

The Beat that Beat Apartheid: The Role of Music in the Resistance against Apartheid in South Africa

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Abstract

To properly understand the processes that have led to the transition from apartheid to majority rule, it is essential to not just analyse the developments at the negotiating tables of politicians, but also to understand popular initiatives for, and responses to political change. Studying popular creative expressions is instructive, since music may reveal popular sentiments as well as the political atmosphere. Just as the apartheid era was not characterised by the same degree of political repression throughout its duration, so the musical response changed over time. This paper uses the German playwright Berthold Brecht's idiom "art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it" to show how the political use of music in South Africa changed from being a 'mirror' in the 1940s and 50s to becoming a 'hammer' with which to shape reality by the 1980s. In South Africa, music went from reflecting common experiences and concerns in the early years of apartheid, to eventually function as a force to confront the state and as a means to actively construct an alternative political and social reality.

Introduction

Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it
(Bertold Brecht in Askew 2003: 633).

Any musical innovation is full of danger to the whole State, and ought to be prohibited; when modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the State always change with them (Plato, The Republic, in Byerly 1998: 27).

As Plato once noted, music at times carries meaning that goes beyond the purely musical level, and that may even enter the political sphere. South Africa is a notable example, since the moral outrage at the injustices committed by apartheid became part of Western pop culture through songs such as 'Biko' by Peter Gabriel, campaigns such as Sun City organised by Little Steven (Ullestad 1987) and the successive Mandela Concerts at Wembley Stadium in London in 1988 and 1990 (Garofalo 1992). Paul Simon's *'Graceland'* album has been the source of much controversy not only in the general press but also inside the academia (Hamm 1989; Meintjes 1990; Erlmann 1994), since Simon's recordings had effectively broken the UNESCO cultural boycott on South Africa that was in effect since 1968. The very fact that such a boycott existed reveals how deeply the arts and international politics had become enmeshed vis-à-vis South Africa.

Also inside South Africa music and song played a significant role in putting pressure on the apartheid regime. Scott, in his work on the arts of resistance, asserts that "oral traditions, due simply to their means of transmission, offer a kind of seclusion, control, and even anonymity that make them ideal vehicles for cultural resistance" (Scott 1990: 160). Oral communication also has been much more accessible to a large part of the South African population than the printed press due to lack of literacy and economic means (for which the apartheid system was of course partly responsible). "Both the semi-improvisational, mosaic-type structure of the lyrics, and the inference that there are deeper levels of meaning that may be reached by the listener, are distinctive characteristics of lyrics in traditional and popular, musical and poetic forms throughout southern Africa" (Allen 2003: 235). In addition, Vail and White mention that in many societies across southern Africa songs and poetry are accepted as appropriate media for discussing the impact of power. They also note that "it is a convention of the form that power may be openly criticised" (Vail/White 1991: 887). "Central to this aesthetic is the concept of poetic license, [...] the performer being free to express opinions that would otherwise be in breach of other social conventions" (Allen 2003: 319). However, the apartheid government did not always share this concept of poetic license.¹

¹ In this paper, I have limited myself to discussing what could be termed 'popular music' and have not examined singing in prisons, churches or among guerrilla fighters. A discussion of the use of song in prisons can be found in Kivnick 1990 and the film *Amandla!* 2004. For a discussion of the role of song in church, as well as a selection of

The extent of what can be clearly defined as 'resistance music' or 'protest song' can at times be a grey area. However, proceeding chronologically, this paper will highlight certain trends in the political functions of South Africa's music. Artists used the textual as well as the purely musical levels to make politically subversive statements and often hidden meanings were concealed in seemingly inoffensive songs. Just as the apartheid era was not characterised by the same degree of political repression throughout its duration, so the musical response changed over time. When the state-controlled media was still relatively tolerant of dissent in the 1950s, songs openly addressed issues affecting musicians and the general population, mirroring their concerns. As oppression increased in the 1980s, politically subversive meanings were hidden in songs. Later, apartheid premises were undermined through musical fusion and song texts presented more militant challenges to the state. My aim in this paper is to show how music in South Africa went from "being a mirror held up to reality" in the 1940s and 50s to becoming a "hammer with which to shape it", to use Brecht's idiom. By the 1980s, popular culture "not only reflected but actively constructed social reality" (Allen 2003).

