

Opening Eyes through Ears: migrant Africans musicking in Brazil

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Abstract

What does it mean to perform your migrant identity through music-making (*musicking*) in one of the world's largest cities, and in a country renowned for its own musicality? This paper offers insights into the local musicking of African migrants in São Paulo. The paper explores how African musicians and artists - part of a recent phenomenon of African migration to Brazil - negotiate their self-representations through their art, and how local politics, and 'politicking' helps to shape these.

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Initial fieldwork has revealed diverse musical groups that perform and rehearse in different kinds of events and places: refugee festivals, churches, public squares, cultural centres, museums and concert halls. The migrant musicians are from Democratic Republic of Congo, Togo, Mozambique, and Senegal, and their musicking involves composing, practicing, rehearsal, performance, listening, collecting, sharing, etc. Some of our questions are: how is music making in São Paulo related to their diasporic experience? How do their musics dialogue with local ones? Which places are occupied (and transformed) by these migrant musicians? What aspects and personal experiences of their countries are performed in their art, brought to a new Brazilian audience? Significantly, we find that Brazilian politics has an important impact on how they shape their collective memories, and on the polyvalent heritages in-the-making that the musicians mobilise in pursuit of their artistic and personal goals.

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