
The liberation songs: an important voice of black South Africans from 1912 to 1994

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Abstract

This paper argues for an interdisciplinary educational approach, towards an understanding of the black liberation struggle and the recognition of the liberation songs as important historical documents. In order to allow these songs to be fully understood a link had to be found to move musicology towards an accommodation with cultural history. The study thus drew on the theory of Shepherd and Wicke (1997), which allowed for an analysis using both musicology and cultural history. The theory was especially suited to this study as it also allows for insights into the processes of affect and meaning as they operate in wider cultural-historical contexts, which can be gained through an examination of the music of a particular historical period.

Introduction

Between 1912 and 1994 liberation songs by black South Africans were used as a strategy to accelerate change in South African society. In order to understand the music of the black liberation struggle there has to be a departure in methodology, theory and content from the narrow paradigms of history. History has to take into account these songs as they reveal a spectrum of communal perceptions and responses to the unfolding events that faced black South Africans between 1912 and 1994. Steve Biko as well as Miriam Makeba highlight this:

Any suffering we experienced was made more real by song and rhythm which leads to a culture of defiance, self-assertion and group pride and solidarity. This is a culture that emanates from a situation of a common experience of oppression . . . and is responsible for the restoration of our faith in ourselves and offers a hope in the direction we are taking from here (Biko, 1978, pp.57, 60).

And

In our struggle, songs are not simply entertainment for us. They are the way we communicate. The press, radio and TV are all censored by the Government. We cannot believe what they say. So we make up songs to tell us about events. Let something happen and the next day a song will be written about it (Makeba, 1988, record sleeve).

This paper argues that the liberation struggle is more fully understood if the songs of the time are taken into account. It emphasises the importance of establishing links between cultural history and musicology, showing how each discipline can inform and enrich the other.

Methodology

This somewhat changed academic terrain – which stresses that society is as much shaped by music as music is shaped by society – unavoidably creates difficulties for analysis, since it is not always possible to draw exact parallels between music and its social or political contexts. The research was best served by employing qualitative research methods that reflect the phenomenological paradigm.

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), the goal of the phenomenological paradigm is primarily directed towards the understanding of individuals in terms of their own interpretations of reality, as well as the understanding of society in terms of the meanings that people ascribe to the societal practices in that society. A phenomenological approach made it possible to understand black South Africans through their own definitions of their world, and to understand liberation songs in their historical context. Tagg (1991) argues that, “a viable understanding of culture requires an understanding of its articulation through music as much as a viable understanding of music requires an understanding of its place in culture” (p.144).

The songs that constituted the data for the study were collected between 1994 and 1996. The collection was problematic as the identity of many of the creators of the songs and their points of origin were lost in the obscurity of the past. There is also a dearth of scholarly literature about black South African liberation songs and very little substantial research in this field has been published to date. Although interviews and tape recordings were useful, I found that data obtained from video recordings at the *Mayibuye* centre at the University of the Western Cape were the most valuable alternative primary source. The videos showed the mass singing of liberation songs in response to

particular experiences during the liberation struggle. It was possible to notate the songs from the videos and this allowed for an understanding of the modifications in style the songs underwent due to changing socio-political circumstances. Seeing and hearing the performance of the songs highlighted the importance of recognising the songs as a particular strategy that was used to accelerate change in South African society, an important aspect in considering the teaching of both history and music.

To highlight the educational value of the songs, music education needs to provide learners with tools for understanding these songs, keeping sight of the value and richness of South African cultural history to which they are heirs. To be of real educational value, this study seeks to show how a move away from traditional musicology that focuses on musical knowledge alone is possible. The stylistic evaluation of the songs thus had to be preceded by the recording of the historical events implicated in the songs.