Music and State Control – Radio Bantu

South Africa presents a striking example of state use of music to further political ends, considering that the apartheid regime went beyond simple propaganda in the attempt to use music to advance their policies. The apartheid philosophy of 'separate development' was not confined to the political sphere, but extended to cultural matters, thereby contributing to the infusion of the arts with political meanings. Apartheid South Africa did possess all the mechanisms for direct censorship of publications and sound recordings. The Publications Act of 1974 provided for the establishment of the Directorate of Publications, which responded to complaints from the police and members of the general public. The directorate "decided whether or not to ban the material submitted to it" (Drewett 2003: 154). Despite all the mechanisms in place, the Directorate of Publications only rarely banned music and fewer than one hundred music records were actually banned

protest songs using a religious idiom, see Kivnick 1990 and Nyberg 1990. On music's role in the guerrilla war, see *Amandla!* 2004.

during the 1980s (Drewett 2003: 154). Instead, the state relied on the government-run SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation) radio service to refrain from playing undesirable songs and to promote the ideology of 'separate development.' Hamm demonstrates how, for more than twenty years, the apartheid government "succeeded in having its entire population, black and white, listen to its own radio service, theorised and programmed in accordance with state ideology" (Hamm 1991: 147). Under the heading of Radio Bantu, all of South Africa

"was blanketed by a complex radio network ensuring that each person would have easy access to a state-controlled radio service in his/her own language, dedicated to 'mould[ing] his intellect and his way of life' by stressing the distinctiveness and separateness of 'his' cultural heritage – in other words, to promoting the mythology of Separate Development (Hamm 1991: 169)".

Clarence Ford, who worked as a radio broadcaster during the apartheid years, concurs: "SABC was state-run, it was really the voice of the government. [...] Radio was a very powerful tool. It was manipulated, very seriously, to assist with the social engineering process in apartheid South Africa" (Freedom Sounds 2004). The selection of music for air play was coordinated with the state ideology and the primary political and cultural impact of this radio music came not from the texts of songs, but in more pervasive ways, such as the language and musical styles chosen (Hamm 1991: 172). While apartheid ideology stressed the separateness and incompatibility of different South African cultures, musically or otherwise, musicians challenged and undermined this premise, first in subtle ways and then in an explicit, direct manner.²

² Throughout the apartheid era, there were of course a number of artists who did not musically challenge apartheid and supplied music for the radio. During the 1970s this music was derogatorily referred to as *msakazo* (broadcast) music.

The Politicisation of Song – The Musical and Textual Levels

*What we have here perceived as beauty,
We shall someday encounter as truth.*
Schiller, *The Artists* (in Ballantine 1984: 13).

In the 1920s and early 1930s, South African music was heavily influenced by American vaudeville and minstrelsy shows, as well as by church choirs. Performers and audience alike valued close imitation of American musical styles (Coplan 1979a; Ballantine, 1991a and 1991b).³ However, by the mid-1930s, African elements were integrated into the music to make a political statement, as a new musical political consciousness developed. “The content of the shift was to assert the belief that there was intrinsically a value in the adoption or incorporation of musical materials that were *African*” (Ballantine 1991b: 145). Protest was therefore first conducted at a purely musical, as opposed to textual level. It was part of “a broad groundswell that reached its first culmination in the early 1940s, where it inaugurated a period of militant protest and articulated itself through the social and political philosophy of the New Africanism” (Ballantine 1991b: 146). This set the foundation for a trend of incorporating African musical materials as a means of making a subtle political statement that was later picked up by the Black Consciousness movement and continued to carry meaning well into the 1980s.

During the early 1940s, musician Molefe Pheto explained “songs were not confrontational.” At first, issues that affected musicians directly were commented upon in song.

“Exploitation is something most musicians complained about. There were no political organisations, these were just musicians feeling that something was terribly wrong and I feel that was political. Another political issue was the night pass. The musicians worked at night, and on their way home they’d be stopped by the police, so songs of protest started around that police harassment. It was not so much a political

³ At this time, another musical genre flourished in the townships – *marabi*. Even though it was quite popular among working class township dwellers, it was considered unrefined by the mission-educated black elite. Due to the consumption of illegal, home-brewed alcohol, *marabi* parties were also the subject of frequent police raids.

movement, but they were protecting themselves and complaining about how hard the police were making it for them to work" (Pheto in Ewens 1991: 199).

The continual police harassment of musicians was regarded as part of a wider political issue, caused by apartheid laws. The individual struggles of ordinary people (i.e. non-musicians) were also understood to result from political injustice and therefore many musicians did not consider themselves to be singing about political issues, but rather about the circumstances of life in South Africa. In the words of Miriam Makeba, "people say I sing politics, but what I sing is not politics, it is the truth" (Ewens 1991: 192). However, increasingly these songs were interpreted as political. Partly owing to the efforts by the African National Congress to enlarge its support base, "the mass of ordinary township people became politically conscious and active during the 1950s and, in turn, the commercial viability of politically oriented recordings increased considerably" (Allen 2003: 234). During the 1950s many popular songs began to be based on the current events in the country. Mary Thobei, who was recording with Trutone at the time, explained,

"our songs all had meaning. They reflected what is happening right now. [...] Cuthbert used to listen to the news, you see. Then he would come there and say, 'Did you hear about in the news they said this and that and that?' It ended up we are going to record that (Allen 2003: 234)".

