

Major role in
successful resistance
against apartheid
history essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Introduction

To what extent did music contribute to the mobilization of the resistance movement against the Apartheid regime during the years spanning 1984-1994 in South African history? Music and song was composed as a response to the political happenings and mood of the decade concerned. Music voiced the popular views and reactions of the oppressed black South Africans to the political climate under the Apartheid regime of 1948-1994. The idiom of German playwright Berthold Brecht: 'art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it.' describes the role of music in the resistance movement. The trends of music in South Africa during the 1940's and 1950's reveal the common experiences and grievances of the black South Africans and serve as a 'mirror' reflecting the political sphere of the time. Music progressed to become a 'hammer' during the 1980's and became a force used to provoke the government and actively construct an alternative reality for the suffering black South Africans. In this One Research Task I will determine to what extent music assisted in ending apartheid and rallying the black oppressed South Africans to resist. I will explore which other factors, such as militant action and political negotiations, played a role and whether their impact outweighed that of music.

Review of Literature

Simpson, S. & Hirsch, L. (2002) *Amandla!* [Motion Picture]. VideoVision Entertainment.

The movie *Amandla!* is a documentary film that explores the role that music and song played in the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa during the years 1948-1994.

The producer and director of the film, Lee Hirsch, was born in 1972 on Long Island. He is a documentary filmmaker and has won several awards, including the Primetime Emmy Award for outstanding Individual Achievements in a Craft: Research. He is a graduate of The Putney School in Vermont and Hampshire College. He also directed *The Bully Project* documentary.

The purpose of this documentary was to educate viewers on the role of music during the struggle as opposed to the role of political negotiations, boycotts and eventually armed resistance. Throughout the events of apartheid, there was song and music to inspire the oppressed people to continue their cause.

I believe this source has been the most useful of all my sources towards my research. It has introduced me to many of the actual artists, poets, activists, politicians and composers of the apartheid era. The documentary includes comments and insights from famous struggles artists such as Abdullah Ibrahim; Hugh Masekela; Mbongeni Ngema; Miriam Makeba; Vusi Mahlasela and many others. This provided me with an intimate look into their role in the struggle and their views on many important issues. Some of the artists played their songs/music as part of the documentary and this gave me an incredible insight into how the music affected them and the rest of their nation who adopted these songs as their anthems for survival.

<https://assignbuster.com/major-role-in-successful-resistance-against-apartheid-history-essay/>

The documentary was chronological and this was useful as it demonstrated how the music of the times varied according to the circumstances and political atmosphere of the apartheid regime. The kind of songs that were being sung, in both their lyrics and musical style, portrayed the mood of the oppressed people. The actual music that inspired Black South Africans during apartheid was played in the documentary to accompany the visuals, and I was provided with a real sense of the shifts of mood during the struggle. The explicit visuals and accompanying heart-felt music assisted me in empathizing with the oppressed people. The people who were interviewed gave individual accounts of how the music of the struggle inspired and encouraged them personally, and their nation as a whole. The origins of certain famous protest songs were revealed and I was very educated and interested by this.

Many other historical events of Apartheid were exposed in this documentary and had the impact of inspiring, educating and enlightening me.

The documentary presents viewpoints of struggle artists, activists and politicians and of old policemen of the National Party and Apartheid jail wardens. The two sources agree with the assessment that music and song during the struggle assisted in promoting the fall of Apartheid. The artists are given more air time, but that is due to the nature of the documentary and is therefore not biased. The opinions of the artists and freedom fighters cannot be objective, because they experienced the injustices of Apartheid and come from the position of being oppressed and having to fight against it. Because they are the actual music-makers they will naturally be partial to the success of their own creations. This source is not objective as it gains viewpoints <https://assignbuster.com/major-role-in-successful-resistance-against-apartheid-history-essay/>

from people who were primarily involved in the events of Apartheid. One limitation this documentary has is not being including the opinions of non-participants of Apartheid to assess their judgment of whether the protest music had an impact on the move to democracy.