Theoretical grounding

Finding a theory suited to this research was problematic, mainly due to the fact that there has been very little research on mapping a link between cultural history and musicology. The sociology of music is an extremely diverse body of work and there is no single or even dominant model of analysis or theory of the relationship between music and society. To add to this problem, musicology has generally isolated musical processes from their social and cultural milieu. On the other hand, other disciplines such as sociology, history, communication and cultural studies generally do not recognise the role of music sounds in generating and articulating social and cultural meanings.

Shepherd and Wicke (1997) provide a theoretically grounded critique of the tendency within disciplines to keep separate music's sounds from the social, historical and cultural processes that inform them. Their theory was developed to interrogate music in much the same way as any other cultural artifact. In order to do this, they bring together musicology and cultural history, as they construe of "the social and cultural constitution of music as a particular and irreducible form of human expression and knowledge" (Shepherd and Wicke, 1997, p.1).

Shepherd and Wicke's theory is thus especially suited to this research as it breaks with the conventional approach in musicology in thinking of music as a

signifying practice based on sounds alone. This article uses this theoretical frame as a lens for examining liberation songs as empirical objects and considers:

- the environment in which the liberation songs were created
- the meaning in the lyrics
- the modifications in the musical style of the songs.

The fact that socio-political aspects are implicated in the essence of all liberation songs manifests itself clearly when a study is made of the cultural-historical conditions which inspired the singing of these songs. This paper, however, places music at the centre of the analysis and then examines links between cultural history and musicological processes, both through the styles and lyrics of the songs. The lyrics serve as the link between musicology and cultural history.

Thus in order to combine the approaches of musicology and cultural history in the research, the contours of black liberation songs were established by means of two classification systems, motivated by:

- lyrics of the songs, which incorporated aspects of South African history during the liberation struggle
- melodies, which allowed for melodic categorisation of notations of songs according to musical style.

A short summary will be provided of the main categories of liberation songs according to style, as the style modifications are a clear reflection of the mood of the people in changing socio-political conditions. In order to reflect the changes in style of the songs, two periods will be considered: songs sung from 1900 until 1950, and songs sung after 1950. The content of the lyrics will be discussed under these two headings as well.

Songs sung from 1900 until 1950

By examining the lyrics of the songs during this period, it is possible to understand the historical context which generated the songs. The lyrics demonstrate the fact that originally black South Africans courted no political confrontation. This was mainly due to the fact that up until 1949 black politicians consisted mainly of the black elite, who were products of English-

medium mission schools. According to Walshe (1987), this small but influential group of political leaders continued to live and think in committed Christian terms, looking upon their faith as “as a social cohesive which transcended tribalism and offered an ultimate goal of inter-racial harmony based on the brotherhood of man” (p.158).

The lyrics of the songs speak about the drama of black life and allow for an insight into the experiential world of black South Africans during this period. Amongst other things the lyrics tell about the establishment of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) and its first president, John Dube; about the Native Land Act of 1913; about tribal antipathies; about the dangers of labour migration; about Government-controlled beer halls; about Acts like the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924, the Slums Clearance Act of 1933, and the Group Areas Act of 1950.

So although non-confrontational, the lyrics can still be linked to socio-political events of the time. However, during this period there were distinctive shifts in political orientation, and these can be more fully understood through an examination of the musical sounds and styles. Three key styles of liberation songs during and up until 1950 are identified, namely *iMusic*, *iRagtime* and *isiZulu*.

iMusic

Liberation songs in the style of *iMusic* were essentially based on the choir music (*makwaya*) of the mission-educated black elite (*amakholwa*). *iMusic* was essentially grounded in European and American church music and, as such, was the least politically overt musical category. *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrica*, falls into this category. Enoch Sontonga, born at Lovedale into the Tembu tribe, composed this hymn in 1897. He was a teacher at one of the Methodist Mission Schools in Nancefield, where he composed music for the entertainment of his pupils. *Nkosi . . .* was first publicly sung in 1899 at the ordination of the Revd Mboweni, a Shangaan Methodist Minister. Sontonga originally composed the hymn and wrote the lyrics for the first two stanzas, while the Xhosa National poet, Samuel Mqhayi, wrote the words of seven additional stanzas. As the liberation struggle intensified the lyrics of *Nkosi . . .* took on a new meaning. Pewa (1984, p.29) gives a possible explanation for this in his view that politicians, looking for a means of unifying people and convincing them about a certain point of view, will always employ collective mediums that confirm a unified identity: for example, mediums such as hymns. Another reason for the utilisation of the

hymn for its potential for political impact is “The ability of church music to reassure the singers of their projection for their future” (*ibid.*).