Molefe Pheto concurs: "There was the general political awakening. [...] In the 1950s the ANC choir was formed that brought retaliation. Politically things were beginning to take shape" (Ewens 1991: 199).

During this time period, protest songs became increasingly popular. Musicians of the 1950s had joined in the overt political opposition to the implementation of apartheid. It is therefore not necessarily useful to make the distinction between recordings of artists and popular protest songs at this point, as in practice they often overlapped. Songs that were first recorded by popular artists were sung in the streets, just as songs that emerged from political rallies were recorded by artists in the studios. Dorothy Masuka's '*uDr. Malan Unomthetho Onzima*' (Dr. Malan's Government is Harsh) sold well and was even played on the South African

Broadcasting Corporation's African re-diffusion service before it was banned (Allen 2003: 236). When security police arrived at the studio to demand the master tape, "Katz and Fagan [of Troubadour Records] attempted to defuse the situation by claiming that the number was a praise song" (Allingham in Allen) and that such recordings were not political, but functioned as a newspaper (Allingham in Allen 2003: 236). But of course, many of the protest songs did more than just inform. At times, they quite openly advised a course of action. During the bus boycott in August 1943 the song '*Azikhwelwa*,' meaning 'We refuse to ride' vibrated through Alexandra and beyond. For nine days 15,000 people trudged nine miles to work to protest the bus company's fare increase from 4d to 5d, until the bus company gave in (Anderson 1981: 32).

Possibly the best-known protest songs from the 1950s were those sung by women in the campaign against passes. One of the most famous, from August 1956 went '*Hey Strydom, Wathint'a bafazi, way ithint'imbodoko uzaKufa*' which translates to 'Strydom, now that you have touched the women, you have struck a rock, you have dislodged a boulder, and you will be crushed' (Pieterse 1989: 126). Here, as in Masuka's '*uDr. Malan Unomthetho Onzima*,' the politician is addressed directly. The same is true for one of the most popular songs of this era, which was composed by the political activist Vuyisile Mini and later recorded by Miriam Makeba: '*Naants'indod'emnyama, Verwoerd bhasobha, naants'indod'emnyama*' which translates to 'behold the advancing blacks, Verwoerd. Beware of the advancing blacks' (Pieterse 1989: 126). Nelson Mandela recalls singing this song with Mini himself during the treason trials in the Johannesburg Prison commonly known as 'The Fort.' "Every day Vuyisile Mini, who years later was hanged by the government for political crimes, led the group in singing freedom songs. [...] We sang at the top of our lungs and it kept our spirits high" (Mandela 1994: 234). During the trial in court, as well as during the trials of facing police at protests, songs promoted a sense of unity and endurance. They provided a means to address particular politicians directly and frankly, not only through song, but also through the attendant boycotts and protests. The songs of the time reflected ('mirrored,' to use Brecht's term) social reality and presented an effective way of acknowledging and protesting against an unjust political system.

Subversive Functions, Songs of Protest, Songs of Lament

Often the lyrics are considered as the only political component of songs of resistance, yet many songs were not only politically subversive through their texts alone, or through their musical styles, as demonstrated above, but also through their use and function.⁴ The South African Communist Party also regularly held dances to raise funds (Ballantine 1991b: 142). Even though the song texts played were not always political ones, their use was nevertheless to advance a political cause. Furthermore, “the ability of cryptic lyrics to accommodate multiple interpretations is particularly useful in a repressive political climate. On occasion, a song’s surface meaning thinly veils a coded message, whose interpretation can be reinforced by the performance context” (Allen 2003: 235). To illustrate, one press report “claimed that Mafuya’s recording ‘*Udumo Lwamaphoyisa*’ (A Strong Police Force) was sung by ‘look-out boys’ to warn shebeen queens and illicit drinkers of police presence and the possibility of a liquor raid” (Allen 2003: 235).

