

*Song in the Anti-Apartheid and Reconciliation Movements in South Africa*

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As apartheid developed in South Africa, political, cultural, and religious resistance emerged. This essay will explore the history of songs used in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Studying music's role in the South African liberation movement reveals various issues concerning the social dynamics and cultural history of the nation. Exploring the soundscapes of South African independence opens space for a new perspective and better understanding of the way diverse communities formed a unified movement to resist apartheid. Music helped people of diverse tribal and racial identities transcend differences that remained salient in other contexts.

This paper draws on a wide variety of scholarly sources in disciplines such as history and musical ethnography. Interviews with Gabi Mkhize, a current member of the African National Congress (ANC), Ohio State University Graduate Student, and isiZulu instructor, offer evidence to support the centrality of music in the anti-apartheid movement. Music spanned ethnic differences, united generations, and aided in the organization of South Africans against their oppressive white government.

The findings of this project will expand upon prior research and provide specific historical data to substantiate the claims that music indeed has a strong impact on the revolution in South Africa. Song is embedded in South African culture and it is not surprising that this medium would serve as a principal vehicle in defeating the apartheid government. Songs were used to hide protest slogans, banned materials, secret information, etc.

Further research concerning the historic role music played in unifying and liberating oppressed communities might consider other timeframes in black South African history or explore the role of music and politics in the context of white South

African communities. Other historic occurrences might also be approached through the study of music, then compared and contrasted to South Africa's experience. The portability and flexibility of the music allowed it to play a crucial role in the liberation movement against apartheid.

At the height of the South African madness...Others were  
engaging apartheid with the guns. Others were engaging  
them through discussion. Others were engaging 'em through  
song. That's how we managed to turn the tide of the world.  
-Sifiso Ntuli (Amandla! 2003)

### **What is apartheid?**

In 1652 the course of South African history changed in dramatic ways. 1652 marked the year South Africa began on a new path. European settlers landed on the Cape and over the course of subsequent years they began exploiting natural resources on many different levels which continued for centuries. The discovery of diamonds and gold in South Africa in 1867 and 1886, respectively, had a dynamic impact on the area as a whole (Thompson 115). Not only did the Mineral Revolution allow the White population to export the valuables abroad, it intrinsically caused the demand for cheap labor to skyrocket. Non-white racial groups in South Africa, Blacks (native to Africa), Indians (imported as indentured workers to work on sugar plantations in the Natal region of South Africa), and Coloreds (the descendants of slave women and White men), were now a commodity.

Human beings were exploited to supply the workforce needed to run the mines. Black South African males were recruited from the rural areas; this forced them to leave their families behind for months, sometimes years. This caused the disintegration of

traditional tribal cohesiveness. Patriarchal societies turned over power to women. Black people drawn to urban areas were unable to reside within the city limits unless they were a White person's servant, so squatting areas around the mining centers gave rise to areas that came to be known as townships. Men from diverse tribes were now residing in the ghettos around the urban centers in appalling living conditions; the housing near the mines was horribly cramped and inhumane.

Some men had to live in the mine-owned compounds at the insistence of the mine-owners, instead of squatting in the townships. The compounds exhibited horrendous conditions comparable to the townships, and in addition, living under the mine company's control gave the White men tremendous power over the Black workers' lives. If one did not show up for work, a mining officer could go to the Black worker's cramped sleeping area and force him back to his hard labor. The compounds and the mines as a whole, created the necessary platform for Whites to establish complete control over the races.

Black workers were suppressed in the work place. Certain jobs were reserved for White mine workers only, and those positions commanded the highest wages. The White worker often made up to eight times as much as his Black counterpart (Thompson 156). Discrimination in the workplace was apparent; however, the need for cash to pay the White government's taxes forced the Black people to deal with such subjugation.

These, and many other inequalities, came to a head in 1948 with the White National Party deriving a plan of complete segregation entitled apartheid. The leader of this party, Daniel Malan, is credited by some as the 'architect' of the radical segregation instituted in South Africa.

Malan's platform was known as apartheid. *apartheid* was a new term but an old idea. It literally means 'apartness' and it represented codification in one oppressing system of all the laws and regulations that had kept Africans in an inferior position to Whites for centuries. What had been more or less de facto was to become relentlessly de jure. The often haphazard segregation of the past three hundred years was to be consolidated into a monolithic system that was diabolical in its detail, inescapable in its reach, and overwhelming in its power (Mandela 111).

With the blossoming of apartheid, many common discriminatory practices that had existed since the European arrival at the Cape were written into South African laws and implemented to the extreme. Despite the overwhelming segregation in South Africa, the oppressed people found strength in their family, friends, and political leaders.

