

Healing With Music: How Music Played a Role in Mending a Post-Apartheid South Africa

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Introduction

As a result of apartheid, South Africa was left broken by racial segregation, social inequality, and the loss of identity. Consequently, music was given an essential role in mending the separated state of South Africa, becoming a symbol of unity and resistance. This paper will look at the role of music in a post-apartheid South Africa, exploring the relationships between musicians, their music, and its consumers. The importance of this paper comes from music in the context of ameliorating the segregation in South Africa, as it provides us with a concentrated insight on one of many factors in the healing process of a country. All this leads to the main aim of this paper, looking at how the intent behind the music differs from the practical use of it, showing how it can reinforce the divisions it aims to destroy. To support this claim, I will first analyze the perspective of the musicians of South Africa, diving into the intent they put behind their music. Next, I will investigate how different demographics engage with the music the artists put out, focusing on social classes and how they uniquely interact with music. Finally, I will look directly at the lyrics of songs from the era of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa to back up or oppose the previous research of the paper, allowing for a more concise final statement.

Methodology

To study the role of music in a post-apartheid country, this paper will analyze and compare a plethora of qualitative peer-reviewed secondary sources, along with a primary source in the form of song lyrics. The journals have been accessed through JSTOR, a digital library of peer-reviewed papers ranging from articles to books, which grants me access to more than enough topic-related content. JSTOR was chosen due to its massive archive of academic work, ensuring a wide variety of credible work to help strengthen my claims. For the song lyrics, I will consult both peer reviewed-papers and an online database of lyrics called Genius, along with YouTube to ensure the lyrics are correct. Genius was selected because of its focus on lyric annotation, allowing for cultural background to be provided by verified contributors. The combination of

primary and secondary sources allows me to conduct the most precise research I can because it enables me to compare theory and practical examples.

Music From the Artists Perspective

Apartheid's long-lasting aftermath has left South Africa divided across racial and social lines, leaving it up to the hard-working population to mend its damage. Taking on a fraction of the burden are the inspirational musical artists of the country. By examining the artists and their music, I will seek the truth behind the intended message of their art, determining the reason why they make the compositions the way that they do.

Starting with a study performed by Gilbert (2007), which aimed to investigate how forms of cultural expression, such as music, were strategically used in anti-apartheid movements, we can look into individual cases and hear from the artists themselves, revealing that “the Ideal art was not elitist or exclusive, but intimately connected with ‘the people’” (p.436). This passage was used while explaining the African National Congress (ANC) commitment to creating songs that empower the community. This shows that rather than being just a good piece of ear candy, the music made in South Africa by local artists was meant to evoke hope and solidarity. This point is further solidified by looking at the work of Shoup (1997). Their work provides more insight into how pop music came to be a powerful tool for resistance and how major artists like Hugh Masekela and Miriam Makeba were forced into exile because of how outspoken against apartheid they were (Shoup, 1997). From their perspective, music was not only mere entertainment but a way to get a political message across, even if it meant being exiled from the country they were trying to help save. Notably, exile did not only reflect personal sacrifice, but also highlighted how apartheid's restrictions extended beyond the physical world, which turned some artists into symbols of resistance.

Being exiled from their own country meant that they could bring attention to the struggle on a global scale, reaching far more people than imaginable, and it is crucial to note the importance they have had in the anti-apartheid movement, however, for the sake of this paper I will only be looking at artists within South Africa at the time of the movements. One artist in particular whose message stuck out to me was Johnny Clegg, who said that he writes music in hopes of “put[ting] together a certain cultural equation that at the end [...] will produce the right answer” (Shoup, 1997, p.87). Here the “right answer” that he is referring to is the downfall of apartheid and the population of South Africa being rightfully restored in a harmonious state without segregation (Shoup, 1997). In another paper written by Ballantine (2004), Clegg’s effectiveness is discussed once again, with the author noting that Clegg was particularly strong at setting examples and connecting with the demographic of white individuals. This makes it safe to assume that musical artists in South Africa have been advocating for change and are trying to help mend some of the division caused by apartheid, which is made clear in the case of Karen Zoid. Karen Zoid is a rock musician that emerged during the time of the post-apartheid state of South Africa. Her music was made to help the youth distance themselves from the generation before them, allowing them to develop their own identities and gave them the help they needed to develop into their own individual selves (Hammond, 2010). Although Zoid’s intentions were good, perhaps they created more division than unity. This is because I purposely failed to mention a few key details about Karen Zoid, I left out the fact that she is white, and her target audience is the white youth of South Africa. This is important to note because her audience and type of music all play a small part in a big problem.

