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South African Choral Music (*Amakwaya*):  
Song, Contest  
and the Formation of Identity

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
of the University of Natal  
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# Preface

## Abstract

*Amakwaya* refers to the tradition and performance practice of choirs in South Africa that emerged from the mission-schools in the nineteenth century and is manifest today in the annual competitions held by various Teachers' Associations or company-sponsored events like the National Choir Festival. This choral practice, combining Western music styles with African tradition, bears the marks – both social and aesthetic – of colonial and missionary influences, and is closely linked to the emerging black middle class, their process of negotiating identity, and their later quest for a national culture. Many aspects of contemporary *amakwaya* performance practice, it is argued, including the recent interest of many members of the *amakwaya* community in opera, can be understood through an analysis of the social dimensions of these choirs. Particular attention is given to the role played by competitions and the sectionalised repertoire. The criticisms made in this regard flow from an understanding of the social meaning and aesthetic thrust of the tradition, from the author's practical involvement with the choirs, and from extensive discussions with choristers and conductors.

The first part of the thesis is concerned with identifying the role played by European values such as those of education and progress, in the self-understanding of the emerging mission-educated black South African elite in the second half of the nineteenth century. An initial tendency towards uncritical imitation and attempts at assimilation ended in the experience of rejection by the settler community and isolation. It was followed, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, by a complex negotiation between traditional and modern values. With political, social and economic mobility restricted in white South Africa, the black middle class turned towards artistic expression such as choral singing in order to define and express a distinctively African concept of civilisation. In this process, *amakwaya* performance developed into a powerful means whereby class identity and consciousness could be constructed and communicated.

The second part looks into the framework of *amakwaya*, and at the mission schools and colleges they attended and the competitions they organise. As a result of the practice of hymn singing, participation in a choir soon became an important part of the leisure time activities of the early mission converts. This formative phase of *amakwaya* is illustrated in a case study of one of the most influential schools in Natal, Adams College, near Amanzimtoti, where the first black South African School of Music was established. In order to promote the values important to the missionaries as well as their converts – discipline, progress, and success – competitions were encouraged at the mission stations. These became models for the competitions which today are the main feature of *amakwaya* practice. The voices of various members of the community are used to present a critical evaluation of the positive and negative aspects of present-day competitions.

The last part of the thesis concentrates on *amakwaya* repertoire, particularly as it is represented at important choral competitions such as the National Choir Festival. This part also attempts to facilitate an understanding of the genesis, structure and aesthetic of the sectionalised repertoire, which consists of neo-traditional songs, Western compositions, and choral works composed by mission-educated musicians. Strict adherence to the sectionalised repertoire is a unique feature of *amakwaya* performance practice to the present day.





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5. Theses
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7. Interviews with Choristers (Questionnaire)
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## Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own, original work. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Natal, Durban. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. D. D.', is written above a horizontal line.

Durban, 24 day of December, 2002.



## Introduction

“Advanced music is Western music”, says Sibusiso. “But we do African music too”, he says, referring to his choir’s repertoire. “Wedding songs are very popular. You see, we sing to suit everybody. And there are the battle songs of old but now they are set in an urban area”. He munches a little on the apple. “These songs have an African rhythm but they have become westernised through urbanisation”. Henry concurs. “We can improve our cultural music through the information we learn here”, he says. Just then, scales surge out of the beginners’ voice class. “You see, we also learn how to care for our voice, what exercises to do, how to project”, Sibusiso continues. “These are things we do not know about otherwise”. Questioned about the long distance they have to travel to the practices, Sibusiso answers: “Yes, of course, but it’s for the love of music”. Henry has been serious. Now he bursts into a smile. “It’s the love of music that gives us the energy”, he says.<sup>1</sup>

I deliberately begin here by letting these two singers from choral groups speak for themselves, because what finally matters is the musicians’ own appreciation of their tradition, the “love of music that gives the energy”. As will become clear in the course of the thesis, the conversation of these two students attending Ukusa music classes (a community arts project that I was involved with at the University of Natal) touches upon many themes that will appear in the following exploration of *amakwaya*.<sup>2</sup> These include issues relating to repertoire (Western – African, traditional – modernised), the special function of competition that make this choral practice unique, ideas of advancement and progress, the appreciation of learning, and also the theme of commitment.

The development of *amakwaya* was facilitated by a strong vocal tradition. Whereas in West and East Africa drums and a variety of instruments are used for musical performance, in southern Africa the voice is predominant, in most cases not even accompanied by an instrument.<sup>3</sup> Today, choral music has become the most popular form of musical endeavour among black communities in South Africa.<sup>4</sup> With hundreds of choral groups rehearsing on a regular basis and receiving financial sponsorship from the private sector for big choral events like the annual National Choir Festival, these mixed choirs that originate in the communities, churches and schools have arguably become the most important musical groups in South Africa. Thus to study choral music here one is not (as, for example, in Germany) studying a fairly specialised and in some ways marginal aspect of music, but rather a musical main-stream.

Today the choristers devote a considerable amount of time to choral singing, and it is not unusual for groups to engage in several practice sessions per week. Particularly when the date for a competition gets closer, daily rehearsals that last for long hours are common practice. Choral performances, festivals and, above all, competitions are also highly attractive to audiences, as George Mxadana, Chairman of the most prestigious competition, the National Choir Festival, explains.

<sup>1</sup> These statements are taken from a report on Ukusa, a community arts project initiated in 1988 at the University of Natal with the aim of developing students from underprivileged backgrounds. See *NU Focus* (Vol. 4 No. 2 1993): 18.

<sup>2</sup> I will offer a detailed definition of *amakwaya* later in this introduction.

<sup>3</sup> A. Vilakazi, *Shembe: the Revitalisation of African Society* (Johannesburg: Skotaville 1986): 136; see also Khabi Mngoma “Music and Ubuntu”. *Proceedings of the 23<sup>rd</sup> ISME World Conference for Music Education* (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 1998): 430. For our theme of the relation between *amakwaya* and the formation of identity, this is important, since the voice is a more direct means of expressing thoughts and feelings than an instrument. See in particular Chapter 3.

<sup>4</sup> See for instance Peter Morake, *Drum Magazine*, (February 1992).

He is proud about the fact that

we are now at a stage where there is no hall that can fit in the music lovers or the music followers in South Africa [for the annual national Finals]. That's why for all the national Finals we are now using sports arenas and very big halls, because there is no single hall that could take all the followers of the music.<sup>5</sup>

The importance of this choral music in South Africa is highlighted by the fact that *amakwaya* is currently receiving growing academic attention,<sup>6</sup> and at present several scholars are busy working on different topics related to *amakwaya*.<sup>7</sup>

My own involvement in South African vocal music started in 1995 when I undertook a research project on *isicathamiya* performance practice. During my stay of four months, I spent considerable time working and singing with some groups based in Durban and Pietermaritzburg. I shall never forget the numerous competitions I attended at the Beatrice Street Y.M.C.A. in Durban. With some groups, such as the Real Happy Singers, I used to travel to various venues for the nightlong competitions. My base at that time was the Music School at the University of Natal. That is where I met Sibusiso Mkulisi, who invited me to assist him with his student choir, the *UND Chorale*. One Saturday afternoon he took me along to a concert of the Pietermaritzburg Choral Society, given at the City Hall in Pietermaritzburg. I was fascinated by the vocal talent and the range of the repertoire. After the concert Mkulisi introduced me to Joshua Radebe, the Conductor of this choir. Little did I know then that the *amakwaya* community would become the subject of my research for my PhD thesis. During these exciting four months in Durban, I found myself increasingly drawn into the world of South African choral singing. The experience of working with the choirs was by no means limited to passive observation. Whenever I met those choirs, I was actively involved as a pianist or singer, and struck by the eagerness for cooperation and mutual learning. All these experiences had left a lasting impression on me by the time I came to leave South Africa, and contributed to the fact that, after four years, I felt the urge to look further into the exciting world of choral music in South Africa.

My interest in and focus on choral music started some years back when I was still studying at the University of Würzburg in Germany. To gain experience for the end of year examination in conducting, I decided to start a small student ensemble that would offer me the opportunity to apply what I had learnt in the training sessions. In the years that followed these fledgling attempts, choral music developed into my special field of interest. When working with choral ensembles one has to deal mainly with laypersons and amateur musicians. This proved to be very attractive for me, as I could combine my interest in music education with working with choral ensembles.

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<sup>5</sup> Personal communication with George Mxadana, Johannesburg, February 08, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> This is evident in the fact that for the inaugural year of the New Music Indaba, organised in 2000 by Rhodes University as part of the annual Arts Festival at Grahamstown, *amakwaya* was chosen as the central topic.

<sup>7</sup> Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Director of the SABC Music Department, is currently researching the educational role of the SABC TV programme, *Unquambothi* (Sweet Melodies) in black South African society. The work of Grant Olwage, a Rhodes University graduate student, focuses on the educational role of choral singing in colonial educational systems. Ludumo Magangane, a conductor from Johannesburg, and Douglas Reid, a retired Professor of Musicology living in Pretoria, are looking into the role that the National Choir Festival, one of the most prestigious competitions in South Africa, has played in the development of *amakwaya* in its twenty-five year history. Further research has been done by Siphon Mandlazi, who is currently writing his doctoral thesis on three contemporary Swazi composers, and by M.N. Mpola who focuses on Xhosa choral composers.

### *Amakwaya* and the Aspect of Identity

It was early 2000 when I had a brief telephone conversation with Sibongile Khumalo, the daughter of the late Khabi Mngoma. I phoned her to ask permission to access some of her father's material. However, I never got to that point. After I had introduced myself and told her that my research was about *amakwaya*, she asked me why, since we were talking in English, I had used this Zulu word *amakwaya*. She insisted that choral music of black choirs was not different from other choral music. Unfortunately after that argument I never had the opportunity to discuss matters in more depth with her. However, without knowing it, she gave my research an important direction. On the surface, our interchange might appear to be about terminology, but when I started looking into the history of this South African choral tradition in more detail, I found an answer to Khumalo's emotional response. It was only then that I started to realise the close relation of this tradition to the identity issue that has haunted the African middle class.

During my involvement with different choral groups, I became aware of significant differences between those who chose to sing in *amakwaya* groups, and those who were involved in other forms of choral music. *Amakwaya* groups had a specific identity, which the choristers, the conductor and the organisers were eager to impress on their audiences. To this end, they used four main means of expression in that performance practice: music, lyrics, dance, and dress.

On reflection, I began to suspect that the identity exhibited by present day *amakwaya* groups to a high degree resembled the identity that black middle class *amakholwa* or "mission people" were busy constructing from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards. Choral singing, as we shall see, was used to create class-consciousness and to express the identity of this emerging elite. The central theoretical concern of this thesis is to show how *amakwaya* shaped their identity through choral singing. Two major elements in *amakwaya* practice – competition and repertoire – are used to illustrate this process.

The fact that, from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, *amakwaya* manifested itself particularly through competition has an important bearing on my discussion of their identity. I intend to argue in this thesis that, for the *amakwaya* community, choral competitions have served as an important vehicle to build, communicate and preserve middle class identity. In the context of a political system that denied to the black social groups dignity, freedom for development, and the possibility of participating in a common society with the dominant (i.e. white) culture, choral singing for the black middle class became a way of communicating their progressivism. It became clear during my three-year long fieldwork that choral music has continued to play a part in maintaining the self-esteem of educated middle class Africans. Present day *amakwaya* competitions, as we will see in the course of my discussion, have been subject to a certain amount of controversy. To evaluate their role in the tradition will be an important concern of mine when I come to deal with contemporary performance practice.

Many aspects of current performance practice reveal a certain ambiguity because of the process of negotiation between Western and African elements (vocal aesthetics, dress, body movement and dance etc.) in which *amakwaya* are still engaged. The degree to which they mediate these two influences ranges from "simple borrowing" to a "wholesale exchange".<sup>8</sup> The process of negotiation is most obvious in the choice of repertoire. Firstly, the repertoire consists of traditional folk songs (or rather modernised versions of them), Western classical compositions, and, finally, formally composed African choral works by mainly mission-trained composers. Secondly, particularly the formal African compositions reveal an eclectic nature, incorporating African and Western influences in

<sup>8</sup> See D. Rycroft, "Evidence of Stylistic Continuity in 'Zulu Town' Music", in *Essays for a Humanist: Offering to Klaus Wachsmann* (New York: The Town House Press. Spring Valley, 1971): 133.

differing degrees. Mzilikazi Khumalo, one of the most important representatives of *amakwaya* today, explains that many of the African composers are gradually “turning back to traditional scales and rhythms, while still keeping much of the Western-style repertoire”.<sup>9</sup>

### Identities, musical expression, and political formations

Ethnomusicologists have long been interested in the possibility of analyzing the links between music and the societies that produces it.<sup>10</sup> Several scholars from the ‘anthropological’ side of ethnomusicology had already in the 1950s claimed that music-making is “social behaviour and action, and that it articulates broader social values and ideologies”.<sup>11</sup> This view was revised in the more recent discussion, in which it has been suggested that social practices and the symbols that people use for self-representation “not only reflect or articulate internalized dispositions and worldviews but also operate dialectically in the ongoing construction of internalized dispositions”.<sup>12</sup> This two-way influence will become clear in the course of my discussion of the ways in which both competitions and repertoire contribute to the formation of the identity of the participants.

In recent discussions of music and identity the need is stressed continuously to return to the actual individuals fashioning their lives through the selection and use of particular resources – material objects, modes of expression, and so on.<sup>13</sup> In my own thesis, whether it is the traditional African culture and identity that is being referred to, or the nineteenth and twentieth century black middle class, such categories are always meant to be taken not as fixed but as fluid and changing. “All human identities, no matter how deeply felt, are from an historical point of view mixed, relational, and conjunctural”.<sup>14</sup> “Culture”, as Thomas Turino reminds us, is not a system to which people belong; it stands for the complex, fluid and often amorphous resources and processes of lived human relations, identity, and understanding.[not clear here how much is quotation]<sup>15</sup> This idea is relevant for the study of *amakwaya*, which developed in a context of westernisation, urban migration, and many forms of cultural contact. If we use a more dynamic sense of culture, it becomes obvious that “‘cultures’ and ‘musics’ do not come into contact or change, *people do*. Rather, we have new groups of individuals, variously self-defined, who must be understood on their own terms in relation to their composite experiences, resources, and circumstances.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>9</sup> M. Khumalo, *Guide to South African Arts, Culture and Heritage* available online: <http://www.artsdiary.org.za/index.html>.

<sup>10</sup> C. Seeger, “Music and Society: Some New-World Evidence of Their Relationship.” in *Studies in Musicology, 1935-1975*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977 [1951]; A. Seeger, “Sing for Your Sister: The Structure and Performance of *Suya Akia*”, in Marcia Herndon and Norma McLeod (ed.) *Ethnography of Musical Performance* (Darby, Pa.: Norwood Editions, 1980).

<sup>11</sup> T. Turino, *Moving Away from Silence: Music of the Peruvian Altiplano and the Experience of Urban Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993): 9; see also D. McAllester, *Enemy Way Music: A Study of Social and Esthetic Values as Seen in Navaho Music*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, Peabody Museum, 1954): 3; A. Merriam, “The Purposes of Ethnomusicology: An Anthropological View.” *Ethnomusicology* 7(2), 1963: 189-204; Blacking, J. *Venda Children’s Songs: A Study in Ethnomusicological Analysis*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1967):5

<sup>12</sup> T. Turino, *Ibid*; see also P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of a Theory Practice*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) and *Distinction: A Social Critique of a Judgement of Taste*. (Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984); T. Turino “The Music of Andean Migrants in Lima, Peru: Demographics, Social Power, and Style.” *Latin American Music Review* 9(2), 1988: 127-49.

<sup>13</sup> T. Turino, 1993: 8

<sup>14</sup> C. Waterman, “‘Our Tradition is a Very Modern Tradition’: Popular Music and the Construction of Pan-Yoruba Identity.” *Ethnomusicology* 34(3), 1954: 367-79.

<sup>15</sup> T. Turino, 1993: 12; see also Stuart Hall’s article “The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity”, in Anthony King (ed.) *Globalization and the World System* (Binghamton, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1991).

<sup>16</sup> T. Turino, 1993: 12.

This point is related to the ambiguity attached to any identity formation. A cultural practice such as music can be seen to express the participants' understanding of themselves and their society; it may also be a shaping influence on this identity. This understanding, supported in Hegel's social philosophy (see Chapter 3.1), allows for the formation and development of communities in a way which responds to the new needs of the situation. At the same time their identity may be constructed as different, or inferior by contrast with others, at times because it excludes certain other groups. An identity formed within a community fixes social stratifications along more or less arbitrary lines. In the course of my analysis of the competitions and their history and of choir repertoires, this ambiguity and its controversial results will come to the fore.

A final point that needs to be made here concerns the role of *amakwaya* in the formation of the new state and the attempts to achieve hegemony. Musical styles can play a part in the dominant group's ability to establish 'spontaneous' consent, in the phrase of the social theorist Gramsci. Music can therefore become a site of the struggle to articulate an identity (in this case, one that is not defined by inferiority or marginality) which contests the way in which the state (in the sense of the official power holders at a particular time) may construe things. Throughout this thesis, I am particularly interested in the specific qualities of *amakwaya* music and its performance practice that make it a powerful medium for bringing people together, for articulating who they are, for furthering their social and political goals, and for making their lives meaningful under regimes that for a long period prevented social mobility and restricted access to education and political and social equality. The efforts of black middle class Africans to create positive and effective self-images and a liveable space in the nineteenth and twentieth century South Africa were profoundly constrained by the social attitudes of the ruling white minority. Particularly in the twentieth century, the identity of the black middle class was an identity embattled within a society which allowed the white hegemony to disempower all black people. Only a few avenues, such as teaching and the ministry, were open to members of subordinate groups. But here too the individual's identity as a professional had continually to be re-asserted – manifested for instance in the activities of the various teachers' associations (see Chapter 8) – and symbolized in various ways.

The idea that black middle class identity should be distinguished from that of traditional black groups by its similarity to the white middle class was under pressure by the early twentieth century. It evolved into a belief what must develop was an identity inclusive of all black people, but not excluding white people or the modern culture (see Chapter 3.3). I will suggest that the culture of negotiation that members of the middle class created in the course of this process became an important driving force which contributed to the political changes towards the end of the twentieth century. This 'middle group' between the dominant colonial elite and the subordinate masses was faced with the task of creating a nation out of formerly distinct social groups in order to underpin their legitimacy in aspiring to control political and economic powers.<sup>17</sup>

This brings us to the present, and I must make it clear here that my study can only suggest, without any definitive judgment, ways of understanding the constraints on choral practice today. What is clear is that during the apartheid years, *amakwaya* developed in highly artificial circumstances, largely cut off from access to international ideas and audiences. How has this choral practice responded to the restructuring of major aspects of South African society in the wake of the 1994 transition to a democratic dispensation? The black middle class finds itself nowadays in a very different position, occupying as it does, among other things, key sectors of the administration of the state and to some extent of the economic sphere. Aspirations to empowerment are now part of the legacy of this group, but the need to symbolize such aspirations has largely disappeared.

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<sup>17</sup> See T. Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000): 14.



What is its role now? The interviews that I conducted with various stakeholders reveal that the members of the *amakwaya* community regard themselves as an elite. But can *amakwaya* continue to symbolize the negotiated identity which it established in the course of the twentieth century (see Chapter 4), a negotiated identity which is not dismissive of traditional cultural aspects though it is essentially modern? Or will it be discredited simply as a sign of ‘eliteness’, undialectically opposed to the traditional – a form of imitative, white-derived eliteness? That *amakwaya* is an integral part of the endeavours to create a new South Africa becomes obvious, for example, in the latest venture of the Education Department under the title “Tirisano: Working Together to build a South African Education and Training System for the 21st Century.”<sup>18</sup> And at present the emphasis on competition suggests that *amakwaya* has become locked into a situation where development has stalled. These ideas will be further investigated later in my study.

In the following section I want first to investigate the various terms that members of the choral community and scholars have used, up to the present time, to refer to this choral tradition, and secondly to propose appropriate terminology for my thesis.

### ***Amakwaya*: the Politics of a Name**

For a number of reasons, it seems necessary to find a term for what is a distinctive form of South African choral music. First, for purposes of clarity it is necessary to distinguish the choral practice that this thesis is mainly concerned with from other South African vocal and choral traditions like *isicathamiya* or Gospel. The use of a more general term such as “South African Choral Music” would lead to confusion, in view of the multitude of different choral traditions that can be found in South Africa today. Secondly, there are a number of factors that make the choral tradition I am speaking of unique: the distinct identity and the aesthetic and musical aspirations of its members, the sectionalised repertoire, the specific performance practice, and the role this choral practice has played in the history of South Africa. All these factors distinguish this choral practice from other South African choral forms and highlight the need for specific terminology.

The term *amakwaya* itself is controversial – which might not be unrelated to its continuing role in pointing to a particular but still unsettled kind of social identity. An examination of the terminology currently used to refer to this specific choral tradition reveals a good deal of confusion. Recent scholarship has, on the whole, used the term *makwaya* when discussing the choral tradition of black middle class as opposed to other urban traditions such as *isicathamiya* or *maskanda*. Like a number of terms in isiZulu, the word has been taken into the language from English, but has a much narrower denotation than “choir” or “choral tradition” has in English. In Veit Erlmann’s view, *makwaya* describes “choral music influenced by Western four-part [music]”.<sup>19</sup> Most scholars, when they use the term *makwaya* to refer to the repertoire of black middle class choral groups, follow Erlmann, who claims that it is “the repertoire itself, which was characteristically called *imusic* or *makwaya*”.<sup>20</sup> Elsewhere he defines this repertoire as “a genre that was largely based upon the Western Methodist hymn and only in part on traditional African material”.<sup>21</sup> Here Erlmann is obviously thinking of the work of early mission-trained composers like John Knox Bokwe who were “reassessing traditional music and blending it with elements of Western hymnody”.<sup>22</sup> That Erlmann is

<sup>18</sup> See [http://education.pwv.gov.za/Tirisano\\_Folder/Tirisano\\_Index.htm](http://education.pwv.gov.za/Tirisano_Folder/Tirisano_Index.htm). Also Chapter 8.2.2.

<sup>19</sup> V. Erlmann, *Nightsong: Performance, Power, and Practice in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 419.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.: 221 and 226.

<sup>21</sup> V. Erlmann, “Africa Civilised, Africa Uncivilised: Local Culture, World-system and South Africa.” *South African Journal of Musicology* (No. 14, 1994): 5.

<sup>22</sup> V. Erlmann, “Apartheid, African Nationalism and Culture: the Case of Traditional African Music in Black Education in South Africa.” *Perspectives in Education*, Vol. 7, No. 3, December 1983): 136.

mainly concerned with a specific part of the repertoire becomes clear when he argues that the black middle class was “drawing on black American performance culture and modernising traditional indigenous elements, [to create] a typically middle class syncretic style called *makwaya* which eventually became synonymous with African music as such”.<sup>23</sup> Sibongile Khumalo and P. J. Nhlapho in their booklet “Choral Music: The Voice of African Song”, refer to the African eclectic compositions as “*makwaya* – from *amaChoir*”. *Makwaya*, they argue, “is based on Western hymnody and has a simple triadic texture. Today *makwaya* has replaced traditional music at social gatherings such as weddings”.<sup>24</sup> When they say that the “marriage between hymnody based on Western [four-part] harmonic principles... and indigenous and folk music... gave birth to *makwaya* which became the form of expression for mission-educated Africans and converts”, they are accepting Erlmann’s view.<sup>25</sup> David Coplan, on the other hand, notes the fact that

for the first quarter of the century, *makwaya* (‘choir’) music other than hymns (*amaculo*) was... divided into three distinct categories by Zulu participants: *Amagama eMusic* (British and African popular choral and light classical songs), *Amagama ‘sizulu* (traditional songs arranged for choir), and *Amagama eRagtime* (American popular songs and local pieces in ragtime style).<sup>26</sup>

I will later discuss in some detail the various sections making up the typical *amakwaya* repertoire (see Chapter 10.1, page 273). By quoting definitions given by different scholars, I want to emphasise the unsettled state of current terminology. The degree of vagueness that surrounds this term becomes especially apparent in the definition given by Elliot Pewa, who argues that *makwaya* “generally, refers to any group of people performing part-singing together. In the present use<sup>27</sup> the word refers to SATB choral music sung by Africans, as against other forms of Black music, like *maskanda* music, *isicathamiya* etc”.<sup>28</sup>

The ambiguity connected to *makwaya* necessitates a revision of the terminology used so far. When I directed the question about a suitable terminology to Mzilikazi Khumalo, one of the central figures of this choral tradition today, he explained that

[t]oday some people say *amakwaya*, some *makwaya*. And you see it actually is a word that comes from English, because it comes from choirs. And I think it’s important, because if you look at communal singing in the traditional setting, it’s not in sort of choir formation... When people saw this [choir] formation, particularly first with the churches, and then with the schools, then these were called choirs: They say, ok, this is *amakwaya*. And the type of music that they sing became *umculo amakwaya* [the songs of choirs], serious choir music that is different from the ordinary traditional music.<sup>29</sup>

Guided by Mzilikazi Khumalo’s explanations I suggest the following terminology for this study: the term *amakwaya* will refer to mixed black choirs that emerged from the mission stations in the nineteenth century, and to their specific tradition and performance practice. The compositions created by members of the *amakwaya* community, which amalgamate Western and traditional African influences in a distinctive form of South African choral composition, will be referred to as “African eclectic compositions”.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.: 140.

<sup>24</sup> P. J. Nhlapho, and Sibongile Khumalo, *Choral Music: The Voice of African Song* (Braamfontein: Skotaville Publishers; Johannesburg: Thorold’s Africana Books, 1993?), (no page numbers): Section 2, “The Hymn and Christianity.”

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> D. Coplan, *In Township Tonight! South Africa’s Black City Music and Theatre* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985): 72.

<sup>27</sup> as used by V. Erlmann, 1991

<sup>28</sup> E. Pewa, *Zulu Music Competitions. The Continuity of Zulu Traditional Aesthetics*, Thesis submitted for the Degree of Master of Music, University of Natal Durban: School of Music, 1995: 155.

<sup>29</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, July 18, 2000.

### Ethnomusicology and the Research of *Amakwaya*

The study of *amakwaya* is still in its infancy. Little research has been done so far that acknowledges the important socio-political role *amakwaya* has played in South African society since the nineteenth century. So far scholars, as I have suggested already, have dealt with some isolated aspects of this rather complex choral tradition and were mainly concerned with African eclectic compositions. The works of Erlmann and Coplan are obvious examples.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, important contributions have been by Rycroft,<sup>31</sup> and more recently by Helen Q. Kivnick.<sup>32</sup> Although Kivnick's book does not focus exclusively on *amakwaya*, her method of capturing the voice of the people is very similar to my own. Joan H. Waters<sup>33</sup> has made a useful collection of African eclectic compositions but one that unfortunately makes little contribution to the understanding of the musical and the socio-political context in which these compositions were written. Some research has been done on individual composers in this choral tradition. Ntsikana Gaba (c.1780-1821), in particular, one of the earliest converts in the eastern Cape, whose hymn-compositions became very influential in the mid-twentieth century, has received a fair amount of scholarly attention.<sup>34</sup> I want also to mention the work of Deidre D. Hansen<sup>35</sup> on Benjamin Tyamzashe, Douglas Reid on S. J. Khosa,<sup>36</sup> and George Ndwamato Mugovhani on Mzilikazi Khumalo<sup>37</sup>.

The absence of a comprehensive study that deals extensively with historical, socio-political or performance related issues of this choral tradition might be explained by considering how ethnomusicology as a distinct discipline has emerged out of the nineteenth century conception of comparative musicology. The latter centred on the cross-cultural comparison of musical thought, practice, and performances. Until recently, a 'purist' motivation in research prevailed, resulting in ethnomusicologists restricting themselves to finding and documenting traditional music presented in its 'pure', 'untainted' form. In other words, ethnomusicologists were following a custom of responding positively only to a conception of "pure ethnic music" and negatively to "any trace of outside influence".<sup>38</sup> For the "ethno-musico-paternalists with a fastidious ear that championed the truly exotic",<sup>39</sup> European influences on traditional music were regarded as anathema and consequently all music that showed traces of such an influence were rejected as a subject of research. Percival Kirby, one of the early scholars of South African music, who undertook most of his studies in the 1930s, was "mainly concerned with the continuity of African musical practices and was only marginally interested in the role of performance in situations of culture contact".<sup>40</sup> He believed that musicians

<sup>30</sup> V. Erlmann, *African Stars: Studies in Black South African Performance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) and *Music, Modernity and the Global Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), and D. Coplan, *In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985).

<sup>31</sup> D. Rycroft, "Black South African Urban Music Since The 1890's: Some Reminiscences of Alfred Assegai Kumalo (1879-1966)." *Journal of International Library of African Music* 1991: 5-31.

<sup>32</sup> H. Q. Kivnick, *Where is the Way: Song and Struggle in South Africa* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990).

<sup>33</sup> J. H. Waters, *An Annotated Anthology of Zulu and Xhosa Choral Music*. Thesis submitted for the Degree of Master of Music. (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1990).

<sup>34</sup> Amongst others: J. Hodgson, *Ntsikana's 'Great Hymn' A Xhosa Expression of Christianity in the Early Nineteenth Century Eastern Cape* (Cape Town: Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1980); and D. Dargie, "The Music of Ntsikana." *South African Journal of Musicology* (SAMUS 2, 1982): 9-27.

<sup>35</sup> D. D. Hansen, *The Life and Work of B. Tyamzashe* (Grahamstown, Rhodes University: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1968).

<sup>36</sup> D. Reid, "In Conversation with S. J. Khosa: Composer and Music Educator." *Ars Nova*, (Vol. 24, 1992): 10-28.

<sup>37</sup> G. N. Mugovhani, *The Manifestations of the 'African Style' in the Works of Mzilikazi Khumalo*. Thesis submitted for the Degree Master of Music. (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1998).

<sup>38</sup> D. Rycroft, 1977: 216.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*: 220.

<sup>40</sup> V. Erlmann, 1991: 1.



who had been exposed to and transformed by Western influences, had produced “nothing of lasting value”.<sup>41</sup>

The concept of a culture and its musical expressions being ‘pure’ and without ‘trace of outside influence’ is, I want to argue, an absurd one. No culture or even sub-culture can be regarded as an island, uninfluenced by the ideas of surrounding communities.<sup>42</sup> Foreign influences may in fact be an important part of the development of a culture. In the case of *amakwaya* it was mainly European culture that exerted a formative influence, but there are a number of other influences that contributed to the formation of this choral genre (traditional, African-American etc.).

In the late 1970s a rethinking of the ‘purist’ approach began to gain grounds. Rycroft warned that “the ethics of personal ‘purist’ motivation in research might be in need of review... A continued emphasis on studying *only* ‘gems from the past’ to the exclusion of what is going on here and now, represents an imbalance that we should take steps to rectify”.<sup>43</sup> Even then Rycroft felt that the scholarly emphasis should still be on traditional music. David Coplan’s book *In Township Tonight!* marked a distinct departure from the methodology of early ethnomusicology by changing the perspective. Coplan portrayed the urban performing arts not as the “disintegration but [as] the creation of a culture”.<sup>44</sup> Since then many scholars have done extensive research into different genres of South African urban music practices, placing questions of origin, development and structure into the multifaceted context of the cultural, social, and economic fabric of black society.<sup>45</sup>

Given the fact that *amakwaya* groups have over the past hundred and fifty years developed an original performance practice with a specific aesthetic and repertoire, it seems necessary to establish a clearer picture of this choral tradition by looking at it from sociological, political, psychological and musical angles. The aim of this study is therefore to take up the central aspects of *amakwaya* in order to produce starting points for further research, and to attempt to answer a few basic questions that will place the subject on a broader basis:

- Where do these choirs originate?
- What kinds of people choose to be part of *amakwaya* groups?
- What is their motivation to sing?
- What distinguishes *amakwaya* and its performers from other characteristic choral practices?
- What is the function and importance of competitions?

Since little work relating specifically to *amakwaya* has been done, the challenge has been to link my work with the work of others. I found Veit Erlmann’s *Nightsong*<sup>46</sup>, a comprehensive study of *isicathamiya*, of particular importance. This book can be regarded as parallel to my own study as it deals with the choral tradition of South African black migrant workers. It offers a number of important reference points, which, from a different perspective, facilitate the understanding of *amakwaya*.

<sup>41</sup> P. Kirby, “The Effect of Western Civilisation on Bantu Music”, in *Western Civilisation and the Natives of South Africa*, Isaac Schapera, ed. (London: Routledge, 1967): 140.

<sup>42</sup> For more details see: W. Welsch, „Transkulturalität – zur Veränderten Verfassung heutiger Kulturen“. *Das Magazin Wissenschaftszentrum*. (Nordrhein-Westfalen 3/1994): 10-13; W. Welsch, „Transkulturalität – Lebensformen nach der Auflösung der Kulturen“, K. Luger und R. Renger, ed. *Dialog der Kulturen* (Wien: Die Multikulturelle Gesellschaft und Medien, 1995): 147-169; R. Pratte, *Pluralism in Education: Conflict, Clarity and Commitment* (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1979); U. Ramseyer, *Soziale Bezüge des Musizierens in Naturvolkkulturen – ein Ethno-sozialer Ordnungsversuch* (München: Francke Verlag, 1970): 68.

<sup>43</sup> D. Rycroft, 1977: 217.

<sup>44</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 3.

<sup>45</sup> for example C. Ballantine (1993), J. Clegg (1991), V. Erlmann (1991) and (1996)

<sup>46</sup> V. Erlmann, 1996.

In setting up the necessary historical background for my research I relied mainly on the important research into early missionary work done by Norman Etherington<sup>47</sup> and Sheila M. Meintjes<sup>48</sup>. When exploring the historical development of *amakwaya* I was aware of the fact that it is essential to keep in mind that cultural practices cannot be investigated without considering socio-political circumstances. It is a truism that musical structures cannot be dislodged from social and political structures. This is particularly true for *amakwaya*, which emerged as a direct product of social, political, religious and cultural developments in nineteenth century South Africa. We will see that the transformation of black society and the formation of a black middle class gave birth to this choral tradition. The analysis of cultural practices of the black middle class, therefore, is necessary for our understanding of historical processes. In the words of A. Epstein, “[i]t is in leisure-time activities such as performance that one gains the clearest impression of emerging African communities and their distinctive culture”.<sup>49</sup> The investigation of the socio-political significance of *amakwaya* since the early nineteenth century also helped me to develop further understanding of characteristics that define contemporary *makwaya* practice: the strong orientation towards competitions, the specific identity projected by the members of this choral community, and aspects of the repertoire and aesthetics. For this I followed important leads in the work of Shula Marks<sup>50</sup>, and Richard Rathbone<sup>51</sup>. The sociological research by Tim Couzens<sup>52</sup> and Absolom Vilakazi<sup>53</sup>, who examined important aspects of the transformation of the black middle class from imitation to negotiation, shaped my understanding of the process by which the identity of the black South African middle class was formed. A particularly helpful source of insight into this identity proved to be Mveli Skota’s publication, *African Yearly Register*, published in the early 1930s,<sup>54</sup> and the somewhat similar publications by James Steward<sup>55</sup> and J. X. Mancoe<sup>56</sup>. These works can be regarded as providing a key to the understanding of the aspirations, the ideology and the philosophy of the black elite in the first half of the twentieth century.

## Methodology

A number of different methodological approaches have been associated with the discipline of ethnomusicology. So far as concerns research into southern African music traditions, I have already pointed to the ‘purist’ attitude, represented by the remarks of Kirby,<sup>57</sup> and to recent approaches more sympathetic to the complex interlinking of music, culture and politics found in the studies of Coplan, Erlmann, and Kivnick.<sup>58</sup> In his useful recent article, “Knowing Fieldwork”<sup>59</sup> Jeff Titon

<sup>47</sup> N. Etherington, 1978.

<sup>48</sup> S. M. Meintjes, *Edendale 1850-1906: a Case Study of Rural Transformation and Class Formation in an African Mission in Natal* (University of London. School of Oriental and African Studies, 1988).

<sup>49</sup> A. Epstein, *Politics in an Urban African Community*, (Manchester, 1958): 9, quoted in D. Coplan, 1985: 232.

<sup>50</sup> S. Marks, *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa: Class, Nationalism, and the State in Twentieth Century Natal* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986).

<sup>51</sup> S. Marks, and R. Rathbone, ed. *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African Class Formation, Culture, and Consciousness, 1870-1930* (Harlow: Longman, 1982).

<sup>52</sup> T. Couzens, *The New African: a Study of the Life and Work of H.I.E. Dhlomo* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985).

<sup>53</sup> A. Vilakazi, *Zulu Transformations: a Study of the Dynamics of Social Change* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1962).

<sup>54</sup> T. D. M. Skota ed., *The African Yearly Register* (Johannesburg: R. L. Esson & Co. 193?).

<sup>55</sup> J. Steward ed., *Lovedale Past and Present: A Register of 2,000 Names* (Lovedale, 1887).

<sup>56</sup> J. X. Mancoe ed., *The Bloemfontein Bantu and Coloured People’s Directory*, (Bloemfontein, 1934).

<sup>57</sup> P. Kirby (1967).

<sup>58</sup> D. Coplan (1985), V. Erlmann (1993), and H. Q. Kivnick (1990).

describes the now largely defunct ‘purist’ approach as that of “musical folklore” and gives as an example of this, the collecting, classifying and analysing the work of Bela Bartok. The association here with the revival of eastern European nationalist culture is not accidental. Music scholarship in this approach went hand in hand with certain political aims. Partly in reaction to this, the dominant method of ethnomusicology, associated with the birth of the Society for Ethnomusicology in the 1950s, would think of making connections between music and cultural, political or educational aims as compromising the discipline. The complexity of the phenomenon of music can be captured only through fieldwork and immersion and not simply by surveying and classifying. Finally, Titon presents what he judges the way forward, the growing method which he terms “the study of people making music”.<sup>60</sup> This approach is influenced by French and German philosophy in the twentieth century, in particular phenomenology, and does not shy away from making connections between music and history, even nationalism, and also “issues of power relationships, ethics, identity, and belief”.<sup>61</sup> Phenomenology as understood here refers to the attempt “to ground knowledge in the world of lived experience”.<sup>62</sup> Titon’s description of this method captures much of my own approach in this thesis. What is paramount, he explains, is

the lived experience of people making music (ourselves included)... Other emphases involve reflexivity and an increase in narrative representation that is descriptive, interpretive and evocative...; sharing authority and authorship with ‘informants’ (who are now considered teachers, consultants, friends, or all three)...; a deconstructing approach to boundary concepts such as race and ethnicity; close attention to how class and gender operate within music-cultures; ... an active involvement as musical and cultural advocates trying to help people in the music-cultures with whom we work have better lives in which their music can flourish.<sup>63</sup>

Titon goes on to say that this method does not abandon techniques of analysis such as that of musical transcription. “Musical sound is still documented, and if musical structure is an important aspect of the musical experience, as it so often is, then it is analysed and interpreted as part of the matrix of meaning”.<sup>64</sup> Likewise, the emphasis that “musical folklore” put on documentation is similarly incorporated into this approach, but now it is “repositioned”, and is “considered reflexively, as an intersubjective product, rather than as the report and analysis of a witness”.<sup>65</sup>

This approach suits the study of *amakwaya*. This tradition, as we shall see in the course of my discussion, was closely linked to the history of South Africa in general and the emergence of a black middle class in particular. Behind the tradition lies a complex totality of political, religious and cultural factors and their interplay. An ethnomusicological analysis of the *amakwaya* tradition must therefore be attempted from various perspectives: to get the voice of the people, to describe the factors shaping the tradition, and to analyse the aesthetic criteria of its complex cross-cultural performance practice.<sup>66</sup> To research *amakwaya* from only one of these aspects would result in a restricted interpretation of this complex phenomenon.

