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"Raising your Voice": Black Female Music Artists Nina Simone's
and Miriam Makeba's Contributions to the American Civil Rights
Movement & the South African Anti-Apartheid Movement

verfasst von | submitted by
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Maybe you were made
for this very moment,
to walk bravely
through blazing fire,
and by grace,
come forth
as gold.

Morgan Harper Nichols

Abstract English

This master's thesis analyses the connection between social movements and music as a social and cultural phenomenon with a lasting impact as a non-violent protest tool, a means of empowerment, and facilitator of social change. The following text is a case study of two influential Black female artists who "raised their voices" within the context of two of the most important social movements of the 20th century: On the one hand the American Nina Simone, a prominent figure within the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, and on the other hand the South African Miriam Makeba, who played an important role as an exiled activist against the Apartheid regime in South Africa. Both musicians contributed to the respective movements in various impactful ways, particularly through songs that thematised the struggles of racial inequality in their home countries through which their fields of action, i.e. political engagement and music, were fused. This paper seeks to demonstrate that their activism within these movements had an ambivalent influence on their careers, their music and their personal lives, as well as on the political role of female artists. It aims to showcase the interwoven history of social movements and music in connection to the ever-present continuous problem of gender bias and racism on a national and international scale.

Abstract German

In dieser Masterarbeit wird der Zusammenhang zwischen sozialen Bewegungen und Musik untersucht, welche als nachhaltiges soziales und kulturelles Phänomen, sowie als friedliches Mittel zum Protest und Empowerment, als auch Förderungsmittel von sozialem Wandel angesehen wird. Die folgende Arbeit ist eine Fallstudie, die sich mit zwei bedeutenden Schwarzen Künstlerinnen befasst, welche im Kontext von zwei der wichtigsten sozialen Bewegungen des 20. Jahrhunderts ihre Stimmen erhoben: Zum einen die US-Amerikanerin Nina Simone, die eine prominente Gestalt innerhalb der Bürgerrechtsbewegung in den Vereinigten Staaten war, und zum anderen die Südafrikanerin Miriam Makeba, die aus dem Exil eine wichtige Rolle als Aktivistin gegen das Apartheid-Regime in Südafrika spielte. Beide Musikerinnen trugen auf vielfältige und bedeutsame Weise zur jeweiligen sozialen Bewegung bei. Dies geschah insbesondere durch Songs, in denen sie den Kampf gegen Rassenungleichheit in ihrem jeweiligen Heimatland thematisierten, wodurch ihre Handlungsräume, in diesem Fall ihr politisches Engagement und ihre Musik, verschmolzen. Mit dieser Masterarbeit soll gezeigt werden, dass ihr Aktivismus innerhalb dieser sozialen Bewegungen ihre Karrieren, ihre Musik sowie ihre Privatleben und die politische Rolle von Künstlerinnen ambivalent beeinflusste. Das Ziel ist hierbei, die verflochtene Geschichte von sozialen Bewegungen und Musik in Verbindung mit der anhaltenden Problematik geschlechtsspezifischer Diskriminierung gegenüber Frauen und Rassismus auf einer nationalen, sowie internationalen Ebene zu präsentieren.

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Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
MIA	Montgomery Improvement Association
MK	<i>Umkhonto we Sizwe</i>
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
UN	United Nations
US	United States
YMCA	Harlem Young Men's Christian Association

1. Introduction

In an age where users of social media can hardly escape trends on its various platforms and the viral sounds accompanying them, French singer Jain's worldbeat pop song "Makeba", originally released in 2015, stands out. Ranked as the song of the summer of 2023 on TikTok in the United States, the millions of videos created with the song playing in the background are no exception to the mass media content produced with trending music on the platform.¹ However, it is the message not only incorporated into the title but also the lyrics of the song that is simultaneously blatantly obvious and unnoticed or ignored by most of its listeners since the main association of the song is a dancing trend not its namesake, Miriam Makeba. Jain's clear homage to the South African artist and human rights activist Makeba, who she grew up listening to and admires², in the following lines, demonstrate the clear connection between Makeba's artistry and her activism against the oppressive Apartheid regime in her home country: "I want to see you sing / I want to see you fight / Because you are the real beauty of human right / [...] / Nobody can beat the Mama Africa / You follow the beat that she's going to give ya / Only her smile can all make it go / The sufferation of a thousand more".³ This is a clear indication for Makeba's persistent relevancy within the discussion around the global fight for human rights, as well as a nod to her musical genius. The new music trends on social media are mostly centred around short snippets of songs, in this case the song's catchy refrain that repeats "Makeba" multiple times, an unfortunate circumstance due to which the real meaning behind the song gets lost. Nonetheless, it is a longstanding tradition for music to have the capacity of being a socio-cultural mass phenomenon with a global impact. Whether it is more recent pop-cultural occurrences like the friendship bracelet trading happening at international pop icon Taylor Swift's *Eras Tour* concerts or the wide-ranging cultural significance of the *Woodstock Festival* of 1969, music has always had the ability to transcend its cultural confines and invite its listeners to become a part of something that could almost be termed larger than life. When considering the shared attributes of pop cultural trends and social movements, both can be a form of communication as well as elicit a feeling of collective identity, and mutually impact each other. The connection between social movements and music, in turn, can be attributed to the fact that while other art forms are also heavily influenced by and influential for social movements that demand social change and can

¹ Cf. 'TikTok Unveils First-Ever U.S. Songs of the Summer', Newsroom | TikTok, 16 August 2019, <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/tiktoks-us-songs-of-the-summer-2023>.

² Cf. 'Jain Is A Third Culture Kid Ready To Make Her Mark', The FADER, 04 November 2015, <https://www.thefader.com/2015/11/04/jain-makeba-interview>.

³ *Jain – Makeba*, Genius Lyrics, <https://genius.com/Jain-makeba-lyrics>.

be utilised as peaceful protest tools, music as well as protest are intrinsically performative. In some cases, music and social movements are intertwined, for instance in two of the most important social movements of the 20th century: The Civil Rights Movement fighting racial inequality, and to a lesser extent in the Struggle against the oppressive Apartheid regime and its racialised ideology of White supremacy. Nina Simone and Miriam Makeba were two influential Black female artists who “raised their voices” within the context of these movements. Both of them made valuable and impactful contributions to each movement, particularly by releasing songs that focussed on the struggles of racial inequality in their home countries.

This thesis derives its relevancy from the continuous global problem of racial inequality and attempts to combat it over the years have included peaceful protests tools such as protest songs. The song selection I present in this paper incorporates some of the more popular, as well as some of the more unknown protest songs Nina Simone and Miriam Makeba released throughout their careers, which have, as far as my research revealed, never been juxtaposed in the same academic text in as much detail. With this thesis, I thus intend to demonstrate that Simone’s and Makeba’s activism within these movements had an ambivalent influence on their careers, their music and their personal lives, as well as on the political role of female artists. Due the increasingly blurry lines between their artist and activist personas, this thesis aims to explore to what extent their fields of action, i.e. music and political engagement, were fused. Further I wish to contribute to a wider discussion about the historical interconnectedness of artistry and politics, as well as the importance of cultural contributions, in this case songs, in the fight for social change. In addition, with this case study of Nina Simone and Miriam Makeba, I want to raise awareness about the lack of recognition of contributions made by Black female artists who were at the same time activists, whose impact is not emphasised enough in the scholarly discussions about the development of social movements in the 20th century. Although they were not the political leaders of the movements they were involved in, they provided the soundtrack for it and encapsulated its messages into their lyrics, the importance of which should not be underestimated.

2. Methodology

In the following chapter, I will outline the methodology I applied while conducting my research for this master’s thesis, and explain my methodological choices in brief fashion. In order to truly grasp Nina Simone’s and Miriam Makeba’s involvement in the social movements they were playing an active role in, I decided that the most natural way to analyse

their contributions and involvement was to look at their music. Through their songs, both women were able to combine two of the fields of action in their lives, i.e., their artistry and their political activism. Therefore, the two research questions I formulated for my thesis are: *Which consequences did Nina Simone's and Miriam Makeba's activism or involvement within the movements have with regards to their music, their careers, and their lives?* (R1) and *What facilitated their political role and to what extent can we detect a fusion of their fields of action, i.e., politics/activism within a social movement, and music?* (R2). The aspects I aim to explore by answering these questions are the interconnectedness of music & politics, with music as a non-violent protest tool, as well as a means of empowerment & a facilitator of social change; both artists' motivation to create impactful music, and the meaning behind their songs, which is connected to the point that merely listening to Simone's and Makeba's music potentially led to an unconscious spread of the political messages of the time. In addition, I ultimately want to showcase an example of the interwoven history of social movements and music in connection to the continuing fight against inequality, racism, and gender bias on a global scale.

Structure-wise, a socio-historical contextualisation that will offer an overview of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle in South Africa will first serve as the essential backdrop for the ensuing chapters. In addition, I will briefly outline how (popular) music has been utilised as a facilitator of social change and introduce its collective identity shaping and communicative properties, especially in connection to freedom and protest songs in the Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle. For the main part of my analysis, I opted to investigate each artist individually but along the lines of the same structure. I first focussed on Simone's and Makeba's biographies, in particular what and which events in particular motivated or inspired them to become activists. Subsequently, I decided to make a selected variety of each artist's discography the heart of my thesis project. The song selection represents different themes connected to the social movements' characteristics, which include thematising inequality, racial and/or gendered stereotyping, threats of retaliation to the oppressor, remembrance, as well as emotions such as rage, despair, loss, and fear. The song analysis is then followed by a subchapter focused on further contributions each artist made to the movements in question and the consequences they had to face due to their involvement in them. After that, a juxtaposed discussion chapter showcases the differences & commonalities in Nina Simone's and Miriam Makeba's

activism. Finally, a concise conclusion sums up the most important points and establishes a connection to current related events.

In order to answer the two research questions, I opted to incorporate a qualitative research approach with a combination of a textual and narrative analysis of how each artist was revealing what messages and meanings through their songs, as well as an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to investigate and understand Simone's and Makeba's individual experiences during their active involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle. As mentioned above, I further included a thematic analysis to categorise the songs according to certain overlapping themes and to understand Simone's and Makeba's perspectives and possible inspirations for writing their songs better. I assembled my research corpus of primary sources by listening to the selected songs on Spotify as well as live performances on YouTube, and I also read/watched interviews of each artist, as well as their autobiographies and two documentaries, "Mama Africa: Miriam Makeba" (2011) and "What Happened, Miss Simone?" (2015) to get to know them better. My criteria for the song selection are explained in more detail in the respective chapter but in general they needed to exhibit a direct connection to prominent issues of the Civil Rights Movement and the struggle against Apartheid. All the findings and data collected this way were further supported by a thorough literature review of secondary sources that include monographies, collected editions, academic journal articles, newspaper articles and dissertations. My research process followed a pattern of snowball sampling, i.e., reading texts with a very specific focus on a certain topic and then looking at the references for further material, as well as making use of the library catalogues of the University of Vienna and the Bavarian State Library in Munich (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek). Some of the factors that I bore in mind during my research included the relevancy of the texts for my work, the recency of their date of publication, English as the preferred language of publication, as well as a peer-reviewed status. My thesis, and especially the analysis chapter, combines a profound reading of the selected primary and secondary sources, wherefore references to both were included in all chapters due to their equal importance. Since I have a background in history, rather than political science or law, I approached this topic from a socio-historical perspective. I intended to conduct a combined analysis of interpretive and analytical research, since my research topic and aims are subjective and thus potentially unique, especially the song selection, yet my research aims are more objective and look beyond my personal horizon. This also means I decided to use inductive research, i.e., a bottom-up approach as I have only a few songs, to go from specific

observations inside the music to more general conclusions. Therefore, I acknowledge that any meaning of the songs inferred by me, despite my taking into account of the context of production of the songs and having scholarly evidence retrieved from my secondary sources, can be classified as subjective and is thus open to interpretations. Furthermore, it is essential to highlight that there will be limitations to my work because I am aware of my positionality, which will be elaborated below. Furthermore, I would like to add a disclaimer that I intentionally capitalised the terms “Apartheid” and Civil Rights Movement”, as well as the racial indicators Black and White to differentiate between races and colours, and used the terms “Anti-Apartheid Struggle”, “Struggle against Apartheid” and Anti-Apartheid Movement” interchangeably, the latter of which is not connected to the specific Anti-Apartheid Movement originating in Britain in 1959.

3. State of Research

Throughout my research process, I was fortunate enough to encounter a multitude of relevant academic literature on the individual thematic aspects of this thesis. The densest scholarly material can be found on social movements in general, approached by many different scientific fields such as sociology and history, of which the latter is the relevant for this paper. In this connection, the two social movements in question, i.e., the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa have also been covered by many different renowned scholars and from a historical perspective, summarised for instance in Aldon D. Morris’ *A Retrospective On The Civil Rights Movement* (1999) and David Mermelstein’s *Anti-Apartheid Reader* (1986). Furthermore, there is plenty of material on Black music genres of the 19th and 20th century and their development, which is closely tied to social phenomena such as the aftermath of slavery or Black pride, and includes the overarching concept of protest music, as is explored, for example, in Jonathan C. Friedman’s *The Routledge History of Social Protest in Popular Music* (2013) or Mary Ellison’s *Lyrical Protest: Black Music's Struggle against Discrimination* (1989) or William H. McClendon’s *Black Music: Sound And Feeling For Black Liberation* (1976). Nonetheless, fewer academic literature can be found on Anti-Apartheid protest songs, which Malisa & Malange attribute to the marginalisation of African languages within scholarship.⁴ In turn, a lot of literature can be found on Nina Simone and Miriam Makeba individually, with a strong (South) African scholarly discussion about Makeba, for instance by Uche Onyebadi & Lindani Mbunyuza-

⁴ Mark Malisa and Nandipha Malange. "Songs for freedom: Music and the struggle against apartheid", in *The Routledge History of Social Protest in Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 305.

Memani, Eesuola Olukayode Segun & Victor Ojakorotu, and Khaya Mchunu & Busisiwe Memela. However, A. Loudermilk shone a light on the fact that Nina Simone has often been left out of more general Civil Rights Movement narratives, which can be confirmed by my research. Most of the secondary literature and online journalistic pieces on the two artists were published in the 2010s, the decade after both Nina Simone and Miriam Makeba had died, which is why there might have been a resurgence of interest in their persons, which would also explain the two documentaries on each artist: Liz Garbus's *What Happened, Miss Simone?* (2015) and *Mama Africa* by Mika Kaurismäki (2011). Naturally, a large variety of academic literature exists about Nina Simone and Miriam Makeba within the field of musicology, which is, however, not the foundation for the ensuing text.

Nonetheless, the research gap I identified is that there is hardly any material on the connection between the two artists Nina Simone and Miriam Makeba, who were not only contemporaries but friends. Ruth Feldstein, whose research specialisation lies in United States history, with a focus on 20th-century transnational culture and politics, women's and gender history, and African American history, is the exception in this regard, as she explored both Nina Simone's and Miriam Makeba's roles as *Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement* (2013) and refers to their friendship in a few instances.

4. Positionality

Over the last two years as a student of the international EMGS Master's Programme in Global Studies, I have questioned and become increasingly aware of my White, Eurocentric conditioning. This eventually inspired me to write my master's thesis about a topic that involves awareness about inherent inequalities tied to the ideology of White superiority, i.e., racism and racial ideologies that were used to justify not only segregation but racialised violence, which were then combatted with social movements such as the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle in South Africa.

Perhaps the most important factor that influences my positionality regarding this thesis is the fact that I am a White European woman and have thus never experienced discrimination based on the colour of my skin, and it is extremely unlikely that I ever will. When I decided to conduct research on a topic connected to such injustices, I was aware of the limitations my positionality entails from the start: I do not claim to have the same insight into some of the most fundamental aspects of my topic that Persons of Colour have. This does not necessarily undermine my work but clearly creates a different perspective, which I ask to be taken into consideration. I acknowledge that my perspective is observant instead of affected, however, I

have tried to research and present this topic to the best of my abilities and thereby hope to add to an extremely interesting and important, ongoing debate about the interwoven history of social movements and music in connection to the continuing fight against inequality, racism, and gender bias on a global scale.

I have discovered that the approach that lets me embrace my full potential as a researcher is a combination of historical, as well as literary research, which are often intertwined. In particular, it is the combination of the creative fields, such as music, and the fact-based, such as history, which fascinates me greatly and which is why this thesis revolves around a topic that lets me explore the interconnection of how (protest) music has had an impact on major historical events such as the social movements in question. The songs included in my research are primary sources with historical value and because of my personal interest in music it brings me great joy to be able to analyse them and, of course, the magnificent artists behind them, within this thesis.

5. Socio-Historical Contextualisation

5.1. The Civil Rights Movement in the United States of America

Timeline Civil Rights Movement

1954	17 May: <i>Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas</i>
1955	August: Murder of Emmett Till December: Rosa Parks & Montgomery Bus Boycott
1957	Civil Rights Act by President Dwight D. Eisenhower Founding of Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) 25 September: Little Rock School Integration Crisis
1960	1 February: Sit-in in Greensboro, North Carolina Formation of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) 6 May: Civil Rights Act
1961	President Kennedy's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity & Interstate Commerce Commission 4 May → Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)'s "Freedom Rides"
1963	Spring: Large scale campaign of sit-ins and marches in Birmingham, Alabama Arrest of Martin Luther King in Birmingham, Alabama, <i>Letter from Birmingham Jail</i> 12 June: Murder of Medgar W. Evers in Jackson, Mississippi June – August: Protests, demonstrations, boycotts in every urban area 28 August: March on Washington → "I Have a Dream" speech 15 September: 16 th Street Baptist Church bombing

	22 November: Assassination of JFK
1964	2 July: Civil Rights Act 4 August: Murder of three civil rights workers by segregationists in Mississippi October: MLK is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize
1965	Spring: Voter Registration Drive in Selma, Alabama 21 February: Malcolm X assassination in NYC 7 March: March from Selma to Montgomery → Voting Rights Act 11 August: Disorder in Los Angeles (6 days and 34 deaths)
1966	October: Black Panther Party for Self-Defense founded in California
1967	May – October: Most racial disturbances in US history (40+ outbreaks)
1968	4 April: Assassination of MLK in Memphis, Tennessee 11 April: Fair Housing Act 5 November: Election of Shirley Chisholm

Despite the clear links between the emergence and the development of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and the accumulation of racial injustice and inequalities that spanned several hundred years, it would take a separate thesis to guarantee an appropriate overview of the history of the manifold inequalities against Black people, Native Americans, and People of Colour in the United States of America, as well as their versatile ways of resistance over the centuries. Therefore, the socio-historical contextualisation for this particular topic starts with the Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* on May 17, 1954. By then, the White population of the Southern States, where the history of slavery was still deeply engrained, had built what Morris, a renowned scholar of race, social movements, and social inequality, terms “tripartite system of domination”: it refers to the economic, political, and personal control of Black people in the urban and rural areas.⁵ Therefore, the verdict was monumental because it ruled that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal”⁶, which consequently outlawed racial segregation in public schools, and thereby reversed the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) Supreme Court decision that had been in place until then. The latter was part of the Jim Crow laws, which entailed “[...] any of the laws that enforced racial segregation in the South between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and the beginning of the civil rights movement in the 1950s.”⁷ It ruled that “separate but

⁵ Cf. Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement : Black Communities Organizing for Change*. (New York: Free Pr. u.a., 1984), 1.

⁶ ‘Separate but Equal | Definition, History, Plessy v. Ferguson, Brown v. Board of Education, & Facts | Britannica’, 31 July 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/separate-but-equal>.

⁷ ‘Jim Crow Law | History, Facts, & Examples | Britannica’, 19 July 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Jim-Crow-law>.

equal” facilities for Black American citizens were no violation of the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution, which guaranteed equal civil and legal rights to African Americans and formerly enslaved people in 1868, and was, in practice, a lie.⁸ However, after the success of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, the racially motivated murder of the Black teenager Emmett Till in Mississippi caused nationwide uproar the following year, especially since the two White men who committed the crime were found not guilty for the lynching. Morris explains: “The crime was extremely brutal, and it was a reminder to the Black community that whites would utilize all means, including murder, to uphold Jim Crow.”⁹ Apart from the horrible truth that lynchings were not an unusual cause for grief in the Black community, the Black press as well as Till’s mother sought to attract more national publicity to the brutality of the racial crime committed and the injustice of the murderers walking free.¹⁰ The national attention given to the case not only influenced political debates of the time, but also mobilised young Black people: “Many of them began embracing ideas of activism because they themselves felt vulnerable. They were well aware that the white community and many adults within the black community refused to fight for justice. Thus, the Till lynching pushed them toward political activism.”¹¹

Until then, the fight against racial segregation, among other aspects, in education, had been sustained by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), an interracial, Northern-based protest organisation of bureaucratic nature, founded in 1909/1910, and mostly made up of intellectuals and educated professionals.¹² Their primary tactics included legal action and (educational) efforts of persuading the White population to adopt a more positive public opinion of Black people by combatting prevalent inferiority stereotypes.¹³ However, as Morris points out, the NAACP’s origin was not within the Black community, thus the Black masses had no involvement in the organisation’s shaping¹⁴, which was, in turn, the case with the Civil Rights Movement. Rosa Parks, who worked as a secretary for an NAACP branch in Montgomery, is often named as its “mother” as her refusal to stand up for a White passenger on a segregated Bus in Alabama in 1955 and her subsequent arrest were the catalyst for the Montgomery Bus Boycott that lasted for over a

⁸ ‘Separate but Equal | Definition, History, Plessy v. Ferguson, Brown v. Board of Education, & Facts | Britannica’.

⁹ Aldon D. Morris, ‘A Retrospective On The Civil Rights Movement: Political and Intellectual Landmarks’, *Annual Review of Sociology* 25, no. 1 (August 1999): 521. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.25.1.517.1999>.

¹⁰ Cf. Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 522.

¹² Cf. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 12-13.

¹³ Cf. Ibid., 13.

¹⁴ Cf. Ibid.

year. This brought more attention to the young Baptist pastor Martin Luther King, Jr., who was part of a social movement organisation involved in the boycott, the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), which was church and Black community based. Since the boycott had been successful and bus segregation in Alabama was declared unconstitutional¹⁵, it revealed that firstly, mass mobilisation and collective action against racial segregation was not only possible but effective, secondly that nonviolent direct action like civil disobedience was needed for the protest not to be met with violence, and thirdly that the Black Church played a pivotal, and autonomous role in providing a Black mass base and a cultural aspect in the form of worship song.¹⁶ The MIA was an earlier branch of what would emerge as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957. King's charisma and oratory soon made him the leading figure of the movement and as president of the SCLC, a fusion of political activism and the Black church for practical as well as ideological reasons, he sought to organise nonviolent protest activities as part of a movement across the South. The organisation gave him a platform to address crowds and get in touch with civil rights activists inside and outside the US. Also in 1957, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the Civil Rights Act of 1957 into law, which included provisions for the protection of voting rights.¹⁷ That year, Eisenhower also sent US troops to protect nine African American high school students prevented from entering their school and harassed as part of the integration crisis in Little Rock, Arkansas. In 1960, the nonviolent protest action was extended to sit-ins, which resulted in the founding of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and Eisenhower ratified the Civil Rights Act of 1960, which was to further protect Black voting rights through federal inspection of voter registration polls.¹⁸ Another direct action organisation against racial discrimination connected to sit-ins was the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), founded in 1942, which had so-called "Freedom Riders" (student volunteers) testing the implementation of anti-segregation laws in the South in 1961, who were met with violence wherever they went.¹⁹ John F. Kennedy became president in the same year and ordered the Interstate Commerce Commission to increase the segregation ban guidelines for interstate travel, and initiated the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity to guarantee racially unbiased hiring and employment chances.²⁰

¹⁵ Morris, "A Retrospective On The Civil Rights Movement", 525.

¹⁶ Ibid., 524f.

¹⁷ Cf. 'Civil Rights Act of 1957 - Civil Rights Digital Library', https://crdl.usg.edu/events/civil_rights_act_1957.

¹⁸ Cf. 'Civil Rights Era - Timeline - Jim Crow Museum', <https://jimcrowmuseum.ferris.edu/timeline/civilrights.htm>.

¹⁹ Cf. 'Freedom Rides | History, Definition, Map, Facts, & Significance | Britannica', 22 July 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Freedom-Rides>.

²⁰ Cf. Civil Rights Era - Timeline - Jim Crow Museum'.

The Civil Rights Movement gained serious momentum in the early to mid-1960s when huge protests consisting of disruptive tactics such as marches and sit-ins were launched by the SCLC in the heavily segregated Birmingham, Alabama, in the spring of 1963. They were met with violence, resulting in the arrest of thousands of protesters, among them Martin Luther King, which prompted him to write his subsequent *Letter from Birmingham Jail* in which he defended the principles of civil disobedience.²¹ The protests increased throughout the summer after the murder of civil rights activist Medgar W. Evers in Jackson, Mississippi, and culminated in the *March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom* on August 28, where King held his famous “I Have A Dream” speech in front of 250 thousand people gathered at the Lincoln Memorial. Barely three weeks later, four young Black girls, Denise McNair, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Roberston and Addie Mae Collins, were murdered in Birmingham, Alabama on September 15th, 1963, as a bomb planted by the Ku Klux Klan went off during their bible study, known as the 16th Street Baptist Church Bombing. However, the summer of 1964 at last brought some positive change with the Movement’s Freedom Summer Project to boost voter registration in Mississippi and when the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed any segregation in public facilities and discrimination in employment, was signed into action by President Lyndon B. Johnson, who had come into office after Kennedy’s assassination. Despite further lynchings against civil rights workers, such as in Mississippi, the movement had by then generated international attention and outrage about the brutal violence against Black Americans. Consequently, King’s dedication to combat these injustices in a nonviolent manner was honoured with the Nobel Peace Prize. Nonetheless, the second half of the decade entailed more highs and lows for the Civil Rights Movement: Martin Luther King’s Voter Registration Drive in Selma, Alabama, at the beginning of 1965 saw thousands of protesters jailed, and resulted in the March from Selma to Montgomery at the beginning of March, not long after Malcolm X, who was a leading Black nationalist figure and had been critical of the nonviolent movement, was assassinated in New York City. There was no way to avoid this ongoing crisis any longer, so the aftermath of the Birmingham and Selma led to a fundamental change to the national legislation: The Voting Rights Act of 1965, which, along with the 1964 Civil Rights Act not only enfranchised Black Americans but put an end to the Jim Crow regime.²² But soon after disorder broke out in Los Angeles, which claimed many lives, and those not content with the nonviolent Movement and its “limited” ambitions had

²¹ Cf. ‘The Civil Rights Movement | The Post War United States, 1945-1968 | U.S. History Primary Source Timeline | Classroom Materials at the Library of Congress | Library of Congress’, , <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/post-war-united-states-1945-1968/civil-rights-movement/>.

²² Morris, “A Retrospective On The Civil Rights Movement”, 527.

since seceded into a more militant direction, for instance the Black Panther Party in 1966 and the following year saw the highest number of racial disturbances in US history. Then, the movement came to an abrupt halt on 4 April, 1968, when Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, followed by an unprecedented shock and nationwide violent riots. The only upside to the end of the 1960s were the Fair Housing Act coming into force the week after King's untimely death, as well as the election of Shirley Chisholm as the first Black congresswoman in November. There is no denying the fact that the Civil Rights Movement was trailblazing for social movements and collective action to come, especially regarding the civil disobedience and protest tactics it employed, and its achievements, just like its lasting impact should not be underestimated. To cite Morris's concluding remarks, it "[...] revealed that that agency resides in Black social networks, institutions, organizations, cultures, and leaders, and in the creativity of a people who have had to engage in a chain of struggles to survive relentless oppression and to maintain their dignity."²³

5.2. The Anti-Apartheid Struggle in South Africa

Resistance against Apartheid Timeline

1949	African National Congress's (ANC's) Programme of Action
1952	Defiance Campaign launched by the ANC & the Communist Party
1954	ANC calls for boycott of new Bantu Education schools
1955	"Freedom Charter" of the Congress Alliance
1956	Start of the Treason Trial (went on until 1961)
1959	Formation of Pan Africanist Congress (PAC)
1960	21 March: Sharpeville Massacre → Turning Point 08 April: Ban of ANC and PAC Formation of an ANC military wing <i>Umkhonto we Sizwe</i> (MK) Formation of a PAC military wing <i>Poqo</i>
1963	9 October: Start of Rivonia Trial against anti-Apartheid activists
1964	12 June: Leaders of the resistance, such as Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu, were sentenced to life imprisonment
1969	Start of Black Consciousness Movement by Steve Biko
1972	Black Peoples Convention (BPC)
1973	Black Trade Unions strikes

²³ Morris, "A Retrospective On The Civil Rights Movement", 538.

	30 November: Adoption of the Apartheid Convention by the United Nations General Assembly
1976	16 June: Start of Soweto Uprising 18 July: Legal recognition of Apartheid Convention
1977	Death of Steve Biko in prison Mandatory UN Security Council embargo on the export of arms to South Africa
1989	15 October: Release of Walter Sisulu
1990	11 February: Release of Nelson Mandela
1994	April: First Democratic Election → Mandela becomes president

The history of exploitative colonial oppression in connection with racialised ideologies on the African continent spans many centuries and is still deeply rooted in the identities of the independent African nations that emerged from colonial tyranny in the second half of the 20th century. Contrary to this trend of decolonisation, South Africa was not free for a long time, which is why the following chapter aims to give a suitable overview of the process of the struggle against South Africa's last oppressor, the Apartheid regime. The socio-historical background for this chapter of South African history begins long before the National Party came into power in 1948, but unfortunately the scope of this paper does not allow a more extensive contextualisation. It is, however, important to state beforehand that racial segregation measures were not introduced during Apartheid, but during South Africa's industrialisation, and then revived in a different form in 1948.²⁴ In addition, Black protest tradition and African political organisations did not only surface with the resistance against Apartheid, neither with the foundation of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1912 but can be traced back to the late 19th century.²⁵

South Africa's dark chapter of the Apartheid era began when the White minority National Party, whose campaign consisted mainly of Afrikaner²⁶ nationalism and playing on White power anxieties, won control of the South African Parliament in 1948. What they established over the next years was a perfidious system of codified racial segregation and labour control that divided the country into racial categories and adhered to an ideology of "apartness" in English or "Apartheid" in their native language Afrikaans with a White

²⁴ Cf. Nigel Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa : Conquest, Apartheid, Democracy*, 5. ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 88.

²⁵ Cf. Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, 88.

²⁶ Afrikaners are an ethnic group descending from the Dutch colonial settlers in South Africa.

superiority engrained in the division of society. Many legislative measures were adopted straight away to cement the new system, for instance the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) to outlaw racial mixing, the Population Registration Act (1950) to categorise every South African according to their race, or the Group Areas Act (1950) to establish residential separation.²⁷ Just as quick as the implementation of these laws was the ANC's reaction to them, first with its Youth League's Programme of Action (1949): "It called for 'national freedom' and political independence from white domination [...] together with rejection of all forms of segregation and the use of weapons of boycott, civil disobedience and strike."²⁸ The next step to protest these new laws was the "Defiance Campaign" of civil disobedience that was launched in 1952 by the ANC and South Africa's Communist Party and where Black South Africans entered segregated places and did not resist their subsequent arrests: "This nonviolent campaign was designed to protest apartheid regulations and court arrest through passive resistance. Within months, white authorities arrested over 5,000 activists."²⁹ The aim was to garner public attention and finally force the Apartheid government to abolish those laws. On the one hand, this showed that the ANC's supporters were committed and unafraid of their activism's consequences, on the other hand that their protest was becoming a mass movement.³⁰ In the following year, the Bantu Education Act required Black South African children to attend state-run schools that trained them for jobs suitable for their race, such as manual labour and menial jobs, instead of providing a solid education³¹, which was followed by a call from the ANC to boycott such schools. Moreover, in 1955 the Congress Alliance, an alliance between the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Indian Congress (SANC), the South African Congress of Democrats, the Coloured People's Organization, and the South African Council of Trade Unions, brought forth the Congress of the People Campaign with its Freedom Charter, for which demands from Black South Africans had been collected and were now presented. The Charter contained a basic set of principles, which also became the ANC's ideology, and a vision for a multi-racial society in South Africa. However, since it was viewed as potential treason, the Apartheid authorities arrested members of the

²⁷ Cf. Charles Hamm, *Afro-American Music, South Africa, and Apartheid*, ISAM Monographs 28 (New York: Inst. for Studies in American Music, Conservatory of Music, Brooklyn College of the City Univ. of New York, 1988), 17.

