

Sounds of Resistance

The Role of Music in
Multicultural Activism

Volume 2: International Activism

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AN IMPRINT OF ABC-CLIO, LLC
Santa Barbara, California • Denver, Colorado • Oxford, England

Chapter 12

"The Toyi-toyi Was Our Weapon"

The Role of Music in the Struggle against Apartheid in South Africa

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The curious beauty of African music is that it uplifts even as it tells a sad tale. You may be poor, you may have only a ramshackle house, you may have lost your job, but that song gives you hope. African music is often about the aspirations of the African people, and it can ignite the political resolve of those who might otherwise be indifferent to politics. . . . Politics can be strengthened by music, but music has potency that defies politics.

—Nelson Mandela¹

In 1948, the National Party in South Africa swept to power on a platform of systematic and legal separation of people into four classifications, white, "colored" (people of mixed race), Indian/Asiatic, and African, and effectively banned all groups of people—except those classified as white—from varying degrees of rights, amenities, and freedom of movement. This was the system known as *apartheid* that became an entrenched and increasingly internationally vilified method of government in South Africa from 1948 to 1994. While independence movements in countries throughout the rest of Africa overthrew European authority and established their own governments, the Republic of South Africa maintained the rule of a white minority over a "non-white" population that made up roughly 90 percent of the country. During this 46-year period, opposition to apartheid found

expression through the actions of the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Congress of Trades Unions (SACTU), the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), the South African Communist Party (SACP), Black Consciousness (BC), and the United Democratic Front (UDF). Opposition also found in expression through song. In the words of activist Sifiso Ntuli, "throughout the struggle, there was music."²

The movement against apartheid can be roughly divided into five stages: the Defiance Campaign of the 1950s—brought to an abrupt halt with the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960 and the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela in 1964; suppression and exile of the liberation leaders marked by underground movement and activity from the border countries of South Africa in the 1960s; the rise of the BC movement and student uprisings of the 1970s; total disruption and increased international pressure of the 1980s; and negotiation toward democracy culminating in the release of Mandela in 1990 and the holding of free elections in 1994. Each of these stages of opposition was both expressed in, and often propelled by music, which operated as an organizing instrument that helped maintain the struggle even during its most challenging times. Music played an integral role at celebrations, funeral student rallies, religious revivals, cell meetings, training camps, union meetings and many other social gatherings, and was combative and rebellious in tone, making specific references to life under apartheid. It was also increasingly accompanied by "toyitoying," a repetitive energetic form of dancing that moved crowds of demonstrators through the streets.

If music was the heartbeat of the liberation movement in South Africa, no song was more familiar to all involved in this movement than what became known as the African National Anthem, "*N'kosi Sikeleli Afrika*." This is a song that has a long tradition in the history of Africans in South Africa and early on evolved into a symbol of resistance and unity that often served as a prelude and a coda to all antiapartheid meetings and demonstrations. The original composer was Enoch Mankayi Sotonga, a songwriter and teacher at a mission school near Johannesburg. Written in 1897, the song, according to the historian D.D. Javabu was "inspired by a depressed heart" due to the oppression of black people by the white authorities in South Africa.³ Sotonga wrote only one known verse, but the Xhosa poet, S.E.K. Mqhayi added seven more stanzas that focused on socially progressive themes, such as community, education, and mutual understanding. The song is an affirmation of African unity and subtly petitions a holy spirit to intervene on the side of the "Nation of Africa."⁴

During the years of the antiapartheid movement *N'kosi Sikeleli Afrika* could not be sung without a raised fist.⁵ Writing about the first time he was

arrested, Mandela describes how the police vans that transported him and his comrades to the prison, "swayed to the rich voices of the defiers singing *N'kosi Sikeleli Afrika*."⁶ The song became so threatening to authorities that it was banned during apartheid. Singing it could lead to arrest and up to eight years imprisonment, even though, in the words of the playwright and historian Duma Ka Ndlovu, "It's not a revolutionary song as we would call it. It's a prayer. A very soothing, genuine, unthreatening prayer."⁷

The success of the National Party in South Africa in the 1948 elections was followed by the rapid passing of the Population Registration Act, The Bantu Education Act, The Group Areas Act, and the Separate Amenities Act: legislation that helped form the pillars of apartheid. The Youth League of the ANC, led by Mandela, began to promote a "Program of Action" in response to this repression that put increased emphasis on confrontation involving demonstrations, boycotts, and passive resistance that echoed Mahatma Gandhi's *satyagraha*.⁸ In 1955, the ANC-led Congress movement drafted the Freedom Charter, a document that declared a commitment to a nonracial democracy, equal opportunity for all people, and a future democratic and multiracial South Africa. The Charter was endorsed by all member organizations, including the ANC, Natal Indian Congress, white radicals in the Congress of Democrats, and the South African Communist Party (which had just been banned by the apartheid government).⁹ These actions marked the launching of the Defiance Campaign throughout South Africa, and led to strikes, demonstrations, challenges to the Pass Laws, and "stayaways,"¹⁰ all of which were punctuated by music. One activist who was arrested and imprisoned during this time described the background of song to his experience: "Now we are swinging in the huge kwela-kwela [police van] towards the Fort [jail]. They are singing, I am singing too: *Izokunyathela I Afrika . . . Africa will trample you underfoot. Unrepentant. People seen through the mesh: surprise and dawning understanding. The thumb raised in reply. Mayibuye I Afrika! [Come back Africa!]*"¹¹