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<sup>59</sup> J. T. Titon, “Knowing Fieldwork”, *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives in Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*. Gregory Barz and Timothy Cooley ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997): 87-100. I am grateful to Patti Giddy for pointing me to this text.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*: 91.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*: 92.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*: 90.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*: 92.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> This approach is supported by Gilbert Chase, who argues that in ethnomusicology, “both anthropology and history are needed for the full knowledge and understanding of music as human experience in time and space” (G. Chase, “Musicology, History, and Anthropology: Current Thoughts”, in *Current Thoughts in Musicology*, W. Grupp ed., Austin,

These reflections had consequences for the choice of research tools I employed for my research. I decided to employ a multi-focal approach using different methodologies at the same time.<sup>67</sup> The absence of in-depth studies of *amakwaya* makes it necessary for me to rely mainly on archival material and primary sources (manuscripts, newspapers, biographies). Other theoretical tools I have used are musical transcription and analysis. In order to capture the authentic voice of the *amakwaya* community, I have carried out extensive interviews with a cross-section of its members. The series of photographs interspersed in the text also carries its own message.

## Interviews

Oral history is a source of invaluable data, especially when dealing with a society that has never relied on the documentation of their cultural practices. Interviews proved to be particularly valuable because they give a personal perspective. A variety of approaches was used for this part of my research. When investigating the views of conductors, composers, choristers, choral associations, and organisers of competitions I used direct interviews, with definite questions, while for others open-ended questions were asked. The idea of the latter interview technique, referred to as “convergent interviewing”,<sup>68</sup> is that of keeping the informant talking without being asked specific questions. Convergent interviewing, which in some respect resembles informal conversation, has an important advantage as the content of the interview comes almost entirely from the informant, and is not determined by the questions asked.<sup>69</sup> Probe questions were asked at the end of the convergent interviews to test conclusions reached on the basis of earlier interviews, performance observation or archival work.

Using a questionnaire, I conducted a number of direct interviews with members of various *amakwaya* groups around the country, and in particular with those that were motivated by their enthusiasm for competitions. The following questions were included:

- What kind of training in music have you received?
- Who trained you?
- Why is it important for you to sing in a choir?
- What skills does one need to develop in order to be a good singer?
- How does your choir get involved with your community or/and with your church?
- Do you socialise regularly with your fellow choristers outside of choir practice?
- Why is it important for you to take part in a competition?
- What is your most memorable experience connected to competition?
- What did your choir do with the prize-money?
- What skills must a choir develop in order to win?
- What do you learn from other choirs by taking part at the National Choir Festival?

Conductors were asked two additional questions:

- Do you think competitions influence the way you train your choir?
- How do the criteria set by the panel of adjudicators influence the way you train your choir?

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Texas, 1976): 236; see also C. Ballantine, who speaks of the “category of totality” (C. Ballantine, *Music and its Social Meanings*, New York: Fordon and Breach, 1984): 21.

<sup>67</sup> In this I followed Anthony Seeger, who wrote: “Musical rigidity – when this implies the use of a single mechanism for obtaining data – is always inferior to the use of a number of different ways of obtaining perspectives on a given problem.” (A. Seeger, *Why Suyá Sing: a Musical Anthropology of an Amazonian People*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 103.

<sup>68</sup> B. Dick, *Convergent Interviewing* (Brisbane: Interchange, 1990).

<sup>69</sup> V. Minichiello/R. Aroni/E. Timewell/L. Alexander *In-depth Interviewing: Researching People* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1990); see also M. Brenner /J. Brown /D. Canter ed., *The Research Interview: Uses and Approaches* (London: Academic Press, 1985).

Sharing people's firsthand experiences was not only an exciting experience in itself, but also helped to make sense of information gathered during observation or archival work. Interviews were valuable in many ways. First, they were indispensable in understanding how choristers, conductors, organisers and members of the audience understood the *amakwaya* tradition, what role it played in their lives, and what made them want to continue it. Secondly, they helped to unearth a number of details that were not available owing to the lack of written documentation. Lastly, when I started the process of writing, they proved to be an excellent way of allowing the voices of the people to be heard.

### Action Research Group Pietermaritzburg

The Pietermaritzburg Action Research Project was started in January 2000. In the first phase of meetings (each phase lasting five months) the participating conductors met weekly from 3 February to the end of June 2000, for an hour on Thursdays. The guiding idea of this project was to open up ways of training that took into consideration the current state of education in South Africa, and collectively to establish a method of instruction that focused on the development of effective rehearsing and conducting skills and appropriate vocal techniques. The essence of Action Research is to enable the community to perceive the value of their own ideas, thereby empowering them towards decision making and development. The main aims, formulated by the conductors themselves, were:

- To upgrade the quality of training choirs by involving teachers and conductors in self-assessment and development skills over a protracted length of time.
- To train conductors for development by initiating them into the skills of Action Research, mainly through rigorous self-assessment journals and informal reports. This would enable them to become more autonomous in the present situation (lack of effective instruction and formal opportunities for further training).
- To develop the skills to produce flexible vocal-sound and techniques, meeting the aesthetics of the various repertoire performed by *amakwaya* groups. A special focus is on the production of vocal, choral and conducting techniques that aim at the aesthetic requirements of the disparate repertoire of *amakwaya*.
- To develop a model of sustainable development of choirs and conductors.

The Project was inspired by a Music Education Action Research Project, "Music and Development", that was initiated at the University of Durban Westville by Sallyann Goodall in 1997. This Project was created to promote development amongst music educators around Durban.

Action Research is "a form of *collective* self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out".<sup>70</sup> The linking of the terms "action" and "research" highlights the essential feature of the approach: "Trying out ideas in practice as a means of improvement and as a means of increasing knowledge... Action research provides a way of working which links theory and practice into one whole: ideas-in-action".<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup> S. Kemmis and R. McTaggart, ed., *The Action Research Planner* (Victoria: Deakin University, 1988): 5.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*: 6.



Action Research as a method of learning and developing further skills has been used mainly in education, industrial management and community services.<sup>72</sup> The main features of this methodology are that it is

- cyclic (similar steps tend to recur, in a similar sequence)
- participative (the clients and informants are involved as partners, or at least active participants, in the research process)
- qualitative
- reflective (critical reflection upon the process and outcomes are important parts of each cycle)

Action Research is an ongoing, cyclic problem-solving process that alternates between critical reflection and critical action. The researcher and others involved first recollect and then critique what has already happened. The increased understanding which emerges from the critical reflection is then used in designing later steps. The cycle used for the Pietermaritzburg Action Research Group was that of Stephen Kemmis.<sup>73</sup> The steps are:

plan → act → observe → reflect (and then → plan etc.)

and the aim is:

- to develop a plan of critically informed action to improve what is already happening
- to act to implement the plan
- to observe the effects of the critically informed action in the context in which it occurs, and
- to reflect on these effects as a basis for further planning, subsequent critically informed action and so on, through a succession of cycles.

Each completed cycle is a step in the direction of better action and better ideas. The early stages in the cycle are used to determine what happens in the later cycles, and in the later cycles the views developed in the early cycles can be tested and challenged and refined. Thus, the cyclic nature of action research gradually refines the understanding and skills of the participants. The practice helps one to change oneself rather than being forced to change from outside as is the case with conservative teaching.

Ideally I would have liked to base my thesis entirely on developing a methodology that would aim at the empowerment of choral conductors, choirs and organisational structures. The reports written by the participants of the Pietermaritzburg Action Research Project at the end of the first phase reveal that the approach yielded very promising results. It became clear, however, that this kind of intervention would take a long time and that the given time frame of two years would not generate sufficient data. Even though my original aims were not achieved, the discussions and practical experiences that occurred during this intervention helped me towards a deeper understanding of *amakwaya* practice. The weekly meetings generated a wealth of data that I could use for checking the results of my research and confirming my hypotheses. Of specific interest to me was how the

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<sup>72</sup> The World Wide Web (WEB) is used by important Action Researchers like Stephen Kemmis, Patricia Weeks, Bill Athweh and Bob Dick as a platform for discussion and spreading of ideas. (The main sites are: The Cornell Participatory Action Research Network-discussion forum and mailing lists: <http://www.parnet.org/home.cfm>; Action research resources in Australia provided by Bob Dick: [http://www.uq.net.au/action\\_research/](http://www.uq.net.au/action_research/); Collaborative Action Research Network: <http://www.uea.ac.uk/care/carn/>; Action Research International Online Journal-discussion forum: <http://elmo.scu.edu.au/schools/sawd/ari/ari-home.html>).

<sup>73</sup> S. Kemmis, 1988: 10-1; See also: B. Dick, (2000) *A Beginner's Guide to Action Research*. Available online at <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/guide.html>.

group prioritised problems, how the choirs perceived themselves, and what they saw as their strong and their weak points. Some of the suggestions about the need for development, which are made at the end of this thesis, are informed by these discussions.

In addition to the discovery of multiple approaches and methodologies that were appropriate, I had to develop a certain flexibility in my use of them. Initially I felt the ambiguity of my position as a researcher with different roles, but my involvement as scholar, performer, conductor and musician proved valuable in giving me insights into *amakwaya* from a variety of perspectives. Whereas the archival work helped me to understand many historical aspects of this choral practice, I could scrutinise this understanding in the light of my interviews and practical work with various school and community choirs. It was this connection of theory and practice that I found most valuable in my investigation of the *amakwaya* tradition. The experience I gained during my involvement with *amakwaya* has confirmed my belief that ethnomusicology should not be a discipline remote from musical practitioners. Ideally theoretical findings should have an impact on practice.

## Outline

In my approach to *amakwaya* I try to achieve an analysis of the aesthetics of this art form which is informed by an understanding of the historical forces that contributed to its emergence and its present shape, and which illuminates the meaning the choral practice continues to have in the self-understanding of the more urbanized and middle class strata of black South African society in their struggle for a negotiated identity. These aims involve answering three distinct questions:

1. What cultural, political, and above all religious and educational influences contributed to the emergence of this tradition? This corresponds to the historical sections in Part One (especially Chapter 2) and Part Two (especially Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8).
2. What meaning did this tradition carry for the members of the choral groups themselves in their negotiation of an identity merging traditional and 'modern' elements in a society in which the normal avenues for self-expression were largely closed off? This question – which is answered, for example, through the comments of the choristers themselves, and through the lyrics of the songs and the choice of repertoire – runs throughout all the chapters, but in particular corresponds to the opening chapter of the thesis, to Chapters 3 and 4 (on identity), to the discussion of the meaning of competitions in Chapter 9 of Part Two, and to various discussions in Part Three, in particular Chapter 12 on eclectic compositions.
3. What is the characteristic repertoire of present *amakwaya* performance, how did this develop, and how is one to evaluate it from an aesthetic point of view in light of the above two questions, and with a view to its future possibilities in a post-Apartheid context? This question corresponds to Part Three of the thesis.

Part One, "Identity: Class and Nation", is historical but also discursive. In Chapter 1 a description of a tour of a choral group to England in 1891 allows us to introduce the various themes in the thesis, having to do in particular with questions of the negotiation of identity and, linked to this, of repertoire and dress, and also gives an insight into the forces of colonialism framing the whole emergence of the tradition. The influence of the visits of black American minstrel groups is considered, providing a catalyst for new aspirations towards emancipation rather than imitation (1.1). Evidence of how identity was being shaped is further provided in the discussion of the characteristic repertoire at choral performances and also of dress or costume (1.2.1 and 1.2.2).

Chapter 2 traces the origins of *amakwaya* back to the early mission communities and looks into the socio-political conditions that at the same time conditioned the emergence of a mission-educated black elite, without which the choral tradition cannot be properly understood. The focus is on Natal and on the roles played by the strategies of the American Methodist missionaries and politically by Shepstone's dual system of governance in the colony (2.1). The various factors at work in the formation of the ethos, and self-image of the mission blacks or *amakholwa* are identified: the privileging of those at the missions (2.2.1), the presentation of alternative life-aspirations to those of the traditional community (the spheres of education and ministry) (2.2.3), the transformed meaning of key symbols such as that of 'home' (2.2.4), the isolation of mission blacks from both the 'heathen' Africans and the largely unsympathetic white settlers (2.3). A number of questions are asked. Who were the people that joined the mission stations? What motivated them to break traditional bonds in order to aspire to a new identity? What was their relation to the 'Other', in the two forms of the 'heathen' Africans and the white settler community?

Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the construction of the specific identity of the black middle class and with their quest for a viable position in South African society. In Chapter 3, I sketch some ideas on identity and difference as a theoretical framework for the discussion (3.1.1), and link these to the African philosophy of *ubuntu* and to the role of music in the traditional culture (3.1.2 and 3.1.3). The tendency towards imitation of the dominant culture is discussed in 3.2 in relation to the strategy of the mission blacks to apply for Exemption from the stipulations of the Natal Native Code; and the role played by the new ideals of 'education' and 'Christianity' in conceptualising identity is discussed (3.2). The chapter concludes with an account of the experience of isolation of the new black middle class from the traditional African communities (3.3).

The discussion of the development of a black middle class identity is taken up in a more positive way in Chapter 4, "Negotiating Tradition and the Modern", in which a decisive shift is seen from uncritical imitation of Western influences to an informed negotiation between Western and ethnic values. The 1930s publication of a Who's Who of middle class black society, the very revealing *African Yearly Register*, is used as a basis for understanding the various ideals now constitutive of the new identity: in particular the ideas of 'progress' and 'education', of crossing the racial divide and linking to the past African traditions are singled out as crucial (4.1). These aspirations are summed up in 4.2 under the rubric of seeking a 'national culture', and the chapter ends with a discussion of the specific quest for and conceptualisation of an African national music and the role *amakwaya* played in this context (4.3).

Part Two, "Music: The Context of Performance", focuses on the important effects of the missionary enterprise – the schools rather than the churches – in the formation of *amakwaya* tradition, and traces the development of competitions, which take a central place in *amakwaya* performance practice today. In Chapter 5, I explore the complex musical influences that the converts were exposed to at the mission stations. A central aspect of this influence is the hymn, which was used by the missionaries as a medium of promoting their ideas and ideals. I trace briefly the modern origins of hymn singing in Europe and North America (5.2) before seeing how these were adapted for use in Africa, with questions of the African vocal tradition and the question of language being prominent in this process (5.3). A process of secularisation brought about the politicisation of hymn singing, resulting in one of the most powerful vocal expressions in twentieth century South Africa, the protest and freedom songs (5.5).

Chapter 6 takes as a case study music education at Adams College, one of the most influential schools operating in Natal before the Bantu Education Act was passed in 1954. I outline the vision of the American missionaries (6.1) and their policies on the content of music education and choral singing, culminating in 1936 in the establishment at the College of the first African School of



Music (6.2). The particular role played by the tonic sol-fa method of music notation is also discussed (6.2.3) in view of its continuing importance today in *amakwaya* practice.

In Chapter 7, I show that leisure-time activities played an important role in the missionaries' aim to control, moralise and discipline the students. After summarising the various activities – Sunday Schools, Scouting, and so on – that were set up at the mission schools to achieve these aims (7.1), I focus on the role choral music played in disciplining and moralising the students (7.2). An examination of the various duties of the choirs shows that their representation of the College at functions, celebrations and competitions became a major strategy of the missionaries to demonstrate the success of their endeavours. In the first half of the twentieth century, competitions, which encapsulated many of the qualities so important to the missionaries as well as their converts – discipline, progress, and success – developed into one of the most important features of *amakwaya* performance practice.

Chapter 8 traces the emergence of *amakwaya* festivals, contests and, in particular, eisteddfodau, associated in the Transvaal with Mark Radebe (8.1). I outline the early form of informal school choir competitions, organised by Teachers' Associations (8.2), and conclude with an examination of the National Choir Festival, the backbone of contemporary choral practice, and its precursors (8.3). This is followed by the discussion in Chapter 9 which expands the discourse on competitions by offering several voices of the choral community commenting on the qualities that make competitions attractive to them. In 9.1 I offer some remarks on competitiveness as manifested in traditional African culture, and follow its transformation into the contemporary choral art form (9.2). In 9.3 I discuss the central importance of the competitions for the members of the choirs themselves, the 'lived experience' again revealing something of importance for the theme of identity and how it is constructed. In this regard, the particular role of the adjudicators in the self-understanding of the choristers is analysed (9.3.2). This leads to a consideration of some criticism of the role of competitions at the present (9.4). These critical comments on structural problems connected to the almost exclusive concentration of *amakwaya* groups on competitions bring Part Two of the thesis to a close.

Part Three, "Repertoire: Negotiation, Tradition and the Modern", focuses on the sectionalised repertoire as a central manifestation of the process of negotiating Western and African influences.

Chapter 10 scrutinises the structure of the sectionalised repertoire, which consists of neo-traditional songs (modernised versions of songs taken from African folk repertoire), Western art music (of mainly European origin), and African eclectic compositions (mainly by mission-trained composers). Following an exploration of the function and meaning of the various parts of the sectionalised repertoire (10.1), I turn my attention to aspects of visual representation (10.2). This is followed by an investigation into the importance and function of each section of *amakwaya* repertoire as seen by the performers themselves (10.3).

Each of the following three chapters treats one of the three sections of the repertoire. Chapter 11 directs attention to the neo-traditional songs. I argue in 11.1 that in the first quarter of the twentieth-century traditional dance-songs such as *inkondlo*, *umgqo*, *umphendu* and *isigekle* were blended with American popular song style and local ragtime style (*amagama eRagtime*), and that this led to the creation of modernised versions of traditional wedding songs (*izingoma zomtshado*). The impulse that triggered this process came from the increasing interest of *amakwaya* groups in their African cultural heritage that developed in the late nineteenth century. The second part of this chapter (11.2) identifies the various musical and stylistic elements that characterise neo-traditional songs as performed by *amakwaya* groups today.

Chapter 12 traces the historical development of the eclectic compositions of *amakwaya* composers since the early nineteenth century. After offering an investigation of the process of

composition (12.1), I propose a periodisation that identifies five stages of stylistic development, with Ntiskana Gaba as an influential precursor of this choral tradition (12.2.1). Whereas the first group of mission-educated composers undertook almost exclusively the imitation of Western musical structures and ideas, a decisive change set in towards the beginning of the twentieth century, when composers started to reconnect with their roots (12.2.2). Initially this recourse to African musical elements, which coincided with an emerging nationalism, concerned only rhythm. Composers, I argue, started to replace Western hymnic square rhythms by introducing polyrhythm, multiple downbeats, syncopated rhythms, interlocking and interrhythm into their compositions (12.2.3). It was only towards the middle of the twentieth century that composers began to explore what Mzilikazi Khumalo, one of the foremost *amakwaya* composers, calls a “distinctively African style” of choral composition (12.2.4). In his latest phase, Khumalo attempted to realise this “African style” in several large-scale works (12.2.5). At the end of this chapter the question of the future of African eclectic composition is put to a number of *amakwaya* composers.

The final Chapter discusses the important changes in the Western part of *amakwaya* repertoire that have occurred from the early 1970s onwards, manifested in the fact that an increasing number of oratorio choruses with extensive solo passages have been prescribed at competitions. A key figure in this development was the music educator and choral conductor, Khabi Mngoma. A discussion of Mngoma’s theoretical deliberations on pitch (13.1) leads to the conclusion that shortcomings in the area of intonation can be attributed to the lack of proper training and to the limited resources available to the choirs even at the present day (13.1.2). Though works by Mendelssohn and Brahms, and, above all, Handel’s *Messiah* and the “Hallelujah” chorus have long been significant presences (as we discuss in 13.2.1), Mngoma promoted the extensive use of choruses taken from oratorios in order to deal with the problems of tempered pitch intonation (13.2.2). The chapter closes by noting a trend towards choruses and solos from Italian opera, which have become icons of aspiration for *amakwaya* groups (13.3).

I conclude my research in the Epilogue with some necessarily sketchy suggestions for the future. The suggestions relating to *amakwaya* practice which I offer derive from three sources. These are: members of the choral community, who voice their dissatisfaction with the current lack of resources and shortages of opportunities to improve their practice; my own research into the records and criticism of *amakwaya*; and finally my involvement over three years with black choirs in South Africa.

## Acknowledgements

In concluding this preface, I wish to express my thanks to the many people of the *amakwaya* community who have contributed to this thesis directly or indirectly. I cannot thank them all personally – many gave me advice, hospitality and friendship during my three-year stay in South Africa. It would be impossible to mention all by name, though many of them appear in the list of interviewees at the end of the thesis. The experience of meeting and interviewing conductors, choristers, composers, adjudicators, organisers of competitions and members of the audience has been a wonderful one which granted me insight into different aspects of the *amakwaya* community. Of the people I have met during interviews, concerts, competitions, rehearsals and more leisurely occasions, I am especially indebted to Sam Shabalala, Phelelani Mnomiya, Ludumo Magangane, Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Mokale Koapeng and, most notably, Professor Mzilikazi Khumalo, all of whom gave their specialist knowledge freely. I was privileged to share the experience and knowledge of many community and school choirs. I was particularly privileged to work with the Durban Serenade Choral Society, their conductors Siyabonga 'Pi' Ngcobo and Thabo Gumede and their organiser, Falithenjwa Mkhize; with the SA Singers and their Conductor, Vusi Khanyile; and with the Pietermaritzburg Choral Society and their Conductor, Joshua Radebe. During the initial phases of setting up the Pietermaritzburg Action Research Project I received valuable input and advice from Sallyann Goodall, who freely shared the knowledge and experience that she had gained in a similar project organised through the University of Durban-Westville.

Among the librarians and archivists I want particularly to thank Heather Gale at the Eleanor Bonnar Library at the University of Natal, Hloniphile Dlamini, Nellie Somers and Nomusa Bhengu at the Killie Campbell Library Durban, Kate Abbott, Michele Pichover and Carol Archibald of the William Cullen Library at the University of the Witwatersrand. I shared memorable moments with Richard Cock who hosted me while I was interviewing members of the choral community and researching in several archives in Johannesburg and Pretoria.

I would like to thank Christopher Ballantine, my chief supervisor at the UND School of Music. His contribution is gratefully acknowledged. Appreciation is also expressed to Angela Impey, who supervised the ethnomusicological parts, for her guidance in my study of South African choral music. I want to mention in particular Margaret Bush and Sally Hodges, also from the School of Music, who were always prepared to go out of their way to support and encourage me. Furthermore, I would like to thank Thokozani C. Khuzwayo from the Department of Zulu for translating archival material and song lyrics.

I also wish to express my deep gratitude to the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) for providing a scholarship and for funding the extensive fieldwork for this project. The University of Natal has provided me with important research facilities while I have been a research fellow of the DAAD there.

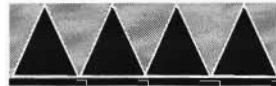
Among those who provided critical commentary on my drafts and ideas I mention with gratitude Patrick Giddy, who read parts of this dissertation in its different stages and provided valuable comments. His input particularly as regards questions of identity helped me shape many of my original ideas. During the last weeks of writing Patti Giddy became an invaluable companion, research assistant and close friend. Without the continuous encouragement, love and help I received from the Giddy family, this work would never have been finished.

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fields, were a source of inspiration for my work and spiritual growth. I shall never forget the time I spent with Bobby Mills and Denzil Cope, and their warm hospitality and generosity. Margaret Lenta did the final proofreading in a very professional and efficient way, and Stefan Detterbeck helped with the final layout.

Finally, and above all, I have to thank one of the key figures that contributed to this thesis. In this case the contribution is too substantial, too diverse and too extensive to be mentioned in detail. It is Almut Kirmse who was the driving force behind this project. Without her continuous encouragement, love and help this work would never have been written. Indeed, she was the soul of our South African home, the sharer of many of my labours, the comrade of many travels and fieldtrips, and, most of all, the inspiration of this work. Thank you for everything you have done for me.

PART ONE



# **Identity: Class and Nation**



## The African Native Choir (1892) and Early Manifestations of Black Middle Class Identity

“Tell me,” I said to the Kaffir maiden [Charlotte Manye], who is black but comely, “tell me what you would like to say to the English people on behalf of your race?” She replied, “I have long wished for a chance to say my thought and now, behold, it has come. This is what I would say: ‘Let us be in Africa even as we are in England. Here we are treated as men and women. Yonder we are but as cattle. But in Africa, as in England, we are human. Can you not make your people at the Cape as kind and just as your people here? That is the first thing and the greatest. But there are still three other things that I would ask. Help us to found the schools for which we pray, where our people could learn to labour, to build, to acquire your skill with their hands. Then could we be sufficient unto ourselves. Our young men would build us houses and lay out our farms, and our tribes would develop independently of the civilisation and industries, which you have given us. Thirdly, give our children free education. Fourthly, shut up the can- teens, and take away the drink. These four things we ask from the English. Do not say us nay’”.<sup>1</sup>

This statement of Charlotte Manye was recorded in 1891 when a group of black South African singers travelled to England on a tour to raise funds for an industrial school in the Cape Colony. Although the venture “failed dismally”,<sup>2</sup> it is remarkable in two ways: it not only represents the first international endeavour involving black South African performing artists, but also marks the early flowering of a South African musical genre brought about as a result of a series of dramatic events that restructured the social fabric and consciousness of South African black society. Industrial capital, merchant activities, settler greed and rapacity, and missionary indoctrination all contributed to the shaping of a new social order in the black community.<sup>3</sup> Colonial intervention and intercultural exchange triggered a crucial encounter between African societies and the Western world that had a lasting effect on all spheres of life, resulting in growing class differentiations and the emergence of class-based cultural practices. An industrial revolution and urbanisation re- shaped South African society and led to the genesis of a multitude of new musical genres.<sup>4</sup> The African Native Choir



**Figure 1.1:** *Charlotte Manye (Illustrated London News, August 22, 1891)*

<sup>1</sup> *Review of Reviews* 4, no 2 (September 1891): 256.

<sup>2</sup> V. Erlmann, *Music, Modernity and the Global Imagination: South Africa and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999): 14.

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion about black social strata and *amakholwa*, see Chapter 2.2.1.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, P. Kirby, “The Effect of Western Civilization on Bantu Music”, in *Western Civilization and the Natives of South Africa*, Isaac Schapera (ed.). (London: Routledge, 1967): 131-40; D. Rycroft, “Evidence of Stylistic Continuity in

represents South Africa's black elitist stratum and their major musical manifestation, *amakwaya*, that developed as a result of colonial and missionary intrusions. In this respect, we can see members of the group as important spokespersons, and the statement of Charlotte Manye, a prominent member of this choir, reveals some of the main issues that singers were concerned with.

Charlotte's remarks point to the backdrop against which the development of *amakwaya* has to be seen. It is important to understand that the social and political circumstances that developed and took shape in the course of the nineteenth century provide both the preconditions and the driving forces for the emergence of a black elite and its music. Charlotte's account, when placed in the context of an emerging black nationalism, allows insight into the interwoven notions of progress, modernity, and the yearning for new identity in a conflicting area of African traditional ideals and Victorian values of Christianity and education.

Veit Erlmann has dealt extensively with different aspects of the tours of the African Native Choir both to England and some time later to America. His main interest was to explore "the interdependence of Western constructions of Africa and African representations of the West" by reviewing the notion of representation of self and the 'other' as a Western epistemological construct.<sup>5</sup> Besides being interested in the way "narratives, ideas, and practices of the global age" manifest themselves in the complex relationship between national identity, biography, and religious redemption, Erlmann focuses on the role music played in the imagination of the choristers and the audience in England and America. Furthermore, he investigates the way in which ambiguities about race, nationhood, and identity are rooted in the performance practice of the African Native Choir.

Although I use Erlmann's analysis as a framework for this chapter, my emphasis will be a different one. When I decided to present the case study of the African Native Choir at the beginning of my thesis, I was particularly interested in setting the scene for an exploration of a number of important issues related to the development of the performance practice of contemporary *amakwaya* tradition. What seems of particular interest is the way the choristers of the Choir are already, by 1892, communicating their identity as an emerging middle class. Moreover, the fact that the tour happened at time when the black middle class was beginning to question its initial strategy of imitation and assimilation of Western values, makes this incident particularly relevant for my discussion of *amakwaya*. Charlotte Manye's comment, as we will see later, is a first manifestation of a decisive shift to a more critical approach. Whereas the first generation of mission-educated black Africans, in the first half of the nineteenth century, showed patterns of dependence that arose from African needs as well as missionary attitudes, the following generations grew increasingly independent of the missionaries and the mission stations. It is a central claim of this thesis that the process of negotiating tradition and the modern has been a main preoccupation for *amakwaya* groups throughout their history, shaping individual identity, as well as every aspect of this choral tradition from performance practice to repertoire and aesthetics. This will become clearer in the third part of this thesis, where I shall discuss the development and nature of the sectionalised repertoire of this choral practice, which today characteristically consists of neo-traditional songs, Western art music, and African eclectic choral works mainly by mission-trained composers. The historical development of these eclectic works and the appearance of its latest product, the controversial African opera *Princess Magogo kaDinuzulu* by the prolific composer Mzilikazi Khumalo, reveal, that the conflicting impulses towards imitation of the white culture, on the one hand, and negotiation with it, on the other, continue to exist to the present day (see Chapter 12, page 297, especially Chapter 12.2.5.2, page 339). Choral singing, I want to argue, developed into

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Zulu 'Town' Music", in *Essays for a Humanist: Offering to Klaus Wachsmann*, (Evaston: Northwestern University Press, 1971): 216-60; also: V. Erlmann, 1991; D. Coplan, 1985 and D. Rycroft, 1991.

<sup>5</sup> V. Erlmann, 1999: 214.

an important means for black middle class Africans to construct and communicate class identity and consciousness. This becomes clear in the performance practice of the African Choir whose members used various aspects of their performance practice to create and communicate their new identity, which, while retaining traditional elements, was based on ‘civilisation’ and progress. This process is manifested in three ways: the repertoire, the dress and the ideas that were articulated by the choristers during talks and interviews. This chapter will throw light on these three elements in order to bring out the main point of how the process of negotiation was already at the centre of this venture. The understanding of how the choristers of the Choir used performance practice, aesthetics, and social constructs in the process of creating a new identity will help us to understand this important aspect of contemporary *amakwaya* practice.

### 1.1 Learning from the Black American Experience: Visiting Artists, Coons and Minstrels

The tour of the African Choir is one of the earliest and at the same time most spectacular and fascinating examples of an *amakwaya* group.<sup>6</sup> The Choir, a group of fifteen African singers, was recruited at Kimberley and Lovedale Mission Station<sup>7</sup> in the Eastern Cape. The choristers came from an elite class that struggled to achieve eminence in a South African society imbued as it was with European values of education and progress. There was no easy path to a new future, as these educated blacks found themselves excluded not only from white but also from black society (see Chapter 3.3, page 85, Chapter 4, page 93).

As Manye’s statement suggests, the tour was put together to raise funds for an industrial school in Kimberley in the Cape Colony, an idea that derived from the tours of black American groups touring South Africa in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> The formation of the choir and the trip itself were inspired by travelling minstrel groups, which left lasting impressions on South African audiences in the form of musical renditions and, even more importantly, in the form of reports of black educational achievements in the United States. The concerts and talks acted as an inspiration for the black middle class to pursue and consequently communicate their enlightenment. In this sense, the establishment of the African Native Choir can be seen as being part of an

<sup>6</sup> There were, of course, earlier cases where the English public encountered African culture. *The Natal Mercury*, for instance, reported in the early 1850s on the “Export of Live Zulus” taken to England by a certain Mr. Caldecott of Pietermaritzburg to be “exhibited for the amusement of the spectacle-loving public... [They] are of course fully accoutred and trained, to perform all the exercises and extraordinary evolutions of their tribe, as well as to charm the ear of England with the dulcet tones [of] their vocal harmony.” (*The Natal Mercury*, December 16, 1852: 3).

<sup>7</sup> Lovedale Mission Station had been founded by Scottish missionaries in 1824 in the Eastern Cape in an area around Alice and Kingwilliamstown. The mission station was one of the earliest institutions offering extensive possibilities in education for Africans and soon became the most important intellectual centre for higher education in the southern part of Africa. In Lovedale the foundations for the “modernizing identity and consciousness of a whole class of Africans were being laid” (V. Erlmann, 1999: 68). Z. K. Matthews points out that “elsewhere [Lovedale] one could go from the sixth standard to a limited kind of industrial or vocational training, or into a teacher-training school to qualify for a post in an elementary school. Only at Lovedale could an African begin to study literature, language, history, mathematics, and science, which Europeans studied on their way to the university.” (Z. K. Matthews, 1986: 33). See also R H W. Shepherd, *Lovedale South Africa: the Story of a Century, 1841-1941* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1940); and “Lovedale: Its History And Its Hopes: Three-quarters of a Century of Missionary Effort”, *The Christian Express*, (July 1, 1916): 100-8.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Xiniwe, one of the choir members attributes the failure of the tour to the fact that the tour originally had been conceived as a “political campaign against white settler paternalism”. According to him, the idea of using the Choir to raise funds for a technical college had been “simply a fine rolling phrase”. See V. Erlmann, “Spectatorial Lust: The African Choir in England, 1891-1893”, in *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*, Bernth Lindfors (ed.) (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999): 108; also *Imvo*, 17 March 1892 and *Imvo*, 9 February 1993, for details about the tour of the African Native Choir and comments by Paul Xiniwe.



emerging nationalism, which, as we will see later, is closely linked to the promotion of a national culture (see Chapter 4.2, page 107).

The transatlantic slave trade had initiated contacts between Africa and America that crucially influenced the development of black cultures on both sides of the Atlantic. After the abolition of the slave trade in the early nineteenth century, cultural exchange between African communities in America and Africa intensified. South Africa was somewhat on the margins of these developments, which mainly involved the West African coast, but in the second half of the nineteenth century contacts with the other side of the Atlantic “grew into an enduring and possibly the most significant influence on black thinking and cultural development in South Africa, particularly on literature and the performing arts”.<sup>9</sup>

African-American minstrel shows had a major influence on South Africa, and especially touring minstrel groups like the Fisk Jubilee Singers, who travelled around South Africa during their 1870s world tour. In the 1890s the Virginia Jubilee Singers left a lasting impression on black, coloured and white communities alike.<sup>10</sup> The term “Jubilee”,<sup>11</sup> borrowed from the Bible, became synonymous with freedom and black American identity. Many spirituals tell of the “Day of Jubilee”, and the names of many popular black groups performing minstrel songs or other repertoire were variations of this term. Spirituals became an important part of the repertoire of those groups and by 1889 were used to “open and close most black minstrel shows”.<sup>12</sup>

The encounter with minstrel songs was first an indirect one. Coon songs<sup>13</sup> reached the Cape brought along by visitors and travellers. Some songs like “Jim Crow” seem to have been quite famous even before the first troupe of American minstrels visited South Africa.<sup>14</sup> They were already well known by the time they arrived in the country, and their tour resulted in an extreme popularisation of the genre. Coon acts became an indispensable feature in most public entertainments and social functions. The rage for minstrels can be estimated by the fact that the Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Virginia Jubilee Singers were just the spearhead of a number of overseas groups visiting the country in the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>15</sup> The success of these troupes was remarkable and inspired many local musicians to imitate the visiting artists. One direct result of the encounter of local musicians with the travelling groups can be witnessed in Cape Town today on New Year’s Day, when Cape Coloured minstrel groups walk down the streets during the famous “Cape Coon Carnival”.

In July 1890, ten singers led by Orpheus Myron McAdoo arrived in South Africa from a previous tour to Britain. Their appearance in all major South African towns and some mission schools enchanted both black and white audiences and contributed to the establishment of new

<sup>9</sup> V. Erlmann, *African Stars: Studies in Black South African Performance*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991): 21.

<sup>10</sup> For the history of the minstrels see D. Coplan, 1985: especially 38-39; V. Erlmann, 1991: Chapter 2; and V. Erlmann, 1996: 46-51.

<sup>11</sup> *Leviticus* 25:10

<sup>12</sup> D. Coplan, *In Township Tonight! South Africa’s Black City Music and Theatre*. (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985): 38; see Chapter 7.2.4 for a discussion of the significance of spirituals in the repertoire of school choirs.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Coon’, derived from the word racoon, was used in nineteenth century America as a racist designation for African-Americans. ‘Coon’ songs appealed to American and South African Blacks alike, and despite their crude and profoundly racist caricature of Negroes they became the single most important musical style of the 1880s and 1890s. What fascinated the black audience in particular was “not in what they said, but in the rhythm and swing in which they said it”. (A. Locke, *The Negro and His Music*, New York 1969; quoted in D. Coplan, 1985: 71).

<sup>14</sup> M. Deniss-Constant, “Cape Town’s Coon Carnival: Aesthetic Transformation, Collective Representation, and Social Meanings”, manuscript published online (<http://ijas.leidenuniv.nl/host/ccrss/cp/cp3/cp3-171.html>): 6 and in *Papers Presented at the 15<sup>th</sup> Symposium on Ethnomusicology*. Rhodes University. (Grahamstown: International Library of African Music).

<sup>15</sup> Other groups included the Christy Minstrels who visited Cape Town as early as 1862, returning the following year, the Devere’s Novelty Company, the Empire Minstrels and the Mississippi Minstrels in the 1880s and early 1890s.

urban black musical genres like *isicathamiya* and *amakwaya*.<sup>16</sup> The repertoire of McAdoo's American Jubilee Singers consisted not only of spirituals, African-American folk songs and instrumental music, but also of other vaudeville items like dancing, juggling and other artistic variety acts. At some stage even hymns and 'classical' European music favourites were added to the programme.

The identification of black South Africans with the visiting American artists was only partly due to the fact that their repertoire provided points of reference and common ground. While the jubilee hymns and spirituals expressed religious sentiment, the classical elements in the repertoire spoke for the pursuit of modernisation that South Africa's petty bourgeoisie perceived as an escape route from racial segregation. Education and 'civilisation' had long been ideologically central for mission Africans. They saw the solution to racial oppression and segregation in acquiring education, which in turn would grant them increased social mobility and eventually the same status that whites had in South Africa. In a lecture given in 1885 during a "Native Concert" in Kimberley, Meshack Pelem pointed out the remarkable advances in education made by black Americans only a few years out of slavery.<sup>17</sup> We know that McAdoo himself gave similar talks on black educational achievements in the United States during his tours, which left a deep impression on the aspiring members of the black South African elite. The lasting effect of these talks becomes evident in an enthusiastic review written by one of the later members of the African Choir, Josiah Semouse, who "received both education and civilisation" at Lovedale, and later went to Kimberley to fill a vacancy that was advertised for an "honest, educated man". There he stayed until the end of March 1891, when he "received an offer from the manager of the African Native Choir to join the choir for England".<sup>18</sup> Semouse perceived the concert he reviewed as an outstanding experience and felt that the American visitors sang "better than anybody else, white or black". What seems to have been even more striking than the fact that they "sang like angels singing Hosannah in heaven", was McAdoo's report on the African-American achievements:

Hear! Today they have their own schools, primary, secondary, and high schools, and universities. They are run by them without the help of the whites. They have magistrates, judges, lawyers, bishops, ministers, and evangelists, and school masters. Some have learned a craft such as building, etc. When will the day



Figure 1.2: Orpheus Myron McAdoo, 1897  
(*The Australian Stage Annual*, January 1900)

<sup>16</sup> Whereas *isicathamiya* choirs, even up to this day, mainly recruit their members from the group of wage labourers who are in most cases migrating between their rural homes and the urban centres, the choristers of the *amakwaya* groups originate from the more stable social strata of mission station educated black Christians. For more information see Chapter 2.2.

<sup>17</sup> "The Situation" Being a Paper Read by Mr. Mesham Pelem at a Native Concert Held at Kimberley on the 14<sup>th</sup> October, 1885'. Printed by Radford and Roper Steam Printers, Kimberley; quoted in D. Coplan, 1985: 85.