Schumann, A. (2008). The Beat that Beat Apartheid: The Role of Music in the Resistance against Apartheid in South Africa. Retrieved July 2, 2012, from SOAS, University of London: http://test.whtdoesittake.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/ThebeatthatbeatNr14_Schumann.pdf

The article The Beat that beat Apartheid is an article that explores the role that music and song had in the resistance against Apartheid in South Africa during the years 1948-1994.

The author, Anne Schumann, is a PhD student at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. She studied from 2006-2010 in the Department of Origins: The Language and Cultures of Africa.

The purpose of this article was to argue how big the role of music was in fighting apartheid and how successful it was in mobilizing the people during the struggle. This article expressed how the music varied to suit the political atmosphere of the time. The article demonstrated, through primary sources of quotes, lyrics and name songs how the music reflected the many different kinds of struggles during the resistance. Responses and discussions were included and this was used to validate the points that were made regarding the effectiveness of music in resistance.

I found this source extremely useful as it provided me with a chronological, logical development of the key argument. There were many examples and quotes that were very beneficial to my research as they provided primary sources and clear evidence. This source, through its ample references, led me to many other sources that had useful and relevant information.

Because this source held the same stance on the topic as I do in my research topic question, the direction and final conclusion of the source were particularly beneficial in encouraging me and reinforcing my interpretation of the information.

The source had few limitations, as there was excess detail that I didn't require for my research, but it proved insightful to read and provided a greater perspective on the topic as a whole. The only notable limitation the source had, was not weighing up the influence music had compared to other forms of resistance, such as peaceful boycotts, militant action and political negotiations. None of the other factors in ending Apartheid were considered and this leads me to conclude that the source was one-dimensional.

Method

This investigation was conducted through various forms of research. I began by browsing through many books, with either the authors or content being relevant to my focus question. This was important in laying my foundation knowledge of the topic and leading me to my focus question and finding more specific information on the topic. I researched online and found an article by a PhD student that dealt with the role that music played in the resistance against Apartheid. I found this article extremely helpful to my

research and used many quotes and references from it to further my research. I used this articles reference list to source other information. It provided other information sources such as the documentary Amandla! . I ordered this film online and it was delivered to my house because all of the DVD rental stores I telephoned did not hold it in their stores due to it not being a mainstream film. I watched the documentary twice, once to get the main idea of its contents, and the second time making notes and gathering quotes and dates. I found this film very insightful because it was from the point of view of actual freedom fighters, artists, politicians, composers etc. of the time and their personal comments assisted in my research greatly. I then read through a book on Mandela's quotes as he was a central icon in the resistance against Apartheid, and found a few quotes which reinforced my information and conclusion.

Processing of findings

Oral traditions and music have always been an important, and vital, part of African culture. Music is used to express the common disposition, grievances, victories and pleas of the African people, and as these change so the music changes accordingly: " Any musical innovation is full of danger to the whole State, and ought to be prohibited; when modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the State always change with them."[1]

A popular mode of entertainment during the years spanning Apartheid, 1948-1994, was radio. The government of South Africa relied on the SABC, " SABC was stateâ€run, it was really the voice of the government. [...] Radio was a very powerful tool. It was manipulated, very seriously, to assist with the social engineering process in apartheid South Africa"[2]and later on <https://assignbuster.com/major-role-in-successful-resistance-against-apartheid-history-essay/>

Publications Act of 1974, to censor the music that was played on air. This meant that any undesirable songs that did not adhere to the government ideal of 'separate development' were banned: "[the government] succeeded in having its entire population, black and white, listen to its own radio service, theorized and programmed in accordance with state ideology"[3].

During the 1920's and 1930's South African township music was influenced by American 'vaudeville and minstrelsy shows'[4]and church choirs. By the mid-1930's popular culture began to have an impact on both the language and the musical styles of music. Musicians began to subtly and inexplicitly challenge the ideal of 'Separate Development'. Hence, African elements began to be incorporated into the American style of music as a political statement. " The content of the shift was to assert the belief that there was intrinsically a value in the adoption or incorporation of musical materials that were African"[5].

