

From Guguletu to Netreg (Cape Town, South Africa): Moppie Performance and Transformations in Social Representations

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This paper proposes an analysis of popular music and performance styles as “social revealers” (Georges Balandier), likely to express in symbolic forms underground mutation processes at work but not yet clearly discernible at the surface of society, and in particular to convey ambiguities, ambivalences and hesitations that verbal languages cannot articulate. Both the theory of cultural practices as “social revealers” and the methods that can be used to develop it in empirical investigations will be discussed. Theoretical and methodological questions will be illustrated with a case study of one *moppie* (comic song) performed during the Cape Town Klopse Carnival in 2007. *Moppies* consist in a repertoire of comic songs in Afrikaans which form part of singing competitions taking place both in the *Klopse* Carnival and in the *Sangkore* (Malay Choirs) competitions organised in Cape Town at the beginning of the year. New comic songs must be composed every year. They provide humorous insights into the perceptions and representations of a transforming society. The participants in both the *Klopse* and the *Sangkore* belong to the group that was labelled coloured during apartheid, a group in which negative representations of Africans have been widespread. In 2007, a carnival troupe (*Klops*) based in a neighbourhood called Netreg, the Netreg Superstars, performed a *moppie* titled “Vusie van Guguletu”, telling the story of the inclusion of an African, Vusie, (from the township named Guguletu) in a *Klops* choir. The song recounts how Vusie’s knowledge of operatic (therefore considered white) singing transformed the performance style of the *Klops* singers. Starting from a general presentation of the *moppies* repertoire, including a description of its particular performance style (compositional processes, responsorial structures, costumes, body languages of the choir and the soloist), this case study will investigate, using the “social revealer” approach, the triangular (coloured, African, white) relationship re-constructed in the song “Vusie van Guguletu” and discuss its signification in terms of the transformations that may be under way regarding the representations members of the coloured working class entertain vis-à-vis not only Africans, but also South African society at large.