Translations of the given excerpts of *Nkosi* clearly show the hymn was not originally composed to be sung as a liberation song. On reading the lyrics it is, however, possible to support Pewa’s argument. The intensification of the liberation struggle led to a politically conscious society, intent on counteracting discrimination, and avenues were sought to express growing discontent. By interpreting the lyrics of *Nkosi* . . . to suit their own circumstances, singers could convey a feeling of solidarity which emanated from a situation of the common experience of oppression.

Bless our efforts
Of union and self-uplift,
Of education and mutual understanding
And bless them

Lord, bless Africa;
Blot out all its wickedness
And its transgressions and sins,
And bless it

(Jabavu, 1987, p.45).

By the turn of the century *Nkosi* . . . was being sung throughout the country in church, school and choir performances. The Ohlange Institute, a private college outside Durban founded in 1901 by Dr John Dube, was also instrumental in popularising this song. The Ohlange Institute was the first African-run and African-funded school, mainly for the children of *amaKholwa*. It is thus understandable that the *iMusic* style and a hymn like *Nkosi*. . . would have been popular at this institution where most teachers and parents belonged to the mission educated elite. According to Erlmann (1991, p.123):

These mission converts had accepted the supposed superiority of the symbols of Western civilisations such as four-part choral hymnody over autochthonous forms of cultural expression such as Zulu prosody.

In 1912 the South African Native National Congress (SANNC), which changed its name in 1923 to the African National Congress (ANC), was the first nationwide umbrella black South African political organisation. The reason for its establishment lay in developments affecting the black population immediately prior to this date. The imposition of the Natives Land Act of 1913 was the first problem that the SANNC had to deal with. This Act laid down the basic guidelines for land division in South Africa, with the black population

being allocated about thirteen percent of the country's total area (Davenport, 1987, p.259).

A direct response to the Land Act was the song *Umteto we Land Act*, which was adopted as the official anthem of the SANNC. The song was composed by Reuban Thokalele Caluza, a pupil and later a teacher at the Ohlange Institute. The translation of the song by Callinicos (1987, p.112) reads as follows:

We are the children of Africa
 We cry for our land
 Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho
 Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho unite
 We are mad over the Land Act
 A terrible law that allows sojourners
 To deny us our land
 Crying that we the people
 Should pay to get our land back
 We cry for the children of our fathers
 Who roam around the world without a home
 Even in the land of our forefathers.

Through the words of the song we learn about the Land Act and the ideals of the SANNC, which “had developed a concern to check tribal antipathies and to establish an organisation through which the growth of an African nation could be encouraged and assured” (Walshe, 1987, p.34). As was typical of many of the liberation songs, the lyrics of this song were changed to suit different situations facing black South Africans at that time. Another version of the song, speaks of the delegation sent to England to complain about the Act and about the fact that their pleas were ignored.

Despite deteriorating socio-political conditions the *iMusic* style remained popular. This can be understood against the background of the SANNC policy that was explained in the following terms by Dube, its first president:

The Africans are approaching the Government, not with assegais but respectfully as loyal subjects, with the intention of airing grievances and removing the obstacles of poverty, prejudice and discriminatory legislation (Motlhabi, 1985, p.39).

The Ohlange Institute conducted regular countrywide choir tours, an unusual occurrence for black performance groups in South Africa. By touring the country and singing Caluza's compositions, the choir was able to keep people informed of prevailing conditions as can be seen in an excerpt from a translation from *Bashuka Ndabazini?* (What is Congress Saying?)