<sup>18</sup> The members of the African Native Choir in London: "Notes Written by Themselves", in *The Illustrated London News* (July 1891)

come when the African people will be like the Americans? When will they stop being slaves and become nations with their own government?<sup>19</sup>

As we have seen in the epigraph of this chapter, Charlotte Manye almost a year later reiterated Semouse's sentiments. Both statements express notions of identity, independence, and progress. Schools and educational institutes are seen as the main agents of preparing the way for equal status with the whites, breaking down segregation. Even if the ideas expressed in the comments of Semouse and Manye cannot be seen to constitute a distinctive African nationalism, they hint at the rising tide of anti-colonial sentiment in South Africa.



Figure 1.3: *The Zulu Choir in Edendale, ca. 1892 (Veit Erlmann Collection)*

The concerts of the minstrel groups brought black American influence to bear on local black communities. As a result new traditions of minstrel and variety entertainment were established in the growing towns of the Cape, Transkei, Basutoland, Orange Free State and Natal. By the turn of the century, minstrels had eventually reached even remote rural areas. At the same time, minstrel shows and musical items began to enter the mission schools, and in these schools students began to form their own groups, “smartly dressed vocal quartets and string bands which became a fixture of student variety concerts”.<sup>20</sup>

Music soon became the central feature of African elite<sup>21</sup> social life and a vehicle for expressing social aspiration. As Coplan has shown, concerts and musical entertainment were “a potent force in the shaping of African middle class identity... [featuring] a blend of African, Afro-American, and European influences”.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, choral groups like the African Native Choir, the Zulu Choir from Edendale (see Figure 1.3), and later Reuben Caluza's choir tours were used to communicate

<sup>19</sup> J. Semouse (*Leselinyana*, October 1, 1890) quoted in V. Erlmann, 1991: 44

<sup>20</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 39; see also V. Erlmann, 1996: 47.

<sup>21</sup> I use the term ‘elite’ to describe the new and rising group of black, originally mission-educated intellectuals (of whom John Knox Bokwe is an example) because they saw themselves as privileged and of special importance. They were not, of course, an aristocracy. See Chapter 2.2.1.

<sup>22</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 40.

the ideas of the rising nationalism and of a national African culture. The repertoire of these concerts was strongly influenced by the experiences of mission-educated blacks in form of church hymns, westernised African choral songs, and English secular pieces. Apart from these, the performances by educated Africans showed the influence of minstrel groups and featured song material gleaned from this genre. The mixed choral programme that the most prestigious and enduring musical organisation of the late nineteenth century, the Philharmonic Society, performed at their debut in Johannesburg in March 1897, reveals their “desire for a cultural identity that was at once ‘civilised’ [i.e. British], internationally black, and African”.<sup>23</sup> The programme included Ntsikana Gaba’s “uTixo Mkulu” (a song that has played a prominent role in the history of *amakwaya* and had been sung in England by the African Choir),<sup>24</sup> a “Kaffir Wedding Song” obviously arranged by John Knox Bokwe at Lovedale, various part songs, and, as a closing item, “God Save the Queen”.<sup>25</sup> From the repertoire of the Philharmonic Society and other choirs at the end of the nineteenth century, it becomes obvious that a certain performance practice was established which remains characteristic of the *amakwaya* groups today. Modern concerts and competitions are based on a three-part repertoire, including Western classical compositions, mainly taken from oratorios, and recently from operas, African composed pieces that show a strong Western influence, and neo-traditional songs, often referred to as “Wedding Songs”.

The touring minstrel groups must be seen as a major influence contributing to the formation of *amakwaya*, not only in terms of repertoire (spirituals, folk songs, ‘classical’ compositions, operatic arias and sacred hymns), but also in terms of aesthetics and performance practice. This will become clear in our later discussion. Let us now return to the tour of the African Choir.

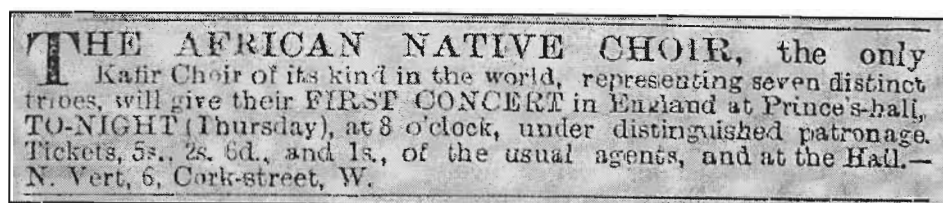


Figure 1.4: *London Times* (July 2, 1891)

## 1.2 Communicating Identity and Difference

The concerts presented by McAdoo and his troupe at Kimberley left a lasting mark not only on Semouse and other future members of the Choir, but also on Albert Walklett who was in the enthusiastic audience. Walklett, a church minister with “some musical talent”, was determined to set up a group modelled on McAdoo’s Jubilee Singers.<sup>26</sup> In addition to the choristers he auditioned in Kimberley, two white professional performers, Walter Letty and John Balmer, who had come to South Africa from England, reinforced the original cast.

After several weeks of training and preparations, the African Choir left Kimberley with a reduced number of choristers, as some members had withdrawn from the enterprise. The choir

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*: 41.

<sup>24</sup> Ntsikana who composed a series of hymns in the early 1820s is commonly regarded as an important precursor of eclectic *amakwaya* composers in South Africa. For a detailed discussion of the historical development of eclectic compositions see Chapter 12.

<sup>25</sup> *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, March 13, 1997 quoted in D. Coplan 1985: 41.

<sup>26</sup> V. Erlmann, 1991: 47; Orpheus McAdoo’s troupe of Jubilee Singers as well as the African Choir, triggered the formation of another choir. Inspired by a concert McAdoo held in Pietermaritzburg in 1891, Paul Msane and a group of fourteen Edendale residents formed a group called the Zulu Choir.

embarked on a hasty tour to the Cape Colony, presenting some concerts and paying a visit to Lovedale College where the group was joined by some past students.<sup>27</sup> W. Moir, Acting Principal at Lovedale, was quite doubtful about the venture. He held the opinion that “the South African Bantu lacked characteristic music; they had hardly begun to produce something of their own, though a beginning had been made in Ntsikana’s hymn and in John Knox Bokwe’s music”. Moreover he was afraid that the performances would not be received well because “of their lack of simultaneousness and other defects”.<sup>28</sup> After returning to Kimberley for some final arrangements and after engaging the white pianist, Lilian Clark, the group of fifteen eventually left South Africa for England.

Although the performances of the choir initially evoked great interest and the choristers were even accorded a reception by Queen Victoria, some month later *The Christian Express* announced, “they have had grave trouble, when on the eve of success”.<sup>29</sup> The reviews of the concerts given in London convey the impression that at the outset the critics were quite struck by the vocal talent of the choristers. Others, however, felt that the choir achieved little more than imitation of European culture. One critic of *The London Times*, describing his impressions of a concert given by the Choir, remarked that although the entertainment was

decidedly effective and in some respects touching, the value and interest of the pieces performed are considerably reduced by the inevitable European harmonies with which most are provided... only here and there, as in the curious “Ulo Tixo Mkulu”; the first music sung by Christian Kaffirs, a composition in a scale resembling the Lydian mode, was the music untainted by harmonies suggestive rather of an English Tonic Sol-fa<sup>30</sup> class than of savage strains... It was no doubt desirable to qualify the strict accuracy of the native costumes, but surely the harmonies need not have been Europeanized also.<sup>31</sup>

This statement evokes typical Victorian stereotypes and points to the expectations the critic and the greater part of the audience must have had when attending a concert of “Native Choristers from South Africa”.<sup>32</sup> The English public seems not to have grasped the message the choristers were trying to communicate, namely, that they embraced the values of progress and ‘civilisation’. Disappointed, a critic of *The Musical Standard* remarked that it seemed “pretty obvious that the South African singers have in the process of civilization adopted more or less the European scale, to say nothing of the European harmonies”. A more liberal critic, however, remarked:

The musical capabilities of the Kaffir Choir which during the last month has claimed attention in London must have been a surprise to many. Hitherto the African has been deemed so undeveloped as to be thought scarcely worthy of association with music, but, as in many other instances this supposition has apparently arisen from ignorance rather than knowledge.<sup>33</sup>

The notion that music comes only with the leisure time available to sophisticated technologically advanced societies is very surprising and reveals a great deal about the ignorance of the British public. The notion that Africans were “scarcely worthy of association with music” had a long tradition

<sup>27</sup> *The Christian Express* (February 1, 1891) and (March 2, 1891).

<sup>28</sup> R. H. W. Shepherd, 1940: 241.

<sup>29</sup> *The Christian Express* (February 1, 1892).

<sup>30</sup> System of musical notation without staves and notes, invented by John Curwen (1816–1880) in the middle of the nineteenth century on a basis of the principles of solmization and solfège. It was introduced to South Africa by choral singers and remains as a widely used system among them. Almost all the compositions of South African composers are written in this form of notation. For a detailed discussion of the tonic sol-fa system see Chapter 6.2.3 below.

<sup>31</sup> *The London Times* (July 03, 1891).

<sup>32</sup> George Webb Hardy, for instance, suggests that “[t]he average Englishman’s idea of the coloured races was that they were a lot of savages”. (G.W. Hardy, *The Black Peril*, London: Holden & Hardingham, 1914: 141–42). See also *The Review of Reviews* (September 1891): 255.

<sup>33</sup> M. McCord, *The Calling of Katie Makanya*. (Cape Town: David Philip, 1995): 37.



in Europe, as can be seen, for instance, from early colonial encounters. After rounding the Cape of Good Hope in 1497, Vasco da Gama reported on his encounter with the Khoi of Mossel Bay, that they “at once began to play on four or five flutes... harmonising together very well for negroes in whom music is not to be expected”.<sup>34</sup>

Be this as it may, eventually the venture of the African Native Choir ended in a fiasco, described by Shepherd in this historical account on Lovedale College as one of those “untoward happenings”.<sup>35</sup> After the two-year tour, losses of more than £1,000 had been incurred. Moreover, rivalry between the Kimberley and Lovedale members of the choir, poor management and Victorian “spectatorial lust” had affected the musical and social presentation of the choir.<sup>36</sup>

That the tour was undertaken with the “object of deepening and extending the wide-spread interest in Africa and the African, and of endeavouring to show the capability of the South African Native, in a novel direction” became obvious not only at a meeting and concert of the Choir in Kimberley before they embarked on the tour, but also in an account of a concert presented during the preliminary tour to the Cape. A colonist paper, *The Midland News and Karoo Farmer*, in Cradock reported on this event:

The appearance of these people on the platform, their good behaviour, and the excellent and correct manner in which they rendered choice selections from Handel, Rossini, Donizetti and other lights of the great musical world, is calculated to set anyone with half a thought for the future seriously thinking. Here are 15 men and women whose immediate ancestors were ‘red blanket Kaffirs’, and yet after a couple of months training they are able to carry out a programme in a style that would be considered eminently satisfactory for a choir of white vocalists chosen from out of a large European town.<sup>37</sup>

After this praise the critic, however, went on to caution against the dangers and consequences of such “achievements”:

Such shows, and their effect upon the other coloured people of this Colony – together with the erroneous ideas that will be fostered by the appearance of the Choir in England – will only tend to intensify and make more difficult the race question in Africa. We take leave to doubt if the Kaffir is to be raised by means of his musical faculties, promising as they undoubtedly are. He can no more escape the primal curse than the man whose skin is of lighter hue, and we thus feel constrained to look upon...(such)...efforts – praiseworthy as they are in some points – as being on the whole detrimental to the interests of the natives themselves.<sup>38</sup>

The politics behind the whole enterprise may be seen in the aim of placing “before the English people a correct idea of what the Natives of Africa can do”.<sup>39</sup> The object of the visit was also printed on posters advertising the concerts. A poster (see Figure 1.5, page 15) announcing two

<sup>34</sup> E. Axelson, *Vasco da Gama: The Diary of his Travels through African Waters, 1497-1499* (Somerset West: Stephan Phillips, 1998): 19.

<sup>35</sup> R. H. W. Shepherd, *Lovedale South Africa 1824-1955* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1971): 57.

<sup>36</sup> Another choir left South Africa for England on a similar venture shortly after the African Native Choir. Under the leadership of Paul Msane, the Zulu Choir, which consisted of fifteen residents of the Edendale Mission Station, travelled to London in 1892. The tour suffered a similar fate as its predecessor, drawing “but a mild audience response”. This tour eventually failed because of a disagreement over the request by theatre managers that the choir should pose as “Zulu warriors”. Moreover, the advertisement of the tour, “From the Wilds to Westminster” caused discontent among the mission-educated Africans as they felt that this would misrepresent their Christian aspirations. (V. Erlmann: 1991: 116-7 and V. Erlmann, 1999: Chapter 6).

<sup>37</sup> *Midlands News and Karoo Farmer*, April 5, 1892, copy at the Killie Campbell Library Durban: Bantu Miscellaneous File.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *The Christian Express* (May 1, 1891).

public concerts at South Shields, expresses the choir's intention "to interest the public in the internal, material and social progress of South Africa and the Native Population" (see Figure 1.8).

Statements like this must be considered from two different perspectives. To begin with, we have to remember Charlotte Manye's interview in London in which she commented on her experiences of English and South African life:

[L]et us be in Africa even as we are in England. Here we are treated as men and women. Yonder we are but as cattle. But in Africa, as in England, we are human. Can you not make your people at the Cape as kind and just as your people here?

Her report reveals the discrepancy in the political and social views that developed between England and its colony, South Africa, in the course of the nineteenth century. The choristers obviously perceived the English as distinctly different from South Africans. Whereas in England they were apparently regarded "as men and women", back home they were treated "but as cattle". Manye's statement might be a somewhat oversimplified analysis of the situation but touches on the tensions that were apparent between the British government and the Colonial rulers. Indeed, the colonists often deviated from metropolitan ideas when it came to the question: "What shall we do with the Natives?"<sup>40</sup> Whereas politics in England tended to be based on class rather than on ethnic grounds, the settlers drew a distinct line between themselves and the black 'other'.

As the next chapter will show in more detail, white settlers and traders, who feared competition and marginalisation if equal rights were granted to the black population, frustrated any attempt to move in this liberal direction. Their major concern was to find ways of taking advantage of Africans as a cheap labour force. Missionary enterprises were welcome only in so far as they worked side by side with economic and political forces, "to eat away the tissues which held together the cells of family, clan, and tribal life".<sup>41</sup> This was seen as necessary in order to secure the supply of labour. Educative measures were to be limited to the purpose of preparing the African with skills needed for the place assigned to him within the colonial society. We will see later how the colonial government used the missionary enterprise for their own purposes. Tensions intensified towards the end of the nineteenth century, owing to the emergence of a black elite, educated by the missionaries, which could not be absorbed into the pool of black labour desired by the colonial powers. The fundraising drive for a technical schools, which was the second motivation for the tour of the African Native Choir, touched on this issue. The Choir argued that training and schooling were essential for the black population not least because "the result of such training would be that the white people would have servants who would do their work more intelligently, more cleanly, and with more economy than is at present done".<sup>42</sup> Whether this was an intelligent move on the side of the choir management to enlist high government patronage and receive extensive support during their trip is not entirely clear.

In any case, issues like these were part of the complex web of paternalistic attitudes and imperialistic and capitalistic ideologies that determined the relations between Britain and the colonies. It is not remarkable that on either side one might find openly anti-missionary and anti-liberal factions, which points to the ambiguity that lay at the heart of the late-Victorian imperial enterprise. The organisers of the African Native Choir were well aware of differences between their own aspirations and their white audiences' understanding of them. Thus they made these differences an issue when they attempted to arouse in "the civilised nations of the world a more direct interest, if possible, in South African affairs and to help to solve the great problem: 'What shall we do with the

<sup>40</sup> *The Christian Express* (May 1, 1891).

<sup>41</sup> M. Perham, *The Colonial Reckoning* (London: Collins, 1961): 37.

<sup>42</sup> *The Christian Express* (May 1, 1891).

Natives?”<sup>43</sup> If their intention really was to interfere with the complex political and social situation, their venture was bound to fail.

Charlotte Manye’s statement must also be seen from another perspective. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a change in British colonial policy is recognisable. In the first half of the century colonialism and the ‘civilising mission’ were justified on the grounds that the inferiority of Africans was due to environmental rather than to racial factors. The missionaries in particular were eager to vindicate their claims that Africans were capable of being civilised. With proper ‘white’ guidance, Africans would be able to match the development of Europeans and eventually catch up with the civilised world. The second half of the century, however, was marked, as Erlmann argues, by a dramatic turn towards a more “blatantly racist variant of the imperial rhetoric, one that declared Africans’ ‘benighted’ condition as permanent, intrinsic”.<sup>44</sup> The change is illustrated by a statement made in 1884 by James Stewart, Lovedale’s Principal, when confronted by recalcitrant students:

Starting as but yesterday in the race of nations, do you soberly believe that in the two generations of the very imperfect civilisation you have enjoyed and partially accepted, you can have overtaken those other nations who began that race two thousand years ago, and have been running hard at it for a thousand years at least?<sup>45</sup>

The tour of the African Choir came at a time when notions of ‘scientific racism’ and Social Darwinism had already entered the minds of British society, and it inevitably touched upon the “epistemological nerve centres of the Victorian global imagination itself” and provoked a clash of ideas.<sup>46</sup> Whereas previous exhibitions of “live Zulus... for the amusement of the spectacle-loving public” in England were mainly aiming at showcasing the uncivilised native,<sup>47</sup> the choristers’ foremost interest was to demonstrate their civilised status. As a result, the English public was quite disappointed at the lack of ‘exotic’ elements in the performance of the Choir. This attitude is revealed in remarks made in the press such as the following:

[T]he Natives are more picturesque but less proficient as singers than the excellent choir which came from the Fisk University<sup>48</sup> a good many years ago; and although the entertainment is decidedly effective, and in some respects touching, the value and interest of the pieces performed are considerably reduced by the inevitable European harmonies with which almost all are provided.<sup>49</sup>

As indicated earlier, the fundamental themes of the venture were those of identity and modernity, which were communicated by the choristers in the form of text, lectures, songs and dress.

So far this chapter has discussed central texts such as the statements made by Semouse and Manye. Before we move away from the adventures of the African Native Choir I will take a closer look at the other two main means used by the choir to communicate their specific identity, namely, the repertoire and dress.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> V. Erlmann, 1999a: 112.

<sup>45</sup> L. De Kock, “Drinking at the English Fountains: Missionary Discourse and the Case of Lovedale” *Missionalia* 20:2, August: 128; see also V. Erlmann, 1999: 64.

<sup>46</sup> V. Erlmann, 1999a: 112.

<sup>47</sup> *The Natal Mercury* (December 16, 1852): 3.

<sup>48</sup> The international success of The Fisk Jubilee Singers, established in the mid 1870s and named after Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, started in the mid 1870s. Fisk University was founded in 1866 in an effort to provide higher education for liberated slaves. For more information see V. Erlmann, 1991: 24ff.

<sup>49</sup> *The London Times* quoted in *The Christian Express* (September 1, 1891).



### 1.2.1 Manifestations in Song

A thorough examination of the two-part programme performed by the African Native Choir at the concerts in England will help us to understand the ambiguous image of “Africa civilised and uncivilised”<sup>50</sup> communicated by the choristers by means of song. A whole range of themes runs through the programme of the choir not only on a structural level and on a thematic level, but also in the contents of individual songs. Concert programmes seldom consist of an arbitrary arrangement of items, and it seems safe to say that the programme of the African Choir was intended “to interest the public in the internal, material and social progress of South Africa and the Native Population”.

The songs selected all deal with the central topics of tradition and progress in African and Western life. Erlmann reproduces a programme of the Choir collected by Bernth Lindfors (see Figure 1.5). Although the programme is divided into two parts there seems to be no separation between the Western and traditional African elements in it: in both parts “English and Kaffir songs” alternate. Yet a closer analysis reveals the contradictions and ambiguities, the layered nature of identity underlying the self-representation of the choristers.

The attempt at an interpretation of the programme is complicated by the fact that, in the case of most pieces, the composer is not named and for many of the items the “origin is doubtful”, as E. Gowing-Scopes remarks in a review of one of the concerts given by the choir, making it difficult to trace the compositions and obtain reliable ideas about the actual music and its message. One might, however, assume that a title reveals at least the theme of a song and can thus be a marker of content. Fortunately the programme gives, in addition to the title, a short description of each song and its context.

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<sup>50</sup> *The Irish Times* (March, 15 1892) used this phrase to report the tour of the African Native Choir.

# GRAND CONCERT

BY THE

## AFRICAN NATIVE CHOIR.

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### PROGRAMME

**Part First.**

1. . . . . "INTLABA-MKOSI" . . . . . *Kaffir*
2. . . . . "Q Qa Qa Qa," . . . . . *Kaffir*

A short piece in the Kaffir tongue adapted to the music of Schumann's "Merry Peasant" giving a striking illustration of the clicks used in the native language. These clicks are considered to be the most charming part of the "taal" perhaps because of their being so difficult to acquire by Europeans.
3. . . . . **PART SONG** . . . . . *English*
4. . . . . "ULO TIXO MKULU" . . . . . *Kaffir*

This is the first piece of music known to have been sung by Christian Kaffirs. The words and music are the original composition of Ntakana, the first convert among the Amaxosa tribe.
5. . . . . "CHILDREN ASLEEP" . . . . . *English*
6. . . . . "MOTJIEVERAKATANG" . . . . . *Dutch-Hottentot*

(A HUMEROUS HOTTENTOT SONG.)

This song is supposed to be a passage at arms between a native woman, who is very fond of talking, and some of her people who are taunting her for her propensity to chatter so incessantly.
7. . . . . **SELECTION** . . . . . *English*
8. . . . . "THE LORD'S PRAYER." . . . . . *English*

This number is given by request. When the prayer was sung by the choir before the Queen, Her Majesty was greatly affected.

**Part Second.**

9. . . . . **SELECTION** . . . . . *Kaffir*
10. . . . . "MOLO-KE-DA" . . . . . *Kaffir*

The natives of South Africa, when travelling in parties, have a singular habit of singing—keeping time to the melody with their feet. Standing upon a hill, you can hear their peculiar chant when the band is miles away.

*Motokeda* is a representation of the effect produced by the gradual approach and disappearance of one of these parties, who have just left their *Arvals* to go into the towns in search of employment.

Perfect stillness is kindly requested during the singing of this piece.
11. *Quintette*, . . . . . "ON THE MOUNTAIN." . . . . *English*
12. . . . . "TYPICAL WEDDING SONG." . . . . *Kaffir*

The song is purely Native, and the harmonies have not been in any way Europeanized; it is sung at the Wedding Feast by the friends of the Bridegroom. The Bride, whose sobs can be heard amid the general rejoicing, is finally led away by two of the guests to her husband's *mqwela* which awaits her. At some of the marriages the festivities are kept up days and nights without cessation.
13. . . . . "LUTUKELA" . . . . . *Kaffir*
14. . . . . "SEND THE LIGHT." . . . . *English*

The words and music of this piece were composed expressly for the European tour of the African Choir, by gentlemen in South Africa who were wishful the enterprise should be a success.
15. . . . . "ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS" . . . . *Kaffir and English*

Figure 1.5: Programme of The African Native Choir  
(Bernth Lindfors in: Erlmann, 1999: 88)

A further source of information may be found in a review written by E. Gowing-Scopes for *The Ludgate Monthly* entitled "The Music of Africa", describing another similar programme given by the African Native Choir. Scopes offers the following detailed list of the pieces performed, together with his comments:

**uTixo Mkulu** "is the first music known to have been sung by Christian Kaffirs, and the original composition of Ntsikana, the first convert amongst the Amaxosa tribe".

**Singamawele** "we are twins, is a song and dance ... The Natives are exceedingly fond of singing and dancing, and this item is typical of how they spontaneously, and at any time, commence their amusements".

**[Q Qa Qa Qa]** "The choir sings a short story in the Kaffir language, giving a striking illustration of the clicks used in the native tongue. It is adapted to the music of Schumann's 'Merry Peasant'."

**A typical Kaffir wedding song** "is purely native, and the harmonies have not been, in any way, Europeanised; it is sung at the wedding feast by the friends of the bridegroom. The bride, whose sobs can be heard amid the general rejoicing, is finally led away by two of the guests to her husband's 'mgwelo' which awaits her".

**Mgwelo engena tentyi** "is a wayside Kaffir song and dance. When travelling by bullock wagon in Africa, the oxen are unyoked at intervals and allowed to graze and rest, or are outspanned – as the local term has it. The scene is supposed to take place when the Kaffirs are seated round their fires, awaiting the time for inspanning, whilst the oxen are grazing and the skoff is boiling in the 'pot'."

**Lutukela** "a duet composed by a Kaffir. The style of this piece is very popular amongst the Natives, they are fond of accompanying solos with their voices, and, as a rule, take the parts very clearly, without training whatever".

**Kaffir Travesty** "Kaffirs are very fond of mimicry, and are always ready to pick up anything to imitate. An item entitled the 'Kaffir Travesty,' is a purely Kaffir song, and is their idea of the English street cry of 'Hot Cross Buns!' Its origin is doubtful".

**Molokoda** "means good-bye. The natives of South Africa, when travelling in parties, have a singular habit of singing-keeping time to the melody with their feet. Standing upon a hill, you can hear their peculiar chant when the band is miles away. 'Molokoda' is a representation of the effect produced by the gradual approach and disappearance of one of these parties, who have just left their kraals to go into the towns in search of employment. Perfect stillness, on the part of the audience, is necessary during the singing of this piece".

**On the Mountain** "is a quintette. It was requested that the choir should give a little more English in the programme; this quintette has, therefore, been introduced in response to this request, and to please those who are so fond of their mother tongue".

**Lovedale** "is a Kaffir solo with vocal accompaniment. It is another composition of a Kaffir, and describes the beauties of the country surrounding Lovedale College, Cape Colony, where seven of the choir were educated. It is also another illustration of the native fondness for vocally accompanied solos".

**Does anybody here know the Big Baboon?** "is a solo and chorus. It was specially composed for the African Native Choir by James Hyde, King Williamstown – one of the, if not the first musician in South Africa – after he had attended one of their concerts given in his town".

**Africa** "is a Kaffir quartette. The London Times, in criticising the African Native Choir Concert, said: 'A quartette, or rather a solo accompanied by three voices, bore so close a resemblance to Rossini's 'Cujus animam' that it is difficult to accept it as a specimen of native music at all.' But this quartette is the composition of a Kaffir who had never heard of Rossini or his 'Stabat Mater,' and did not dream that such a selection as 'Cujus animam' was in existence. It is descriptive of how the natives hum some portions of their songs".

**Good News** "is another English piece, but one given in true Kaffir style".

**Send the Light** "is a solo and chorus, the words and music having been composed expressly for the European tour of the African Native Choir, by gentlemen in South Africa who were wishful the enterprise should be a success".<sup>51</sup>

<sup>51</sup> E. Gowing-Scopes, "African Music", *Ludgate Monthly* 2 (1891-92): 107-12; quoted in V. Erlmann, 1999a: 87-9.

The programme compiled by Lindfors and the one commented on by Gowing-Scopes are not, as one might expect, arranged according to the principle of an ‘uncivilised’, traditional first half and a ‘civilised’, westernised second half.<sup>52</sup> Though similar in structure, the two programmes differ in some points. The songs not included in Gowing-Scopes’s review are “Intlaba Mkosi”, “Children Asleep”, “Motjieverakatang” (“a humorous Hottentot song”), “The Lord’s Prayer”, and “Onward Christian Soldiers”, the last two of which were obviously used as alternative closing items of the performance. When attempting an interpretation, one must be aware of typical Victorian stereotypes in Gowing-Scopes’s review, and some of his comments must be read with some care. However, what interests me here is not so much his own perception of the concert, but rather the structure and the concealed message of the items in the programme presented by the African Native Choir.

The concert reviewed by Gowing-Scopes started with Ntsikana’s “Ulo Tixo Mkulu”. Ntsikana Gaba, born circa 1780 to a family of counsellors to the famous Chief Ngqika, is generally considered to be the first Xhosa Christian. He converted to Christianity circa 1815 after having experienced a vision.<sup>53</sup> Before his conversion, Ntsikana was a celebrated singer and orator, familiar with traditional music and its forms. Praise poetry had an especially important influence on his work at the centre of which stand four hymns that were woven into the order of service he devised. The fourth hymn, also called “Ulo Tixo Mkulu”, the “Great Hymn”, became one of the core musical items of Protestant church music and, as Dave Dargie writes, “has featured in all the major Protestant Xhosa hymnals, down to the present day”.<sup>54</sup> According to Janet Hodgson, Ntsikana based his literary style on the traditional praise-poems or *ixibongo* rather than adopting a foreign style for his compositions, and thus used old forms for the new content.<sup>55</sup> Ntsikana’s work, as we will see in Chapter 12.2.1 (page 307), had an important influence on *amakwaya* composers, particularly towards the middle of the twentieth century.

### *Ulo Tixo Mkulu*

Ulo Tixo omkulu, ngosezulwini;  
Ungu Wena-wena Kaka lenyaniso.  
Ungu Wena-wena Nqaba yenyano.  
Ungu Wena-wena Hlali lenyaniso.  
Ungu Wena-wen 'uhlel' enyangwaneni.  
Ulo dal' ubom, wadala pezulu.

### *The Great Hymn*

*He, is the Great God, Who is in heaven*  
*Thou art Thou, Shield of truth.*  
*Thou art Thou, Stronghold of truth.*  
*Thou art Thou, Thicket of truth.*  
*Thou art Thou Who dwellest in the highest.*  
*He, Who created life (below), created (life) above.*

<sup>52</sup> One might assume that during the tour, which lasted for almost two years, the programme was changed at some stage. This was obviously the case with some items, which were either newly composed during the tour, for example, “Kaffir Travesty”, or included in the programme owing to public demand, for example, “The Lord’s Prayer, given by request” and “On the Mountain” – “it was requested that the choir should give a little more English in the programme.” Margaret McCord, in her account of Katie Makanya’s life (sister of Charlotte Manye), describes the sequence of songs performed during the Choir’s appearance before Queen Victoria. The Choir, dressed in “the old way” for the first half of the concert sang “as their people used to sing when they hunted or danced or gathered together for some celebration.” In the second half, “dressed in Christian clothes”, they sang the “English songs Mr Blamer had taught them.” (M. McCord, 1995: 34). The veracity of this performance order may be questioned as McCord loosely based this report on the oral testimony of Katje Manye in 1954.

<sup>53</sup> See J. Hodgson, *Ntsikana’s “Great Hymn” A Xhosa Expression of Christianity in the Early Nineteenth Century Eastern Cape* (Cape Town: Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1980; J. Hodgson, “The Genius of Ntsikana” in *Paper Presented at the Conference on Literature and Society in Southern Africa*, held at the University of York, September 8-11, 1981 (University of York, Centre for Southern African Studies, 1981).

<sup>54</sup> D. Dargie, “The Music of Ntsikana” *South African Journal of Musicology* Vol. 2, 1982: 7.

<sup>55</sup> J. Hodgson, 1980: 22.

The term *ukubonga*, to praise loudly, refers to impromptu songs and orations. Traditionally *ixibongi* were used to praise the deeds of a chief or the valour of an army. The *imbongi* who acted as the poet within the community was a herald, announcing the arrival of the chief at important occasions by singing or reciting his praises and those of his ancestors.

Lo Mdal' owadala wadala izulu.  
 Lo Menzi wenkwenkwezi noZilimela;  
 Yabinza inkwenkwezi, isixelela.  
 Lo Menzi wemfaman' uzenza ngabom?

*That Creator Who created, created heaven.  
 This maker of the stars, and the Pleiades;  
 A star flashed forth, it was telling us.  
 The Maker of the blind, does He not make  
 them of purpose?*

Lateta ixilongo lisibizile.  
 Ulonqin' izingela imipefumlo.  
 Ulohlanganis' imihlamb' eyalanayo.  
 Ulomkokeli wasikokela tina.  
 Ulengub' inkul' esiyambata tina.  
 Ozandla Zako zinamanxeba Wena.  
 Onyawo Zako zinamanxeba Wena.  
 Ugazi Lako limrolo yinina?  
 Ugazi Lako lipalalele tina.  
 Lemali enkulu-na siyibizile?  
 Lomzi Wako-na-na siwubizile?

*The trumpet sounded, it has called us.  
 As for His chase He hunteth, for souls.  
 He, Who amalgamates flocks rejecting each other.  
 He, the Leader, Who has led us  
 He, Whose great mantle, we do put it on.  
 Those hands of Thine they are wounded.  
 Those feet of Thine, they are wounded.  
 Thy blood, why is it streaming?  
 Thy blood, it was shed for us.  
 This great price, have we called for it?  
 This home of Thine, have we called for it?<sup>56</sup>*

Like the traditional praise-poem, the hymn is built of a series of praise names for God (Thou art Thou, Shield of truth, Thou art Thou, Stronghold of truth...). The repetition of clauses and phrases is a typical feature of the praise poem, and, by using those repetitions, the *imbongi* (praise poet) creates an interesting rhythmic effect. However, the traditional influence is to be seen not only in his compositions, but also in the performance practice. Ntsikana always wore his leopard skin robe when singing his hymns for the congregation, thus continuing the *imbongi* tradition.<sup>57</sup> This could be seen as a way of negotiating elements from his cultural background in order to articulate a new faith and identity. That the African Native Choir should have opened its concerts with Ntsikana's hymn reveals an ambiguity which is significant in the light of the whole purpose of the tour to England.

**Send the Light.**  
 [To be sung as Solo, with accompaniment and Chorus.]  
 AFRICAN CHOIR. Harmonized by J. K. BOKWE.  
 KEY G.

	ME	
1. I have left my home and loved ones,		f : - .d   d : - .r
2. Once I had never heard of heaven.		far across the
3. Help then, for the love of Jesus,		Once my heart was bound in
		For the love He bears for
<i>Humming</i>	ME : -   - : -	f : - .d   d : - .r
<i>VOCAL ACCOMP.</i>	DOH : -   - : -	d : -   - : -
<i>Softly.</i>	SOH <sub>1</sub> : -   - : -	l <sub>1</sub> : -   - : -
	DOH : -   - : -	d : -   - : -
	DOH <sub>1</sub> : -   - : -	d <sub>1</sub> : -   - : -

	ME	
sea.		Come to crave your help and blessing, Help to
sin.		I had never heard of Jesus: Knew no
you:		Help! to give to every creature, God's great
n : -   - : -	ME : -   - : -	
d : -   - : -	DOH : -   - : -	
s <sub>1</sub> : -   - : -	LAH : -   - : -	
d : -   - : -	LAH <sub>1</sub> : -   - : -	
d <sub>1</sub> : -   - : -		

Figure 1.6: "Send the Light" (*Amaculo ase Lovedale*)

Four of the presented items, "Lovedale", "Onward Christian Soldiers", "Molo-Ke-Da [or Mololeda]" (Good-bye), "On the Mountain", and "Send the light", disclose the striving for an identity which is compounded of the Western ideals of progress and education. The central topics of those songs consist in tropes of home (finding a new home), of fighting as 'Christian soldiers', of leaving darkness (the old home) behind, of being elevated and seeking light.<sup>58</sup> In the fifth edition of *Amaculo ase Lovedale* (Lovedale Music), Bokwe published a song with the title "Send the Light"

<sup>56</sup> J. K. Bokwe, *Ntsikana: the Story of an African Hymn*. (Lovedale: Lovedale Mission Press, 1904): 31.

<sup>57</sup> J. Hodgson, 1980: 23; for further discussion about Ntsikana and his compositions see Chapter 12.2.1 below.

<sup>58</sup> The missionaries were convinced that their primary calling was to lead the Africans from the 'darkness' of their 'heathen' lives into the 'light' of Christianity. This belief is reflected in their often-used phrase: "to enlighten those who are benighted" (see A. Vilakazi, 1962: 128).

(see Figure 1.6).<sup>59</sup> *Amaculo ase Lovedale*, a collection of “about a dozen original songs, set in Tonic Sol-fa notation” was first published in November 1885, containing reprints of songs which from June, 1875 had appeared as supplements in *Isigidimi Sama-Xosa* and *The Christian Express*.<sup>60</sup> Bokwe acknowledges the African Native Choir as joint author of the song. That this version of the song goes back to the composition performed by the African Native Choir during their trip to England in 1991 is confirmed by the concert review written by Gowing-Scopes, in which the similarity in their structure becomes apparent.<sup>61</sup>

### *Send the Light*

1. I have left my home and loved ones,  
Left them far across the sea.  
Come to crave your help and blessing,  
Help to set my people free.  
I have heard the wondrous story,  
I have found the glorious light;  
Now I long to send the tidings  
to the land where all is night.

2. Once I had never heard of heaven.  
Once my heart was bound in sin.  
I had never heard of Jesus:  
Knew no master but my king.  
He was cruel. And oppress'd me.  
Blood and war were his delight,  
Till the man of God, and Bible,  
brought to us the blessed Light.

3. Help then, for the love of Jesus,  
For the love He bears for you:  
Help! To give to every creature,  
God's great gift so pure and free.  
And the darkness will be over:  
Christ has set my people free.  
Africa, for God, and Heaven!  
Light to all eternity.

Chorus:

Send the light! Send the light!  
Darkness takes its flight  
Send, oh! Send the light.

Apart from the references to ‘light’, linked mainly to Christian symbolism, the song contains another keyword, ‘home’. The idea of ‘leaving home’, the loved ones, and more significantly, leaving the ‘tribal’ past (“knew no master but my king...”) became of central importance for the emerging black middle class. Those who came to live on mission land perceived the mission station and the community that had gathered around the missionaries as their new home. Herbert Dhlomo, for instance, in his poem “Sweet Mango Tree”, written in 1942, remembered the privileged and sheltered life he led at Adams College:<sup>62</sup>

### *Sweet Mango Tree*

Neat, nestled ‘neath rich scenes of green,  
(Below sweet Manzimtoti stream  
Glides past as lovely as a dream!)  
The chapel stands, defying change!  
Calm, hallowed, staid! Where all is strange,  
Its breath is home! ...

The important mission station Lovedale, for example, founded in 1824 by Scottish missionaries in the area of the Eastern Cape, was more than ‘home’ (*ekbaya*): it was a symbol of achievement for

<sup>59</sup> J. K. Bokwe, *Amaculo ase Lovedale* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, fifth edition 1922): 30-3; see also another song published by Bokwe in his collection with the title “Lwamkelen’ Ukanyiso” (Accept the Light). J. K. Bokwe, 1922: 12-15.

<sup>60</sup> J. K. Bokwe, *Amaculo ase Lovedale* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, fifth edition 1922): iii.

<sup>61</sup> Bokwe actually indicates that the song ought “to be sung as Solo, with accompaniment and Chorus”. (J. K. Bokwe, 1922: 30)

<sup>62</sup> Quoted in T. Couzens, 1985: 74.

Africans in the field of education and 'civilisation'. Together with Fort Hare, the first university for black students, these mission schools were not only educational facilities: they became the "irreducible atom of Christian society",<sup>63</sup> the cradle of an emerging middle class with a new class-consciousness and identity. The second part of this thesis will examine the influence of the mission schools on *amakwaya*.

Mission schools were perceived as the shining light in the darkness not only by the missionaries, who might have initiated the idea, but also by the converts themselves, who successfully applied this concept to create an image of their new identity. "Bringing Light" to the heathen world, to the "Dark Continent" were key terms in nineteenth century Christian missionary doctrine and lay at the heart of the mission endeavour.<sup>64</sup> Mission-educated Africans readily absorbed this concept and perceived it both in a religious context, as a symbol of salvation and also, in a secular context, as source of civilisation, modernisation, and education.