Sophiatown, near Johannesburg, was musically very active, the heart of the jazz and *marabi* scene at the time. It was also a thorn in the eye of the government, being a racially mixed area. With the Group Areas Act (1950) and the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act (1951), the government passed the legal framework that initiated the removal of people from Sophiatown and their relocation to Meadowlands in Soweto. Since these policies particularly affected the musical scene, many songs protested this practice, such as the Sun Valley Sisters’ ‘Bye Bye Sophiatown,’ Miriam Makeba’s ‘Sophiatown is Gone’ and Strike Vilakazi’s ‘Meadowlands,’ popularised by Nancy Jacobs. Relying on literal translation, (We’re moving night and day to go to Meadowlands. We love Meadowlands) the government interpreted the song as supportive of their removal programme. The inhabitants of Sophiatown sang this song as their belongings were being hauled away by government trucks (Coplan 1985: 165). Their interpretation caught the ironic tone of the song and carried the opposite meaning as that of the government

⁴ A revealing example is ‘*Nkosi Sikelel’iAfrika*’ (God Bless Africa), the text of which really is “an unthreatening prayer” (Duma ka Ndlovu in *Amandla!* 2004). It first became a politically subversive song, and then South Africa’s national anthem – following a similar trajectory of Nelson Mandela himself, who went from being labelled a ‘terrorist’ to becoming the country’s president.

and 'Meadowlands' became a protest anthem against the Sophiatown removals (Allen 2003: 235).

The late 1950s saw the height of overt political protest through song of this period. The political climate of South Africa soon changed with the general intensification of apartheid and increasing repression of political dissent. The Sharpeville massacre on 21st March 1960, where sixty-nine unarmed protesters against the pass laws were shot and many more wounded, "represents the beginning of the era of repression which stunted all political development among black South Africans in the 60s" (Jeffrey 1985: 3). The ANC and the PAC were outlawed and 169 black political leaders were put on trial for treason. The Sharpeville massacre and the imprisonment of the political leadership left the population shaken, as the removal of the creative seat Sophiatown and the following jazz exile (among them Abdullah Ibrahim, Jonas Gwangwa, Miriam Makeba, Hugh Masekela, Chris McGregor, and Kippie Moeketsie) hushed the musical community. The severe new broadcasting policies of the SABC prevented subversive tunes that were previously tolerated from being aired (Hamm 1991: 153). Joseph Molifi of the Sharpetown Swingsters explained that "the band has been unable to perform any shows because of the unrest since they are unable to (get together) easily, and simply because they are too scared to move about the township" (Jeffrey 1985: 107). The new government-planned townships completely lacked venues and recreational amenities. Furthermore, all gatherings consisting of more than three people were forbidden, and this included concerts.

Dorothy Masuka's last South African recording of this period commented on the assassination of the Congolese President Patrice Lumumba and provoked another security police raid at Troubadour Studios. Fortunately, Masuka was in Bulawayo at the time of the raid. Hereafter, she was declared a 'wanted person,' which prevented her from returning to South Africa during the next three decades (Allen 2003: 237). The demise of her South African career warned other artists from releasing overtly politically subversive material. However, according to Hugh Masekela, "music became an even more important weapon in the struggle as any possibility of open legitimate protest had come to an end after the Sharpeville massacre" (Freedom Sounds 2004).

This was a time when the songs took a mournful tone. '*Senzeni Na?*' and '*Thina Sizwe*' in particular demonstrate the desolation that characterised this

period. The accusatory, confrontational tone of some of the former songs is abandoned, as the lyrics of *'Thina Sizwe'* demonstrate:

<i>Thina Sizwe, thina sizwe esinsundu</i>	We the nation, we the black nation
<i>Sikhalela, sikhalela izwelethu</i>	We mourn, we mourn for our land
<i>Elathathwa, elathathwa ngabamhlope</i>	Stolen from us, stolen from us by the white man
<i>Mabayeke, mabayek'umhlaba wethu</i>	Let them leave, let them leave our land

(cited in Stapleton 1987: 192).

The effect of the song *'Senzeni Na?'*, meaning 'what have we done?' is not so much achieved by the text itself, as by its repetition, explains musician Sibongile Khumalo: "Can you imagine, that's one line, *Senzeni Na?*, 'what have we done?', repeated over and over and over... You have no other option but to stand up and go and fight" (*Amandla!* 2004). Indeed, Soweto's youth, and numerous artists heeded that message.

Hidden Messages

Many artists were determined to continue to voice their views musically, and by the 1970s, many incorporated hidden meanings into their songs. With the student uprisings beginning on June 16, 1976 in Soweto, protesting against the introduction of instruction in Afrikaans, the political struggle regained momentum. Song-texts were now often undeniably political, but frequently couched in metaphor, such as the following example by Johnny Clegg and Sipho Mchunu of Juluka, from their first album *'Universal Men'*:

"This next song describes two fighting bulls. One is large and strong with huge horns and one is small with tiny horns. But as they fight it becomes clear that the little bull is going to beat the big one. From this story comes a Zulu proverb, which says: the bull does not stab with his horns but with his fighting knowledge. It is the spirit that counts, not superior weaponry. It is a tale that symbolises the victory of the underdog over his oppressor (in Marre and Charlton 1985: 39; *Rhythm of Resistance* 1988)."