²⁸ Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, 95.

²⁹ Ruth Feldstein, "'Africa's Musical Ambassador': Miriam Makeba and the 'Voice of Africa' in the United States", in *How It Feels to Be Free: Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Ruth Feldstein (Oxford University Press, 2013), 58, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195314038.003.0003>.

³⁰ Cf. Ibid.

³¹ Cf. 'Apartheid | South Africa, Definition, Facts, Beginning, & End | Britannica', 7 September 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/apartheid>.

Congress Alliance in 1956, claiming they conspired to overthrow the state.³² The ensuing Treason Trial dragged on for five years, the state's case was eventually overturned and the accused, among them Nelson Mandela, acquitted. In the meantime, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) was formed as there was a rift between those who envisioned post-Apartheid South Africa as multi-racial and those who wanted it to turn into an Africans only state.³³ The following year brought one of the greatest tragedies of the South African resistance movement, the Sharpeville Massacre, and it is one of the cruellest, yet important markers of the history of Apartheid. On March 21st of 1960, the PAC organised an abortive protest campaign against the existing pass laws according to which Black South Africans were obligated to always carry a pass with them.³⁴ After several thousand protesters had peacefully marched to the police station in Sharpeville and presented themselves for arrest without passes but refused to disperse, what started as a peaceful protest action deteriorated terribly: When tear gas and other means of intimidation did not work, the situation got out of control when the police started firing at protesters out of panic. Most of them were hit in the back while they were fleeing the scene, not charging at the police officers, and almost 70 protesters died.³⁵ The massacre became a turning point because its immediate aftermath entailed nationwide strikes, a ban of both the ANC and the PAC, and the realisation that nonviolent protest might not be the solution after all.³⁶ As a consequence both parties formed military wings for armed resistance, the ANC's *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) and the PAC's *Poqo*. In the following years, many acts of sabotage were committed by both the ANC and the PAC, who also sent members out of the country to garner solidarity and support, and gather resources against the Apartheid regime from abroad. In 1962, however, a large scale arrest, especially at the MK headquarters, eventually led to the Rivonia Trial where the following leaders of the resistance against Apartheid were accused of treason and guerilla warfare: Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Ahmed Kathrada, Denis Goldberg, Raymond Mhlaba, Elias Motsoaledi, Andrew Mlangeni. Large crowds gathered to witness the Trial, either inside the courtroom, or on the streets, where they showed their support. Perhaps the most famous incident of the Trial was Mandela three hour long "Speech from the Dock" on April 20th 1963, concluding with the following statement:

³² Cf. Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, 115.

³³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 116.

³⁴ Cf. Gail M. Gerhart, "Massacre at Sharpeville, 1960" In *The Anti-Apartheid Reader. The Struggle Against White Racist Rule in South Africa* ed. David Mermelstein (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1987 [1977]), 213.

³⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 214-215.

³⁶ Cf. Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, 116.

I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.³⁷

Not even two months later, Mandela and most of the other accused were found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment. With their leaders in prison and the parties both banned, it became increasingly difficult for the remaining members of the ANC and the PAC, many of whom were in exile, to effect change in South Africa, as they were excluded from the internal developments.³⁸ Meanwhile, the Apartheid regime was confronted with international pressure, for instance by the UN's Adoption of the Apartheid Convention by the United Nations General Assembly and a mandatory UN Security Council embargo on the export of arms to South Africa. The South African local resistance that obtained momentum in the 1970s was the Black Consciousness Movement, a student movement started by Steve Biko in 1969. This mobilisation of the younger generation led to rallies and protests of school students, most famously the devastating Soweto Uprising that started on June 16th, 1976 and marked another turning point in the Struggle against Apartheid. Soweto was a township complex near Johannesburg, ruled by poverty and lack of infrastructure.³⁹ Thousands of Black South African students took to the streets to protest the introduction of Afrikaans as the official language in their classrooms instead of their native languages.⁴⁰ Opposition against the Bantu Education policy had been growing steadily in Soweto schools⁴¹ since Afrikaans was not just any other language; it was the language of Apartheid, of their oppressor, and thus another means of subjecting Black South Africans to the apartheid regime's rules. First, the students marched peacefully through Soweto while singing freedom songs, chanting slogans, and holding up placards. Unfortunately, the demonstration took a tragic turn when the situation grew more hostile after efforts to disperse the thousands of students were unsuccessful and the students resorted to violence, for instance by throwing bricks, after the police had opened fire on the protesting children quite early on with an estimated death toll in the hundreds.⁴² The following decade was characterised by protests all over the country and a continuous growth

³⁷ 'Biography of Nelson Mandela – Nelson Mandela Foundation', <https://www.nelsonmandela.org/biography>.

³⁸ Cf. Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, 125.

³⁹ Cf. Uche T. Onyebadi, and Lindani Mbunyuza-Memani. "Women and South Africa's Anti-Apartheid Struggle: Evaluating the Political Messages in the Music of Miriam Makeba," in *Music as a Platform for Political Communication*, ed. Uche T. Onyebadi (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2017), 42.

⁴⁰ Cf. Alan Brooks and Jeremy Bruckhill. "The Soweto Uprising, 1976", in *The Anti-Apartheid Reader. The Struggle Against White Racist Rule in South Africa* ed. David Mermelstein (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1987 [1980]), 228f.

⁴¹ Cf. Ibid.

⁴² Cf. Ibid., 230.

in resistance against Apartheid's oppression, which is why the regime declared a state of emergency in 1985/86. At the turn of the 1980s, new hope emerged at a time of heightened political violence: Walter Sisulu's release marked the beginning of the reversal of the ban on anti-Apartheid organisations such as the ANC and the PAC, which culminated in the release of Nelson Mandela on February 11th, 1990. However, despite the gradual end of the Apartheid oppression, which was formalised with the ANC's win of South Africa's first democratic election in April 1994 and Mandela's presidency, the years up until that point were the most violent of the whole struggle.

6. Music as a Facilitator of Social Change

The decade of the 1960s saw a multitude of important social movements demanding a change in society, and sometimes even a revolution. These include the Civil Rights Movement, second wave feminism, the Black Power Movement, and the Hippie movement. The Struggle against Apartheid in South Africa was another movement abroad that was ongoing in the 1960s. What unites these movements apart from the fact that they were challenging existing societal structures, is a strong connection to music, which was an essential component of many of the movements listed above. Olukayode Segun & Ojakorotu, professors of politics and international relations from Nigeria and South Africa respectively, highlight that this is particularly prominent when politics, for instance those of a social movement, are combined with popular music, as it, in contrast to more specific genres, encompasses the largest mass of people.⁴³ Naturally, one of the main goals of a social movement is spreading its messages or uncomfortable truths and raising awareness about it to as many people as possible, wherefore "the most widely enjoyed form of human communication"⁴⁴ is an efficient tool to use. An especially potent way to do this, according to the US-American historian Friedman, is performance, and he adds: "A song's poetry and music can change reality, maybe not by immediately resulting in changes in law, but by having a deeper impact on the society that makes laws."⁴⁵ Street continues this point by arguing that contrary to an established assumption about the relationship between music and politics as one where music "[...]

⁴³ Cf. Eesuola Olukayode Segun and Victor Ojakorotu, 'Indigenised Popular Songs for Oppositional Political Communication : Fela Kuti and Miriam Makeba in Perspectives', *African Renaissance* 16, no. 1 (20 March 2019): 248, <https://doi.org/10.31920/2516-5305/2019/V16n1a12>.

⁴⁴ Steven H. Chaffee, 'Popular Music And Communication Research: An Editorial Epilogue', *Communication Research* 12, no. 3 (July 1985): 413, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365085012003013>.

⁴⁵ Jonathan C. Friedman, *The Routledge History of Social Protest in Popular Music*, Routledge Histories (New York: Routledge, 2013), xv.

form[ed] the packaging, not the substance, of the political activity”⁴⁶, it is instead one of reciprocal shaping: “The music was a product of politics, just as the politics was a product of music.”⁴⁷ This can be supported by the fact that in some cases, this not only lead to song lyrics written about the political messages the movement intended to convey to its participants but to the emergence or redefinitions of genres, for instance freedom or protest songs, as well as the use of lyrics as political slogans, such as “We Shall Overcome”. In addition, music attracts and positively impacts the formation of a collective identity among movement participants, for instance through rituals like singing together, which simultaneously (re-)produces and empowers a cultural community.⁴⁸ Onyebadi & Mbunyuza-Memani, whose fields of research lie in journalism and mass communication respectively, attribute the inspirational qualities of music within a political setting to a “high level of emotional consciousness and investment in a cause”⁴⁹, which music generates. This consequently triggers the need to act and thus “[...] music becomes a vehicle through which people are entertained or persuaded to adopt certain positions on a number of topical issues of the day.”⁵⁰ Therefore, the following two subchapters provide a brief introduction of the emergence of freedom and protest song culture in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-Apartheid Movement and give an overview of the role music plays in collective identity formation or shaping, as well as of its communicative properties.

6.1. Moved for Change – Collective Identity Shaping & Communicative Properties of (Popular) Music

Music is not only a cultural phenomenon but a type of communication, for instance between a singing artist and their listening audience. Steven H. Chaffee, a renowned scholar of mass media and political communication and their effects on society, highlights the power of simplicity embedded in the communicative properties of music as the “most universal mass communication behavior, requiring neither literacy nor advanced electronic media”.⁵¹ James Lull, another important contributor to communication studies, points out the capacity of music to be an agent of social utility and a source of entertainment, but particularly assesses the symbolic messages conveyed by the artist to its receiver, i.e., the audience, through musical

⁴⁶ John Street, “‘Fight the Power’: The Politics of Music and the Music of Politics”, *Government and Opposition* 38, no. 1 (2003): 122.

⁴⁷ Street, “‘Fight the Power’”, 124.

⁴⁸ Cf. Jasmine A. Mena and P. Khalil Saucier, “‘Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood’: Nina Simone’s African Womanism”, *Journal of Black Studies* 45, no. 3 (April 2014): 251, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934714528512>.

⁴⁹ Onyebadi and Mbunyuza-Memani, “Women and South Africa’s Anti-Apartheid Struggle”, 33.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Chaffee, ‘Popular Music And Communication Research’, 416.

expression as profound.⁵² Other non-verbal aspects that can be communicated through music are, for instance, emotions, often discernible by the tempi, pitch, or volume employed by artists. For this paper, however, the capacity of music to function as a catalyst for collective identity formation is even more important as it is an essential aspect of social movements and impacts their success. Following Danaher, a sociologist, “[a] collective identity is formed when groups seeking social change share common ideological, normative, and cultural goals.”⁵³ He further demonstrates that this is often related to rituals the participants of a movement enact together and by bringing people together, for example through singing, music also possesses the ritualistic qualities beneficial for community and solidarity building.⁵⁴ While these ritual interactions facilitate a space to come together to share and express oneself in the presence of those experiencing mutual things, it is often song lyrics that “[...] reflect the feelings underlying a particular social movement culture beyond an individual level by framing key issues, making them politically important and leading to a collective consciousness.”⁵⁵ Although this consciousness and a deep social solidarity might already exist without the musical context, especially regarding social movements of marginalised groups, Eyerman & Jamison, a sociologist and a professor of Technology, Environment and Society, argue that “[b]y becoming sources of empowerment, education, and “consciousness-raising,” musical expression can thus serve as a form of exemplary social action.”⁵⁶ According to their research, the relationship between social movements and music, which can be connected to popular culture, is reciprocal: “Movements, through their activists and their activities, are both consumers and producers, takers and shapers, of popular culture.”⁵⁷ This can be attested by the fact that fans of artists are often associated with or even perceived as cultural representatives of values or messages that go beyond the music.

6.2. Freedom / Protest Songs in the Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle

Civil Rights Movement

Music has a fundamental value within the construction of a Black cultural identity in the United States. This can be traced back to the centuries of when slavery forbade the development of anything of the kind. Hobson, a professor of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality

⁵² Cf. James Lull, ‘On The Communicative Properties Of Music’, *Communication Research* 12, no. 3 (July 1985): 364, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365085012003008>.

⁵³ William F. Danaher, ‘Music and Social Movements: Music and Social Movements’, *Sociology Compass* 4, no. 9 (September 2010): 812, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2010.00310.x>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 817.

⁵⁶ Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1998), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511628139>, 78.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 109.

Studies, therefore directly connects North American Black music to the protest tradition that developed during those years and through which African culture was to be preserved.⁵⁸ The themes that were processed through song contained individual as well as common human experiences, such as romance, but also grievances unique to the Black community, such as racial violence within the “Jim Crow” era. These grievances of the Black communities in the South were communicated via spirituals during slavery and later through the blues, which belongs to the Black folksong genre, and were often coded to not arouse suspicion about its contents at a time when lynching was common.⁵⁹ Following Turner, who specialises in Musicology, Women’s and Gender Studies, “[...] rather than becoming paralyzed by the terror, the blues became a creative outlet for blacks to emote in [relative] safety behind the language of everyday scenarios and concerns.”⁶⁰ The important role of the (segregated) church as a place of unity untainted by White interference within the Black American communities went hand in hand with the importance of music, as it constituted a large part of the religious experience. This resulted in the emergence of the gospel blues, a genre that built the foundation for the freedom songs of the Civil Rights Movement, along with traditional spirituals. Eyerman & Jamison elaborate that the church connection naturally included identificatory potential and helped to establish a sense of belonging to one big community: “Music served as a source and sign of strength, solidarity, and commitment. It helped build bridges between class and status groups, between blacks and white supporters, and between rural and urban, northern and southern blacks. It also bridged the gap between leaders and followers [...]”.⁶¹ This is especially relevant given the context that the Civil Rights Movement’s leading figure was the Baptist minister Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who also underlined the significance of song within the Movement: “The freedom songs are playing a strong and vital role in our struggle [...] They give the people new courage and a sense of unity. I think they keep alive a faith, a radiant hope, in the future, particularly in our most trying hours.”⁶² The songs that were thus struck up during protest marches of the Civil Rights Movement were often the same songs that its participants sang together at church and therefore well-known and easy to join. The goal was not to create songs that had chart

⁵⁸ Janell Hobson, ‘Everybody’s Protest Song: Music as Social Protest in the Performances of Marian Anderson and Billie Holiday’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 33, no. 2 (January 2008): 445, <https://doi.org/10.1086/521057>.

⁵⁹ Cf. Katherine L. Turner, “Sonic opposition: protesting racial violence before Civil Rights” in *The Routledge history of social protest in popular music*, ed Jonathan Friedman (New York: Routledge, 2013), 47.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Eyerman and Jamison, *Music and Social Movements*, 98.

⁶² ‘Songs and the Civil Rights Movement | The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute’, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/songs-and-civil-rights-movement>.

potential but to have a means to generate shared performance and convey the movement's ideals and objectives.⁶³ Nevertheless, while there were "[...] relatively few attempts to use music as an instrument of education, enlightenment and possibly even mobilization for those not already in, or close to, the struggle"⁶⁴, musicologist Kernodle insists that its main value lay less in the coordinating movement activities, and much rather in the articulation of where the activists' motivation originated.⁶⁵

Anti-Apartheid Struggle

In South Africa, culture, and more specifically music was also an important means of collective resistance against the overlying racial inequality and discrimination of the Apartheid regime, but especially against the destruction of cultural coherence among Black South Africans to crush any kind of collective identity formation.⁶⁶ One form of musical expression of the time were struggle or freedom songs, even though Rhetoric Studies specialist Nkoala proposes to rather use the term "songs of hope and struggle": "This is because over and above expressing 'resistance' to some form of oppression, these songs are about 'projecting hope' for the day when the oppression will be no more."⁶⁷ Another crucial characteristic of these songs is to record and hand down information about historical events in line with the tradition of oral history. This was particularly powerful when articulated in African or tribal languages like Zulu or Xhosa, so as to not lose original meanings through translations, but also in English as the use of any other language apart from Afrikaans could be deemed an act of political opposition.⁶⁸ Another reason to not use the language of the oppressors but rather one they did not understand in songs protesting Apartheid was the general awareness about the ruthless consequences public opposition could entail. To maintain historical accuracy, and because the Struggle against Apartheid lasted for many decades, the songs were adapted to illustrate the feelings and conditions of the time, which could also entail a changed meaning.⁶⁹ Apart from that, general themes that can be identified within these songs are the demand for change and a transformation of South Africa, poverty and other sufferings, but also unity and endurance, as well as direct addresses to politicians.

⁶³ Cf. Eyerman and Jamison, *Music and Social Movements*, 102f.

⁶⁴ Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding*, 1. ed. (London: Routledge, 2012), 293, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203214459>.

⁶⁵ Cf. Tammy L. Kernodle, "'I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free': Nina Simone and the Redefining of the Freedom Song of the 1960s", *Journal of the Society for American Music* 2, no. 3 (August 2008): 296 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196308080097>.

⁶⁶ Cf. Mary Ellison, *Lyrical Protest: Black Music's Struggle against Discrimination*, Media and Society Series (New York: Praeger, 1989), 149.

⁶⁷ Sisanda Nkoala, 'Songs That Shaped the Struggle : A Rhetorical Analysis of South African Struggle Songs', 2013, 10, <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:41342925>.

⁶⁸ Cf. Olukayode Segun and Ojakorotu, 'Indigenised Popular Songs for Oppositional Political Communication', 249.

⁶⁹ Cf. Nkoala, 'Songs That Shaped the Struggle', 8.

Nkoala further stresses the persuasive aspect of struggle songs, which, for instance, increased group cohesion, boosted morale, and reaffirmed the messages imbedded in them: “Other than in instances where people were directly marching against apartheid authorities, and thus subsequently singing to these authorities, when groups gathered to sing struggle songs, they were in essence singing to themselves.”⁷⁰ Malisa & Malange, coming from Education and Cultural Studies and government consultancy, however, add one important detail in their investigation of South African freedom songs: While these songs were a call to action, the action changed in accordance with the movement over time, from peaceful to armed. They stress, however, that because of the potentially violent messages in them, many of these songs have since been excluded from a historical discussion of the contribution of music to fight Apartheid, probably to avoid hindering the process of reconciliation after the end of the Apartheid era.⁷¹ This is an unfortunate decision as these songs are important historical sources and were highly efficient, which they stress by incorporating a quote by Mandela on the importance of music within the Struggle:

The curious beauty of African music is that it uplifts even as it tells a sad tale. You may be poor, you may only have a ramshackle house, you may have lost your job, but that song gives you hope. African music is often about the aspirations of the African people, and it can ignite the political resolve of those who might otherwise be indifferent to politics. One merely has to witness the infectious singing at African rallies. Politics can be strengthened by music, but music has a potency that defies politics.⁷²

Mandela and other important figures of the Struggle who were imprisoned at some point, were often subjects of songs that demanded their release, which simultaneously functioned as a call for the release of all of South Africa’s many political prisoners under the Apartheid government.⁷³

7. Raising their Voices – Nina Simone’s & Miriam Makeba’s Activism

In the following chapter, I will introduce two Black female artists, whose music and identities were influenced and to varying degrees shaped by their political activism within two of the most important and impactful social movements of the last century: the Civil Rights Movement in the United States of America and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle in South Africa.

⁷⁰ Nkoala, ‘Songs That Shaped the Struggle’, 9.

⁷¹ Cf. Malisa and Malange. “Songs for freedom: Music and the struggle against apartheid”, 306.

⁷² Ibid., 307.

⁷³ Ibid., 313.

First, I will give a succinct overview of each artist's biographical details, then I will draw a connection to the origins of their political involvement, i.e., how the artist became an activist or started to be regarded as such, and then I will present and analyse four songs by each artist according to some of the following parameters: the socio-historical context of the songs' production and subsequent release, the historical events or messages hinted at within the lyrics, their reception by critics as well as the public, if available, and lastly a selection of interpretations regarding the meaning(s) behind each song. Furthermore, if applicable, I will highlight the potential discrepancies between the lyrical or textual components of the songs and the music. Nonetheless, the vocabulary, the lyrical as well as the musical choices of the artist play a less important role since this work does not focus on philology and I am not specialised in musicology. As the final part of this chapter, I will discuss further contributions Nina Simone and Miriam Makeba made as active participants of the movements apart from their songs, and the consequences they had to face as a direct result.

7.1. Nina Simone – “High Priestess of Soul”

In order to understand Nina Simone's extraordinary career as well as her fascinating person, this chapter functions as an introduction of one of the most versatile musicians of the 20th century whose legacy lives on until today. After the release of her 1967 album *High Priestess of Soul*, she received the moniker of the same name, primarily because of her ability to “put a spell on” her audiences during her hypnotic performances.⁷⁴ Despite feeling uncomfortable with labels and being allocated to any specific music genre, Simone was a mediating figure between her audiences and a higher purpose, in this case the advocacy for the civil rights and racial equality of the Black American population in the United States. The following chapters provide a biographical portrait, an investigation of how and when Simone became an artist that was also an activist, then an analysis of four of her songs connected to the Civil Rights Movement, and finally her contributions to the movement and the consequences she was confronted with because of her political engagement.

7.1.1 Biographical Details

Most of the following biographical details focus on Simone's childhood and her most successful years until around 1970, and are taken from her autobiography *I Put A Spell On You* (1991), written with Stephen Cleary, a film developer and producer.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Cf. ‘Biography – The Official Home of Nina Simone | The High Priestess of Soul’, <https://www.ninasimone.com/biography/>.

⁷⁵ Cleary has stated that while he was involved in the research, the content and style are all Simone's. www.reddit.com/r/IAMA/comments/frsw7q/im_stephen_cleary_writer_of_nina_simones/.

Born Eunice Kathleen Waymon on February 21st 1932 in Tryon, North Carolina, Simone was the sixth of eight children her parents Mary Kate Irvin (1902-2001) and John Divine Waymon (1899-1972) had together. While narrating the first chapters, Simone offers an elaborate and well-illustrated portrayal of her humble upbringing in the South in the aftermath of the Great Depression (1929-1939). Religion was an especially prominent part of her childhood, as her mother was an ordained Methodist minister and her father a church deacon: “Life at home was run along very strict rules: there was never liquor in the house and there was no profanity.”⁷⁶ The other lasting memory Simone remembered from her childhood was the omnipresence of music: “It was part of everyday life, as automatic as breathing. As well as piano Daddy played guitar and harmonica and led the choir in church; Momma played piano and sang too. My brothers and sisters all played piano and sang in the church choir, smaller gospel groups, glee clubs and at other social events.”⁷⁷ Consequently, because of her family’s natural musicality, it was expected that she also inherited some musical talent, which turned out to be true sooner than later, namely when Simone was only about three years old and able to play some of her mother’s favourite hymns on her family’s pedal organ solely from memory: “The whole family was astonished [...] To Momma’s mind there was only one explanation: I had received a gift from God.”⁷⁸ Nonetheless, she was taught by her parents to be humble about her talents. Simone accompanied her mother when she went on the road to preach and played the opening hymn for her services before she was four years old. Therefore, her main musical influence in her early years was gospel music, however, her father also secretly introduced her to what her mother classified as “real songs”, which were “[...] tainted by such worldly concerns as love and dancing.”⁷⁹ After becoming her church’s regular pianist at the age of six, Simone had her first job before starting school, which took up most of her week, as she details in her autobiography. Still, she generally describes her relationship with the instrument as a positive one and gospel music was her natural companion.⁸⁰ Simone also highlights the impact the improvisation parts of gospel music had on her piano as well as her performance skills, which were an important addition to the classical piano training she started to receive after her mother’s White employer offered to pay the tuition for her because Simone’s family could not afford it. It is with great fondness and admiration that Simone details her introduction to proper musical technique by Mrs

⁷⁶ Nina Simone and Stephen Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You: The Autobiography of Nina Simone*, 2nd Da Capo Press edition (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 2003), 5.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 14.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁹ Dorian Lynskey, *33 Revolutions per Minute: A History of Protest Songs*, 1.publ. (London: Faber & Faber, 2011), 93.

⁸⁰ Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 17.

Massinovitch and Simone's first love, Johann Sebastian Bach, which inspired her to dream big: "Once I understood Bach's music I never wanted to be anything other than a concert pianist; Bach made me dedicate my life to music [...]"⁸¹ In order to continue her training and nurture her talent, Mrs Massinovitch set up the *Eunice Waymon Fund*, to which most of the town contributed financially to ensure Simone's musical training: "I became well known; white folks would point to me on the street and call me "Mrs Massinovitch's little coloured girl". And so I was, although I didn't like the way they said it."⁸² The fact that her whole community was quite literally invested in her budding musical career did not just make her feel supported by a mixed-race community like her fans would one day be, but also created some distance between her and the rest of her family and, naturally, also put some pressure on the young child⁸³: "Music had become such a serious business for me all of a sudden. There was a lot of black pride and money invested in me, and a fair amount of white money too."⁸⁴

As the years went on, Simone started to experience the gap her musical talent created between her and her those around her, but especially her parents, more and more.⁸⁵ Following Brooks, a professor of African American Studies, American Studies, Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and Music, it was this "[...] social and cultural isolation as a factor that fostered and nurtured in Simone her experimental wanderlust as a musician, as well as a kind of fearless, non-conformist streak."⁸⁶ Nevertheless, Simone knew that although she had her own aspirations of becoming the first Black classical concert pianist, she technically could not stray from the career path laid out for her by her mother, piano teacher, and the Eunice Waymon Fund. After graduating high school as a Valedictorian in 1950, she obtained a scholarship to the Juilliard School of Music in New York for one year, during which she would prepare for the scholarship examination to the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. Unfortunately, Simone was eventually rejected by the Institute, apparently because of a lack of skill but more likely because of Simone's skin colour, which was a setback that shook her world to the core, partly because more than just her ambitions were at stake:

The direction of my life was determined by their ambitions and their money and I was promised a future I had no part in choosing [...] It was the only thing I knew how to do. I had no arrogance in regard to my talent, it just never occurred to me that what had been promised would not come about [...] it was as if all the promises ever made

⁸¹ Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 23.

⁸² Ibid., 24.

⁸³ Cf. Ibid., 15 & 25.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 30.

⁸⁶ Daphne A. Brooks, 'Nina Simone's Triple Play', *Callaloo* 34, no. 1 (2011): 177.

to me by God, my family and my community were broken and I had been lied to all my life.⁸⁷

After initially wanting to quit music altogether after this disheartening experience, Simone started working as a piano teacher in Philadelphia until she went to Atlantic City in 1954 to make more money with a summer job as a pianist of a dodgy bar, *The Midtown Bar and Grill*. Because she feared her mother's reaction to what she felt was an utterly morally questionable decision, it was in this place that Eunice Waymon became Nina Simone as she needed a stage name to perform in secret: she combined a nickname given to her by a former boyfriend, Niña, with her fascination for French actress Simone Signoret.⁸⁸ Equipped with her classical concert training as well a repertoire that included popular, gospel, and classical music, she played her very first concert there to "an audience of drunken Irish bums"⁸⁹ while "pretending I was somewhere else, like Carnegie Hall or the Metropolitan Opera."⁹⁰ In order to keep her job, she had to start singing, too, and despite internally despising popular songs she compared to her superior classical heroes, she created versions that contained the best of both worlds, for instance by improvising for hours, a combination which she began to enjoy. Her first original compositions would thus simply come out of her every night and people started to notice her.⁹¹ Already, Simone had very specific expectations she demanded to be fulfilled by her audience: "My attitude to performing was that of a classically trained musician: when you play you give all your concentration to the music because it deserves total respect, and an audience should sit still and be quiet."⁹² She would not change this attitude over the whole duration of her future career, but she admits that her unusual approach might have left a rather strange impression on the people who saw her perform early on, which affected her at the beginning.⁹³ Her popularity grew and she continued to return to Atlantic City for the following two summers, as well as play at supper clubs in Philadelphia and New York. Although Simone asserts that she was having fun playing to those audiences, the performances were still merely a means to an end for her to continue financing her musical education and become a concert pianist one day. Simone's career eventually took off after her cover of "I Loves You Porgy" from George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* was released on Simone's first official album *Little Girl Blue* in 1958. The first bootleg album had come out

⁸⁷ Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 41.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 49.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 50.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 50.

⁹¹ Cf. Ibid., 51f.

⁹² Ibid., 52.

⁹³ Cf. Ibid., 53.

previously with secret live recordings of one of Simone's sets, which was the first of many disappointments with record labels and the music industry in general Simone had to face over the years.⁹⁴ However, even then, "[d]espite accolades and acclaim from audiences and critics Simone initially viewed her career in popular music as a poor substitution for a career in classical music."⁹⁵ In her autobiography, she confirms this very openly: "If someone had walked up to me in the street and given me \$100,000 I would have given up popular music and enrolled at Juilliard and never played in a club again. And I wouldn't have missed the life because I hated it anyway [...]"⁹⁶ Furthermore, even at the beginning of her career, performing was always tiring her, and when she had to take on an extra job to make ends meet despite having a hit record, in 1959, she admitted: "To fill the gap I took a job as a maid for a white family. I didn't have to think at all – just clean up, fold sheets and wash dishes. It was like a holiday after the tension and unnatural hours of nightclub life: if it had paid more I would have stuck at it."⁹⁷ After her concert at New York City Town Hall on September 12th, 1959, Simone became an overnight success: "Suddenly I was the hot new thing, Queen of the Village for a while. I started to get recognized on the street, I was offered concerts all across the States, my records were released in Europe, journalists started pestering me for interviews, and TV producers wanted me for their shows."⁹⁸ She started associating with the people of the buzzing intellectual scene of Greenwich Village, most of which were involved in the Civil Rights Movement and whose impact on her life will be discussed more closely in the following chapter, as well as famous celebrities of the time such as Lauren Bacall or Frank Sinatra. Within this social bubble, Simone finally grew to like the direction her career developed into. One thing Simone despised from the start of being more well-known were the critics', and especially White critics' attempts of putting her into a box, for instance by comparing her to other Black artists, mostly of the jazz genre, which she took as an insult on at least two levels as she was well aware that the sets she performed were unique: her musicality could and should not be diminished to just one genre within her repertoire, and being categorised as something that was a stereotype based on the colour of her skin did not sit right with her, either.⁹⁹ The 1960s was the arguably the most intense decade of Simone's life: Not only cemented it Simone's fame and success, which was partly the case because she worked without stopping, with many tours, concerts, and releasing a total of 19 records, but

⁹⁴ Cf. Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 57.

⁹⁵ Kernodle, "'I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free'", 300.

⁹⁶ Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 65.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 63.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 67.