The concept of light penetrating and dispelling darkness appears numerous times in both the Old and the New Testaments. In its account of the creation of the world, Genesis tells of God creating light to dispel darkness, meaning that the origin of light rests with God and that God himself is the very essence of light. The darkness "over the surface of the deep" is associated with the chaos which preceded God's orderly creation: "Now the earth was formless and void... Then God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light" (Gen. 1:2-3). G. F. Handel's *Messiah*, which is of central importance for *amakwaya* groups, picks up this symbol. The popularity (see Chapter 13.2.1) of the work in South Africa can be partly ascribed to this fact. African choirs could identify with the main themes and apply the message in their own context. Throughout the work there is an alternation of darkness and light, realised by musical means, for example, the use of tonality (from minor to major, from a 'dark key' to a 'bright key'). And this is complemented by the choice of relevant Biblical passages, for example, "For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and a thick mist the nations, but the Lord shall rise as the sun... and the heathen shall walk in thy light, and the kings in the brightness that is risen over Thee", and again, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light". (Isaiah 9: 2-3) Besides 'light' and 'darkness', references to relief from suffering and injustice, as in "My yoke is easy and my burden is light", have had a profound significance for *amakwaya* groups.

It is not surprising that Bokwe closes the preface of his song collection, *Amaculo ase Lovedale*, with the following words: "And thus it may help the cheer of the joyful news of Light as it is spreading in what was once reputed a 'Dark Continent', to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of mankind".<sup>65</sup>

The symbol of *light* was a central one for many missionary institutions in South Africa, appearing, for instance, in *The Torch Bearer*, the student magazine published jointly by the Inanda Seminary and the Ohlange Institute from 1933 onwards. Ohlange Institute was later described as "a citadel of light – a cross on which barbarism was crucified".<sup>66</sup>

<sup>63</sup> J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder: Westview, 1992): 280 quoted in V. Erlmann 1999: 63.

<sup>64</sup> The idea of Africa being the 'dark continent' was a common perception and a recurrent phrase since the nineteenth-century. This is, for example, illustrated in the titles of two books published by Henry Morton Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent* (1879) and *In Darkest Africa* (1890).

<sup>65</sup> J. K. Bokwe, 1922: iii.

<sup>66</sup> *Ilanga Lase Natal* (October 11, 1912); henceforth *Ilanga*, quoted in T. Couzens, 1985: 86.



Above the Ohlange heights,  
 There hover ever glorious lights;  
 They glow, they gleam, they quiver  
 Ever, ever, ever;  
 As a flowing river,  
 From the mighty heart of God.

This is again evident in a report on the Inanda Seminary in *The Native Teachers' Journal*,<sup>67</sup> in which the writer closes with an affirming statement that reveals the mechanisms of constructing identity through the symbolic meaning of light: "There are many who have lighted lamps in dark places throughout this land and who have truly kept the school motto, 'Shine where you are.'" Similarly Adams College chose as a motto for their monthly magazine, *Iso Lomuzi*, the phrase, "Arise and Shine", and in an address at the College's ninety-ninth "Founders and Builders Day", D. Mtinkulu, who was at that time Principal of the Ohlange Institute, remarked: "In our country, torn by racial strife as it is, Adams College can be a shining light".<sup>68</sup>

"Lighting lamps in dark places" implies the idea of 'upliftment' in the context of black middle class society. Two of the songs presented by the African Native Choir seem to be suggestive of this idea: "Molo-Ke-Da [or Molokeda]" (Good-bye) and "On the Mountain" both deal with leaving one place or situation behind in order to aspire to new achievements. The observers in the song "Molo-Ke-Da" are described in the programme notes as "standing upon a hill". "The natives of South Africa... who have just left their kraal" are heard "singing keeping time to the melody with their feet" as they go to town in search of employment. These observations, together with the fact that, as the programme notes continue, "you can hear their peculiar chant when the band is miles away", seem to indicate various aspects of the ambiguity contained in the Choir's use of these songs.

The dramatic situation in the song and the comments published in the programme seem to be a reflection of the missionaries' policy of keeping their converts at a distance from their ancestral roots. The early missionaries insisted on a radical re-orientation of the individual convert's life along Christian ethical lines. This, among other things, included the abandonment of 'heathen' practices and 'heathen' beliefs. Therefore, it is not surprising that early converts started to disassociate and alienate themselves from traditional communities.

The idea of 'leaving' suggests 'moving on', not only in a horizontal, but also a vertical way. For the emerging black middle class, progress and 'civilisation' were strongly linked to a racial context, with the whites occupying a higher position on the scale of the supposed development of the races. Consequently, it became the foremost objective for educated Africans to achieve the same status as the 'developed' whites, leaving the uneducated Africans behind. In the following chapters, we will see that this endeavour tended to isolate the emerging elite, who were accepted neither by the whites nor by the traditionalist black communities. The latter disliked them for their deviations from traditional morality, while the former resented their adoption of European modes of life. One traditionalist African summed up the strict division between Christian and non-Christian communities by observing that "we do not intermarry with the Mission Natives, as they have become as white men".<sup>69</sup> Daniel Isimango, a spokesperson for *amakholwa*<sup>70</sup> in Natal declared, "... we are in the light and yet in the darkness. We are in the immediate neighbourhood of the white man, and yet we are

<sup>67</sup> *Native Teachers' Journal* (April 1951): 460.

<sup>68</sup> Adams College manuscript Collection (Durban: Killie Campbell Library).

<sup>69</sup> Testimony of Mahobe, Pietermaritzburg, National Archive, Evidence: 376.

<sup>70</sup> The nineteenth-century meaning of the Zulu word *amakholwa* was that of African 'believer' but in this thesis it will also signify, in a broader sense, the black middle class. See Chapter 2.2.1 for a more detailed etymology of this term.



far removed. . . Which road are we to take to the right hand or to the left? Are we retreating instead of advancing in civilization?"<sup>71</sup>

Why did the African Native Choir include traditional song material in their programmes at all? This might be an indication of a process of negotiation between tradition and the modern, mentioned earlier, which began towards the end of the nineteenth century after an initial phase of unquestioning imitation. We shall later see that this process of negotiation had an important effect on *amakwaya* tradition (see Chapter 4, page 93).

Besides songs narrating issues to do with 'light' and 'progress', the Choir presented several items displaying the traditional culture that they were busy negotiating. "Mgwelo engena tentyi", for instance, is described in Gowing-Scopes's programme notes (see page 16) as a "wayside Kaffir song and dance".

As I have mentioned already above, the programme exposes a certain ambiguity in the way traditional and Western compositions are mixed throughout the two halves. On the one hand, the conflict between tradition and Western identity, and, on the other hand, their amalgamation are revealed both in the structuring of the programme and in some of the individual songs. "Q Qa Qa Qa" is based on a popular piece played by children in the early stages of their education. The fusion of Robert Schumann's "The Merry Peasant" from the *Album for the Young* (*Jugendalbum*) with the most characteristic element of the Nguni language group, the click sound, reveals something not only of the dialectical nature of the choir's self-representation, but also of the history of composition practice of early mission-trained choral composers. This is equally true for another piece, "Africa", a quartet which *The London Times* reviewer criticised because it "bore so close a resemblance to Rossini's 'Cujus animam' that it is difficult to accept it as a specimen of native music at all".<sup>72</sup> Obviously some of the compositions by African composers that were performed by the African Choir used Western aesthetics, compositional ideas and principles. Statements like the one published in *The London Times* must, however, be handled with caution, and should not be taken at face value. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Choir was receptive to Western influences and musical ideas. One of their songs, "Kaffir Travesty", was, according to Gowing-Scopes, based on the hawkers' call of "Hot Cross Buns!" and probably arose out of impressions gained during their stay in London.



**Figure 1.7:** *Ladies of the Native African Choir* (*Ludgate Monthly* 2, 1891-2, in Erlmann 1999)

<sup>71</sup> *Ilanga* (March 27, 1863): 2.

<sup>72</sup> *The London Times*, (July 03, 1891).

### 1.2.2 Manifestations in Dress

The poster (Figure 1.8) describes the African Native Choir as “the only Kaffir Choir of its kind in the World, representing Seven Distinct Tribes... who appeared before Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria, Empress of India”, and announces a concert of the choir to be held at South Shields on November 5 and 6, 1891. Furthermore, the poster promises that “the choir will appear in Native Costume as above”. From an official meeting of the promoters of the tour, the Choir and the Mayor of Kimberley, E. H. Jones, we know that already at the onset of the tour questions of dress were considered and that Mr Howell, manager of the venture, intended to “give the audience value for their money in the concerts given, as the Natives will appear in sundry African costumes”.<sup>73</sup> In fact, the strategy was to have the choir perform the first half of the programme dressed in “sundry African costumes singing in the Kaffir tongue”, and in the second half to change to “European dress, and give selections in the English tongue”.<sup>74</sup> A review of the first concert published in *The London Times* confirms that “all the members of the party wore native dress of various descriptions, from the ornate attire of a warrior bearing his ox-hide shield to the simple blanket covering the entire person”.<sup>75</sup> Presenting the songs in traditional attire seems to have met the expectations and imagination of the English public, as the review concludes: “the Natives are more picturesque but less proficient as singers than the excellent choir which came from the Fisk University a good many years ago”.<sup>76</sup>



Figure 1.8: Poster for a concert of *The African Native Choir* in South Shields, Library Hall, November 5/6, 1891 (South Shields Public Library, in Ertmann, 1999.)

<sup>73</sup> *The Christian Express* (May 1, 1891).

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *The London Times* (July 3, 1891); see also *The Christian Express* (September 1, 1891).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*





Figure 1.9: *The African Native Choir in Native Dress* (*Review of Reviews*, 1891)

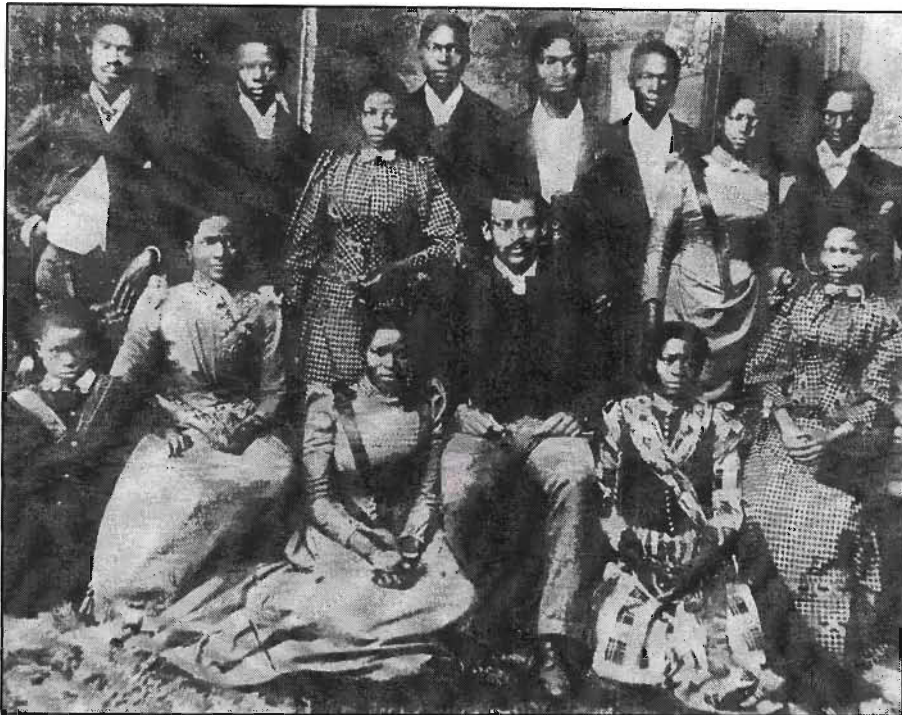


Figure 1.10: *The African Native Choir in Victorian Dress* (*Veit Erlmann Collection*)

The choice of dress was by no means a trivial question, as it may now seem on the face of it. Questions of the appropriate dress for the Choir's performance were soon taken up by the English public as well as institutions and members of the African elite in South Africa. When the news of this debate reached South Africa, the missionaries at Lovedale disapproved, as they put it, of "the adoption, almost exclusively, on the stage, of the old barbarian dress, a dress none of them ever wore at home". They felt that "this costume would do occasionally, but it is a mistake otherwise,

and physically and morally dangerous”.<sup>77</sup> The missionaries felt that by wearing “native dress”, the choristers had actually “exposed themselves”. The rumour “that the Choir [appeared] in Native dress on Sundays” additionally confirmed the suspicions of the missionaries.<sup>78</sup> Recognising that the exotic display of “Africa uncivilised” catered for the fantasies of the English audience, they concluded that “the costuming in karosses &c., was mischievous, in spite of its spectacular attraction, and [had] been the source of more harm, physical and moral, than readily appears”.<sup>79</sup> Looking for someone to blame for this mistaken strategy, they were certain that “the decision to dress in this way [was] the act of the managers”, and hoped that it would “soon be modified”.<sup>80</sup> Edwin Howell promptly refuted those charges and wrote a letter to *The Christian Express* explaining that “the decision as to dress was not solely the act of the Managers, but the natives themselves were consulted and approved of the dress worn in every particular”. Countering the accusations that the dress was “physically and morally dangerous”, he declared that great care was taken to assure the health and the comfort of the choristers: “they simply wear their skins over their ordinary clothing, and although in a few instances in the hot weather they appeared with bare feet, when anything like cold weather came, they wore warm knitted stockings and slippers”.<sup>81</sup>

Clothing and dress etiquette was a morally charged aspect of the mission enterprise itself. Moreover, from the beginning, clothing was one of the most visible forms of the ideological changes that occurred when Africans joined the missionaries.<sup>82</sup> Imposed ideas of ‘modesty’ made clothing the most distinctive emblem of black Christianity: there were “the dressed people” as opposed to “the blanket people”.<sup>83</sup> Dress became the most obvious symbol of leaving traditional social and economic ties behind in order to enter new modes of westernised, ‘modern’ relationships.<sup>84</sup> The missionaries hoped that by “restyling the outer shell of the ‘heathen’, they would reform and salvage the inner self of the newly converted”.<sup>85</sup> The converts had within a short time internalised this idea without reservation. The symbolic content of clothing became so central to the mission-educated blacks that they regarded dress as the single most important image to demonstrate civilisation, education, and progress. Reverend Myaka from Clermont remembers: “if you were converted, you had to throw away your skins and then get some trousers from Europe [*laughs*]”.<sup>86</sup> The importance of dress was not a new concept for Africans.

To get an idea of the importance attached to dress and costume, we can make a brief digression into the early days of colonial encounters. From an early meeting between Captain Allen Gardiner

<sup>77</sup> *The Christian Express* (November 2, 1891).

<sup>78</sup> *Leselinyana* (December 1, 1892); *The Christian Express* (March 1, 1892).

<sup>79</sup> *The Christian Express* (August 1, 1892); also: V. Erlmann, 1999: 15 f.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*: (November 2, 1891).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*: (March 1, 1891).

<sup>82</sup> See H. Weman, 1960. *African Music and the Church in Africa*. (Uppsala: Svenska Institutet för Missionsforskning, 1960): 115.

<sup>83</sup> The expression “blanket people” along with “red people” was used particularly in the Eastern Cape Colony since the nineteenth century to distinguish rural non-Christian communities from mission-educated Africans. The term “red people” derived from the habit of colouring the body and clothing with red ochre. This body decoration, along with the blankets, which the traditional Nguni preferred to western-style clothing, became a “positive symbol of red conservatism”. (R. Hunt Davis, “School vs. Blanket and Settler: Elijah Makiwane and the Leadership of the Cape School Community”, in *African Affairs: Journal of the Royal African Society*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1979, Vol. 78): 12; see also discussion on social taxonomies in Chapter 2.2.1.

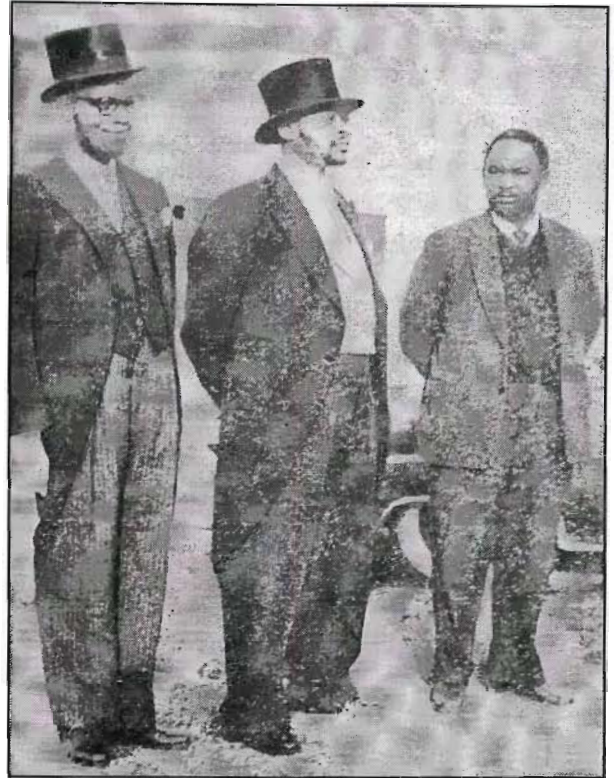
<sup>84</sup> In a way, clothing was a bodily expression of what the ‘upright’, square houses meant in the transformed life of mission-educated Africans. Those new houses became the quintessential atom of their new social universe and a reshaped representation of home.

<sup>85</sup> V. Erlmann, 1999: 126.

<sup>86</sup> Personal communication with Rev. Myaka, Clermont, May 08, 2000.



and Dingane,<sup>87</sup> who ruled the Zulu kingdom from 1828 to 1839, we know that Dingane asked Gardiner: “Are we not a merry people? What black nations can vie with us? Who among them can dress as we do?”<sup>88</sup> In fact Dingane turned out to be a “connoisseur of arts: he had designed the costumes of the women he led into the dancing ring”, and he was even responsible for composing some of the songs chanted during the dance.<sup>89</sup> This shows the immense importance that the Zulu king attached to dress. Dress in connection with music and dance seems to have been for him an essential part of the ceremony at which Captain Gardiner was welcomed at the royal kraal in 1835. Gardiner remarked that Dingane indeed had “a good ear and a correct taste”.<sup>90</sup> This statement becomes more interesting when we consider his reaction to illustrations and pictures of the English court Gardiner showed him during his visit. Dingane took “a keen interest” in European fashion, from Gardiner’s dress uniform to the sweeping gowns of the women. Apart from the dresses designed for dancing during the celebrations, the Zulu had another important item of dress called *isicoco* or head-ring.<sup>91</sup> I mention this headgear to exemplify the importance the Zulu attached to clothing. The gradual replacement of head-rings with top hats signifies the process of negotiating identity through the medium of dress.



*Their Immaculacies Chief Gatsha and Chief Cyprian.*  
(*Drum*, September 1957: 67).

In the second half of the nineteenth century, top hats and other European-style hats, introduced by the white population, became increasingly fashionable in South Africa. Historical evidence in the form of photographs in black African newspapers suggests that from the last quarter of the nineteenth century head-rings were being replaced by European-style hats. It is, however, noticeable

<sup>87</sup> When the former Naval Captain Allen Gardiner set off on his solitary journey to the Zulu kingdom in 1835, he was warned that the Zulu were “angry people”, who would kill him if he dared enter their country. Gardiner, who was neither the agent of a mission society nor the representative of a government, was driven by his desire to meet the Zulu king, Dingane, and win him to Christ. What Gardiner found was anything else but a fierce king. A detailed account of the encounter can be found in A. F. Gardiner, *Narrative of a Journey to the Zoolu Country in South Africa* (Cape Town: Struick, 1966): 39; reprint of (London: W. Crofts, 1836), and N. Etherington, “Kingdoms of This World and the Next: Christian Beginnings among Zulu and Swazi”, in *Christianity in South Africa: a Political, Social and Cultural History*, Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport, ed. (Oxford: Currey, 1997): 89ff.

<sup>88</sup> A. F. Gardiner, 1966: 39.

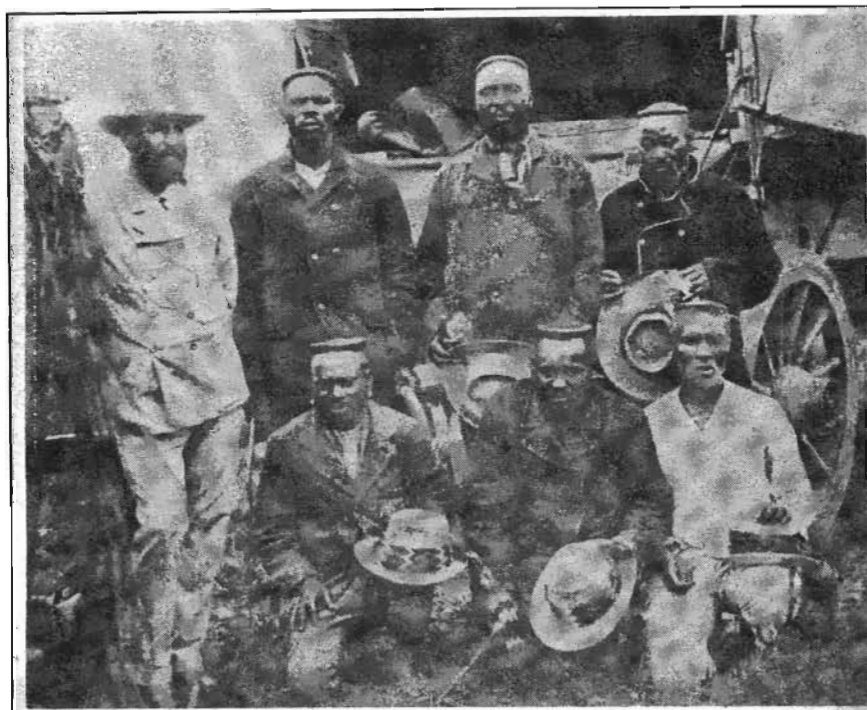
<sup>89</sup> N. Etherington, 1997: 89.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>91</sup> The section on head-rings was inspired by a paper presented by Vukile Khumalo at the History Department of the University of Natal in 1999. (V. Khumalo, *Head-rings, or Top Hats? An Inquiry into the Shifting Meaning of Body Coverings in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century KwaZulu-Natal*, unpublished, University of Natal, August 1999); I am indebted to Khumalo for the many suggestions made by him in this section. The *isicoco*, as Samuelson calls the head-ring of the Zulu men, came into fashion during the early reign of King Mpande. It was made of insects nests (*ungiyane*), “boiled up by itself till it liquefies, and then it is ground fine together with unboiled *ungiyane* and then it is laid over what they call *uqondo* which is a ring made of fibre and sewn onto the hair”. (L. H. Samuelson, *Zululand: its Traditions, Legends, Customs and Folklore*, Durban: Griggs and Co, 1974).

that at the time of transition Africans posing for the camera are in most cases wearing hats or head-rings, or both. Headgear was an essential feature of dress and was not given up, only altered, during the period of transition. The gradual replacement of one type of headgear by another can be seen as an act of negotiating self-representation. However, the transition from one type of headgear to the other was not an abrupt one. Even after European-style hats became fashionable, head-rings were not abandoned but were often worn simultaneously.

The photograph taken in 1882 of John Dunn and his headmen (*izinduna*) shows them all wearing Western clothes. Whereas the headmen hold their European-style hats exposing their head-rings, John Dunn posed for the photograph with his hat on.<sup>92</sup>



**Figure 1.12:** John Dunn and his *izinduna*, 1873  
(in Jeff Guy: *the Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom*, 1982)

It can be argued that the display here of the head-rings is more than a mere visible ‘sign of being men’. The photograph illustrates how the *izinduna* of John Dunn dealt with the influence of Western modes of dress and how Zulu men appropriated Western dress while retaining some of their traditional costume. The headmen’s act of taking off their hats in order to exhibit their hat-rings worn beneath the hats, gives an idea of how they negotiated identity in relation to progress, westernisation, and imperialism.<sup>93</sup> This act resembles a symbolic transition from one socio-cultural context to another and thus reveals the headmen’s inner ambivalence in a phase of transition, acculturation, and quest for an identity within changing cultural, political, and social structures. In other words, the act of taking off the hats can be perceived as a kind of code switching between traditional and Western manifestations of identity, or, as Erlmann suggests, “the use of dress as a metonymic gesture”.<sup>94</sup> The change from native dress to Victorian clothing during the performances

<sup>92</sup> John Dunn was the best known of the White traders living in Zululand. As a young man he had hunted and traded in Zululand and later lived in the region after an invitation to do so by king Cetshwayo, who reigned between 1872 and 1879. Dunn would adopt the way of life of a Zulu chief and eventually married a number of Zulu women. For more detail on John Dunn and his appointment as a chief in connection with Wolsley’s settlement plans of Zululand see J. Guy, 1982: 16-7 and 69-78.

<sup>93</sup> See also H. Hendrickson, ed., *Clothing and Difference: Embodied Identities in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

nymic gesture”.<sup>94</sup> The change from native dress to Victorian clothing during the performances of the African Native Choir can be interpreted in a similar way. Dress was not only used as an allegoric device to demonstrate progress from backwardness, but also discloses the ambivalent self-representation of the wearer.

In discussing the relevance of garments and headgears among the Zulu, I intend to stress the use of dress as a significant symbol in traditional social behaviour. Clothing obviously has always been a major component in communicating identity. The dress codes of missionaries, at first strategically imposed upon mission-educated Africans, came to be deliberately used by them to transcend ‘tribal’ or local identities. Thus the garment as social skin<sup>95</sup> played an important role in negotiating Western and traditional images of self. Jean and John Comaroff confirm this by suggesting that Western dress “made available an expansive, expressive, experimental language with which to conjure new social identities and senses of self, a language with which also to speak to the whites”.<sup>96</sup> For mission-educated Africans the adoption of Western dress became a strategy for communicating ideas of progress and a new sense of belonging, “a way to express their willingness to be part of the wider world of circulating commodities”.<sup>96</sup>



**Figure 1.13:** *Josiah Semouse of The African Native Choir with headgear (Illustrated London News, August 22, 1891).*

Although the mission stations initiated this process, the metropolitan centres became the stage for further development. The relevance of clothing in urban life is the theme of a series of songs composed by Reuben T. Caluza over the period of ten years up to the mid 1920s. The first song, “Ematawini or Excuse Me Please”, composed shortly after World War I, is one of the earliest models for such depictions of urban life in song. It illustrates urban life and caricatures the slick, well-adapted early town dwellers often called *ooscuse-me* by the Xhosa and isiZulu-speaking migrants; hinting not only at the polite manner of speaking, but also at behavioural patterns and Western dress codes:<sup>97</sup>

<sup>94</sup> V. Erlmann, 1999a: 128.

<sup>95</sup> J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, 1997 *Of Revelation and Revolution: the Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997): 219.

<sup>96</sup> V. Khumalo, 1999: 26.

<sup>97</sup> *Bantu World* (September 21, 1935).



*Ematawini or Excuse Me Please*

Nisibona silapha nje saphum' ekhaya  
 Sigudl' ulwandle sabon' izimoba  
 Nemishini yokugay' ushukela  
 Nabant' abatheng' uthiligi  
 Sadlula lapho kesafik' eThekwini.

Nisaka ngwa' zintombi kanye nezinsizwa  
 zasehlaze nyuka emywaqweni.  
 Zihamba ziqenya zingen' impahla.  
 Abanye bey'olwandle abanye kwaMadala.

Zabethi Excuse me please gidedele  
 Me want some cup-a-tea, because me hungly  
 Insizwa zifake izigqoko,  
 nentombi zihambis' okwamada ngez' cathulo.

Abany'ubonanj' ukutina bo besikholo.  
 Kunjal' wematawini.

Kukhon' inhlobo izinhlobo zabantu.  
 Ababi nabahle  
 abaziqenyayo kanye nabathobile.  
 Kukhon' abaqhafi nabulungile.

*In Town or Excuse Me Please*

*As you see us here, we have just come from home.  
 Along the coast we saw sugar-cane fields.  
 And sugar-mills<sup>98</sup>  
 And people who buy treacle.  
 We came to Durban.*

*Our attention was caught by young ladies  
 and gentlemen walking up and down the streets.  
 They are proud of their clothes.  
 Some of them were going to the beach, some to Madala.<sup>99</sup>*

*They say: Excuse me please, can I pass?  
 Me want some cup-a-tea, because me hungly.  
 The young men were wearing hats,  
 and the young ladies were walking like ducks in their shoes.*

*You could see that some of them were students.  
 It is like that in town.*

*There are all kinds of people. Ugly ones  
 and beautiful ones, proud and simple people.  
 There are gangsters (vagrants)  
 and good people (upright ones).<sup>100</sup>*

“Ematawini” or “Excuse Me Please” clearly reveals Caluza’s ambivalent attitude towards the urban lifestyle that was evolving in Durban.<sup>101</sup> The lyrics reflect the precarious situation of Durban’s black intelligentsia “caught between a self-conscious urbanism and rural nostalgia, and hemmed in between white hegemony and black popular opposition”.<sup>102</sup> Caluza, born in 1895 to *amakholwa* parents who were among the first converts settling at Edendale near Pietermaritzburg, was educated at Ohlange Institute, one of Natal’s important mission school and, with Adams College, among the most active centres of African middle class musical life. He is the product of a missionary education and the ideologies of the emerging *amakholwa*.<sup>103</sup> For African Christian families, music was one of the main focal points of socialisation and leisure time activities and of their “worldview”.<sup>104</sup> For them music and arts, but choral music in particular, contained an “assurance of civilised advancement”, which went hand in hand with education and modernisation.<sup>105</sup> The sights of “ladies and gentlemen walking up and down the streets” and the young ladies “walking like

<sup>98</sup> In fact, there was a sugar mill close to Adams Mission that was established by black entrepreneurs. Maybe this is the mill that Caluza mentions as an outstanding example of *amakholwa* success. Further east in Amanzimtoti, African Christians had initiated their own sugar co-operative without white support. (Rood to Anderson, July 31, 1865, Papers of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission 15.4, VII, [henceforth cited as ABC] quoted in N. Etherington, 1978: 121); See also page 51.

<sup>99</sup> Another song “KwaMadala” (At Madala’s place) describes two popular places in Durban where people who arrived from the rural areas could get assistance and be introduced to the city. Madala and Matsheni were two shops in Victoria Street close to the old Berea Railway station where everything from sweets, food, beer and clothes was sold. But those places were more than mere shops, they were a “social centre, a Kaffir Trade Market, A Propaganda Centre...” (*Ilanga*, November 20, 1954).

<sup>100</sup> Adapted from V. Erlmann, 1996: 125; and E. Mngadi, *The Socio-Political Relevance of R. T. Caluza’s Song Texts*, thesis submitted for the degree of BA Hons (Music), University of Durban-Westville (November 1997): 53-4.

<sup>101</sup> This is true for some of Caluza’s songs, for example, “Insizwa Ezimbili”, which deals with the strange table manners and toilet fineries of the urban black middle class.

<sup>102</sup> V. Erlmann, 1991: 127.

<sup>103</sup> See Chapter 12.2.3 for a detailed discussion of R. T. Caluza and his importance within the *amakwaya* tradition.

<sup>104</sup> V. Erlmann, 1991: 116.

<sup>105</sup> *Ilanga* (June 12, 1911).

ducks in their shoes” described by Caluza in his song were commonplace in the Edendale of the late nineteenth century (see Figure 1.14). The description of the promenading couples, “proud of their clothes”, and of the duck-like walking of the ladies suggests newcomers to the town, not yet comfortable with or accustomed to their new roles. Clothes and shoes became important markers of progressive status in the towns.

Another song depicting middle class forms of social behaviour and codes of dress is Caluza’s most popular song, “Ubunghca” (Ama Oxford Bags). In both songs Caluza’s characterisations of the urban dwellers not only satirise the imitations of European behaviour in the upper reaches of Durban’s *amakholwa*, but also reveal a profound ambivalence toward the value systems and cultural formations of black urban society. Elegant ladies and men dressed in double-breasted coat with big-brimmed hats may be markers of progress, but for this progress a price has to be paid “that is the price of forgetting one’s relations”. This demonstration of admiration for the European lifestyle was regarded by many blacks with unease and even disapproval.



Figure 1.14: *Sunday at Edendale* (from: Lady Barker, *A Year's Housekeeping in South Africa*, London, 1877: 196 in Meintjes, 1988)

### *Ubunghca (Ama Oxford Bags)*

Nxa nivakashela eThekwini, niyozibon' in tomb'  
Eziphambili, zingena ziphum' emawotela.  
Nezintomb' eziphambili.  
Niyobon' izinsizwa eziphambili.

Zingen' ewotela lika T. D. zithi woza la wetha,  
Kukhona kudla kuni?  
Akubalek' uwetha ukudl' okukhona.  
Zithi leth' isitshulu leth' ilayisi.  
Letha noloz' bhifu nom' inyama yesiklabhu.

Zizangez' gubhu imsiko yase-Merika.  
Abanye fak' isitali, behamba bebhungca.  
Zabeqhenya beti njengomkholwane,  
Bhungca ngesitaliyana  
Manje beza ngamaOxford bags,  
Bafake kanye nama double breast coat,  
Bafak' iziqqok' eyizimbenge  
Zamakawa z'yakind' intombi,  
Amasilik' avuzayo, namabhantsh' akhindiwe.

Kukhon' izintomb' eziphambili kukhon'  
Ez' fana no dadenje.  
Nezinsizw' ezingasay' emakhaya.  
Imihuqa nemigovu.  
Zibanjiwe banjiw' eSamseni.  
Iyabagwinya iMayville.

*When visiting Durban, you will see  
Beautiful girls, entering hotels.  
Elegant ladies.  
You will also see elegant young men.*

*They enter T. D.'s hotel and call the waiter, and ask him:  
"What kind of food do you have?"  
Or they ask the waiter to bring the menu.  
Then they will say: "Bring stew and rice."  
"Bring roast beef or mutton."*

*They are dressed in American style.  
Some will come dressed in Italian style, with trousers,  
The legs tied like a red-billed hornbill,  
As in Italian trousers.  
Some come with their Oxford Bags  
And wear a double-breasted coat,  
Big brimmed hats,  
Short ladies dresses,  
Expensive silks, short coats.*

*There are also fashionable girls,  
And also ones just like you and me.  
And young men who no more go back to their homes.  
Old crooks and hobos.  
They are trapped in Samseni.  
Mayville is the only place for them.<sup>106</sup>*

<sup>106</sup> Samsen and Mayville were two former black townships, situated to the west of the Berea Ridge in Durban.

Bayakhala bayalamb' omam' ekhaya.  
 Yek' usizi olukululwe zinsizwa.  
 Kunjani na eGoli? Zinjani na siqat' eGoli?  
 Babanjelw' isiqata kanye nesigomfana.  
 Yiwo to umvuzo wokubhunguka.

*Their women at home are crying and suffering.  
 It is sad, gentlemen.  
 How is Johannesburg? How is the liquor in Johannesburg?  
 They are being arrested for concoctions brewed in their homes.  
 That is the price of forgetting one's relations.<sup>107</sup>*

In a similar way the African Native Choir was negotiating identity through the medium of dress during their concerts in England. In the partly autobiographical, partly biographical account of the life of Katie Makanya (née Manye), loosely based on the oral testimony given by Makanya to Margaret McCord in the 1950s, a description of the dresses used by the choir is recorded. In the first half of the programme, Makanya recounts, the singers dressed

in the old way, according to their tribe, with beaded robes covering their breasts, carved wooden combs in their hair, and ankles of seed pods which rattled as they stamped their bare feet on the floor... For the second part of the programme, they dressed in Christian clothes, the men in dark suits and the girls in white dresses with long gloves.<sup>108</sup>



**Figure 1.15:** *Katie Makanya*  
 (McCord, 1995).

Apart from beadwork, leopard skins, and woollen blankets, different forms of headgear are worn for the Choir photograph as markers of 'native' identity (see Figure 1.9 and Figure 1.13). As Erlmann shows, the outfit of the Choir was not authentic, but rather "a sign of what, in the imperial lexicon of the late nineteenth century, was taken for Africa".<sup>109</sup> Issues of dress, Erlmann argues, revolved around "conflicting notions among Britons and South Africans about vision, seen [sic], and being seen".<sup>110</sup> In other words, the choice of dress must be seen from different perspectives. Besides being a move to satisfy the exotic expectations of English audiences, the change from native dress to Victorian outfits in the second part of the performance is also a manifestation of the progressive history of the choristers. Thus costume was used purposely by the choristers for staging a theatrical effect. For them it was, along with the music, an important means of conveying their message. The fact that the traditional garments were not authentic but only what Victorian audiences perceived as African, strengthens

the supposition that this apparel was intentionally used by the Choir as requisites for staging "savage and dark" Africa, an Africa that they intended to leave behind. Changing from traditional to Western dress during the interval was to be understood as representing the transformation of their traditional identity to that of being 'civilised'.

<sup>107</sup> Adapted from V. Erlmann, 1991: 129-31; and E. Mngadi, *The Socio-Political Relevance of R. T. Caluza's Song Texts*, Thesis submitted for the degree of BA Hons (Music), University of Durban-Westville (November 1997): 49-50.

<sup>108</sup> Katie Makanya quoted in M. McCord, 1995: 34.

<sup>109</sup> V. Erlmann, 1999a: 132.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*: 103.

### 1.3 Summary

By drawing from the case study of a single event, the tour of the African Native Choir to England, this chapter has attempted to illuminate in one flash a number of central issues important for the understanding of contemporary *amakwaya* practice. The fundamental themes of the venture, I argued, were those of identity and modernity, which were communicated by the choristers in the form of interviews, lectures, songs, and dress. These topics are still central in present day *amakwaya* practices, mainly mediated by repertoire, vocal aesthetics, social organisation, choice of dress, and competitive events. We will see later that today competitive events in particular serve as a platform to communicate these ideas.

Various statements of some members of the 1892 choir, the list of songs and the important issue of dress have served as illustrations of the fact that choral music and its performance practice was perceived and actively used by the choir as an “assurance of civilised advancement”.<sup>111</sup> The findings, however, also revealed that the articulation of identity was marked by a high degree of ambivalence. The intention of the choristers to communicate their progressiveness through dress, music, and interviews was not as successful as the choristers had intended and anticipated. The remark of a white South African whom the Choir met in a hotel in England, disappointedly recalled by Katie Makanya (néé Manye,) summarises the failure: “They may look civilised in their Christian clothes, but underneath, the blacks are all savages”.<sup>112</sup> Soon the choristers had to realise that even the English were more interested in the exotic image of ‘savages’ than in the message of progressive and educated Africans. In other words, spectatorial lust, a wish to look at ‘the darkies’ from Africa, was the key motivation of the English public attending the concerts of the African Native Choir. There was yet another important aspect to the tour which happened at an important moment in *amakwaya* tradition. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, members of the black middle class were beginning to question their initial strategy of exclusive imitation and assimilation of Western values. Experiences such as those during the tour to England eventually led to a process of negotiating between their own traditions and the modern. This process, as we will see, became the main theme for *amakwaya* groups throughout the twentieth century, shaping individual identity, as well as every aspect of this choral tradition, from performance practice to repertoire and aesthetics.

Before we return to the question of identity and the ambivalence of imitation and negotiation, the following chapter will deal in particular with the important aspect of the emergence of a black middle class which was closely connected to the *amakwaya* tradition and arguably still is.

<sup>111</sup> *Ilanga*, (June 12, 1911).

<sup>112</sup> M. McCord, 1995: 56.



## Becoming Amakholwa: Mission Communities and the Emergence of an African Black Middle Class

In the previous chapter we saw that issues of progress and being modern were central concerns of the choristers throughout the tour of the African Native Choir in England. Notions of identity and self-representation and their articulation, however, were highly ambiguous or contradictory, manifest not only through the programme, the choice of songs and the texts, but also by dress. For the community of mission-educated black South Africans who decided to break away from traditional African social, political and cultural patterns in order to follow the path of Western civilisation, *amakwaya* had at least by the 1890s become an important musical medium for communicating identity. The creation and manifestation of a new kind of identity turned out to be the key factor in the formation of the African Native Choir as well as other choirs that followed its example, like the Zulu Choir from Edendale.