What is Congress negotiating about?
They are trying to help *Mafukuzela* (Dube)
Who went overseas.
What is his aim for going overseas
He aims to negotiate for us
To present black men's grievances
We are made to pay poll tax,
Carry references books (*dompass*)
Pay rent for houses
Pay for cattle dipping
Pay for dogs
Pay for the car wheels
And we have been deprived of our land

(Caluza, 1930).

Despite the hymn-like style of *iMusic*, political themes, such as freedom and justice are articulated in the lyrics of the songs. Caluza's exposure to mission education clearly influenced his early composition style which Erlmann (1991), describes as: "A blend of nationalism with a moral, Christian viewpoint" (p.119). The lyrics of these songs lament the migrant labour system; the fact that black nationalist movements were beset by disunity; increasing discrimination against black South Africans and other socio-political conditions facing blacks.

It soon became clear, however, that Caluza felt that *iMusic* lacked the qualities that were needed to satisfactorily express the growing resistance to declining black autonomy and deteriorating class privileges. He thus began composing in ragtime (*iRagtime*), an example of Afro-American music, which he felt was more compatible with Zulu speech patterns and was more acceptable than *iMusic*, which lacked the ethnic components that rural Africans could readily identify with.

iRagtime

Black South Africans had first gained experience of Afro-American culture and ragtime music through the visits of Orpheus McAdoo and his Jubilee Singers between 1891 and 1898. They were the first cultural representation in South Africa of black life and living conditions in the United States and *amaKholwa* audiences throughout Natal celebrated the descendants of former slaves as their music heroes (Erlmann, 1991). The admiration for Afro-American values was also high at Ohlange Institute due to concrete historical contact and similar experiences of racial discrimination between South African blacks and Afro-Americans. It is thus not surprising that Caluza's liberation and protest music shifted from the *iMusic* category to *iRagtime*.

The first indication that Caluza was starting to compose in *iRagtime* was his piano introduction to a praise song composed for Dr John Dube, *Vul'indhelela, mnta ka Dube* (Pave the way Dube). This syncopated ragtime music of the Afro-Americans was seen as an expression of racial pride by Caluza. Dube was known to be a serious man and the ragtime introduction may not have been too well received by him. This is reflected in an article by him in which he urges Caluza's choir to forget *iRagtime* and to sing pure music, *iMusic* (Dube, 1917). Dube's views did not, however, deter Caluza who started composing whole songs to be sung in the *iRagtime* style.

Deteriorating socio-political conditions are highlighted in all songs sung in *iRagtime*. An especially poignant song is *Idipu eTekwini* (Dipping in Durban), which articulates one of the most dehumanising aspects which black work seekers in Durban had to face. In 1923, Durban's white City Administrators introduced a new dispensation that requested all black work seekers to undergo deverminisation in dipping tanks, allegedly for the sake of public hygiene. An excerpt from the translation of the song read as follows:

What are you people in Durban saying about dipping?
 What is chasing people away from Durban?
 You fellow countrymen, long live the black nation.
 Talk on our behalf, *Mafukuzela!* [John Dube!]

(Caluza, 1930).

In 1919 the SANNC sent another delegation to Britain to complain about land and franchise issues, but this delegation was also unsuccessful and a realisation was born that the blacks were on their own in what they considered to be a just struggle against social domination. After this event the mood of the people was reflected in their choice of *Nkosi Sikelel'iAfrica* as the new SANNC national anthem. It moved away from being sung as a hymn to being a liberation song acquiring a symbolic meaning of the struggle for democracy in South Africa.