⁹⁹ Cf. Ibid., 68f.

she also got married for the second time, to Andrew Stroud, who also became her successful manager until their divorce in 1971, and had her daughter, Lisa, in 1962, as well as her political awakening the following year. These years, which coincided with the height of the Civil Rights Movement, will be discussed in more detail over the next chapters. Her relationship with Stroud was tumultuous and toxic, as she explicitly narrates incidents of physical violence and abuse, but also praises his skills as her ambitious manager and safe haven to calm her down in times of feeling overwhelmed.¹⁰⁰ The way she narrates it in her autobiography, it seems that Simone never intended to become the kind of star she turned out to be, but just like during her childhood days, a lot depended on her success, therefore she could not quit.¹⁰¹ Her total commitment in all of the aspects of her life came at a high price: Simone's excessive touring, political engagement, and trying to raise a small child resulted in an overworked state where she suffered from extreme exhaustion, physically as well as psychologically. Consequently, she turned to alcohol to cope with her fast-paced life, and developed mental health issues, which were later diagnosed as part of a bipolar disorder.¹⁰² She spent most of the second half of her life in a self-imposed exile, for instance in Barbados and Liberia, because she was so disappointed with the state of her home country, and continued to release eight more albums until she died in 2003.

7.1.2. Political Involvement – How the Artist became an Activist

The mentality that permeated Nina Simone's upbringing in North Carolina, i.e., the South, was heavily influenced by the 1930s Depression era, which, in turn, meant that due to the economic hardships of the times, she was raised to accept and tolerate rather than to question or even defy the ubiquitous racism as an additional problem.¹⁰³ In Simone's words: "At home we never talked about race, ever. It was the great unspoken that we lived with but never brought out into the open"¹⁰⁴, explaining that "[...] the Waymon way was to turn away from prejudice and to live your life as best you could, as if acknowledging the existence of racism was in itself a kind of defeat."¹⁰⁵ Still, that did not mean she was spared from being confronted with racial discrimination from a very early age, and the realisation felt like

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 72-116.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁰² Cf. Mena and Saucier, "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood", 262.

¹⁰³ Cf. Ward, *Just My Soul Responding*, 300.

¹⁰⁴ Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 32.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

“switching on a light”¹⁰⁶. Simone illustrates her first conscious experience of racism during a piano recital at the local town hall at the age of eleven in her autobiography:

I sat down at the piano with my trained elegance while a white man introduced me, and when I looked up my parents, who were dressed in their best, were being thrown out of their front row seats in favour of a white family I had never seen before. And Daddy and Momma were allowing themselves to be moved. Nobody else said anything, but I wasn't going to see them treated like that and stood up in my starched dress and said if anyone expected to hear me play then they'd better make sure that my family was sitting right there in the front row where I could see them [...] But my parents were embarrassed and I saw some of the white folks laughing at me.¹⁰⁷

The crowd at the town recital was predominantly White, as would many of her future audiences be, just like the factors that she was a Black trained classical pianist, confronted her audience directly, and protested racism through her music or her performances, would remain central elements of her (future) career.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, it would take some more time for her to realise and consciously come to terms with the fact that she was indeed affected by racial discrimination, and very much so considering her dream of becoming the “first Black classical pianist” by means of obtaining an education at the prestigious Curtis Institute in Philadelphia were crushed, most likely because of the colour of her skin. In her autobiography, she describes the situation as follows:

The wonderful thing about this type of discrimination is that you can never know for sure if it is true, because no one is going to turn around and admit to being a racist. They just say no, you got turned down because you weren't good enough and you'll never know. So you feel the shame, humiliation and anger at being just another victim of prejudice and at the same time there's the nagging worry that maybe it isn't that at all, maybe it's because you're just no good.¹⁰⁹

By publishing this statement about her experience in the 1990s, she did expose the racist practices that permeated society and hindered the social mobility of African Americans, even those with exceptional talent. However, this is Simone's assessment of her situation later in life. While she felt the unfair treatments such as the Institute's rejection most acutely, during the years she spent in New York in the 1950s trying to establish herself as a musician, she refused to admit that they affected her and initially did not see the bigger picture, despite

¹⁰⁶ Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 26.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. A. Loudermilk, 'Nina Simone & the Civil Rights Movement: Protest at Her Piano, Audience at Her Feet' 14 (January 2013): 122.

¹⁰⁹ Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 43.

observing “the advances my own people were making with the civil rights movement”¹¹⁰. In this case, this includes failing to draw the connection between individual and structural discrimination, i.e., the “connection between the fights I had and any wider struggle for justice”¹¹¹. Heard, a postdoctoral humanities fellow at Stanford University, argues that “Simone’s political coming into being was occasioned by a cultural scene defined by the counter-cultural interplay of music, comedy, and politics.”¹¹² This was facilitated by her association and socialisation with some of the Black intellectual, political, and artistic protagonists of the day in New York’s Greenwich Village of the early 1960s, particularly at Art D’Lugoff’s Village Gate nightclub.¹¹³ The famous members of this emerging intelligentsia and eventually Simone’s close friends circle, which included writers such as James Baldwin, Lorraine Hansberry, and Langston Hughes, just like activists Malcom X and Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as musicians like newcomer Miriam Makeba and Odetta, guided Simone onto a path of first becoming more politically conscious, and then involved. One of the most influential figures during this time was the playwright Hansberry, who not only became a special friend and Simone’s daughter’s godmother, but enabled Simone to perceive herself in a different light, i.e.: “a black woman in a world dominated by white men.”¹¹⁴ Hansberry, who was an active participant in the Civil Rights Movement, further encouraged Simone, who was not at all interested in writing music with a political message yet, to question her own position and apparent lack of involvement: “She understood that I felt separated from what was going on, but told me over and over that like it or not I was involved in the struggle by the fact of being black – it made no difference whether I admitted it or not, the fact was still true.”¹¹⁵ Despite that, Feldstein chronicles that by 1963, Simone already supported the SNCC, CORE, NAACP and YMCA as a sponsor and performer at benefit concerts.¹¹⁶ Consequently, while a tentative political activism was slowly becoming part of Simone’s life, it was formulating her own political messages into words and creating her own political content within the Civil Rights Movement that only gradually developed. Simone acknowledges that “[she] didn’t make the jump to thinking [she] had a part to play in

¹¹⁰ Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 86.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Danielle C. Heard, “‘Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood’: Nina Simone’s Theater of Invisibility”, *Callaloo* 35, no. 4 (2012): 1058.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 1059.

¹¹⁴ Lynskey, *33 Revolutions per Minute*, 96.

¹¹⁵ Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 87.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Ruth Feldstein, “‘I Don’t Trust You Anymore’: Nina Simone, Culture, and Black Activism in the 1960s”, *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (1 March 2005): 1360, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3660176>.

what was happening”¹¹⁷, but stresses Hansberry’s lasting impact, for instance when she was confronted by her friend about “what [she] was doing for the movement while its leaders were stuck in jail”¹¹⁸, which was during Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s, arrest in Birmingham, Alabama, in April 1963, leading to his famous *Letter from Birmingham Jail*.¹¹⁹

The turning point of Simone’s political role as an artist within the movement, however, was the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama, on September 15th, 1963. Four young Black girls were murdered as a bomb planted by the Ku Klux Klan went off during their bible study. For Simone, this and the shooting of Medgar Evers, a field secretary for the NAACP, in Jackson, Mississippi, were the final straw: “I suddenly realized what it was to be black in America in 1963, but it wasn’t an intellectual connection of the type Lorraine had been repeating to me over and over – it came as a rush of fury, hatred and determination. In church language, the Truth entered into me and I ‘came through’.”¹²⁰ After this realisation hit her, her first reaction was to resort to violence and avenge the suffering of Black Americans: “I had it in my mind to go out and kill someone, I didn’t know who, but someone I could identify as being in the way of my people getting some justice for the first time in three hundred years”¹²¹ and “The idea of fighting for the rights of my people, killing for them if it came to that, didn’t disturb me to much – even back then I wasn’t convinced that non-violence could get us what we wanted.”¹²² Her husband at the time, Andy Stroud, suggested that music might be a more suitable way for her to process what she was going through, which is how Nina Simone wrote her first protest song, “Mississippi Goddam” that will be discussed in the following chapter. Kernodle argues that the release of the song rang in the beginning of a new era of Simone’s life on two levels: “The release of “Mississippi Goddam” not only marked the awakening of Simone’s political beliefs but symbolized the breaking of her musical inhibitions”¹²³, which further accentuates the interconnection between Simone’s politics and her music. It is no surprise that Simone used what she calls “church language” to describe this pivotal moment in her life, as it was also a re-connection with her religious roots to find a deeper meaning for her life. Simone, who had always had trouble with coming to terms with the fact that the career she had envisioned for

¹¹⁷ Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 86.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹¹⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*, 89f.

¹²³ Kernodle, “I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free”, 305.

herself but never got would have been much more meaningful than the world of popular music she somehow found herself in, shares that

[...] the entire direction of my life shifted, and for the next seven years I was driven by civil rights and the hope of black revolution. I was proud of what I was doing and proud to be part of a movement that was changing history. It made what I did for a living something much more worthwhile [...] I could finally answer Momma's great unasked question 'Why do you sing out in the world when you could be praising God?' [...] I didn't feel like an 'artist' because the music I played, to which I dedicated my artistry, was so inferior. That was why I put as much of my classical background as I could into the songs I performed and the music I recorded, to give it at least some depth and quality.¹²⁴

Lynskey, a British author and music critic, even goes as far as to call it a rebirth thanks to a new-found purpose after years of hollowness when she fully immersed herself in the Movement and when she left the stage "[...] she still had work to do: books to read, people to meet, a cause to champion."¹²⁵ The people she learnt from and spent time with included Stokely Carmichael, a member of the SNCC who would later become the leader of the Black nationalist movement in the US and coin the phrase "Black Power", as well as Nation of Islam minister Louis Farrakhan.¹²⁶ Lynskey highlights that there still was a mutual admiration between Simone and members of the SNCC, as her music, at that point yet without proper protest songs since her album *In Concert* with "Mississippi Goddam" on it was only to be released in the spring of 1964, had been a steadfast companion throughout the progress of the Civil Rights Movement.¹²⁷ To fully understand Simone's effect on those involved in the movement, Ward illustrates her political and racial significance by referring to another important Civil Rights Movement personality, Bernice Johnson Reagon, founder of the SNCC's *Freedom Singers* group and one of the main gospel singers that provided the soundtrack of the movement. According to Reagon, it was not only that Simone, as opposed to many other Black artists and celebrities at the time, who were understandably scared to appear too "radical" and thereby damage their careers¹²⁸, regularly appeared at marches and supported the movement by participating in fundraising and benefit concerts, but what Simone and her music represented: "Simone helped people to survive [...] [w]hen you heard her voice on a record it could get you up in the morning... She could sing anything, it was the

¹²⁴ Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 91.

¹²⁵ Lynskey, *33 Revolutions per Minute*, 104.

¹²⁶ Cf. Ibid.,; for "Nation of Islam movement", see 'Nation of Islam | History, Founder, Beliefs, & Facts | Britannica', 31 July 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nation-of-Islam>.

¹²⁷ Cf. Lynskey, *33 Revolutions per Minute*, 96.

¹²⁸ Cf. Jasmine Hines, 'Incorporating Intersectional Musicality within the Classroom: Black Feminism through Nina Simone and Janelle Monáe', *Journal of Popular Music Education* 4, no. 3 (1 November 2020): 316.

sound she created. It was the sound of that voice and piano... Nina Simone's sound captured the warrior energy that was present in the people. The fighting people."¹²⁹ Ward sums it up as the unique combination of message, music and manner, cementing her role within the Movement¹³⁰, however, for a long time, Simone was unaware of the power she already held before she "came through" and began to consider herself an activist, too:

Once I got inside the civil rights movement I found out that many people already thought of me as a political artist, a 'protest singer', because I used to talk about civil rights on stage sometimes, praising the freedom riders, or asking if there was anyone from the SNCC [...] in the house [...]. But I didn't consider myself involved; I was just spurring them on as best I could from where I sat – on stage, an artist, separate somehow.¹³¹

This distanced perception of her own involvement does not mean that Simone did not create meaningful music before finding her "calling", she just had not considered it activism until she wrote her very first protest song. However, Nina's standards when it came to composing music were clearly influenced by her classical training and her desire to create meaningful pieces, which appeared to be another inhibiting factor: "I didn't like 'protest music' because a lot of it was so simple and unimaginative it stripped the dignity away from the people it was trying to celebrate."¹³² Contrary to herself, Simone's fans inside the Civil Rights Movement had no doubt about the potential of her musical genius for the movement and were anxiously awaiting for her to put all her resources into the "struggle".¹³³

Simone describes the transformation her active involvement entailed as an enriching experience as it not only increased the bond she felt with her audiences and elevated it to a higher level of community, but also improved how she felt about herself:

They [her audience] knew I was making sacrifices and running risks just like they were, and we were all in it together [...] My music was dedicated to [...] the fight for freedom and the historical destiny of my people. I felt a fierce pride when I thought about what we were all doing together. So if the movement gave me nothing else, it gave me self-respect.¹³⁴

The sacrifices and risks she is referring to here add another crucial angle to her transformation from an artist into an artist that is also a political activist and taking a stand on stage: Due to her genre-blurring musicality, a fusion of classical music, folk, blues, jazz, and more,

¹²⁹ Ward, *Just My Soul Responding*, 302,

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 90.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Cf. David Nathan, *The Soulful Divas : Personal Portraits of over a Dozen Divine Divas, from Nina Simone, Aretha Franklin, & Diana Ross to Patti LaBelle, Whitney Houston, & Janet Jackson*, 1. publ. (New York: Billboard Books, 1999), 52.

¹³⁴ Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 91.

Simone's music appealed to both White and Black Americans and she had further been "embraced by both the black intelligentsia and hip, white jazz and folk audiences."¹³⁵ Simone stood out because of many aspects: her eclectic musical style, her continuous support for the Movement, as well as "[...] an independence of mind, spirit and action which seemed both refreshing and inspirational"¹³⁶ and became especially prominent during her frequent interactions with her audiences, where she rarely held back. Brooks takes a closer look at the relationship between Simone and her listeners and exposes its duality: "By engaging in a rigorous, internal, socio-political dialogue with her own audiences, she repeatedly questioned, examined, and tested the limits of agitprop popular music as well as the complex range of power dynamics between black performers and predominantly white audiences."¹³⁷ These interactions were simultaneously a blessing and a curse for her performances: On the one hand, it offered her the opportunity to be a representative of cultural resistance and perform her explicit music in front of those who might needed to be reminded most of the fact that "blatant structural racism and anti-Black violence was rampant"¹³⁸, on the other hand it exposed her to potential dangers. Feldstein stresses that despite more liberal political attitudes among her White audience members, as well as her association with the jazz-loving, respectable elite culture should not lead to the assumption that she had the "safety" of being able to openly show her political involvement in African American activism and voice her opinions without having to factor in possible repercussions for her career or her life.¹³⁹

Simone was well aware that she was not like the other activists because she was at the same time, and possibly even more so, an artist with an active, successful career:

I wished I could dedicate all my time to the movement but I had professional obligations – like touring Europe – to fulfil, and they isolated me [...] On stage I might create a feeling of unity strong enough to keep me awake for a week, but I always came down to the knowledge that I was different.¹⁴⁰

Still, Simone participated in many of the famous events of the Civil Rights Movement, for example, she was one of the famous artists to welcome and play for the marchers who had made their way from Selma to Montgomery in March 1965 (See Image 1).¹⁴¹ Nonetheless, she did not simply show up, which was a political choice that posed a significant risk as it

¹³⁵ Nathan, *The Soulful Divas*, 52.

¹³⁶ Ward, *Just My Soul Responding*, 300.

¹³⁷ Brooks, 'Nina Simone's Triple Play', 178.

¹³⁸ Mena and Saucier, "'Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood'", 256.

¹³⁹ Feldstein, "'I Don't Trust You Anymore'", 1361.

¹⁴⁰ Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 112.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Ward, *Just My Soul Responding*, 302.

were, but performed music that was very different from what Feldstein terms “supper club” sets she performed during her normal concerts.¹⁴² While she did not only release protest music from then on, it is noticeable that her lyrics became increasingly political as the 1960s went on, which will be showcased in the ensuing analysis of some of four of her songs released between 1964 and 1967. Kernodle establishes what formula Simone utilised for her freedom or protest pieces: “[...] create songs that reflected the artist’s true identity, keep them as simple as possible musically, and write texts that were real in their presentation of world events.”¹⁴³ For the remainder of the 1960s, Simone’s activism guided her music as well as her performance strategies and remained two-fold: One of her main goals was to empower Black cultural identity, while she was equally as concerned with thematising injustices within the US-American society. Her affirmations of a Black identity, for instance songs such as “Young, Gifted, and Black” based on Lorraine Hansberry’s play, that came with positive connotations to Blackness during a time when there was a constant threat to Black lives, transported a message of resilience, pride, and strength. Mena & Saucier assess Simone’s inspirational potential as follows: “She takes on a role of a mentor by making sure she spreads the message and encourages others to do the same.”¹⁴⁴ This is yet another one of her titles, underscoring her multifaceted persona.

The character Nina Simone was in itself quite paradoxical, which Feldstein goes into detail about: Because of Simone’s rural Southern background and her religious upbringing, she represented a stereotype of US-American Blackness, however, at the same time, being a classically trained pianist, a job typically reserved for White upper-class people, did not fit at all into the Black entertainer stereotype and was a sign that she was able to bridge cultural hierarchies.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, Feldstein highlights that her first European tour in the summer of 1965 was not the first time international jazz magazines had raved about her uncategorisable and unique live performances compared to the dominant images of contemporary African American entertainers, female ones in particular.¹⁴⁶ Neither did her appearance, the tone of her protest songs, nor her activism as a singer align with the Freedom singers in the South.¹⁴⁷ Her activism posed a challenge to the existing Civil Rights activism as it questioned “[...]”

¹⁴² Cf. Ruth Feldstein, “‘More Than Just a Jazz Performer’: Nina Simone’s Border Crossings”, in *How It Feels to Be Free: Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Ruth Feldstein (Oxford University Press, 2013), 94, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195314038.003.0004>.

¹⁴³ Kernodle, “‘I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free’”, 301.

¹⁴⁴ Mena and Saucier, “‘Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood’”, 259.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Feldstein, “‘More Than Just a Jazz Performer’”, 90f.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Ibid., 88.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Ibid., 110.

religion as a source of solace and protest for African Americans, and the viability of a beloved community of whites and blacks.”¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, she added one crucial element to the content of her activism: It included Black women’s experiences. Feldstein perceives Simone’s intersectional approach of addressing gender and race within her activism as one of the most groundbreaking aspects about Simone’s artistry and ahead of her time: “That she did so at all is significant; that she did so as early as 1963—well before the apparent ascendance of black power or second-wave feminism in the late 1960s and ‘70s—is even more so.”¹⁴⁹ In total, Feldstein declares that Simone defied several pre-existing categories regarding music, liberal civil rights ethos, and links between race and gender in connection with power dynamics, which lead her to the following conclusion: “Because she was a performer whose fans cut across lines of race, class, gender, and nation, these multiple and interconnected levels of defiance set Simone apart and reinforced both her celebrity and notoriety in the 1960s.”¹⁵⁰ Heard adds that those around her and Simone herself knew that she was destined to be an extraordinary artist: “Hughes, along with many black artists, intellectuals, and activists, saw what Simone was doing as important political work. No mere pop artist, and up to something much bigger, Simone rejected being labeled as an “entertainer.”¹⁵¹

Consequently, Simone was simultaneously heralded the “true singer of the Civil Rights Movement”, for instance by Stokely Carmichael¹⁵², while the collective memory of her activism within the movement is not that present if not excluded from the narrative as it, just like her protest music, challenged the movement’s nonviolent characteristic. Simone fondly remembers the moment Carmichael awarded her this title: “The way he said it, honouring me in front of those people, made me break down and cry. He made a convert of me there and then, and I would have walked into the fires of hell with him and never looked back once.”¹⁵³ Simone openly supported the SNCC, thus her music personified the ideological and generational development within the Civil Rights Movement. In the second half of the decade, the “the originally neutral-appearing and dialect-free Simone adopted a more Afrocentric look and sound”¹⁵⁴ and was increasingly associated with the Black power movement: Her songs, which “[...] became the embodiment of these beliefs and served as a strong link connecting

¹⁴⁸ Feldstein, “More Than Just a Jazz Performer”, 84.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 86f.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 110.

¹⁵¹ Heard, “Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood”, 1074.

¹⁵² Kernodle, “I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free”, 306.

¹⁵³ Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 98.

¹⁵⁴ Loudermilk, ‘Nina Simone & the Civil Rights Movement’, 125.

the different militant factions developing across the country”¹⁵⁵ and her affirmation of Blackness straddled the “aesthetic beliefs of the Black Arts Movement with the rhetoric of Malcolm X and the emerging black nationalist movement.”¹⁵⁶ By then, members of the SNCC had “begun stockpiling weapons and expressing the benefits of what they called “armed self-defense”.”¹⁵⁷ This controversial attachment to her name is only one of the examples for how her popularity and notoriety always went hand in hand, and made her stand out between other musicians engaged in the “struggle”.¹⁵⁸ Her gradually more radical position was also integrated into her performances, for example, when Simone performed at the Harlem Music Festival, also famously termed “Black Woodstock” on August 17th, 1969 (see Image 4). After playing songs such as “Four Women” to stress the complexity and intersectionality of Black women’s realities, she recited a poem by David Nelson called “Are You Ready, Black People?”. She addressed the audience with the following questions: “Are you ready to call the wrath of black gods...black magic...to do your bidding?” or “Are you ready to smash white things...to burn buildings, are you ready?” and “Are you ready to kill if necessary?”, all of which were answered with vehement a “Yeah!”.¹⁵⁹ Although the words had not been written by her, the stage is where her fields of action converge, even when there is no music anymore. Therefore, the way she performs the poem leaves no doubt about the fact that she is convinced by its contents and would answer the same way as the audience in front of her would.

At the end of 1969, Simone gave an exclusive Interview, which was broadcast on October 27th on the monthly TV show *Black Journal*, which had Black Americans as their target audience. Within her statement regarding the political involvement of artists, one can clearly observe a firm position on the topic, shaped by the six years that had passed since Simone herself became seriously involved in the Civil Rights Movement:

An artist’s duty, as far as I’m concerned, is to reflect the times. I think that is true of painters, sculptors, poets, musicians. As far as I’m concerned, it’s their choice, but I choose to reflect the times and situations in which I find myself. That, to me, is my duty. And at this crucial time in our lives, when everything is so desperate, when every day is a matter of survival, I don’t think you can help but be involved. Young people, Black and White, know this. That’s why they’re so involved in politics. We will shape and mold this country, or it will not be molded and shaped at all anymore. So, I don’t think you have a choice. How can you be an artist and not reflect the times? That to me is the definition of an artist.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ Kernodle, “I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free”, 306.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 301.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 306.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Feldstein, “More Than Just a Jazz Performer”, 99.

¹⁵⁹ Garbus, *What Happened, Miss Simone?*, 2015, 01:01:20 – 01:03:54

¹⁶⁰ Nina Simone, “Nina Simone: An Artist’s Duty”, YouTube Video, 0:51, February 22, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99V0mMNf5fo>

Simone openly addresses the interconnectedness between art and politics, as well as activism or “being involved”, an attitude which had impacted her career tremendously over the previous years. It is a fact that her most successful years coincided with the height of the Civil Rights Movement¹⁶¹, therefore, the times she felt compelled to reflect happened simultaneously to when she was at the zenith of her cultural influence, wherefore the assumption that it also inspired her musical creativity is not too far-fetched. About her increased motivation due to her political engagement, Simone professes that “[w]ith civil rights I played on stage for a reason, and when I walked off stage those reasons still existed – they didn’t fade away with the applause; and there were always new ideas to discuss, articles to read, speakers to listen to and songs to write.”¹⁶² Aware of the affect her performances had on her audiences, Simone’s political role transcended the representative and mediative but became educational: She was a role model who “[...] did not only entertain, rather she helped raise her listeners’ consciousness of various sociopolitical issues (e.g., anti-Black oppression and Africana womanist perspective), thus preparing them for political action.”¹⁶³

7.1.3. Civil Rights Song Selection

Nina Simone’s discography is incredibly extensive, as she created songs that can be allocated to various different music genres, such as jazz, folk, and blues, thereby defying being put into a box throughout a career that spanned over forty years. As Brooks puts it:

She was the ultimate queen of popular music "crossover" in the most exhilarating and unconventional sense of the word, and she deftly and consistently called upon this ability to mix and match musical forms as a way to break free of the racial and gender circumscriptions placed upon her in popular music culture.¹⁶⁴

While the critical acclaim of her catalogue and the worldwide popularity of her music were not the main determining factors for the ensuing chapter, her unique and trailblazing way of expressing herself as a Black female artist involved in a social movement of her time builds the foundation for it. As a representative of cultural resistance, “[h]er songs were written within the political and cultural terrain of Black suffering, disavowal, and rage [...]”¹⁶⁵ The following four songs, “Mississippi Goddam” (1964), “Old Jim Crow” (1964), “Four Women” (1966), and “Backlash Blues” (1967), were selected with a set of criteria in mind: apart from

¹⁶¹ Cf. Hines, ‘Incorporating Intersectional Musicality within the Classroom’, 316.

¹⁶² Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 94.

¹⁶³ Mena and Saucier, “‘Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood’”, 247.

¹⁶⁴ Brooks, ‘Nina Simone’s Triple Play’, 176.

¹⁶⁵ Mena and Saucier, “‘Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood’”, 248.

one exception, they were at least co-written by Nina Simone, they have a direct connection to prominent issues of the Civil Rights Movement, they were officially released under labels the artist was signed to at the time, and they represent different facets of being involved in the movement. Simone's discography absolutely allows for a more extensive investigation of protest music because even with songs that did not have an overt political message, "she was able to colour unrelated songs with meaning, breathing the heat of the civil rights struggle into [them]".¹⁶⁶ Nonetheless, I decided to rule out cover songs, such as "Ain't Got No / I Got Life" (1968), which is a medley of songs from the musical *Hair*, or Simone's famous version of Billy Taylor's "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free" (1964), as well as some of her later singles "To Be Young, Gifted and Black" (1970), based on her friend Lorraine Hansberry's autobiographical play, and "Revolution (Part 1 & Part 2)" (1969), when the Civil Rights Movement was already on its decline. My selection represents different themes that can be connected to the social movements' characteristics, which include inequality, racial and/or gendered stereotyping, threats to the oppressor and retaliation, as well as emotions such as rage and fear. Another factor taken into consideration for this analysis were potential direct appeals to an audience within the songs' lyrics. In order to get an impression of how Simone's engagement in the Civil Rights Movement as well as her own political stance developed, the songs are listed in chronological order and all stem from the period of Simone's life when she was most involved in the Movement, i.e., the mid to late 1960s.

7.1.3.1. *Rage* – "Mississippi Goddam"

Nina Simone's first, yet at the same time most famous protest song is "Mississippi Goddam", which she performed live for one of the first times during a concert at the prestigious Carnegie Hall in New York on March 21st, 1964. A compilation of live recordings of these Carnegie Hall concerts from March and April 1964 was then officially released on her album *Nina Simone In Concert* with the Dutch-based Philips Records, a division of Mercury Record Productions, Inc that had facilitated Simone access to the international market and was linked to sophisticated, elite, educated jazz audiences.¹⁶⁷ Following Nathan, it is with this particular album that "[...] Nina staked her claim as a fearless musical leader for civil rights."¹⁶⁸ The song was chosen as the seventh and final track of the record, ready to leave its listeners with a bang. Since it is a live recording, it also contains the audience's reactions. For the following analysis, this exact version of "Mississippi Goddam" will be used as it contains not only

¹⁶⁶ Lynskey, *33 Revolutions per Minute*, 104.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Feldstein, "More Than Just a Jazz Performer", 94.

¹⁶⁸ Nathan, *The Soulful Divas*, 52.

Simone's live vocals and piano playing, but more importantly her introductory remarks and comments, as well as the audience's initial reactions to the brand-new song, thus simultaneously providing a recording of their reception. The track has a total length of four minutes and 56 seconds and is described by the artist herself during an interjection as "a show tune but the show hasn't been written for it, yet". It is fast-paced, up-beat, and features Simone's prominent piano, which Lynskey places somewhere between "jauntiness and hysteria"¹⁶⁹, and is accompanied by a constant hi-hat beat, while the chorus is supported by more drum elements.

The name of this tune is Mississippi Goddam
And I mean every word of it
Alabama's gotten me so upset
Tennessee made me lose my rest
And everybody knows about Mississippi,
goddamn
Alabama's gotten me so upset
Tennessee made me lose my rest
And everybody knows about Mississippi,
goddamn
Can't you see it, can't you feel it
It's all in the air
I can't stand the pressure much longer
Somebody say a prayer
Alabama's gotten me so upset
Tennessee made me lose my rest
And everybody knows about Mississippi,
goddamn
(This is a show tune, but the show hasn't been
written for it, yet)
Hound dogs on my trail
School children sitting in jail
Black cat cross my path
I think every day's gonna be my last
Lord have mercy on this land of mine
We all gonna get it in due time
I don't belong here, I don't belong there
I've even stopped believing in prayer
Don't tell me, I'll tell you
Me and my people just about due
I've been there so I know
They keep on saying "Go slow!"
But that's just the trouble (Too slow)
Washing the windows (Too slow)
Picking the cotton (Too slow)
You're just plain rotten (Too slow)
You're too damn lazy (Too slow)

The thinking's crazy (Too slow)
Where am I going, what am I doing
I don't know, I don't know
Just try to do your very best
Stand up, be counted with all the rest
For everybody knows about Mississippi,
goddamn
(I bet you thought I was kidding, didn't you)
Picket lines, school boycotts
They try to say it's a communist plot
All I want is equality
For my sister, my brother, my people, and me
Yes, you lied to me all these years
You told me to wash and clean my ears
And talk real fine just like a lady
And you'd stop calling me Sister Sadie
Oh but this whole country is full of lies
You're all gonna die and die like flies
I don't trust you any more
You keep on saying "Go slow!"
"Go slow!"
But that's just the trouble (Too slow)
Desegregation (Too slow)
Mass participation (Too slow)
Reunification (Too slow)
Do things gradually (Too slow)
But bring more tragedy (Too slow)
Why don't you see it, why don't you feel it
I don't know, I don't know
You don't have to live next to me
Just give me my equality
Everybody knows about Mississippi
Everybody knows about Alabama
Everybody knows about Mississippi, goddamn
*That's it*¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Lynskey, 33 *Revolutions per Minute*, 100.

¹⁷⁰ Nina Simone - Mississippi Goddam, <https://genius.com/Nina-simone-mississippi-goddam-lyrics>.