While the ANC organized its resistance to the apartheid government in the 1950s, the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) brought together women from all different backgrounds in South Africa to challenge injustice of the system. The FSAW stated in its charter of 1954 that its purpose was to unite "all women in common action for the removal of all political, legal, economic and social disabilities."¹² Two years later, 20,000 women marched to the government buildings in Pretoria as part of a massive anti-pass law campaign against the apartheid government. The pass laws required that all Africans (including previously exempted women) carry a reference book that authorized them to be in a certain area. It essentially

kept Africans away from urban areas, except for reasons of employment. Albertina Sisulu, wife of antiapartheid activist Walter Sisulu, and considered by many to be the mother of South Africa's liberation struggle, recalled the march on Pretoria:

Our leaders, Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Sophie Williams, and Rahima Moosa attempted to give our protests to the prime minister J.G. Strijdom, but when we got there, he'd left, he'd run away. When the four women returned, we stood in silent protest for thirty minutes and then started singing *Nkosi Sikeleli Afrika*. Twenty thousand women singing *Nkosi Sikeleli Afrika*, you should have heard the sound of the echoes in the Union Building. There was nothing like that sound, it filled the world. Then we sang a song of the women, *Strijdom, wathina abafazi, wathint' imbokodo, uzakufa*—Strijdom, you have tampered with the women, you have struck a rock, you have unleashed a boulder, you will die.¹³

Many of the Defiance Campaigners were led by the actions, compositions, and deep bass of the singer/activist Vuyisile Mini. Mini joined the struggle against apartheid at age 17 and later became Secretary of the Dock Workers' Union and the Sheet Metal Workers' Union, both affiliated with SACTU. He then joined the Defiance Campaign, and was imprisoned for entering railway property reserved for whites only.¹⁴ Mini was also among the 156 arrested, along with Nelson Mandela, in the Treason Trial of 1956. He soon became known among the Defiance Campaigners for his protest songs, which he would sing at campaign meetings, demonstrations, and in prison, to raise the spirits of his fellow protesters. The activist and poet Jeremy Cronin (later Deputy Minister of Transport in South Africa) states, "Probably because of his bass voice, he was one of the best organizers in the liberation movement."¹⁵ Mini's most popular song was "*Nannts'indod'emnyama, Verwoerd*," which could be heard throughout the townships in the 1950s and was recorded by Miriam Makeba. Singer Dolly Rathebe remembers, "When you really wanted to make the whites mad, you sang, '*Nannts'indod'emnyama, Verwoerd*.'"¹⁶ The words mean "Watch out, Verwoerd. Here comes the black man," and refer to Hendrik Verwoerd—often described as the architect of apartheid—who was Minister of Native Affairs from 1950 to 1958, and Prime Minister from 1958 to 1966.

In 1963, the security police arrested Mini and charged him with sabotage. He was hanged in 1964. Ben Turok, former Secretary of the South African Congress of Democrats, was serving a three-year term of imprisonment at the same time and recalled the death of Mini. He remembered the

occupants of the death cells communicating to the prison that their end was near in "gentle melancholy song."

And then, unexpectedly, the voice of Vuyisile Mini came roaring down the hushed passages. Evidently standing on a stool, with his face reaching up to a barred vent in his cell, his unmistakable bass voice was enunciating his final message in Xhosa to the world he was leaving. . . . Soon after, I heard the door of their cell being opened. Murmuring voices reached my straining ears, and then the three martyrs broke into a final poignant melody which seemed to fill the whole prison with sound and then gradually faded away into the distant depths of the condemned section.¹⁷

Mini and his songs were part of a thriving musical culture in South Africa that was most often expressed on the raucous and energetic streets of Sophiatown, a township on the edge of Johannesburg that, in the 1950s, was one of the few remaining areas where black South Africans could own land. Described as "the Harlem of South Africa," Sophiatown gave birth to the music of Dolly Rathebe, Dorothy Masuka, Dollar Brand (now Abdullah Ibrahim), Kippie Moeketsi, The Ink Spots, The Manhattan Brothers, the jazz trumpeter Hugh Masekela, and Miriam Makeba, who became known to musicians throughout the world as "Mama Africa." The music that came out of Sophiatown combined jazz and blues and an upbeat local sound called "Marabi" and "*Kwela*" that featured the pennywhistle. ("*Kwela*" is a Zulu word that means "Get up!" or "Jump up!"—an instruction to those about to be picked up by the police.) Many of the songs were an expression of life for Africans living in townships such as Sophiatown, and encompassed protest and opposition to apartheid. These songs included "*Jikele Emaweni*" by the Manhattan Brothers, a song about the hardship of working in the diamond and gold mines of South Africa; and "Scullery Department" that Kippie Moeketse wrote to express his disgust at having to go through the kitchen and stand in the alleyways during breaks when performing at white clubs.¹⁸