As the situation for black South Africans became progressively worse, the *amaKholwa* came to the insight that they would have to forge links with the wider African community. Previously *amaKholwa* and traditional peasantry each belonged to mutually exclusive classes with their own diametrically opposed cultures. The dilemma facing the *amaKholwa* was that they had been exposed mainly to *iMusic*, and they had had very little contact with indigenous African culture. According to an *Ilanga* correspondent, "the missionaries had naturally discouraged and tabooed traditional culture, but failed to put anything in the place of the heathen songs of the Natives" (cited in Erlmann, 1991, p.70)

On a more general level, the 1930s saw a more sustained effort by the state to influence black political thinking through a restoration of Zulu tribal authorities and a strengthening of ethnic consciousness. The resurgence of Zulu ethnicity found expression in the performance of the *isiZulu* category of music that can be seen as a traditional performance idiom for the expression of Zulu ethnic identity, in opposition to what was perceived as the racism of Natal's white settlers. Soon indigenous African musical elements were entrenched in the liberation songs, indicating a growing rejection of white domination. Some of the elements found in the music are the oral tradition, repetition, call and response (antiphonal) and rhythmic patterns which invite the body to move. It was, however, only after the 1950s that these indigenous musical elements became entrenched in the liberation songs.

The importance of understanding the liberation struggle through the styles of the songs was highlighted in this section. The changes in style of the songs mirrored the mood of black South Africans who were facing deteriorating socio-political conditions. The change to *iRagtime* indicated that Afro-American ideas of self-advancement became powerful alternatives to colonial ideology and major forces in the intellectual climate of Natal's *amakholwa* communities. The resurgence of Zulu ethnicity found expression in the performance of the *isiZulu* category of music.

Through the lyrics, decontextualised from the sounds and styles of the liberation songs, we learn of the circumstances facing black South Africans. Once the lyrics are interpreted in the melodic configurations found in the songs it is, however, possible to understand the moods, emotions and cultural meanings of the songs. This understanding is emphasised by Philip Tagg (1991), who states that: "A viable understanding of culture requires an understanding of its articulation through music as much as a viable understanding of music requires an understanding of its place in culture" (p.144).

Songs sung after 1950

From the 1950s to 1994 the liberation struggle intensified and the songs reflected this intensification. Assembled political groups were able to educate their members through song, while using extant melodies with words to suit the situation. Both the lyrics and the sounds had meaning for the participating crowd. Walshe (1987) also recognises the importance of the sounds of the songs when he writes about the ANC Youth League (AYL) which authorised an official ANC sign, the clenched right hand with the thumb pointing to the right

shoulder. According to him:

This was to be a symbol for Africa and a sign of Unity, Determination and Resolution, which, with the congress flag and the sounds and singing of the Anthems, *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrica* and *Mayibuye iAfrika* became the outward signs of a renewed search for self-confidence (Walshe 1987, p.291).

Not only were songs with more militant lyrics composed from the 1950s onwards, but some old songs also underwent changes to reflect the mood of the people. The song *Senzenina?* (What have we done?), was heard throughout the liberation struggle in many versions. This is an example of a song that fulfilled the function of asserting cultural unity and assisting in societal integration, and at the same time critiquing key socio-political issues. Translated excerpts of some of the versions of *Senzenina* read as follows:

What have we done?
Our sin is that we are black.
Oh UDF we love you.
The Boers are dogs
They will die dogs
Farewell our beloved hero
Let Africa return

(Hamilton, 1993, p.5).

The composers of the songs after 1950 are mostly unknown as the songs were spontaneously articulated in response to situations. The name of Vuyisile Mini, secretary of the Dock Workers' Union of Port Elizabeth is, however, often mentioned. Mini, considered an activist and prolific composer of liberation songs, was executed in 1964 and thrown into a pauper's grave amidst an avalanche of worldwide protest. A song definitely attributed to him was *Izakunyathel' I Africa*, composed by him in prison in 1956 while he was awaiting trial on charges of high treason (Hooper, 1965, Record Cover). It was aimed at Hendrik Verwoerd, Minister of Native Affairs (subsequently renamed Bantu Affairs), the key person behind the government's 'grand apartheid' policy. The translation reads as follows:

Africa is going to trample on you, Verwoerd.
Verwoerd! Shoot. . .
You are going to get hurt.
Verwoerd, watch out.
You are going to get hurt.
Watch out
Chorus: Africa is going to trample on you, Verwoerd

(Hooper, 1965, record sleeve).