The theme attributed to this song is rage, as it was this strong emotion that provoked Simone to channel her fury about the murders of innocent Black people into her songwriting skills one day, instead of building a zip-gun and going out to kill someone, which was her initial reaction.¹⁷¹ In her autobiography, she describes this cathartic moment as follows:

An hour later I came out of my apartment with the sheet music for ‘Mississippi Goddam’ in my hand. It was my first civil rights song, and it erupted out of me quicker than I could write down. I knew then that I would dedicate myself to the struggle for black justice, freedom and equality under the law for as long as it took, until all our battles were won.¹⁷²

Maxwell, a US-American writer and musician, assesses Simone’s realisation as an explosive combination: “Crisply honest, it is a pure expression of rage and an indictment of inequality. Stylistically, it leapfrogged the righteous, passive anthems that characterized protest music of the time. It was knowing, biting, and inciting.”¹⁷³ One of these contrasting, more passive anthems Maxwell alludes to would be, for instance, Sam Cooke’s equally influential and defining protest song “A Change Is Gonna Come”.¹⁷⁴ Both songs represent divergent trends within the Civil Rights Movement arising in the year of 1964: Cooke’s song goes along with the path of peaceful protest tradition, whereas like Malcom X and the SNCC’s Stokely Carmichael, “[...] Simone’s [path] flashes hot red: it is tart and frantic, ragged with impatient fury.”¹⁷⁵ The recent acts of racial terrorism that triggered the need to get involved, which she works through in this song, include the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama, on September 15th, 1963. The other triggering event for Simone was the murder of civil rights activist Medgar Evers in Mississippi in June of the same year¹⁷⁶, and she also thematises the protests against integrating schools in Nashville, Tennessee.¹⁷⁷ Another possible explanation for her rage about Mississippi could be one of the earlier incidents tied to the state and the Civil Rights Movement: The murder of the Black teenager Emmett Till in 1955. Simone offers a direct critique of the situation for Black citizens in the Southern States: “Alabama’s got me so upset / Tennessee made me lose my rest / And everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam”. Heard argues that “Simone’s political anthem reveals a seething irony in the contrast between the upbeat show tune quality of the accompaniment and tongue-in-

¹⁷¹ Cf. Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 91.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁷³ Tom Maxwell, ‘A History of American Protest Music: When Nina Simone Sang What Everyone Was Thinking’, Longreads, 20 April 2017, <http://longreads.com/2017/04/20/a-history-of-american-protest-music-when-nina-simone-sang-what-everyone-was-thinking/>.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Lynskey, *33 Revolutions per Minute*, 92.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Heard, “‘Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood’”, 1061.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Hines, ‘Incorporating Intersectional Musicality within the Classroom’, 321.

cheek understatement of African American experiences of Jim Crow and civil rights struggles [...]”¹⁷⁸. Alluding to the song’s musical jauntness in stark contrast to its serious contents, Maxwell agrees that the song contains a “dark message, delivered in a white envelope”¹⁷⁹, here to Simone’s predominantly White Carnegie Hall audience. Although Simone was not the first famous Black artist to speak out about the everyday cruelties endangering Black lives during the height of the Civil Rights Movement, it was more or less revolutionary to address these issues in such a brutally honest way in front of a mainly White crowd. While everybody was aware of the situation in the Southern states, apparently nothing was being done about it. In addition, Simone particularly stresses the ubiquity of the threat of racial violence and its everyday occurrence when she asks her (white) audience “Can’t you see it, can’t you feel it / It’s all in the air / I can’t stand the pressure much longer / Somebody say a prayer”. According to Brooks, these lines are all about exposing a brutal reality:

At its core, "Mississippi Goddam" aims to expose the myth of American collectivity that the insult of Jim Crow culture repeats and plays out in the everyday lives of black folks. Simone here "plays out," in her jaunty piano riffs, in her darkly candid lyrics, in the shifting fever of her vocals, the triple rift between what "everybody knows," what no one but her will say, and what she prophetically reads in her jeremiad moments as the fire, brimstone, and locust future at which the nation is hurling.¹⁸⁰

Simone also insinuates that she has had enough and that it has become hard for her to contain her rage, clearly discernible in her voice, which appears more strained and louder when she sings those words. The prayer she requests could either be for the people suffering and in constant fear of a new racially motivated attack, or for herself, as a calming safety measure to contain the anger she could otherwise release. She continues to illustrate the permanency of the threats against the Black community by painting the following picture: “Hound dogs on my trail / School children sitting in jail / Black cat cross my path / I think every day’s gonna be my last”. Not only does she feel like she is being followed (by hound dogs), and fears superstitious incidents (like black cats crossing her path), she is frightened to the point where every day is a day she expects her death. Furthermore, she adds a concrete example of the absurdity and cruelty of racism when she mentions the imprisoned school children. As was explained in the previous chapter, religion played a tremendous role in Simone’s life, and it is not only an important component of the Black community in the United States, but also of the Civil Rights Movement. Furthermore, Ward explains that especially in the early-to-mid 1960s

¹⁷⁸ Heard, “Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood”, 1063.

¹⁷⁹ Maxwell, *A History of American Protest Music*.

¹⁸⁰ Brooks, *Nina Simone’s Triple Play*, 187.

soul music genre and the songs that could be allocated to the movement, it was common practice to incorporate quasi-religious imagery, “[...] rather than direct invocations of race, Jim Crow or the Movement, to make their racial provenance and political relevance obvious.”¹⁸¹ While Simone did not shy away from direct political statements in her songs, her appeal to God “Lord have mercy on this land of mine” as well as her revelation that “I’ve even stopped believing in prayer” make up a vulnerable plea for the fate of Black people in her home country, but also a direct challenge to the more “passive” approach of waiting and praying instead of actions proposed by the Civil Rights Movement’s leaders. In the end, for her to proclaim that she has stopped believing in religion as a means of getting through these trying times or as an alleviation for the pain and the lack of belonging she experiences, by giving up this large part of her upbringing and ultimately her life, her desperation becomes particularly prominent.

By further stressing that “I don’t belong here, I don’t belong there”, she alludes to the effect that segregation and inequality have on those targeted by being excluded from society: a questioning of belonging and identity. At the same time, she tries to convey the urgency of the situation by criticising those not taking it seriously enough, those not directly affected, or those trying to repress its urgency by appeasing tactics, so she calls them out: “Don’t tell me, I tell you / Me and my people just about due / I’ve been there so I know / They keep on saying “Go Slow!”” Again, she hints at the fact that she and this time also “her people” are fed up with the situation, a potential, undefined threat for what might happen once it’s the last straw for them, and in the following passages she maps out how inefficient the waiting and praying approach has been in order to improve the situation of Blacks in the United States: “Well, that’s just the trouble / “Too slow” / Washing the windows / “Too slow” / Picking the cotton / “Too slow” / You’re just plain rotten / “Too slow” / Too damn lazy”. In these lines, she skilfully integrates several racist stereotypes about Black people, some stemming from the days of slavery, for instance “Picking the cotton”, as well as “too damn lazy”, which was a common reason used to justify punishment of slaves if they did not bring their owners enough profit. With the recurring interjections of “Too Slow” by a male background choir, she continues her critique on the abovementioned dealings with racial violence by stressing that the chosen tempo just does not suffice for things to change, as stereotypes and practices associated with Black people since slavery continue to be perpetuated. In this regard, Brooks highlights the double meaning of Simone’s fast-paced “Too Slow” bridge, as it is “[...] both a

¹⁸¹ Ward, *Just My Soul Responding*, 300.

mark of resistance and a failure on the part of movement leaders to face the time bomb that keeps ticking (off) in the race against Civil Rights era white supremacist terror.”¹⁸²

Simone then proceeds to question herself and opens up about a moment of helplessness or even an identity crisis caused by this gridlock: “Where am I going / What am I doing / I don’t know / I don’t know”. Simone explains that people are “[j]ust tryin’ to do [their] very best / Stand up be counted with all the rest / Cause everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam”. She thus highlights that civil obedience is a survival mode and the incident in Mississippi can also be seen as a warning that everybody knows about, the uncontrolled and deliberate violence they could face if they rebel against the system. Her following interjection during the song’s very first performance released on the album could be a remark about her Carnegie Hall audience’s faces: “I bet you thought I was kiddin’”, which could be interpreted as a smug comment on the incredulous looks she must have gotten for speaking so openly and raw about a topic mostly if at all only hinted at in a much more subtle manner by other artists.

In the next few lines she lists a few of the peaceful protest measures taken up by the followers of the Civil Rights Movement, challenges to the system of white supremacy and inequality: “Picket lines, school boy cots / They try to say it’s a communist plot / All I want is equality / For my sister, my brother, my people and me”. Picketing is a practice of protesting in front of workplaces, often used by striking workers, or event locations in order to draw public attention to their demands and raise awareness about their situation. Simone also includes one of the most famous practices of protest the Civil Rights Movement brought forth: the school boycotts happening all over the United States at the time. Apparently, possibly because of these mass protests, the Movement was diminished to the claim of belonging to a communist infiltration of the country, a delicate topic as the United States was completely wrapped up in the dealings of the Cold War in the mid-1960s. Scholars of the University of California’s Berkeley Library gained access to FBI files of the time and highlighted that any ties to communism, perceived as a threat, was as a way how Black (radical) movements could be undermined and disbanded¹⁸³, and Simone was clearly aware of this. She further expresses her one crucial demand: all she wants is equality for the country’s Black population. It appears to be a simple enough request, yet at the same time so unattainable. In this connection, she then proceeds to call out the unknown “You”, potentially

¹⁸² Brooks, ‘Nina Simone’s Triple Play’, p. 187.

¹⁸³ Cf. Virgie Hoban, “‘Discredit, Disrupt, and Destroy’: FBI Records Acquired by the Library Reveal Violent Surveillance of Black Leaders, Civil Rights Organizations | UC Berkeley Library”, <https://www.lib.berkeley.edu/about/news/fbi>.

the government, or the Civil Rights Movement leaders, when she raises her voice to accuse them of the false promises of integration¹⁸⁴: “You lied to me all these years / You told me to wash and clean my ears / And talk real fine just like a lady / And you’d stop calling me Sister Sadie”. At the very end she references a character from Mark Twain’s famous book “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn”: “Sadie, the wife of a runaway slave, was a cook and a healer - a stereotypical strong Black woman who kept her pain, anger and frustration to herself and didn’t talk back.”¹⁸⁵ She does not want to be associated with this stereotype from slavery times, instead she wants to talk back, and apparently she feels betrayed because of the empty promise she outlines: if she behaved a certain way, played by the rules set by those in power, i.e., white people, she and Black women would be elevated from this inferior role ascribed to them by past societal rules, allegedly not in place anymore. Simone claims this is not true and continues to call out their deception, even adding a direct threat or prophecy: “Oh but this whole country is full of lies / You’re all gonna die and die like flies / I don’t trust you any more / You keep on saying “Go slow!”. One can detect a strong intonational stress on the word “trust”, which establishes a more personal connection to the betrayal she feels. Again, Simone expresses the need for more action and less talk, her impatience regarding the situation shining through the next lines when she sings: “That’s just the trouble / Too slow / Desegregation / Too slow / Mass participation / Too slow / Reunification / Too slow / Do things gradually / Too slow / But bring more tragedy / Too slow”. According to her assessment, the practices in place to enable gradual change will not bring positive results but instead more tragedy as it is prolonging a state where Blacks are dying at the hands of Whites with very little to no consequences and legal support. Her exasperation becomes evident in the next four lines: “Why don’t you see it / Why don’t’ you feel it / I don’t know / I don’t know”. She even offers that “[y]ou don’t have to live next to me / Just give me my equality”, thereby highlighting again that she does not necessarily desire a unified society with Whites and Blacks intermingling, however, she does want equality for the Black population to improve their rights, the overall living situation as well as their safety by demanding legal accountability for violence against Black people based on racial grounds. She repeats the chorus one last time and after a final prolonged, emphasised “Goddam”, she exclaims “That’s it!” before the band goes straight into what appears to be a jazzy intermission piece.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Mena & Saucier, “Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood”, 257.

¹⁸⁵ ‘Black History Month: Nina Simone’s First Protest Song’, KNKX Public Radio, 25 February 2021, <https://www.knkx.org/black-history-month-nina-simones-first-protest-song>.

In later recordings or performances of “Mississippi Goddam”, Simone added a few lines to the finale of the song: She not only repeats the chorus, i.e., lists Mississippi and Alabama as things or events everybody knows about, thereby exposing the people’s complicity, but mentions famous personalities, for example Ronald Reagan, Michael Jackson, or Margaret Thatcher, which puts the events of Mississippi, Tennessee or Alabama on the same level of common knowledge. Other important changes in different recordings include for instance her introduction of the song before performing it at the Westbury Music Fair in New York on April 7th, 1968, three days after the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., where “[...] Simone used her concert to stage an act of collective mourning and outrage.”¹⁸⁶ During this concert she also premiered a song specifically written by Gene Taylor and her in the wake of the assassination a few days prior: “Why? (The King of Love is Dead)”. She provides some context and appears hopeful that change is finally around the corner: “And, of course a couple of years ago... Four little girls were killed in Alabama. And at the time we got the inspiration to do this song / But Dr. King’s murder has left me so numb / I don’t know where I’m at, really. And of course you heard this song that was composed by Gene Taylor / Especially for today... But I hope that between now and the end of the year / It’ll all be together enough / That we will have songs that go down in history / For these wonderful, brave people / Who are no longer with us”. In addition, in the second chorus she claims that Lurleen Wallace has made her lose her rest, who was the Alabama governor of the time of the concert and against desegregation.¹⁸⁷ During the same performance, Simone later changed the same line to “And Memphis has made me lose my rest” to integrate the Memphis Sanitation Strike that happened between February and April 1968 and was caused by racial discrimination against Black sanitation workers, who were exposed to dangerous working conditions¹⁸⁸, or to highlight the place where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr died. Both events are tied together as King’s assassination was one of the strike’s consequences.¹⁸⁹ In the middle of the song she appeals to her audience with the following words: “If you have been moved at all / And you know my songs at all / For God’s sakes, join me / Don’t sit back there / The time is too late now, good God! / You know? The king is dead, the king of love is dead / I ain’t ‘bout to be nonviolent, honey!” and “And I loved him because he believed it / He lived

¹⁸⁶ Richard, ‘Nina Simone’s Tribute to Martin Luther King – Fifty Years Ago Today’, *Late Voice* (blog), 7 April 2018, <https://latevoice.com/2018/04/07/nina-simones-tribute-to-martin-luther-king-fifty-years-ago-today/>.

¹⁸⁷ ‘Wallace, Lurleen B.’, *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, accessed 21 July 2024, <https://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/lurleen-b-wallace-1967-68/>.

¹⁸⁸ ‘Memphis Sanitation Workers’ Strike | Causes, Result, Summary, Significance, & Martin Luther King, Jr. | Britannica’.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

by it”. It becomes evident that while she is deeply affected by King’s death and loved him for who he was and what he stood for, she is making her own position clear, which is more aggressive and open to using violence in order to fight inequality.

7.1.3.2. *Inequality* – “Old Jim Crow”

The fourth song on *Nina Simone In Concert* and the second one used for this analysis is “Old Jim Crow”, which, as the title insinuates, directly thematises the Jim Crow laws in place in the Southern States. With its total length of two minutes and 38 seconds it is one of the shorter songs on the album, however, this does not diminish its poignancy. Simone’s voice is accompanied by her piano playing, as well as a steady drum beat, primarily from the hi-hat and congas, and it can be classified as a swinging up-tempo jazz song with hard bop elements and a soulful delivery.¹⁹⁰

<i>Old Jim Crow</i>	<i>Old Jim Crow, don't you know</i>
<i>Where you been, baby?</i>	<i>It's all over now, yeah</i>
<i>Down Mississippi and back again</i>	<i>Old Jim Crow</i>
<i>Old Jim Crow, don't you know</i>	<i>Thought I had you beat</i>
<i>It's all over now</i>	<i>Now I see you walkin'</i>
<i>Old Jim Crow</i>	<i>And talkin' up and down my street</i>
<i>What's wrong with you?</i>	<i>Old Jim Crow, don't you know</i>
<i>It ain't your name</i>	<i>It's all over now, yeah</i>
<i>It's the things you do</i>	<i>Old Jim Crow</i>
<i>Old Jim Crow, don't you know</i>	<i>You've been around too long</i>
<i>It's all over now</i>	<i>Gotta work the devil</i>
<i>Old Jim Crow</i>	<i>'Til your dead and gone</i>
<i>You've been around too long</i>	<i>Old Jim Crow, don't you know</i>
<i>Gotta work the devil</i>	<i>It's all over</i>
<i>'Til your dead and gone</i>	<i>All over</i>
<i>Old Jim Crow</i>	<i>Oh Lord, it's all over</i>
<i>Yes, don't you know</i>	<i>All over</i>
<i>It's all over now</i>	<i>It's all over</i>
<i>It's all over now</i>	<i>It's all over</i>
<i>Old Jim Crow</i>	<i>It's all over now</i>
<i>You know it's true</i>	<i>Yeah</i> ¹⁹¹
<i>When you hurt my brother</i>	
<i>You hurt me too</i>	

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Kernodle, “I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free”, 305.

¹⁹¹ ‘Nina Simone - Old Jim Crow’, <https://www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Nina-Simone/Old-Jim-Crow>.

With its unambiguous title, Kernodle describes the song as “[a] militant, hard-line statement against the growing resistance against activists and the rising tide of desegregation.”¹⁹² The main theme the song can be categorised under is Simone’s portrayal of the persistence of inequality directly related to the term Jim Crow, which is expressive enough on its own so that listeners, especially those from the United States, immediately have a strong association in their minds: As Maxwell explains, “Jim Crow was a character originating in a blackface minstrel song from the 1820s, and was the name of the prevailing racial caste system in the South after slavery.”¹⁹³ Simone highlights its rootedness in the past, not only by adding “Old” in front of Jim Crow, but by stating “You’ve been around too long / Gotta work the devil / ‘Til your dead and gone” but also by repeating over and over that “It’s all over now”, thereby alluding to the apparently changed times over the past decades and keeping a resilient stance towards the racist laws. Nonetheless, due to the continuous attacks against Blacks, in particular in the Southern States, and a surge in racially motivated violence around the time Simone wrote the song, Simone sings: “Where you been, baby? / Down Mississippi and back again” and “Thought I had you beat / Now I see you walkin’ / And talkin’ up and down my street”. She is referring to recent events and painting a picture of everyday violence as well as normalised violence by alluding to the fact not only was racial segregation and equality present “on [her] street”, but they were “walkin’ and talkin’”, thereby an occurrence seemingly accepted by society. Furthermore, she stresses the strong solidarity she feels with the Black community when she sings “When you hurt my brother / You hurt me too”, which not only creates a sense of empathy for those who have been victims of racialised violence or inequality, but also establishes a visible bond between singer, by then definitely classified a celebrity, and the rest of the Black American community. By presenting herself as a “woman of the people” who experiences their pain not only with them but just like them, she brings their struggles to the forefront as a narrating voice who fills audiences with a large percentage of White guests in need of more awareness of the situation.

7.1.3.3. *Race & Gender Stereotypes* – “Four Women”

On her 1966 album with Philips Records, *Wild is the Wind*, “Four Women” can be found as the second track, which is four minutes and 24 seconds long. The song is slow, typical for the blues style, and starts with Simone’s simple piano theme, as well as a soft beat played by the drums in the background. During the second verse, an e-guitar joins the musical accompaniment of Simone’s raw voice, and from the third verse onwards a flute takes over

¹⁹² Kernodle, “I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free”, 305.

¹⁹³ Maxwell, *A History of American Protest Music*.

the guitar's part. There are brief piano solos between each verse, but her playing reaches its peak during the final lines of the song, the grand finale.

My skin is black

My arms are long

My hair is woolly

My back is strong

Strong enough to take the pain

Inflicted again and again

What do they call me?

My name is Aunt Sarah

My name is Aunt Sarah, Aunt Sarah

My skin is yellow

My hair is long

Between two worlds

I do belong

My father was rich and white

He forced my mother late one night

What do they call me?

My name is Saffronia

My name is Saffronia

My skin is tan

My hair is fine

My hips invite you

My mouth like wine

Whose little girl am I?

Anyone who has money to buy

What do they call me?

My name is Sweet Thing

My name is Sweet Thing

My skin is brown

My manner is tough

I'll kill the first mother I see

My life has been rough

I'm awfully bitter these days

'Cause my parents were slaves

What do they call me?

My name is Peaches ¹⁹⁴

Simone introduces each character one by one, starting with Aunt Sarah, who is reminiscent of the Sister Sadie Simone refers to in “Mississippi Goddam”. She sings: “My back is strong / Strong enough to take the pain / Inflicted again and again”, thereby creating for her listeners the image of a female hard worker, potentially a slave, who suffers through her unfair punishments without complaining. The second character she describes is a woman of mixed or mulatto heritage as her “[...] skin is yellow / my hair is long / Between two world / I do belong / You see my father was rich and white / He forced my mother one night”. The “family” situation Simone describes is not unusual for those who had to live through slavery as evidence of illegal race relations, but also contemporaries, who experience a lack of belonging and identity struggles by not being part of either race community, White or Black. Anything in-between cannot be classified as one or the other, and thus not only presents

¹⁹⁴ “Nina Simone - Old Jim Crow, <https://www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Nina-Simone/Four-Women>.”

difficulties for how society treats or values them, and which laws apply to them, at least at the time of composition and release, but also how the person views or values themselves. In addition, the woman of the name Saffronia insinuates she has a difficult relationship with her father, who not only belongs to a social group viewed as superior to hers or her mothers, but since she is a product of his rape of a Black woman, it is clear that he abused this power to hurt those in a weaker position. The third woman Simone portrays is called Sweet Thing and introduced in the following lines: “My skin is tan / My hair is fine / My hips will invite you / My mouth like wine / Whose little girl am I? / Anyone who has got money to buy”. Here, Simone presents the overly sexualised black woman who is exoticized and objectified, which is a perpetuation of a slavery stereotype as it suggests ownership over a Black woman’s body, who in this case, appears to be working as a prostitute. Bratcher, a former US-American Associate Professor of African & African American Studies at the University of Oklahoma, connects this to a “breeder” label that White slave owners used for Black women and calls this stereotype the “exotic/erotic Black female-Jezebel”¹⁹⁵. It seems to be no coincidence that the woman described in the most attractive or enticing way has lighter skin, since it plays on a stereotype regarding beauty standards within the Black community, where light-skinned women are often deemed more desirable than those of deeper shades of Black because they resemble White beauty standards. According to Hill-Collins, a US-American sociologist with a specialisation in race, class, and gender, what these three women introduced above share is that they represent images of being controlled, for instance through hard work (on plantations), rape, or prostitution: “Simone explores Black women’s objectification as the Other by invoking the pain these three women actually feel.”¹⁹⁶ Bratcher adds that “[t]he lyrics allude to social purification where Black female beauty and value are derived from the strength that they wield in overcoming their plights.”¹⁹⁷ Finally, the last character included in the song, Peaches, is different, primarily because of the anger she feels; a woman who seems to feel the difficulties her heritage entails most acutely and deals with the generational trauma of her ancestors in her own way: “My skin is brown / My manner is tough / I’ll kill the first mother I see / My life has been rough / I’m awfully bitter these days / Because my parents were slaves”. Bratcher explains that the legacy of enslavement is present in various aspects of African American history and can be directly associated with Peaches’, and other Black

¹⁹⁵ Melanie E. Bratcher, *Words and Songs of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone : Sound Motion, Blues Spirit, and African Memory*, Studies in African American History and Culture (New York [u.a: Routledge, 2007), 58.

¹⁹⁶ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought : Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd edition., Perspectives on Gender (New York : Routledge, 2000), 113.

¹⁹⁷ Bratcher, *Words and songs of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone*, 120.

women's, experiences of having to endure hardships and rough lives because of this.¹⁹⁸ The impression conveyed through these lines "[...] demonstrate her growing awareness and self-definition of the situation she encountered. They offer to the listener not sadness and remorse, but an anger that leads to action."¹⁹⁹ By introducing Peaches at the very end of the song, one can detect a chronological development regarding the women's awareness of their situation, but also Simone's increasingly militant stance, with Aunt Sarah offering a stereotype that suggests submissive behaviour and exploitation, whereas Peaches exudes anger and an awareness of her oppressed state. According to Hines, whose research interests include Critical Race Theory, creative thinking, and Feminist and Gender studies, the four characters introduced in the song are archetypes of lived Black female experiences of intersectional oppression in the US, who are musically and vocally personifying how Black women survived from slavery up until the point where Simone wrote the song, and are strongly tied to how useful Black women were to White culture.²⁰⁰ Simone herself sums it up as follows: "Black women didn't know what the hell they wanted because they were defined by things they didn't control, and until they had the confidence to define themselves they'd be stuck in the same mess forever – that was the point the song made."²⁰¹ Hines identifies these uncontrollable factors as intersecting inequalities based on sex, race, class, and sexual discrimination.²⁰² Bratcher succinctly adds that "[s]he reflects on the fact that there may be moments of pain, confusion, misguided sexual activity, and bitterness; however, those moments in African American history do not define the Black woman."²⁰³ One can also trace this gradual development in Simone's voice throughout the song: It starts serious and softly, but ends with a lot of rage and emotion lacing her voice, especially when she screams "Peaches" at the very end.

Nina Simone's "Four Women" is not an obvious protest song, but much rather Simone's observation of how (US-American) society views Black women, which turned into a Black feminist anthem.²⁰⁴ According to Bratcher, "[t]he song is beautiful because it affirms the protest song tradition; particularly, it carries the feeling of "Negro spirituals" that gave voice to Black people's sorrows and joys."²⁰⁵ The "Four Women" in question represent four different stereotypes of African American women, which Simone presents from a first-person

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Bratcher, *Words and songs of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone*, 51.

¹⁹⁹ Hill-Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 113.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Hines, 'Incorporating Intersectional Musicality within the Classroom', 318.

²⁰¹ Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 117.

²⁰² Cf. Hines, 'Incorporating Intersectional Musicality within the Classroom', 316.

²⁰³ Bratcher, *Words and songs of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone*, 122.

²⁰⁴ Cf. Heard, "'Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood'", 1071.

²⁰⁵ Bratcher, *Words and Songs of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone*, 123.

perspective in a blues song, and she reveals the characters' names at the very end of each verse. In her autobiography, she elaborates that

[t]he women in the song are black, but their skin tones range from light to dark and their ideas of beauty and their own importance are deeply influenced by that. All the song did was to tell what entered the minds of most black women in America when they thought about themselves: their complexions, their hair – straight, kinky, natural, which? – and what other women thought of them.²⁰⁶

Bratcher connects this to the internalisation of White beauty standards that affects Black women's perceptions of themselves and identifies one of the inspirations behind the song: Simone's own thoughts and doubts about her appearance and its message of reassurance that Black women in general, her included, were indeed beautiful.²⁰⁷ Simone opens up about this internal struggle with her self-image: "[...] I'd look in the mirror and see two faces, knowing that on the one hand I loved being black and being a woman, and that on the other it was my colour and sex which had fucked me up in the first place."²⁰⁸ This adds an interesting angle to her activism, as the song's topic allows the assumption that she was well aware of the intersectional constraints of her race and her gender, as well as gendered and racialised stereotypes placed on women in particular. Heard contributes a very important point to this discussion about the diversity of Black women's realities: [...] "Four Women" breaks apart assumptions of monolithic black womanhood and complicates racist and masculinist understandings of black femininity with its reinterpretation of the worn slave, tragic mulatta, jezebel, and angry black woman stereotypes."²⁰⁹ Hines agrees that "[...] the point of view Nina Simone presents in 'Four Women' not only accounted for the essentialized Black cultural understanding of these stereotypes, an essentialized White hegemonic understanding, but Simone's radical perception and understanding of the discourses too."²¹⁰ With regards to this theme of defining one's identity or self within an unequal society, yet inside as well as outside of the community, Hill-Collins argues that Simone actively uses the blues to affirm the self.²¹¹ She further explains that "[i]dentity is not the goal but rather the point of departure in the process of self-definition. In this process Black women journey toward an understanding of how our personal lives have been fundamentally shaped by intersecting oppressions of race, gender, sexuality, and class."²¹² Within this song, Nina Simone

²⁰⁶ Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 117.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Bratcher, *Words and songs of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone*, 119-120.

²⁰⁸ Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 118.

²⁰⁹ Heard, "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood", 1072.

²¹⁰ Hines, 'Incorporating Intersectional Musicality within the Classroom', 318.

²¹¹ Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 112.

²¹² Hill-Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 113f.

chronicles this growing understanding or awareness of the tensions between racial and gender (in-)equality, and thereby validates an experience of numerous Black women in the US that had been wrapped in silence until then.²¹³ Instead of a negative understanding of or stigma around the discussed stereotypes, Hines points out the empowering potential in Simone's song and especially the "[...] musical and poetic opportunity for Black women and Others to grapple with the sociocultural paradoxical nature of Black female archetypes and stereotypes."²¹⁴

Despite this original intention, the song was received critically by some Black radio stations, Simone remembers, who even banned their DJs from playing it as it was deemed insulting to Black women, whereas Simone claims that it much rather exposed an uncomfortable truth many, and she specifically names Black men among them, could not yet acknowledge at the time.²¹⁵ Today, Bratcher assesses listening to the song as empowering and awareness-sharpening: [...] "Four Women" allows the listener to discover that many Black women are struggling with issues of skin color and stereotypes. Blacks are renewed and empowered to rise above the treachery of (that kind of) oppression."²¹⁶

7.1.3.4. *Threat/Retaliation* – “Backlash Blues”

The last song included in this selection of Nina Simone's songs is “Backlash Blues”, which was released on her 1967 album *Nina Simone Sings the Blues*, released under RCA (Radio Corporation of America) Victor. It is the sixth and last track on the A-side of the record and two minutes and 30 seconds long. While Simone did compose the track, it was Langston Hughes, one of the most famous African-American poets and social activists of the time, who wrote the lyrics, which are actually taken from a poem of the same title he wrote in the previous year. The lyrics differ slightly from the poem but only in the sense that repetitions had to be made to establish a chorus for the song. Simone and Hughes not only ran in the same intellectual circles of 1960s New York City but were close friends and mutual supporters of one another.²¹⁷ Before the album's release, she first performed the song at the Newport Jazz Festival in July 1967, not even two months after Hughes had died of complications after an operation and dedicated her performance at the festival to him.²¹⁸ The song is a classic blues composition, with a repetition of a piano theme, harmonica, as well as an electric guitar, which is given several solos throughout the song.

²¹³ Cf. Mena and Saucier, “Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood”, 256.

²¹⁴ Hines, ‘Incorporating Intersectional Musicality within the Classroom’, 318f.

²¹⁵ Cf. Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 117.

²¹⁶ Bratcher, *Words and songs of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone*, 123.

²¹⁷ ‘Home’, Backlash Blues, accessed 21 July 2024, <https://www.backlash-blues.com>.

²¹⁸ ‘Home’, Backlash Blues, accessed 21 July 2024, <https://www.backlash-blues.com>.

Mr. Backlash, Mr. Backlash
Just who do you think I am?
You raise my taxes, freeze my wages
And send my son to Vietnam
You give me second class houses
And second class schools
Do you think that all colored folks
Are just second class fools?
Oh, Mr. Backlash, I'm gonna leave you
With the backlash blues
When I try to find a job
To earn a little cash
All you got to offer

Is your mean old white backlash
But the world is big
Big and bright and round
And it's full of folks like me
Who are black, yellow, beige and brown
Mr. Backlash, I'm gonna leave you
With the backlash blues
Mr. Backlash, Mr. Backlash
Just what do you think I got to lose?
I'm gonna leave you
With the backlash blues
You're the one who'll have the blues
Not me, just wait and see

The “backlash” Simone is referring to is connected to an increase in racially motivated violence and hate crimes by Whites against the Black community as a response to the Civil Rights Movement. Loudermilk categorises the song and its very clear message as one of the “in-your-face banners” the Civil Rights Movement could use.²²⁰ Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Hughes and Simone directly confront those in power, which Heard terms the “power-holding white “you””.²²¹ The lyrics contain overt criticism on US-American politics of the time: One of the major themes being addressed in the song is the United States’ role in the Vietnam War (1955 – 1975), a proxy war of the Cold War, during which the US supported the South of Vietnam with other anti-Communist allies, as well as the consequences this involvement meant for US citizens. The song describes the dire conditions of the times as follows: “You raise my taxes, freeze my wages / And send my son to Vietnam / You give me second class houses / And second class schools / Do you think that all colored folks / Are just second class fools?” Within these lines, Hughes underlines that the situation in the country was bad to begin with, with increased taxes and diminished wages, as well as drafting into the US army, however it was even worse for the Black population because their living conditions were already terrible due to the inequality permeating society for decades. This critique continues in the second verse: “When I try to find a job / To earn a little cash / All you got to offer / Is your mean old white backlash”. In other words, if Black people were trying to

²¹⁹ ‘Nina Simone - Backlash Blues’, <https://www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Nina-Simone/Backlash-Blues>.