Much of the music that came out of Sophiatown demonstrates the particular power of songs that were sung in a language shunned by the majority of the white population. To sing in a language not understood by the authorities meant that the music could operate as a kind of code to communicate frustration and solidarity among Africans, and work against the apartheid government's attempts to divide and rule. In most cases music was a camouflaged way of demonstrating resistance, as it was aimed at bypassing or ignoring apartheid. The song "Meadowlands," was written when

the South African government finally forced the occupants of Sophiatown out of the township and tore it down to build a suburb for white people, despite resistance organized by Mandela, Walter Sisulu, and other ANC leaders.¹⁹ The song has a happy sound to it with words that seem to express content with moving to Meadowlands, a crude township erected on the outskirts of Johannesburg to house the newly evicted population. The words, however, were understood to be ironic by the Africans and new words were added that were not caught by the authorities. The singer Sophie Mgcina describes the reaction of white people when they heard the Africans singing "Meadowlands": "They used to clap hands, you know, think it's nice music. Oh, these blacks can sing so nice. And they clap their hands while we sing, 'we will shoot you, we will kill you. Be careful what you say. You gonna die slowly, be careful what you do.'" ²⁰

Resistance to apartheid in the 1950s reached a climax with the Sharpeville Massacre of March 1960, when a peaceful march organized by the PAC to protest the carrying of passes caused police to panic and fire into the crowd, resulting in the death of 69 people, many of them shot in the back. The resistance movement reacted with strikes and stay aways throughout the country, and the government declared a state of emergency, while banning the ANC and PAC, and launched an intense crackdown on all forms of opposition. Mandela went underground and formed Mkhonto We Sizwe (MK) the military wing of the ANC, arguing that the violence of the apartheid government was now too severe to be met merely with nonviolent resistance.²¹ His subsequent capture and arrest culminated in the famous Rivonia Trial that aroused international attention. The climax of the trial came when Mandela gave an historic passionate speech in defense of himself and the struggle. Together with Sisulu and six ANC leaders, he was sentenced to life imprisonment, and a tough period for the struggle followed in the 1960s with the imprisonment and exile of many of the protest leaders, and the movement of opposition leadership to the border countries of South Africa and to Europe.

Many South African musicians were also forced into exile, including Kippie Moeketsie, Abdullah Ibrahim, Miriam Makeba, and Hugh Masekela. The last South African recording of Dorothy Masuka during this time was about the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, President of the Congo, and provoked one of several police raids at her studio. Masuka was declared a "wanted person" (at the time she was in former Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe), and could not return to South Africa for the next 30 years.²² The music of the struggle continued during the 1960s, but had a hushed element to it and often took on mournful overtones. This was a time when Miriam

Makeba sang the song "*Bahleli Bonke*," which asks the question "Where are the leaders?" and names Mandela, Sisulu, and other prominent comrades, before answering, "They are all sitting in jail."²³ Hugh Masekela argues that in the 1960s music became an even more important weapon in the struggle because "any possibility of open legitimate protest had come to an end after the Sharpeville massacre."²⁴

Two songs that express the sadness yet perseverance of the antiapartheid movement during this period are "*Thina Sizwe*" and "*Senzeni Na?*" "*Thina Sizwe*" expresses the mourning of "We, the black nation" for the land "stolen from us from the white man,"²⁵ while "*Senzeni Na?*" asks the simple question "What have we done?" Duma Ndlovu states of "*Senzeni Na?*": "Somewhere along the lines, a thousand years from now . . . 'Senzeni Na,' like 'We Shall Overcome,' will take her rightful place in society, because at one time a mass body of people related to that song." The musician Si-bongile Khumalo asks, "Can you imagine, that's one line . . . 'what have we done?' repeated over and over and over . . . I mean, come on. You have no other option but to stand up and go and fight."²⁶

The 1970s in South Africa witnessed the rise of the BC movement led by Stephen Biko and the student uprisings that reached a climax in Soweto on June 16, 1976. The primary cause of the initial uprising was the decision by the apartheid government to force black students to learn math and social studies in Afrikaans—the language, in the eyes of protesters, of oppression. The killing of students in the demonstration led to clashes between riot police and protesters that left more than 575 dead and 2,389 wounded.²⁷ The achievement of independence, meanwhile, in border states such as Mozambique and Angola in 1975, and Zimbabwe in 1979, helped both to reignite and fuel the struggle. Students were now leaving South Africa to join MK's guerilla armies in the border countries and raising the level of disruption and sabotage within South Africa. There was a new fearlessness—almost recklessness—among the youth of South Africa in the antiapartheid struggle and this was again both reflected in and propelled by music. Activists who were students during that time have memories that combine singing freedom songs with running away from the police.²⁸ Lindiwe Zulu, a former freedom fighter from that time (who stated, "I was too angry to be a student"), remembers that after the Soweto uprisings of 1976, "you see the songs of youth with energy. Youth that is dynamic."²⁹ The energy of the youth began to infect the older generation. Singer Vusi Mahlasela tells the story of being constantly harassed when he was young due to his activism and membership in the ANC and the cultural group "Ancestors of Africa" while he was living with his grandmother. The harassment intensified

particularly around the anniversary of the Soweto uprising, when the police rounded up young people a few days before June 16 and held them in jail until about June 20:

On the tenth of June the police came and surrounded the house. My grandmother came, switched off all the lights in the house, and opened the kitchen door. And she said, "Vusi's here and you're not going to take him tonight. I'm tired of you having to come here harassing us while your children are sleeping peacefully in your homes. He is here and you're not going to take him. I've got a bowl full of boiling water. The first one who comes in here gets it." And they left.³⁰