### **The Anti-apartheid Movement**

The African National Congress (ANC), a large group of Africans led by prominent political activists, was founded in 1912 (Mandela 579). The ANC assumed the leadership role in the struggle and it determined the type of opposition to be used against apartheid. The first approach supported by the ANC was to resist within the means of the law. As time passed, ANC leaders continued to encourage a more aggressive struggle while remaining nonviolent, and asked that the more radical opposition resist taking up arms, for "it would be as foolish as attempting to fight a pride of angry lions" (Mandela 271). The ANC grew more militant with the establishment of the Youth League (Spear of the Nation) in the 1940s, in which Nelson Mandela was a leader. For instance the Program of Action, introduced around 1950:

called for the pursuit of political rights through the use of boycotts, strikes, civil disobedience, and noncooperation... This was a depart from the days of decorous protests, and many of the old stalwarts of the ANC were to fade away in this new era of

greater militancy... We had now guided the ANC to a more radical and revolutionary path (Mandela 115).

While still discouraging armed opposition, the ANC had many loyal followers.

The White government encouraged tribalism, rather than Pan-Africanism, and this hindered complete unity among anti-apartheid activists. In an attempt to decrease the threat of growing unity and feelings of Pan-Africanism, the White government continued to use a 'divide and conquer' approach. Tribal Homelands were formed under the Group Areas Act of 1950 (Thompson 194). This law forced all urban Africans to live in government area determined by their ethnic group origin.

Despite legislation, Africans of all tribes found common ground through song and used music as a way to surmount the apartheid policies aimed at fragmenting their oppositional front. This can be seen in a song with a line that translates to:

*Let's unite, let's unite  
Let's unite, fellow Africans  
Down with interfighting  
Up with Peace (Pollard 122)*

These lyrics directly address and simultaneously resist the chasm that the apartheid government was trying to create between Black people of different origins in order to prevent a united opposition front.

Music clearly emerged as one of the tools with which Africans bonded together to oppose the unjust government of South Africa. Struggle songs such as *Senzeni Na* and *Meadowlands*, which describes the struggles of daily life in the Meadowlands Township, both represent the less militant sentiment found in the early reaction to apartheid. These songs have light percussion and relatively melodious tunes, which coincide with the passive resistance that was implemented against White rule. The deceptiveness of *Senzeni*

*Na*'s smooth and sorrowful melody can be seen when the harsh lyrics are translated to reveal insults targeting White oppression.

*Senzeni na senzeni na  
Senzeni na senzeni na  
Senzeni na senzeni na  
Senzeni na kulomhlaba?  
Amabhulu azizinja  
Amabhulu azizinja  
Amabhulu azizinja  
Amabhulu azizinja  
Kuyisono 'kubamnyama  
Kuyisono 'kubamnyama  
Kuyisono 'kubamnyama  
Kuyisono kulelizwe*

*[What have we done, what have we done?  
What have we done, what have we done?  
What have we done, what have we done?  
What have we done in this country (world)?  
Boers are dogs  
Boers are dogs  
Boers are dogs  
Boers are dogs  
It's a sin to be Black  
It's a sin to be Black  
It's a sin to be Black  
It's a sin in this country (world)] (Pollard 113)*

The peaceful resistance during the time *Senzeni Na* was used in protest is apparent because the song lacks the definitive aggression found in the music of later anti-apartheid struggle songs. Also, its lyrics may seem unforgiving, but they are not as demanding and violent as protest songs from the more militant years of the anti-apartheid movement that were imminent. According to Alton Pollard III, "To its credit, 'Senzeni Na' fully implicates the Boers, the agents and architects of apartheid. Still, this song, with its uneasy mix of pain and protest, lacks the crucial imperative of Black re-creation according to Black Consciousness philosophy [of the late 1960s]" (Pollard 114). South

African musician Vusi Mahlasela compares *Senzeni Na* to *We Shall Overcome*, the anthem of the United States civil rights movement. The South African counterpart invokes such disparaging feelings that Mahlasela admits that, “this is one of the really sad songs. I myself, for one, I don’t want to listen to that sometimes” (Smiley 2). The sadness in *Senzeni Na* sets this struggle song apart from other, more militant ones to follow.

Different phases of the anti-apartheid movement, indeed, called for different types of resistance, some of which relied heavily upon the Black Consciousness Movement. Barney Pityana, who worked closely with this movement’s leader, Stephen Biko, described the changes that came with the Black Consciousness attitude among Africans: “It infused Blacks with a spiritual fibre, a mettle and a fighting spirit. It is the inner soul-force seen to be invincible” (Pollard 114). This new outlook on the situation contrasted significantly with the relatively meek lament in *Senzeni Na* and similar songs, and manifested itself in a new wave of resistance and music.