Having presented the narrative of a single choir at the end of the formative phase of *amakwaya*, I will now turn my attention to the implications of the historical development of colonialism and the missionary endeavour in particular in the course of the nineteenth century. The historical development of *amakwaya*, as I shall argue, is closely linked to political and social upheavals caused by the colonial and missionary impact on South Africa. A closer look into these forces will support our understanding of contemporary performance practice. The main focus of this chapter, will be on the missionaries and their early converts. This seems of particular importance as early mission stations became the cradle of a black middle class, which again was closely connected to the emergence of *amakwaya*.

The process of colonialism involved an intense process of cultural domination. In his book, *The African Way*, Mike Boon gives a dramatic and critical summary of this. The destruction of tribal societies, he writes, began with the missions and schools “oriented to the Western way”:

The white world seemed hell-bent on making black Africa white. White values and white beliefs were vigorously pursued. The tribal societies were not respected in their own right and they were dismantled. They were disfigured by the new message and they became ill – part new world, part old world – and, in this way, not whole.<sup>1</sup>

Boon emphasises that the process of dismantling old social, political and cultural structures resulted in their being neither fully part of the Old, nor the New World. This ambiguity of identity will constitute a major thread in my discussion of *amakwaya* in the following chapters. Indeed, as I shall argue, the process of dismantling, and especially that associated with the missionary effort, played a crucial role in developing a new musical genre. A couple of simple questions will indicate the line of inquiry to be pursued. Who were the people that joined the mission stations? What motivated them to break traditional bonds in order to aspire to a new identity? What was their relation to the ‘other’? What were their guiding ideas and how were music and choral singing used in the process of establishing a new identity? Answering these questions will take us back to the early beginnings

<sup>1</sup> M. Boon, *The African Way: the Power of Interactive Leadership* (Johannesburg: Zebra Press, 1996): 49.

of *amakwaya* and provide an important background for understanding the forces that brought this choral tradition into being.

Shula Marks states: "it is through the specific institutions of time and space that larger structures become a lived reality and are reproduced".<sup>2</sup> This seems to be true for the emergence of an African intelligentsia as a product of missionary activity and colonialism in nineteenth-century South Africa. In the case of the mission-educated elite, specific institutions like Lovedale and Adams College provided the elements of a development that eventually led to the formation of a new class. Since the experiences of the residents of mission stations constitute the most important factor in the formative phase of *amakwaya*, I have chosen to concentrate on a single mission institution in order to answer the questions asked above. Natal will form the backdrop and Adams College the stage for the exploration of the emergence and the historical development of *amakwaya*. We have already seen that Lovedale Mission Station in the Eastern Cape played an essential role in the tour of the African Native Choir. This institution had trained some of the choristers, and its staff commented critically throughout the tour on the actions of the group. At the time when missionaries arrived in Natal, Lovedale along with other mission schools had already been established in the Cape.<sup>3</sup> These schools played a decisive role in the historical development of the emerging middle class and cannot be ignored.<sup>4</sup> Though drawing on developments outside Natal where necessary, I have, for various reasons, deliberately chosen to concentrate my investigation on Adams College in Natal.

In Natal, a British colony since 1843, the process of colonisation and proselytisation followed a similar pattern to that set in the Cape, but there are some significant differences. As the colony that experienced probably the most concentrated missionary effort in Africa,<sup>5</sup> Natal played a key role in the emergence of an elite stratum of mission-educated Africans. Black middle class communities throughout the colony formed a consciousness that must be seen as a fundamental factor in the emergence of this new middle class. Mission-educated Africans lived in a highly ambiguous world, being the most ardent believers in the new colonial order and, at the same time, its most ferocious critics. This contradiction is rooted in the social and political conditions that prevailed when the first missionaries arrived in Natal. Early settlers and their government had introduced mechanisms of segregation, which were manifest, for instance, in the allocation of reserves to the Nguni (1846), and in the legal system associated with Theophilus Shepstone, who had arrived at the Cape as a

<sup>2</sup> S. Marks, *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa: Class, Nationalism, and the State in Twentieth-century Natal* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986): 10.

<sup>3</sup> Janet Hodgson reports that "by 1825, 'school people' were an identifiable class among the Xhosa. She mainly refers to the system of Sunday schools, which the Wesleyans had introduced on a large scale in the Eastern Cape. J. Hodgson, "A Battle for Sacred Power: Christian Beginnings among the Xhosa", in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social and Cultural History*. Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport, eds. (Oxford: Currey, 1997): 77.

During her fieldwork in the Transkei, Deirdre Hansen found a clear division of the people. "We spent the first day in All Saints administrative area, where we attended a wedding and a burial. Since this area is occupied mainly by 'school people', we had a very successful day. Our difficulties began on the second day, when we travelled out to an administrative area about 20 kilometres from Engcobe village. ... At the end of the week we had recorded a great many 'school' songs, but very few of the 'red' (i.e. tribal) people, who were always very polite, but very distant." (D. D. Hansen, *The Music of the Xhosa-speaking People*. Thesis submitted for the Degree Doctor of Music. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1981: XXI-XXIV).

<sup>4</sup> Lovedale was opened in 1842 with the Rev. Govan as the first headmaster. Govan's education policy was assimilationist in character: he regarded education as the means by which Africans could be elevated to exactly the same level as Europeans. An elite group of Africans would be educated in the same subjects and at the same standards as white pupils. It is important to note that Lovedale was initiated as a multi-racial school. See also my discussion of education at the end of this chapter (2.2.3).

<sup>5</sup> N. Etherington, *Preachers, Peasants and Politics in Southeast Africa, 1835-1880: African Christian Communities in Natal, Pondoland and Zululand*. (London: Royal Historical Society, 1978): 4, 24.

young child with his 1820 settler parents. The latter, in his function as Diplomatic Agent (1846) and later as Secretary for Native Affairs, provided separate laws, one code for whites, based on English legislation, and the other for Africans, based on customary law. This practice was criticised by the *amakholwa* community as it actively favoured traditionalism and prevented mission-educated Africans from following their ideas of progress. In fact, they soon found themselves in difficulties, trapped between the white community to which they wished to belong and the traditional society they had left behind. Aspiring to Western ideals, a Western way of living, progress and assimilation to the white community, they gradually severed the links to their traditional societies and ended up belonging to no particular group. This experience, contrary to what one might expect, welded them together and provided the necessary energy to form a new social stratum with a distinct identity.

The reasons for concentrating on Natal and especially on Adams College lie in the fact that this missionary institution played a major role in the development of the new elite and their music. Among the many spokesmen for and important figures of this westernised intelligentsia that were trained at mission institutions throughout Natal, John Langilibalele Dube, third generation Christian, stands out as the archetype of the mission-educated African. Born in 1871, he began his education at a primary school at Inanda and then went to Adams College where he received his teacher's training. Both these schools were started by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission, whose missionaries were among the first who attempted to work in the north-eastern part of South Africa. After returning from America, where he graduated in Arts and Theology at Oberlin College, Dube founded the Ohlange Industrial School modelled, like the famous Tuskegee Institute, on the educational ideas of Booker Washington. Apart from being an important educator, Dube was a newspaper editor (he founded *Ilanga laseNatal*) and was the founding president of the South African Native National Congress (which, formed in 1912, later became the African National Congress).



**Figure 2.1:** Ohlange Institute (Mweli Skota, *African Yearly Register*, 193?: 406)



Another important figure to make a vital contribution to the development of music in South Africa, especially in the field of choral music, was Reuben Tholakele Caluza, born on 14 November 1895 at Siyamu Village near Edendale. Caluza, arguably “one of the most colourful and popular musicians of the 1910s and 1920s”,<sup>6</sup> became the driving force of music education at the first Music School for black students in South Africa, established at Adams College in the 1930s. The two core values of mid-Victorian ideology, ‘progress’ and ‘improvement’, informed Caluza’s professional goals. The *amakholwa* community of Edendale was one of the foremost embodiments of these values. Besides the activities of teaching, farming, and preaching, which were the main pursuits of these “proud men and women”,<sup>7</sup> music played a key role in leisure-time activities and thus in the whole process of socialisation. Choral music in particular was well understood and used as an important means of communicating ‘progress’ and ‘civilisation’, as we have seen in the previous chapter (page, 9).

Before I offer a more detailed portrait of the emerging African black middle class, I want to look into socio-political developments at the time when the first missionaries arrived in Natal. My intention is to facilitate the understanding of important factors that eventually led to restructuring the social world of nineteenth century South Africa.

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<sup>6</sup> V. Erlmann, 1991: 112.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.: 115.

## 2.1 Setting the Scene: Early Mission Work in the North-Eastern Seaboard Regions of South Africa

### 2.1.1 Shepstone and the Dual System of Jurisdiction

Georg Schmidt, of the Moravian church, was the first European missionary specially sent to South Africa to start a missionary enterprise. He arrived in Cape Town in 1737 and started his work in Genadedal the following year.<sup>8</sup>

It was hundred years after Schmidt's arrival that the first missionaries appeared on the north-eastern seaboard regions of South Africa. When in 1837 the advance party of the Voortrekkers pushed their way over the Drakensberg mountains, the agents of two different mission societies, one sent by the Anglican Church and the other by American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (hereafter called "American Board Mission"), had already begun to establish missionary stations in Natal.

After 1842, when sovereignty in Natal (the territory bounded by the Tsekela river in the north, the Mzimkulu river in the south and the Drakensberg mountains in the west) had shifted from the Trekkers to the British, the shape of a new social dispensation began to be revealed.<sup>9</sup> The new policy recommended that Africans who could not be recognised as having aboriginal claims on land were to be placed in scattered locations. Superintendents were to be used to establish and preserve order and justice, while missionaries should be encouraged to support this venture by working for "moral improvement" in the locations.<sup>10</sup> The potential influence of the missionaries began to be perceived, and they were utilised as the "first connecting link between the highly civilised newcomers and the less advanced African".<sup>11</sup> The most influential of the new white commissioners assigned to the new locations was Theophilus Shepstone, a dominating figure in early politics in Natal.<sup>12</sup> His influence on Natal was crucial and impacted on missionaries and Africans alike. Many Africans broke with their traditional culture in order to join the missionaries.

There were two main factors that shaped social relations in the colony and determined the development of the missionary enterprise in Natal. The first factor centred on the allotment of ancestral land through the establishment of reserve land and locations. The second was the introduction of the separate legal systems mentioned earlier and designed to make the administration of Natal cheap and effective. Because both of these measures, in large part associated with the person of Shepstone, crucially contributed to the formation of a new social order, and thus became a central issue for *amakholwa* identity, we shall examine the political structures and attitudes of settlers and Zulus in more detail.

Shepstone was aware of the fact that his continuance in office depended to a large extent upon his ability to establish and maintain law and order in Natal. The application of the dual jurisdiction

<sup>8</sup> A. E. Du Toit, *The Earliest South African Documents on the Education and Civilisation of the Bantu* (Pretoria, 1963): 5. Further information about Georg Schmidt can be found in: H. C. Bredekamp and J. L. Hattingh, *Das Tagebuch und die Briefe von Georg Schmidt*, (Belleville: University of the Western Cape Press, 1981); for an overview of the Moravian Mission see: B. Krüger, *The Pear Tree Blossoms: A History of the Moravian Mission Stations in South Africa, 1737-1869* (Genadedal: Genadedal Printing Works, 1966). For further information about early missions in the Cape Colony: E. Elbourne and R. Ross, *Combating Spiritual and Social Bondage: Early Missions in the Cape Colony*. In *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social and Cultural History*. Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport, eds. (Oxford: Currey, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> E. H. Brookes and C. Webb, *A History of Natal* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1987): 9-41.

<sup>10</sup> N. Etherington, 1978: 8.

<sup>11</sup> *Natal Advertiser* (June 22, 1935).

<sup>12</sup> For an extensive examination of Shepstone's controversial role and personality see N. Etherington, 1978: 9.

referred to earlier, however, proved difficult and raised in problems of definition relating to the question of who the “Natives” were. To restrict Native Law to the locations or mission reserves was not possible because of constant migration and shifting of boundaries. The other alternative, which initially seemed more reasonable, was to define “native” by ethnic origin. In the end this proved to be equally unenforceable, for as a delegate stated at a meeting of “civilised natives” at the Edendale mission station:

We have left the black race – it is impossible to return. We are under the wing of the Queen; let us ask her for her law ... The believers were in an unfortunate position. They had left their people. The hand was at the plough, and it was too late to return. They had left their people for ever, and they would indeed be lost if deserted by the white man.<sup>13</sup>



Figure 2.2: Theophilus Shepstone, (Natal Archives, Pietermaritzburg).

A journalist from *Ilanga* gave a detailed account of this “remarkably well conducted and well attended meeting”, which was held on March 18, 1863. It is worth noting that the meeting “commenced at seven in the evening, and was closed at two in the morning”. This shows the significance the attending members of the *amakholwa* community must have attached to this gathering. One of their central concerns was to protect their identity by claiming exemption from Native Law. A spokesman by the name of Totella summarised the prevailing confusion amongst the black community caused by the legal system practised in Natal.

He [Totella] said, he did not know how many laws there were in Natal. English, Kafir, and Roman Dutch he had heard of. There was also a mixture of all; by all of which the natives got the worst of it. He said they wanted a written law – not one in which the brain was [sic] the only book to which reference was to be made.<sup>14</sup>

The delegate from Umsundisi agreed with this statement, saying, that “one thing alone detracts from our security. The law by which our cases are decided is only fit to be eaten by vultures... The question for us to decide is – whether will we have Kafir or English law?”<sup>15</sup> The ordinary courts of Natal tried most civil cases in which one party was white; all other cases involving Africans were decided according to “Native Law” in a rough hierarchy of courts established by Shepstone. Nguni law constituted the main elements of Native Law and custom and remained uncodified for decades, resulting in the uncertainties inherent in a common law constructed on a basis of legal precedents.<sup>16</sup> The uncertainties of Native Law led to public protest, mainly by mission-educated Africans who saw only one solution: the application for exemption from Native Law.<sup>17</sup> In the following chapter

<sup>13</sup> *Ilanga* (March 27, 1863).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*; and *Natal Witness* (March 27, 1863).

<sup>15</sup> *Ilanga* (March 27, 1863).

<sup>16</sup> N. Etherington, 1978: 13-16.

<sup>17</sup> It must be remarked here that, after Shepstone had introduced the law, a decade passed without granting of a single letter of exemption. Little more than a year before the exemption law, Shepstone had argued “there are not twelve natives in the colony that could rightly use such freedom” (Shepstone quoted in N. Etherington *The Rise of the Kholwa in South East Africa*, Thesis submitted for the Degree Doctor of History. Yale University, 1971:42). Brookes and Webb argue that there was no single African who succeeded in becoming totally exempt. For a detailed discussion of the importance of exemptions for the black middle class see Chapter 3.2.

(see page 72), we will see how important exemptions from Native Law were for the members of the black middle class and for their specific identity as an aspiring elite.

The separate judicial system designed by Shepstone was not only the cause of problems and uncertainties, but was perceived by many *amakholwa* as a sign of the white man's contempt for and rejection of them. In the first chapter, I quoted the statements of Charlotte Manye and other members of the *amakholwa* community who perceived this segregation as a striking contradiction to what they were expecting when they decided to join the Christian community. In Manye's statement, "yonder we are but as cattle. But in Africa, as in England, we are human", she asks, not only for the political elevation of the black community to legal equality with the settlers, but also for social recognition (see page 3).

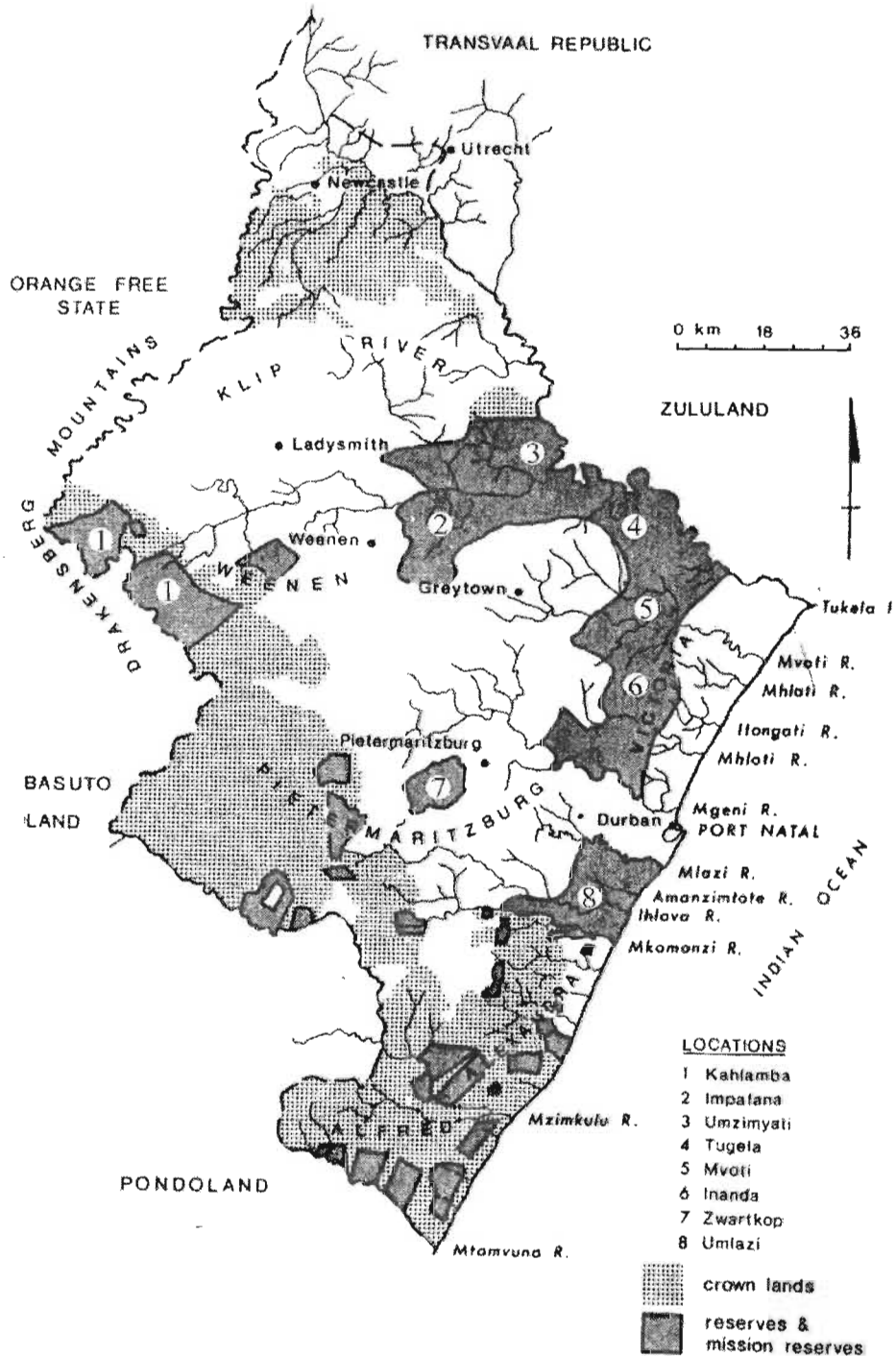
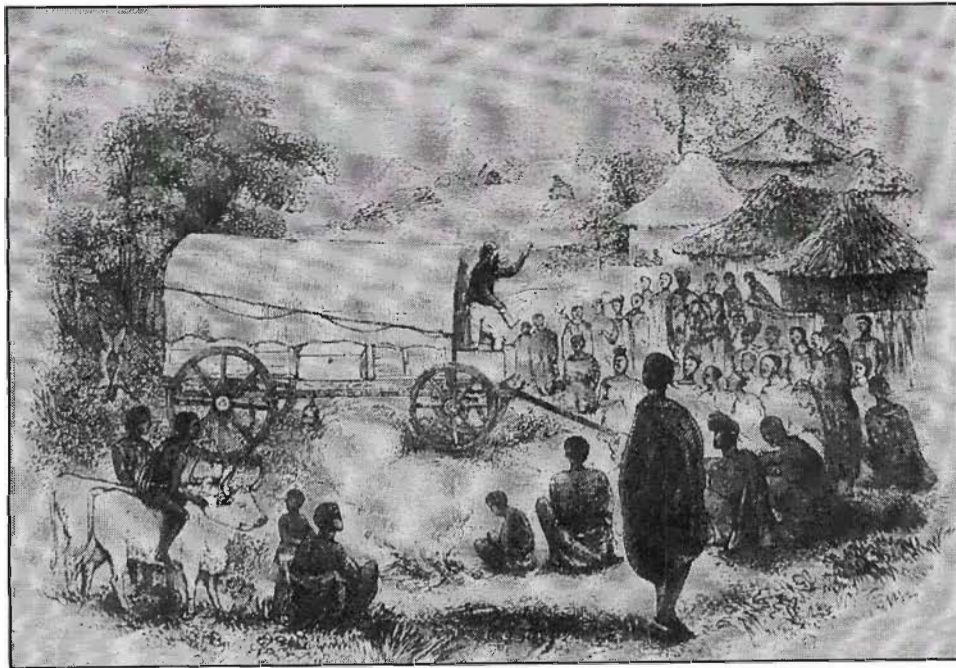


Figure 2.3: Shepstone's Natal 1869 (Etherington, N. 1978: 7).



### 2.1.2 Missionaries and the Initial Phase of Recruiting Converts

The north-eastern region of South Africa was one of the most popular of the mission fields in the nineteenth-century.<sup>18</sup> In 1835 the American Board Mission sent their first missionaries to evangelise and educate the Nguni. Hoping to convert to Christianity the entire Zulu nation in just one generation, they had envisaged a short stay.<sup>19</sup> However, within less than a decade, the fledgling missionaries were forced to accept that their original aim “to exert general and enduring influence”<sup>20</sup> was not an easy one to achieve. It was, in point of fact, as Henry Venable, one of the first American missionaries, remarks, “a hopeless task”.<sup>21</sup> Instead of immediately embracing Christianity, the Nguni initially offered resistance, as I will discuss later in more detail. The outbreak of the Anglo-Zulu War in 1879 signalled the end of the first wave of mission work in South Africa. Thwarted by local resistance and political restrictions, the missionaries succeeded in forming only a handful of isolated Nguni Christian communities.



**Figure 2.4:** *Preaching at Mosheu's Village*  
(Robert Moffat, *Missionary Labours*, 1842).

<sup>18</sup> N. Etherington claims, “no other quarter of nineteenth-century Africa was so thickly infested with Christian evangelists.” Natal, especially, was a highly popular field for mission activity. The Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners estimated in 1880 that the number of missionaries in Natal was proportionately “greater than in any other community on the globe, two or three times over.” (quoted in N. Etherington, 1971: 7). By 1850 the American Board Mission had already established nineteen missionaries at twelve stations, and as early as 1854 seven different missionary societies had started mission stations aimed at evangelising the Nguni. (J. Du Plessis, *A History of Christian missions in South Africa*, Cape Town: Struik, Facsim. Reprint, 1965:259; originally published in London: Longmans, Green, 1911). Robert Strayer has published an interesting study that explores the origins of East African mission communities associated with the Anglican Church Missionary Society from 1875 to 1935. His work reveals interesting parallels with the situation found in South Africa. (R. W. Strayer, *The Making of Mission Communities in East Africa: Anglicans and Africans in Colonial Kenya, 1875-1935*, London: Heinemann, 1978).

<sup>19</sup> N. Etherington, 1978: 24-5.

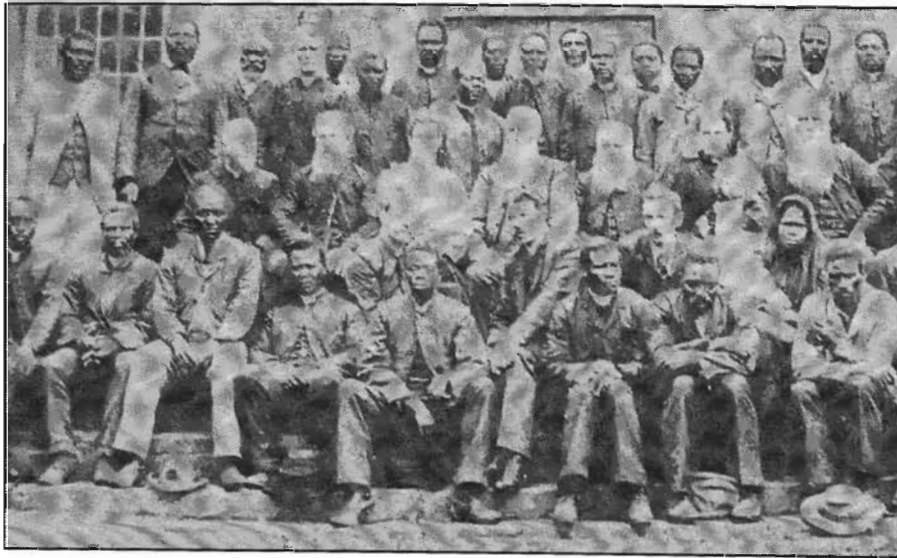
<sup>20</sup> Anderson, correspondence, 1835, Miscellaneous Missionary Papers, Durban: KCL.

<sup>21</sup> Lindley to Anderson, July 17, 1839, ABC 15.4,II.

Nevertheless, some Nguni chiefs did request missionaries, for three main reasons. First, they hoped that linking with missionaries would strengthen their position in relation to powerful neighbours. Second, in addition to this protection, the chiefs hoped to improve their relations with the white authorities, since missionaries were used as intermediaries. Third, the missionaries were expected to perform certain welfare and technical services.<sup>22</sup> The most important of these functions was that of the missionary as ‘protector’: “[t]he greater the real or imagined threat from African neighbours was, the more vehement a call for missionaries was likely to be”.<sup>23</sup> The chiefs, however, were destined to be disappointed because the missionaries generally avoided any involvement in inter-tribal disputes. But when it came to dealings with white authorities, the missionaries willingly offered their services to the chiefs.

The declared aim of missionaries in the nineteenth century was twofold – to produce Christians and to create civilised people. They emphasised that the only route to true civilisation was through Christianity. J.W. Colenso, for example, wrote: “Christianity and civilization are twin sisters, and are always found in company, especially when the former leads the way. Sometimes the latter may be found without the former, but she never is so happy, and seems to sit disconsolate, sighing for her natural companion”.<sup>24</sup>

We will later see how those who chose to follow the doctrine of the missionaries constructed a new identity that centred on these two attributes. It is important to note that even though this identity has changed somewhat, these attributes characterise *amakwaya* groups up to the present day.



**Figure 2.5:** *Amakholwa community at Edendale Training Institution, ca. 1900 (Natal Archives, Pietermaritzburg).*

Nguni resistance and the social pressures that they exerted on the converts placed rigid limitations on the kinds of communities that missionaries could set up on their stations. As a consequence, during the first decades of mission activity in the north-eastern seaboard regions of

<sup>22</sup> The services rendered other than diplomatic errands included the practice of amateur medicine. Other esteemed secular skills demanded from the missionaries were carpentry and construction. Apart from that, prospects of trade appear to have attracted many people to mission stations. “Possibly such visible secular benefits prompted many Zulu notables to ask for missionaries.” (N. Etherington, 1978): 79.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*: 49.

<sup>24</sup> J. W. Colenso, “Visit to a Modern Missionary Station at Edendale, Natal, South Africa”. *Natal Journal*, Vol 1, no 4, 1857; quoted in S. Meintjes, *Aspects of Ideological Formation Amongst the Kholwa of Edendale in Nineteenth Century Natal*, African Seminar (Cape Town: Centre for African Studies, 1988): 5.

South Africa, the lines of demarcation between Christian communities and heathen African communities grew increasingly distinct.

Having outlined the political and social context of early colonial and missionary activity in Natal, I will now turn my attention to the individuals who came to live at the mission stations and who, by the 1890s, had emerged to form the elite class of *amakholwa*.

## 2.2 Becoming *Amakholwa*

Setting up taxonomies is quite a difficult task as “they are socially constructed and as such subject to a great number of constraints, both material and ideological”.<sup>25</sup> It is safe to say that affiliation to a social group is linked to specific musical interests and in the context of our topic, it is clear that the mission-educated black elite is significantly linked to *amakwaya*, whereas, for example, the migrant labour force is linked to *isicathamiya*. An examination of the socio-political and cultural profile of the black middle class will foster an understanding of this genre. Although Harold Thomas’s findings in his study of *ingoma* dance teams in Durban show that leisure time activities only in part coincided with the taxonomies of social grouping,<sup>26</sup> the case seems to be different with *amakholwa*. Their leisure time activities were directly linked to issues of identity, resulting in a clear profile of activities, and a clear idea prevailed among the educated African communities as to what activities an educated and progressive African should be engaged in.<sup>27</sup> It is a central argument of this thesis that *amakwaya* performance became an important vehicle for culture in black middle class communities. With such communities drawing their members mainly from the highest social strata of the urban educated class, their choral practice manifests a strong inclination towards competition, self-transformation and progress.

### 2.2.1 Social Stratification

The formation of social structures is usually caused by new classes growing out of the existing ones. In the case of South Africa, this appears to be only half the truth, as external agencies, often characterised by an interventionist approach and imperial power relations, promoted and at times even enforced a colonial society that gave rise to the formation of new classes before older hierarchies had disappeared. Ambivalence was a characteristic experience of the mission-educated African on both a social and an individual level. A new social order marked by both continuity and disjuncture in their social, political and ideological practices and values was the result of an “articulation of a new capitalist mode of production with older forms of production, class and property relations, political authority, and ideology”.<sup>28</sup> For the mission-educated Africans, this experience was contradictory because of their growing dependence on the colonial political economy and the colonial state, on the one hand, and the indifference, at times dislike, of the colonists for educated blacks, on the other.

According to the present Music Director of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (S.A.B.C.) in Johannesburg, Thulasizwe Nkabinde, people in the community “were divided into school-goers and those who stuck to their traditional roots”.<sup>29</sup> A closer examination reveals that

<sup>25</sup> V. Erlmann, *Nightsong: Performance, Power and Practice in South Africa*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996): 110.

<sup>26</sup> H. J. Thomas, *Ingoma Dancers and their Response to Town: a Study of Ingoma Dance Troupes Among Zulu Migrant Workers in Durban*. Thesis submitted for the degree of Bachelor’s honours (Durban: University of Natal, 1988): 44.

<sup>27</sup> An extensive examination of leisure time activities can be found in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

<sup>28</sup> S. Marks, 1986: 1.

<sup>29</sup> Personal communication with Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Johannesburg, November 21, 2000.



during the second half of the nineteenth century there was a gradual emergence of at least three distinct socio-economic groups from among the South African black population. The following Zulu terminology is indicative of this distinct division of social strata:<sup>30</sup>

<i>Amabhinca</i>	those who are traditionalists, remaining very close to their tribal way (also <i>amaquaba</i> or <i>izicholo</i> ).
<i>Amakholwa</i>	those who follow Western ideologies and are generally Christians.
<i>Amagxagxa</i>	those who borrow ideologies from both of the previous groups (neo-traditionalists). <sup>31</sup>

By far the largest group is made up of the *amagxagxa*. They occupy a rather insecure position between non-Christian traditionalists and mission school Africans. Because they have to some extent been influenced by the Western societies but not highly educated, one might also call them neo-traditionalists.<sup>32</sup> Coplan calls them the “dressed people” or *abaphakathi*, “those in the middle”.<sup>33</sup>

*Amakholwa* (from Zulu: *khohwa* – to believe) followed the teachings of the missionaries in so far as they “aspired to be like the English”,<sup>34</sup> and therefore resolved to reside on mission land. For them, education played a major role and they readily adopted European and later African-American “culture”. They regarded themselves as progressive and “deliberately and willingly changed their behaviour patterns and learned a new life style”.<sup>35</sup> Crucial to this cultural shift, as Nkabinde explains, was the adoption of “a new [first] name, which was a Christian name; Western cloth, which was no longer traditional cloth; and doing away with tradition, for example, the ancestors; and the music that they sang was no longer traditional music”.<sup>36</sup> The designation is still in use today, as Langa Nkosi confirms: “*Amakholwa*, those are church goers or Christians... if you are a Christian, you are called *ikhohwa* as compared to somebody who did not understand gods as the whites understanding or Christ as the whites understanding”.<sup>37</sup>

The antonym to *amakholwa* is *amaqaba*, meaning the “unbelievers”. According to Professor Mzilikazi Khumalo, Head of the Department of African Languages at the University of the Witwatersrand until 1997, “*iqaba*... meant in older terms somebody who is not very polite, not very well behaved. So it had this negative connotations. And then *iqaba* got to be called a non-believer by the ‘new ones’”.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>30</sup> In the Eastern Cape Colony a similar division was in existence in which Africans were labelled either as “school people” (*abantu basesikolweni*) or “red-people” (*abantu ababomvu*) or “blanket people”. The “school people” were those who had entered the cash economy, received formal education, had changed to the Christian belief or had otherwise assimilated prominent aspects of European culture. The “red people” maintained the old and familiar traditional patterns of life. For a detailed discussion refer to R. H. Davis, “School vs. Blanket and Settler: Elijah Makiwane and the Leadership of the Cape School Community”, *African Affairs: Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 78. (London: Oxford University Press, 1979): 12.

John Tengo Jabavu also saw three classes among the Cape Africans, but describes them in a slightly different way: those who maintained an “average European mode of living” with an economic position, educational attainments, and social values (the school elite); “[t]he more civilised who endeavour to improve themselves but are, as yet, unequal to keep up the European standard” (the larger school community) and finally “the raw element” (*Imvo ZabaNtsundu*, March 18, 1901). For further discussion see: P. Mayer, *Townsmen or Tribesmen* (Cape Town, 1971): 3-4, 20ff.

<sup>31</sup> M. Boon, 1996: 47-8

<sup>32</sup> B. Mthethwa, “The Songs of A. A. Kumalo”. *Papers Presented at the 6<sup>th</sup> Symposium on Ethnomusicology* (Grahamstown: International Library of African Music, 1987): 28.

<sup>33</sup> D. Coplan, *In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre*. (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985): 264.

<sup>34</sup> Personal communication with Langa Nkosi, Johannesburg, July 20, 2000.

<sup>35</sup> Bonnie B. Keller quoted in R. H. Davis, 1979: 12.

<sup>36</sup> Personal communication with Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Johannesburg, November 21, 2000.

<sup>37</sup> Personal communication with Langa Nkosi, Johannesburg, July 20, 2000.

<sup>38</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, November 20, 2000.

Vera Maria Kubeka confirms that *iqaba* was also used to designate the

‘old ones’, who dressed in *ibheshu* (the skin buttock-covering worn by men) and the women dressed in *isidwaba* (a leather kilt, worn from waist to knee) and *inkehli* or *isicholo*<sup>39</sup> (the high head dress or top knot of an engaged or married women). They had the big holes in their ears, were walking without shoes and didn’t go to school.<sup>40</sup>

It is interesting to note that Khumalo calls *amakholwa* “new ones”, implying therefore that this group emerged as a new force in society from the older traditional social structure (those whom Kubeka referred to as the ‘old ones’).

The development of a new class of westernised and educated Africans was marked by ambiguity. From the available literature dealing with the *amakholwa* it is clear that historians have formed two quite distinct impressions of the early twentieth century Zulu Christians. The first is that of a scorned minority that was left out of both the black traditional communities and the white communities. Here the early converts are portrayed as the “flotsam and jetsam” of black society washed up on the mission stations, their motivation to convert and settle on mission land being primarily nurtured by the fact that they had no other place to go.<sup>41</sup> The second impression, however, is quite different, depicting black middle class communities and the mission-educated black elite as new emergent urbanised leaders.<sup>42</sup> Members of the black middle class are portrayed as influential personalities who rose to positions of authority within the wider Zulu society, playing a crucial role in forming political parties.<sup>43</sup>

A closer look shows that these two contradictory perceptions belong to successive periods in the history of the black middle class, with the turning point around 1900. The question that needs to be answered in this context is what led to this remarkable transformation. It seems that, as we will later see in more detail, the isolated position of the black middle class between the white and the traditional black communities is partly responsible for this transformation. Moreover, a series of revivals initiated in the late 1890s, remembered as the “Great Revivals”, were critical in the evolution of black middle class identity and in the emergence of a new self-confidence. These revivals triggered momentous changes in the black middle class community from an “inwardly focused people content with their own pursuits, to a group intent, much to the colonial power’s chagrin, on bringing as many of the surrounding traditionalist into the fold as possible”.<sup>44</sup> This moving of themselves into the elite position they occupied in the twentieth century provided the black middle class with a solution to the predicament of being scorned and denied entrance into

<sup>39</sup> The term *isicholo* describes the high headdress of a married woman. However, Thulasizwe Nkabinde used this term in a more general sense to describe those who adhere to their traditional roots: “*isicholo* are those, who are not civilised.” Personal communication with Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Johannesburg, November 21, 2000.

<sup>40</sup> Personal communication with Vera Maria Kubeka, Durban, January 11, 2001.

<sup>41</sup> N. Etherington, 1978: 67.

<sup>42</sup> See for instance M. Boon, 1996; R. Houle, *Constructing an amaKholwa Community: Cattle and the Creation of a Zulu Christianity*, MA Thesis, (University of Wisconsin-Madison: 1998); Nicholas Cope, *To Bind the Nation: Solomon kaDinuzulu and Zulu Nationalism, 1913-1933* (Pietermaritzburg: 1993); S. Marks, *Ambiguities of Dependence*, 1986: particularly Chapter 2.

<sup>43</sup> Looking at the leaders of the African National Congress confirms this picture. Matthews notes in his memoirs: “Rev Canon Calata and Z. K. himself, so long leaders in the Cape, were devout men, as was Chief Luthuli in Natal and Dr Xuma in the Transvaal. ... Many of the younger leaders also were, and continued to be, professing Christians”. (M. Wilson, *Freedom for my People. The Autobiography of Z. K. Matthews: Southern Africa 1901 to 1968*. Cape Town: Africasouth Paperbacks, 1986): 194.

<sup>44</sup> R. Houle, “Becoming Amakholwa: Revival and the formation of group identity on the stations of the American Zulu Mission, 1890-1910”, paper presented at the University of Natal, Durban, 2001. Houle attempts a first analysis of this important transformation of identity, ascribing it to some extent to a religious revival started by the American Zulu Mission.

Western society when at the same time acceptance back into traditional society seemed undesirable to all concerned and thus improbable.

### 2.2.2 “Multi-ethnic Melting Pots”: The Residents of Mission Stations

Few converts came from the vicinity of the mission station seeking security and acceptance, which they could not find at home. Some were outcasts from family and community, and some had no homes and nowhere else to go because their communities had ceased to exist.<sup>45</sup> If a missionary managed to win converts from nearby, he generally acquired the unstable, the rebellious or the rejected since only they were eager to venture into the challenging new life the missionaries were offering.<sup>46</sup>

Those who came to the mission stations seeking land, security and employment, often had the appearance of freaks: outcasts from traditional society and detribalised people from all parts of South Africa.<sup>47</sup> Among them were young lovers seeking freedom to marry, the old who were unable to care for themselves and not supported by kinship networks, individuals fleeing witchcraft accusations and therefore certain death, and young girls escaping arranged marriages.<sup>48</sup>

Many entered the church for economic reasons. In Natal, the Africans’ most pressing secular needs were wages and land. After Shepstone had introduced his land policy, purchasing a share of the mission reserve land was the only way for Africans to become landowners. Owning land to start farming promised economic security. While Etherington acknowledges that a few *amakholwa* came into the Christian fold for purely religious reasons, he argues that “land was an even greater incentive for Africans to draw near to the church”. Generally there was a “primacy of secular needs”.<sup>49</sup> It seems to be no coincidence that the stations with the best land grew into the largest communities. This is the case, for instance, with the mission station of Edendale, which became one of the most important stations in Natal.<sup>50</sup>

With potential converts coming from every corner of South Africa, the mission stations became melting pots where converts lost old identities and developed into “simply African Christians”.<sup>51</sup> Mission communities were ethnically extremely varied, with individuals or whole families coming from all over southern Africa and settling on the mission stations. An examination of Edendale reveals a community whose members “epitomised in their individual backgrounds the diversity of

<sup>45</sup> N. Etherington, 1978: 93.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*: 67.

