

Music as part of social movements



Amandla!

Music has shaped culture in all parts of the world, in many ways. I believe that the tradition of music is already there, and it helped the African resistance movement. We have seen several protests throughout time, use cultures musical essence. From the protest songs used in Greece, Native American protests, to the more recent Black Lives Matter movements, we see the use of music to be integrated into these movements in order to change what they are fighting for. The Black Lives Matter movement uses hip-hop to express their voice on opinions they are trying to change. Hip-hop music was already a major root of African American culture, that has been used for decades to express their thoughts on certain issues. The Greeks used protest songs to protest the economic turmoil that has been going on for years in the country of Greece. Fighting for democracy and freedom has been a common theme used throughout the history of music in Greece. The roots of the music are already in each culture, protests are formed from the usage of these genres of music to make their struggles known and bring awareness to these ideas.

Apartheid means separateness in the African language. In 1910, segregationist privileges became legalized because South Africa became a politically independent nation. The official start of the Apartheid was in 1948 when Daniel Francois Malan won the presidential election. He won over voters by supporting policies that would enforce racial segregation. “ The implementation of apartheid, often called “ separate development” since the 1960s, was made possible through the Population Registration Act of 1950, which classified all South Africans as either Bantu (all black Africans),

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Coloured (those of mixed race), or white.” (Britannica). There was an immediate protest to the Apartheid from the people of Africa as soon as the discrimination began. Over the years, Apartheid progressively got worse and worse. Eventually, marriages between whites and people of color were banned, sexual relations were prohibited, and a Land act set 80% of the land to be set aside for the white minority (History). The effects that these policies created were dramatic. This affected the ability of non-whites to get a proper education. The government created schools for whites that non-whites were not allowed to attend. Non-white schools were created, but the level of education was nowhere near that of the white schools. Without the proper education, non-whites did not have the same opportunity that white people had. As a result of this unfair treatment, a wealth and power separation between whites and non-whites grew exponentially. Apartheid came to an end when the United Nations began to step in. Other outside countries would start to force economic sanctions on South Africa, causing them to pass reforms and begin to bring an end to Apartheid (History). The music we hear in *Amandla!* is what we would normally hear in a South African setting but now it is integrated with chants and protest anthems. All of the fightings in the country resulted in the music becoming protest-oriented instead of creating music for the love of it.

Black South Africans sang songs as a way to feel united with one another. This created a strong bond with one another because the songs they sang meant something. They would connect them not only through a physical sense, but an emotional sense. They feel abandoned by their country so it was a comforting feeling to know that each person singing the song had their

backs. The song “ Senzeni Na?” is an anti-apartheid folk song that was extremely popular in the 1970-1980s. It is a simple yet powerful song that is composed of few words. The phrase “ Senzeni na Senzeni na” is repeated over and over again, which translates to “ What have we done?”. This is repeated because they have done nothing wrong to the government. The only sin they have committed is having black skin. In the movie, there is a scene that shows a large gathering of African Americans singing while raising a fist to signify unity among all African Americans. The act of showing togetherness demonstrated to the government that they can take away their rights but they will never be able to break their bond. A popular dance that was used during protest songs to strike fear into the enemies was the toyi-toyi. The combination of song and dance can be performed by partaking in rhythmic high-stepping movements, with loud stomping and synchronous chants and singing. It is an intimidating gesture that resembles a war dance. The resistance knew that they would not be able to defeat the enemies with violence, so they turned to unarmed protests of song and dance. An activist by the name of Vincent Vena was quoted in *Amandla!* saying, “ We didn’t have guns. We didn’t have tear gas. We didn’t have all the sophisticated modern technology for war... for us, toyi-toyi was like a weapon of war,” (Amandla!). Not only did the toyi-toyi instill fear into the enemy, but it also united the protestors and won the hearts and minds of others on the outside looking in.

The first song “ Bring Him Back Home (Nelson Mandela)” appears in the movie at 1: 23: 00. The song is about freeing the activist leader Nelson Mandela from jail. The artist wants to see him walking down the street with

his wife as a free man. The melody is polyphony. There is a basic melody that is followed throughout the entirety of the song but then they add a second melody via trumpet. The instruments used are trumpets, saxophones, electric guitars, acoustic guitars, and drums. The song is sung by a lead singer who also plays the trumpet at times while backup singers sing through his trumpet solos. The song was a traditional song that we would hear today that included a hook, melody, chorus, and a bridge. The second song is “Thina Sizwe” which is shown at 33: 19. This song was created after the massacre in Sharpeville. Hundreds of natives gathered peacefully to protest the passes they were forced to carry. The natives were unarmed but that did not prevent the whites from opening fire. Sixty-nine were killed and hundreds more were wounded. It is a solo song that has a somber, depressing tone used to mourn for the people affected by this travesty. The song is polyphony that has two melodies created by two different voices. The song has no instrumentation, only singing. The song asks the white men to give the natives their land back. The final song is the song of struggle: “Ingoma”. It appears at 53: 13. This song has a call and response form with one man calling to the crowd and the crowd responds in unison. The song is monophony that follows a single melody throughout the song. There are no instruments used in the song, but the crowd claps along giving the song a higher tempo melody.

Humans try to learn from the past so it does not repeat itself. African Americans are free people now but they still struggle with many disadvantages compared to white people. “White boys who grow up in rich households are likely to stay rich, but black boys who are also raised at the

top are more likely to become poor” (PBS NewsHour). There is still a disadvantage for African Americans to move up the economic ladder. The disadvantage that most people do not want to talk about is: unarmed African Americans are still being killed by law enforcement because of the color of their skin. Nobody wanted to bring this into the light until the Black Lives Matter movement was created. Just like during the Apartheid, this movement uses song and dance to unite people and protest against the unfair treatment of African Americans. Songs like “ How Many” by Miguel and “ A Lot of Love” by Chris Brown were released in the wake of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling’s deaths. Both of these men were wrongfully killed by white police officers. Like the song “ Thina Sizwe”, Miguel is wondering how many unarmed African Americans must die before law enforcement changes. His song was a call to action to change human lives from being turned into hashtags, while the murderer got off free with no charges. Chris Brown’s song is a lot like “ Ingoma” in the sense that it is about the struggle of dealing with social injustice. Both songs have a somber tone that makes you feel a sense of grief for those that have been lost. In times of despair and heartbreak, people need to unite together to bring hope to those that are being affected. Through the passing years it has not changed; song and dance is the key to rising up and fighting for what you believe in.

After watching the movie and gathering research, I believe that song and dance helped the protest gain traction and allowed the protests to be heard around the world. The style and genre were already made throughout the African culture. The only thing that changed was the message as a result of the hardships and killings of the African American people. This music gave

the people of South Africa hope that one day their lives would change and they will be treated as a human beings. Protest songs will always play a major part for those who believe they are being treated unfairly. They can look back at the Apartheid to see how powerful music can be in uniting people together as one. In a time of need, the people of South Africa looked towards music for help which resulted in a long but successful rebellion against the harsh government rule.

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