### **Repression and Radical Expression in apartheid South Africa**

The peaceful protests encouraged by the ANC in the earlier years became more and more resolute and determined with the birth of new legislation imposed to hinder the opposition to the apartheid regime. In the 1960s the White government banned and imprisoned hundreds of people and political organizations, including the ANC and many of its leaders. Despite these restrictions, the resistance fearlessly continued. As Nelson Mandela recalls in his autobiography, “There is nothing so encouraging in prison as learning that the people outside are supporting the cause for which you are inside” (Mandela 484). Leaders who were exiled or imprisoned had underground lines of



communication with their peers and followers. The people of South Africa did not lose hope and instead used the government's actions against their cause as fuel to continue fighting back. South African born musician Dave Matthews states, "Singing is something that is hard to ban" (Amandla! 2003). Further, Alton Pollard III, states in his essay: "In point of fact, no amount of government resolve could quell the insurrectionary power of song" (Pollard 117). Indeed, song helped communication amongst those opposed to apartheid and also aided in raising awareness for their cause. "For it was song, along with news and information, that best helped to convey the objectives of the struggle" (Pollard 118).

At Sharpeville in 1960, Black South Africans rallied together to oppose the pass laws: "When the groups were assembled, almost 12,000 men, women and children started marching to the police station - chanting freedom songs and calling out campaign slogans" (History: 1960 Sharpeville Massacre). Music often kept rhythm at these peace marches and gathered the masses into one decisive whole. The crowd marched to the Sharpeville police station where their leaders were reluctantly admitted to address the authorities with their grievances. Many who were present on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1960 recalled that "...their singing and shouting, the crowd's mood was more festive than aggressive" (History: 1960 Sharpeville Massacre). Nonetheless, the White police officers soon opened fire on the non-violent crowd and "In less than two minutes the police had managed to turn the joyful singing into wild screams, cries of those wounded and the silence of the dead" (History: 1960 Sharpeville Massacre). It was instances like these, where nearly 80% of the Africans killed were shot in the back because they were running

for their lives, which led the ANC to call for a drastic change and broadening in the type of resistance tactics being used against the apartheid government.

After the ANC realized that the government's violent reactions to these peaceful protests must in turn be met with violence, it called for the organization of the Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK). Literally *Spear of the Nation*, the MK was founded in 1961 as a military wing of the ANC and was led by Chief of Staff Chris Hani.

At its [MK's] inception, the High Command decided on selective sabotage as the form armed resistance would take. All efforts were made to avoid the loss of human life. We clearly stated that the aim of the campaign was to bring the government to its senses before it was too late and save our country from going down the path of war which would leave scars very difficult to heal and further polarise South African society.' (Hani).

Hence, the event of Sharpeville sparked a new kind of militancy that incorporated armed struggle. Throughout the militarization, songs continued to ignite the spirit of African resistance. The songs themselves also took up arms and assumed more military forms. For instance, the MK adopted a song named *The Toyi Toyi*, which activist Vincent Vena called "a weapon of war" (Amandla! 2003). The dance accompanying this song was used as physical training for the guerilla soldiers and to boost morale (Smiley 2). The music also united them as brothers and sisters on their journey to end apartheid. Traditional struggle songs also faced a makeover with more militant lyrics as the apartheid opposition took up arms. Sifiso Ntuli, a political activist, recalls one particular example.

Shonamelanga. I love that song. I remember how we used to explain it to the Americans. Shonamelanga was a song which came from domestic servants; it was Sheila's day... The darkies couldn't say the Zulus, especially can't say Thursday. So instead it was Shlursday, which became Sheila's day. Sheila's day was Thursday when the domestics like my mom were on their free day from the plantation...that song like many others

was adapted to the condition that we found ourselves in. So as opposed to saying Shonamelanga, Shona we will meet on Thursday on Sheila's day, - it became: we will meet where we would rather not meet – in the bushes with our bazookas (Amandla! 2003).

The struggle became increasingly bloody as the country headed toward the brink of civil war. In 1976, there were student uprisings in Soweto (South Western Township) near Johannesburg that protested the use of the language Afrikaans in African schools.

“Students did not want to learn and teachers did not want to teach in the language of the oppressor” (Mandela 483). Peaceful protests and pleas against the use of Afrikaans had gone unanswered, and fifteen thousand students gathered on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1976 to show their disapproval. As had been the case in Sharpeville massacre, Police in Soweto opened fire on the young crowd, killing and wounding many.

During atrocities like those in Sharpeville and Soweto, those participating in the protests, especially the youth, were faced with the death of their ‘comrades’. Lindiwe Zulu (a former militant youth) remembers the burials. “We never used to cry, we used to sing” (Amandla! 2003). Oftentimes, the Black soldiers of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* were present at the funerals because it was one of their members who had passed. The ceremonies were politically charged and began with song. *Hamba Kahle* is a funeral song, “melancholic and militant, a powerfully evocative mix of hymn and war song, protest and pain” (Pollard 99). This contrast can be seen with the following translation of the violent lyrics of *Hamba Kahle*.