It is only the indigenous musical elements in the songs that allow for a real understanding of the people singing the songs. Black South Africans singing liberation songs represented a confluence of different groupings of individuals, all experiencing a sense of solidarity and unity owing to the oppression of the apartheid regime. Ethnicity, class and political affiliations were often transcended as issues of common concern were articulated in the liberation songs. Thabo Mbeki explained this unity experienced through song in an interview on British Television:

It doesn't matter what form the struggle takes, whether it is a mass political struggle or worker's songs expressing exploitation; everywhere culture becomes a very central and a very important element in this act of asserting that we are human. People are singing at the thought of liberation.

(Spear of the Nation, 1986, video).

Many liberation songs containing the names of CYL leaders were often sung, e.g. *Baba Mandela*, *Papa Sisulu*, *Sikokhele Tambo* and *Mandela Wethu*. Often the names of other leaders were superimposed for different verses and the songs are also interspersed with references to political leaders of the Nationalist Party during apartheid. Songs were also sung about struggle leaders in prison on Robben Island. For example a translation of *Umbuso ka Verwoerd* reads as follows:

Verwoerd's regime will crumble
When Mandela is released.
Luthuli will rule the way
African people wish.
Mandela, the people are calling, the African Nation
Verwoerd's Government is going to tumble.

(Hooper, 1965, record sleeve).

In 1952, the ANC requested Prime Minister D.F. Malan to improve the legal position of black South Africans and when this request was refused, it launched a programme of passive resistance (Motlhabi, 1985). From June to December of 1952 the ANC, under the leadership of Albert Luthuli, instigated this Defiance Campaign where blacks walked around without their passbooks, entered public places reserved for whites and ignored the black urban curfew. By December 1952, 8 500 black South Africans participating in this Campaign had been taken into custody. The Defiance Campaign was non-violent and participants offered no resistance to police action or arrest. Many songs were sung, one of which was *Sikhalela izwe lakithi* (We are crying for our land). This song was clearly inspired by Caluza's *Silusapho Lwase Afrika* (We are the Children of Africa), the first anthem of the ANC composed in 1913. It is interesting to see that not

only are the lyrics of the chorus similar to the 1913 version, but it is also composed in *iMusic* style. This could have been intentional, as *iMusic* courted no political confrontation, which mirrored the passive resistance strategy of black South Africans participating in the Defiance Campaign. Excerpts from a translation of the lyrics of *Sikhalela izwe lakithi* read as follows:

We are crying for our country
Which was taken by the robbers

Chorus: Zulus, Xhosas, Sothos unite!

Hey, Verwoerd open up your jails
We are going to go in, we the volunteers

(Hooper, 1965, record sleeve).

Many hymns were also adapted to the words of liberation songs, with remarkable results. According to Pewa (1984), it was easy to adapt the hymn to use for political songs; because of its “folk song qualities it is easy to fit new words to an already existing musical text” (p.34).

At funerals during the 1970s the words of old hymns like *Thina Sizwe* and *Thula Sizwe* were adapted to suit the circumstances. The translation of one of these modifications of *Thina Sizwe* reads:

We the black race.
We moan for the black race.
We moan for our land that was usurped
By the white man.

Let them leave!
Let them leave our land alone.
The children
The children of Africa are moaning
For their land that was robbed
By the white man

(Nyberg, 1983, p.18).