<sup>47</sup> N. Etherington compiled biographical data on 748 individuals mentioned by name as “station residents” in missionary manuscripts and publications as well as in official documents. These statistics show the characteristics of residents arranged according to their denominational affiliation. Employment was the predominant reason Africans came to the mission station; some also sought after refuge, having been accused of witchcraft or were escaping a distasteful marriage arrangement. Other motives include interest in religion or following relatives who had already settled at the mission station. (N. Etherington, 1978): 181.

<sup>48</sup> In the Inanda Papers, manuscript collection (Killie Campbell Library), there are reports of girls arriving at the Inanda Seminary. Various motives for joining the school are recorded.

<sup>49</sup> N. Etherington, 1978: 90-1. In painting a picture of the early mission stations as sanctuaries for outcasts, Etherington implies the existence of a strict dividing line between *amakholwa* and their neighbours. This boundary, however, seems to have been much more indistinct. Converts brought their family members to live on the mission station. Traditionalist households sent one or two children from a homestead for education, but occasionally renegades returned home after conversion and while many went back to traditional ways, they retained some aspects of their newly adopted beliefs (see: R. Houle, 2000: 2).

<sup>50</sup> For a very good and detailed study of the development of the black freehold land tenure at Edendale, see S. Meintjes, 1988: especially Chapter 3.

<sup>51</sup> N. Etherington, “Christianity and African Society in Nineteen-century Natal”. In *Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times to 1990: a New History*. Andrew Duminy and Bill Guest, eds. (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1989): 296.

ethnic origin which characterised all the early mission communities of southeast Africa".<sup>52</sup> With the yearning to satisfy their special material, social and psychological needs as a common ground, they soon grew to a community that developed strong bonds among its individuals, who, as indicated already, were not originally the prosperous and elite members of African society. Co-operation within black middle class communities, however, springing from common goals, intermarriage, and the special, shared experience of mission station life, welded men and women of various backgrounds into one people and provided the potential for enormous development. The last three decades of the nineteenth century saw the social and political rise of the black middle class and by the end of the century it had become numerous enough to be "self-sustaining and self-confident enough to move out from under missionary sponsorship to paternalism".<sup>53</sup> Becoming increasingly conscious of their potential and their special situation within colonial society, black middle class communities around the country sought to give expression to their new identity.

Diversity continued to be a characteristic of mission stations in the twentieth century,<sup>54</sup> and the student population at the mission schools may be seen as a reflection of the communities living on or close to the mission stations. Z. K. Matthews reports of his days at Lovedale:<sup>55</sup>

As I look back on it now, it seems that the most valuable experience at Lovedale was the intimate contact it provided among boys and girls from different groups and different parts of the country. This contact rubbed away whatever I still had of the strange notions one grows up with about members of groups with different languages and customs. I got to know some of these languages, Xhosa and Zulu. I made fast friends with boys of these other peoples and learned through them that my own Tswana were not the only true humans in the universe. I had known such contacts before in the streets of the Kimberley Location where, in my boyhood, I had played with all sorts of children, but when evening came we parted. Here at Lovedale, we lived and worked together and, in doing so, overcame in large measure our ignorance and our prejudices about each other.<sup>56</sup>

In the 1870s, nearly 400 students were taught at Lovedale, which from this time onwards became the principal training ground for educated Christian African leadership.<sup>57</sup> Among the students

<sup>52</sup> N. Etherington, 1978: 113. Note that Etherington is referring to the mission communities that lived in the north-eastern seaboard regions of South Africa.

<sup>53</sup> R. H. Davis, 1979: 13.

<sup>54</sup> See also *Iso Lomuxi* (November 1942: 18).

<sup>55</sup> Zachariah Keodirelang (Z. K.) Matthews was born at Winter's Rush near Kimberley in 1901 to parents of Tswana ancestry. The surname Matthews (his ancestral surname was Dinku) was adopted as part of his paternal grandfather's conversion to Christianity. The first African to graduate with a BA at Fort Hare and the first to graduate with an LLB degree at Unisa, he was an outstanding academic and politician in twentieth century South Africa. Matthews was educated at Lovedale and was a product of the liberal and humanitarian mission education. He was implacably opposed to the injustices of colonialism and Apartheid. Willem Saayman described his ambiguous contribution to South African Christianity as "subversive subservience: while employing many colonial 'tropes' he did not 'follow the script' consistently, but undermined it in various ways. In other words, while acknowledging the positive contribution of missionaries, he was highly critical of their injustices. Matthews' influence was important: Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Robert Sobukwe and Mangosuthu Buthelezi were among the students who attended Fort Hare during ZK's tenure as lecturer in Social Anthropology and Native Law, and later as Acting-Principal. Moreover, he influenced students who were to assume leadership positions in the anti-colonial struggles in South Africa and in the independent states of sub-Saharan Africa". (W. A. Saayman, *Subversive Subservience: Z. K. Matthews and Missionary Education in South Africa*, originally published in *Missionalia*, journal of the Southern African Missiological Society, available on the Internet:

<http://www.geocities.com/missionalia/saayman.htm>). See also: W. A. Saayman, *A Man with a Shadow: The Life and Times of Professor Z. K. Matthews*, (Pretoria: Unisa Press); T. J. Jukes, *Opposition in South Africa: The Leadership of Z. K. Matthews, Nelson Mandela, and Stephen Biko* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1995) and his autobiography: Z. K. Matthews, *Freedom for my People*, M. Wilson ed. (Cape Town: David Philip, 1983).

<sup>56</sup> Z. K. Matthews, 1986: 35-6.

<sup>57</sup> R. H. Davis, 1979: 16.

were about seventy Europeans who had gradually joined the establishment because the education was “much better than anything else”.<sup>58</sup> The racial composition of the school can be seen by looking at the national census taken on the night of May 5-6, 1936, and it also reveals the wide area from which Lovedale drew its pupils. The 1154 students registered at the school were of the following ethnic extraction: 77 Europeans, 950 Bantu, 114 Coloured, and 13 Indians. The distribution of those described as “Bantu” shows that they represented no fewer than twenty-five different ethnic groups, drawn not only from all parts of the Union of South Africa but also from as far away as Kenya.<sup>59</sup> The fact that Lovedale became “in a very real sense a kind of microcosm of complex South Africa, with its great diversities of race and people... was not accidental”, in the view of the Rev. R. H. Shepherd, Principal of Lovedale between 1942 and 1955, “but the result of the declared and traditional policy of Lovedale”.<sup>60</sup> Obviously, the experiences at the schools and training institutions resulted in shared knowledge, mutual living, acquaintance and friendship, by changing traditional attitudes. Later these experiences would provide the black middle class community with the basis for co-operation in many other spheres of life.

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the multi-ethnic community of mission-educated blacks turned into a socially and politically powerful elite. Black elite communities became aware of the fact that diversity was an important driving force in their development. Diversity together with a “keen sense of isolation from both their white and their black neighbours acted as a powerful spur to material and educational advancement”.<sup>61</sup> More than any other single factor, the multi-ethnic character of the mission stations and schools made the black middle class a special element in the African population.<sup>62</sup> That the African Christians were aware of this fact becomes clear in their reactions to the events in the 1950s when the Nationalist Government seized control over education by passing the Bantu Education Act.<sup>63</sup> Before a Parliamentary Select Committee, set up to examine the feasibility of colleges being designated for each ethnic group, Matthews stressed the fact that “Fort Hare had experienced no difficulties, but much advantage, by drawing on students from different ‘ethnic’ groups”.<sup>64</sup> When in 1959 Fort Hare was forced by the apartheid government to close, Z. K. Matthews was called upon to speak at the ceremony on behalf of past students. On this occasion, he again emphasised the importance of the integration of students of different racial and cultural backgrounds:

Right here, within the boundaries of South Africa ... Fort Hare has striven to show during the last 40 years that it is possible for people of different racial backgrounds, different cultural backgrounds, different political affiliations, and different faiths, to live together in amity. I believe that this unhappy country will not become a happy country until that lesson is learnt ... I [feel] that sooner or later the lesson must be learnt or South Africa will come to disaster.<sup>65</sup>

The Nationalist Government, however, felt threatened by the development of an educated, politically active and outspoken group of Africans. Education in the liberal atmosphere at the mission schools, which led to political awareness and class-consciousness, was a thorn in the flesh of the Apartheid government. Consequently, the Nationalist Government seized control of Lovedale and

<sup>58</sup> J. H. Davidson ed., *South Africa by Anthony Trollope: a Reprint of the 1878 Edition* (Cape Town: Balkema, 1973): 172.

<sup>59</sup> R. H. W. Shepherd, *Lovedale South Africa 1824-1955*, (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1971): 111-2.

<sup>60</sup> R. H. W. Shepherd, 1971: 112.

<sup>61</sup> N. Etherington, 1978: 115.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*: 134.

<sup>63</sup> For some important aspects concerning the take-over of African education by the state see *Ilanga Lase Natal* (September 23, 1944) and (May 19, 1951).

<sup>64</sup> Z. K. Matthews, 1986: 196.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*: 197.



other schools in 1954, of Fort Hare in 1959, and expropriated the Federal Theological Seminary near Fort Hare in 1975. In 1953 Hendrik Verwoerd, then Minister of Native Affairs, said in the House of Assembly: "Natives ... should have training in accordance with their opportunities in life". In the Senate, in 1954, he criticised the former educational system of having created a class of Africans which "feels that its spiritual, economic and political home is among the civilised community of South Africa".<sup>66</sup>

I will now turn to two key documents, which I see as revealing the process of identity formation: first, the Applications for Exemption in the second half of the nineteenth century, and, second, a book by an African writer, T. D. Mveli Skota, *The African Yearly Register*, published in the early 1930s. In both documents, we can find an indication of the aspirations of the emerging middle class.

### 2.2.3 Employment and the Work Place: Farming, Teaching and the Ministry

*...most of the people who come from missionary schools and missionary stations would train to be teachers, to be nurses and the like.*<sup>67</sup>

The list of Applications for Exemption from Native Law provides some indication of the most common forms of employment among the converts to Christianity.<sup>68</sup> Most of the applicants were employed as farmers and traders, often with an involvement in the ministry or teaching. Other important occupations were in the field of transport or the skilled trades. Although there were unskilled labourers amongst the converts, they were only a small minority.

Along with the Applications for Exemption, there is a curious publication that allows an interesting insight into *amakholwa* community. In the 1930s T. D. Mveli Skota compiled a book entitled *The African Yearly Register*, which he designed as "an illustrated National Biographical Dictionary (Who's Who) of Black Folks in Africa"<sup>69</sup> Mveli Skota, at that time General Secretary of the ANC, divided his publication into three parts:

- 1) pages 1-109 present the biographies (with photographs) of famous deceased Africans;
- 2) pages 123-289 are "Who's Who" portraits (also with photographs) of living Africans;
- 3) pages 297-449 give details of organised African bodies, religious, social, educational and political.

As we will see in chapter 4 (see page 93) in more detail, this publication was more than just a register of prominent and "progressive" Africans. It represents a "lifelong effort to lend the black elite historical depth and a consciousness of its own reality and role".<sup>70</sup> Skota's *Register*, though

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.: 198.

<sup>67</sup> Personal communication with Langa Nkosi, Johannesburg, July 20, 2000.

<sup>68</sup> The Applications for Exemption from Native Law are housed at the Natal Archives, Pietermaritzburg; see especially SNA 121-202, 1/1/29 and 1/6/10; another interesting document is Isaac Caluza's Application for Exemption from the Land Act (CNC 66, 426/1912).

<sup>69</sup> T. D. M. Skota ed., *The African Yearly Register* (Johannesburg: R. L. Esson and Co. The Orange Press, 1932?); A similar register was published much earlier, in 1887, by James Stewart. It provides biographical material of 2,000 Africans and focuses mainly on Lovedale alumni. (J. Stewart ed., *Lovedale Past and Present: A Register of 2,000 Names*, Lovedale, 1887).

<sup>70</sup> J. T. Campbell, "T. D. Mveli Skota and the Making and Unmaking of a Black Elite" in *The Making of Class*. History Workshop February 9-14, 1987 (Johannesburg, University of the Witwatersrand): 2.

published in the 1930s, proves very valuable for my discussion as it contains a number of biographies of early missionary converts. For example, Skota includes the biographies of a number of people we have already become acquainted with in connection with the choral ventures of the African Native Choir. In fact, most of the members of the Choir are included, and the ideological purpose of the tour runs through the *Register* like a basic theme. Moreover, the fact that the publication is based on a historical continuum allows us to see certain trends in the development of black South Africans. For the moment, we will look at the professions of the persons mentioned in the first section of the book (biography of famous deceased Africans):<sup>71</sup>

Clergymen	32	(37,6%)	Councillors	02	(2,4%)
Chiefs	24	(28,2%)	Clerks	02	(2,4%)
Entrepreneurs	06	(7,1%)	Teachers	01	(1,2%)
Agents-at-law	04	(4,7%)	Captains [petty chiefs]	01	(1,2%)
Interpreters	03	(3,5%)	Printers	01	(1,2%)
Women	03	(3,5%)	Compound Managers	01	(1,2%)
(unspecified occupation)			Unclassified	01	(1,2%)
Lawyers	02	(2,4%)	Total	85	
Journalists	02	(2,4%)			

Analysis of the second section (“Who’s Who of living Africans”) reveals the following occupational statistics:

Teachers	48	(16,5%)	Nurses	07	(2,4%)
Clerks	36	(12,4%)	Doctors	06	(2,1%)
Entrepreneurs	29	(10,0%)	Lawyers	04	(1,4%)
Clergy (Established)	26	(8,9%)	Carpenters	03	(1,0%)
Women	18	(6,2%)	Caretakers	02	(0,7%)
(occupation usually not stated)			“Native Doctors”	02	(0,7%)
Chiefs	15	(5,1%)	Compound Headmen	02	(0,7%)
Interpreters	15	(5,1%)	Law Agents	01	(0,3%)
Farmers	10	(3,4%)	Others	21	(7,2%)
Clergy (Separatist)	09	(3,1%)	Unclassified	22	(7,6%)
Journalists	08	(2,7%)	Total	291	
Secretaries	07	(2,4%)			

Among the number of those who qualified to be included in Skota’s *Register* teachers and clergymen emerge at the top. The African Native Choir, as we have seen already in the first chapter, consisted of devout Christians, most of them mission-educated graduates from the Cape. Hence it is not surprising that the ministry and teaching should constitute the main vocations of the people mentioned by Skota. A comparison of the two sections (“famous deceased Africans” and “living Africans”) reveals that the latter distinguishes between established churches and separatist churches. This distinction is an indication of the emergence of African-initiated churches, a process linked to emerging Black Nationalism. We have to bear in mind that an important characteristic of separatist churches is the incorporation of traditional African elements, and that mission-educated Africans were originally opposed to these elements, which were regarded by the missionaries as heathen. Pewa confirms that

<sup>71</sup> T. Couzens, *The New African: a Study of the Life and Work of H.I.E. Dhlomo* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985): 14-5.



[T]he struggle went on between those that looked upon themselves as 'civilized' and those that were 'uncivilized'. The 'better' class were proud to be members of one of the main line churches like the Methodist Church or the Roman Catholic Church. Those that belonged to any of the Zionist Separatist churches were looked down upon as uneducated. Belonging to one of the churches that were led by the missionaries was a sign of being westernized.<sup>72</sup>

This 'struggle' seems to have continued well into the second half of the twentieth century, as A. Vilakazi claimed in the 1960s that Christian Churches served "as a very important index of social status in the Zulu society, and the Church to which one belongs, Protestant or Catholic, Mission or Separatist, English-speaking or Afrikaans-speaking, is of tremendous importance to the people".<sup>73</sup>

There are other interesting differences between the statistics of the "Who's Who" of living Africans and those drawn from the biographies of deceased Africans. To begin with, there is a considerable increase in the number of clerks and teachers. Moreover, the second section reveals that farmers and entrepreneurs emerged as an important category. African farmers also availed themselves of the services of a small number of skilled tradesmen, for example, blacksmiths, wagon-makers, carpenters, and masons. Much of the conveyance of goods and products in Natal and Zululand as well as in the Eastern Cape was in the hands of African wagon-owners.<sup>74</sup> All these statistics point to the fact that towards the end of nineteenth century, the members of the black middle class changed their social, political, and economic modes of life.

As the church and the school gained a central meaning for the black middle class communities, the ministry and teaching became highly respected vocations among them.<sup>75</sup> In fact, it was through these institutions that the members of this class distinguished and defined themselves. Those who went into a career in teaching and the ministry constituted the elite. In his autobiography, Matthews affirms the importance of education as an agent of "civilisation" and "progress": "In sum, my parents were responsible for adding four teachers to the small but growing number of Africans who have passed their learning on to others, and our families have multiplied and will increase the promise of the future".<sup>76</sup>

The prestige of a person was directly related to his level of education.<sup>77</sup> For the black middle class proficiency and fluency in English were regarded as a sure sign of a good education. Vilakazi remarks: "...anyone who has not had a good education can only speak 'Kitchen English'... English is considered the language of the learned; and in the field, everybody who wanted to impress me with the fact of his education would always address me in English".<sup>78</sup>

<sup>72</sup> E. Pewa 1995: 28; for a discussion on separatist churches see especially B. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961); for a very good survey of Pentecostal churches in South Africa: A. Anerson, *Tumelo: The faith of African Pentecostals in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 1993). Furthermore, A. Vilakazi, *The Revitalisation of African Society* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1986); B. Mthethwa, "Western Elements in Shembe's Religious Dances". *Papers Presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Symposium on Ethnomusicology* University of Natal-Durban 1982 (Grahamstown: International Library African Music, 1982):34-7; and E. L. Roberts, *Shembe, the man and his work*, Thesis submitted for the degree of Masters, Pretoria: University of South Africa; and "The Shembe Way" (*Sunday Times*, November 19, 2000).

<sup>73</sup> A. Vilakazi, *Zulu Transformations: A Study of the Dynamics of Social Change*. (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1962): 99.

<sup>74</sup> R. H. Davis, 1979: 14. See also J. Stewart, *Lovedale, Past and Present*, 1887; and T. D. M. Skota, *The Yearly Register*, 1937.

<sup>75</sup> The register compiled by J. Stewart also reveals quite a high number of teachers: Fifteen per cent of the living Lovedale alumni mentioned were teachers working in rural areas. See James Stewart, *Lovedale, Past and Present*, 1887.

<sup>76</sup> Z. K. Matthews, 1986: 14.

<sup>77</sup> A. Vilakazi, 1962: 140. While working with *amakwaya* groups I became aware that, up to the present day, education is a prevalent factor by which someone's prestige is measured. For a detailed discussion of the importance of education for black middle class communities see Chapter 3.2.2.

<sup>78</sup> A. Vilakazi, 1962: 109, 140.

The importance of English was a central issue in a debate between Herbert Dhlomo, who controlled *Ilanga* for over a decade, from 1943 on, and Walter Nhlapo, the Editor of *Bantu World*. Dhlomo, who wrote much of the English half of the newspaper, suggested that “the Zulu section may have been more important since it reflected more clearly the aspirations of the people”.<sup>79</sup> Nhlapo, however, was sure that “the important things in the Bantu newspaper are in English, and hardly any young educated African writes in the newspapers in a Bantu language”.<sup>80</sup>

The progress of *amakholwa* in the economic sphere assumed a visible form, in clothing and in “upright houses”, as I have already claimed in Chapter 1.2.2 (see page 25). It was also evident in their transformation of farming and other economic practices, previously geared to subsistence.<sup>81</sup> Within a short time, the religious and educational progress of black Christians was complemented by an economic change. One of the most outstanding economic achievements was a sugar co-operative established near an Amanzimtoti mission station, south of Durban. In 1865 the American missionary David Rood reported to the American Board Mission:

Their sugar mill was completed and set in operation about six weeks ago since which time the little valley north of the station has witnessed a visible [*siz*] triumph of Christianity and civilisation which the most sceptical cannot gainsay. Men with black skins who a few years ago were naked boys ... are now competing with the white man in manufacturing sugar.<sup>82</sup>

Competing in business and farming with the white man and excelling him became symbolic for the educated black elite. Whereas migrant workers had consistently gravitated toward employment in the manufacturing industry and were mainly employed as labourers and unskilled workers in factories, kitchens and suburban gardens, the *amakholwa* elite aspired to upward social movement.<sup>83</sup>

In leisure activities, a clear relation between vocational and musical interests can also be observed. Whereas *isicathamiya* choirs to the present day recruit their members from the group of wage labourers who in most cases migrate between their rural homes and the urban centres, the choristers of *amakwaya* groups originate from the more stable social strata of black Christians who were educated at the mission stations. *Amakwaya* groups, as we have seen in the example of the African Native Choir, were eager to communicate their commitment to Western values and behavioural patterns in their concert appearances by means of specific performance practices such as dress and repertoire.

Ideas of westernisation, modernisation and progress in Africa are closely associated with urbanisation. Centres like Kimberley, Johannesburg and Durban were of course important places in this process and quite a number of *amakholwa* were town-dwellers. Most of them, however, did not live in the towns themselves but in the rural areas where they tilled the soil and became farmers. This becomes obvious when we look at the members of the African Native Choir who besides being devout Christians were also members of exceedingly prosperous farming communities.<sup>84</sup> Having severed their ties with the traditional agricultural economy and adopted new farming

<sup>79</sup> T. Couzens, 1985: 351.

<sup>80</sup> “Busy Bee”, *Ilanga Lase Natal*, June 30, 1951; quoted in T. Couzens, 1985: 351.

<sup>81</sup> For a description of the traditional Zulu economy see A. Vilakazi, 1962: 111ff. and M. Wilson and L. Thompson, *Oxford History of South Africa*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969-1971): Vol. I, 107-16.

<sup>82</sup> Rood to Anderson, July 31, 1865, ABC 15.4, VII, quoted in N. Etherington, 1978: 121.

<sup>83</sup> When the economic conditions of the emerging black middle class as a result of political restrictions (for example, the 1913 Land Act) got more and more difficult, they responded by placing their hopes on an increase in social mobility in education rather than on economic enterprises. (D. Coplan, 1985: 27).

<sup>84</sup> V. Erlmann, “Africa Civilised, Africa Uncivilised: Local Culture, World-System and South Africa”. *Papers Presented at the 11<sup>th</sup> Symposium on Ethnomusicology*. University of Natal-Durban (Grahamstown: International Library African Music, 1993): 39.

methods, they were able to compete with white farmers. Orienting themselves towards an agricultural capitalism, *amakholwa* needed land to pursue their agricultural experiments. Changing from subsistence farming to production for profit entailed an urgent need for more land. Soon it became apparent that Mission Reserves alone could not meet the demand. Before 1880 land was auctioned on the open market and Africans were able to buy land on the same conditions as the white settlers.<sup>85</sup> In the 1880s and 1890s, largely in response to settler interests, Crown lands were made available for public purchase. *Amakholwa* started to purchase land all over Natal.<sup>86</sup> Besides having its economic consequences, this purchase of land had psychological consequences for the new black landowners. The possession of land significantly contributed to altered perceptions of the meaning of 'home' (*ekhaya*) on the part of African Christians.

#### 2.2.4 "Kaya Kulu"<sup>87</sup> (Great Home): the Transformed Meaning of Home

In the previous chapter (2.1, page 37), we have seen how in the nineteenth century, the cataclysmic arrival of the colonisers changed the social and political structure of the north-eastern seaboard regions of South Africa. During these events, many Nguni "found the landscape so altered that every man seemed homeless. White squatters on all sides denied access [to Zulus] to old homelands. New laws suppressed or supplemented the old".<sup>88</sup> In Natal to have land was to have a home, and therefore, for the dispossessed, it was very tempting to turn to mission stations in order to find a new home. In other words, early mission-Africans were often homeless people, who were looking for new space for a transformed identity in response to the changes set off by the socio-political upheavals caused by a complete alteration of traditional structures in the nineteenth century.

For most migrant workers, the situation was quite different, with urban areas, townships and reserve lands being regarded as only temporary spaces and not as 'home'. The formation of *isicathamiya* groups and homeboy associations constituted two major escapes from the predicament in which the migrant workers found themselves. In more recent times, however, the depressed situation of South Africa's black rural population has resulted in a situation where the majority of today's black migrant population can best be described as "men of no world".<sup>89</sup> Caluza's song, "Ubunghca" (AmaOxford Bags), already discussed in the previous chapter (see 1.2.2, page 30), tells us about the "young men, who no more go back to their homes". They appear as having been

<sup>85</sup> N. Etherington, 1978: 122

<sup>86</sup> It was not unusual for black farmers to own farms of some hundred acres. Some even purchased several thousands of acres of freehold land. For further details see S. Meintjes 1988: Chapter 10 and J. Lambert, "African Purchases of Crown Lands in Natal, 1881-1903", in *Papers Presented to the Conference on the History of Natal and Zululand* (Durban: University of Natal, July 1985) Vol. 2.

<sup>87</sup> Shadrach F. Zibi, who was a teacher, choir conductor and interpreter at the Lovedale Missionary Institution and "one of the most progressive chiefs in South Africa," named his settlement *Kaya Kulu* (The Great Home). See T. D. M. Skota, 193?: 289.

<sup>88</sup> N. Etherington, 1978: 92

<sup>89</sup> V. Erlmann, 1996: 106. Home, *ikhaya lami*, is also one of the key issues of *isicathamiya* performances. "Loneliness and nostalgia" were a central experience for migrant workers who started the practice of male choral singing at hostels in the urban centres of South Africa. Homeboy-ties and singing helped them cope with their situation and gave relief from the tedium of work. However, there is an important difference between the experience of the migrants and the mission-Africans. *Amakholwa* were looking for a new home because often their ties to the rural no longer existed or had been given up to a certain degree. The migrant workers, however, became 'unhomely' because of labour policies. Their experience of urban spaces was a confused one because they were constantly oscillating between rural home and town, becoming "the modern wanderers of a world in which the dichotomies of the past – here and there, dwelling and travel, centre and periphery – increasingly become enmeshed with each other." (V. Erlmann, 1996: 110); for a detailed discussion of the significance of 'home' for the *isicathamiya* performers see V. Erlmann, 1996: especially Chapters four and five.

trapped in the urban black townships and mission reserves, and as having “forgotten [their] relations” in the sense of having left their traditions behind. *Amakholwa*, by contrast, though coming from a similar background, had decided to take a completely different route. The majority never attempted to maintain strong relationships with the rural areas. Moreover, they strove to establish their new homes on mission lands. The early black Christians were caught in a predicament: they lost their traditional communities but at the same time they were unable to establish ties with the white communities: “We were being taught to live in two worlds, or at least to divide our spirit between two different ways of life, the one in reality abandoned forever, the other offering us no real chance to thrive and grow in a new way”.<sup>90</sup> Mission Africans were therefore desperate to find a space that could offer them a renewed sense of belonging and a new home. For them, the old home was associated with “the dull, the backward, the broken, and the dirty”, whereas the school and the mission environment in general were regarded as “clean, attractive and congenial”.<sup>91</sup> The transformed perception of ‘home’, the result of their breaking away from their traditional and tribal past, was crucial for the black middle class’s development of an ‘elite’ identity.

The Applications for Exemption from Native Law show that nearly all Christian Africans exempted before 1882 were substantial property holders.<sup>92</sup> The transformation in the meaning of land ownership becomes obvious when we look at Edendale near Pietermaritzburg, one of the most important stations offering freehold land for Africans.<sup>93</sup> According to Stephanus Mini, headman at Edendale from 1893 onwards, individual ownership was a foreign concept to Africans: “The Kaffir in his wild state knows nothing about owning land. It is only those Natives who have followed the customs of the whites that know anything of it”.<sup>94</sup> In traditional Zulu society, land could only be “owned tribally”, i.e., it was not owned by individuals but by the community itself.<sup>95</sup> Land is a very important aspect of Zulu social, ritual, and economic values: it is the material basis on which all social relations to the living and the dead are built; it gains an almost mystical significance: “*okhokho bethu sabatshala kulomblaba*” (“we have planted our great-great-ancestors here”).<sup>96</sup>

When the first Africans graduated from the mission stations, many of these traditional assumptions were abandoned. Land ownership for *amakholwa* became very important in enabling them to develop new and distinctive patterns of economic and social interaction. To some extent it created the conditions that eventually altered them from a heterogeneous mixture of outcasts into a homogeneous, contented, and progressive community. For them ‘home’ was no longer located in the remote rural areas and bound to time-honoured social, ritual, and economic values. *Ekhaya* was transferred to the mission station, the mission land, and the reserves where they settled. *Kaya Kulu* (‘the great home’) as Chief Shadrach F. Zibi, who taught for many years at Lovedale, named his settlement in the District of Rustenburg, is one example that shows that mission Africans established a community with new social, religious, and political ties.<sup>97</sup> In that respect, *amakholwa* had a decisive advantage over the migrant workers, who appeared to be ‘unhomely’ and “men of no

<sup>90</sup> Z. K. Matthews, 1986: 15.

<sup>91</sup> A. Vilakazi, 1962: 130.

<sup>92</sup> See applications for Exemption at the Natal Archive SNA 121-202, 1/1/29, 1/6/10.

<sup>93</sup> See S. Meintjes, 1988: Chapter 10.

<sup>94</sup> Evidence (1881-2), J. Allsopp: 26 quoted in S. Meintjes 1988: 342.

<sup>95</sup> There was a clear system of administering and assigning the land to the members of the community: “The chief, who is a trustee, carves it out to the different lineages and each lineage in turn subdivides it and parcels it out among the heads of different *imizi* or ‘kraals’, so that each *indlu* or ‘house’ which constitutes the Zulu nuclear family gets its fields from the lands which have been allocated to the kraal head... Rights over land are not plenary but usufructual”. (A. Vilakazi, 1962: 111-2; see also D. Rycroft “Black South African Urban Music since the 1890’s: Some Reminiscences of Alfred Assegai Kumalo”. *Journal of International Library of African Music*, 1991: 22).

<sup>96</sup> A. Vilakazi, 1962: 112.

<sup>97</sup> See footnote 87, page 52.

world” who had lost their sense of spatial and moral direction and suffered from acute disorientation.<sup>98</sup> The perception of their new environment as *ekhaya* was a necessary part of *amakholwa* establishing themselves as an elite. Building homes at the mission stations on the reserve lands and in the new urban environment provided a basis for their social, political, and cultural advancement. What strikes one about this new life of theirs on the missions is its similarity to colonial family life and even life in rural English villages of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Furthermore, there are parallels not only in the architecture of the houses, but also in the structure of mission settlements.<sup>99</sup> Edendale, for instance, was laid out in streets, with small individual plots separated from one another by fences or walls.<sup>100</sup> There was a social significance in the physical planning of the mission station. Stephanus Mini, headman at Edendale, remarked in the 1880s that the closeness of the houses, often built around the church and the school, united the community.<sup>101</sup>

Home continued to be a key concept for those who had joined the missionaries and lived at the mission station. This becomes clear in Herbert Dhlomo’s poem, “Sweet Mango Tree”, mentioned in the previous chapter (see 1.2.3, page 19), and in a short contribution in *The Torch Bearer* written five years earlier by a student at Ohlange, Annie Mazibuko, which she entitled “Home Sweet Home: Ohlange my Mother, my Father, my Home, Sweet Home”.<sup>102</sup> Albert Luthuli’s perception went beyond ‘home’. For him, Adams College became more than just home, it was a “protected world”: “At Adams College I had no particular cause to look far beyond the walls of the institution. I was, of course, aware of the South African scene, but Adams was in some ways a protected world”.<sup>103</sup> The young Africans who lived within the walls of the mission schools perceived this “protected world” as home not least because of the missionaries’ promise that progress and equality were realisable. Indeed, political, social, and economic events in the outside world, as Luthuli’s comment reveals, did not reach this sheltered space, which went on “defying change” for quite a long time. As I have shown earlier (see Chapter 2.2.2, page 47), the sheltered world was finally destroyed by the National Government in 1954 with the passing of the Bantu Education Act. Luthuli’s perception of a protected world can be applied to the wider space around the mission stations, which for *amakholwa*, became home, their new world, making them unlike the migrant workers who were “men of no world”. The ties that bound them together were their Christian beliefs and their belief in ‘progress’ and in the priority of education.

In order to get a better understanding of the *amakholwa*, the following sections will contrast them with groups they perceived as Other: the traditional Nguni (*amabhinca*) and the white communities.

## 2.3 Images of the Other

Those who eventually established their home at the mission station paid for their economic and social security with compulsory participation in an alien way of life, being isolated from both their traditional and the white communities. A ban on participation in customs inconsistent with

<sup>98</sup> V. Erlmann, 1996: 127.

<sup>99</sup> See A. F. Hattersley, *Portrait of a City* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1951) and A. F. Hattersley, *Portrait of a Colony: the Story of Natal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940). Also M. Louwrens, *Victorian Pietermaritzburg*. Paintings by Mat Louwrens, text by Ruth Gordon (Springfield, Tvl.: Village Publishers, 1984). About population and social structure in Britain: K. W. Wachter, *Statistical Studies of Historical Social Structure* (New York: Academic Press, 1978).

<sup>100</sup> J. W. Colenso, 1857 “Visit to a modern missionary station at Edendale, Natal, S.A”. *Natal Journal*, Vol.1. No.4: 14.

<sup>101</sup> Stephanus Mini, Evidence to the Natal Native Affairs Commission, 1882: 138; quoted from S. Meintjes 1983:11.

<sup>102</sup> *The Torch Bearer* (June 1937: Vol.5, No1): 6.

<sup>103</sup> A. Luthuli, *Let My People Go: An Autobiography* (London: Collins, 1962): 52.

Christianity, strictly imposed on the converts by the missionaries, made things worse. The possibility of practising these customs would have been a means of maintaining social contact with non-Christian kinsmen. Because of the restrictions, however, the mission stations became “islands of acculturation in a traditional sea” that led to the polarisation of *amabhinca* (traditionalists) and *amakholwa*.<sup>104</sup>

Inevitably the black middle class adopted the values and many of the social practices of the missionaries. Industry, thrift, thought for the future – most evident in the emphasis which they learnt to place on education – became characteristic of them as a class. They acquired, in fact, the typical traits of a middle class, which led to their advancement, at least until Apartheid closed down this possibility. Their middle class attitudes and aspirations, almost from the first, aroused the resentment of many of the colonists, who wished to insist that blacks could be no more than a rural or urban proletariat.

The choirs, in which members of this middle class united in purposeful groups, always embodied the middle class values of the group. Even under Apartheid, the performance practice and repertoire, as well as the social organisation of the *amakwaya* groups, retained the class-related characteristics of the bourgeoisie. Choirs, therefore, provided one of the few spaces where these values could survive.

### 2.3.1 Relation to the *Amabhinca* and Bonds to the Past

*We were not allowed to mix up with the surrounding heathens.*<sup>105</sup>

By the 1870s a deep cleavage had occurred within the African population: the division between the traditional Nguni society (*amabhinca*) and those who had converted to Christianity (*amakholwa*) was well demarcated. Mike Boon observes, “...among the *amakholwa*, in particular, there are people who are very opposed to traditionalism, seeing it as pagan, savage and contemptible... They have very high moral standing”.<sup>106</sup> For most of the nineteenth century, however, the traditionalists put up a determined resistance to Christianisation.<sup>107</sup> This can be explained further. Generally traditional Nguni communities imposed significant social constraints on their members, which meant that those who were considering drawing closer to the missionaries were not allowed to do so. This applied to all members of the tribe without exception, even when it came to schooling. Sending children away to school for education would trigger an outcry within the tribe. This was one of the most serious issues, as nothing so clearly distinguished the black middle class from the ‘heathen’ as their hunger for and commitment to education.<sup>108</sup> People ignoring this fact put their social position at risk and faced severe consequences. Etherington reports the story of a Methodist missionary who, not far from Durban, in 1860 made the acquaintance of “a petty chief very friendly to

<sup>104</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 26-7.

<sup>105</sup> Alfred Assegai Kumalo in an interview with David Rycroft. D. Rycroft, “Black South African Urban Music since the 1890’s: Some Reminiscences of Alfred Assegai Kumalo” in *Journal of International Library of African Music*, 1991: 11-12.

<sup>106</sup> M. Boon, 1996: 48.

<sup>107</sup> Their relations with Christian missionaries and black converts showed a very similar pattern in the colony of Natal and Zululand to that in the rest of the Union of South Africa: the “reds” who adhered to the traditional way of life, used the epithet *amagoboka* (‘people having a hole’) to express their view that the converts had “opened a hole in the nation which had allowed its white enemies to gain an entrance”. (R. H. Davis, 1979: 71) Philip Meyer’s publication “Townsmen or Tribesmen” is an exhaustive study of the intra-ethnic differences among the Xhosa, among who were some that identified with the “reds” (traditionalists). His findings show irrefutable evidence of intra-ethnic disdain, which at times resulted in inter-ethnic conflict. (P. Meyer, *Townsmen or Tribesmen*, Cape Town: University Press, 1971).

<sup>108</sup> R. H. Davis, 1979: 13. Also, N. Etherington, 1978: 131.

Christianity who would himself have believed but for his people and great men who told him that by doing he would forfeit his chieftainship and make himself a fool".<sup>109</sup>

These circumstances created difficulties for the missionaries and determined their policies. Missionaries were quite aware of the fact that one of the most important reasons for the resistance of traditional communities to Christianity was the issue of *lobola*. Although missionaries interpreted *lobola* as a purchase and consequently strongly disapproved of it, they accepted this practice on practical grounds.<sup>110</sup> They could not outlaw objectionable practices such as *lobola* if they wished to channel converts to their mission stations. At the centre of this conflict around *lobola* was the "dispute about the relationship between individuals and society on the one hand, and between individuals and forces beyond their material existence on the other".<sup>111</sup> To avoid the payment of *lobola* was not so much a problem as long as both families lived on the mission station and were part of the Christian community. However, when a marriage had to be arranged with girls whose parents still lived in a 'heathen' community, the payment of *lobola* was indispensable. Failing to pay *lobola* would jeopardise or even destroy established relationships of kinship and mutual obligation.

In fact, the struggle involved two conflicting powers: on the one side, the power of the ancestors, and, on the other, the power of God, about whom the missionaries were preaching. The missionaries were determined to free their converts from what they perceived as 'heathen' ideological influences and practices. As a result, early converts found themselves in the predicament of having to resign themselves to a "painful renunciation of the central tenets of their identity as human beings in their own society".<sup>112</sup> To accept Christianity meant completely altering their long-established relationship to society and the ancestors. Therefore it is not surprising that missionaries in the first decades of their work in Zululand and Natal struggled to find converts. By the time of the Natal Native Commission hearings of 1881, the belief among the heathen communities appears to have been firmly established that Christianisation led directly to a deterioration in family relationships. During the hearings it became obvious that it was common opinion amongst traditional communities that it was not a good idea to send children to a mission school because "they are little enough under control now. They are not under authority like we were to our fathers. A son when he is grown up does not give his wages to his father".<sup>113</sup> Members of the community who had turned to missionaries and Christianity were perceived as lost, having fallen out of the social cohesion of traditional African society.

The anger and the disapproval against those who fell prey to the missionaries is expressed in an anonymous poem, "Our Dying Speech", which was published in 1927 under the pseudonym of "Zulu". In this poem, the author mourns the death of the Zulu language for which it blames the westernised elite:<sup>114</sup>

### *Our Dying Speech*

Our customs are condemned by our pastors,  
And our language neglected by the teachers;  
The uneducated Natives are bereaved and depressed  
By the sad loss sustained by their brothers.

<sup>109</sup> J. Jackson Jr. quoted in N. Etherington, 1978: 60.

<sup>110</sup> See for instance Mellen, "Two Marriages". *Echoes from Life and Light*, Vol. III, March 1873, No3: 66.

<sup>111</sup> S. Meintjes, 1988: 60.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.: 61.

<sup>113</sup> Evidence: 217.