However, in South Africa, Radio Bantu refused to play Juluka's music, since they considered Clegg's efforts 'an insult to the Zulu and their culture'

(Abrahams 2003: 23). In actual fact the group did not fit into their neatly categorised radio programmes and were regarded as a threat to cultural apartheid and the concomitant ideology of 'separate development' (Coplan 1985: 198).

Many of the songs sung at demonstrations and meetings were so widely known that they functioned in ways similar to folk songs and enabled individual performers to "take refuge, like the originator of a rumour, behind this anonymity" (Scott 1990: 161). In fact, the songs sung in the streets and the churches are "collective in nature and the boundaries between choir/listeners and choir/choir-leader are shifting and can even vanish" (Nyberg 1990: 6). The improvised nature of many songs, as well as the dynamics of group singing in South Africa, opened the way for the texts to be slightly altered according to the circumstances. "Those who have earlier been privy to the more seditious interpretation will appreciate the hidden meaning of the innocuous version" (Scott 1990: 162). The 1980s especially saw a lot of such word play and hidden meanings. Yvonne Chaka Chaka gives one such example from her own musical career:

"We recorded a song which at that time was called 'Winnie Mandela.' The SABC refused to play the song; we changed it to 'winning my dear love.' But what was nice during those days, [was that] the public knew all these songs. When you did live shows you'd go 'Winnie Mandela,' people knew what was the song all about" (Freedom Sounds 2004). "

In a similar manner, Lucky Dube explains the word play in his song 'Slave,' "I spoke there about someone who was a liquor slave. When we did live shows, people were singing the song as 'legal slave.' [...] People always had an ear for these subtle messages" (Freedom Sounds 2004). In 1985 Shifty Records released a compilation album of politically subversive tunes called '*A Naatjie in Our Sosatie*' (a tangerine in our kebab), a play on 'Anarchy in our Society' (Drewett 2003: 158). The censors never caught on the pun.

As illustrated by the examples given by Yvonne Chaka Chaka and Lucky Dube, live concerts were a way of circulating the intended texts of songs that had been altered due to censorship. "We could talk about these things during live shows, but we could not have anything on record that was against the government," according to Dube (Freedom Sounds 2004). Coplan describes how an additional meaning got inserted to a love song,

without so much as changing the lyrics, during the performance of a popular soul group in Soweto in July of 1976, during the height of the uprisings,

“Live shows, even when sponsored by a commercial studio, can be an important platform for the inspirational dissemination of musical protest. [...] When the word ‘power’ incidentally occurred in the lyrics of a love ballad, the female vocalist raised her fist in a ‘Black Power’ salute. Instantaneously fists rose throughout the hall amidst a responsive chorus of ‘*amandla eyethu*’ (power is ours) (Coplan 1979a: 148).”

In a 1976 interview, Miriam Makeba comments, “I could not afford the luxury of just being a singer who sings about happy things and love” (Freedom Sounds 2004). However, in South Africa, the normal divide between love songs and ‘revolutionary songs’ did not necessarily hold, since, as mentioned earlier, the struggles of ordinary life and the political struggle were regarded as related. The singer Vusi Mahlasela politicised his love songs in other ways, referring to the political unrest of the late 1980s on a textual level. “So who are they who say no more love poems now? I want to sing a song of love for that woman who jumped fences pregnant and still gave birth to a healthy child” (Mahlasela in ‘Red Song’ 1991).

The Black Consciousness movement picked up on the incorporation of African material to music as part of a political statement, a trend whose beginnings in the 1930s have been described above. Groups such as Malombo were at the forefront, incorporating Venda traditional rhythms into their jazz-fusion. The group Harari, as well as Malombo, made little overt political references in their songs, but communicated a sense of cultural pride and self-consciousness (Coplan 1985: 195). Malombo quickly became “associated with African cultural nationalism and the emerging political aims of the Black Consciousness movement” (Coplan 1985: 196). Pianist Abdullah Ibrahim was very adept at inserting political subversion at the purely musical level.

“Ibrahim has for many years now utilised the melodies of freedom songs in his piano improvisations. [...] In this way instrumental music charged with the melodies of freedom songs, gains a level of political

meaning for the South African audiences who hear the unstated lyrics in their hearts (Kerkhof in Drewett 2003: 159)."

A jazz musician from Cape Town's old District Six elaborates on this concept. "Music can deliver its message without words. The most powerful anthem of the struggle in the 1980s was a song called 'Mannenberg' [also composed by Ibrahim], which had no words, it simply referred to a series of styles of music that was influenced by black culture," drawing on church organ music, *marabi*, jazz and the blues (Freedom Sounds 2004). The musician continues, upon hearing such songs, you "would automatically associate them with being free, to have an identity." They delivered the message "you can do what you like, but we are not going away" (Freedom Sounds 2004). Ibrahim was also one of many jazz musicians who gave political titles to instrumental pieces, such as his 'Anthem for the New Nation,' released in 1979 (Drewett 2003: 159). South African music of this time reflects not only the continuing resolve to resist apartheid, but also the creative ways used to evade censorship.

