

REFLECTIONS ON AN ERA: FREEDOM SONGS AND LIBERATION MOVEMENTS IN AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF KENYA AND SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

This paper argues for an interdisciplinary educational approach, towards an understanding of the African Liberation struggle and the recognition of the liberation songs as important historical documents. In order to allow these songs to be fully understood a link had to be found to move musicology towards an accommodation with cultural history.

The work thus drew on the theory of Shepherd and Wicke (1997), which allowed for an analysis using both musicology and cultural history. The theory was especially suited to this presentation as it also allows for insights into the processes of affect and meaning as they operate in wider cultural-historical contexts, which can be gained through an examination of the music of a particular historical period.

Since the beginning of resistance against Colonialism liberation songs by African liberation movements were used as a strategy to accelerate change in African societies. In order to understand the music of the African liberation struggle there has to be a departure in methodology, theory and content from the narrow paradigms of history. History has to take into account these songs as they reveal a spectrum of communal perceptions and responses to the unfolding events that faced Africans, for example, Miriam Makeba who, in relation to the South African Context, explains that

“In our struggle, songs are not simply entertainment for us. They are the way we communicate. The press, radio and TV are all censored by the Government.

We cannot believe what they say. So we make up songs to tell us about events.

Let something happen and the next day a song will be written about it”

(Makeba, 1988, record sleeve).

This paper argues that the liberation struggle is more fully understood if the songs of the time are taken into account. It emphasises the importance of establishing links between cultural history and musicology, showing how each discipline can inform and enrich the other.