The inspiration of newly independent African states on the borders of South Africa was accompanied by an increased encompassing of the traditional roots of black South Africa. Young radicals of the 1970s took a second look at the authentic lore of their culture and traditions that had formerly been scorned by urban sophisticates or tamed and incorporated into the system by apartheid authorities. Tradition was now revisited as a source not of unchanging and passive separation but of creativity and unity. The poet Maishe Maponya remembers wearing traditional clothing for performances, memorizing all their lines so that the police would be unable to seize their material, and enacting their art with a rhythm and spontaneity that echoed the history of their culture:

The drum became part of our performance . . . it created a kind of a free flow out of the performance. One poet would be reading and reciting, and another would jut in with lines . . . and then proceed, and then someone else would come in and create choruses, and sounds, and rhythms. . . . We used musicians, we had flutes . . . and we had a guy playing the guitar. . . . And so in that sense for us, you know, music became the basis.³¹

As repression provoked resistance it intensified artistic rebellion. The painter Sydney Selepe believes that all the various forms of resistance had a defining cultural characteristic: "When I was a kid [in the 1970s], if it was not political, it was not art."³²

Many of the cultural developments of the 1970s happened underground because of the radical content and illegality of unlicensed clubs and meetings. One of the challenges was finding a space to do what was forbidden. Many performances and community arts projects that reflected a powerful African consciousness were continually harassed by apartheid authorities. In 1972, *Phiri*, a musical adaption of Ben Jonson's 17th century satire, was

shut down during rehearsals in Johannesburg. Sophie Mgcina was part of the cast and recalls:

The LP [of the play] was recorded and it was banned, because it spoke about apartheid. But what is political if you say [sings]: "Madam, please before you shout about your broken plate/ask me what my family ate . . .?"³³

Jazz music that challenged apartheid during the 1970s was played in unlicensed music clubs, primarily in Johannesburg. The existence of many clubs was short lived because they could not stand up to the constant raids and restrictions or could not afford to pay off the township police or hold together audiences who were continually intimidated by the authorities. One of the most resilient of these was Lucky Michaels's Pelican in Orlando township. The Pelican not only hosted jazz music, but cabaret, pop, and traditional music, including the early formation of the now famous a cappella group Ladysmith Black Mambazo, then known as Black Mambazo.

Michaels remembers being raided three months after they opened: "They piled as many people as they could into kwela-kwelas and took them to Orlando Police Station. . . . And the beautiful problem was they arrested the Malawian ambassador. . . . When the station commander came in . . . he saw . . . a guy sitting here in a long dress and a funny hat . . . and . . . realized: hey wait man, you've just arrested the ambassador from Malawi!" Michaels also recalls what kept his club going: "Insanity! That's what I had. I had insanity and defiance."³⁴

The illegal station Radio Freedom came onto the scene at this time, broadcast from Lusaka, and former activists recall listening to it under their blankets at night.³⁵ Musical groups such as Malombo made a connection with the BC movement through its expression of African national culturalism and the aims of BC.³⁶ There arose an impatience in the younger generation of activists that challenged what it perceived as passivity in the resistance of the 1960s, including the songs. Laments of the 1960s such as "*Senzeni Na*" fully implicated the Boers in oppression as the agents and architects of apartheid. But the song had, to the newly politicized youth, an uneasy mix of pain and protest. As one activist expressed it, "Blacks *know* what they have done. Blacks *know* what they have not done. Blacks *know* what they *must* do. There is no more time for wimpish lament, self-pity, begging or praying."³⁷

The songs of the 1970s became more militant, with words such as "They are lying to themselves. Arresting us, killing us, won't work. We'll still fight for our land"; and "We will shoot them with our machine guns." With the

growth of MK, songs were changed to fit a war situation. As one activist puts it, they were "changing a word here, changing a word there. Putting an AK here, taking out a Bible there."³⁸ A song used by the Pan-Africanist Congress, for example, changed the words from the hymn, "Let Us Break Bread Together on Our Knees," to "Let Us Break Chains Together with Our Guns."³⁹

One of the songs that symbolizes this more militant time is the freedom song "*Shona Molonga*," which actually came from the tradition of African domestic servants having Thursdays off. Africans had difficulty saying the word Thursday, so it became known as "Sheila's Day," and was originally a song about meeting on that day. During the 1970s, the words were changed to meet the conditions of the times and became "we will meet where we would rather not meet—in the bushes with our bazookas." It included the repeated phrase: "Shorten the days until we meet again, the struggle for freedom continues."⁴⁰ It was also during the 1970s that a culture arose in the training camps of MK that centered on performance and music. The camps often held competitions for the best song, and for songs sung while marching through the bush and in drills and practices, and would draw on both old traditions and new debates, including how to fight a just war.

The 1970s also witnessed the formation of one of the ANC's most significant cultural projects in exile, the Mayibuye Cultural Ensemble, based in London. Established in 1975, this ensemble performed throughout Europe with considerable success, incorporating narrative, poetry, and song to communicate a message against the apartheid regime and raise international awareness about the situation in South Africa. The ensemble was also a starting point for developing practical ways to incorporate cultural activity in the struggle for national liberation, particularly the mobilization of music. After 1976, the group added many songs to their repertoire that arose out of the Soweto uprising. By 1979, however, Mayibuye was struggling to continue due to organizational problems and the fact that its members worked largely on a voluntary and unpaid basis. Its role as a project in exile was eventually taken over in the 1980s by the Amandla Cultural Ensemble as a result of the Culture and Resistance conference held in Gaborone in 1982 and attended largely by ANC members. That same year the ANC established a Department of Arts and Culture and ANC President Oliver Tambo stressed the role of cultural workers in the struggle against apartheid.

