



Static: Race and Representation in Post-apartheid Music, Media and Film

ADAM HAUPT
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BOOK REVIEW

Gone for a badass song

Professor Adam Haupt leaves no strings un-plucked in his new book, *Static: Race and Representation in Post-apartheid Music, Media and Film* (HSRC Press 2012).

Static opens with haunting lyrics from “hawks” by colony. The image of “hawks coming down on small fry rodents from a dizzy height” sets the tone of the book as Haupt explores music, film, social media, corporations and copyright laws in South Africa and the global north.

Haupt defines static as unmoving or unchanging, a static society, and static as noise. He then poses two questions. Is South Africa undergoing change after apartheid, or are we static? Can we hear each other through all the noise?

Static cuts across genres, such as hip hop, gangster rap, Afrikaans folk music, and Afrikaans punk, in its discussion of race and representation in post-apartheid media. Haupt uses theories by Frantz Fanon and Louis Althusser to show how race and representation in South Africa go beyond skin colour. It's a subtle, systematic ideology under the control of those with all the power, without the physical burden of colonising. Read: Empire.

This issue of power, its ownership and meaning for “small fry rodents”, is explored at great length in *Static*. Who controls the music? Who controls the production and reception of the message?

In the first chapter Haupt takes on big music production companies and their copyright laws, as well as post-apartheid government's adoption of neo-liberal macroeconomics, to show how, despite our best efforts, resources and power still lie in the hands of the elite minority. He explores social media as an alternative distribution channel to mainstream media, but finds that South African artists like Prophets of da City, EJ von Lyric, Tumi and the Volume, and many more are to a large extent left behind by the digital divide.

Haupt then looks to Die Antwoord in chapter

three for their successful employment of social media, but finds other factors that catapulted them onto the world stage. Die Antwoord portrays a “white trash”, “zef-side” identity and representation of a marginal white and coloured working class. However, Haupt goes beneath the surface of carefully crafted gangster tattoos and appropriated dialect to their Mitchell's Plein braai on *Top Billing* to ask the question, “Are Die Antwoord blackface?”

In chapter two Haupt explores the popularity of folklorist Bok van Blerk's songs, “De la Rey” and “Tyd om te trek” (Time to move). In contrast to this he analyses Afrikaans punk rockers Fokofpolisiekar's music, but finds them lacking as a viable political alternative to the nostalgic hankerings of Van Blerk.

He also highlights the positive way in which the now infamous Reitz video was first received, and modifies Jonathan Jansen's question from his inaugural address: “What can we learn from a community's popular culture to explain why such an atrocity would find an approving audience?”

In chapter four Haupt studies gangster currency and the construction of black masculinity in films, through Gavin Hood's *Tsotsi*, Ralph Ziman's *Jerusalema*, and Oliver Schmitz's *Hijack Stories*. Popular kwaito star, Zola, and SABC 1 programme *Yizo Yizo* also form part of the discussion.

Finally the Soccer World Cup, K'naan and Shakira's compromises, as well as Fifa's control and copyright of all things soccer, lead Haupt to conclude that this one was not for Africa.

Static is well written with clear arguments, crisp language, and badass song lyrics peppered throughout. It ends with more words from colony: “...now our freedom's gone for a song.”

Static, as well as Haupt's first book, *Stealing Empire: P2P, Intellectual Property and Hip-Hop Subversion* (HSRC Press, 2008), are available under open content licences at <http://www.hsrcpress.co.za/>.

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