<sup>114</sup> *Ilanga*, (July 1, 1927); quoted in T. Couzens, 1985: 53.



'Heathen' Africans made a decisive effort to exclude mission-educated Africans and started to quarantine those communities. The decision "not to intermarry with the Mission Natives, as they have become as white men",<sup>115</sup> resulted in a strict division between Christian and non-Christian communities.

Christian Africans were well aware that traditional "chiefs [did] not desire to have Christians amongst them, and [would] deal with undue severity [towards] them". When Adams met the Zulu king Mpande in 1843, Mpande told him at first that he had told his people to "go to meeting and attend to his [the missionary's] instructions. But the people soon began to call themselves the people of the missionary, and refused to obey me; I had no authority over them – they cast off their allegiance to their king, and were of no use to me".<sup>116</sup> Without doubt there was a conflict of interests as the king was convinced that "the missionary should not have told the people in the beginning that he, the king, could not be their captain".<sup>117</sup> Through this statement, it becomes clear that the king and his chiefs were afraid of losing control over their people. Missionaries ought not to "become the captains" of those who went to the mission stations. *Amakholwa*, however, recognised their missionaries as leaders: a few missionaries were even accorded the title *nkosi* (chief) in addition to the more common *mfundisi* (teacher).<sup>118</sup>

With a few exceptions, the resistance of traditional Nguni against Christianity aimed at preventing the establishment of centres of disloyalty and subversion.<sup>119</sup> As a result, the heathen Africans looked upon members of the mission-educated black middle class as "separate people" and even their own relatives looked upon them "coldly".<sup>120</sup> *Amakholwa* in fact were treated as "dead men or strangers" and quite often, as a final insult, Zulus accorded the mission station residents the same disparaging designation as that which white men gave to all blacks: "they called them *kaffirs*".<sup>121</sup> Their answer to the decision of *amakholwa* to join the mission stations and become converts was to deprive them of the benefits as well as the duties of their Zulu citizenship. In other words, men and women who consented to baptism ceased for all practical purposes to be Zulus: they lost all connections to their tribes once they decided to become converts. In accordance with their new condition, they were not permitted to *khonza* (i.e., to pay homage to the king). Chiefs refused to allocate land to Christians, who could hold property and farm only on mission stations. Finally, there was a strict social exclusion as they were quite shut out from traditional festivals celebrations.

Etherington describes cases reported by missionaries of physical attacks and killings of converts who wished to be baptised.<sup>122</sup> Until the end of the nineteenth century, Christianity and membership of the Zulu nation were mutually exclusive. It is only in the twentieth century that the strict

<sup>115</sup> Testimony of Mahobe, Evidence: 376.

<sup>116</sup> Adams to Anderson, May 30, 1843 (ABC 15.4, II); quoted in N. Etherington, 1978: 75.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> See N. Etherington, 1978: 99.

<sup>119</sup> One exception to the condemnation of Christianity were the Qadi under king Mqhawe, who lived not far from the Inanda mission station. Mqhawe reported that there was 'a whole school' of Christians in his tribe and gave the Inanda mission station a qualified endorsement:

"It is a good thing that children should be taught; it makes men of them. I have a school in my location and I send my children there. I was amongst the first chiefs to have missionaries in my tribe: I was at the school myself, but I left it because it was said that becoming a Christian made people throw away their wives. I do not send my daughters, but they go to the service on Sundays. I am not settled or I would do so. I grew up amongst missionaries and I think it is a good thing to have a good teacher... My uncle became a minister [he is referring to James Dube]". (Testimony of Umaqawe, Evidence: 224, 228); quoted in N. Etherington 1978: 69.

<sup>120</sup> See N. Etherington, 1978: 68.

<sup>121</sup> N. Etherington, 1978: 80.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. 1978: 84-5.

separation and isolation of *amakholwa* ceased. In his autobiography, Matthews tells of his mother, born in Mafeking area where the Barolong lived, who had

wholly blended into her own life the teachings of the Bible and Christian observance and a firm adherence to the familial and communal obligation of her own people's past. Although she had not often been back to the Barolong home since she was a young girl, her information, carefully gleaned from relatives who kept coming to our home, was amazingly up to date. Martha Matthews' home was always open to relatives and friends from the rural areas. Some would even leave their children with her, whom she always treated as her own.<sup>123</sup>

The Matthews family did not receive only 'heathen' relatives and friends, but integrated Christian belief and traditionalism. Apparently, for them, Matthews claims, "there was no conflict because they saw none: in their minds the values common to both had blended and become a whole".<sup>124</sup> The complex past and the continuous struggle to negotiate various influences is reflected in the sectionalised repertoire of *amakwaya* (see Part Three of this thesis).

What, however, was the perception from the side of the white communities? We complete this chapter by a brief look at this.

### 2.3.2 Stance of the White Community

*[The] educated Bantu... is merely an 'imitation-European', a sham who has learned to ape the externals of the white man's ways, but who at heart remains savage.*<sup>125</sup>

In the previous chapter, I have already dealt with some typical Victorian stereotypes. When Anthony Trollope travelled to South Africa in 1877, he had some of these stereotypes in his mind when mentioning the "Kafir warrior who, with his assegai and his red clay, and his courageous hatred was a terrible fellow to see".<sup>126</sup> However, he was quite surprised to see this 'warrior' "with a slate and pencil, wearing his coarse clothing with a jaunty happy air, and doing a sum in subtraction".<sup>127</sup> When witnessing whites' treatment of black South Africans, Trollope was surprised that the white communities of South Africa were more interested in keeping the "native [in his] raw and uneducated state" rather than in educating him. The progress of the mission-educated Africans remained ignored by the colonial authorities.<sup>128</sup> In fact, white farmers and businessmen felt threatened by Africans who worked independently in agriculture or trade, and it was therefore their main

<sup>123</sup> Z. K. Matthews, 1986: 11.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid: 16.

<sup>125</sup> R. F. A. Hoernlé, *Notes on «Assimilation»* (University of the Witwatersrand : Manuscript collection AD 843 B 43.6, undated): 2.

<sup>126</sup> J. H. Davidson, 1973: 175.

<sup>127</sup> Patrick Mühlbauer, who visited South Africa fifty years after Trollope, gained a similar impression: "I came to Natal with no poor expectations in regard to Native Schools, but I must confess that these expectations have not only been fulfilled, but surpassed. I have studied carefully the different school-types from the sub-Primary-School, to the Teachers' Training College, and was struck by the high degree of efficiency everywhere". (*Native Teachers' Journal*, October, 1927): 56f.

<sup>128</sup> The Natal Native Commission, which was set up 1881-82, stated in its report that "any progress made in civilisation by Natives is, generally speaking, so slow that we can hardly expect to be able to trace it as having in any very sensible degree taken place". The report continues: "We think that there is little desire among ordinary Natives for education, but we do not anticipate that there would be opposition to schools being placed in Locations." (Pietermaritzburg: Natal Archives, NCP 8|3|19): 7; 11.

aim to “eliminate competition and obtain labour by proletarianising Africans”.<sup>129</sup> This becomes obvious in a letter to the Editor of *The Star* by a reader who used the pseudonym “English Rebel”: “Why do the churches educate the Native? If they give the Native far higher education, what are the poor whites going to do. Natives are permitted to rush to Johannesburg and do every white man and woman out of their jobs”.<sup>130</sup>

The hostility of white communities to missionaries and their converts was often harsh.<sup>131</sup> Reports of this hostility, which eventually led to physical attacks, go back to the early beginnings of missionary work in South Africa. In her *Cape Journals*, Lady Anne Barnard describes the experiences she had during a visit to the first mission station of the Cape, Genadendal. There the missionaries reported to her that hostility against the missionaries and their black converts took a drastic turn: “We know not how soon the Revenge of the Farmers may take us off, again and again there have been plans laid to *murder us*, the last, when we erected the *Church Bell* ... we were to have been shot with *poisoned arrows* when the congregation was assembled near it”.<sup>132</sup> In his report, Trollope goes on to describe the disapproving attitude of white South Africans towards the black middle class:

Out in the world, as I have said before, among the Europeans who regard the Kafir simply as a Savage to whom pigeon-English has to be talked, it is asserted broadly that all this education leads to no good results – that the Kafir who has sung hymns and learned to do sums is a savage to whose natural and native savagery additional iniquities have been added by the ingenuity of the white philanthropist.<sup>133</sup>

The question of Kafir education, he writes, “is perhaps the most important that has to be solved in South Africa – and it certainly is the one as to which there exists the most violent difference of opinion among those who have lived in South Africa”.<sup>134</sup>

Many members of the white communities took the view that the position of the black African in the economic, social and political structure should always remain subordinate: “The Kafir is a very good fellow, and may be a very good servant, till he has been taught to sing psalms and to take pride in his rapidly acquired book learning”.<sup>135</sup> Education, they argued, would not only result in “removing the African away from his own people”,<sup>136</sup> but would lead to a decrease in the abundant supply of cheap black labour and finally to competition from independent African farmers and merchants.<sup>137</sup> As early as 1875, *The Natal Mercury* associated education with revolution: “A little

<sup>129</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 27.

<sup>130</sup> *The Star* (July 6, 1935).

<sup>131</sup> There is an abundance of literature for instance, in the field of colonial discourse and Postcolonial Theory (see for instance, Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contents, Practices, Politics*, London, New York: Verso 1997), that attempts to show the negative effects of the Christian missionary effort in Africa. Sylvia Vietzen questions the role of Christian missionaries, arguing, “Western missionary education has been a major factor in producing the social, economic and political anomalies so inherent in the African scene to-day.” (S. Vietzen, *The Rev. James Archbell: a Study in Missionary Activity*, Pietermaritzburg, 1962: 80). It is argued that the unsuitability of missionary education to the needs of the African communities led to an imitation of western culture that created a new race of ‘misfits’. In Margery Perham’s view the missionary education was an acid, “working side by side with the new economic forces, to eat away the tissues which held together the cells of family, clan, and tribal life, elevating the book learned child above the illiterate parent, taking him away, perhaps, from guarding the stock, and from the circumcision school in which youth graduated in the disciplines of the tribe... Hence the Christian schoolboy might begin to move out of his own society into a mental no-man’s land.” (Margery Perham, *The Colonial Reckoning* London: Collins, 1962): 37.

<sup>132</sup> R. A. M. Lewin (ed.), *The Cape Journals of Lady Anne Barnard 1797-1798*. (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, Second Series No.24, 1994): 333; italics as in original.

<sup>133</sup> J. H. Davidson, 1973: 175.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*: 166.

<sup>135</sup> J. H. Davidson, 166.

<sup>136</sup> R. H. W. Shepherd, 1971: 105-6.

<sup>137</sup> V. Erlmann, 1983: 134.

knowledge will indeed prove a dangerous thing in the case of our natives if they are taught by their teachers to use their pens as weapons of outcry and agitation. Such a tendency if developed can only end in sedition and disorder".<sup>138</sup> Needless to say, the missionaries strongly disapproved of this attitude, being convinced that European type of education must be offered as a symbol of equal opportunity for black people. In Christianity and in education, the missionaries saw a means "by which within an age or two the population of the country may be made to drop its savagery and Kafirdom and blanket loving vagabondism and become a people as fit to say their prayers and vote for members of parliament as at any rate the ordinary English Christian constituent".<sup>139</sup> This prediction in fact was fulfilled when a number of *amakholwa* stars, including John L. Dube, H. S. Msimang, A. W. G. Champion, Saul Msane and Albert Luthuli, emerged as highly literate spokespersons for the emerging twentieth century African nationalism.<sup>140</sup>

Ray Phillips who in the 1920s and 1930s worked as a missionary in Johannesburg, summarised the highly ambiguous attitude of the white community:

It is undoubtedly true, however, that so far as the general run of white opinion is concerned, it is supremely indifferent. Some Europeans are full of fear. A few are definitely antagonistic. "Why educate the Native?" ask the indifferent. "Leave him exactly where he is; where he belongs. He is a different sort of being; you cannot make a White man out of him". The fearful will ask, "What will become of the Poor Whites? What future will there be for our children? Don't you know that the Natives will demand social equality and inter-marriage if they become educated?" The antagonistic proffer the opinion, largely second-hand or based on casual observation: "Educated Natives are no good. It spoils them to educate them. It makes them insolent and cheeky".<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> *The Natal Mercury* (July 31, 1875).

<sup>139</sup> J. H. Davidson, 1973: 166.

<sup>140</sup> The introduction of the Bantu Education Act in 1954 was a direct result of the events of 1948, which signalled an end to mission education in South Africa. This legislation must be seen as the most dramatic step in the process of separating the races. Under the Bantu Education Act, the Union government took control of all primary and secondary education for Africans. The result was that the missions, which had for more than a century developed a system of African education, lost control over the educational policy in African schools they had established. Alan Paton believed the Bantu Education Act to be the epitome of Apartheid policy in its pretence of offering "something that is better, but it is always a withholding of everything that is best." (Alan Paton in *The Liquidation of Adams College*, unpublished manuscript for private circulation, Adams Mission Manuscript Collection, KCL 1956: 3).

<sup>141</sup> R. E. Phillips, *The Bantu in the City: A Study of Cultural Adjustment on the Witwatersrand*. (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1938): 165.

## 2.4 Summary

The declared aim of missionaries, as we have seen in this chapter, was twofold – to produce Christians and to ‘civilise’ people. In the course of my discussion it has become clear that those who chose to follow the missionaries began to construct a new identity that centred on these two attributes of Christianity and civilisation. The emerging middle class took religion and education as signs of respectability and prestige, and the ministry and teaching became highly respected vocations. A further point is that, by aspiring to westernisation and in hoping for incorporation into colonial society, they envisaged the status of “exemption” from the oppressive racial policies of local Afrikaner and British settlers.

In southern Africa colonisation as well as missionary activity had initiated a process of destroying political and social ties among the local people. In the efforts towards reintegration mission enterprises played a central role. Mission stations and mission schools became localities of a social change that led finally to the formation of a black South African middle class. My discussion in this chapter makes it clear that the endeavours of this new social group towards empowerment was welcomed neither by the *amabhinca* nor by the white communities. This double rejection, and the resulting isolation, led to members of *amakholwa* (or *school*) communities forming an exclusive group caught between the past which they rejected and the future to which they aspired. In particular, as their efforts towards upward social movement were frustrated, they turned their attention more towards achievement in the cultural arena. Music competitions, I will argue later (see Chapter 7.2.3, page 192 and Chapter 8.1, page 207), began to function as a platform for communicating progress and education.

The following two chapters will show how this minority of mission-educated black Christians managed to construct a new identity and what different factors contributed to the transformation of this black middle class from a shunned minority into an elite.

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### 3



## Shaping a New World: The African Middle Class's Quest for Identity

*So what I'm saying is this new class of people are the people who have got a lot of influence... they were a different class of people, they are the very people who [later] started the ANC as well when in fact you would not have expected that because they had had franchise – of course it was stopped at some stage... the people who would speak English everywhere. Even when he meets a black person, he would not speak any other language than English. ... a lot of them cut their culture and they believed in honest that they were English. That is the kind of influence English had on us.<sup>1</sup>*

During my fieldwork, I became aware of significant differences between those who chose to sing in an *amakwaya* group and those who were involved in other forms of choral music. More than this, it could be observed that the choristers, the conductors and the members of the organisational teams were eager to impress on their audience a specific identity, a specific sense of themselves as a group. A variety of means were used to achieve this, particular repertoires and costumes, very similar to those discussed in Chapter 1.2.2 (page 23) in relation to the tour of the African Native Choir. That Choir, as we saw, aimed at constructing or confirming their identity as a group of mission-educated Africans in the eyes of both traditional South African communities and, during their tour, English Victorian society. This aspect of *amakwaya*, I came to realise, is of central importance in understanding both their origin and their present practice.

Every individual normally has a number of 'collective identities' (nationality, gender, locality, class, race, and so on), never static but constantly shifting. In general one's sense of identity with others is something that derives from relationships built up through many different networks. In the case of mission-educated black Africans, these networks were formed to a high degree by their affiliation to Christianity and a shared striving for progress and the modern world – or, as Veit Erlmann expresses it, through their adherence to such "key tenets of Victorian ideology as improvement and education, values that make the individual stand apart from the masses".<sup>2</sup>

When I started reflecting on the differences between *amakwaya* and other South African choral traditions, I discovered that the identity of present day *amakwaya* groups largely resembled that of the black middle class *amakholwa* or "school people" as this was evolving during the second half of the nineteenth century, and in fact seemed to be its continuation. In the previous chapter, our investigation of the endeavours of the early missionaries and their converts provided us with important insights into the social, political, and cultural developments that transformed the emerging black

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<sup>1</sup> Personal communication with Langa Nkosi, Johannesburg, July 20, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> V. Erlmann, *Music, Modernity and the Global Imagination: South Africa and the West*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999): 55.



South African middle class. In this chapter my main aim is to show how a significant change from imitation to negotiation occurred in this struggle towards transformation.

Problems of identity and difference had indeed become the core experience of the black middle class. A growing number of black South Africans were experiencing, as Erlmann puts it, “dislocations and discontinuities of a new kind – ruptures of established social norms and the disintegration of moral canons more radical and more disturbing than anything experienced before”.<sup>3</sup> Torn from their traditional context, they were looking for a “new space” and an existential framework. For *amakholwa*, for instance, this experience resulted in the abandonment of old collective identities, a change more or less forced upon them. Losing their old identities necessitated the construction of new ones to replace them.

We have seen that those who arrived at the mission stations were “refugees, disinherited, and marginals of various kinds”.<sup>4</sup> Those who remained there soon found out that there were advantages in their new situation. Despite their experience of deracination, the mission-educated Africans rose to positions of considerable influence, even rising to leadership. The educational policy at the early mission stations focused on turning “out a few cultured men, sane in mind, strong in character, broad in sympathy, willing to serve”.<sup>5</sup> We shall see in the course of the following discussion how this policy led to the foundation of a new class of black Africans, whose educational acquisitions, mobility and lack of tribal ties suited them for political leadership. A disproportionately large number of mission-educated black Africans figure prominently in later nationalist movements. The roots of this development lie in the nineteenth century when “with the help of missionaries and white employers, the converts became the core of an emerging class of prosperous small-scale farmers. African society...was already beginning to develop patterns of social stratification based on a degree of westernisation”.<sup>6</sup> It is safe to say that mission stations and mission schools were the main agents of social change in nineteenth century South Africa.

Imbued with Western ideas, members of the black middle class at first saw the imitation and assimilation of Western values as a possible escape route from the potential oppression of colonial rule in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, they realised that their attempt to adopt a new middle class identity by imitating Western culture and obeying the teachings of the missionaries had not been at all successful. Rather, they found themselves in an isolated position between the Western culture to which they aspired and the traditional African culture which they had opted to leave behind. Seeing that their aspirations were not fulfilled, since the white communities strongly rejected them, they embarked on a process of re-orientation that led to the formulation of an African national culture. This re-orientation was achieved by a process of negotiating African tradition and Western values. E. A. Ayandele's study of the impact of missionaries in Nigeria reveals remarkable parallels to their impact in South Africa. He lists four stages in the growth of African political awareness that the Christian missions had made possible.

In the first stage, missionaries, who preached brotherhood and equality, encouraged converts to seek the privileges of whites. Second, converts began to lose their African culture and acquired a European one; along with the new character came a new set of political and economic ambitions. Third, religious journals and newspapers familiarised black Christians with the instrumentalities of political expression and communication. Finally, African experience of positions of leadership and

<sup>3</sup> V. Erlmann, 1999: 39-40.

<sup>4</sup> See D. Coplan, *In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre*. (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985): 26.

<sup>5</sup> “Lovedale, Its History and Its Hopes: Three-quarters of a Century of Missionary Effort”. *The Christian Express*, (July 1, 1916): 102.

<sup>6</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 26.

responsibility within the church paved the way for leadership in secular institutions and political parties.<sup>7</sup>

The following discussion aims at throwing light on how black middle class identity is reflected in the movement away from mere imitation of European values and behaviour patterns towards the negotiation of the traditional and the modern. To exemplify this development I shall refer mainly to two sources: firstly, to the Applications for Exemption made in the second half of the nineteenth century, and, secondly, to T. D. Mveli Skota's *The African Yearly Register*, published in the early 1930s. As I have already discussed in some detail, these two sources indicate that a major shift occurred in the self-perception and the ideals of the black middle class: Whereas the Applications for Exemption reveal the applicant's desire to become part of the dominant Western culture, Skota's *African Yearly Register* is an important manifestation of the process of negotiation of African and Western influences that began in the late nineteenth century. In the following sections, I will trace the various stages in the growth of black middle class identity in some detail. This process, as will later be argued, in part shaped the repertoire, performance practice and aesthetics of *amakwaya*.

### 3.1 Theorising Identity

#### 3.1.1 Identity and Difference

The etymology of the term "identity" reveals two strands of meaning.<sup>8</sup> The first, derived from the Latin *idem* (the same), describes the quality or condition of being the same, an absolute or essential sameness, and seems to contradict the second meaning, which describes "the distinguishing character or personality of an individual", their 'individuality'. But people who are in a state of "absolute or essential sameness" do not seem necessarily to possess personality or individuality.<sup>9</sup> A person who aims at imitating and assimilating group characteristics may appear indistinguishable from his group. This discloses one of the most important issues connected to identity: the dialectic of identity and difference (or otherness). In his *Encyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundriss* (Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline, 1817), G. W. F. Hegel speaks of this complex, dialectic relation of identity and difference. His idea may be summarised in the somewhat puzzling sentence, "Identity is identity of identity and difference".<sup>10</sup> According to Hegel, at the root of human nature seems to be a marked desire for recognition by other persons.<sup>11</sup> In line with this, Charles Taylor argues that identity is community orientated rather than individualistic. The relation with other people is essential to this foundation of identity, as a person is able to define his identity only through being acknowledged by others: identity is marked by a struggle for recognition.<sup>12</sup> Thus

<sup>7</sup> E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842-1914* (London, 1966): 264-7, 256, 330, 340-42.

<sup>8</sup> See C. T. Onions ed., *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, third edition, 1952); H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler ed., *The Concise Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, eighth edition, 1990). In the following discussion about the philosophical implications of identity, I am indebted to Patrick Giddy from the School of Governance, University of Durban-Westville, who gave me important leads and contributed with central ideas.

<sup>9</sup> Individuality is defined by Merriam-Webster as "total character peculiar to and distinguishing an individual from others... to have separate or distinct existence".

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion on the methodology of Hegel's dialectic see, for instance, the article on Hegel and Hegelianism in (*The Encyclopaedia Britannica* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); C. Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); and C. Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

<sup>11</sup> C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> A. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: the Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, translated by Joel Anderson (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996).

the self constructs its identity in the process of being recognised by the 'other'. A valid summary might therefore be: identity is partly a matter of who or what we think we are, but also involves identification with the others within a particular group or collective culture.

This very brief reference to a complex problem is intended only to orient our study of *amakwaya*. In seeking to understand individuals and groups in terms of their 'identity', one is emphasising the importance of uncovering how they see themselves. This is a move away from a previous model, influenced by the natural sciences, in which the behaviour of individuals and groups was seen as completely shaped and determined by certain social forces. In contrast, the understanding of identity described above, with reference to Hegel and others, is dialectically shaped through such social influences, but not fully determined by them. Recent studies tend to speak of identity – gender, for example – as 'constructed' rather than given by nature. However, this important insight could, as pointed out by Craib,<sup>13</sup> be taken to mean identity is imposed rather than negotiated. Our study of *amakwaya* will provide a counter example.

From the point of view of psychology, the trend has been away from an individualistic conception towards a more Hegelian approach. Known broadly as Social Identity Theory, this approach stresses the centrality of social identity in an individual's sense of self.<sup>14</sup> Social Comparison, which is part of Social Identity Theory, signifies that people will assess their skills and opinions of themselves in comparison with others. This means that evaluation of and comparison with the other influences the individual's perception and behaviour. They assess the value of their own group in comparison with others, thus constructing an identity on the basis of difference. This will also be relevant later, when I explore the almost exclusive focus of *amakwaya* groups on competition (see Chapters 8.2.1, page 215 and 9.4, page 263). The fact that comparison and the urge to compete with others take a central position in contemporary *amakwaya* groups, reveals that the mechanisms of constructing identity have not changed.

### 3.1.2 Community and Identity in African Traditional Thought

Some core ideas in the above discussion of identity link to the traditional African philosophy of *ubuntu*,<sup>15</sup> being "the ethic and interaction that occurs in the extended family".<sup>16</sup> "Extended family" epitomises the shared values that are manifested in the wider community as *ubuntu*, a complex of "socio-cultural practices and beliefs of caring, compassionate service-orientated interaction, recognition of the self-worth of others, generosity, respect and magnanimity of spirit, as embodied in African customs, tenets and beliefs".<sup>17</sup> The phrases, "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" (*isiZulu*), "*motho ke*

<sup>13</sup> I. Craib, *Experiencing Identity*. (London: SAGE, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> See R. Jenkins, *Social Identity*. (London: Routledge, 1996) and. J. E. Stets and P. J. Burke, "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory". *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63: 224-237; available on the internet: <http://burkep.libarts.wsu.edu/online.htm>.

<sup>15</sup> C. M. Doke and B. W. Vilakazi translate the term *-ntu (ubuntu)* as 1. human nature, 2. humanness, good moral nature, and 3. one's real self, character (C. M. Doke / B. W. Vilakazi, *Zulu-English Dictionary*, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1990). In the Bantu linguistic group "being a person" is the key metaphysical and ethical notion. This is a normative idea: a boy or girl is initiated and develops, through progressively more responsible participation in society, into an adult man or woman. (P. Giddy, "African Traditional Thought and Growth in Personal Unity" *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 42, 2002); The International Society for Music Education (ISME) defines *ubuntu* as "an age-old African term for humaneness – for caring, sharing and being in harmony with all of creation. *Ubuntu*, as an ideal, means the opposite of being selfish and self-centred. It promotes co-operation between individuals, cultures and nations. *Ubuntu* thus empowers all to be valued: to reach their full potential in accord with all around them. The warmth of *ubuntu* is what we promote in music education". See <http://www.unisa.ac.za/isme/ubuntu.html>.

<sup>16</sup> M. Boon, 1996: 31.

<sup>17</sup> K. Mngoma, "Music and Ubuntu". *Proceedings of the 23<sup>rd</sup> World Conference of the International Society for Music Education* (ISME) Pretoria, 1998: 430.

*motho ka batho babang*” (Sesotho), and “*munhu munhu pamusana pevanhu*” (Shona), express the central meaning of this philosophy, and reveal the maxim I discussed above: “A person is only a person because of other people”. *Ubuntu* is manifested not only in the actions of individuals (offering care, kindness, empathy, sharing and ‘humaneness’), but also in the recognition of their qualities by other people.<sup>18</sup> One’s humanity can be defined only through interactions with others. This idea is manifested in many African proverbs:

*Umuntu kala-hlwa. (Zulu)*

Never abandon or give up another human being.

*Umuzi ngumuzi ngokuphanjikelwa. (Zulu)*

A home is a real one if people visit it.

*Ntja pedi bae blowhe be sebata. (Southern Sotho)*

It is better to do things as a group than as an individual.

*Intaka yokha ngentsiba zenye intaka. (Xhosa)*

A bird builds its house with another bird’s feather.

*Izandla ziyahlambana. (Xhosa)*

The hands wash each other.

The concept of *ubuntu* is central to traditional African morality. *Ukublonipha*, for instance, means to recognise other people by paying respect.<sup>19</sup> It stresses conformity and respect over and above principle: this implies a strong adherence to hierarchic order and authority. The word *ukublonipha* can be understood as “the proper way of greeting”, which emphasises mutual recognition. *Sawubona* – “We see you”, meaning we recognise you, is more than just a trivial formula of greeting. It attaches importance to individual people and allows them to bring their identity to bear by making them part of the community. The use of the plural indicates that this formula is not exchanged merely between two individuals. It rather implies that the other person is symbolically acknowledged and respected by a whole community of the living and the dead. *Dumela* – “I agree”, a greeting used in Lesotho, has a similar function. “To agree” with an individual not only expresses acceptance, but also integrates her into the community and acknowledges her identity.

All this suggests that a person is defined by a set of relationships and by the active establishment of interaction. John Mbiti confirms the philosophy behind this idea: “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am”.<sup>20</sup> In other words, the community does not simply confer status on the individual, but rather more than this: there is an active process of recognition involved: we see you and recognise you as a person (*sawubona*), we “agree” with you (*dumela*) and respect your identity (*isiblonipha*). This suggests that “we are only what we are in the eyes of the other”.<sup>21</sup> Although individual identity is recognised within the group, solidarity with the community rates higher than a concern for what is due to the individual.

Critics might remark that the emphasis on authority and hierarchy in the community may be oppressive. In fact, one can observe many instances in African society where the principle of *ubuntu* is abused, manipulated, or inverted. This seems to be especially true in a context where capitalism,

<sup>18</sup> One important difference between *ubuntu* and liberal western thought seems to be that, on the one hand, *ubuntu* stresses the need for conformity to the norms of society: it is not the individual that is of importance, but more his or her behaviour and interaction within the group. Liberal philosophy in the West, on the other hand, insists that a society is truly free only when the individual has the right to challenge its norms and cause society to re-examine itself.

<sup>19</sup> Doke and Vilakazi (1990), English translation of *blonipha* is: respect, regard with awe, honour.

<sup>20</sup> John Mbiti quoted in P. Giddy, “African Traditional Thought and Growth in Personal Unity”, *International Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 42, 2002: 315-327. See also Ifeanyu Menkiti, “Person and Community in African Traditional Thought”. *African Philosophy*, Richard Wright ed., (University Press of America, 1979).

<sup>21</sup> P. Giddy, 2001: 317.

commerce, and industrialism have left their mark on society. Khabi Mngoma, an important music educator, argues, however, that the philosophy of *ubuntu* is not meant to be oppressive. In an *ubuntu* culture, he argues

each living human being enjoys what I choose to call personal **SPACE**, physical, intellectual and spiritual **SPACE**; through emphatic and transcendental interaction and sharing of that **SPACE**, espousing and practising **UBUNTU**'s wholesome and lofty virtues, a gestalt, all-embracing communal **SPACE** permeated by those virtues and goodwill, is created [original emphasis].<sup>22</sup>

The 'proper way of greeting', exemplifying the principle of *isihlonipha* among other forms of behaviour regulated by the philosophy of *ubuntu*, signifies respectful acknowledgement and acceptance of each other's self-worth. It indicates the greeter's willingness to share space, to allow space for the other to develop individuality.

In the following section I intend to point out to what extent these traditional concepts played a role in the history of *amakwaya* and continue to do so to the present day.

### 3.1.3 Music and Traditional African Thought

*To be human is to be musical.*<sup>23</sup>

In the context of *ukuhlonipha*, respect is paid when an individual avoids the use of words that contain the radical of the name of certain persons to whom respect is due. The taboo words are substituted by fresh terms. L. M. B. Chonco, who today is one of the well known composers from Umhlabi, a township near Durban, has composed a song entitled "Ukuhlonipha" in which he refers to the tradition of paying respect to people by substituting names. The song captures all the phrases that the bride has to use in order to pay respect to the fathers. Zakhele Fakhazi explains:

For instance if the father-in-law, his name is Stonehouse, then you cannot say the word stone, you cannot say the word house. When you are talking about the stone, you have to give it another name. When you are talking about the house, you have to give it another name. This language is made up. Similar to the song "Italian salad". It's about all the musical sings. The piano, it would be soft, and then FORTE! And so on. Chonco does something similar to that. So the brides had to respect the fathers and the big brothers, so they wouldn't say their names. So they use substitute words and phrases. I think the main point of his song is about the respect that people had for one another. Respect was the fabric for the society. If we stuck to that and not allow the Western ways to change us, then we will have a better life. That's what he actually wants to say.<sup>24</sup>

Another song that makes use of substituting words is Alfred Assegai Kumalo's "Intokozo". The word *mtoti* is a *hlonipha* word for the word *nandi*. The substitute goes back to the days when, out of respect, the use of the name of King Shaka's mother, Nandi, had to be avoided. Therefore the expression *indab' innandi* (sweet story) had to be changed into *indab' imtoti*.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> K. Mngoma, 1998: 430.

<sup>23</sup> K. Mngoma, "Khabi Mngoma 75". *Musicus*, 1998a: 44.

<sup>24</sup> Personal communication with Zakhele Fakazi, Marianhill, November 05, 1999.

<sup>25</sup> In a similar way, the phrase *amnandi amanzi* (the water is sweet) had to be changed into *amanzi mtoti*. This is how Amanzimtoti, the place where Adams College was situated got its name: place at the sweet water.

*Intokozo*

Nans' intokozo kubantu bonke bomhlaba,  
 Nans' indab' imtot' imtoti, imtot' imtoti  
 kubantu bonke;  
 Nans' intokozo kubantu bonke bomhlaba,  
 Kuvel' izindaba ezimnandi.

*A Dream*

*Here is joy, to all people on earth;  
 Here is a lovely story.*

*Here is joy, to all people on earth;  
 Angels appearing to the shepherds.<sup>26</sup>*

What is stressed in these examples is the respect for social roles. But musical practice has also been used to illustrate the other side of the traditional African ethic, that is, the idea of the extended family including everyone.

In the performance of European compositions the primacy of the conductor is emphasised. But *amakwaya* performance of neo-traditional songs is significantly different. Here any member of the choral group can take the place of a leader or conductor. In fact, when rehearsing or performing wedding songs, *amakwaya* groups do not have just one leader for all the songs they are performing. Whoever knows a song is welcome to step in front of the group and teach it with the supporting steps and gestures.

Musical practice, Khabi Mngoma argues, is closely linked to the concept of *ubuntu*, as it is “an integral part of life in the community [and] a factor in determining the human worth of the individual – the extent to which the individual regards, responds to and is involved in Music and Life, as a member of the community – and not necessarily as a specialist practitioner”.<sup>27</sup> A central feature of this thinking is that differing degrees of talent should not prevent individuals from participating in music-making on equal terms. It is important to keep in mind that music-making in traditional Bantu communities has always been communal: every member of the community is welcome and often even required actively to take part in performance.

The community aspect of African music is also manifested in the antiphonal form of “call – response”. The call is usually made by a solo voice, whereas the response to the call comprises many voices and is usually homophonic. Music making is accompanied by synchronised body movements, and though the individuality of the participants is obvious, “it is maintained without jeopardising the *gestalt* wholeness of the performance. Individuality is a vital component for the enhancement of the whole”.<sup>28</sup> Andrew Tracey’s comment is apt:

The fundamental aesthetic in Africa, in music or anything else, is that without participation there is no meaning. You can consider African music as being a form of co-operation which happens also to produce sound. So cooperation is the first keyword. Everything starts from the feeling of cooperation; the musical sound comes after.<sup>29</sup>

The concepts of *umuntu* and *isiblonipha*, in sum, are important elements in *amakwaya*, as the choir represents the social framework that offers security to its members and provides the space for co-operation by recognising individual members. Choristers perceive their choral community to be “like a family”,<sup>30</sup> marked by “the spirit of love – no hatred. It must be together”.<sup>31</sup> Kagisho

<sup>26</sup> This song was recorded and transcribed by D. Rycroft during an interview with A. A. Kumalo: See D. Rycroft, “Black South African Urban Music since the 1890’s: Some Reminiscences of Alfred Assegai Kumalo”. *Journal of International Library of African Music*, 1991: 11-12.

<sup>27</sup> K. Mngoma, 1998: 427.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*: 431.

<sup>29</sup> A. Tracey, “Keywords in African Music” in C. Lucia ed., *Proceedings of the First National Music Educators’ Conference 1985* (Durban: University of Natal, Department of Music, 1986): 13.

<sup>30</sup> Musa, Bonisudumo Choristers (Gauteng), interview questionnaire, Johannesburg/Springs February 12, 2001.



Diphame of the Molopo Choral Artists confirms that for the choristers the choir represents a common bond that goes beyond the mere musical interest: "You know, a choir, we are a family. We just associate with the choir. Even outside the choir, we associate so that we [cultivate] the spirit of nearness, of family – the spirit of friendship"<sup>32</sup>.

This is also the case at schools where the choral group develops a distinctive identity. The fact that choirs usually meet after school for rehearsal plays an important role in forming a bond among the students. Besides the many hours the choristers spend rehearsing, "socialising is a very important aspect"<sup>33</sup> for the choristers. Thabo Tabane of the Ga-Rankuwa West U.R.C. Choir says:

... if there are people who are good in socialising, it's the choristers. In essence what I'm trying to say, we are a group, and I mean when you are a group, you get to know another better... it's just wonderful because we always sing, even if we are not practising... you wouldn't spend 30 minutes without end[ing] up singing... And the other nice thing is that it involves men and women... unlike soccer where there are only men for a team – that's what I like.<sup>34</sup>

Even during these social get-togethers, music and singing play an important part for the choristers and become a connecting link. As Lunga, a chorister from the Johannesburg-based choir Bonisudumo Choristers, says: "We don't talk a lot, we just burst with singing... There is no time for chatting. We sing always"<sup>35</sup>. In addition the very strong group sense found in choirs is intensified by preparation for and participation in competitions (see Chapter 9, page 237). That challenging other choirs usually intensifies the bond among the choristers becomes clear in the following statements of various choristers:

Wherever the choir appears I'd like to be seen with them.<sup>36</sup>

...we like to have a challenge, to be known. Just to be known that there is a choir in Kwa Thema, called Bonisudumo.<sup>37</sup>

You know [at competitions] it's very important to people to realise what potential our choir, not me, has, [what] our choir can do. Because I'm not a choir, I'm a chorister. Because singing there it doesn't mean I can represent our choir. I can represent myself being a soloist. You see. But sing with a choir is to show people that this choir has got a potential of singing. So that's why it's so among the best choirs.<sup>38</sup>

A final point that we can make on the musical manifestation of the *ubuntu* ideas relates to the positioning of benevolent authority within the choir. This falls on the conductor, who is responsible for the individual choristers and offers them security and guidance. Asked what characteristics make up a good conductor, Lunga of the Bonisudumo Choristers comments:

<sup>31</sup> Israel Dzagare, conductor of the Chitungwiza Harmony Singers (Zimbabwe), interview questionnaire, Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>32</sup> Kagisho Diphame, Molopo Choral Artists (North West Province), interview questionnaire, Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>33</sup> Personal communication with Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Johannesburg, November 21, 2000.

<sup>34</sup> Thabo Tabane, Ga-Rankuwa West U.R.C. Choir (North-West Province), interview questionnaire, Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>35</sup> Lunga, Bonisudumo Choristers (Gauteng), interview questionnaire, Johannesburg/Kwa Thema, February 12, 2001.

<sup>36</sup> Maureen Ngubane, Pietermaritzburg Choral Society (KwaZulu Natal), interview questionnaire, Pietermaritzburg, January 30, 2001.

<sup>37</sup> Lunga, Bonisudumo Choristers (Gauteng), interview questionnaire, Johannesburg/Kwa Thema, February 12, 2001.

<sup>38</sup> Tshepo Moreothata, Kimberley Spornet Choir (Freestate), interview questionnaire, Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

A good conductor [must be] a person who knows what he is doing. Like Ludumo [Magangane – her conductor], he knows what he is doing. He is very strict, disciplined and with a very good sense of humour. A person who is reachable. He is not the person who will say, I'm teaching music and that's it. ... I adore him... he is very much helpful. Community wise, even in the choirs here, you come with your problems and he is there for you. And he is my best friend – him and his wife. He is a real man, which is why I can't stay away from the choir most of the time. Because I do miss him and the music too. And friends here".<sup>39</sup>

Some choristers become part of the organisational team and individuals in the choir gain a specific role and place within the group. They become essential to the framework of the choir. Thus the structure of a choir in many respects resembles traditional socio-political entities. This is interesting in two respects: first, it shows the fragile and relatively unstable identity of *amakwaya*, oscillating between attachment to traditional ideas and the modern practice of hymn singing and other kinds of Western choral practice; secondly, it constitutes one reason why choral music became so attractive for those who came to the mission stations, and remains so today for those who have experienced the trauma of rupture from the traditional, secure social and political framework.