The Amandla Cultural Ensemble was later viewed by the ANC as one of its most significant achievements in the area of cultural opposition. The ensemble was organized primarily by exiled musician Jonas Gwangwa starting

at the World Black Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) held in Lagos in 1977. Gwangwa put together an impromptu musical group that he called Amandla ("power"—a popular liberation slogan) that met with great success, and the group accepted invitations to tour Tanzania and Zambia. This group evolved into the Amandla Cultural Ensemble and the majority of performers in it were young soldiers from training camps. Some, such as Man Santana Ntombela, made requests to leave the group to return to the frontlines of resistance. Ntombela was emphatically denied his request by the ANC leadership because the ANC believed so strongly in Amandla's importance in organizing the international community. Much of Amandla's repertoire drew from the culture of exile and MK camps, including many freedom songs and use of the "toyi-toyi."⁴¹

The 1980s in South Africa marked a time of greater internal disruption combined with international pressure on the apartheid government. P. W. Botha (often referred to as "the old crocodile") became prime minister and combined a superficial easing of apartheid restrictions with tightening security and a raised level of violence against the resistance movement. Protesters took to the streets in increasing numbers and greater confidence despite the repressive tactics employed against them.⁴² The song "Mannenberg" written by Abdullah Ibrahim, rose to prominence at this time. Referring to a township illustrating the forced removal of the "coloreds" from District 6—the Sophiatown of the Cape Area—it was a song with few words but a catchy melody that was an instant hit when it was first released in 1974. In the 1980s, it experienced a revival as an anthem for the antiapartheid movement, and was played at rallies, demonstrations, and benefit concerts, evoking a collective response from dancing audiences and musicians who would flock to the stage to join in.⁴³ According to writer Mandla Langa, "The tune became a popular metaphor for all the townships where trouble brewed."⁴⁴

Songs during this time were more intentionally political but often their messages were disguised in metaphor and hidden messages. Johnny Clegg and Juluka wrote and performed songs with antiapartheid messages including one borrowed from a Zulu proverb that demonstrated how the small bull can defeat the large bull through superior weaponry. Yvonne Chaka Chaka recorded a song called "Winning My Dear Love" that all her fans understood to be in reality "Winnie Mandela" (the wife of Nelson Mandela) and they would sing those words at her concerts. Lucky Dube sang of a "Liquor Slave" but sang the words live with his fans as "Legal Slave."⁴⁵

Other musicians such as Roger Lucey and Mzwakhe Mbuli challenged the state more directly. Lucey wrote and recorded the song "*Longile Tabalaza*"

about police brutality in the South African prisons that tells the story of a man arrested and who died within days in detention. The sentence for owning this banned song was up to five years imprisonment.⁴⁶ Mbuli challenged the state directly with songs such as "Behind the Bars" and "Shot Down." Both suffered as a result of their protest songs: Lucey finally gave up his musical career after the Security Branch intimidated his record label and raided his house, and tear gas was poured into the air-conditioning during one of his performances.⁴⁷ A hand grenade was thrown into Mbuli's house, he was shot at, and the authorities refused his passport applications.⁴⁸

A prominent feature of protest song at rallies, funerals, and demonstrations in South Africa during the 1980s was the "toyi-toyi," the jogging dance that accompanied the singing and is said to have originated on the guerilla training grounds in Zimbabwe to keep up the endurance and the spirits of freedom fighters.⁴⁹ The 1980s were often referred to as the time of "The People's War," when songs were designed to articulate a new urgency and a new direction, and the toyi-toyi reflected this. Johnny Clegg believed that the combination of dances and lyrics as a whole in black South African culture worked with the ethic of courage and endurance that created a form of resistant masculinity. To experience this combination of dance and song was to experience a moment of empowerment and a brief understanding of what it means to be alive.⁵⁰ The former activist Vincent Vena claims, "The toyi-toyi was our weapon. We didn't have guns so it became a tool we used in a war." According to another activist, "The toyi-toyi made us not to see the bullets and the guns that the whites used to shoot us." Hugh Masekela describes the use of the toyi-toyi in frank terms: "Because we can't beat these people physically, you can scare the shit out of them with the songs."⁵¹

Several former riot policemen have admitted that they were scared by the singing, the toyi-toyiing and the sheer numbers of the protesters. They would hear the African word "*Kumo!*" (Charge!) and know that "this kumo comes with stones."⁵² Ndlovu states, "What I saw in the '80s I had never seen in my life and I could never ever imagine. Because it was as if we had put the struggle into fifth gear . . . It gave you chills just watching it."⁵³ Ian Herman of the Cape Town group the Genuines expressed the turbulent mood of the music reflecting the times:

We were talking about and expressing what was going on around us. We were breaking free from our chains, and we were filled with anger. We wanted to turn a negative situation into a positive situation; sometimes we could do it with love, sometimes with hate. The thing that people couldn't take was the ugly side. A lot of the band's energy and what we had to say was ugly, because we were living in ugly times.⁵⁴