²²⁰ Cf. Loudermilk, ‘Nina Simone & the Civil Rights Movement’, 125.

²²¹ Heard, “‘Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood’”, 1074.

escape poverty and change something about their living situation, for instance by finding work, and well-paid jobs were primarily available to Whites exclusively anyway, one of the inequalities the Civil Rights Movement sought to fight, they were met with “white backlash”. However, the tone changes during the second part of the verse, which sounds more defiant: “But the world is big / Big and bright and round / And it’s full of folks like me / Who are black, yellow, beige and brown”, and turns into what could be interpreted as a downright threat of revenge by the very end of the song²²²: “Mr. Backlash, Mr. Backlash / Just what do you think I got to lose? I’m gonna leave you / With the backlash blues / You’re the one who’ll have the blues /Not me, just wait and see”. Hughes, speaking for the Black community, rightly poses the rhetorical question of what was left to lose after being let down repeatedly and bled dry after many years of inhumane treatment. The fact that the song is composed as a classical blues track adds further substance to the African American tradition of voicing one’s struggles through song. When Simone played “Backlash Blues” at the Westbury Music Fair in April 1968, as mentioned above briefly after Dr Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination, her performance was recorded and later released as the third track of her 1968 album *‘Nuff Said!* with RCA Victor. This version contains a slightly different ending, during which Simone remembers her late friend Hughes and one of their conversations: “When Langston Hughes died, when he died, he told me many months before...He said, “Nina, keep on working ‘til they open up the door. One of these days when you made it and the doors are open wide, make sure you tell them exactly where it’s at. So they’ll have no place to hide”.” This is particularly relevant given Simone’s own experience with having doors shut in her face, i.e., opportunities taken away from her, because of her skin colour, for example when she was not accepted into the prestigious Curtis Institute in Philadelphia.

By publishing a statement about her experience in her autobiography in the 1990s, she did expose the racist practices that permeated society and hindered the social mobility of African Americans, even those with exceptional talent, like Nina Simone. Nonetheless, she defied the odds and “made it” anyway, however she could not have known that as a talented young woman whose dreams of becoming a professional musician were crushed. She then continues to sing “So Mr. Backlash / Hear me now / I’m warning you, yeah / Somehow, someday, yeah / I’m gonna leave you / With the blues”, which constitutes an even more overtly expressed threat than in the original version from the previous year. Mena & Saucier, associate professors of psychology and sociology respectively, observe that “Backlash Blues” is one of Simone’s songs that induces revenge fantasies that is connected to and being kept

²²² Heard, “Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood”, 1074.

alive by Black female rage: “Beyond the experience of adversity and oppression a theme of revenge and/or consequences for the injustices delivered to oppressed groups was evident in her lyrics. At least four passages in three albums were detected as delivering messages to the oppressors.”²²³ This could be connected to how the Civil Rights situation had changed over the year, especially with regard to the death of Dr King, so the intensified edge in Simone’s performance of the song is representative for the change that was in the air at the time. It further supports the observation that Simone’s own activism had also progressed into a more militant direction by the late 1960s.

7.1.4. Contributions to the Movement & their Consequences

It takes a lot of courage and vulnerability to openly voice one’s opinions and feelings, or to “speak truth to power”²²⁴, as Mena & Saucier phrase it. While this is a relatively common phenomenon among artists and songwriters, who often bare their souls through their music, this rings even more true when the messages they are conveying within their songs are related to politics, where visible and heartfelt support can lead to detrimental consequences. As Friedman stresses: “Protest music continues to be a relevant mode of artist expression and, when music is overtly political, controversy usually lurks close behind.”²²⁵ As was explored in the previous chapter, Nina Simone did not hold back when it came to raising her voice about what she believed in and explicitly addressed those sentiments by means of her songwriting, as well as through her performances and interactions with her audiences. However, as an activist within the Civil Rights Movement, her influence went beyond that: “Through her lyrics Nina Simone engaged in sociopolitical consciousness raising, which assisted in planting the seed for community action [...]”²²⁶ and through her “[...] outrage with unjust and intolerable social conditions gave her listeners permission to get in touch with these experiences personally, or at least empathize with those experiencing such oppression.”²²⁷ A concert of Nina Simone was thus a portal through which she invited her, in most cases, mixed race audiences to not only get a glimpse of her innermost world, but also what it meant to be Black in 1960s America because her lyrics and the social criticism within were so unambiguous. Although her activism within her music comprises a large part of what she contributed to the Civil Rights Movement, her engagement extended to various other sectors of active participation in the struggle for Black Americans’ rights and identity. She

²²³ Mena and Saucier, ““Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood””, 257.

²²⁴ Ibid., 248.

²²⁵ Friedman, *The Routledge History of Social Protest in Popular Music*, xvi.

²²⁶ Mena and Saucier, ““Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood””, 257.

²²⁷ Ibid.

financially supported the movement, primarily through performing benefit shows or at fundraisers, for instance for CORE with a grossing estimate of around \$2,000 per concert, a sum no other performer of the time could bring the organisation.²²⁸ Moreover, she was also a representative of the movement with important responsibilities that she had to familiarise herself with. As she outlines in her autobiography, there were “[...] political questions in press interviews, my opinion was quoted concerning news events, and I received dozens of requests to play benefits and appear on marches. So I had to be familiar with the issues, and know who the benefits were aiding, what the marches were for and who they were organized by.”²²⁹ As a representative, her association with the movement brought more attention to it even without people paying closer attention to her protest song lyrics. Therefore, Simone had to remain relevant, i.e., maintain her active career, both to function as a cultural icon to the Black community, lifting its spirits and empowering its identity in the process, and as a warning symbol for those who needed a reminder about the importance of the movement and its causes.²³⁰ Other topics she introduced were pioneering early second-wave feminist black power perspectives,²³¹ as well as her defiance of many stereotypes, such as the “exotic” female African American entertainer: “[E]ven though European fans and critics, white and black, may have regarded Simone as exotic, her well-known reputation for political activism coupled with the ways in which she aggressively claimed certain styles for herself made it harder for her to be the object of a primitivist discourse.”²³² Through her physical appearance and fashion, Simone also made political statements related to an increasing Afrocentrism trend that was partly inspired by the Civil Rights Movement²³³: Simone started wearing African dresses with colourful patterns and hairstyles such as corn rows or an afro, instead of evening gowns and wigs.²³⁴ The combination of her thematisation of Black women’s realities as well as her identification with the Afrocentrism trend of the 1960s result in what Mena & Saucier call Simone’s Africana Womanism.

Since she was not a popular artist and never wanted to be one, scaring away the general public and thereby losing their (financial) support because of the uncomfortable truths imbedded in her lyrics was not necessarily an inhibiting factor for Simone. Following Kernodle, the reason why pop and R&B radios avoided playing her music can be explained

²²⁸ Cf. Feldstein, “‘More Than Just a Jazz Performer’”, 94.

²²⁹ Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 97.

²³⁰ Cf. Ward, *Just My Soul Responding*, 336.

²³¹ Cf. Feldstein, “‘More Than Just a Jazz Performer’”, 86f.

²³² Feldstein, “‘I Don’t Trust You Anymore’”, 1371.

²³³ Cf. ‘Afrocentrism | Definition, Examples, History, Beliefs, & Facts | Britannica’, 9 July 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Afrocentrism>.

²³⁴ Cf. Nathan, *The Soulful Divas*, 46.

by Simone's uncategorisable sound in combination with her explicitly political lyrics.²³⁵ According to Nathan, a historian and music journalist, however, she appealed exactly to the people she wanted to inspire the most: "Nina's unequivocal call for justice and an end to prejudice didn't endear her to the American establishment. But it did help her gain a much stronger foothold among her own people, and she soon became the darling of an upwardly mobile black audience."²³⁶ She was also very well aware of the power she could exert on an audience enthralled by her performance, which she used to her advantage, and thus not too worried that her real fans would turn on her.²³⁷ Nevertheless, Ward stresses:

If Simone had less to lose in commercial terms than, for example, Diana Ross, in terms of giving public expression to her support for the black struggle, this should not detract from her courage, or impugn her motives. After all, it was Simone's life, not just her chart position, money and coiffure which she sometimes put at risk. Hard choices had to be made and, regardless of how much the peculiar composition of her audience gave her a certain room to manoeuvre, Simone chose to align herself publicly and proudly with an ongoing black freedom struggle with little regard for the personal or professional consequences.²³⁸

What was more difficult for her to juggle were all of her responsibilities coming together at once, i.e., that of an artist, an activist, a wife and a mother: "I only had a certain amount of energy and time available – Andy was trying to keep my music industry career on track while all this was going on there were tours and recording sessions to be done, and there was still my baby daughter to look after – so I had to use whatever time there was to full effect."²³⁹ There is no doubt about the fact that she did use her time effectively: Between 1963 and 1969, Simone released a total of 16 records or compilations, was praised as the "true singer of the Civil Rights Movement" by Stokely Carmichael²⁴⁰, and received a citation for her work in the movement by CORE, which also declared her song "Young, Gifted and Black" as the 'National Anthem of Black America'.²⁴¹ Her motives to actively participate weren't of egotistical nature, however, it was a rewarding experience regardless: "I wasn't in the movement for personal glory, but this dedication made me very proud because it showed I was succeeding as a protest singer, that I was writing songs people remembered and were inspired by."²⁴² In addition, the empowerment she felt from being recognised by some of the most influential figures of the movement functioned as a catalyst for her musical creativity for

²³⁵ Cf. Kernodle, "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free", 304; 307.

²³⁶ Nathan, *The Soulful Divas*, 46.

²³⁷ Cf. Brooks, 'Nina Simone's Triple Play', 193.

²³⁸ Ward, *Just My Soul Responding*, 303.

²³⁹ Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 97.

²⁴⁰ Cf. Kernodle, "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free", 306.

²⁴¹ Cf. Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 108.

²⁴² Ibid.

a decade, which was monumental for Simone's strained relationship with her career within the popular music genre: "I was desperate to be accepted by the Civil Rights leaders and when I was, I gave them 10 years of singing protest songs. In turn, it was the only time when I've been truly inspired by anything other than the music of composers like Mozart, Czerny, Liszt and Rachmaninov."²⁴³

With respect to what was just explored above, there is one aspect that stands out when it comes to Nina Simone's contributions to the Civil Rights Movement: An obvious lack of acknowledgement of her involvement in the years after the movement's decline – she was snubbed.²⁴⁴ This transpires when researching the connections between her and the Civil Rights Movement: while she is very closely associated with the movement, this is not the case the other way around. As Loudermilk observes: "When the subject is Nina Simone, the Civil Rights Movement is inevitably if not immediately the context; the two are equated, as if one were the very essence of the other. But when the subject is the Civil Rights Movement, Nina Simone and her anthems go unacknowledged."²⁴⁵ While she and her contributions were very much respected during the height of the "struggle", few of the relevant works documenting all things Civil Rights Movement, and especially those that focus on music as an important part of it, even mention her. Loudermilk continues to point out that despite her evident commitment, she neither appears, for instance, in the *Smithsonian Folkways Compilation – Voices of the Civil Rights Movement: Black American Freedom Songs 1960-1966* (1997) nor do Dr Martin Luther King, Jr.'s biographers mention that she was the one who sang his elegy at his funeral.²⁴⁶ As Loudermilk puts it: "Then the cause faded, the music industry turned away from her, and the history books erased her."²⁴⁷ Feldstein adds that after Simone's death in 2003, the general consensus in the obituaries separated Simone's fields of action, and increased a division between music or culture and politics, since she was portrayed "[...] as a historical relic from a bygone era or as an entertainer who had supplied background music for the civil rights movement more than as an activist in her own right."²⁴⁸ This completely understates her influence and her contributions to the Civil Rights Movement. Maybe it was Simone's absence in the 1970s and 1980s, which was primarily triggered by her exhaustion from the double workload she had been shouldering throughout the years, or her financial troubles with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) that was responsible for the lack of historical

²⁴³ Bradley, "Here Comes Trouble", Q Magazine, 1991, 82.

²⁴⁴ Cf. Loudermilk, 'Nina Simone & the Civil Rights Movement', 121.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 126.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 131.

²⁴⁸ Feldstein, "I Don't Trust You Anymore", 1379.

accounting of her contributions.²⁴⁹ Maybe it was her (in-)famous unpredictability and her temper when performing, especially visible during her *Montreux Jazz* performance in 1976.²⁵⁰ However, what remains true regardless of all these possible explanations is that “[...] she never got full credit for being one of the very first black female performers to speak out on social and political issues when it wasn’t fashionable to.”²⁵¹ This is especially unfortunate since Simone’s involvement in the movement was on the one hand so unique, and on the other hand cost her a great deal: Her activism was forever intertwined with her artistry, therefore her private life, as well as her foothold in the music industry were deeply affected by her political engagement. She illustrates this period of her life as follows: “People who lived through those times doing the same thing as I did, living and breathing revolution, will tell you the same stories of how their private lives faded away for years at a time. Nothing was personal or private.”²⁵² The Black female artist Nina Simone was indistinguishable from the Black female activist Nina Simone and that phenomenon had made her an internationally recognised trailblazer: “Reactions to Simone among critics and fans in the United States and abroad, her efforts to represent herself, and lyrics to “Mississippi Goddam” and other songs on her first overtly political album, all highlight the creative ways that Simone fused politics and performance as a black woman vocalist.”²⁵³

However, while her genius thrived and her newfound purpose guided the way through the 1960s, her personal, just like her professional relationships started to suffer more and more by the end of the decade as her record companies, RCA Victor at the time, were breathing down her neck with worries about her political engagement.²⁵⁴ This crisis only started to dawn on her once she got dissatisfied with the development of the Civil Rights Movement in the late 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. Once she realised the future she had envisioned for the Black community did not seem reachable anymore, she felt disillusioned and experienced a sense of utmost betrayal from all sides:

The days when revolution really had seemed possible were gone forever. I watched the survivors run for cover in community and academic programmes and felt betrayed, partly by our own leaders but mostly white America. And I felt disgusted by my own innocence. I had presumed we could change the world and had run down a dead-end street leaving my career,

²⁴⁹ Cf. Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 119 – 122.

²⁵⁰ Cf. Vanessa Okoth-Obbo, ‘Nina Simone, Montreux Jazz 1976: A Difficult, Unsteady Return to the Limelight’, *The Guardian*, 29 July 2020, sec. Music, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/jul/29/iconic-festival-sets-nina-simone-montreux-jazz-1976>.

²⁵¹ Nathan, *The Soulful Divas*, 46.

²⁵² Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 104.

²⁵³ Feldstein, “More Than Just a Jazz Performer”, 87.

²⁵⁴ Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 121.

child and husband way behind, neglected. Optimists talked about the advances we had made, but all I saw were lost opportunities.²⁵⁵

Betrayal was followed by disappointment and regret about having fought for what she then thought of as a lost cause, which might have only been a trend for those who had disengaged from the “struggle”. She discussed her disenchantment with Lloyd Bradley in their interview from 1991:

So many of the figureheads were either dead, in jail or had gone abroad and of those that were left, it was as if the movement wasn’t fashionable any more. They just gave up and got respectable. I felt as if my people had just rolled over and played dead and I hated them for it. I was more than let down, I was the most disappointed person in the world and regretted the 10 years of my life I’d given them.²⁵⁶

In terms of her career, a new popular music era had slowly begun and superseded Simone’s protest songs in the 1970s, for instance with James Brown’s “Say It Loud – I’m Black and I’m Proud” (1968).²⁵⁷ Moreover, as her fields of action, political activism and artistry, had been fused together for that decade, once she emotionally and spatially distanced herself from the movement, for instance by leaving the United States, things could still not go back to the way they were at the beginning of her career, as she had yet been put into another box:

What made it worse was I couldn’t get back to what I’d done before because I was labelled a protest singer. Record companies either thought I’d be trouble or that nobody would be interested in me singing love songs. It was a stigma I couldn’t get away from, as in Europe – one of my biggest markets – protest songs were all they knew me for and I had to go on singing them.²⁵⁸

The rebirth Simone experienced when she took up her political role within the Civil Rights Movement was a moment that could not be repeated once that chapter was closing for her. Subsequently, she found herself a “wandering soul”²⁵⁹ without a proper purpose once more, “[...] her identity fixed in a historical era passing before her eyes”.²⁶⁰ In the following years, Simone refrained from getting involved in political causes or getting her career in the mix: “It got me into a lot of trouble. It hurt my career. Maybe it helped black people, but it hurt me.”²⁶¹

Nevertheless, Simone’s legacy, musically as well as politically, is a constant part of more recent movements celebrating Black cultural pride and fighting for equality and against

²⁵⁵ Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 118.

²⁵⁶ Bradley, “Here Comes Trouble”, 82.

²⁵⁷ Cf. Kernodle, “I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free”, 315.

²⁵⁸ Bradley, “Here Comes Trouble”, 82.

²⁵⁹ Nathan, *The Soulful Divas*, 46.

²⁶⁰ Loudermilk, Loudermilk, ‘Nina Simone & the Civil Rights Movement’, 133.

²⁶¹ Simone in Lynskey, *33 Revolutions per Minute*, 104.

racial injustice in the United States. This is especially prominent within rap culture, about which Simone had mixed feelings: “I have a great respect for the rappers that are carrying a message to black youth, but I have no respect at all for rap as music [...] They should learn a bit more about their history and their music, and most could learn from old-timers like me. I’d be willing to go along and sing some of the old songs with them.”²⁶² Many famous rappers, such as JAY-Z, Kanye West or Lil Wayne, have since sampled Simone’s songs in the early 2000s and 2010s, and thus incorporated some of her posthumous spirit into their music. Despite mostly using it for their own purposes and pitching her voice, instead of paying homage to Simone and her political messages, the relevancy of her words still showcases her continuous impact. Another crucial part of her legacy is more locally centred: Her hometown Tryon inhabits the *Eunice Waymon-Nina Simone Memorial Project*, which honours and supports Simone’s musical talent, founded by Crys Armbrust, who also brought the *Nina Simone Scholarship* into being. This initiative supports students in fulfilling their short- and long-term educational goals in cases of financial need and is inspired by the *Eunice Waymon Fund* the people of Tryon contributed to during Simone’s childhood, thereby laying the groundwork for what would become an extraordinary career.

7.2. Miriam Makeba – “Mama Africa”

Miriam Makeba is arguably one of the most famous artists the African continent produced in the 20th century and her influence is still palpable today, both because of her international career as a successful singer, and her impactful activism against the Apartheid regime and for human rights in her home country. However, because her political engagement transcended borders, for instance through African diasporic fashion or popularising music styles from several African countries and singing in their native languages, she was called “Mama Africa”.²⁶³ The following chapters will serve as an essential backdrop for this paper, starting with a biographical portrait of her extraordinary person, an overview of how and when exactly Makeba became an activist on top of being an artist, then an analysis of four of her anti-Apartheid songs, and finally an overview of her contributions to the movement and the consequences she had to face because of them.

²⁶² Bradley, “Here Comes Trouble”, 1991, 82.

²⁶³ Cf. Khaya Mchunu and Busisiwe Memela, ‘Fashioning Resistance: The Unsung Fashions of Miriam “Mama Africa” Makeba’, *Alternation: Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the Arts and Humanities in Southern Africa*, 1 December 2019, <https://doi.org/10.29086/2519-5476/2019/sp26a3.72-73>.

7.2.1 Biographical Details

The following chapter is a chronological introduction to Makeba's remarkable person and is primarily based on what Makeba wanted the world to know about herself through her autobiography *Makeba – My Story*, which she wrote with James A. Hall and was published in 1987.²⁶⁴ It is important to highlight that the Apartheid regime still ruled South Africa during the writing process and the publication of the autobiography as this potentially influenced her perspective.

Zenzile Miriam Makeba was born as the first child of Nomkomndelo "Christina" and her second husband Mpambane "Caswell" Makeba on March 4th, 1932. Her African name, "Zenzi", has its origin in her mother's difficult pregnancy and labour with her, to which her grandmother only had to say: "Uzenzile!" which translates to "You have no one to blame but yourself" for the circumstances you are in, i.e., her mother wanting another child.²⁶⁵ Based on her paternal lineage, she identifies as belonging to the Xhosa tribe, whereas her mother is a Swazi.²⁶⁶ Makeba entered the world shortly before British colonial ended in South Africa²⁶⁷ and grew up during the Great Depression (1929-1939) as well as the Second World War. Even without this historical context illustrating the state the world was in when she was a child, she experienced many hardships and traumas throughout her adolescence.²⁶⁸ Due to these circumstances and the prevalent discrimination against Black people in South Africa, her family had a hard time making ends meet, therefore her mother decided to let her three children from her previous marriage live with their grandmother in Pretoria. At the tender age of eighteen days, Makeba was sent to prison with her mother for six months because she brewed and sold beer illegally.²⁶⁹ Her father, who worked in the administration of Shell Oil, died when she is around five years old and since her mother had to commute to her job as a domestic worker in Johannesburg to support her family, Makeba moved to her grandmother's compound in Pretoria, where she lived with her older siblings and other relatives.²⁷⁰ In her autobiography, Makeba details how she experienced racial discrimination as a child, for instance through break-ins by the police in the middle of the night to control their passbooks,

²⁶⁴ Hall is an American writer, broadcaster, journalist, filmmaker and – after a spiritual awakening brought about by Makeba – a traditional healer living in Swaziland since the late 1980s.

²⁶⁵ Cf. Miriam Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 1. Plum print. (New York, NY: Plume Book, 1989), 4.

²⁶⁶ Cf. Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Cf. Quintina Carter-Ényì and Aaron Carter-Ényì, 'Decolonizing the Mind Through Song: From Makeba to the Afropolitan Present', *Performance Research* 24, no. 1 (2 January 2019): 58–65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2019.1593737>, 59.

²⁶⁸ Cf. Benjamin M. O. Odhoji, 'The Miriam Makeba Story', *Journal of New Poetry* 6 (2009), 18.

²⁶⁹ Cf. Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 7.

²⁷⁰ Cf. Ibid., 9.

which she asserts was “to keep us off-balance. It is their way of keeping us down.”²⁷¹ She further elaborates how from a very early age, she was exposed to advertisements and other social standards that encouraged Black South Africans to internalise an inferior image of themselves as they should adhere to the White beauty standard, for instance by hair straightening or using skin whitening chemical creams. However, Makeba distanced herself from such expectations and developed her own self-worth over the years:

You cannot help but think: I wish I was white so I might live well and not suffer the way I do. But if I am envious of white people as a little girl, I am only envious of the way they live. I do not want to be white. I will never bleach my skin, although I am dark. I will not straighten my hair. As time passes I begin to discover something about myself: I am not bad-looking.²⁷²

The Afrikaner-led system of Apartheid was implemented in 1948 when Makeba was sixteen years old and because of the uncertainty this change generated for her family’s livelihood, she had to leave school and start working as a domestic, nanny, and laundry worker, where she was confronted with racial biases and racial profiling, for instance when her employer accused her of being a thief.²⁷³ She explains that she had to get used to interactions with White employers and adapts to a subservient attitude towards them to prevent potential dangers.²⁷⁴ Another domineering aspect she was subject to apart from the White supremacist ideology are the patriarchal structures of society. Despite being in love with her first boyfriend and later husband, Gooli, their daughter Sibongile “Bongi”, born when Makeba is 18 years old, was conceived through rape.²⁷⁵ Furthermore, Gooli physically and mentally abused her during their marriage, which is why she ultimately divorced him.

Although she did not get to spend much time with her parents due to her father’s early death and her mother’s work, she fondly remembers their musical influence on her upbringing: “My father was a very musical man. He played piano and composed music. My mother would sing and he would accompany her. My mother tells me that my father wanted me to study music. It was his one real hope for me.”²⁷⁶ Moreover, she describes the strange pull that music had on her from an early age, for instance when she watched the Bapedi tribesmen dance and sing: “Already I have discovered that music is a type of magic. Music can do all sorts of things. It can make sad people happy. It can make dull people sit up and pay attention. I know what it does to me. Music gets deep inside me and starts to shake things

²⁷¹ Cf. Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 11.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁷³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

up.”²⁷⁷ Odhoji, a Kenyan research scientist, highlights the tremendous influence Makeba’s maternal forebears appear to have had on her identity construction, and this also pertains to her musicality: “Makeba represents and attributes her complex multi-faceted identity – not least, her musical talents – to her mother’s influence and power.”²⁷⁸ Her mother’s spirituality and her transformation into a traditional healer, an *isangoma*, also had a profound influence on her. Makeba joined a church choir and during her teenage years she became a member of the senior chorus at school, despite being a lot younger than the other students: “Listening to them, I got so stirred up inside that I had to sing along.”²⁷⁹ Showcasing the early incidents of resistance against the Apartheid regime she witnessed, she points out that the choir “[...] perform songs written by South African composers. They are in the tribal languages, and some are frankly seditious to the white rule. But since whites do not speak our tongue, we get away with it.”²⁸⁰ She also enjoyed listening to American jazz music by artists like Ella Fitzgerald or Billie Holliday, to which her brother introduced her.²⁸¹

Her professional career as a singer started when she was in her early twenties and singing for her cousin’s band *The Cuban Brothers*, who mainly played what musicologists Carter-Enyi & Carter-Enyi call “vernacular versions of swing and doo-wop”²⁸² from the United States but also Zulu *isicathamiya* choral music. However, during one of their performances, Nathan Mdele, a member of the famous South African band *The Manhattan Brothers*, noticed her talent and persuaded her to audition for being their female vocalist.²⁸³ After being taken on in 1955, Makeba changed her stage name to Miriam Makeba, at first with the *Manhattan Brother’s* “Our Own Nut Brown Baby”, later “The Nightingale” added to her name, and she could scarcely believe her luck of being able to do what she loved for money: “I never wasted my time dreaming of living a life in show business, or of doing what I like to do more than anything else in the world, which is singing. But now, all of these are coming true as if it is, well, a dream!”²⁸⁴ The music scene Makeba now belonged to was part of an emerging Johannesburg neighbourhood called Sophiatown²⁸⁵, and Carter-Enyi & Carter-Enyi emphasise that its cosmopolitan flair was more or less obviously challenging the Apartheid regime and its suppression of Black South African cultural expression and

²⁷⁷ Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 15.

²⁷⁸ Odhoji, ‘The Miriam Makeba Story’, 16.

²⁷⁹ Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 17.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Cf. Ibid., 20.

²⁸² Carter-Ényi and Carter-Ényi, ‘Decolonizing the Mind Through Song’, 59.

²⁸³ Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 47

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 48.

²⁸⁵ Cf. April Sizemore-Barber, ‘The Voice of (Which?) Africa: Miriam Makeba in America’, *Safundi* 13, no. 3–4 (July 2012): 260, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17533171.2012.715416>.

advancement in society: “While not overtly political, their music conveyed a cosmopolitan and international mindset that reflected a longing for, and embrace of, the expressive freedom that was presumed to be found in the United States.”²⁸⁶ Makeba also testified that there was a longing among Black South Africans to go to America because despite their mutual inferior position in societies ruled by White people, it would have still been better than the living situation under the Apartheid regime.²⁸⁷

Due to their popularity, she toured other African countries with the *Manhattan Brothers* and by the mid-1950s, Makeba was a budding star in her own right: “If you want, you can buy my records. You can hear me on the radio or see me give a show with the Manhattan Brothers. And I’ll look right back at you from the pages of a magazine or from a billboard with a bottle of Coca-Cola in my hand!”²⁸⁸ The record company Gallotone Records urged her to release her very first single: “Lakutshuna Ilangu” by Mankhekwe Dvushe in Xhosa and it became her “breakthrough” hit²⁸⁹, which even made its way to America. Although it was illegal for a Black South African to sing in English, an Afrikaner measure to keep the British cultural influence as limited as possible²⁹⁰, Gallotone insisted to also release a rerecorded English version in 1956, which turned out to contain a poor translation in which the true meaning got lost, very much to Makeba’s disappointment.²⁹¹ Despite their celebrity status, Makeba and the Manhattan Brothers remain to be subject to racial profiling and humiliation, for instance by White policemen or doctors they encounter during their tours. Consequently, she observes: “There are times when each African wonders how much longer we can stand living the way we do, as subhumans. The whites do not want to treat us like human beings because it is easier to keep us down if they think we are animals.”²⁹² Without knowing at first, she performed in front of members of the African National Congress (ANC) during one of their meetings discussing the Freedom Charter, where she also met Nelson Mandela for the first time.²⁹³ Despite her shyness and her timidity regarding her political knowledge, she was convinced that change had to come sooner or later: “But we know we are human beings. We know we are as good as anybody. We also know that something has got to happen. There is only so much anger, resentment, pain, and fear that can build up in a person

²⁸⁶ Carter-Ényì and Carter-Ényì, ‘Decolonizing the Mind Through Song’, 59.

²⁸⁷ Cf. Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 25.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁸⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁹⁰ Cf. Carter-Ényì and Carter-Ényì, ‘Decolonizing the Mind Through Song’, 59.

²⁹¹ Cf. Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 52-53.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 54.

²⁹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

before there is an explosion.”²⁹⁴ Gallotone Records then formed an all-female group with three other singers around Makeba: *Miriam Makeba and the Skylarks*. According to Mchunu & Memela, an interesting duo of a South African Fashion Studies specialist and the CEO of the South African Social Security Agency, it was supposed to resemble popular American girl groups of the 1950s, but their music was a mix of township sounds, tribal rhythms, gospel and American doo-wop.²⁹⁵ In 1956, Makeba was part of a touring ensemble, *African Jazz and Variety*, where she played primarily to White audiences and only to Black people on the free nights of the local domestic servants.²⁹⁶ It was during one of these performances that an independent American filmmaker, Lionel Rogosin, picked her to represent an authentic Black South African artist in his anti-Apartheid film project *Come Back, Africa*²⁹⁷ (See Image 2), which was also the ANC’s anthem. Although she accepted his proposal eventually, Makeba was aware of the potential risk her participation in such a regime-critical project entailed.²⁹⁸ The filming had to be done in secret as there was no permission from the government since it was clear that it would do anything to prevent this film from seeing the light of day, but the film was to “[...] expos[e] the harsh conditions for black South Africans living under the apartheid regime.”²⁹⁹

Makeba’s appearance in the film became the turning point of her career. In the film, Makeba plays herself and performs two songs in a *shebeen*, a place of entertainment, underground music and illegal drinking, and despite her four-minute-performance in it, Feldstein insists that “[...] her body language, clothing, and professional performance strategies all helped to signal a cosmopolitan modern black identity, one that was transgressive precisely because it had simultaneous political and pleasurable dimensions and drew on multiple and transnational sources.”³⁰⁰ Before the film’s release in 1959, Makeba also joined the cast of the jazz opera/musical *King Kong*, which further presented a challenge to the Apartheid system’s racial segregation laws, as it included both Black and White South Africans in the audience and an interaction between talented Black performers and White audiences.³⁰¹ Rogosin submitted *Come Back, Africa* to debut at the 21st Venice Film Festival but had also shown the film to some influential US-Americans beforehand: The television

²⁹⁴ Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 55.

²⁹⁵ Cf. Mchunu and Memela, ‘Fashioning Resistance’, 77.

²⁹⁶ Cf. Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 63.

²⁹⁷ Cf. Ibid., 66.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Carter-Ényì and Carter-Ényì, ‘Decolonizing the Mind Through Song’, 59.

³⁰⁰ Ruth Feldstein, ‘Screening Antiapartheid: Miriam Makeba, “Come Back, Africa,” and the Transnational Circulation of Black Culture and Politics’, *Feminist Studies* 39, no. 1 (2013): 20, <https://doi.org/10.1353/fem.2013.0014>.