During the 1940's many musicians composed songs describing the Apartheid laws and how they affected their lives. One of these musicians was Molefe Pheto whose songs directly dealt with the conditions of his life due to the oppressive regimes of Apartheid.

In the 1950's songs became progressively interpreted as political. As the ANC increased their efforts to broaden their support, popular songs were founded on current events and the trends in protest. Musicians merged with all other political opposition and many protest songs were recorded and composed. These songs would inform the oppressed people and directly recommend a course of action/resistance. " the mass of ordinary township

people became politically conscious and active during the 1950s and, in turn, the commercial viability of politically oriented recordings increased considerably"[6]. An example of this is the bus boycott which occurred in August 1943, for nine days 15000 people walked miles to work rather than pay the increased bus fare. Songs were compiled, for example 'Azikhwelwa,' meaning 'We refuse to ride', and spread to encourage this successful form of resistance. In 1956, there was huge resistance against the forced possession of passes amongst the black community. Politicians were addressed directly. " Dorothy Masuka's 'uDr. Malan Unomthetho Onzima' (Dr. Malan's Government is Harsh) sold well and was even played on the South African Broadcasting Corporation's African reâ€ diffusion service before it was banned."[7]. These songs stimulated unity and endurance through tough times, such as the Treason Trials, and they provided a means with which to openly and frankly address their situations. The songs reflected their social reality and evidently music was an effective form of protest.

Many songs written were politically subversive through their texts (lyrics), musical style, or their use and function.[8]South African resistance groups held dances to raise funds for their fight against Apartheid and the music was used to further the political cause, despite not being directly political in text.

Often resistance songs were ambiguous as their texts did not convey the true meaning of the songs. When the vibrant, racially mixed people in Sophiatown were forced to separate under the Group Areas Act of 1950 and the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act of 1951, they composed songs that were completely ironic. " the ability of cryptic lyrics to accommodate multiple

<https://assignbuster.com/major-role-in-successful-resistance-against-apartheid-history-essay/>

interpretations is particularly useful in a repressive political climate. On occasion, a song's surface meaning thinly veils a coded message, whose interpretation can be reinforced by the performance context"[9]The government interpreted the songs as being " supportive of the Removal Programme"[10]. The song 'Meadowlands' became a protest anthem.

In the late 1950's and early 1960's the political climate of South Africa intensified as many brutal events took place. The Sharpeville Massacre took place on the 21 March, 1960, and was followed by stringent measures by the government to secure the end of the resistance movement. The ANC and DAC were outlawed and 169 political leaders were put on trial for treason. These left the black community traumatized and consequently the musical community was silenced. " music became an even more important weapon in the struggle as any possibility of open legitimate protest had come to an end after the Sharpeville massacre"[11]. This was exacerbated by the government-planned townships that the black people were forced to move into. They had a lack of venues and recreational amenities. Concerts were forbidden and gatherings were restricted to no more than three people.[12]

Music took on a mournful tone that portrayed the feelings of desolation and helplessness. The songs 'Senzeni Na?' and 'Thina Sizwe' became popular as any advancement in protest looked doubtful. These songs encouraged the black community to continue with their strife: " Can you imagine, that's one line, Senzeni Na?, 'what have we done?', repeated over and over and over... You have no other option but to stand up and go and fight"[13].

During the 1970's the political struggle increased momentum. At demonstrations and meetings protest songs were popular and widely sung. Through the improvised nature of group singing, the meanings of the songs were changed according to the circumstances. Live concerts played a big role in uniting the oppressed people of South Africa, " We could talk about these things during live shows, but we could not have anything on record that was against the government,"[14]as the musicians were able to express and sing their intended meaning of the songs, " Those who have earlier been privy to the more seditious interpretation will appreciate the hidden meaning of the innocuous version"[15], and through the use of puns and metaphors, " Shifty Records released a compilation album of politically subversive tunes called 'A Naatjie in Our Sosatie' (a tangerine in our kebab), a play on 'Anarchy in our Society'"[16], the government never picked up the intended meanings.