Attacking the State

To take part in the African revolution it is not enough to write a revolutionary song; you must fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves.

Sékou Touré in Fanon, 1961 (Byerly 1998: 44).

While instrumental music was by nature subtle in undermining apartheid premises, other artists, especially by the 1980s, were ready to challenge the state directly. As artists openly confronted the government, so the government ruthlessly attacked artists. Roger Lucey, a musician who confronted the government directly through his lyrics, subsequently had his career ruined by the secret police (Lucey 2004: 69). In his song 'Longile Tabalaza', he "had not only attacked the state head on, [...] but further made a direct reference to the Security Branch (Special Branch elite) (Erasmus 2004: 75):

Well the cops came Monday morning and they took him on
 suspicion
 Of robbery and arson, the law makes no provision
 So they handed him to plain clothes
 The Special Branch elite
 And it doesn't really matter how strong you are
 They've got ways to make you speak ...
 Well whatever happened in that office God and the cops will
 only know
 The law has ways of keeping quiet so that nothing at all will
 show
 But at three o'clock that same afternoon, Longile fell five floors
 Lay dead below on the street outside
 They quickly rushed his body behind closed doors
 Some said it was murder and some said it was suicide
 But this is not the first time men have gone in there and died

'Longile Tabalaza' tells the story of a young man who was arrested and within days died in detention, alluding to police brutality in South African prisons. Its very direct and confrontational textual style is the effect of wanting to reach a public that did not necessarily have the ear for subtle messages, and, beyond the politically active white community, those who were either ignorant of or indifferent to the situation in their country's prisons. It was also Lucey's preferred style: "I believed in an in-your-face, tell-it-like-it-is approach" (Drewett 2003: 157). In the 1980s, the sentence for owning this banned song could be up to five years of imprisonment (Freedom Sounds 2004). After Lucey's record label was intimidated by the Security Branch, his albums and tapes confiscated from music shops, tear gas poured into the air-conditioning during one of his performances, and armed policemen sent into his house in the night, Lucey finally gave up on his musical career (Erasmus 2004: 76). In fact, Sipho 'Hotstix' Mabuse states that "the white musicians suffered more than we did. Because our position was that if we sang songs that alluded to the struggle, our community was always there behind us" (Reitov 2004: 87).

Mzwakhe Mbuli was known as a musician and as a public speaker at rallies and challenged the state directly with lyrics of 'Behind the Bars' and 'Shot Down.' Mbuli "was the victim of even more serious attacks in the mid- to late 1980s. A hand grenade was thrown at his house, he was shot at, and his

passport applications were turned down” (Drewett 2003: 158). His first album ‘*Change is Pain,*’ released in 1986, “was banned by the Directorate of Publications, and he was arrested, detained, and tortured” (Drewett 2003: 158).

Songs started taking on a new militancy as students and youth took to the streets in the 1980s in what has been termed ‘the people’s war,’ with the aim of making South Africa ‘ungovernable’. According to Beinart, “if the renaissance of black opposition in the 1970s paved the way for political change, the insurrection of 1984-6 made the process difficult to reverse” (Beinart 1994: 236). As a popular opposition culture

“began to reappear, it did so because of, and almost simultaneously with, the re-emergence – on a momentous scale – of black working class and community politics. In 1983, a few months after the launch of the United Democratic Front (UDF), at an historic, sold out concert, a big band of older African jazz musicians – many of whom had not played publicly for 20 years – gave their inaugural performance under the name of African Jazz Pioneers. [...] *Isicathamiya* choirs and 1950s style bands shared the stage with speech-makers at huge Cosatu and UDF rallies” (Ballantine 1993: 9).

Manala Manzini, an antiapartheid activist, correctly points out that “these songs expressed not just the mood, but the political momentum of the time. The more radical the situation was becoming, the more militant many of these songs became” (*Amandla!* 2004). In August and September 1984, protests against the inauguration of the tri-cameral parliament (with representation for Indians, ‘coloureds’ and whites, but none for blacks) resulted in heated battles between youths and police. The government responded by moving large numbers of troops into the townships and in July 1985 declaring a State of Emergency, which gave the security forces even greater powers.