³⁰¹ Cf. Carter-Ényì and Carter-Ényì, ‘Decolonizing the Mind Through Song’, 59 & Gwen Ansell, *Soweto Blues: Jazz, Popular [Sic.] Music, and Politics in South Africa* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 104.

show host Steve Allen and the owner of one of Greenwich Village's most popular jazz clubs, Max Gordon, who instantly wanted Makeba to perform on their stages, which would happen soon after.³⁰² Rogosin convinced Makeba to join him for the highly awaited debut of their film in Venice, but her travel arrangements had to be kept under wraps because of the film's controversy. However, as soon as she left the country, two goodbye songs were released, thereby announcing her departure from South Africa, about which she had mixed feelings.³⁰³ *Come Back, Africa* eventually won the Critics Award at the Film Festival and "[...] the film's debut at Venice created something of a sensation, and, in the process, the film and its female star stimulated a dialogue on both sides of the Atlantic about apartheid, race relations, and the documentary as a genre."³⁰⁴ In London for more film screenings, Makeba met Harry Belafonte, who took her on as a protégée and facilitated her travel to the United States.³⁰⁵ Belafonte was involved in many aspects at the beginning of her career in the US: from letting Makeba record her first album *Miriam Makeba* (1960) with his band, over making introductions between her and some of the most important Black artists of the time, for instance Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, and Nina Simone, to fashion choices. Therefore, Makeba started calling him "Big Brother"³⁰⁶ and thus gained a new family member, however, she also experienced a profound loss: soon after her daughter Bongi joined her in America in 1960, her mother died and Makeba's passport was revoked after trying to obtain a visa to go back home to pay her respects. She narrates her experience as follows:

I am nervous when I go into the South African consulate. Here I am once again nothing but a native black without rights. The darling of the American newsmagazines and music industry, the girl who charmed the New York sophisticates and started a fashion trend with her hair and clothes, here she is just a *kaffir* who doesn't know her place.³⁰⁷

She realized that she had been exiled from South Africa because no matter how her situation had improved in the US, she had provoked the Apartheid authorities with the undeniable success of her unique combination of traditional African music, jazz, and folk music in various languages: "If I go back home now, jail awaits me. [...] [The authorities] are displeased with me. I have gone too far. I have become too big. Maybe they fear I will speak out against them. I have not said a word about politics in all the newspaper stories that have

³⁰² Cf. Feldstein, "Africa's Musical Ambassador", 63.

³⁰³ Cf. Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 74.

³⁰⁴ Feldstein, "Africa's Musical Ambassador", 63.

³⁰⁵ Cf. Onyebadi and Mbunyuza-Memani, "Women and South Africa's Anti-Apartheid Struggle", 37.

³⁰⁶ Cf. Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 83.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 96.

been printed about me. But I am still dangerous.”³⁰⁸ Emboldened by this realisation, Makeba got increasingly more vocal about Apartheid, slowly but surely accepting her new role as a spokesperson for her people: “From now on my importance with my people is greater, and with each song my commitment to them grows stronger. Once again, a totalitarian state tries to drive a wedge between an oppressed people, and it only brings us closer together.”³⁰⁹ Just like the start of the decade, the rest of the 1960s was an emotional rollercoaster ride for Makeba and her career. After rising to international stardom and touring the US, she performed at President John F. Kennedy’s 45th birthday, gave a speech in front of the United Nations Special Committee on Apartheid on two occasions in 1963 and 1964, got diagnosed and recovered from cervical cancer, released four more records and received a Grammy Award for her and Belafonte’s successful collaboration album *An Evening With Belafonte/Makeba* (1965). She married fellow South African musician Hugh Masekela in 1964 and divorced him two years later, had a serious falling out with Belafonte in 1967³¹⁰, became a grandmother as her daughter Bongki fell pregnant at 17 like herself, and got married to Stokely Carmichael in 1968. Because of his affiliation with the Black Power Movement, they were under FBI surveillance, her career deteriorated and the couple eventually left the United States after an invitation to Guinea from its president, Sekou Touré, where Makeba permanently settled until 1986.³¹¹ During those years, she continuously toured Europe and performed all over the African continent, primarily because many African countries became independent in an era of decolonisation that had started in the 1960s. In addition, she was made a Guinean diplomat and received a variety of honorary passports through her UN connections.³¹² Shortly before the publication of her autobiography, her daughter Bongki died. Broken by this loss, Makeba nonetheless remained actively involved in the Anti-Apartheid movement until South Africa was freed of Apartheid’s shackles in 1994, and later continued her career, as well as her support to the cause of empowering and supporting African countries through activism and philanthropic work until her death in 2008.

³⁰⁸ Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 83.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 112f.

³¹⁰ Cf. Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 142-145: A misunderstanding about potentially sending a political message by performing a Hebrew love song, which had been a staple duet during their performances on tour, after the news of the Six-Day-War in 1967 caused a significant rift in their relationship.

³¹¹ Cf. Mchunu and Memela, ‘Fashioning Resistance’, 88.

³¹² Cf. Sizemore-Barber, ‘The Voice of Which?’, 268.

7.2.2 Political Involvement – How the Artist became an Activist

Until months before she passed away, Miriam Makeba maintained that she was “not a political singer”³¹³. In an interview with *The Guardian*’s Robin Denselow in 2008, Makeba explained how being a singer and the political content of some of her songs are interwoven in her point of view: “I don’t know what the word means. People think I consciously decided to tell the world what was happening in South Africa. No! I was singing about my life, and in South Africa we always sang about what was happening to us - especially the things that hurt us.”³¹⁴ It is not surprising that she incorporated these feelings into her songs as throughout her years in the spotlight, Makeba experienced a lot of hurt and hardships, both privately as well as professionally, and much of it related to her home country South Africa. Nevertheless, although she denied that she intentionally included political messages in her music, she raised her voice and thereby granted her audiences access to a window to her soul, which had its home in South Africa, which, in turn, could hardly be separated from Apartheid. Therefore, the following chapter seeks to give an overview of how and in particular when she transformed into an activist.

As a musician with an extensive discography, Makeba’s music is not only centred around the realities of a country ruled by an oppressive regime, but also contains songs about other topics that affected her, such as love, loss, or even folk tales. However, even the release of her early jazz music with the *Manhattan Brothers*, following trends originating in the United States, as well as pairing these influences with original African culture could be interpreted as her first tentative attempts to challenge to the Apartheid system or a “[...] political claim to forms of urbanity that were denied to black South Africans by the apartheid state.”³¹⁵ The townships, where those musical innovations as well as an urban cosmopolitan identity among Black South Africans emerged, were intended to nip inspiration for Black identity formation in the bud, not inspire it. And in Makeba’s case, the inspiration was so great that she ended up becoming an internally acclaimed artist and thus the most successful export South Africa produced.³¹⁶ One of the main driving forces behind the resistance against Apartheid was the intention to foster “[...] awareness that Africans take pride in their culture and tradition despite systems of oppression.”³¹⁷ It is the assertion and empowerment of cultural pride that Makeba appears most likely to accept as an additional benefit of her fame

³¹³ Robin Denselow, ‘The Long Goodbye’, *The Guardian*, 15 May 2008, sec. Culture, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2008/may/16/worldmusic.jazz>.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Louise Bethlehem, “‘Miriam’s Place’: South African Jazz, Conviviality and Exile”, *Social Dynamics* 43, no. 2 (4 May 2017): 249, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02533952.2017.1364464>.

³¹⁶ Cf. Mchunu and Memela, ‘Fashioning Resistance’, 87.

³¹⁷ Carter-Ényì and Carter-Ényì, ‘Decolonizing the Mind Through Song’, 63.

through the years and she found multiple ways to incorporate it into her artistry. Mchunu & Memela establish two categories of activism strategies that can be attributed to Makeba: they distinguish between direct action, which includes music and speech, and indirect or symbolic action, such as fashion, both of which served as ways to celebrate a positive Black identity and show criticism regarding the Apartheid repression of African cultural heritage.³¹⁸ Before she left South Africa in 1959, Makeba had been part of the vibrant cultural scene of townships like Sophiatown, and this also had an impact on her fashion sense. Makeba's wardrobe was heavily Western inspired at the beginning of her career in South Africa³¹⁹, thereby "appropriating" fashion that was not deemed fit for Black South Africans, but once she had left for the United States, she increasingly asserted her South African heritage through her looks. She explains in her autobiography that this was a personal preference of hers, which makes sense since it was also at least a small part of home that she could retain for herself. Furthermore, she challenged prevalent beauty standards of the South African and American elites of the time and thus subverted them due to her success: "I like my hair the way it is: short and woolly [...] I am not a glamor girl. I'm just naturally myself. I still do not wear makeup. The big earrings that hang from each lobe and my large, colorful bead necklaces are all the decorations I need."³²⁰ For her performances, in turn, Makeba often opted for elegant evening dresses and Mchulu & Memela observe that: "She occupied the space of white, cultured intellect through her dress, but reinforced that the intellect is in fact black through her hair."³²¹ Mchunu & Memela go into detail about how Makeba's appearance was a clear indicator of her support of and appreciation for not only South Africa, but other African countries not only within a Western society, i.e. on US-American stages, but also during an age of decolonisation from the West.³²²

Still, Makeba would probably assert that apart from proudly wearing African fashion, even her earliest "indirect" statements against Apartheid, i.e., her participation in the jazz musical *King Kong*, and even more obviously her role in *Come Back, Africa*, an anti-Apartheid documentary, were no direct acts of defiance. Feldstein elaborates why Makeba's four minute appearance was absolutely crucial on several levels: "Her impact had to do with her ability to convey the film's central—and contradictory—message: that blacks in South Africa were suffering and degraded under white rule, and that blacks in South Africa were forging a vital and cosmopolitan community that was intellectually, emotionally, culturally,

³¹⁸ Cf. Mchunu and Memela, 'Fashioning Resistance', 73.

³¹⁹ Cf. Ibid., 77-81.

³²⁰ Makeba and Hall, *Makeba: My Story*, 86.

³²¹ Mchunu and Memela, 'Fashioning Resistance', 81.

³²² Ibid., 71.

and politically rich.”³²³ In her autobiography, it becomes clear that she was on the one hand very well aware of the increased attention her name brought the film, but on the other hand of possible risks her role could put her at: “If Mr. Rogosin is booted out of the country, he can go back to America and make another movie. But the other black cast members and I would be in real trouble.”³²⁴ The fact that she did get involved in both projects provides evidence that she, if consciously or not, was part of a bigger movement of artists that sought to defy and call out the systemic injustice, dehumanisation, segregation and racial discrimination against Black South Africans through peaceful defiance strategies, such as their artistries.

Nonetheless, she tried to maintain a fairly unpolitical public persona when it came to direct activism and did not actively appear as politically involved at the beginning of her career. One of the main reasons for this reluctance is the fact that while she left the country in 1959, her family remained in South Africa and was thus in danger of being punished for her actions or political statements made from abroad. Still, the American press was desperate to get her opinions on the ongoing struggle in her home country, although she did not want to reveal them: “They want to know if I am associated with the African Nationalist Movement. “Please, “I say. “let’s not talk about politics.” I must certainly avoid this. My mother, my daughter, my whole family is in South Africa, and they will have problems if I do something to displease the authorities.”³²⁵ A change in attitude, however, gradually materialised once she was exiled in 1960, her passport revoked, and thereby prohibited from re-entering her home country for her mother’s funeral and to be with her family. By then, her daughter Bongie had made a safe journey to the United States, and Makeba became more outspoken about the situation in South Africa. At that point, Makeba was already a rising star in the US and, encouraged by her success and inspired by Harry Belafonte’s political engagement in the Civil Rights Movement, which unfolded around her, Makeba decided to “no longer be shy”³²⁶ during press conferences on her tour with Belafonte: “We talk about the shows, of course but also about social affairs. [...] All the newspapermen and the radio and TV people give me a valuable chance to speak up about the crimes that are being committed against my people at home.”³²⁷ Due to her association with Harry Belafonte, who, for instance personally provided financial support to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., through the course of the 1950s³²⁸, and other influential Black American musicians of the early 1960s, Makeba also highlights that

³²³ Feldstein, “Africa’s Musical Ambassador”, 57.

³²⁴ Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 66.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

³²⁷ Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 103.

³²⁸ Cf. Sizemore-Barber, ‘The Voice of Which?’, 263.

she developed an interest in the Civil Rights Movement. She saw the obvious similarities between how Black people were treated in her old and her new home but also the obvious difference of codified and non-codified racism:

I admire the civil rights movement here in the U.S. All over the country, I see black people who are not just sitting down and letting everybody step on them. When you come to think of it, the treatment of black people in the U.S. is quite similar to the treatment of my people in South Africa. In the U.S., black people live in segregated areas that are not called townships but “ghettos” [...] To me it’s the same thing in both countries, except that the American government condemns racism in its constitution, and the South African constitution condones it.³²⁹

In her autobiography, she particularly highlights King’s “I Have a Dream” speech during the March on Washington on August 28th, 1963, as a truly inspiring moment for her while she was recovering from cancer: “Yes, I have a dream, too.” I would like to see my people free. I would like to see the black and white children of South Africa walk hand in hand. I would like to go home again. This is something for me to dream about. And then I think, this is something for me to live for.”³³⁰ But based on advice from Belafonte, she refrained from making comments on American politics or accompany them to any of the protests or marches because she was still a guest, and a Black person in the United States of the 1960s.³³¹

The real turning point for her to step into the sphere of political activism was when she was invited to speak as a representative for her South African people in front of the United Nations Special Committee on the Policies of Apartheid of the Government of the Republic of South Africa on July 16th of 1963. She was encouraged to do so by delegates of other African countries at the United Nations, who she had connected with over the years and who also provided her with a selection of honorary passports.³³² Still conflicted about whether her public statement on Apartheid would do her family in South Africa more harm than good, she ultimately decided to take the risk and commit treason against her home country’s government.³³³ The following passage is an edited version of her speech:

Every member of this committee knows by now what apartheid means to the Africans. I do not have to explain in detail what is going on there. The members of the committee also know that every time we tried to better the situation, the Verwoerd government went further to make South Africa a nightmare to the Africans, through police brutality and government terrorism. The story of the shootings at Sharpeville is well-known throughout the world, indeed, all men

³²⁹ Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 101.

³³⁰ Ibid., 124.

³³¹ Cf. Ibid., 164.

³³² Cf. Sizemore-Barber, ‘The Voice of Which?’, 262; 268

³³³ Cf. Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 112.

and women of goodwill all over the world raised their voices in anger on that occasion but all these protests just fell on deaf ears. [...] However, since the South African Freedom Fighters started making representation to the United Nations for the removal of the Verwoerd government and the restoration of power to those to whom it belongs, we have received nothing more than lip service from most of the big powers of the world [...] This therefore does not leave us with any option but to ask the United Nations to take positive action against the South African government. By positive action, I mean of course, that the United Nations should put into action the very good resolutions calling for a complete boycott on South Africa and especially the sending of arms by outside powers to South Africa. I have not the slightest doubt that these arms will be used against the African women and children. [...] the United Nations and the entire world should do their utmost to compel the Verwoerd government to open at once all the doors of the prisons and concentration camps in South Africa. As I speak here, thousands of our people, men and women, and even children, are now in jail [...] Among those who have been jailed and detained or restricted by the Verwoerd government are many of our prominent leaders, which include Chief AJ Luthuli, Robert Sobukwe, Nelson Mandela, Mrs Lilian Ngoyi and only last week Mr Walter Sisulu and others were arrested. These people must be released at once. I am certain nobody can liberate his people when he is in a prison cell or in a concentration camp [...] [M]y country has been turned by the Verwoerd government into a huge prison. I feel certain that the time has come for the whole of humanity to shout “Halt!” and to act with firmness to stop these crazy rulers from dragging our country into a horrifying disaster. Thank you!³³⁴

Her message to the Apartheid regime and leaders of the rest of the world was clear and direct: not only did she emphasise the fact that what had been unfolding in South Africa for the last 15 years was common knowledge and hardly anything was being done by the world community to put an end to the Verwoerd regime, she explicitly called for a complete boycott to cut South Africa off. This unequivocal statement cemented her political role in the fight against Apartheid, and her reputation as a public enemy of the Republic of South Africa. In this speech, it also becomes apparent that despite being in exile, she kept up-to-date with how the situation in South Africa progressed, for instance about the planned peaceful protest in Sharpeville, which eventually turned into a terrible bloodbath,³³⁵ and the detainments of the important leaders of the resistance movement in 1962 and 1963. The immediate aftermath of her decision to appear in front of the UN Committee was that she transformed from the South African singer Miriam Makeba into an activist and spokesperson for the South African

³³⁴ Transcript of Miriam Makeba, “18th Meeting of Special Committee Against Apartheid”, United Nations, UN Audiovisual Library, 09:57, July 16, 1963, <https://media.un.org/avlibrary/en/asset/d255/d2553678>.

³³⁵ Cf. Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 94.

people: “The person Miriam Makeba is no longer just an African singer to them. I am a symbol of my repressed people. To be in such a position is to live with a great responsibility. It is as if I am more than myself. And it is scary, because I am afraid I will make a mistake and disappoint people.”³³⁶ Feldstein cites a contemporary critic who labeled Makeba as “Africa’s musical ambassador to the United States.”³³⁷ Sizemore-Barber, whose research spans Women’s, Gender and Africana Studies, remarks that while Makeba still did not consider herself a diplomat or an activist but a singer, the lines between her music and politics became increasingly blurry “[...] between her role as an African performer, and herself as performance of Africa.”³³⁸ Makeba returned to the United Nations on March 9th, 1964, and this time her speech was in front of the General Assembly (see Image 3). The following excerpt is taken from the *Miriam Makeba Foundation*’s website highlights her most important points:

I ask you and all the leaders of the world: Would you act differently? Would you keep silent and do nothing if you were in our place? Would you not resist if you were allowed no rights in your own country because the color of your skin is different to that of the rulers and if you were punished for even asking for equality? I appeal to you and to you, to all the countries of the world, to do everything you can to stop the coming tragedy. I appeal to you to save the lives of our leaders, to empty the prisons of all those who should never have been there.³³⁹

While her appeal in her first speech to the Special Committee contained more direct requests, such as sanctions and putting a stop to arms deliveries, she used a more personal and conscience-based approach to gain the General Assembly’s sympathy and understanding. Her tone is more urgent for a reason: The coming tragedy she is referring to was the feared outcome of the Rivonia Trial of anti-Apartheid activists, such as Nelson Mandela, which had begun three months after her first appearance in front of the Special Committee: Her fears would come true on June 12th, 1964, when Mandela and seven others of the accused were sentenced to life imprisonment and sent to Robben Island, only three months after Makeba’s General Assembly speech.³⁴⁰

Raising her voice and using her words to speak out against injustices on a political stage was a completely new and nerve-wrecking experience for Makeba, as can be seen by her shaking hands in the video footage from her United Nations speeches. However, this was not the same with regards to her primary field of action, i.e., performing onstage as an artist,

³³⁶ Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 94.

³³⁷ Feldstein, “‘Africa’s Musical Ambassador””, 53f.

³³⁸ Cf. Sizemore-Barber, ‘The Voice of Which?’, 262.

³³⁹ ‘Monologue, Citation, Excerpts’,

https://miriammakeba.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=41&Itemid=243.

³⁴⁰ Cf. ‘Trials and Prisons Chronology – Nelson Mandela Foundation’, <https://www.nelsonmandela.org/trials-and-prison-chronology>.

wherefore the following paragraph will outline Makeba's activism within her music and thus create a bridge to the ensuing song analysis. Carter-Enyi & Carter-Enyi argue that the fact that Makeba consciously chose to sing in her native language, Xhosa, can be interpreted as a post-colonial "reclamation of indigenous culture and identity"³⁴¹ and an attempt to preserve and revive one of Africa's many languages.³⁴² Her records also feature songs in English, French, Yiddish and other African languages, however, Carter-Enyi & Carter-Enyi continue to stress that although she was outside of South Africa's jurisdiction and thus legally allowed to sing in English, she preferred singing and performing in African languages "[...] despite the commercial demand for singing in English and any pushback from the record companies and tour managers."³⁴³ Furthermore, her defiance of the marginalisation as well as of the oppression of African cultural heritage through the use of language was a way of breaking free from the Apartheid regime's control tactics.³⁴⁴ Olukayode Segun & Ojakorotu agree that "[...] it has been established that popular songs, when they use indigenous languages and interact directly with indigenous people, are even more potent as instruments of political opposition."³⁴⁵ Carter-Enyi & Carter-Enyi classify Makeba's deliberate use of African languages with the popular Calypso music as part of her ethnolinguistic agenda: "Makeba's white audience could connect with this familiar aspect of the song's presentation, possibly increasing receptivity to the unfamiliar sounds of the Xhosa language and intricate African rhythms. This hybridization gave the world a small dose of Xhosa culture with a Calypso frame."³⁴⁶ As has been highlighted earlier, Makeba had also made bad experiences with translations of lyrics into English because a lot of cultural meaning got lost in the process, which possibly further contributed to her linguistic preferences, especially when it came to songs that thematised topics close to her heart, like the oppression of her people.

Furthermore, Makeba explains the traditional aspect of communicating via song within African cultures, something she got used to from an early age: "If something happens today, tomorrow somebody will write a song about it. Positive or negative [...]. Some are played on the radio until the government finds out what they mean, and then they are banned. But we sing them amongst ourselves. Our songs mean more to us than the official media of the press and radio."³⁴⁷ According to Schumann, this connection between everyday life and current events, especially the struggle against Apartheid, became a common phenomenon

³⁴¹ Carter-Ényi and Carter-Ényi, 'Decolonizing the Mind Through Song', 58.

³⁴² Cf. Ibid.

³⁴³ Ibid., 59.

³⁴⁴ Cf. Ibid., 60.

³⁴⁵ Olukayode Segun and Ojakorotu, 'Indigenised Popular Songs for Oppositional Political Communication', 249.

³⁴⁶ Carter-Ényi and Carter-Ényi, 'Decolonizing the Mind Through Song', 61.

³⁴⁷ Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 22.

when it came to South African music in the 1950s and cannot be isolated to the protest song genre: “It is therefore not necessarily useful to make the distinction between recordings of artists and popular protest songs at this point, as in practice they often overlapped. Songs that were first recorded by popular artists were sung in the streets, just as songs that emerged from political rallies were recorded by artists in the studios.”³⁴⁸ Aware of the communicative properties of song, it is only natural that she also eventually chose it as a means to directly convey her support and increase the awareness of what was going on under Apartheid. With *An Evening With Belafonte/Makeba* in 1965, Makeba had fully fused her fields of action, i.e., her music and the political stance she now openly took, although she does not reveal to the readers of her autobiography what exactly triggered her to actively decide to integrate more political messages of varying subtlety into her songs and make music that illustrated the difficulties of living in Apartheid South Africa entailed. Since many of her songs were sung in her native language, Xhosa, her audience members might not have suspected the true meanings behind the songs, possibly because they were hidden in plain sight behind a curtain weaved of a strange language as well as cheerful, danceable music. Their contents, although she mainly claimed the role of the messenger, are undoubtedly unambiguous political messages, which the following chapters will focus on.

7.2.3. Anti-Apartheid Song Selection

Miriam Makeba’s music catalogue is extensive and exhibits a great range of songs in different musical styles, for instance folk, calypso, jazz, or Afropop, dealing with manifold topics that affected the singer. Most prominently, Onyebadi & Mbunyuza-Memani observe, “Makeba, through her music, affords us a window and glimpse into the lives of black people under oppression in South Africa, as well as how they challenged the apartheid regime.”³⁴⁹ Hence, following song selection for the ensuing analysis was primarily based on whether the songs’ contents focussed on Apartheid and the South African population’s struggle against it but the following criteria were also regarded: Makeba played an instrumental role in bringing her version of the songs to life, despite not necessarily writing them herself, they were officially released under labels the artist was signed to at the time, and they represent different facets of being involved in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle. This selection includes certain themes that can be attributed to each song, which include inequality, remembrance, threats to the oppressor and retaliation, as well as emotions such as rage, despair, and loss. I can confirm that the translations of the lyrics in isiXhosa are verified and were interpreted by an authentic

³⁴⁸ Anne Schumann, ‘The Beat That Beat Apartheid: The Role of Music in the Resistance against Apartheid in South Africa’, 2008, 22.

³⁴⁹ Onyebadi and Mbunyuza-Memani, “Women and South Africa’s Anti-Apartheid Struggle”, 39.

source.³⁵⁰ Nevertheless, I am aware of the risk translations of African languages into English entail. As Carter-Enyi & Carter-Enyi put it: “Because language and music are so tied in Africa, to divorce a melody from its lyrics [...] is to disfigure the music. Even if a song can be translated, the cultural idioms may not be preserved.”³⁵¹

For those of her listeners who were also not fluent in isiXhosa, which hardly any of her audiences buying the American records were, while those who spoke the language were prohibited from obtaining them after they had been banned in South Africa in 1963, the true meaning behind some of her songs remained hidden when they were first released. Nonetheless, she knew there were ways for Black South Africans to get their hands on Makeba’s records. As with any other song released in isiXhosa in the United States, Makeba could count on two things: firstly, her primary audience in the US would not be able to understand most of her lyrics in her native languages, unless she provided some introductory words at performances, which means the political messages contained in them were being spread more subconsciously through the distribution of her records, especially paired with someone as well-known as Harry Belafonte, than through an active participation from her listeners in the struggle against Apartheid. Secondly, she could thereby send messages of encouragement and solidarity to her fellow South Africans because she knew that through the black-market distribution of American records, and especially her records as a national hero, they would find their way to the ones she wanted to show support to. While none of the following songs selected for my research have to be classified as stereotypical protest songs, their political just as their thematic relevancy regarding Apartheid South Africa make them valuable historical sources of information about what Apartheid instilled in people and which ways were used to put these emotions into words. To capture how Makeba achieved this over time, the songs are listed in chronological order and offer a timeline of Makeba’s thematisation of Apartheid within her music, since the Apartheid regime was in place for most of the duration of her career.

7.2.3.1 *Threat/Retaliatio*n – “Beware, Verwoerd! (Ndodemnyama)”

Miriam Makeba’s song “Beware, Verwoerd! (Ndodemnyama)”, is the sixth track on one of Makeba’s most famous albums: *An Evening With Belafonte / Makeba*. The record was released under RCA (Radio Corporation of America) Victor in 1965 and eventually won a

³⁵⁰ Since one of Miriam Makeba’s native languages was isiXhosa and I do not possess the necessary language skills to understand, let alone translate the original lyrics into English, Nkosinathi Dlamini, a native South African lecturer at the University of Vienna’s Department of African Studies, was so kind to support me.

³⁵¹ Carter-Enyi and Carter-Enyi, ‘Decolonizing the Mind Through Song’, 62.

Grammy award for “Best Folk Recording” at the 8th Annual Grammy Awards in 1966.³⁵² This made Makeba the first African who was ever awarded with a Grammy.³⁵³ It features twelve songs sung either by Harry Belafonte or Miriam Makeba on their own, but also two duets sung by both artists. With a total length of two minutes and five seconds, “Ndodemnyama”, written, arranged and adapted by Makeba³⁵⁴, is the shortest song on the album and has a very simple structure, but that does not mean it lacks in meaningfulness. Nkoala points out that the simple and repetitive lyrics function perfectly in a group context, which was important for Freedom Songs.³⁵⁵ From a musical perspective, the mellow guitar strings and the pleasant drumbeat do not immediately insinuate that it is a protest song. The overall tone of the song and its musical composition are joyful and invite the listeners to sway along to the rhythm, not suspecting that what they are listening to is coating a strong political statement.

Bhasobha nants'indod'emnyama Verewoed (Yini Verewoed)

Bhasobha nants'indod'emnyama Verewoed x 2

Nants'indod'emnyama Verewoed (Indod'emnyama) x 4

Bhasobha nants'indod'emnyama Verewoed (Yini Verewoed)

Bhasobha nants'indod'emnyama Verewoed x 2

Nants'indod'emnyama Verewoed x 4

Bhasobha nants'indod'emnyama Verewoed (Yini Verewoed)

Bhasobha nants'indod'emnyama Verewoed x 2

Nants'indod'emnyama Verewoed (hayi, hayi, hayi) x 4

Bhasobha nants'indod'emnyama Verewoed (Yini Verewoed)

*Bhasobha nants'indod'emnyama Verewoed x 2*³⁵⁶

This song is one of the most popular South African freedom songs of the 1950s, composed by the political activist and singer Vuyisile Mini, who was one of the defendants next to Nelson Mandela during the famous Treason Trial; they even sang this song together while they were in Johannesburg Prison in the early 1960s.³⁵⁷ As the title already reveals, the song directly addresses one of the most important political figures connected to Apartheid, Hendrik Verwoed, and thus the Apartheid regime in general, as Makeba was aware of this

³⁵² Cf. ‘Miriam Makeba | Artist | GRAMMY.Com’, <https://www.grammy.com/artists/miriam-makeba/4292>.

³⁵³ Ansell, *Soweto Blues*, 227.

³⁵⁴ *Belafonte / Makeba - An Evening With Belafonte/Makeba*, 1965, <https://www.discogs.com/release/2400355-Belafonte-Makeba-An-Evening-With-BelafonteMakeba>;
<https://www.ascap.com/repertory#/ace/search/workID/912437838>

³⁵⁵ Cf. Nkoala, ‘Songs That Shaped the Struggle’, 14.

³⁵⁶ ‘Lyrics | Miriam Makeba | Beware, Verwoerd! (Ndodemnyama)’, <https://lyrics.lyricfind.com/lyrics/miriam-makeba-beware-verwoerd-ndodemnyama>.

³⁵⁷ Schumann, ‘The Beat That Beat Apartheid’, 23.

government's spread of intimidation and fear among the Black community.³⁵⁸ Verwoerd became minister of native affairs in 1950 and prime minister of South Africa in 1958. There is no denying the fact that he was one of the main orchestrators behind apartheid. In this case, Verwoerd functions as the personification of "the White man".³⁵⁹

Throughout the song, Makeba and her background singers repeat the following lines multiple times: "Nants'indod'emnyama Verewoed", which, according to Dlamini, can be translated as "Here is a black man, Verwoed". Later, Makeba changes the lyrics a little, for instance by adding one important word in front, "Bhasobha nants'indod'emnyama Verewoed", which then translates the repeated lines to "Watch out/ Be careful - here is a black man / here comes a black man, Verwoed". Then, another exclamation is added at the end, "Yini Verewoed", which means something along the lines of "What is the matter Verwoed?". The song, therefore, has quite a challenging undertone to a very powerful man and his racial policies, as Makeba delivers a warning piece of music that can be interpreted almost as a rallying cry. Dlamini also points out that the skilful use of the imagery of a strong Black man whose arrival is imminent further stresses the threatening meaning behind the song, which was supposed to install fear in Verwoerd and members of his regime. Nkoala agrees that justice, as well as "honour and reputation for the oppressed black nation"³⁶⁰ play a crucial role in this song. In this connection, the focus on and empowerment of the strong Black man could also be interpreted as the Africans' strength to emancipate themselves from Verwoerd's tyranny. This interpretation is supported by Onyebadi & Mbunyuza-Memani: "In fact, the lyrical content of the song warns Verwoerd to be careful because the black man will not be docile and absorb the humiliating position he was subjected to, but will rise up and fight him and his apartheid government."³⁶¹ Following Nkoala in this regard, the song not only hints at the pending day of Black retaliation but also the ubiquity of violence, thus it "[...] plays quite strongly on the sense of fear that existed in both black and white South Africans, based on the fact that the conditions under apartheid were so turbulent that at any moment violence could break out on either side."³⁶² Furthermore, by extending the song title with the Afrikaans derivative "pasopa/bhasobha" (be careful) from *passop* and "Beware, Verwoerd!" it is clear who Makeba intends to send a simple message to without inferring revenge, intent, nor

³⁵⁸ Cf. Onyebadi and Mbunyuza-Memani, "Women and South Africa's Anti-Apartheid Struggle", 40.