We also learn about the role of the women in the struggle through the songs they sang. When 20000 women marched to the Union Buildings carrying thousands of petitions to Prime Minister J.G. Strijdom, the women stood outside the offices and sang *Nkosi . . .* and the Zulu warrior’s song *Wathinta amadoda* with adapted words. The women’s song, *Wathinta abafazi, wathinta imbokodo*, could be translated as:

Strijdom, you have struck a rock
once you have touched a woman;
you have dislodged a boulder,
you will be crushed

(You have struck a rock, [s.a.], video).

Today this song, with adapted words, is still sung on Women's Day throughout South Africa.

Through liberation songs we also learn about the militant wing of the ANC, *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK), meaning Spear of the Nation. One of the most popular songs, *Hamba Kahle Mkhonto*, is still heard at funerals of ex-MK members, e.g. Chris Hani. The militancy of the lyrics dealing with MK cannot clearly be understood if the performance style of the songs is not taken into account. Many of these songs were accompanied by chants and the *toyi-toyi*.⁶ It is only by seeing and hearing people performing in this way, that the listener is able to understand the affect and meaning of the songs to the participating crowd.

The chant or slogan is a spoken declamation where pitch movement is conditioned by the words. As was mentioned liberation movements from all over South Africa sang the same freedom songs. As a result they accessed the same information and communicated in the same performance mode. This led to sloganeering of popular songs. According to Van Schalkwyk (1994, p.131):

When these slogans are cited, previous memories of the song text are also raised for the performer. As such the song is concerned with human experience and emotions, while the slogan reinforces this experience without having to perform the original text in its entirety.

The liberation songs discussed in this study served a propaganda function in terms of which artistic value was of secondary importance. They were sung by the masses, with the messages taking priority over musical expression. Liberation songs were, however, also composed and performed by an artist or artists, where musical expression takes priority over the message. Many black

⁶ The meaning of the *toyi-toyi* and the chant is described by Dali Tambo thus:

The *toyi-toyi* is part of the tradition of black South Africans and has been for centuries, before the whites got to South Africa. It has changed form over the years. Today it is very politicised but it is very deeply cultural. . . [T]he motion, the energy that is expanded brings people together, it brings that feeling of community. . . it brings out the courage in the people taking part in the *toyi-toyi*. . . it is a cultural form of expression and somehow intimidates the policemen. . . it is used as a weapon against apartheid (Tambo, [s.a.]: video).

South African musicians expressed criticism of the apartheid government through song and music for performances, e.g. Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela. These types of liberation songs unfortunately remain outside the domain of this study.

Conclusion

This study has highlighted the fact that the liberation songs were used effectively as a positive strategy to accelerate change in South Africa. By employing qualitative research methods that reflect the phenomenological paradigm, it was possible to allow the liberation songs to be situated in their social and cultural contexts. This also allowed for the interpretation of the songs within a framework of a cultural-historical system, rather than the result of meaning implicit in only the styles or lyrics of the songs. The phenomenological paradigm also highlighted the fact that the liberation songs did not exist as a separate entity apart from their cultural-historical context but that they were intertwined and inseparable from it. Using this methodology it was possible to employ an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the songs by stressing the importance of reciprocity and mutuality in allowing the disciplines of musicology and cultural history to coexist without enforcing assimilation or threatening the viability of the other.

Musicology, however, allows for a deeper understanding of the songs as the modifications in style mirrored the mood of black South Africans facing changing socio-political conditions during the struggle. Shepherd and Wicke (1997) provided a frame for discussing music in a way that recognises the importance of a link between musicology and cultural history. They emphasise the fact that musicology becomes a prerequisite for cultural history. This was especially suited to research about the liberation struggle where the songs played such a vital role. The lyrics of the songs were used as a link between musicology and cultural history.

The article argues that liberation songs should be seen as a powerful building block to the past as they are a concrete form that echoes a collective cry of discontent by black South Africans between 1912 and 1994. They are unique to South Africa and are part and parcel of the country's history. As such they are valuable educational tools, which allow for a greater understanding of the liberation struggle and traditional culture.

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