The 1980s also marked a period of increased international attention to and involvement in the politics of South Africa, and music played a large role in this development. The cultural boycott of South Africa by the United Nations gained momentum and was more effectively enforced. In 1981, the Associated Actors and Artists of America—an organization with close to 250,000 members—voted unanimously that none of its members should perform in South Africa, and the purpose of the boycott broadened from simply not performing for segregated audiences to ending apartheid altogether. The ban also encompassed groups from South Africa performing in other countries, which brought mixed reactions from black South Africa musicians. According to Khaya Mahlangu:

It was OK and not OK. Not OK, in terms of not being able to travel extensively, because I felt if there was any cultural boycott, why should it be against the people who are the victims of apartheid? And it left a bitter taste. But on the positive side we were able to get more into ourselves. People were able to appreciate that, hey, we have music here—music that we can call South African and be proud of.⁵⁵

One of the more visible controversies resulting from the ban was the recording of the album *Graceland* by Paul Simon. The critically acclaimed and immensely popular album raised the difficult question of how the cultural boycott affected South African musicians attempting to raise awareness of their culture and music internationally, an awareness that Simon's album had highlighted in his use of South African musicians on the tracks and the recording of many of the tracks in South Africa. The album increased the visibility of black South African music, but it broke the UN boycott and Simon came under heavy criticism from activists in South Africa and overseas for making the album. He had apparently consulted musician and veteran civil rights activist Harry Belafonte before going to South Africa, and Belafonte had advised Simon to talk to the ANC—advice that Simon did not follow. In 1987, Simon claimed that he had been cleared by the ANC, although Dali Tambo (son of ANC president Oliver Tambo and founder of Artists against Apartheid), denied that any clearance had been given. The resulting controversy was eventually calmed by the involvement of Hugh Masekela who offered to go on tour with Simon. This tour also included Miriam Makeba, and Masekela placed emphasis on the performances bringing South African musicians together and providing their music with international exposure. "South African music has been in limbo because of apartheid," he told a reporter later. "Exile and the laws have parted us and caused a lack of growth. If we'd been free and together all these years, who knows what we could have done?"⁵⁶

The 1980s also marked the advent of the song "Bring Back Nelson Mandela" by Masekela, which helped push Mandela, the symbol of the anti-apartheid struggle, to the forefront of international attention. Pressure increased on the apartheid regime through the cultural boycotts and concerts held in honor of Mandela. The strain of "The People's War" and the economic consequences of disinvestment and sanctions combined with a suffering economy at home led the South African government to recognize that its regime was irrational in practical terms even as it still struggled publicly to admit its immorality. F.W. deKlerk took over the leadership of the National Party and then the government, and the first major decision of his office was to announce the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the ANC as well as other opposition parties. The country then began to move painfully toward a democratic system that encompassed the rights of all the people and away from rule by the white minority, a process that culminated in the democratic elections of 1994.

When Mandela was released from prison, he began his first address to the public with the traditional call and response that punctuated all rallies and demonstrations in South Africa and reflected the tradition of music in Southern Africa going back to ancient times. He raised his fist with the cry, "*Amandla!*" (Power!) and the crowd responded with raised fists and the response, "*Awethu!*" (To the People). He then called out "*Mayibuye!*" (Come back!) and the crowd once again responded "*iAfrika!*" (Africa!).⁵⁷ Music continued to play a role in politics in South Africa during this time, but it was a role that reflected the trepidation mingled with hope that accompanied the painful transition toward democracy, and the confusion facing a movement that until this time had always occupied a place of opposition. A fierce political rivalry arose between the ANC and the Natal-based Inkatha Freedom Party, secretly fueled by the South African Defense Force, and many feared that the country was teetering on the brink of civil war. The negotiations toward a new government moved through frustrating phases of short progression followed by stalling due to outbreaks of violence or assassinations such as that of Chris Hani, the ANC Youth Leader tragically killed by rightwing extremists. Music in South Africa at this time began to take on a celebratory tone, reflected especially in the rallies that commemorated the release of Mandela and later the opportunity for all people in South Africa to exercise their vote. Music also, however, continued to be prominent at demonstrations and funerals often expressing frustration with the process of transition and the continued violence.

The role of music in South Africa also came into question during the early 1990s, sparked by a controversial paper written by ANC activist and

jurist Albie Sachs in 1989 called "Preparing Ourselves for Freedom." In the paper he called for a ban from that time on of the term "culture as a weapon of struggle," arguing that creativity had often been sacrificed for politics, and quality for righteousness. To Sachs, it was time once more to sing love songs: "What are we fighting for but for the right to express our humanity in all its forms, including our sense of fun and capacity for love and tenderness and our appreciation of the beauty of the world? . . . Let us write better poems and make better films and compose better music."⁵⁸ What Sachs was arguing for was the use of art to express not just the formula of struggle, but the richness and diversity of the newly emerging South African nation, but the paper caused a reaction among artists and musicians. Trumpeter Dennis Mpale states,

It felt like being kicked in the guts. Like no one valued what we had done. And like there was going to be nothing for us to do in the future. Which is not true, because politically, we're not there yet. Winning elections is just the start.⁵⁹