³⁵⁹ Cf. Nkoala, 'Songs That Shaped the Struggle', 15.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Onyebadi and Mbunyuza-Memani, "Women and South Africa's Anti-Apartheid Struggle", 40.

³⁶² Nkoala, 'Songs That Shaped the Struggle', 15.

violence.³⁶³ Nkoala stresses the importance of including a threat to the oppressor in their own language:

Because this song was normally used when struggle activists were marching in direct confrontation to the apartheid police or army, it can be assumed that the Afrikaans word was deliberately chosen so that the apartheid authorities could comprehend that a direct warning and challenge was being issued to them.³⁶⁴

As Onyebadi & Mbunyuza-Memani succinctly synthesise: “In *Ndod ‘emnyama*, Makeba articulated the collective message of the black population to their white oppressors represented by Verwoerd; a message that warned the oppressors about the determination of the black population to fight back and regain their freedom.”³⁶⁵

7.2.3.2 *Inequality* – “Nongqongqo (To Those We Love)”

Another song Miriam Makeba wrote for *An Evening With Belafonte / Makeba* is “Nongqongqo (To Those We Love)”. It is the fourth track on the album, two minutes and eighteen seconds long and an acapella piece.

Bahleli bonke entilongweni
Bahleli bonke kwaNongqongqo x 4
Hee hee hee halala x 4
Nanku, nanku, nank'uSobukwe
Nanku, nanku entilongweni x 2
Yini baba Luthuli?
Hayi uzotheni, uzotheni? x 2
Nanku, nanku, nank'uMandela
Nanku, nanku entilongweni
Nanku, nanku, nank'uSisulu
Nanku, nanku entilongweni
Yini weh maAfrica?
Hayi uzotheni, uzotheni? x 2
Bahleli bonke entilongweni
*Bahleli bonke kwaNongqongqo x 2*³⁶⁶

The title refers to the isiXhosa name *kwaNongqongqo* for one of the famous penitentiary units that held political prisoners, such as Steve Biko, during the Apartheid era: Fort Glamorgan Prison in East London of South Africa's Eastern Cape Province.³⁶⁷ Makeba begins the song

³⁶³ Onyebadi and Mbunyuza-Memani, “Women and South Africa's Anti-Apartheid Struggle”, 40.

³⁶⁴ Nkoala, ‘Songs That Shaped the Struggle’, 14f.

³⁶⁵ Onyebadi and Mbunyuza-Memani, “Women and South Africa's Anti-Apartheid Struggle”, 40.

³⁶⁶ ‘Lyrics | Miriam Makeba | Nongqongqo (To Those We Love)’, <https://lyrics.lyricfind.com/lyrics/miriam-makeba-nongqongqo-to-those-we-love>.

³⁶⁷ Cf. ‘Steve Biko Bridge, East London | South African History Online’, accessed 11 July 2024, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/place/steve-biko-bridge-east-london>.

with: “Bahleli bonke entilongweni / Bahleli bonke kwaNongqongqo”, which translates to: “They are all sitting in prison / They are all sitting in Nongqongqo”. These lines are repeated several times and then she starts introducing some of the most impactful Apartheid fighters, who were imprisoned at the time she wrote and released the song, in a sort of call-and-response-manner with a choir of background singers accompanying her: “Nanku, nanku, nank'uSobukwe / Nanku, nanku entilongweni”. Following Dlamini’s translation this means: “Here (he is), Here (he is), Here is Sobukwe (Robert Sobukwe) / Here (he is), Here he is in prison.” The person she refers to is Robert Sobukwe (1924 – 1978), who was a South African politician and Black nationalist leader who founded the Pan-Africanist Congress in 1959. He was arrested in the following year and spent the remainder of his life in prison or under house arrest until his death in 1978.³⁶⁸ Makeba then continues with addressing another important political figure: “Yini baba Luthuli? / Hayi uzotheni, uzotheni? / Yini baba Luthuli? / Hayi uzotheni, uzotheni?” A translation for these lines would be: “What is it Mr Luthuli / (No) What are you going to say, what are you going to say?”. Albert John Luthuli (1898 – 1967) was the African National Congress’s (ANC) president from 1952 until his death in 1967. During his tenure he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1960 for his nonviolent struggle to fight racial discrimination, the first African to be recognised with this honour.³⁶⁹ Makeba asks him for guidance or his opinion, both are possible interpretations, about the current situation and the (unjust) incarcerations, such as those of fellow prominent ANC members, some of the most famous ones she is about to name: “Nanku, nanku, nank'uMandela / Nanku, nanku entilongweni / Nanku, nanku, nank'uSisulu / Nanku, nanku entilongweni”, translated to: “Here (he is), Here (he is), Here is Mandela (Nelson Mandela) / Here (he is), Here he is in prison / Here (he is), Here (he is), Here is Sisulu (Walter Sisulu) / Here (he is), Here he is in prison.” As before, Makeba introduces the person and the fact that they are currently imprisoned, however, this time she does this in a raised voice compared to the introduction of Sobukwe and Luthuli, and she is joined by the strong voices of her background singer choir. This increase in volume of their voices might have something to do with the fact that Nelson Mandela (1918 – 2013) was the most well-known anti-Apartheid fighter and struggle leader.³⁷⁰ Walter Sisulu (1912 – 2003) was an equally

³⁶⁸ Cf. ‘Robert Sobukwe | Apartheid Opponent, Pan-Africanism, PAC Founder | Britannica’, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Robert-Sobukwe>.

³⁶⁹ Cf. ‘Albert John Luthuli | South African Leader, Activist, & Death | Britannica’, 17 July 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Albert-Luthuli>.

³⁷⁰ Cf. ‘Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela | South African History Online’, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/nelson-rolihlahla-mandela#section3>.

important figure within the Resistance movement, as well as a close friend of Mandela's.³⁷¹ In 1964, the year before the album's release, Mandela and Sisulu were sentenced to life in prison in an infamous trial and would eventually only be released in 1990. With the event of their imprisonment so fresh in her mind, Makeba was probably imagining its consequences for the apartheid struggle and Africa in general when she wrote the following lines: "Yini weh maAfrica? / Hayi uzotheni, uzotheni? / Yini weh maAfrica? / Hayi uzotheni, uzotheni?", translated to: "What is it Africa / (No) What are you going to say, what are you going to say?". One interpretation for these lines would be that Makeba is worried for the future of (South) Africa, how it will react and cope with the apparent loss of these leading representatives of the anti-Apartheid struggle. For further emphasis the introductory lines are repeated one last time "Bahleli bonke entilongweni / Bahleli bonke kwaNongqongqo / Bahleli bonke entilongweni / Bahleli bonke kwaNongqongqo", stressing the fact that all of these influential freedom fighters were imprisoned at the time of the song's release. Dlamini points out that from a linguistic point of view, Makeba's use of the word *itilongwe* is interesting in the sense that she used an Afrikaans loan word for prison (*tronk*) in its locative form, *entilongweni*, and then combined it with the Xhosa name for a specific prison. Consequently, she insinuates that it is an Afrikaner prison where Black South Africans, possibly native speakers of isiXhosa, are being held. It is not a farfetched conclusion to claim that this was an intentional move on Makeba's part: By using these terms she not only reaffirmed the fact that she knew what was happening in South Africa at the time by integrating these very specific terms, especially *kwaNongqongqo*, and dropping the names of several known resistance fighters; she also established a connection of solidarity from abroad to highlight the increasing number of incarcerations happening in the early 1960s, which dislocated the leaders of the anti-Apartheid struggle from their people, an active attempt by the government to limit their powers to an absolute minimum. Furthermore, Onyebadi & Mbunyuza-Memani highlight that Makeba's deliberate name-dropping was an act of defiance, as, at the time, certain words and names, especially those of alleged terrorists, were banned by the government from everyday discourse among the oppressed population to limit communication about potential threats to the Apartheid system.³⁷² Makeba, however, did not perceive herself as subject to these curtailments of freedom of speech or in danger of facing severe harassment or arrest when she lived in exile: "In fact, in this song Makeba

³⁷¹ Cf. 'Walter Ulyate Sisulu | South African History Online', <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/walter-ulyate-sisulu>.

³⁷² Cf. Onyebadi and Mbunyuza-Memani, "Women and South Africa's Anti-Apartheid Struggle", 44-45.

clearly undermined the white supremacist governments in South Africa and its regulations against the use of such names [...] *Nongqongqo* was a public show of defiance against the rules, and through that song, she openly challenged the apartheid regime.”³⁷³

7.2.3.3. *Despair* – “Mama Ndiyalila”

The next song that will be used for this analysis is “Mama Ndiyalila”, which can be found as a track on Makeba’s 1974 album *A Promise*, released with the labels Disques Espérance in France, RCA Victor in Scandinavia, and AMIGA in the German-Democratic-Republic. She wrote and composed it with fellow South African jazz musician and composer Caiphus Semenya. Together they created a song of three minutes and eighteen seconds with an up-beat soul accompaniment played by a brass band and a soft e-guitar melody. When Makeba enters the second verse of the song, a choir of background singers answers her with the lyrics in brackets.

<i>Mama ndiyalila</i>	<i>Vukani zintombi (Vuka mzi)</i>
<i>Oh ndililel'umuzi kaBawo mama x 4</i>	<i>Oh silwele umuzi kaBawo mama (Umzi kaBawo)</i>
<i>Vuka mzi ontsundu (Vuka mzi)</i>	<i>Oh zaphalal'inyembezi mama</i>
<i>Oh sililel'umuzi kaBawo mama (Umzi kaBawo) x 4</i>	<i>Yeheni woh zaphalal'inyembezi</i>
<i>Yii phalala nyembezi mama</i>	<i>Woyeni, woyeni, woyeni mama</i>
<i>Yii yeyeni phalala nyembezi</i>	<i>Zaphalala, zaphalala</i>
<i>Zaphalala, zaphalala</i>	<i>Kudala sihlupheka mama</i>
<i>Zachitheka iinyembezi zethu mama</i>	<i>Yekelan'ukulila bo</i>
<i>Vukani madoda (Vuka mzi)</i>	<i>Oh mama ndiyalila</i>
<i>Oh silwele umuzi kaBawo mama (Umzi kaBawo)</i>	<i>Oh ndililel'umuzi kaBaba mama</i>
<i>Vukani bafazi (Vuka mzi)</i>	<i>Oh mama ndiyalila</i>
<i>Oh silwele umuzi kaBawo mama (Umzi kaBawo)</i>	<i>Oh ndililel'umuzi kaBawo mama</i>
<i>Vukani zintsizwa (Vuka mzi)</i>	<i>Watsh'umzi kaBaba</i> ³⁷⁴
<i>Oh silwele umuzi kaBawo mama (Umzi kaBawo)</i>	

The song title means “Mother I am Crying” and is repeated several times within the first lines of the song, along with the following lyrics: “Oh ndililel'umuzi kaBawo mama”, which means “I am crying for the home of (my) father, mother”. Dlamini highlights that the word *umuzi* does not refer to a physical house or home, but much rather a genealogical one. This insinuates that what is lost or mourned is the heritage of the family, and in the context of

³⁷³ Onyebadi and Mbunyuza-Memani, “Women and South Africa’s Anti-Apartheid Struggle”, 45.

³⁷⁴ ‘Lyrics | Miriam Makeba | Mama Ndiyalila’, <https://lyrics.lyricfind.com/lyrics/miriam-makeba-mama-ndiyalila>

Apartheid this applies to the non-White South African population that is being destructed or endangered. Makeba calls upon the citizens of an unknown black city and appeals to their commiseration or awareness of the situation: “Vuka mzi ontsundu (Vuka mzi) / Oh sililel'umuzi kaBawo mama (Umzi kaBawo)”, which means “Wake up black city / We are crying for the home of father, mother”. Onyebadi & Mbunyuza-Memani interpret this as a call to South Africans to rise up and fight against Apartheid.³⁷⁵ Makeba then goes on to illustrate the overwhelming sadness: “Yii phalala nyembezi mama / Yii yeyeni phalala nyembezi / Zaphalala, zaphalala / Zachitheka iinyembezi zethu mama”, translated to: “Oh, shed a tear mother / Oh hey, shed tears / The tears are shedding, the tears are shedding / Our tears are pouring out”. These grave emotions are clearly discernible in Makeba’s voice: “Vukani madoda (Vuka mzi) / Oh silwele umuzi kaBawo mama (Umzi kaBawo) / Vukani bafazi (Vuka mzi) / Oh silwele umuzi kaBawo mama (Umzi kaBawo) / Vukani zintsizwa (Vuka mzi) / Oh silwele umuzi kaBawo mama (Umzi kaBawo) / Vukani zintombi (Vuka mzi) / Oh silwele umuzi kaBawo mama (Umzi kaBawo)”. Following Dlamini’s translation, Makeba is again calling upon the citizens of the unknown Black city to remind them to mourn the fate of their shared heritage: “Awake (you) men - (Awake you city) / We are crying for the home of mother (The home of father) / Awake you women (Awake you city) / We are crying for the home of mother (The home of father) / Awake young men/ gentlemen / We are crying for the home of mother (The home of father)”. Onyebadi & Mbunyuza-Memani offer an interesting interpretation for this wake-up-call in relating to the word “vukani”, which they assess more as “[...] a command or an instruction than a plea. In this song, Makeba is not just pleading with people to abandon crying, she urges them to fight. The lyrics of the song suggest that she believes that a sustained fight against black oppression is the only solution to eradicating apartheid.”³⁷⁶ To have the choir repeat her wake-up-calls creates the impression that they are a collective identity, mobilising others to join them. Nonetheless, it is interesting to notice how Makeba appears to be addressing a mother-figure, maybe even her own mother, who had died many years earlier, to tell her about the fate of her people and its endangered heritage. The lyrics could be interpreted as a conversation Makeba had with her mother, in spirit or in a dream perhaps, where she laments the development of the situation in South Africa to her mother. This could also be connected to the use of song for documenting historical events to pass on, which in Makeba’s spirituality might also pertain to the dead. She continues to sing and raises her voice: “Oh zaphalal'inyembezi mama / Yeheni woh

³⁷⁵ Onyebadi and Mbunyuza-Memani, “Women and South Africa’s Anti-Apartheid Struggle”, 41.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 42.

zaphalal'inyembezi / Woyeni, woyeni, woyeni mama / Zaphalala, zaphalala / Kudala sihlupheka mama / Yekelan'ukulila bo". As above, Makeba describes her emotional state: "Oh, the tears are shedding / being shed – mother / Oh my, these tears are being shed / Oh my, oh my, oh my mother / They are being shed, they are being shed", as if she was unburdening herself in a very vulnerable way, overcome by emotions, or describing the extreme state of misery around her. Moreover, in the last two lines she points out the duration of the struggle: "It has been so long that we have been suffering (We have suffered for so long) / Still with the crying (please)". After a saxophone solo, the song ends with a repetition of the first verse starting with "Oh mama ndiyalila", however Makeba's voice appears to sound worn out, tired from the suffering and the mourning. Just before the song fades out, she adds one final, yet essential line: "Watsh'umzi kaBaba", which means: "The home of my father has burnt down". This statement at the very end indicates that Makeba's assessment of the situation is that South Africa has grown into a hopeless state, burnt down because so many lives had been lost. However, this insinuation that a breaking point has been hit can be interpreted in two ways: it could either be a call to action because there is nothing left to lose, or a sign of despair because of an uncertain future.

7.2.3.4 *Remembrance/Rage* – "Soweto Blues"

The last song chosen for this analysis was actually written by another famous South African musician, Hugh Masekela, who was Makeba's second husband. Although their marriage did not last long, they continued to be friends and influence each other's music. This particular song is featured as the third track on his album *You Told Your Mama Not To Worry*, which was released with Casablanca Records in 1977. From then on, Makeba, who is credited as one of the vocalists featured on the album and also clearly distinguishable on "Soweto Blues", included it in her performances, before eventually releasing her own recorded version of the song on her 1989 album *Welela* with Mercury Records. Moreover, she had already performed it on Paul Simon's *Graceland* Tour in 1987, the purpose of which was to bring unity to South Africa's Black and White population through music and dance.³⁷⁷ Makeba's studio version of four minutes and 17 seconds is shorter than Masekela's, and the musical arrangement is different given the fact that music from the late 1970s is vastly different from the sound of the late 80s, especially in terms of production: Where Masekela's song very much sounds like a funk-soul track and features his distinct jazz trumpet solos, as well as brass band interludes, Makeba's version is much more mellow, with a distinct base and steel drum arrangement, as

³⁷⁷ Cf. Mchunu and Memela, 'Fashioning Resistance', 91.

well as a guitar sequence playing in the foreground and other rhythm instruments playing in the background. However, content and lyric wise they are identical.

*The children got a letter from the master
It said no more Xhosa, Sotho, no more Zulu
Refusing to comply, they sent an answer
That's when the policemen came to the
rescue
Well, the children were flying, bullets, dying
Oh the mothers screaming and crying
The fathers were working in the city
The evening news brought out all the
publicity
Just a little atrocity
Deep in the city
Benikuphi na madoda xa bedubula
abantwana
Benikuphi na?
Abantwana xa bejikijela ezizimbokodo
Benikuphi na?
There was a full moon on the golden city
Knocking at the door was the man without
pity
Accusing everyone of conspiracy
Tightening the curfew, charging people with
walking
Hmm, the border is where he was waiting
Waiting for the children
Frightened and running*

*A handful got away, but all the others
Are in the jail without any publicity
Just a little atrocity
Deep in the city
Benikuphi na madoda xa bedubula
abantwana
Benikuphi na?
Abantwana xa bejikijela ezizimbokodo
Benikuphi na?
Soweto blues
Soweto blues
Soweto blues (awu yelele mama)
Soweto blues (oh, they are killing all the
children)
Soweto blues (without any publicity)
Soweto blues (hmm, they are finishing our
nation)
Soweto blues (while calling it black on
black)
Soweto blues (while everybody knows they
are behind it)
Soweto blues (without any publicity)
Soweto blues (basiqedil'isizwe sethu
mawethu mama)
Soweto blues (awu yelele mama)
Soweto blues³⁷⁸
Soweto blues*

The timing of the song's initial release is no coincidence, and neither is the song title – the year before was when the *Soweto Uprising* or *June 16* took place in Soweto, a township complex near Johannesburg. This protest in June 1976, eventually resulted in the untimely deaths of hundreds of young students who the police fought with utmost brutality. Masekela chronicled the events in the first lines of the song, which are sung in English: “The children got a letter from the master / It said no more Xhosa, Sotho, no more Zulu / Refusing to comply, they sent an answer”. The answer he is referring to is what started out as a peaceful protest but quickly escalated and turned into a bloodbath instead: “That's when the policemen

³⁷⁸ ‘Miriam Makeba - Soweto Blues’, <https://www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Miriam-Makeba/Soweto-Blues>.

came to the rescue / Well, the children were flying, bullets, dying / Oh the mothers screaming and crying / The fathers were working in the city / The evening news brought out all the publicity / Just a little atrocity / Deep in the city". By describing the uprising and its catastrophic outcome as "just a little atrocity", Masekela achieves to convey the normalisation of racially motivated violence against the Black population of Johannesburg by using a diminutive and thereby seemingly relativizing its extent when in reality it was clearly just that: atrocious. The chorus is sung in isiXhosa: "Benikuphi na madoda xa bedubula abantwana / Benikuphi na? / Abantwana xa bejikijela ezizimbokodo / Benikuphi na?", which translates to: "Where were you men, when they were shooting the children? / Where were you (plural) ? / When the children were throwing these rocks / where were you men?". What Masekela primarily criticizes here about his fellow South African men is that they did not participate in the riots, literal schoolchildren had to be the ones to fight for their own issues and against grown men at that. Following Onyebadi & Mbunyuza-Memani, "[...] she demands to know how it was that mature men (black South Africans) could allow the brutality to happen; where the men were when students were ambushed and killed by the apartheid government's police and other security forces."³⁷⁹ The feeling that should probably be triggered by these accusations is shame or guilt for not being the ones at the front. The song continues in English, where Makeba / Masekela outline the consequences of the riots, especially the absurdity of it: "There was a full moon on the golden city / Knocking at the door was the man without pity / Accusing everyone of conspiracy / Tightening the curfew, charging people with walking / Hmm, the border is where he was waiting / Waiting for the children / Frightened and running / A handful got away, but all the others / Are in the jail without any publicity / Just a little atrocity / Deep in the city". Then, the song title is repeated multiple times, and in most lines Makeba sings backing vocals in English and Xhosa that add meaning and more context: "Soweto blues / Soweto blues (awu yelele mama) / Soweto blues (oh, they are killing all the children) / Soweto blues (without any publicity) / Soweto blues (hmm, they are finishing our nation) / Soweto blues (while calling it black on black) / Soweto blues (while everybody knows they are behind it) / Soweto blues (without any publicity) / Soweto blues (basiqedil'isizwe sethu mawethu mama) / Soweto blues (awu yelele mama) / Soweto blues". According to Dlamini, the Xhosa interjections can be translated to: "Soweto blues (they are destroying/ they have destroyed our nation, my mother)". This refers not only to the destructive nature of Apartheid in general, but in particular to the destruction of the Black South African youth, the future of the population that is fighting the Apartheid

³⁷⁹ Onyebadi and Mbunyuza-Memani, "Women and South Africa's Anti-Apartheid Struggle", 43.

oppression. One could also interpret this last sentence as something one of the surviving children might have told their mother after the uprising – an eyewitness’ testament of the extent of brutality shown towards those who are challenging the regime, given in naïve, simple words. Onyebadi & Mbunyuza-Memani view “Soweto Blues” as a reconstruction of a historic event, but also a part of an oral tradition to pass information on to future generations: Makeba pieced together the incidents that led to the students’ protest. “We suggest that she did this so that whoever listened to the song understood the context in which the apartheid police unleashed mayhem [...]”³⁸⁰. The song is remembering those who lost their lives during the tragic unfolding of the uprising, but it simultaneously highlights not only the tension coming from the oppressing Apartheid regime but also within the Black South African community, about those who went out into the streets to protest and those who didn’t. It is not clear whether this criticism is mirroring the situation in the country or Masekela’s and Makeba’s perspective from the outside, as both lived in exile during the time when both albums were made and had not set foot into South Africa for more than fifteen years when the Soweto Uprising happened. Nonetheless, this is not merely her version or strategic storytelling, but “[...] she was also demanding answers, wanting to know why children were unprotected and left to die at the hands of the “man without pity” [...]. The subtlety of the indictment of black men in *Soweto Blues* is clear in her message. Yet, her anger was directed at the white police in her narrative.”³⁸¹ Furthermore, Makeba had been performing the song for over ten years by the time she released her own version, which not only shows that not much had changed over these years but that the meaning of the song had not lost in relevancy. In addition, her release of the song could be seen as a repeated reminder to her people and the international community of the brutal reality of Apartheid.³⁸² Nevertheless, what comes across in both versions of the song, and particularly by means of Makeba’s unique voice that carries over the danceable rhythm, the listeners are supposed to hear the pain and rage about the tragic deaths of the innocent children triggered in the singer: According to Onyebadi & Mbunyuza-Memani, the official death toll of student protesters lies at 176, whereas the unofficial numbers are much higher, around 600 to 700.³⁸³

7.2.4. Contributions to the Movement & their Consequences

As has been established earlier, Miriam Makeba’s own assessment of her contributions to the struggle against the Apartheid regime in South Africa was humble to say the least. This is a

³⁸⁰ Onyebadi and Mbunyuza-Memani, “Women and South Africa’s Anti-Apartheid Struggle”, 43.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Cf. Ibid., 47.

³⁸³ Cf. Ibid., 43.

general pattern when it comes to how she perceived her impact, as in her autobiography, she chronicles her rise to fame as something that she was kind of thrown into and her celebrity status was something that she found herself in not actively pursued. Within the scholarly discussion on Makeba's activism there is no general consensus about the question of her agency as well as her passivity. While she definitely was grateful for the life she led, this might come across as quite a passive attitude towards one's career. Nonetheless, there is no denying the fact that some of her career moves must have stemmed from a personal drive to introduce her home country to her new home in the US. Makeba might not have attended as many marches or protests as the other "proper" activists of her time, which was almost impossible since she could not enter South Africa to stand in solidarity with its Black citizens, but that does not mean her contributions were less valuable or lessened the impact of the consequences she had to face because of them.

From the very beginning of her career outside of South Africa, Makeba became a representative and a symbol for (South) Africa. There are, however, diverging opinions on whether she was put in this position because she was subjected to exoticisation, i.e., a primitive discourse, from the predominantly White society she primarily performed in, or a calculated move on her part to raise awareness through her otherness. Thereby, it could be either a consequence she had to endure or a contribution she actively made, or, most likely, a mixture of both, using the stereotype placed on her to her advantage. The othering of Makeba was no exception when it came to foreign artists performing in Western countries at the time: "African voices and performances have been fetishized and naturalized by the west as primal, sensual, and incomprehensible—especially when compared to the supposedly civilized, intellectual, and rational music of the west."³⁸⁴ Whatever enjoyment and excitement her artistry brought American audiences, "[n]o matter how well she sang songs in non-African languages, no matter how accepted she may have been by international (read: western) elites, Makeba was always different."³⁸⁵ Feldstein clearly identifies that Makeba had to reproduce what her American audiences imagined (South) Africa to be as they projected their expectations onto her. Moreover, Feldstein stresses that "Makeba was an appropriate reminder to liberal Americans of all that they wanted their country not to be."³⁸⁶ For Black audiences, Sizemore-Barber detects an opportunity to establish a connection between the struggles of racial inequality Black people were enduring in the United States and the oppression happening because of the racial superiority ideology in Apartheid South Africa through

³⁸⁴ Sizemore-Barber, 'The Voice of Which?', 254.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 257.

³⁸⁶ Feldstein, 'Screening Antiapartheid', 27.

Makeba.³⁸⁷ Their engagement with these foreign yet familiar realities had a positive effect as Makeba's concerts thus "[...] targeted and reached many audiences, and her presence in this range of venues subtly reinforced the ways that Americans across lines of race became more aware of apartheid, and African Americans became more oriented toward Africa in an era of decolonization."³⁸⁸ Sizemore-Barber, for instance, argues that Makeba intentionally "[...] used the cultural capital of the fame she gained in the early part of her career (as an African Other to white audiences) to craft a political and musical identity that was in solidarity with black and diasporic causes and rooted in an African and exilic identity."³⁸⁹ However, her main argument about Makeba's embodiment of Africa is centred around the dialectical tension between Makeba's cosmopolitan status from back home which was reaffirmed in the New York circles she was part of, and the fetishisation of her exotic Africanness.³⁹⁰ Feldstein connects this with an alleged gendered subordination towards the prominent men she was associated with, such as Harry Belafonte, which was based on non-Western biases about non-Western cultures.³⁹¹ Downplaying her success by limiting her to primitivity and attaching her to men can be explained by Feldstein's broader argument: "These ways of talking about Makeba drew on entrenched assumptions about blackness as akin to savagery and about femininity as intrinsically subordinate to masculinity."³⁹² But yet again, Makeba defied pre-existing categories about Black femininity by not only rejecting White or Western beauty standards of the time but reconfiguring meanings of Black pride and glamour³⁹³, for instance by keeping her short Afro hairstyle or wearing African accessories and fashion on and off stage, as was explored in 7.2.2. Despite not growing up within the constraints of being Black in America but within similar White superiority structures, the following passage demonstrates that she had a very observant eye:

For so long black Americans have been ashamed of their African roots. They do this because the whites, Hollywood, and everyone says that Africa is a primitive place, and it embarrasses those who come from there. I think that much insecurity and unhappiness must come from denying one's own ancestors. But this is changing.³⁹⁴

Consequently, she was positively surprised to see the empowering cultural impact her "Africanness" had on Black Americans: "Soon I see other black women imitate the style,

³⁸⁷ Cf. Sizemore-Barber, 'The Voice of Which?', 255.

³⁸⁸ Feldstein, "'Africa's Musical Ambassador'", 71.

³⁸⁹ Sizemore-Barber, 'The Voice of Which?', 255.

³⁹⁰ Cf. Ibid., 257.

³⁹¹ Feldstein, "'Africa's Musical Ambassador'", 54.

³⁹² Ibid. 51.

³⁹³ Cf. Feldstein, 'Screening Antiapartheid', 28.

³⁹⁴ Makeba and Hall, *Makeba: My Story*, 134.

which is no style at all, but just letting our hair be itself.”³⁹⁵ Mchunu & Memela offer a fitting summary:

Not only did Makeba’s choice of dress propagate an identity of black excellence, her fashioned performances allowed American consumers across a broad political and racial spectrum to engage with Africa generally, and with apartheid specifically, in ways which ultimately reinforced a transnational circulation of ideas, people, culture and politics something - which went against the apartheid regime’s agenda.³⁹⁶

Unfortunately, Miriam Makeba’s political engagement in the struggle against Apartheid from abroad also entailed severe consequences that not only tremendously affected her career but also her private life. The most obvious instance for the negative impact of her political activism that she was confronted with was, of course, being exiled in 1960 for her participation in the anti-Apartheid documentary *Come Back, Africa*. Not only did she lose her citizenship from her home country because of singing a mere two songs in the film, but she had to simultaneously cope with the loss of her mother, with whom she had shared a special bond, and being prohibited to pay her last respects. Furthermore, she had to continuously take into consideration that any other political actions or statements, if more indirect like her performance in the film, or more direct, such as releasing explicit political statements or singing songs with lyrics that had a clear political message, could put her family in danger. This fear was heightened when she gave speeches at the United Nations, especially in front of the Special Committee on Apartheid in 1963, and although the repercussions she had to face because of her courageous act did not harm her family, they sent a clear message: “[W]hen the authorities learn of my testimony, I become something else: a criminal [...] I am guilty of condemning the murder of my people. [...] From now on all of my records are banned in South Africa. It is illegal to sell my old records that I did for Gallotone and any of my new U.S. albums I do for RCA.”³⁹⁷ While she knew that people could still get a hold of them because they were smuggled into South Africa from other countries³⁹⁸, they were now connected to criminal activities as she had become an enemy of the state. Onyebadi & Mbunyuza-Memani highlight the use of Makeba’s illegal songs during protest marches and other purposes that were supposed to boost the participants’ morale.³⁹⁹ Thereby, they were able to defy the Apartheid regime on two levels of protest: taking to the streets to stand up for their rights and simultaneously supporting an exiled member of their community turned

³⁹⁵ Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 90.

³⁹⁶ Mchunu and Memela, ‘Fashioning Resistance’, 85f.

³⁹⁷ Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 112.

³⁹⁸ Cf. Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Cf. Onyebadi and Mbunyuza-Memani, “Women and South Africa’s Anti-Apartheid Struggle”, 45.

public enemy, potentially with songs that contained damning lyrics. Through the release of those songs, she symbolically stood in line with the activists on site, but also used the opportunity to broadcast the realities of life under the Apartheid regime on a global scale and an international stage.⁴⁰⁰ While she had been exiled before she became more vocal about Apartheid, there had still been hope for her to be allowed back into her home country one day. Her testimony in front of the United Nations made this impossible for the next 30 years. Furthermore, banning the sale of her records not only was a symbolic slap on the wrist, it was also an economic sanction.