*Hamba kahle mkhonto.  
Wemkhonto  
Mkhonto wesizwe  
Thina Bantu bomkhonto siz'misele  
Ukuwabulala  
Wona lamabhulu*

*[Safe journey spear  
 Yes spear  
 Spear of the nation  
 We, the members of Umkhonto are determined  
 To kill  
 These Boers] (Pollard 99).*

Music was everywhere in anti-apartheid South Africa: protests, social events, religious ceremonies, etc. Even with the overthrow of apartheid and the establishment of a democratic vote, song still held its place as a political vehicle in South Africa. The ANC launched its presidential campaign along with a song:

*We mama no baba  
 We sisi no bhuti  
 Inkululeko ifikile  
 Ashambeni sovota  
 Vote ANC, ANC, ANC...  
 Sekunjalo  
 Kinakayo  
 People let's vote  
 ANC, ANC, ANC...  
 [Mother and father  
 Sister and brother  
 Freedom is here  
 Let's go vote  
 Vote ANC, ANC, ANC...  
 Now is the time  
 Now is the time  
 People let's vote  
 ANC, ANC, ANC...] (Pollard 123)*

With the ANC's victory in April of 1994, South Africa celebrated with music, by composing a song based on President Mandela's historic words. Each chapter of apartheid, whether it was passive resistance, military action, violence and death, elections, or victories, led to the birth of a new group of songs to unite the South African anti-apartheid power. It is important to note that, "Though we may encounter a soundscape at a given time and in a given site, it is rarely static: music and its performance are flexible,

changeable, and often on the move” (Shelemay 8). South Africa exemplifies this, as the soundscape of the movement was constantly evolving. Song was used as an emotional release and political vehicle amongst the masses throughout the various stages in the anti-apartheid fight. As Duma Ka Ndlovu, a South African playwright and historian expressed in *Amandla!: a Revolution in Four-Part Harmony*, “Somewhere from the cracks of all that repression, you find this song permeating.”

### **Soundscape of the Struggle Songs**

Exploring the soundscape of a culture or era relates important information regarding the historical and political context of the setting, sound and significance, the three parts of a soundscape as explained by author Kay Kaufman Shelemay. “A soundscape consists not only of a series of musical events but also the time and place within which the events take place and to which they lend both form and significance” (Shelemay 8). The sound of these struggle songs of South Africa is one of ‘Amandla’, a word in isiZulu meaning force, strength, power, or might (isiZulu.net). There are thousands of languages and dialects in Southern Africa, and when asked if language posed a threat to communication, Gabi Mkhize, a South African graduate student at The Ohio State University and current member of the ANC, replied:

No, communication is never a problem in South Africa. We always get a way of understanding one another. We have slang, which is very helpful. We understand songs easily despite the language used, as long as it one of the native South African languages.

The extra interviews on the DVD documentary, *Amandla!: a Revolution in Four-Part Harmony*, provided a look into popular musician Dave Matthews childhood growing up

as a White South African. As a White citizen, knowing indigenous African languages was rare, but he asserts that the power of African music did not fall on deaf ears, “If you couldn’t understand what they were saying, you could understand what the meaning was.” He described the sound of so many voices in unison as overwhelming.

As far as the origin of these powerful songs, they are not often credited to a single composer. Instead, a sense of community attributes each song to the struggle as a whole. Some known composers are better remembered for their effort in the resistance rather than their actual musical talent. A case in point is Vuyisile Mini, described several times in *Amandla!: a Revolution in Four-Part Harmony* as “one of the best organizers in the liberation movement... song had become an organizer and... he was the embodiment of this reality.” Mini used music to be a political activist and martyr. Ntuli remarked, “He was physically hung [for his political activity], we [the people] were spiritually hung.” Respect for devotion to the fight, not just to composing music, made Mini’s name a remembered one.

As to the specific lyrics of songs, the increased militarization of the words came with the birth of the armed struggle and the Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK). Further, lyrics were used to encode messages as shown in *Sheila’s Song* above. Some song lyrics were very direct in addressing the White government, but the encoded message was hidden in the African languages. Sophie Mgcina, a famous South African vocalist and actress, recalls the irony of singing in an African language in front of White troops, “They used to clap hands... ‘oh these Blacks can sing so nice!’ And they clap their hands and we sing ‘We will shoot you, we will kill you’ [sings and laughs]” (*Amandla!* 2003). In this way, using African languages helped the struggle by allowing illegal messages and ideas to be

passed along musically. The song *Watch Out Verwoerd!* translates as a condemnation against the National Party politician and mastermind of tribal homelands, Hendrik Verwoerd. The lyrics read: *Here comes the Black man, Verwoerd! Watch out for the Black man Verwoerd!* (Amandla). Vusi Mahlasela reminisces about this protest song, “Even today when I hear these songs on tape, it...really bring[s] me back...into those scenes...the people who died before us, who went with us and...bring such really bad, sad memories” (Smiley 2). After the lyrics of *Watch Out Verwoerd!* fade out, the song is followed by ululating and the call and response of *Amandla! [power]*, then *Ngawethu! [the power is ours]* (Mandela 318). *Amandla!* became the slogan of Black power in anti-apartheid South Africa. In his autobiography, Nelson Mandela recalls the ferocity of the young men during the 1970s: “They were brave, hostile, and aggressive; they would not take orders, and shouted ‘*Amandla!*’ at every opportunity. Their instinct was to confront rather than cooperate” (Mandela 484).