In 1992, singer Letta Mbulu released the album *Not Yet Uhuru* (liberation) and Sophie Mgcina argued, "Music is storytelling. It should conscientise and talk about [the things] that are happening in this country. . . . We're not free yet; we've just been liberated."⁶⁰

Because music is an intrinsic part of black South African culture, it necessarily accompanied many of the changes, challenges, vicissitudes, and celebrations of postapartheid society and politics. The song "*Umshini Wami*" (My Machine Gun), for example, experienced a revival with the political campaign of Jacob Zuma, president of the ANC since 2005 and now president of South Africa. "*Umshini Wami*" represented the guts of the struggle during the antiapartheid years, and University of Witwatersrand Research Associate Liz Gunner argues that its renaissance in 2006 exposed in South Africa

a longing in the body politic for a political language other than that of a distancing and alienating technocracy. . . . The song—and song more widely—became the means by which a group of the marginalized within the . . . ANC seized back agency and the power to determine the flow of change in the new era.⁶¹

The incorporation of music in protest was evident again August 2012, when a series of strikes broke out in South Africa and over 80,000 mine-workers downed tools in demand for a large increase in their salaries. The

strike led to a backlash from police who fired on striking mineworkers in the North West province, killing 34 strikers, and causing a national outcry and crisis. Singing and toyi-toying punctuated the strikes and the aftermath of the killings, and reawakened sentiments from the antiapartheid period of resistance, as the mines were held to still represent mainly wealthy white interests. Old liberation songs such as "Senzeni na?" were revived and "Ayabeleka Amaphoyisa" (The police are running away) and "Amaphoyisa ayangcangcazela" (Police are terrified and trembling). In the words of a former activist,

The singing during ANY strike action will always be there. It is usually what mobilizes the strikers to action. It is what makes them stick together as a unit. It is what makes them to stand firm on what they are demanding. It is what gives that strength to move forward with the strike without fearing the consequences.⁶²

Music is such a strong element in South African and African society as a whole that to try to separate it out and define its role in events is a complex endeavor. Even now, activists from the apartheid era disagree as to whether songs gave birth to the struggle or the struggle gave birth to song.⁶³ What can be said of music's role in the antiapartheid movement was that it provided people with a sense of unity, identity, and purpose in the struggle. One woman remembers her youth in the midst of apartheid: "The freedom songs evoked a kind of pride in me. There was no age group boundary. Absolutely not. You could be standing next to a sixty-year-old woman who would be singing . . . 'Senzeni Na?'. And there would be a bond and an immediate kind of acknowledgment of . . . what we were about."⁶⁴

Victor Modise, Executive Officer of Arts and Culture in Johannesburg believes music was "the most powerful mobilizing instrument that the ANC ever had. Because, you know, it was entertainment. . . . People would just eat it up and buy it." Violinist Jonas Gwungwa stresses, "Music is very important to us. . . . And we're not going to sing because we want to sing. We are a singing nation . . . [During apartheid] singing lightened the burden that was there."⁶⁵

Protest songs did not merely form the backdrop to revolution in South Africa, nor were they just part of an underground artistic tradition among Africans. To activists music acted as a revolutionary tool that served to educate, awaken political consciousness, and galvanize the African people to action. It was a vehicle for condemning the oppressive regime and informing the entire world about the evils of apartheid. It is not an exaggeration to

state that every activist involved in the antiapartheid struggle sang freedom songs. Music was an essential weapon in the struggle against apartheid and in the pursuit of national liberation and democracy in South Africa.

Notes

1. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1994), 155.
2. Sifiso Ntuli, from *Amandla! A Revolution in Four-Part Harmony*, dir. Lee Hirsch (Kwela Production, 2002).
3. Quoted in Alton B. Pollard III, "Rhythms of Resistance: The Role of Freedom Songs in South Africa," in *"This is How We Flow": Rhythm in Black Cultures*, ed. Angela M. S. Nelson (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 105.
4. *Ibid.*, 146.
5. Personal memories of former student activists Kogie Thangavelu, Vangeli Gamede; personal memories of Lindsay Michie Eades.
6. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 114.
7. Duma Ka Ndlovu, quoted in *Amandla!*
8. Lindsay Michie Eades, *The End of Apartheid in South Africa* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 14.
9. G. Williams, "Celebrating the Freedom Charter," *Transformation* 6 (1988), 73–86.
10. "Life's Just Fabulous, White Madam!" protest bill distributed by the Defiance Campaign, 1960. Document PC2/4/6, Alan Paton Center, University of Natal, Pietermaritzberg, South Africa.
11. Description by Alfred Hutchinson, Treason Trial, 1956. Document PC2/4/10, Alan Paton Center.
12. "Charter Adopted at the Founding Conference of the Federation of South African Women Johannesburg, 17 April 1954," *Indigenous People of African and America*, http://www.ipaaa.com/federation_of_south_african_women.htm.
13. Peter Maqubane and Carol Lazar, *Women of South Africa: Their Fight for Freedom* (Boston, MA: Little Brown, 1993), 39.
14. "Vuyisile Mini," ANC Historical Documents Archive, <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/misc/mini.html>.
15. Jeremy Cronin, quoted in *Amandla!*
16. Dolly Rathebe, quoted in *Amandla!*
17. "Vuyisile Mini," ANC Historical Documents Archive.
18. Hugh Masekela, from *Sophiatown*, dir. Pascale Lamche (Little Bird Productions, 2003).
19. Memorandum, "On Families Left Homeless in Sophiatown Submitted to the Johannesburg City Council," September 28, 1959, Document PC2/4/11, Alan Paton Center.
20. Sophie Mgcina, quoted in *Amandla!*
21. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 234–46.