Music and the Separation of Class

While musicians are working towards bringing people together, their music just might be doing the opposite. One factor that plays into this is the labels that South Africans apply to music

genres. For example, in South Africa, the type of music you listen to is often associated with race among other classes such as gender and age. Because of this, we will dive into if music in a post-apartheid South Africa is bringing communities together like the artists intend or doing the opposite. Remembering that Karen Zoid creates rock music can help us pick apart why her audience is primarily white youth and why it matters. One of the many repercussions of apartheid is the unfortunate labels that have been assigned to music genres. For example, Robertson (2011) informs us that in South Africa, rock music is associated with being white and a unique genre called kwaito is associated with being black. This racialization of genres reinforces societal divisions, which is the exact opposite result the artists have hoped for. In addition to Robertson's comments, Livermon (2014) adds their input and expertise on kwaito music, mentioning how this genre falls into the category of being a part of a "uniquely South African black musical culture" (p.300). From this we can conclude that racial labels separate genres of music, with the most prominent examples being rock and kwaito being associated with being white and black respectively.

Not only does music occasionally serve as a way to separate racial classes, but it also uses that same Marxist framework to separate communities and individuals further by categorizing and labelling people as genders. In this country, the fashion in which a female artist, like Karen Zoid, sings and expresses themselves can ultimately lead to them being unfairly grouped as being "unfeminine or inappropriate (specifically sexually [...])" (Hammond, 2010, p. 13). It can be argued that it is a good thing that they are considered different, because by embracing their styles, it challenges the norms that have been put in place and can be helpful towards developing a consumer's sense of self. To explore this further, we can look at the difference between Karen Zoid and another Afrikaans musician named Bok van Blerk. While Zoid's music embraces her norm-breaking sound, Van Blerk's music tends to do the opposite and

reinforce traditional gender labels (Hammond, 2010). For example, one of his songs titled “De La Rey” frequently refers to conservative values and is dehumanizing to women (Hammond, 2010). This contrast highlights the differences and divide between gender views that music can provide in the era after apartheid. Together, Karen Zoid and Bok van Blerk demonstrate to us how music can be used to both conform and transform their audience when it comes to developing their own Identity, with Zoid’s approach being to embrace who you are and challenge stereotypes and traditional norms and Van Blerk reinforcing tradition and trying to maintain the gap in gender perspectives.

So far, I have explored how both race and gender influence the way music is both consumed and produced, revealing that music often reflects and reinforces certain categories tied to identity. To deepen my understanding and strengthen the conclusion of this paper, I will look into a third factor: age. Age plays a significant role in shaping how music is experienced and utilized. Younger generations tend to engage with music in ways that goes beyond mere enjoyment. For them, music often serves as a tool for self-expression and social connection, especially with the advances in technology which allow for music on demand. On the other hand, the older demographic might approach music differently, often focusing on consuming the music passively which disconnects them from its cultural or emotional aspects. This concept is further supported by Swartz (2008), who makes a comparison of kwaito to rap in the sense that it appeals to a younger audience. They further explain how the youth in South Africa uses music to not only entertain themselves, but also as a way to express themselves and form their identities (Swartz, 2008). This aligns perfectly with what was previously stated and gives a concrete example on how age is just another factor that contributes to the separation of classes caused by music in a post-apartheid South Africa. Yet another example comes from Robertson (2011), who touches upon her findings of how the youth expressed similarities along “the importance of

music as a resource for the process of self-construction” (p. 465). This once again falls in line with what was previously said regarding the reasons of consumption among the younger generation, becoming another piece of evidence that shows how the youth consume music for more than just its sonic value, because they use it as a tool to help with some repercussions that were left behind from apartheid. An additional paper from Grundlingh (2004) provides some insight on another way that the youth might separate themselves from the generations before them. Grundlingh (2004) speaks on the Voëlvry movement and how this movement would also suggest that music can be used as a tool for the younger generation. More importantly, the author speaks about some bands that emerged during the movement and how some of their lyrics can be confrontational, which was used to help the young population to distance themselves from their parents and the generation before them (Grundlingh, 2004). This suggest it is true that the younger generation uses music to help them further separate themselves from others, however it also points out how this was very intentional, making it clear that the youth wanted to distance themselves from the other generations because they wanted to distance themselves from the apartheid ways that they were stuck in (Grundlingh, 2004). This could make one think that the separation of classes does not necessarily have to have negative repercussions and can in fact be useful towards the ultimate goal of healing a broken community.