The entire repertoire of struggle songs however was not militarized. For example Vusi Mahlasela’s *Kuzobenjani Na?* asks *How would it be?* While narrating a young couple marrying after achieving freedom and overcoming the struggle of being apart from loved ones. The range of lyrics covered every facet of the oppressed lives led by so many Africans in the apartheid era.

Another dynamic of the anti-apartheid soundscape is instrumentation. There are sounds of guitars in songs, such as *Kuzobenjani Na?*; drums and percussion are an important sound in all struggle songs; flutes are also featured in songs such as *Meadowlands*. Flute bands are still around playing struggle songs, such as “The All Star Flutes” (Amandla). Amongst sounds of other woodwinds, the most prominent aspect of

South African anti-apartheid music is the vocals. Many of the songs start with a simple unison, a cappella group of voices. Using the voice as the primary instrument creates a powerful sound that can be produced even when manmade instruments may not be available.

To create a strong central rhythm in these songs many lyrics are repetitive, such as seen in *Senzeni na*. It is repeated on different layers to emphasize the title question of *What have we done*. The entire song is one line sung in different harmonies. The redundancy of lyrics found in the vocal portion of the music is also fortified by the strong clapping or stomping dances that usually accompany these songs, such as *Injamblo/Hambani Kunye Ne-Vangeli*. The claps and stomps are used as part of the instrumentation and also as a way to unify a group in one physical movement. Another form of rhythm in some of these songs is found in the African language itself. Many of them are sung in 'click' languages where certain consonants take on a tongue click. For example, in isiZulu Q, C, and X all have a respective click very distinct to a trained ear. Clicks can be heard throughout *Y'zinga*, for example. This adds a layer of rhythmic sophistication to the struggle songs.

The sound of anti-apartheid liberation music can be understood and differentiated by examining the political developments that sparked the music to evolve. The lyrics reflect the changes in the tactics of the movement, from nonviolent to armed struggle. Songs clandestinely conveyed otherwise banned topics of discussion and self-expression through music became a liberation tool. Studying the instrumentation of struggle music provides a look into the unavailability of instruments and the strong dependence on voice. This could be because of the portability of vocal music. Everyone can take part in a song,



and as Dave Matthews stated “it’s a quick way to have a voice” (Amandla! 2003).

Rhythm is an important part of the sound of struggle songs as the beat unites the voices and drives the protesters forward when facing hardships. Art forms (painting, sculpture, song, etc.) are often used to oppose an idea, but music is more universal; it can be easily understood by an outsider and adapted to changing political situations.

The sound of anti-apartheid South African music, when considered with the varying political context in which the songs were developed, reflects the significance of the culture in which its various temperaments were born. The powerful sound of the songs themselves, without the literal meaning taken into account, portrays the strength of the African movement. A sense of community ownership of each song speaks to the culture’s strong cooperative spirit. The instrumentation and vocals of the protest songs of the anti-apartheid movement show the value of rhythm in South African culture. The element of ‘click’ language ties rhythm and sound together to represent the pulse of South African cultures. Strong rhythms, formed in these clicks or clapping, embody the ‘heartbeat’ of the nation. Each individual element of the song serves a purpose in exposing central features of the culture of Black South Africans living during the racial struggle against apartheid.

The significance of music in South African culture can be seen in its use in life-cycle events. The vocal patterns reflect important facts about the society’s strong communal bonds. In South African cultures, music transcends age. Struggle songs were created by people who had followed a rich cultural heritage before the abrupt interference of European Whites, and these characteristics are reflected in each song.

In many cultures life-cycle events, such as weddings and coming of age ceremonies, are performed with accompanying musical traditions. This can be seen in one of the largest cultural groups in South Africa, the Xhosa, which Nelson Mandela was born in to. After his circumcision ceremony he remembers that "...family, friends, and local chiefs gathered for speeches, songs, and gift-giving" (Mandela 29). It is worth noting the presence of music in his memory of a significant event in his life. Concerning the Zulu culture Gabi Mkhize observes that, "In funerals, music is a strength, hope, and love. It unites us and conveys our empathy, love for one another, and hope." Both cases report music at a gathering of people where unity is welcomed. The use of music proved no different in the hardships of apartheid.

The unison of struggle songs correlates with the strong sense of family and community in many of the South African cultures. According to Gabi Mkhize, "Music is very important in my culture and to all Black South Africans. It is a form of unity, peace, comfort, strength, and entertainment. For example, in times of hardship, oppression, and suffering, music acts as a form of solidarity." The unison of voices in struggle songs emblazon this feature of Black South African culture. The family is the most important unit of African culture, and exposure to music on a family level no doubt impacted the struggle's use of song (Amandla). Duma ka Ndlovu remarked, "We were raised in families and homes where our parents would break into song at the slightest provocation" (Amandla! 2003). A united front was needed in order to make an impact on the oppressive apartheid system. Ms. Mkhize elaborates, "The songs... played a crucial role in bringing Black South Africans together to share their experiences and strategize for the better tool to fight apartheid". Being united as a community was a core value in each

South African ethnic group even before apartheid. Banding together as a Pan-African movement overlooked past tribal prides and instead looked to the improvement of South Africa as a whole.