22. Lara Allen, "Commerce, Politics, Musical Hybridity: Vocalizing Urban Black South African Identity During the 1950s," *Ethnomusicology* 47, no. 2 (2003), 228–49.
23. Miriam Makeba, quoted in *Amandla!*
24. *Freedom Sounds: The Musical Liberation of South Africa*, six-part series presented by Hugh Masekela. BBC Radio 2, London. Broadcast on March 31, April 7, April 14, April 21, April 28, and May 5, 2004.
25. Chris Stapleton, *African All-Stars: the Pop Music of a Continent* (London: Quartet Books, 1987), 192.
26. Duma Ndlovu and Sibongile Khumalo, quoted in *Amandla!*
27. Eades, *The End of Apartheid in South Africa*, 19.
28. Audrey Brown, quoted in *Amandla!*; person memories of Kogie Thangavelu, Vangeli Gamede.
29. Lindiwe Zulu, quoted in *Amandla!*
30. "Vusi Mahlasela Sings 'Thula Mama.'" *TedGlobal* (2007), filmed June 2007. http://www.ted.com/talks/vusi_mahlasela_sings_thula_mama.html.
31. Interview for *Ubuyile*. Quoted in Gwen Ansell, *Soweto Blues: Jazz, Popular Music, and Politics in South Africa* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005), 144.
32. Interview with Judy Seidman, 2001. Quoted in Ansell, *Soweto Blues*, 144.
33. Interview for *Ubuyile*, 2000. Quoted in Ansell, *Soweto Blues*, 145.
34. *Ibid.*, 146–47.
35. From *Amandla!*
36. David B. Coplan, *In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985), 196.
37. Pollard, "Rhythms of Resistance," 114.
38. Duma Ndlovu, quoted in *Amandla!*
39. Pollard, "Rhythms of Resistance," 108.
40. Sifiso Ntuli, quoted in *Amandla!*
41. Shirli Gilbert, "Singing Against Apartheid: ANC Cultural Groups and the International Anti-Apartheid Struggle," *Journal of African Studies* 33, no. 2 (June 2007), 421–41.
42. Personal memories of Kogie Thangavelu, Vangeli Gamede, Cameron McConnachie, and Lindsay Michie Eades.
43. John Edwin Mason, "'Mannenberg': Notes on the Making of an Icon and Anthem," *African Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (Fall 2007), 25–46.
44. Ansell, *Soweto Blues*, 153.
45. Jeremy Marre and Hannah Charlton, *Beats of the Heart: Popular Music of the World* (London: Pluto Press Limited, 1985), 39; *Freedom Sounds*.
46. *Freedom Sounds*.
47. Paul Erasmus, "Roger, Me and the Scorpion: Working for the South African Security Services During apartheid," in *Shoot the Singer! Music Censorship Today*, ed. Marie Korpe (London: Zed Books, 2004).
48. Michael Drewett, "Music in the Struggle to End apartheid: South Africa," in *Policing Pop*, eds. Martin Cloonan and Reebee Garofalo (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2003).

49. Interview with activists (requested at the time that their names be withheld) by Lindsay Michie Eades, 1989–1990.
50. Liz Gunner, "Jacob Zuma, the Social Body and the Unruly Power of Song," *African Affairs* 108, no. 430 (January 2009), 27–48.
51. Vincent Vena, Former ANC activist; Hugh Masekela, quoted in *Amandla!*
52. Erasmus, "Roger, Me and the Scorpion"; General Adrian de la Rosa (former head of riot police), quoted in *Amandla!*
53. Ndlovu, quoted in *Amandla!*
54. Ansell, *Soweto Blues*, 185.
55. *Ibid.*, 183.
56. Robin Denselow, "Paul Simon's Graceland: The Acclaim and the Outrage," *The Guardian* (London), April 19, 2012. This controversy has recently been revisited with Simon's decision to return to London to give a Graceland concert to commemorate its 25th anniversary, and because of the release in 2012 of the movie *Under African Skies*, a documentary directed by Joe Berlinger about the making of *Graceland*.
57. Personal memory of Lindsay Michie Eades, February 11, 1990.
58. Albie Sachs, "Preparing Ourselves for Freedom: Culture and the ANC Constitutional Guidelines," *TDR* 35, no. 1 (1991), 187–94.
59. Ansell, *Soweto Blues*, 263.
60. *Ibid.*
61. Gunner, "Jacob Zuma."
62. Private e-mail exchange between Lindsay Michie and Vangeli Gamede, October 10, 2012.
63. Activists discussion in *Amandla!*; personal memories of Kogie Thangavelu and Vangeli Gamede.
64. Gail Smith, journalist, quoted in *Amandla!*
65. Victor Modise, Heritage Museums, Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council, and Jonas Gwungwa, violinist, Soweto Chamber Orchestra, "Music and Apartheid in South Africa," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3XhzmNxR8w>.