These circumstances were “reflected in the songs, because the songs had to articulate a new urgency” recalls Sibusiso Nxumalo, an antiapartheid activist. According to Nxumalo, during this period, “the songs started taking on new overtones, changing a word here, changing a word there, putting in an AK[47] here, taking out a Bible there” (*Amandla!* 2004). While “earlier songs anticipated a vaguely defined victory; mass singing now quite openly acknowledged the young people who have left South Africa

since 1976, to train as guerrillas" (Kivnick 1990: 315). One example of this trend is the song '*Shona Malanga*', which means 'Sheila's Day' and came from domestic servants, referring to their free day of the week. Sifiso Ntuli, antiapartheid activist, explains, "the song was adapted to the condition we found ourselves in, so instead of saying: 'we'll meet on Thursday, on Sheila's day, it became, we'll meet where we would rather not meet, in the bushes with our bazookas" (*Amandla!* 2004). '*Shona Malanga*,' in its new version, could now frequently be heard at protests and battles in the streets. Hundreds of songs were composed at this time, as one song finished, the next person started another (*Amandla!* 2004). The new militant lyrics included the following: "They are lying to themselves. Arresting us, killing us, won't work. We'll still fight for our land," "The whites don't negotiate with us, so let's fight" and "We will shoot them with our machine guns," "We have left, our mothers and fathers don't know where we are, to country they have never been, fighting for our freedom" (all in *Amandla!* 2004). At these confrontations with the government troops, the *toyitoyi* song and dance was ever more frequently used. Activist Vincent Vena recalls, "*toyitoyi* was like a weapon when you didn't have guns, didn't have teargas. It's a tool that we used in war" (*Amandla!* 2004). Hugh Masekela concurs: "because you can't beat these people physically, you can scare [...] them with the songs" (*Amandla!* 2004). And scare them it did: "even some of the older guys, even though they won't admit it, they were also frightened stiff" recalls a retired policeman (*Amandla!* 2004). By this time, music and song was used to confront the state and its organs directly. The aim was to oppose the state and to further undermine its crumbling remnants of legitimacy. Music now sought to advance political change and to construct an alternative political reality in South Africa.

Undermining Apartheid Premises through Musical Fusion

The same Security Branch officer who dealt with Roger Lucy also "conducted investigations" on Johnny Clegg of Juluka. Clegg comments on the circumstances of a live show in Sandton in Johannesburg, where the group was warned an hour earlier about a possible police raid and closing of the show. They acquired a bucket and a broom for the band member Sipho Mchunu, so that if the police came they could pretend he had just been sweeping the floor before he joined in the singing. As Clegg put it, it

was “ridiculous but true” (Freedom Sounds 2004). In fact, at times “interracial bands like the Flames would have some members playing behind curtains, depending on the colour of the audience” (Masekela in Freedom Sounds 2004). The police and the state security apparatus seemed to generally view musical preferences as a political rather than a personal choice. One South African Indian woman, interviewed during the State of Emergency in 1986, recalls: “Last week during the boycotts the police asked me why I had an African music station turned on in my house when I am Indian? I told them I like African music. They called me a communist and said that they were watching me, so I should ‘watch out’” (Pillay 1994: 291). However, by the mid-1980s, the musical fusion that was set in motion by groups like Harari and Malombo mentioned above, gained new momentum. Groups such as Sakhile, Bayete, Sabenza, Tananas and Savuka, as well as many less well-known local bands, played music that might blend “*mbaqanga* with traditional Nguni song; Cape Coloured *klopse* idioms with bebop; *marabi* with electronic rock; Zulu guitar style with Cape Malay *ghommali*edjies; or many other permutations” (Ballantine 1993: 9). Ballantine continues, “it is what these integrations discovered and made possible that was exciting and important, for, like their audiences, the bands were wholly non-racial, rejecting in their behaviour and commitment, centuries of racial and class dichotomy. Their music was an alchemy, helping, in its way, to corrode the old social order and to liberate the new” (Ballantine 1993: 9). The most explicitly political example of this style is of course the superimposition of two anthems that were historically representative of opposing ideologies. According to Byerly, “the official national anthem ‘*Die Stem van Suid-Afrika*’ [...] was discovered to be remarkably compatible with the banned African anthem ‘*Nkosi Sikelel’iAfrika*’ when superimposed harmonically or woven together” (Byerly 1998: 24).⁵

By 1986 the government had caught on this trend of musical fusion and promoted a song to further its own motives. The Bureau of Information sponsored an official ‘peace song,’ entitled ‘Together We Will Build a Brighter Future.’ Many prominent musicians were hired to sing in English, Afrikaans, Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Tswana and Pedi. 4.3 million Rands had been spent on the project, but the song turned out to be a scandal (Byerly 1998: 29). Released during the height of political unrest in the country, the

⁵ See van Zyl Muller (2000) for a debate on this point.

promised 'brighter future' did not seem to be attainable reality. "Musicians were particularly angry that their sacred ground had been usurped by the very camp against which their music was most fervently and effectively being targeted" (Byerly 1998: 29). The severity of the cultural struggle became evident as the house of Steve Kekana, who had participated in the project, was burned down (Gwangwa and van Aurich 1989: 156). The public boycotted the release and by December 1986, prior to any commercial sales, all copies of the song were recalled (Byerly 1998: 30).