In Soweto in July 1976 was the pinnacle of the uprising. The Black Consciousness movement became important in the integration of African material as part of a political proclamation. This music, with or without lyrics, was important in building the pride and determination of the black people of South Africa. Instrumental pieces had just as much impact on the resistance movement as lyrical songs " Music can deliver its message without words. The most powerful anthem of the struggle in the 1980s was a song called 'Mannenberg' [also composed by Ibrahim], which had no words, it simply referred to a series of styles of music that was influenced by black culture,"[17].

During the 1980's, many artists began to defy the state directly, openly opposing the issues they experienced. The artist Mzwakhe Mbuli was one of the musicians and public speakers who challenged the government forthrightly. Militancy and aggression amongst the students and youth increased and their aim was to become 'ungovernable'. A popular opposition culture ensued, and the youth went to the forefront of resistance. " These circumstances were " reflected in the songs, because the songs had to articulate a new urgency"[18]. During July of 1985, the government declared a State of Emergency and the violence in the country amplified due to rebellion against the Tri-Cameral parliament that had been formed. Songs transformed appropriately, " the songs started taking on new overtones, changing a word here, changing a word there, putting in an AK[47] here, taking out a Bible there"[19], leading to an even further increase in willingness amongst the black people to fight : " these songs expressed not just the mood, but the political momentum of the time. The more radical the situation was becoming, the more militant many of these songs became"[20].

Toyitoyi, song and dance became a threatening confrontation of the government, " toyitoyi was like a weapon when you didn't have guns, didn't have teargas. It's a tool that we used in war"[21]. The aim was to compete with the state and additionally undermine its legitimacy. Music was used to advance political reform and build an alternative social reality for the oppressed people, " because you can't beat these people physically, you can scare [...] them with the songs"[22].

Musicians and bands began to racially integrate, creating new fusions of music: " mbaqanga with traditional Nguni song; Cape Coloured klopse idioms with bebop; marabi with electronic rock; Zulu guitar style with Cape Malay ghommaliédjies; or many other permutations"[23]. Music acted as an indicator of the popular sentiments of the people, and the interracial characteristic of music encouraged the new ideology of a democracy for all. " it is what these integrations discovered and made possible that was exciting and important, for, like their audiences, the bands were wholly non-racial, rejecting in their behaviour and commitment, centuries of racial and class dichotomy. Their music was an alchemy, helping, in its way, to corrode the old social order and to liberate the new"[24]An example is the superimposition of two anthems that traditionally signify two conflicting ideologies. " the official national anthem 'Die Stem van Suid-Afrika' [...] was discovered to be remarkably compatible with the banned African anthem 'Nkosi Sikelel'iAfrika' when superimposed harmonically or woven together"[25]

In the 1990's, after Nelson Mandela was released from prison, a largely accepted 'peace Song' was compiled by famous anti-Apartheid musicians; such as Hugh Masekela, Brenda Fassie and Yvonne Chaka Chaka. The financial earnings of this song went to the " Victims of Violence fund". It had widespread airplay and was largely supported.

Conclusion

Music's function began as merely 'mirroring' the unacceptable reality of the oppressed people of South Africa, but progressed into 'hammering' the social reality because opposing the state of affairs indicates the desire for a

<https://assignbuster.com/major-role-in-successful-resistance-against-apartheid-history-essay/>

different reality and change for good. Music reflected the political mood of the country; during the 1950's the increase of mass protest against pass laws, and the consequent escalation of the strict Apartheid regulations. The protest songs directly addressed the politicians concerned and portrayed the common grievances of the people. During the 1960's the sorrowful tone of music reflected the general sentiments of the black people after the Sharpeville Massacre and the banning of African leadership. With the growing censorship of music, songs began to have hidden meanings covering their politically subversive songs, but these were openly voiced at live concerts. During the 1980's the texts of songs displayed an insubordinate challenge of the government. Interracial musical fusion contradicted the ideology of the Apartheid regime. The 1990's saw a period of political reform and alteration which eventually led to victory in 1994, when Nelson Mandela became the first president of a democratic South African nation.