Not even ten years later, Makeba was put into a similar position of hostility against her person in her new home, the United States. This time, however, it was not because of something she had done that was deemed suspicious or even criminal but because of who she associated with: her relationship and marriage to Stokely Carmichael. When they met in 1967, Carmichael was still a member of the SNCC and had coined the phrase “Black power”⁴⁰¹, but was already becoming one of the leading figures of the emerging Black nationalist movement in the US, which was aiming for pan-African unity and became increasingly radicalized.⁴⁰² In her autobiography, Makeba strictly separates Carmichael’s politics and their relationship, claiming that she stayed out of his business and that “[t]he man’s activities do not interest me, only the man himself”⁴⁰³ and innocently asking: “Why shouldn’t power be black?”⁴⁰⁴ Nonetheless, she was also aware that her life would always be connected to politics, whether South Africa’s or her partner’s was not that relevant, and that she functioned as a symbol:

Anyone else can go home and see their family, but for me to do so would require changing the political system of South Africa [...] [...] and half the audience sees me as a symbol of African nationalism, protest against apartheid, and black pride. Not that I mind; it is an honor to be associated with these things. But when Miriam Makeba falls in love with a black militant like Stokely Carmichael, people are going to say more than, “Oh isn’t that nice!”⁴⁰⁵

As Sizemore-Barber observes, Makeba found herself in the middle of the divisive US race debate as she represented the embodiment of Africa to the American public.⁴⁰⁶ Before 1967, for instance when she accompanied Harry Belafonte to Civil Rights Movement related events, where they performed together or separately and thus supported organisations like the SNCC, focused on advancing the fight against racial inequality in the US, or the Student Aid

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. Onyebadi and Mbunyuza-Memani, “Women and South Africa’s Anti-Apartheid Struggle”, 45.

⁴⁰¹ Sizemore-Barber, ‘The Voice of Which?’, 266.

⁴⁰² Cf. Ibid., 265.

⁴⁰³ Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 155.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 147.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 154.

⁴⁰⁶ Sizemore-Barber, ‘The Voice of Which?’, 252.

Association of South Africa.⁴⁰⁷ She was therefore involved in domestic and international Black activism, and extended her engagement beyond the political space provided by these events through a continuous presence on American television. Through televised performances, for instance on *The Steve Allen Show* or *The Ed Sullivan Show*, Makeba could reach millions of Americans at once and thereby spread awareness on an enormous scale.⁴⁰⁸ At the beginning, her Africanness did not harm anyone and “[...] her voice represented the concerns of blacks in Africa, it was exotic or tragic. When her voice mingled with those of African-Americans’, she became too black and too much of a liability.”⁴⁰⁹ This was the case when she entered a relationship with Carmichael and she grew more and more popular among Black audiences who, especially after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., had sent the Civil Rights Movement into shock, became increasingly militant.⁴¹⁰ Following Sizemore-Barber,

Makeba’s marriage to Carmichael coincided with a larger shift in consciousness for black people worldwide. As Africa was entering a process of rapid decolonization, the idea of pan-Africanism emerged and took root as a global force. An African singing of freedom and building political and personal relationships with African-Americans became less of an oddity and more of a threat to the government.⁴¹¹

Consequently, Makeba’s concerts were cancelled, and despite exceptions it got increasingly difficult for her to be separated from her husband’s name and politics: “Not everybody cancels my shows. Some realize that I am Miriam Makeba first and Mrs. Stokely Carmichael second. I am a singer, not a revolutionary. I keep reminding the press of this. But interviewers won’t leave me alone about my husband’s politics.”⁴¹² At the time, Carmichael was also affiliated with the Black Panther party⁴¹³ and although Makeba does not receive explanations as to why her bookings were cancelled, the indirect connection to the controversial party led White club managers to the conclusion that she and therefore also they would financially support the Black Panthers this way.⁴¹⁴ However, her marriage to Carmichael not only heavily impacted her professional relationships but also her safety and privacy. Makeba’s assessment of her husband’s radicality (“But I never saw Stokely kill anybody.”⁴¹⁵) clashed with that of the government, to the point that FBI director J. Edgar Hoover declared the Black Panthers

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. Feldstein, “‘Africa’s Musical Ambassador”, 70.

⁴⁰⁸ Cf. Feldstein, “‘Africa’s Musical Ambassador”, 71.

⁴⁰⁹ Sizemore-Barber, ‘The Voice of Which?’, 266.

⁴¹⁰ Cf. Ibid., 265

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 267.

⁴¹² Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 159.

⁴¹³ Cf. Sizemore-Barber, ‘The Voice of Which?’, 265

⁴¹⁴ Cf. Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 164.

“the greatest threat to the internal security of the country”⁴¹⁶ in 1968. As a consequence, Carmichael and Makeba were under FBI surveillance and their home was wiretapped.⁴¹⁷ When Makeba wanted to open a fashion shop on the Bahamas, her association with Carmichael ultimately resulted in a cancellation of the whole project and On top of that, she was not only temporarily denied a visa to enter the United States, but her American recording company also withdrew from her and did not request new records, which was the final straw of hostilities for her to come to terms with a sad reality: “I would have to be more than illiterate, now, if I could not read the handwriting on the wall. I would have to be blind. This wonderful dream come true – the little African girl who becomes a big star in America – it’s all over.”⁴¹⁸

Following this development, the couple, who no longer felt neither welcome nor safe in the US, moved to Guinea, where Makeba was awarded with a Guinean passport and asked by President Sekou Touré to act as a delegate of Guinea to the United Nations. There she was supposed to address the General Assembly on behalf of the Guinean people but also continued to speak up against Apartheid in South Africa.⁴¹⁹ As has been shown in the song analysis, Makeba continued to raise her voice for her fellow South Africans from abroad, but she also supported the liberation and independence of all the other African nations that became independent during the decolonization of the African continent of the 1950s to 1970s. By attending and performing at ceremonies and concerts all over Africa, often in the countries’ native languages, she not only demonstrated her solidarity with the liberation of African societies from its colonisers, but continued to function as a representative for the one country that was still very much oppressed. She thereby served as a constant reminder that while there was independence to be celebrated, the fight was not yet over.

On a more positive note, after the collapse of the Apartheid regime, Makeba was able to return to South Africa after over 30 years. Furthermore, under South Africa’s first Black president Nelson Mandela, Makeba was awarded the honorary position of her home country’s goodwill ambassador to the United Nations due to her decadelong political engagement.⁴²⁰ Her contributions to the struggle against Apartheid continue to be relevant as they are used to express what contemporary social movements in South Africa focussed on political, social and economic change want to convey.⁴²¹ Apart from its political affiliation, her extensive

⁴¹⁶ Hoban, “Discredit, Disrupt, and Destroy”.

⁴¹⁷ Cf. Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 162.

⁴¹⁸ Makeba and Hall, *Makeba : My Story*, 165.

⁴¹⁹ Cf. Onyebadi and Mbunyuza-Memani, “Women and South Africa’s Anti-Apartheid Struggle”, 37.

⁴²⁰ Cf. Ibid. 47.

⁴²¹ Cf. Ibid.

music catalogue as well as her iconic dance moves also stand the test of time: her songs continue to be an inspiration for upcoming as well as established artists from South Africa, who pay homage to her on remixes and modern reinterpretations, and thus immortalise her artistry in South Africa's collective memory.⁴²² Onyebadi & Mbunyuza-Memani offer a concise summary of the impact of Makeba's decision to actively take on a political role, even if she felt uncomfortable with the term:

As an accomplished musician, Makeba had the opportunity to choose to bask in the comfort of her blooming career in Europe and the United States over engaging in the anti-apartheid crusade in her fatherland. However, she was unrelenting in using her music as a platform to challenge the philosophy of apartheid and campaigned globally to abolish the system of racial prejudice that trampled upon the dignity and freedom of black Africans in her country.⁴²³

8. Discussion – Differences & Commonalities in Nina Simone's & Miriam Makeba's Activism

The previous chapters introduced various fundamental aspects related to Nina Simone's and Miriam Makeba's activism during their careers as artists. The following paragraphs are not intended to rate both women's activism but much rather serve as a juxtaposition of their diverse contributions to the Civil Rights Movement and the Struggle against Apartheid. As intriguing as what has been explored thus far is, the scope of this thesis does not allow for an in-depth discussion of all the findings of the previous chapters. Therefore, the two overarching research questions as well as a selection of guiding questions will provide a digestible framework for presenting the most relevant differences and commonalities of Simone's and Makeba's activism.

For chronological reasons, it appears suitable to begin with the first part of the second research question, i.e.: *What facilitated Nina Simone's and Miriam Makeba's political role?* There are many ways to approach this question but the most important aspect here is that the circumstances of each artist's upbringing and their socialisation plays an essential part in developing the necessary awareness and desire to take up a political role, which is an active decision. In Makeba's case, despite her own awkwardness around the term political singer, there was no option for her to avoid the circumstances of Apartheid present all around her, which also included resistance: from the time she spent in jail with her mother as a newborn, their Apartheid induced poverty, discrimination she had to face during nightly police break-ins as a child, accusations of being a thief as a teenager, forbidden music she enjoyed and

⁴²² Cf. Onyebadi and Mbunyuza-Memani, "Women and South Africa's Anti-Apartheid Struggle", 47.

⁴²³ Ibid.

created. Thus, she was forced to navigate her way within an oppressive system that allowed no wiggle room or grey areas, and every ambiguous or intentionally challenging move could be interpreted as a political gesture. From this perspective, her upbringing under Apartheid laws can be counted as an early shaping of a political awareness that can grow into political activism later, which was the case with Makeba. Another factor related to the environment that influenced Makeba, were her involvement in the musical *King Kong* and more prominently her role in Rogosin's *Come Back, Africa*. The participation in projects that were inherently part of Apartheid resistance can be considered as political activism, but it at least established the foundation for not shying away from being involved in performances that on the one hand contained indirect or direct political messages and on the other put herself and her family at risk because of said messages. Since I located Makeba's political coming-into-being within her speech in front of the United Nations Special Committee on the Policies of Apartheid of the Government of the Republic of South Africa in 1963, the three years she had spent in the United States up until then also had an impact on sharpening her political awareness. Another influential environment was that of Harry Belafonte and people she associated with through his contacts as his protégée, especially the Black intellectual scene in New York's Greenwich Village of the early 1960s. These people's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement introduced her to a new kind of politics-laden world where the lines between art and activism blurred all the time. Furthermore, living in the US meant that she (involuntarily or not) became a representative of South Africa's Black population suffering under Apartheid, wherefore her performances always included a political component, whether she wanted to or not, and where Apartheid was not part of everyday life but something she had to explicitly explain to people foreign to the concept. Having a career in the US granted her access to spaces and audiences she could inform and thus a bigger stage to raise awareness about Apartheid, which must have in turn increased her own political consciousness. In addition, one should not underestimate the political developments in other African nations that became independent during the decolonisation era and reminded Makeba that liberation was indeed possible, thereby generating hope for her home country.

Makeba's early jazz music with the *Manhattan Brothers* had in itself been a more or less indirect act of resistance and the African tradition of writing songs about the events of the day, which Makeba referred to many times to explain the political content within her songs, also helped to naturalise an intertwined relationship between being an artist and the political properties of song. However, it is doubtful whether she could have released songs like "Beware Verwoerd! (Ndodemnyama)" or "Nongqongqo (To Those We Love)" that contained

lyrics with a strong political message in South Africa's climate, with translators of Xhosa or Zulu available to the Apartheid government, whereas in the US or elsewhere they could remain hidden while still providing an outlet. Continuing the fight from a country where she was safer from the Apartheid regime supported the facilitation of Makeba's political role. I would argue that Makeba's exiled state gave her space to develop her own political persona, for once because the South African authorities had already turned her into a symbol or a political statement by revoking her passport in 1960, but also because she had more liberties to show active support from abroad where her career was not in jeopardy because of her anti-Apartheid activism, than had she been on site where her music would have been banned and access to the international market denied. Nonetheless, the fear of repercussions for her family in South Africa made her reluctant to accept an outspoken political role.

When it comes to Simone's journey to embracing her strong political role within the Civil Rights Movement, one significant difference lies in the circumstances and socialisation during her upbringing and up until she "came through" in 1963, as Simone grew up within a mindset that actively avoided thinking about racial discrimination, which was not possible for Makeba. Simone's reluctance to political involvement does not lessen her own experiences with racism, starting with her piano recital when she had to fight for her parents to sit in the front or her rejection from the Curtis Institute. Nonetheless, according to her own assessment she was oblivious to the existence of structural racism until her political consciousness started to take shape after starting to gain a foothold in the same predominantly Black intellectual circles as Makeba. In Simone's case, the deep friendships she made within that scene, especially with other artists like Lorraine Hansberry and Langston Hughes, broadened Simone's perception of the ubiquity of racial inequality. As they were actively involved in the Movement, Simone was inspired to contribute, too, which she did even before 1963 by performing at benefits, fundraisers and marches. Still, once she had the epiphanic moment, Simone almost immediately accepted her new role as it offered her career a new meaning and a newfound purpose for her life after finding it difficult to cope with the disappointment of not becoming a classical pianist. Given that "Mississippi Goddam" is an outburst of rage, it not only gave her a way of processing her emotions, but others an opportunity to relate to this state that partly contradicted the peaceful protest tradition of the movement. Considering the alternative path her life could have followed had she not been rejected from the Curtis Institute, her targeted musical career in the world of classical music would not have permitted her the same outlet as the space she created for herself in her genre-transcending performances. Without her knowledge, Simone had already become a symbol of the

movement before releasing her protest songs, which her activist rebirth had triggered: her music was played among members of the SNCC and belonged to what would be called a motivational playlist nowadays. This existing appreciation of her music as part of the Civil Rights Movement made it a lot easier for Simone to feel welcome among the activists despite her special position as a successful artist.

One important aspect about the facilitation of Simone's and Makeba's political roles is also the fact that for both of them, the turning points to become politically active were not events that personally affected them; it was much rather the accumulation of racial injustice that provoked them to act in 1963: for Simone this was a particular incident, the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in September, for Makeba it was her speech in front of the United Nations Special Committee on Apartheid at a time when the leaders of the resistance movement against Apartheid back home were already imprisoned for close to a year. Although she was not a diplomat, Makeba thereby became an official spokesperson and representative for the oppressed South Africans. Simone on the other hand, despite her active and intense engagement within the Civil Rights Movement, was not officially awarded with a role within the movement but acted out of her own motivation. Still, she was overjoyed with being named the "true singer of the Civil Rights Movement" who captured the trying times in her music, for instance in "Old Jim Crow" or "Backlash Blues". The difference in what kind of liberation they fought for was that while structural inequalities against Blacks were a shared struggle, in South Africa, racial discrimination and segregation were codified, whereas in the United States there were laws in place that were supposed to guarantee equal civil rights for all but they were not upheld. Consequently, one could argue that their primary motivation to enter the realm of political activism, independent from any emotion they might have experienced as a consequence of the racial injustices towards their communities, like Simone's murderous intent, was to a great extent altruistic. Naturally, they would ultimately also be affected by any positive change to their position as Black women in the United States or South Africa, so one cannot differentiate entirely between motivations benefitting their community and themselves. However, supported by the fact that both artists were aware of the potential risks and consequences their taking up of a political role could have on their lives and careers, which were very successful at that time, as will be explored in more depth below, leads to the assumption that their pledge to be involved in the movements through whatever contributions was first and foremost supposed to benefit others. This intention matches with the way that while the protest songs introduced in this thesis contained some personal aspects or experiences, for instance Simone's exasperation and paranoia in

“Mississippi Goddam”, or Makeba’s cry for her mother in “Mama Ndiyalila”, most of the situations or topics they thematised within their songs were relatable for members of their communities (“Four Women”), documented historical events to be passed on (“Soweto Blues”), or critical of society on behalf of others (“Backlash Blues” and “Nongqongqo”). The roles they thus took on were of a mentoring or representative nature, much more than that of a leading figure, which was possibly an easier position to get comfortable with since as artists they were also conveyors of messages, just in the spotlight. From their stages, they delivered uncomfortable truths to predominantly White audiences, which was a rare opportunity during these times for Black people to have more power over Whites by enthralling them with music.

The question of which protest repertoire was used and which movement contributions each of the two artists made while fulfilling that political role can be connected to the second part of the second research question, i.e.: *To what extent can we detect a fusion of their fields of action, i.e., politics/activism within a social movement, and music?* Firstly, it is important to emphasise that this fusion entailed on a metalevel the mixture of something abstract or unpersonal, in this case political ideals, and something intimate or personal, here Simone’s and Makeba’s music, especially their singing and their lyrics, which I perceive as windows into their souls as both were highly intuitive artists. They further included their concert stages into their activism, thereby opening a personal platform to spread awareness apart from their performances officially tied to the social movements. While Makeba did not feel comfortable with having intentional political messages ascribed to her songs, she actively utilised the African traditional use of song and its communicative properties to record and spread awareness about historical events that impacted the Black population of South Africa. Therefore, she made use of the natural socio-critical properties of (South) African song, which according to her definition focussed on “singing about things that were happening to us”, which included political developments. Following this argument, the South African musical tradition Makeba preserved in her songs insinuates that music and politics are interwoven and cannot be separated anyway, which is neither exclusive to her songs nor in her hands. Neither could nor did she want to separate herself from South Africa, which, in turn, was indistinguishable from Apartheid. However, one should not interpret this as a lack of agency or neglect the fact that Makeba’s consistent hesitancy to ascribe any intentional use of political activism to her music could to a certain extent also be attributed to the safety concerns she had for her friends and family still in South Africa. Even during her marriage to Stokely Carmichael, her insistence that she was a singer in her own right independent from her husband’s radical politics can be viewed as a protective measure. Simone had no issue

whatsoever to be associated with the Civil Rights Movement or Carmichael's politics, as she admired him a lot, and due to the fact that she was not "about to be nonviolent, honey", her rising militancy drew her further away from just being Nina Simone, the artist, and gave her a more provocative edge.

Within the two songs from her album *An Evening With Belafonte/Makeba* in 1965 investigated in this thesis, "Beware, Verwoerd! (Ndodemnyama)" and "Nongqongqo (To Those We Love)", one can detect how Makeba fused her two fields of action according to her own rules. She showed her defiant side by singing a popular resistance song containing a direct threat, and she showed her solidarity to the political prisoners and leaders of the resistance against Apartheid in a heartfelt acapella piece, using just her voice as an utterly personal conveyor. The inconspicuous musical arrangements as well as the language barrier cleverly veiled the serious protest lyrics. Makeba took a political stance every time she performed those songs on stage, and even if her American audiences, who awarded the album with a Grammy, did not understand a thing she sung, she could still hope that the record might find its way to those who understood, desperate to hear her words of encouragement. Makeba's discography is not solely made up of protest songs, so listening to her music did not necessarily mean listening to political messages, but the more she got involved on the African continent, for instance during independence ceremonies, the less distinguishable became her public persona and her performing from being a political figure, if as a symbolic representation of South Africa or as an activist. In total, we can detect a broad spectrum of direct and indirect action within Makeba's protest: her songs, especially those where she name-drops (oppressive) politicians or important resistance leaders and incorporates themes such as remembrance, retaliation, and inequality, but also her performances at venues with a political connotation constitute more direct forms of activism. She unapologetically remained true to her South African identity, of which she was very proud, so she used dress and looks as indirect ways of protest, and thus defied White beauty standards of the time while affirming Black pride, deliberately or not.

Simone, as a successful Black female artist in the 1960s political climate of the United States, possessed the natural qualities to be a representative of the Civil Rights Movement, and this would have been the case even without her celebrity status but just because she was a Black woman whose everyday life was affected by racial inequality. Still, her position put her at an advantage to raise awareness about the continuous racial inequality because she willingly transformed her stage into her own protest platform ever since she had embraced her meaningful new role. Contrary to the exiled Makeba, she was on-site and also able to attend,

financially support, and perform at protest marches of the movement she advocated for. Other direct forms of action within Simone's extensive protest repertoire included: interactions with her audiences during her performances, which went from scolding them to be quiet to persuading them to join the Civil Rights Movement, as well as name-dropping political figures of the time, and shocking them with a jaunty genre mix that had highly explicit protest lyrics as a surprise with themes that for example highlighted inequality and threats of retaliation, but also gender, which is a topic Makeba does not emphasise. Simone's increasingly African performance looks can be counted as an indirect way of empowering the formation of a positive Black cultural identity, whereas lyrics in songs such as "Four Women" were more direct ways to address and empower Black women specifically. With *Nina Simone in Concert* in 1964, and most famously with "Mississippi Goddam", Simone irretrievably linked her musical career to her new field of action, activism within the Civil Rights Movement. To her, this fusion was natural as it represented what she argued was an artist's duty, to be involved and to "reflect the times", and she maintained this intertwined relationship between her music and political activism until the Civil Rights Movement's decline in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In her perception, the two fields of action, "being involved" and her "artistry" were deeply interwoven and inextricably linked; therefore it is impossible to separate one from the other, especially since her political activism not only seemed to give her purpose but an inspiration to use the tools and biggest assets she possessed, i.e., her musicality. She could not untie herself from it, even if she wanted to later, which already hints at the consequences her political involvement entailed. Both Makeba and Simone embodied the intuitive and reciprocal relationship between music and a political context, and their fields of action were also fused to a very similar degree. Nevertheless, Simone was objectively the more outspoken and explicit activist during her performances. Makeba's less confrontational but extended activist role, in turn, was integrated into several social movements and political moments throughout her lifetime, such as African independence movements.

As has been demonstrated in the previous chapters, Simone's and Makeba's activism dominated their lives, their careers, and their music for a long time. They had bared their souls and raised their voices through their music but while their contributions were impactful and valued at the time, the consequences of their fearless political advocacy ran deep. In connection to the first research question, Simone's and Makeba's shared or different experiences regarding the aftermath of their political involvement will be explored in the following. Despite the mutual feeling of pride for raising their voices for important causes, the

responsibilities that came with their representative functions were also a burden: Makeba had the weight of a whole country on her shoulders and Simone's private life was particularly strained so that her relationship to her husband and daughter deteriorated over time. Both of their careers thrived but also suffered because of their activism. Dedicating their efforts to a cause so important as the fight against racial injustice in their home countries was empowering and inspirational, especially for Simone, who thrived because of her new purpose that consumed her life but also her music. Furthermore, the 1960s was Simone's most productive and creative era, her musical genius and determination to fight for social change mutually stimulating although her career high point caused her major exhaustion at the end of the decade. South Africa banned Makeba's records thereby ending her career there in theory, but at the same time she was a celebrated newcomer in the US, where she had found refuge, and rose to international fame. However, she was not allowed to enter her home country for thirty years, to a certain extent because of the defiant political messages she spread through her songs. Simone's record label was not too fond of her political activity within the Civil Rights Movement, even less so when her views became more radical and Simone's confrontational activism combined with outbursts on stage, usually triggered by audiences that did not live up to her expectations, added to her notorious reputation. Therefore, we can detect a distinct duality in the impact Simone's and Makeba's activism had on their professional careers as genre-transcending artists and their place in the music industry. Another interesting factor is that their involvement in political activism only really started to bother people in the US once they became associated with the Black Power Movement, particularly Stokely Carmichael: one because she supported his messages, the other because of her marriage to him. The surge of hostility towards Makeba by the end of the 1960s was particularly hard to digest since she found herself without a home yet again in 1968 after experiencing FBI surveillance due to her husband's politics. Even if her career as a successful singer and her political activism would continue for a long time to come, her concerts were cancelled and her record label turned its back on her. The ensuing disillusionment and disappointment, as well as the threat to her privacy facilitated the tough decision to leave the US behind. Simone's music was never banned as part of what can only be called a political sanction like in Makeba's case and she was not considered an enemy of the state in her home country, either. However, the self-imposed exile she lived in after the Civil Rights Movement had run its course also stemmed from a place of disappointment and regret, as well as disillusionment about which goals had been reached with the movement and which were not, and about how much she had given up for the cause, its substance slowly vanishing. Since

Simone had become the personification of Black protest by the end of the 1960s, and while she was still outspoken about Black empowerment, she consequently could not return to the career she had until 1963 as a unique but “regular” artist. Finally, the lack of acknowledgement and credit she received for her outstanding commitment in the Civil Rights Movement within the collective memory, where she is primarily remembered as a “jazz” musician, and the scholarly debate around it greatly understated her contributions. This establishes a remarkable contrast to the lifelong recognition of and association with political activism Makeba receives until today, evident for instance in Jain’s song “Makeba” (2015).

9. Conclusion

All in all, this thesis project demonstrated that Nina Simone’s and Miriam Makeba’s activism within the Civil Rights Movement and the resistance struggle against Apartheid had an ambivalent influence on their careers, their music and their personal lives, as well as on the political role of female artists. This paper presents an example for the historical interconnectedness of artistry and politics, as well as the importance of cultural contributions, in this case songs, in the fight for social change, which had a lasting and deep impact on the two movements in question. Over the course of their active years, the lines between their artist personas and their political role as activists became progressively blurrier, which leads to the conclusion that their fields of action, i.e. music and political engagement, were fused to a significant extent. The vehicles Simone and Makeba chose to protest, i.e., their music, performances and songwriting, were an individual way to use their considerable cultural influence in order to spread awareness to communities that the respective societies of 1960s United States and South Africa until 1994 desperately tried to keep apart. Moreover, they encouraged Black pride and cultural empowerment in societies that were shaped by White standards of beauty and aesthetics and notions of Black inferiority by proudly representing a “Black is beautiful” philosophy. Embedding crucial information about what was going on at the time, such as historical events of enormous consequence, and addressing controversial topics such as female stereotyping and political prisoners, and presenting them live on stage, was an essential part of confronting their audiences with potentially uncomfortable truths. This was connected to a longstanding tradition of using songs for cultural or collective identity formation, as a peaceful protest tool and thus a facilitator of social change. Their audiences did not have to attend protests or rallies to acknowledge the Civil Rights Movement and the reality of Black South Africans living under Apartheid. Especially Simone made sure that even in their leisure time, her audience members could not escape the plight of the oppressed people. Makeba’s symbolic embodiment of the situation in South Africa served as

a constant reminder, enforced through appearances on the international political stage, like her speeches at the UN.

Throughout their lives, Makeba and Simone developed different facets of their identities that shaped them, and they all came together on the performance stage: they were artists, activists, mentors, mothers, and successful Black women who defied the odds. Their musical careers were extraordinary, while their contributions to the two movements they advocated for were incredibly impactful, with a legacy living on until today. However, their involvement in political activism came at a price: Makeba went from her emergence as an international newcomer after her appearance in an anti-Apartheid documentary to being exiled from her home country, from receiving critical acclaim as a new rising star in New York and earning a footing in a new country only to be later dropped by bookers and her record label, from being celebrated for her Africanness only to be feared when it transcended (White) popular projections of Africa. Simone's experience was equally as dichotomous, as her activism and the creation of explicit protest songs gave her a new purpose in life, while her health, finances, and family life suffered from the double exhaustion of being an equally committed artist and activist.

There is a multitude of material regarding this topic that could not be explored within the scope of this thesis but could produce fruitful results in future research projects, for instance an analysis from a gender studies perspective about how Simone's and Makeba's contributions were perceived compared to their male artist counterparts. I had to refrain from analysing the influence of their close friendship to be able to illustrate them better individually, but I believe this angle could also produce interesting results. Another closely related investigation with a less specific focus could be the historical development of Black female protest music throughout the course of the 20th century.

At a time when a Black-Indian woman is part of the electoral race of the United States in 2024 and her chances of winning that race are questioned because of her gender and her ethnicity, it is obvious that while progress has been made since Nina Simone's and Miriam Makeba's activism, the process is slow and incomplete. However, the continuous relevancy of the special connection between music and politics was only recently highlighted by Kamala Harris's use of a protest anthem by one of today's most internationally successful Black American artists, Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, for the first official video released to support her presidential campaign.⁴²⁴ The song in question, "Freedom" feat. American rapper Kendrick

⁴²⁴ Conor Murray, 'What To Know About Beyoncé's "Freedom"—Kamala Harris' New Campaign Anthem', Forbes, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/conormurray/2024/07/25/what-to-know-about-beyoncs-freedom-kamala-harris-new-campaign-anthem/>.

Lamar (2016) is full of political messages related to racism, the history of slavery, and police brutality towards Black people, which is why it became one of the main songs associated with the Black Lives Matter movement that intensified with the murder of George Floyd by a White police officer in 2020. Nina Simone and Miriam Makeba stand out because they paved the way for other Black female artists, like Beyoncé, to fuse their fields of action and use their platforms to become involved by taking up the most powerful tool at their disposal: their music. By creating blueprints for protest songs in “Mississippi Goddam” and fearlessly performing songs of defiance like “Beware, Verwoerd! (Ndodemnyama)”, Simone and Makeba showed artists how they could raise their voices against racial inequality, and oppression and their legacy lives on until today. Since the global fight against racial inequality is ongoing, Simone’s wish for Black people to “know how it would feel to be free”⁴²⁵ has yet to come true.

⁴²⁵ Nina Simone – I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free, <https://genius.com/Nina-simone-i-wish-i-knew-how-it-would-feel-to-be-free-lyrics>.

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10.3. Images

Image 1: Nina Simone performing at the "Stars for Freedom" rally at the City of St. Jude in Montgomery, Alabama, the night before the end of the Selma to Montgomery March, 24th March 1965.



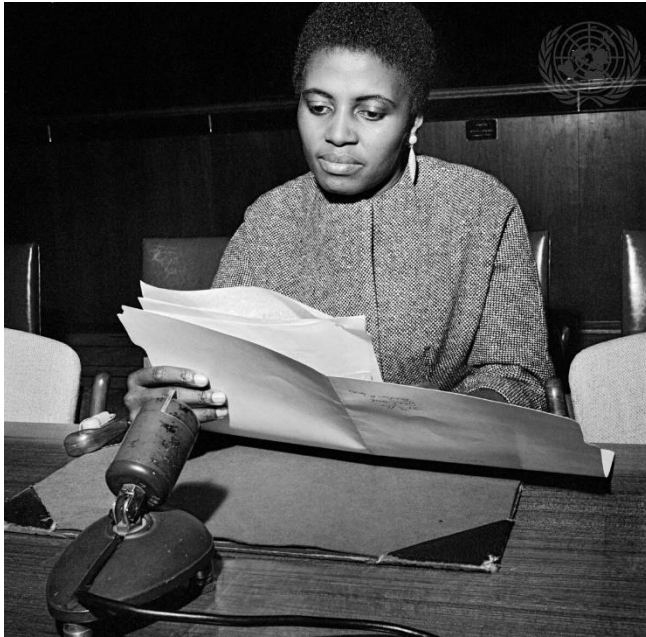
Credit: Martin, Spider. "Nina Simone performing at the "Stars for Freedom" rally at the City of St. Jude in Montgomery, Alabama, the night before the end of the Selma to Montgomery March." 1965-03-24. <http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/cdm/ref/collection/amg/id/41087>. Copyright, Alabama Department of Archives and History. Donated by the Alabama Media Group, <http://www.alabamamediagroup.com>.

Image 2: Miriam Makeba in Lionel Rogosin's Anti-Apartheid Film *Come Back, Africa* (1959)



Credit: Lionel Rogosin, *Come Back, Africa* (1959), taken from <https://milestonefilms.com/products/come-back-africa>.

Image 3: Miriam Makeba as a petitioner at the Special Committee on the Policies of Apartheid of the Government of the Republic of South Africa at the UN headquarters in New York City, United States of America, 9th March 1964.



Credit: UN Photo/Teddy Chen

<https://dam.media.un.org/archive/-2AM9LO3P0ZQW.html>

Image 4: Nina Simone at Harlem Renaissance Festival (aka Black Woodstock), in Harlem, NY, 17th August 1969.



Credit: Nina Simone: Ain't Got No/I Got Life, Dailymotion, 2013.

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x1tfecx>.