Bouws mentions a popular 'native band which consisted of Cape Malayans', which took turns with a European military band performing music at a ball in 1849 where 'both groups were then praised for their playing' in Bouws J., Die musieklewe *van Kaapstad 1800–1850 en sy verhouding tot die musiekkultuur van Wes-Europa* (Cape Town: 1966) 92.

49 Dooling W., "The Castle. Its place in the history of Cape Town in the VOC period", in Heyning E. van (ed.), *Studies in the History of Cape Town* 7 (Cape Town: 1994) 18. Kock V. De, *Those in Bondage. An Account of the Life of the Slave at the Cape in the Days of the Dutch India Company* (London: 1950) 91–92.

50 Mentzel O., *Geographical and Topographical Description of the Cape of Good Hope* (1785), transl. by H.J. Mandelbrote (Cape Town: 1925) 80–81.

51 Historians Nigel Worden, Elizabeth van Heyningen and Vivian Bickford-Smith argue that 'De Blaauwe Haan' was a well-known tavern in Cape Town. Worden N. – Heyningen E. – Bickford-Smith V., *Cape Town. The Making of a City. An Illustrated Social History* (Cape Town: 1998) 54.

> So one can taste right away
> the fruits of the Cape soil.[52]

It was probably during those moments of informal contact between slaves and European colonists and sailors that a larger Creole music culture developed, merging not only the Indian Ocean Diaspora sounds but also the European sounds.[53] In my view this Cape Creole music culture developed combining European compositions with music instruments and non-diatonic scales from the slave community. Slaves who performed in the taverns of Cape Town played on European as well as their own musical instruments.[54] Ethnomusicologist Denis-Constant Martin equally argues that at the Cape:

> Slaves danced to various types of music which may have retained for some time elements of the musical cultures they came from, but it is highly probable that they infused something of their own musical feeling in the way they performed European dances.[55]

Slaves also sang and appropriated Dutch or English folk songs and melodies which they overheard in taverns, during rainbow balls or in other informal settings.[56] South African folklorists have pointed out that indeed most folk

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52 *Het Oudt Haerlems Liedt-Boeck, Inhoudende Vele Historiale ende Amoureuse Liedekens, Oock Tafel, Bruyloft ende Scheydt-Liedekens* (Amsterdam, Jacobus Bouman: 1680) 43. Also published in later songbooks such as: *De nieuwe overtoompze markt-schipper ofte de vrolyke overtoompse vis-boer* (Amsterdam, Hendrik van der Putte: 1766) 92. See for more publications of this song, the Dutch Song Database online: http://www.liederenbank.nl. These lyrics are also published in Worden – Heyningen – Bickford-Smith, *Cape Town. The Making of a City* 54. Original text: 'Aan de Caap hoord en wilt verstaan / Daar de meisjes dagelycks verkeeren / Al in het huys De Blaauwe Haan / Daar wyze dagelyks converzeeren. / Een frissche roemer Kaapsche wyn / Zal hem, die geld heeft, smaaklyk zijn. / Zo proeft men reeds op d'eersten stond / De vruchten van de Kaapschen grond'.

53 Denis-Constant Martin argues that such meetings in taverns and bars was 'the cradle of a Creole society'. Martin, *Coon Carnival* 53–54.

54 Kock, *Those in Bondage* 91–92.

55 Martin, *Coon Carnival* 60.

56 Folklorist Izak David du Plessis argues that 'as fishermen in contact with vessels passing through, and as chosen servants of the burghers, they [the slaves] had ample opportunity to learn those songs which the Dutch brought out with them'. Du Plessis I.D, *The Cape Malays: History, Religion, Traditions, Folktales: the Malay Quarter* (Cape Town: 1972) 40. He argues that new songs were constantly introduced in Cape Town by sailors and enthusiastically taken up by the Coloured (slave) community. Du Plessis I.D., *Die bijdrae van die Kaapse Maleier tot die Afrikaanse volkslied* (Cape Town: 1935) 32. Folklorist Theodore Schonken points out that in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth

melodies and songs sang by the white European community were also known to the (freed) slave and Khoikhoi communities and vice versa.[57] Songs like "Aljander al deur die bos" ("Aljander through the woods"); "Môre Oompie, Môre Tannie" ("Morning Uncle, Morning Aunt") and "Daar kom die wâ" ("There comes the wagon") were sung by the descendants[58] of both communities.[59]

Sometimes slaves changed the composition of a song to fit the music piece to their own taste, as for example the following account by a British lieutenant stationed at the Cape indicates:

> Sometimes when our servant girls happened to hear some air played on the flute which struck their fancy, I was agreeably surprised to find it sung all over the neighbourhood, with the addition of a second of their own composing.[60]

Creole subcultures were usually not confined to the slave community alone.[61] In the Trans-Atlantic World, 'black people [i.e. slaves] interacted with white

century, music at picnics and other informal parties in the countryside was mostly performed by Coloured servants, similar to the situation as it existed at the Cape in the eighteenth century. Schonken T., *De oorsprong der Kaapsch-Hollandse volksoverleveringen* (Cape Town: 1914) 21.