Thus while many musicians were engaging in, and a wide audience appreciated, various kinds of musical fusion – the manipulation of this sentiment by the government was acceptable to neither. Music can therefore act as an acute indicator of finely tuned public sentiment. The artists' motives were regarded as authentic, and as these fusion bands were multiethnic, new multiracial clubs such as Kippie's in Johannesburg provided venues for an audience of diverse backgrounds to gather. However, during the State of Emergency, the government was not seen to constructively promote peace and racial harmony in other, non-musical spheres, and consequently the song was dismissed as a propaganda scam. Therefore, while popular artists tried to construct an alternative social reality through their music, the government could not usurp this function.

By 1990, Mandela was released from prison and the time was ripe for another wave of songs in his honour. Songs "jumped out of everywhere, not only celebrating the occasion of Mandela's release but also speaking of a promise of a brighter future ahead" (Ngema and Ndlovu in Kivnick 1990: xv). It was also occasion for another, more genuine, and more widely accepted 'peace song.' Chicco Twala composed the song, saying, "the time is ripe for a peace song. Political leaders are freed and exiles are returning. But we must have peace before we can truly be free" (Byerly 1998: 35). All artists (including Hugh Masekela, Brenda Fassie, and Yvonne Chaka Chaka, among many others) contributed free of charge and all financial gain went to the newly-established 'Victims of Violence' fund (Byerly 1998: 35). Since the song was not initiated by the government, and not affiliated with any political party, it received "overwhelming commercial support" and extensive airplay (Byerly 1998: 35).

Conclusion

It is true that the line between 'mirroring' an unacceptable reality and 'hammering' it into a new shape is fine, and that protesting a given state of affairs implies the desire for an alternative reality. However, as this paper has shown, certain trends are discernible with regards to the role of music in the struggle to end apartheid in South Africa. Music has often reflected the political atmosphere in the country. In the 1950s, at a time of rising mass protest against pass laws and the intensification of apartheid, songs of protest openly addressed the politicians in question and mirrored common concerns of the population. The mournful tone of songs in the 1960s reflected popular sentiments after the Sharpeville massacre and the banning and arrest of the African political leadership. Due to mounting censorship, politically subversive meanings were hidden in songs, often to be expressed openly only at live concerts. By the 1980s, song texts portrayed a rebellious challenge to the state. Musical fusion by ethnically diverse bands (and audiences) negated decades of apartheid ideology and practice. Plato's comment, that "when modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the State [...] change with them" did indeed hold true for South Africa, as the early 1990s saw a period of political change and the elections of April 1994 ushered in a new period of majority rule.

Eyerman and Jamison's observation applies very well to South Africa, since "periods of social movement have served to open up spaces for musical experimentation – a new kind of [...] public sphere" (Eyerman & Jamison 1998: 77). Social movements have also given a political focus and direction to musical expression, "charging music with a special intensity and responsibility" (Eyerman & Jamison 1998: 77). Mandela himself correctly captured this phenomenon,

"The curious beauty of African music is that it uplifts as it tells a sad tale. [...] African music is often about the aspirations of African people, and it can ignite the political resolve of those who might otherwise be indifferent to politics. [...] Politics can strengthen music but music has a potency that defies politics (Nelson Mandela, in *The Hidden Years*, 3rd Ear Music)."

Zusammenfassung

Um die Prozesse, die von der Apartheid zur Mehrheitsregierung in Südafrika geführt haben richtig zu verstehen, ist es notwendig auch populäre Initiativen für, und Reaktionen auf, politische Veränderungen zu betrachten. In diesem Text wird die populäre Musik daraufhin analysiert wie sie die jeweilige politische Atmosphäre ausdrückte und wie sich diese im Laufe der Zeit wandelte. Ebenso wie die Apartheid nicht immer vom gleichen Niveau der Unterdrückung gekennzeichnet war, änderte sich auch die Form der musikalischen Reaktion darauf. In diesem Artikel wird Berthold Brechts Sprichwort „Die Kunst ist nicht ein Spiegel der Realität, sondern ein Hammer um sie zu ändern“ herangezogen, um zu zeigen, wie sich die politische Anwendung der Musik von einem „Spiegel“ in den 1940-1950er Jahren zu einem „Hammer“ in den 1980er Jahren hin gewandelt hat.

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