In Western cultures, elders are not always respected. However, in African cultures the elderly hold the most respect. It is not unlikely to see generations mingling to learn from one another. This transgenerational sentiment also served to increase the unity of the liberation movement. Rifts in the Black opposition due to something such as age would have surely been devastating to the movement. I asked Gabi Mkhize whether or not the struggle songs were important to all those opposed to apartheid despite age and if all generations could relate to the music. Her response was a resounding “Yes” to both inquiries. In *Amandla!: a Revolution in Four-Part Harmony*, a South African journalist Gail Smith explains, “There was no age group boundary, absolutely not. You could be standing next to a 60 year old woman. And there would be a bond, and an immediate kind of acknowledgement of commonality.” Surpassing age boundaries, the African resistance fortified their cause with a more widespread unity. The sense of community in these cultures abandoned common boundaries such as age or tribal affiliation, and focused on the universal goal of equal rights.

The soundscape of anti-apartheid South Africa has a significance deeply embedded in the indigenous Black cultures that have existed for centuries. Colonization affected the roots of those societies, but those groups overcame oppression by returning to their origins and traditions. Close family and community ties laid the foundations for unity to emerge in the African resistance. The harmony that transcended age and other boundaries clashed with the discord of apartheid. The goal to synchronize the races and

birth a new South Africa was reached after years of cruelty, marked by Nelson Mandela's victory as the first Black president of South Africa in 1994. Going from a broken nation to a full blown democracy takes time. South Africa is on the path to reconcile and find unity across all races.

### **Case Study #1: Dave Matthews**

The internationally known musical artist, Dave Matthews, has been influenced by the politics of South Africa because he was born in Johannesburg January 9, 1967 (Martell 3). Even when Matthews was not living in South Africa he made frequent visits to the country and supported the anti-apartheid movement. Matthews states "I was made hyperaware of racism...the concept was punctuated at a pretty young age...I became more and more horrified, first at the absurdity of it but then with the horror that comes of it: the power that's put into the wrong people's hands" (Matthews 72). His experiences are reflected in the lyrics and tones of his music. The Dave Matthews Band, including Matthews (guitar), Carter Beauford (drums), LeRoi Moore (saxophone), Stefan Lessard (bass) and Boyd Tinsley (violin), has released many albums since its debut in 1991 (History: [The Official Dave Matthews Band Website](#)). Many songs have described aspects of the violent racial divide in South Africa, an issue close to Dave Matthews' roots.

The song *Cry Freedom* was released on the album *Crash* on April 30, 1996 (Martell 170), and its lyrics are loaded with contentious imagery.

*How can I turn away  
Brother/Sister go dancing  
through my head*

**Human as to human**  
**The future is no place**  
**To place your better days**  
 Cry freedom, cry  
 From a crowd 10,000 wide  
 Hope laid upon hope  
 That this crowd will not subside  
 Let this flag burn to dust  
 And a new a fair design be raised  
 While we wait head in hands,  
 hands in prayer  
 And fall into a dreamless sleep again  
 And we wave our hands

Hands and feet are all alike  
**But gold between divide us**  
 Hands and feet are all alike  
 But fear between divide us  
 All slip away

There was a window and by it stood  
 A mirror in which  
 he could see himself  
 He thought of something  
 Something he had never had but  
 hoped would come along  
 Cry freedom, cry  
 From deep inside  
 Where we are all confined  
 While we wave hands in fire  
 Wave our hands

Hands and feet are all alike  
 But gold between divide us  
 Hands and feet are all alike  
 But fear between divide us,  
 Slip away  
 In this room stood a little child  
 And in this room this little child  
 she would remain  
 Until someone might decide  
 To dance this little child  
 across this hall  
 Into a cold, dark, space  
 Where she might never trace her  
 way across this crooked mile

*Across this crooked page  
Cry freedom, cry  
From deep inside where  
we are all confined  
Till we wave our hands*

*How can I turn away  
Brother/Sister go dancing  
through my head  
Human as to human  
The future is no place  
To place your better days*

*Hands and feet are all alike But gold  
between divide us Hands and feet are all  
alike But fear between divide us Hands and  
feet are all alike Hear what I say Hear what  
I say Oh, so be it*

*How can I turn away Brother/Sister go  
dancing through my head Human as to  
human The future is no place To place your  
better days (Lyrics: [The Official Dave  
Matthews Band Website](#))*

This song's title, *Cry Freedom*, is also the title of a book and movie entitled that tell the story of anti-apartheid activists Stephen Biko and Donald Woods. The lyrics mention the division the discovery of gold created, and also express Matthews' hope for a peaceful future in a torn nation; both are a symbol of his connections to South Africa and its history. This song's soundscape is a sorrowful lament about the problems that plagued South Africa's apartheid state. The slow pace and powerful lyrics offer an understanding of the sorrows of segregation, but are hopeful that something can be done to heal South Africa before a generation is destroyed.