Evidence in Lyrics

As a final way to strengthen the conclusion of this paper, an examination of song lyrics will be used as a primary source to gather examples directly from the source. This will serve to show

how the words chosen by artists try to convey messages of resistance and unity, seeing the exact way they try to captivate their audience, and theories on why it can cause more discourse.

As a first song choice, it feels appropriate to analyze a song from an artist that has been previously mentioned in this paper because the artist has already been discussed and given background. Johnny Clegg will be the first artist used, with his 1987 song “Asimbonanga (Mandela)”, a powerful song in both Zulu and English about the struggles of apartheid made with artist Savuka. The song was so powerful in fact, that it was banned from being aired in South Africa. Luckily, this ban only affected airtime and still allowed for physical copies of the song to be distributed (Shoup, 1997). This censorship shows how music could have been a threat to those who were in control during the apartheid regime, revealing just how powerful a form of art can be. In the lyrics of the song, Clegg mentions the names of three figures: Steve Biko, Victoria Mxenge and Niel Agget (Clegg, 1987). These three were all known anti-apartheid activists, each with their own respectable accomplishments who all share the fact that they were killed during the fight of apartheid. By mentioning these names, it would be easy to infer that he made this song as a way to immortalize these important activists and their works and ensure that their messages of anti-apartheid endure for many generations to come. In other words, one can easily assume that the intended purpose behind the release of this song lines up with what this paper would assume it to be, a composition dedicated to bringing people together and fighting against separation created by apartheid. It is also not hard to see how this song could be controversial considering its ban, however it seems like there are no notable bad consequences that came out from this song, making it a case that argues against the negative aspects stemming from the separation of class that this paper has covered.

As a second song to analyze, it feels only fair to include another artist that has been heavily mentioned in this paper, Karen Zoid. Just like Clegg, looking into her lyrics can provide

a deeper understanding of how artists use music to convey their intended messages and connect with their audience, whether it be used for good or bad. The song that will be covered in this section will be special, because it is a song that she helped produce and sang with an assortment of artists in a group called “Friends of Johnny Clegg”, which released a song called “The Crossing” (2018). The song was originally Clegg’s original but was covered as a tribute to Clegg and his work, with all proceeds going towards a charity designated to help South Africa. Zoid mentions this, along with the song’s lyrics in the description of the music video which is posted on her official YouTube channel, making it a reliable primary source. In the lyrics, Zoid and the group work together to sing a message about resilience and collective healing. The refrain, “O Siyeza, o siyeza , sizofika webaba noma” (Zoid, 2018, 5:19), which we find can be translated as “we are coming, we are coming, we will arrive soon” (Zoid, 2018, line 10), portrays a message of determination by emphasizing the ability to push past hardship. While the lyrics send a message that can easily be interpreted as an artist who is working towards the progression of mending South Africa through the community, which aligns with the themes explored earlier. Although the message speaks volumes, I find that the mere existence of the song speaks louder than the words. This is because the song is a direct monument of the lasting impact and legacy of music during such a sensitive time (Zoid, 2018). It also demonstrates how music can go beyond feelings and help endorse real change and how it can be used as a tool to distance oneself from a problematic lifestyle, but also helps people work towards fixing it, by bringing attention, and in this case profits, to help raise awareness and evoke pride towards a fragmented nation.

Conclusion

This paper set out to explore whether music in post-apartheid South Africa fulfills its intended purposes of creating unity and is overall a positive force within the larger effort to heal and rebuild a divided nation, or if it inadvertently threatens these goals by intensifying the divisions it

aims to destroy. To start things off, an analysis of artists was performed to gather if the music that the artists released were indeed intended to do good and progress towards a division free south Africa. This resulted in finding that while most artists like Johnny Clegg and Karen Zoid make music to unite, some artists are still stuck creating music that intends to keep old and outdated traditions like the music of Bok van Blerk (Hammond, 2010). This led into viewing how the music is used, concluding that when used, the music of south Africa can create both divisions and unity. Of all of the divisions it creates, the most important one is the division of age. This is because the disunity among generations is not inherently bad, rather it allows for the youth to distance themselves from the everlasting effects that apartheid left with older generation, allowing them to redefine their values in a way that progresses toward a better future. Finally, by looking into the lyrics of key songs, this paper was able to fortify the intentions and usage of songs, while introducing how some music may cause controversies. Together, these findings show that the music created during the post-apartheid period of South Africa is often misused from the artists original intentions, however, it is important to note that this divergence does not entirely undermine the value that music can hold, rather it shows the versatility and transformative power it has.

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