57 Theodore Schonken points out that parts of comic songs and rhymes which originated within the Coloured community were also known to the Afrikaner community. Examples which he mentions are songs such as "Al sla my ma my neer" and "Trein naar Mamerie". Schonken, *Kaapsch-Hollandse volksoverleveringen* 144. The folklorist Stephanus Du Toit equally argues that the folk songs of the Khoi and Coloured community found their way into the European community through the performance of Coloured musicians at weddings and dance parties of European settlers. Du Toit S.J., *Suid-Afrikaanse volkspoësie. Bijdrae tot die Suid-Afrikaanse volkskunde* (Cape Town: 1924) 172. Folklorist Izak David du Plessis has shown that many songs as sung by the Afrikaner community can also be found amongst the Coloured community. Du Plessis, *Die bijdrae van die Kaapse Maleier* 19, 48, 74–75.

58 Most folk songs, their melody and lyrics, were collected and published by folklorists working at the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. We have few lyrics published before Emancipation in 1834. However, these early folklorist such as Schonken and Du Plessis as well as later musicologists (Winberg and Martin) and the Coloured community itself believe these songs to be much older and created at the Cape during times of slavery. Winberg C., "Satire, Slavery and the Ghoemaliedjies of the Cape Muslims", *New Contrast* 76 (1991) 78–96; Martin, *Coon Carnival* 49.

59 Du Plessis, *Die bijdrae van die Kaapse Maleier* 105–107, 115.

60 Moodie J.W.D. Lt., *Ten Years in South Africa* (London: 1835).

61 Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* 102. Gilroy, "Sounds Authentic", 115.

communities under conditions where neither group was a master class'.[62] The same can be said for the Cape. The subculture which developed through interaction and cultural exchange between slaves, freed slaves and lower-class colonists, for instance in the harbour taverns and at rainbow balls as described above, was regarded as subordinate by other European colonists. For example, in 1789 a German VOC servant expressed his disdain for the in his view scenes of rowdyism and promiscuous behaviour found at such mixed musical gatherings frequented by sailors soldiers and slaves.

> There are a number of public whores' inns at the Cape where a bottle of wine costs 7 groschen and a bottle of beer 4. A whole troop of brown whores are to be found there, who with their gallants divert themselves with dancing and singing. A man from Halberstadt who acted as surgeon in the hospital took me with him to such an inn. I couldn't help laughing on entering the room when I saw five such black spirits sitting a gallery, attempting to rouse their male and female dancers with some certainly not pleasant music. Here with us [in Germany] certainly no apprentice would dance to such fiddling, while in contrast, men aspiring to some standing, who often occupy considerable posts as well, are able to amuse themselves splendidly with their brown African women. Germans are completely indifferent in this country.[63]

William Bird also expressed his own apprehension of this emerging Creole culture in 1822, when he stated: 'It cannot be pretended that these meetings [rainbow balls] add to the morals of the town'.[64] Historian Nigel Worden states that indeed the upper and middle classes of Cape Town were worried to see their washerwomen and domestic servants, 'some of whom were white', mixing with slaves and freed slaves at such rainbow balls [and other informal settings].[65] It was not the fact that slaves learned and adopted European music repertoires which was seen as threatening to the social or cultural status of the colonial elite. Rather it was the creolisation of lower-class white settlers and the development of a subordinate Cape Creole culture, which was

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62 Manning, *The African Diaspora* 5.

63 Jäntzsch, C.C.F., *Freunden und Jammer, oder Seltsame Lebensgeschichte eines Leipzigers; zur Aufrechthaltung einer unglücklichen Familie* (Berlin: Auf Kosten einer Gessellschafts Menschenfreunde, 1790) 300–301. Cited in Karel Schoeman, *Portrait of a Slave Society. The Cape of Goop Hope, 1717–1795* (Pretoria: 2012) 519–520.

64 Bird, State of the Cape of Good Hope 166.

65 Worden, *Cape Town. The Making of a City* 195.

publically performed through music and folk songs, which the colonial elite found displeasing.

But what did this process of musical interaction and appropriation mean for the ways in which the slave community used music to create, negotiate and advocate a cultural identity? Slave musicians had a dual position in the cultural life of the Cape Colony. As musicians in larger slave orchestras, they were renowned and appreciated for performing European music. As frequent guests as well as musicians at the so-called rainbow balls where a Cape Creole music was performed, they represented the development of this hybrid subordinate subculture. This Cape Creole music culture, which developed through the interaction between slaves and lower-class colonists, did not hold a prominent position within the cultural landscape of the Cape Colony. Thus, by performing and adopting the folk songs and other cultural habits of the European settlers, the slave community did not conform or subject to colonial rule and culture. Rather, through this subordinate music culture this slave community was able to publicly perform and advocate their truly Creole Capetonian reality.

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