Another Dave Matthews Band song with an obscured meaning is #36, which was originally released on the *Live at Red Rocks 8.15.95* album.

*Yeah, yeah I scream...  
 With you on my mind so heavy and so hard  
 I don't know quite everything  
 You make me think of a better thing...  
 Better things to fill my day with  
 But they don't mean to go  
 Please don't be too bad with me, God  
 Please don't be too good...  
 Let some women's light, women's light  
 Chain my hands with me singing...*

***Hani Hani, come and dance for me  
 Whoa, whoa, sooner there  
 Hani Hani, come and dance for me  
 Only the brave  
 Hani Hani, come and dance for me  
 (feeling the night)  
 Hani Hani, come and dance for me  
 Lead me back home to life***

*You made Heaven turn to dirt  
 And dirt turn to dance on  
 Heaven come my way  
 Baby surely do  
 Maybe some moonlight  
 Maybe some, baby surely do  
 Maybe some moonlight  
 Say this say this...*

*Hani Hani, come and dance for me  
 Underneath the moonlight  
 Hani Hani come and dance for me*

*Hani Hani, come and dance for me  
 Come on, come on go  
 Hani Hani, come and dance for me  
 Give it back, give it back....*

*Oh man, I can't talk  
 A man was tall and once tore a piece of freedom for us all  
 When, then, you least expect it  
 Man can cut from of his own heart  
 For us all, that man  
 Don't believe it, oh yeah....  
 God, two men slice and dice each other up in his place  
 They don't believe it...*

*Well leave it  
 Leave it lying, leave it lying, leave it lying  
 Got me singing  
 Hani Hani, come and dance for me (Dave Matthews Band-  
 36 Lyrics: [Smart Lyrics](#))*

The song is referencing anti-apartheid activist and MK leader Chris Hani who gave his life for the movement. After its original release, Dave Matthews Band began to perform this song with the word *Hani* replaced with *honey* because Matthews felt the song's upbeat soundscape was contradicting to its sad message about Chris Hani's death. The song was then contorted into another song, *Everyday*, and the lyrics were replaced with "a more upbeat mix of scats, moans, and lines about love and happiness" (Dave Matthews Band- 36 Lyrics: [Smart Lyrics](#)). Dave Matthews' political awareness, especially concerning apartheid and South Africa's state, acted as inspiration for songs such as #36. Matthews also used his fame to support the anti-apartheid movement as well as providing opportunities to South African musicians that were not otherwise available in a war-torn country.

Another Dave Matthews song that has South Africa inspired lyrics is *Mother Father* from the *Everyday* album released February 27, 2001 (Martell 171).

*Mother Father please explain to me  
 Why a world so full of mystery  
 A place so bitter and still so sweet  
 So beautiful and yet so full of sad sad*

*Mother Father please explain to me  
 Why forests march to deserts be  
 While snow capped mountains melt away  
 What do we tell our babies  
 What do we say*



*Mother father please explain to me  
 How a man who rocks his child to sleep  
 Yet pulls the trigger on his brother's heart  
 He digs a hole right to the middle of **a storm of hatred***

*Mother Father please explain to me  
 How it could be so this world has come to be  
 A precious balance in between  
 Such cruelty and such kindness please please*

*Mother Father please explain to me  
 How this world has come to be  
 Unequaled in her blessings oh I see  
**Unbridled hatred so extreme** please tell me*

*Mother Father please explain to me  
 How the world has come to be so  
 Twisted between time and dreams  
 Oh Mother Father please explain to me*

*What's all this talk about  
 All this talk about it  
 Spinning down down down down down  
 All this talk about  
 All these words without  
 And nothing done*

*Mother Father do you know  
**Why one mans belly overflows**  
**Another sleeps in hungers bed**  
 We'd trade our world for a piece of bread*

*Mother father please explain to me  
 How this rare worlds come to be  
**A place so full of color yet overflowing always**  
**In black and white black and white**  
 Drowning in the waters of our*

*Mother father please explain to me  
 How the world has come to be  
 While still blessed in all the things we see  
 Such a sad sad home for you and me*

*Come on  
 Come on out  
 Come on out you*

*Come on out you*  
*Come on out you save yourself*  
*Come on out you*  
*Come on out you*  
*Come on out you*  
*We're taking on water*  
*Taking on water*  
*We're taking on water*  
***But we've got the freedom***  
***We've got the freedom***

*There's no God above*  
*No Hell below*  
*It's here with us*  
*It's up to us*  
*To keep afloat oh*

*Mother Father please explain to me*  
*How this world has come to be*  
*How we've come to this oh*  
*Mother Father please explain to me*  
*How this world has come to be* (Lyrics: [The Official Dave Matthews Band Website](#))

*Mother Father* makes many mentions of anti-apartheid emotions. *Hatred* is mentioned twice, in the second and fourth stanzas. The song also addresses the poverty that was rampant throughout South Africa when it mentions *hunger* and some of the inequalities seen between races. The soundscape also has an angry tone and the aggressive instrumentation symbolizes Dave Matthews' frustration with South Africa's segregation. One of the most profound lines in the song, *A place so full of color yet overflowing always, In black and white black and white*, shows the absurdity of South Africa's race relations. With four main racial groups and a great diversity, the segregation is essentially dichotomous.

Dave Matthews' strong connection to South Africa from having been born there, living there and visiting frequently is not surprising, but is worth mentioning because of

the awareness his lyrics brought to the anti-apartheid movement. Matthews fostered the globalization of South African artists, such as Vusi Mahlasela, and used the medium of Dave Matthews Band performances as an arena for political consciousness of South Africa's situation. *Cry Freedom*, #36, and *Mother Father* are three of the songs that best illustrate the beautiful and veiled meanings that can be found in some of Dave Matthews' lyrics.

### **Case Study #2: Vusi Mahlasela**

Vusi Mahlasela is a South African guitarist, composer and poet who has made a strong impact on South African music and has worked closely with Dave Matthews. As previously mentioned Mahlasela's music created hope and healing for those oppressed in anti-apartheid movement. He was born in 1965 in the South African township of Mamelodi known as a hotbed of young artists and musicians (Cornwell 22). Mahlasela began playing music at funerals, vigils and community gatherings, eventually stepping into the political arena with an acoustic guitar in hand. "At stadium rallies, his guitar and his voice were weapons on the front lines of a revolution" (Simon 1). His music evolved in step with the movement, from sadness, to aggression, to forgiveness; each of his albums has a different theme for the political climate in South Africa. Mahlasela states that his goal was to change "what was really deadly into something very much lively" (Simon 4). His role in the anti-apartheid music was pivotal and his impact on South African culture is still felt today.

Vusi Mahlasela has been likened to the “great protest singers- Marvin Gaye, Woody Guthrie, the young Bob Dylan- intent on fighting injustice and oppression with music” (Cornwell 22). He was often banned from reciting and distributing his songs and poetry during the violent apartheid years. In response, Mahlasela memorized his works and continued to perform them to ignite the passions of his fellow activists at protests and rallies. His commitment to the movement came full circle when he was given the opportunity to perform at Nelson Mandela’s inauguration in 1994 (Cornwell 22). Vusi Mahlasela is a symbol of strength and rebirth in South Africa, and now across the world as his popularity spreads. He “is a voice that has championed hope and love and battled hate and segregation in his apartheid-scarred homeland” (Orshoski 39). Mahlasela and his musical colleagues, such as Dave Matthews, helped shape the anti-apartheid movement through song.

Dave Matthews and Vusi Mahlasela have worked very closely on several occasions. With a mutual respect these artists bridge music culture gaps often seen between South African artists. Each has featured the other on a title track of an album; Matthews invited Mahlasela to perform on the track *Everyday*, and Mahlasela asked Matthews to add vocals to his song *Sower of Words*. Matthews explains his respect for Mahlasela, “I always think we’re headed toward the next Dark Ages, but then it’s people like Vusi that give me hope that culture and civilization will survive. And I don’t mean that in any small way—I mean that absolutely” (Orshoski 39). Even with reconciliation, the memory of apartheid lives on. The collaboration of these two renowned artists work is even more important to facilitate peace in South Africa.

## Conclusion

The significance of music on the anti-apartheid era of South Africa was vital. Gabi Mkhize comments on music's centrality for the movement, "Music was part of our everyday life and struggle. It is a form of power that knows no boundaries." The freedom songs were used as an expression of the discontent with apartheid when the White government passed laws to prohibit all other forms of protest. As Dave Matthews speculates, "When you have no power, how do you express yourself? If you don't have a way to fight, how do you...express...the fight that you have inside you?... I think that music is very often the first thing that happens in cultures or groups" (Amandla! 2003).

Each individual song was used in a particular phase of the struggle and each had a different aim. Despite these internal differences the genre of anti-apartheid struggle songs encompasses all music involved in motivating the opposition. "For the irrefutable facts are that those who resisted apartheid—multiethnic, male and female, sometimes secularized, always determined—continually turned political oppression to political advantage via the idiom of African sacred song" (Pollard 103). The unity, the power, the people, the voices. They all served as a reminder that the Black African resistance would not back down in the face of the White apartheid government.

When you have guns facing a crowd of people that are singing, it's pretty interesting to see the power of a crowd that is singing in harmony as they approach this line of guns. It's... overwhelming to see that sort of strength, that unity. And that it [singing] can build enough courage for people take on an unbeatable opposition.

-Dave Matthews (Amandla! 2003)

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