There seems to be a tendency for *ubuntu* to become of such importance in small groups that claims of the larger society are overlooked. This occurs especially in the context of an urban environment where the existence of the individual is very much dependent on the framework of such groups. The phenomenon of small individual groups teaming up to form communal identity can be interpreted as a survival strategy.<sup>40</sup> Obviously individual *amakwaya* groups perceive the social cohesion as a central motive for their participation. Sandile Ndlanya, who sang in the Durban Serenade Choral Society for almost a decade before he left Durban and went to Johannesburg for vocational reasons, told me: "... the choir is like a family, it is home... I feel strongly connected to this choir and I miss it a lot. In fact when I think of Durban, I think of the choir. Home for me is the choir. I would not join another choir, this would almost mean betraying my choir".<sup>41</sup>

During the finals of the National Choir Festival, Sandile, who once had the position of treasurer of the Durban Serenade Choral Society, was constantly with his fellow choristers, supporting wherever he could. Apart from offering moral support, he was organising now rehearsal venues, now a piano and lunch for his fellow choristers. The choristers obviously enter into a very intense relationship with their chosen choirs. Membership grants a sense of belonging. The choral community not only provides social security but also contributes to the formation of identity.

<sup>39</sup> Lunga, Bonisudumo Choristers (Gauteng), interview questionnaire, Johannesburg/Kwa Thema, February 12, 2001.

<sup>40</sup> This observation is in many respects true for the membership of a church. In a similar way, especially in separatist groups, a very clearly defined understanding of support, often restricted to the community itself, can be observed.

<sup>41</sup> Personal communication with Sandile Ndlanya, Johannesburg, December 7, 2001.

### 3.2 The Applications for the Exemption from Native Law: Manifestation of Exclusiveness and Assimilation

*So there was a new class that developed, of exempted Africans, what you call ama-zempted.<sup>42</sup> So these exempted Africans had an influence now. I mean these were the people that we looked upon as better people. And most of these people [were] quite different from other Africans. You found them in Edendale, Pietermaritzburg. They were land owners. You found them in Claremont, you found them in Groutville – that's where Chief Luthuli came from.<sup>43</sup>*

The initial strategy of the group associated with the missions was one of imitation and assimilation. Coming from a traditional African background, they shared many social and cultural values with tribal people. In other words, they had a common identity defining them as black South Africans. Leaving the rural community meant leaving the protective community of shared values and ideas, the secure position of traditional identity. The separation from traditional society had a traumatic effect on those who arrived at the mission station. There they found themselves confronted with a completely novel situation that necessitated giving up their old identity in order to formulate what became the identity of an elite black middle class. Imbued by the missionaries with Western ideas, they gradually came to perceive the assimilation of Western identity as a possible escape route from the exploitative situation created by the colonists. The Applications for Exemption from Native Law are therefore important documents that provide evidence of the identity of the new middle class and their desire to imitate and participate in the dominant Western culture. Langa Nkosi, a highly respected adjudicator and choirmaster from Pretoria, explains:

I think the influence of the English in the Cape and the influence of the English in Natal in itself made a great difference in the sense that there was at some stage franchise for the blacks in the Cape and in Natal – but we had to qualify. You had to have gone to school [up] to a certain level, you had to be like English, and you had to respect English. Your dress had to be formal. Even where you stay. You know, they made sure that they kill your own identity as a black person by putting the people like Theophilus Shepstone... and by destroying the influence of *amakhosi* [the chiefs] and *izinyanga* – that's the traditional healers – and putting in doctors among people and putting in the magistrates so that they actually take over from *amakhosi*.

Natal's middle class *amakholwa* communities strongly rejected Shepstone's administration in Natal.<sup>44</sup> They protested against legislation that divided society along racial lines rather than class lines, as this caused them to lose many of the privileges attached to their essentially middle class position. After all, the missionaries had promised their converts that they "were the salt of the earth and were destined to play a leading role in African history",<sup>45</sup> and they had made intense efforts to assimilate Western cultural values. They were disappointed by the introduction of Native Law as they

<sup>42</sup> "The *amazempted* or *amazemthithi* were the rich people, those who were going the white way and thought of themselves of being something better." (Personal communication with Vera Maria Kubeka, Durban, January 11, 2001.)

<sup>43</sup> Personal communication with Langa Nkosi, Johannesburg, July 20, 2000.

<sup>44</sup> See 2.1.1.

<sup>45</sup> N. Etherington, 1978: 175.

felt that their efforts were not honoured. For them, being judged according to Native Law meant “falling back into savage and wicked customs”.<sup>46</sup>

Anticipating these protests, Shepstone promulgated Law No. 11 of 1864, supplementing it one year later with Law No. 28. These laws laid down the rigid procedures to be followed by any black African who wanted Exemption from Native Law. According to Native Law, the applicant had to demonstrate his fitness for Exemption, and no reasons needed to be given by the Secretary for Native Affairs when the rights of British subjects were denied to applicants. Up to the mid 1870s, no Exemptions were granted, and when at last a few score of Africans did succeed in complying with the requirements of the Law, they found themselves exempt in name but not in fact.<sup>47</sup>

Isaac Caluza, born in 1840 in Lesotho, was the son of Reuben Inhlela “Tuyana” Caluza, who arrived in Edendale with the Presbyterian missionary, James Alison, in 1847.<sup>48</sup> Isaac was the grandfather of Reuben Tholakele Caluza, who became a prominent figure as a composer and choirmaster in the first half of the twentieth century. The Caluzas in the nineteenth century can be seen as a typical black middle class family. “Teaching, farming and preaching – were the main pursuits of a family of proud men and women, whose thinking revolved around two core concepts of mid-Victorian ideology: ‘progress’ and ‘improvement’”.<sup>49</sup> The Edendale community embodied these values in a striking way, and visitors to Edendale felt that the village was “a piece of Yorkshire”.<sup>50</sup> There is no record of whether Isaac, whose application has survived in the Natal Archives at Pietermaritzburg, was actually granted Exemption from Native Law, but we know that other members of the family were (see Figure 3.1). Among the few who met the requirements of the colonial administration were Moffat Caluza and his sons, Alphabet and Frank, and his wife, Evelyn (née Goba).<sup>51</sup>

In his Application Isaac describes under Article 13 “the object the Petitioner has in view in seeking such letters of exemption”: “He wishes to get away from many native laws which civilised people dislike and which appear to himself to be bad especially Lobola which causes much quarrelling and he wishes his wife and younger children to have their part in the [circumstance?] he may leave”.<sup>52</sup>

The other applications that have survived in Pietermaritzburg show a very similar pattern to that of Isaac Caluza. Looking at the first fifty Applications, put in between November 1876 and July 1881,<sup>53</sup> helps us understand the motivation of mission-educated black Africans to acquire exemption from Native Law. Besides being a manifestation of black middle class’s growing sense of distance from traditional Nguni society, the reasons included in the petitions reveal important facets of the identity of the emerging black middle class.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>46</sup> A. Dube, *Applications for Exemption*, SNA 121-202.

<sup>47</sup> N. Etherington, 1978: 13; see also S. Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion: the 1906-8 Disturbances in Natal* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).

<sup>48</sup> V. Erlmann, 1991: 113.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*: 115-6.

<sup>50</sup> R. S. Statham, *Blacks, Boers & the British: A Three-cornered Problem*. (London: Macmillan, 1881): 182, quoted in V. Erlmann, 1991: 116; see also B. Magubane, *The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa* (New York-London: Monthly Review Press, 1979): 55f.

<sup>51</sup> V. Erlmann, 1991: 116.

<sup>52</sup> Application of Exemption from Native Law, Isaac Caluza June 1, 1887 (Natal Archives 1 | 1 | 29).

<sup>53</sup> Natal Archive Pietermaritzburg: SNA 121-202, 1/1/29, 1/6/10

<sup>54</sup> The table is drawn from Etherington’s source material (N. Etherington, 1987).

Objection to <i>ukulobola</i> – the selling of daughter to legalise the wedding	10
Born and raised as Christian – Native Law is opposed to Christian instruction	7
Devise property in accordance with Colonial Law – wants property freedom	7
Objection to traditional customs	6
Native Law opposed to instruction and improvement	3
Wants strong, good law	3
Having been instructed by teachers according to English customs	1
Wants to be subject to civilised customs	1
Wants to become a free British subject	1
Happiness	1
Feelings of inferiority	1
General	9

The majority of applicants who gave a specific reason for their petition, named the rejection of traditional customs and specifically the practice of *ukulobola* as their main motivation: for example, “the petitioner [has] embraced Christianity, [has] married into a Christian family according to Christian rite (no transfer of cattle having taken place by the mutual consents of both parties concerned)”.<sup>55</sup> *Lobola* was always very problematic for middle class *amakholwa* communities, and some members still adhered to this traditional custom.<sup>56</sup> The fact that the majority of applicants declared their rejection of it shows that a decisive change in identity had taken place by the second half of the nineteenth century. For traditional Nguni society, *lobola* was important because it created relationships and bonds of mutual obligation. Abandoning this custom meant a deliberate break with African tradition that had profound consequences at a social level. Without the payment of *lobola*, it was impossible in the traditional communities to establish family ties. In order to become effective, a marriage had to be arranged in accordance with the tradition of exchanging of cattle. As a result of the black middle class orientation towards Western capitalist values, the meaning of cattle underwent a drastic change.

<sup>55</sup> Application of Exemption from Native Law, Luke Msimang, January 13, 1881 (Natal Archives 1|1|29).

<sup>56</sup> Family ties or social constraints, for example, made it impossible for some members of the *amakholwa* community to escape the payment of *lobola*. See N. Etherington, 1978: 62-4;

Vilakazi points out that the ambiguity connected to the practice of *ukulobola* exemplifies the “indeterminate area of ‘floating’ values, unattached to any of the two systems standing in juxtaposition”. In other words, the lack of cultural consistency in the new elite becomes evident when the “school-Africans” fuse western practices with African practices. The result is a new form of *lobola*, characterised by “sophistication which is an exaggeration and/or caricature of both the traditional Zulu and the western of Christian element”. A. Vilakazi, 1962: 142.

See also Chapter 2.3.1 for more details about *lobola*.

S. 2-u  
266/01

[FOR MALE NATIVE.]

**PETITION** under the provisions of Law No. 28, 1865,  
 "For relieving certain persons from the operation  
 of Native Law."

To His Excellency Sir Henry Evelyn Wood, F.C.  
Major General, Knight Commander of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath  
Governor in and over the Colony of Natal, Vice Admiral of the same, and  
Supreme Chief over the Native Population.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY:

The Petition of Isaac Caluza  
 a Native, residing at Compulsorem Mission Station, in the County  
 of Pietermaritzburg, in the Colony of Natal, praying  
 for a letter of exemption declaring him exempt from the operation of Native Law,

HUMBLY SHEWETH:

That your Petitioner is a Male Native, resident in this Colony, and is anxious to  
 obtain a letter of exemption declaring him exempt from the operation of Native Law, and  
 with this object furnishes hereunder the particulars required to be stated and set forth in  
 every Petition for such exemption:

- Petitioner's full name Isaac Caluza
- Place of his birth Basutoland
- His age and residence 41 Years of Age  
Lives at Compulsorem Mission Station
- The length of time he has resided in the Colony About 35 Years
- His trade or calling Farming
- Whether he be married or unmarried, and, if married, when, where, and in whose  
 presence he was so married, and in case he shall have been married by any Minister of  
 Religion, or by any Resident Magistrate, such petition shall state by whom he was so  
 married Married to Elizabeth Gogole in August 1857 at Pal-  
meston by Rev. T. Jenkins. She died in Sept 1865 at Edendale.  
Married to Esther Malunga in Sept 1871 at Futura in  
the Rossa country by the Rev. John Longden  
in the presence of Master Soga.
- The number, sex, and ages of any child or children, if any, then living, By  
the first wife 2 Daughters, Kelly aged 20 Married  
Jane Esther aged 18 unmarried and living at home.  
By the second wife 2 Daughters, Judith Edna  
aged 8, Nepia Lurian aged 5.

Figure 3.1: Application for exemption, Isaac Caluza (first page);  
 (Natal Archives 1|1|2)9



### 3.2.1 Economic Transformation and Imitation of the West

Among mission-educated black Africans from the 1870s and 80s, cattle were no longer used for barter or for directly supplying the owners' material needs, but were kept on their farms to produce saleable surplus. This development is associated with the significant increase in the number of people working as farmers (see statistics presented in Chapter 2.2.3, page 49).<sup>57</sup> An important change in the economic mode of African middle class life was taking place that was particularly obvious in the transformed meaning of cattle. In the traditional economy, cattle were not the *means* by which a man became wealthy; they *were* the wealth.<sup>58</sup> In pre-colonial southern Africa, "cattle had been a principal form of currency... serving, like cash, as a standard of value, a store of wealth, and a medium of exchange".<sup>59</sup> Traditionally wealth was calculated in terms of cattle, and heathen Africans had accumulated wealth that often by far exceeded that of the most affluent black Christians. The fact that high status accrued to men who owned a large herd of cattle, motivated them to work hard in order to acquire surplus livestock. Wealth, success and respect were measured in terms of the possession of cattle and wives: "no matter how intelligent, helpful or good an adult man was, he would not be accorded respect if he did not own a large herd of cattle and many wives".<sup>60</sup> Therefore, it seems clear that in the traditional context the conversion of cattle into other forms of property would degrade rather than enhance a man's status. Since exchanging cattle was inextricably bound up with the relations of kinship and marriage, "to sell them would weaken [the] tribe".<sup>61</sup> Thus, property in the form of cattle lay under a sort of restriction and was not readily available for distribution or exchange. The emerging black middle class, however, judged their success in terms of property holdings and the accumulation of capital. Whereas traditional African economies were geared to subsistence, members of the middle class used ploughs and land to produce a saleable agricultural surplus. As a result of this, cattle lost their traditional meaning. Domestic cattle were used for many different purposes. Oxen, for instance, were used for ploughing and, harnessed in front of wagons, for transporting the surplus to the markets. For mission-educated Africans, the mere possession of cattle did not signify social values, wealth, and social influence. In the late 1950s, Absalom Vilakazi conducted a study amongst the Qadi and the Nyuswa in the Valley of a Thousand Hills area, west of Durban. In this study, Vilakazi summoned up the decisive transformation that had taken place among the "school-people":

Work and western possessions, for example, are much more important among Christians than the other values such as attach to cattle and goats as forms of wealth among the traditionalists. Prestige comes to men and women who work and accumulate western goods. The signs of this accumulation are good clothes, western furniture, western-style houses, motor cars, motor cycles and radios. Among the Quadi and the Nyuswa, these things can only be found in the homes of Christian and therefore educated people. Those who have these things acquire considerable social prestige in the community, for these goods have become important indices of advancement.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>57</sup> See Chapter 2.2.1 statistics of professions (see page 49).

<sup>58</sup> See E. J. Kriege, *The Social System of the Zulus*. London, 1936.

<sup>59</sup> B. Samson, "Traditional Economic Systems" quoted in D. Coplan, 1985: 102.

<sup>60</sup> See also: E. Pewa, *Zulu Music Competitions: The Continuity of Zulu traditional Aesthetics*. Thesis submitted for the Degree of Master of Music. University of Natal Durban: School of Music, 1995: 34.

<sup>61</sup> R. E. Phillips, *The Bantu in the City: A Study of Cultural Adjustment on the Witwatersrand*. (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1938): 2.

<sup>62</sup> A. Vilakazi, *Zulu Transformations: A study of the Dynamics of Social Change*. (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1962): 139.

The transformation described by Vilakazi has its roots in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the early 1880s, James Matiwane explained the ideals of the black-middle class:

We do use European food, such as coffee, sugar, bread, and such like; butter also; we also use pepper and salt. We have given up our Native dancing, and attend tea meetings and the like. We have no social gatherings, except weddings and such like. The boys and girls have no games though the boys do play at marbles sometimes. I could not say that the people would not join in ploughing matches and agricultural shows, etc.<sup>63</sup>

The attempt to assimilate the culture of the ruling minority is not only manifested in the transformed meaning of cattle, but in the adoption of European clothes and upright houses – in short in almost every aspect of life. The black middle class deliberately used these as a badge of advancement and civilisation. This was most visible in the matter of dress. For those who arrived at the mission stations, “conversion into Christianity meant change of dress”<sup>64</sup> first of all. In a report of the Natal Missionary Conference held in July 1889 in the Mercury Lane Schoolroom in Durban, Rev. Josiah Tyler stated that initially

young men and boys... were not willing to wear European clothing lest they should be laughed at by their relations and accused of becoming Christians. So that one of our missionary brothers remarked at the time, quaintly but truthfully, that “a shirt was the penitent form among the Zulus”, for as soon as a young man was seen clad with that article, he was set down as a believer.<sup>65</sup>

The Native School Report for 1876 reveals the high priority given to methods of encouraging “conformity with European habits in regard to clothing, cleanliness, and general tidiness”.<sup>66</sup> The meaning of dress as a marker of education and progress again becomes obvious in Alfred Assegai Kumalo’s memory of living at Edendale: “We used to be sent out in batches of four or six, to the outskirts, to preach. And we got questions from the heathens, I can tell you! But we were prepared. You find no heathens around here now, they are all dressed up”.<sup>67</sup>

The Applications for Exemption reveal that the possession of Western goods enabled applicants to better their chances of being granted Exemption. Luke Msimang, for instance, describes his property as consisting of a “house, [holding] furniture of European manufacture, such as tables chairs etc”.<sup>68</sup> Besides the use of Western garb, housing was an obvious marker of the “imitation of the white”. Square houses that had separate rooms for cooking, eating and sleeping,

<sup>63</sup> J. Matiwane, Evidence: 387.

<sup>64</sup> A. Vilakazi/ B. Mthethwa / M. Mpanza, *Shembe: the Revitalization of African Society* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1986): 148.

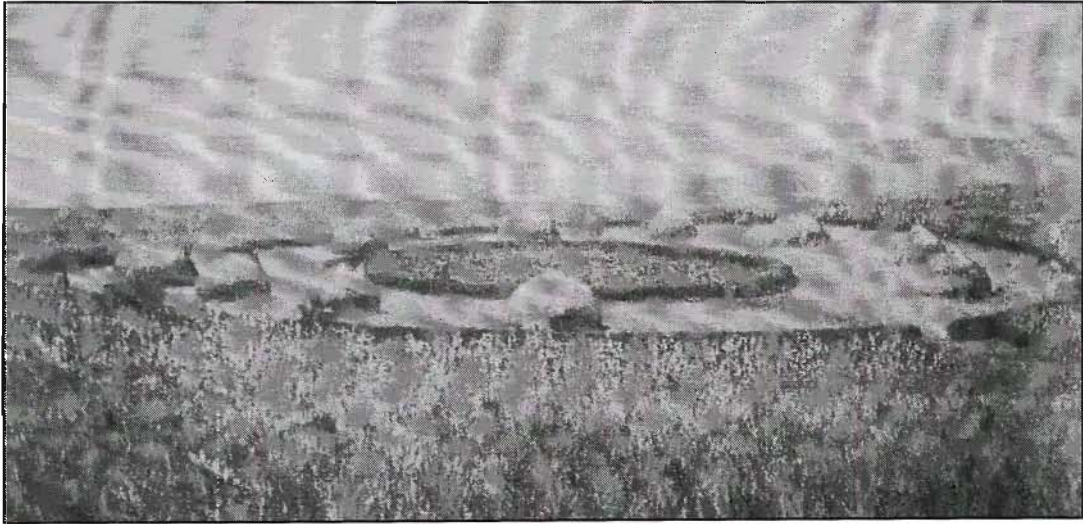
<sup>65</sup> J. D. Tyler, “Retrospect of Forty Years Missionary Life Among the Zulus”, paper given during the conference July 1883 in the Mercury Lane Schoolroom, Durban, July 1883, in *Natal Missionary Conference 1877-1950*. (manuscript at Durban: Killie Campbell Library).

<sup>66</sup> Native School Report for 1876, Natal Archives PMB 1 | 1 | 29). The school at Bishopstowe, for instance, reported: “...boarders are supplied with a blouse which they must keep clean and neat”. At a Ladysmith school “cleanliness and tidiness is enforced, but the Principal complains of the Kafirs’ innate dirty habits, and the love of finery displayed by the women especially on Sundays”. Hermannsberg admitted only those “clean and clothed” to school while Adams Central Training School, Amanzimtoti, reported: “all are required to wear European clothing and the teachers do all they can to foster habits of cleanliness and general tidiness”. The missionaries at Edendale prided themselves on the fact that “the natives of Edendale [were] considerably advanced in civilization, and their children are nearly equal to the average of English children in regard to these matters”. Conformity with English habits was encouraged and in most cases enforced at the mission stations and schools.

<sup>67</sup> D. Rycroft, “Black South African Urban Music since the 1890’s: Some Reminiscences of Alfred Assegai Kumalo”. *Journal of International Library of African Music*, 1991: 23.

<sup>68</sup> Application of Exemption from Native Law, Luke Msimang, January 13, 1881 (Natal Archives 1 | 1 | 29).

replaced round huts (see Figure 3.3). In traditional African society, *ekhaya* (home) was the nucleus of social life.<sup>69</sup> The most important part of the homestead, sacred and spiritually charged, was the cattle enclosure. It was here that men convened before they went to war, and where communication with the ancestors took place. The *isibaya* (cattle enclosure) was laid out in a round shape with the huts grouped around it (see Figure 3.2).



**Figure 3.2:** *Heathen Kraal*  
(Dexter Josiah Tyler, *The American Board Mission in South Africa*, 1911).



**Figure 3.3:** *"Houses of Christians* (D. Wolff, *Unter den Sulu*, 1914)

Living in an architectural space very different from this traditional architectural layout would therefore have had an enormous psychological effect on converts. In 1889 Rev. Josiah Tyler gave an account of how, after ten years of patient waiting and longing, he might win five converts: "A nucleus having been formed... soon neatly thatched and white washed houses of European

<sup>69</sup> See Chapter 2.2.4 for the relevance of *ekhaya* to black middle class Africans and the transformed meaning of home.

construction began to dot the hills about our dwelling, and we were encouraged by visible proofs that the work of Christianity and civilization was advancing".<sup>70</sup>

The significance of housing as a symbol of progress, education and civilisation is also conveyed in R. H. W. Shepherd's description of the early missionary effort in his historical account of Lovedale: "Within a few years they had thirty acres of land in cultivation, bearing grain of various kinds, and the station had a street of houses, thirty of them square in shape".<sup>71</sup> At some mission stations, the missionaries laid down the rule that, by the end of their first year of residence, all tenants should have constructed at least one square hut with at least a door and a window, and possess at least a table and chairs.<sup>72</sup> These documents substantiate Sheila Meintjes's observation that the square and rectangular houses, in contrast to the circular homesteads of traditional culture, became the symbols of 'civilised' life: "Houses, rooms, slates for writing on, tables, books, and even fields fell into these categories".<sup>73</sup>

In his discussion of South African choral traditions, Erlmann draws attention to how the members of *isicathamiya* choirs, in a kind of warm-up phase, before moving on to the stage, form a ring with their leader in the middle. The circle, Erlmann argues, makes a spiritual connection with the cattle enclosure. A similar connection is made in the physical movements in Zionist ritual and in the circular layout, marked with white stones, of the Shembe places of worship. All these practices represent a type of kinetic 'architectonics' that reshapes "the rectangular architectural framework of the alien order by evoking the 'feeling tones' of the pre-colonial concentrated circularity".<sup>74</sup>

Nearly all of the Christian Africans exempted from Native Law before 1882 whose application forms have survived in the Natal Archives were substantial property holders.<sup>75</sup> Within a short space of time, black middle class Christians were drawn into a whole new set of economic relationships. In 1861, Aldin Grout, one of the American Missionaries, remarked:

When we hear of... an increase of religious interest among a heathen people, we naturally expect a corresponding increase in the direction of civilisation; accordingly I have to say that there has never been anything like the rapid changes in any previous year as in the one now closing. Every man now desires to own a plot of ground, and there is a rush for wagons, oxen and ploughs, and many are laying plans for upright houses. As to garments, if the improvement continues, we shall soon see out entire sabbath congregation respectably clad.<sup>76</sup>

Grout's observations tally with the accounts of a number of observers who testify that the progress of black middle class communities, achieved in a short time, was remarkable. Encouraged by the missionaries and driven by their desire for economic security, many converts orientated their efforts towards agricultural capitalism and became prosperous small-scale farmers. In this position,

<sup>70</sup> J. D. Tyler, "Retrospect of Forty Years Missionary Life among the Zulus".

<sup>71</sup> R. H. W. Shepherd, 1971: 4. See also Chapter 1.2.2, page 25

<sup>72</sup> H. Gamble, *Marianhill: A Century of Prayer and Work (1882-1982)*. (Marianhill: Mission Press, 1982): 36.

<sup>73</sup> S. Meintjes, 1988: 55.

<sup>74</sup> J. Fernandez, "Emergence and Convergence in some African Sacred Places". *Geoscience and Man* 24: 38; quoted in V. Erlmann, 1996: 190.

<sup>75</sup> By 1880, for example, Absolom Dube owned "6 plots, about 20 acres in all" (SNA 1/6/10). It seems that the purpose of this land accumulation was to ensure that sons and daughters should be able to establish their own households and thus perpetuate their family. In traditional African societies, land was 'owned' communally. Therefore, the colonial capitalist concept of individual ownership of land, that is, of individuals being able to buy and sell tracts of land, was foreign to the African communal notions. In South Africa, owning land became an important issue. For a detailed discussion on colonialism and the ownership of land see W. A. Saayman, *Christian Mission in South Africa: Political and Ecumenical* (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 1991): 28-30.

<sup>76</sup> A. Grout, "Annual Report of Mvoti Station for the Year Ending", May 29, 1861, ABC 15.4, VI; quoted in N. Etherington, 1978: 116.



they grew more and more subject to colonial land policy and market restrictions. It is therefore understandable that many of the applicants stood up for "property freedom", fearing that under Native Law their position as landowners would be threatened.

### 3.2.2 Overcoming "Feelings of Inferiority": Education and Christianity

*You are at the base of a mountain and the Europeans are at the summit.*<sup>77</sup>

In his extensive field study conducted in the Valley of a Thousand Hills area in the early 1960s, A. Vilakazi looked at the impact of Western culture on traditional social structures. One of his findings was that "the African wants education so that he can have the power that Europeans have".<sup>78</sup> When we think of mission education as an important means of overcoming "feelings of inferiority", we have to keep in mind that not only the colonial powers but also quite often the missionaries themselves had generated these feelings.

Musa Xulu, for example, argues that, in this way, missionaries could be seen as seeking "to confine [Africans] to their own imaginary *inferior* status, until [they] accepted their inferiority and the superiority of Europeans".<sup>79</sup> There is, however, a significant gap between what Xulu terms the "champions of Apartheid" and the missionaries. One has to be aware, that though the champions of Apartheid insisted that all the races in South Africa were equal but different, and that, in order to fulfil themselves, they should develop along their own lines, this guiding principle, which eventually led to the partition of South Africa, the creation of Bantustans, and the withholding of education, was obviously in sharp contrast to missionary endeavour. In fact, the colonists and, later, the Apartheid government blamed the missionaries for encouraging black people to aspire beyond their status. Though almost certainly not innocent of racism, the missionaries disagreed with the colonists who saw black communities merely as a subservient labour force. The missionaries wanted the lives of their converts to be transformed by the Truth in the way their own lives had been transformed. The segregationist educational policies enacted by Verwoerd following the recommendations of the Eiselen Report (1951), in 1953 were a direct attack on missionary education. The mission schools had been a 'thorn in the flesh' of the Apartheid system as they gave black children ideas of growing up to live in a world where there were equal rights among races.<sup>80</sup> It was his firm

<sup>77</sup> In an address at a meeting of the Natal Native Teachers' Union, H. M. S. Makanya, elaborated on the question of progress, advancement and the position of black South African communities within the "advancement of the nations of the world". He encouraged his audience to enjoy the "chance and pleasure of climbing" and concluded "to attain true strength we should not be satisfied with this little education which we have. We should keep learning to fit and strengthen our brains to help our people forward." H. M. S. Makanya, "The Position of the Native in World Development". *Natal Teachers' Journal*, (January 1922): 46.

<sup>78</sup> A. Vilakazi, 1962: 134.

<sup>79</sup> M. Xulu, "Socio-Political Change and the National Anthem in South Africa: A Critical Appraisal of Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika" in *Papers Presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> Symposium on Ethnomusicology*, Rhodes University, 1991 (Grahamstown: International Library of African Music, 1995): 164.

<sup>80</sup> The Bantu Education Act (1953) was put into operation in April 1955. Only two major churches continued to run state-assisted missionary schools, the Dutch Reformed Church and the Swedish Lutheran mission. All other missionary societies and churches refused to accept government conditions, including the new Bantu Education syllabuses that crippled their policies and ideals. Adams College closed down completely and the American Board sold the premises and the inventory to the Government, which re-opened the school under state control with the changed name Amanzimtoti Zulu Training School (see *Ilanga* October 10, 1956 and *Natal Mercury* December 3, 1956). Amanzimtoti Tiger Kloof in the northern Cape was leased to government, and was later re-founded as Moeding College in Bechuanaland; St Peter's at Rosettenville in Johannesburg became a whites-only school. Others, particularly Catholic schools, like the Training College at Marianhill, tried to keep going on school fees and mission funds alone.

intention to “reform [black education] so that Natives [would] be taught from childhood to realize that equality with Europeans is not for them”.<sup>81</sup> He later explained to the Senate that there was “no place [for blacks outside the reserves] above the level of certain forms of labour... What is the use of teaching a Bantu child mathematics when he cannot use it in practice?” He added: “Education must train and teach people in accordance with their opportunities in life”.<sup>82</sup>

The point that I am making here is that, whatever their professed aims were, the effect of the missionary intervention was to assign inferior status to black Africans. The missionaries were convinced that there was only one culture – European culture. This, of course, went hand in hand with the distortion of the African value system. The underlying idea was that “some races are at the bottom of the ladder, while others have climbed halfway up the ladder”.<sup>83</sup> The picture being drawn here would encourage the new converts to set their sights on aspiring to reach the levels associated with Western culture and to reject their tribal past. The aspiring black elite, under the guidance of the missionaries who imparted to their converts the belief that they were superior to those who remained ‘heathens’, started to adopt the ideas of group superiority and inferiority. Rejecting ‘heathenism’, they were encouraged to believe that they were potentially the equals of white people, sentiments that were bound to remain unfulfilled, as we will see in due course.

Although initially the greatest obstacle for the missionaries was the fact that among Africans “schools were universally regarded as the door to the church”,<sup>84</sup> western Christian education for black mission converts soon became a focal point of hope for social status and integration into white colonial society.<sup>85</sup> In the course of the nineteenth century, the missionaries were successful in educating a class of African cultural leaders who had accepted – as the first black minister Tiyo Soga put it in a newspaper article in 1863 – “the blessings which came with the White man”.<sup>86</sup> Soon education became a central feature of the new progressive identity of the black middle classes: “Their overriding concern was with education, because it constituted the primary means for improving their economic and social condition”.<sup>87</sup> The black middle class’s concern with education is again obvious in the efforts of the Native Education Association (NEA), which was founded in 1879<sup>88</sup>. The constitution stated that its purpose was “to take a special interest in all educational matters, in schools, in teachers and all others engaged in similar work, the aim of which is the improvement an elevation of the native races; to promote social morality and the general and

<sup>81</sup> N. Parsons, *A New History of South Africa*, (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1982): 291.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*: 292-3.

<sup>83</sup> K. Mngoma, “Education and Social Reconstruction”. *Iso Lomuzi* (May/November 1946): 9.

<sup>84</sup> Henry Callaway cited in N. Etherington, 1987: 54.

Historically, the school grew out of the Church catechismal teaching and was perceived by the missionaries as a necessary part of missionary work. The close relation of school and church is furthermore evident in the common Zulu term *isikole* (school). According to Doke and Vilakazi, the noun *-kole* describes either a school, a Mission station or a church. Furthermore, the term *umfundisi* was used for the teacher as well as the minister or missionary. C. M. Doke and B. W. Vilakazi, *Zulu-English Dictionary*, (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 1990).

<sup>85</sup> Initially mission schools were designed as instruments of conversion and were indeed almost exclusively used by the missionaries for this purpose. This is why for Africans the disadvantages of conversion outweighed the benefits of education. A change in this attitude seems to have set in during the late 1860s when mission schools became more accepted and enthusiasm for education grew so rapidly that “local missionary resources could not keep pace with the demand” (N. Etherington, 1978: 128.). What the Africans expected from the schools was not so much religious instruction as to learn to read and write. For that reason, the majority of schools taught fundamental arithmetic, reading, and writing. For a discussion of the central role of education within the black middle class see Chapter 3.2.2.

<sup>86</sup> *Indaba* June 1863, quoted in T. Couzens, *The New African: Herbert Dhlomo and Black South African Literature in English 1857-1956*, Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Johannesburg, University of the Witwatersrand, 1980: 87.

<sup>87</sup> R. H. Davis, 1979: 30.

<sup>88</sup> See *Imvo*, January 21, 1887; quoted in R. H. Davis, 1979: 28-29.



domestic welfare of natives".<sup>89</sup> In an address given in 1884, Elijah Makiwane<sup>90</sup> acknowledged: "the members [of the NEA]... have an important work to do – that of showing their countrymen the value of Education and also that they are in danger of having it taken away".<sup>91</sup>

In the 1860s and 70s enthusiasm for education grew so rapidly that local missionary resources could not keep pace with the demand.<sup>92</sup> This trend continued and on March 2, 1891 *The Christian Express* announced: "The re-opening of the school-year had proved the truth of what careful observers have suspected for some time, that the desire for education among the Natives has of late been growing rapidly, and is exceedingly strong and wide-spread".<sup>93</sup> The demand for education grew to such an extent that missionary societies could not supply African demands. Wherever schools failed to measure up to black middle class expectations, either through inefficiency or through defects in curricula, people were quick to demand improvement. Etherington reports that pupils and parents took matters in their own hands at Edendale to protest at the incompetence of a teacher sent to them. They asked that she be replaced by a young black teacher from one of the American stations which had the best reputation in Natal at that time. When they found that their demands were ignored, they hired the black teacher on their own account. A later inspection of both schools by the Methodist District Chairman revealed that this independent operation produced much better results than that of the regular school".<sup>94</sup>

In view of the fact that education became a key issue for the black middle class, it comes as a surprise that in the Applications for Exemption education is specified by only one applicant as a means of justifying his application. There are, however, a number of references to education, which suggest that education was of the utmost importance to black middle class communities. When, for instance, some applicants declared that Native Law was "opposed to instruction and improvement", they obviously remembered their missionaries impressing on them that education was an important tool, ensuring advancement and upward mobility. In adapting to a capitalist economy, the black middle class pursued education with a fervour that sharply distinguished them from their heathen neighbours.

Throughout their history the black middle class looked to education to lift them to the 'civilised' status of European culture. They were convinced that "they [would] be automatically absorbed into friendship with the Europeans of South Africa, because they will all be having one thing in common interest, namely, education".<sup>95</sup> There was agreement among the members of the black middle class that "there was no hope in the progress of the Bantu if they were discouraged in acquiring proper education".<sup>96</sup> In 1938, after having visited the elite Natal Midlands white school, Michaelhouse, students of Adams College reported back to their teachers:

The one thing that made us feel at home was that we had something in common. That is to say, we had education as a common factor in us all. For that matter, even if they did not intend to be kind to us, they

<sup>89</sup> *Imvo*, January 26, 1885; *Ibid*.

<sup>90</sup> Elijah Makiwane, a minister in the Free Church of Scotland, was born in 1850 in the Victoria East District of the Cape Colony. During his lifetime he was one of the most prominent spokesmen of the Xhosa school elite. Through his social standing and his participation in politics, Makiwane epitomised the newly-established school leadership.

<sup>91</sup> See *Imvo*, January 26, 1885; quoted in R. H. Davis, 1979: 28-29.

<sup>92</sup> This is evidenced in the Official Natal Bluebooks for 1858, 1859, 1864, and 1865, which provides a rough measure of educational progress. According to these figures, the total number of Africans attending some sort of mission school rose from a low on 124 in 1858 to a high of 1,853 in 1965. During the years 1876 to 1880 the numbers of black students varied between 2,295 to 3,153 (see N. Etherington, 1978: 128-9).

<sup>93</sup> *The Christian Express* (March 2, 1891).

<sup>94</sup> N. Etherington, 1978: 132.

<sup>95</sup> *Ilanga*, (May 28, 1938).

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*. (December 28, 1940): 13.

tolerated our company because of our little education. Under such conditions, I am hopefully led to conclude that there shall yet come a time when the Bantu shall have some status in the population of South Africa... I have said, this may seem a very optimistic outlook considering the present flow of the tide; but I am confident that with educated minds we can still stem the tide. Therefore let the Bantu find the key to open the doors that bar them from European Society, and the key is nothing but 'Education'.<sup>97</sup>

The family of Z. K. Matthews epitomises the thirst for education of black middle class families.<sup>98</sup> His parents were passionate about education and insisted that their children attend school: "Education was the magic word in our family. Our parents insisted with genuine passion that we go to school and never miss a day if we could help it".<sup>99</sup> The Matthews children distinguished themselves in the fields of law, the health sciences, and the natural sciences. In his autobiography, Matthews remembers his graduation ceremony: "I listened, my mind divided between my sense of achievements past and speculation about the future. I was sure Dr. Roberts was right. I was a new specimen in the zoo of South African mankind, an African with a South African university degree".<sup>100</sup>

An important argument in this context is that it is on the basis of achievement that distinctions of class are largely drawn. This means that the level of education one has and the kind of job one is in determine one's position in the social hierarchy.<sup>101</sup> Vocations that require a long and thorough education like teaching, the ministry, law, medicine and other 'white-collar' jobs, confer respect. Matthews recalls: "All my teachers were Africans, young men and women upon whom I looked with deference and awe... In the 'Location' they were regarded with immense respect. Even the most wayward child did his best to conduct himself properly in the presence of his teachers".<sup>102</sup> Being a teacher not only conferred status, but was perceived as a real vocation, a calling with significance and wide-ranging responsibilities:

And I was determined upon a career in teaching. It was the one way I knew I could fulfill my need to serve my own people and discharge my enormous obligation. I would be able to pass on to others what had been given to me. I would help make a wider way of the narrow path. Our graduation [as the first students of Fort Hare to obtain the Degree of the University of South Africa]... had raised our whole people "by a perceivable amount". It would be my function to help raise it more, until it was no longer a noteworthy thing, but a commonplace, for men with black skins, as well as men with white skins, to learn and make use of all that they were capable of absorbing. Teaching in a society like that of South Africa was not like teaching elsewhere. It was not merely a profession. It was more like a mission than a way of earning a living, a vocation, a call to help satisfy the great hunger for education that existed among the millions of our people, a hunger which so few had done so little up to now to appease. I would find my work here.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid. (May 28, 1938).

<sup>98</sup> In the course of the twentieth century, the importance of education for the black middle class became increasingly important. This trend is recognised in the speeches and articles of Matthews, who, during the 1930s, repeatedly spoke of education as the means of escape from poverty; and the condition of political participation. See M. Wilson, *Freedom for my People: the Autobiography of Z. K. Matthews: Southern Africa 1901 to 1968*. (Cape Town: Africasouth Paperbacks, 1986): 217.

<sup>99</sup> Z. K. Matthews, 1986: 13.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.: 82.

<sup>101</sup> For a discussion of vocation see also Chapter 2.2.1.

<sup>102</sup> Z. K. Matthews, 1986: 17.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.: 82.

This attitude is recognisable today in the choirs where during rehearsals the choristers refer to their conductor as *uteacher*.<sup>104</sup> Professional titles are a sign of status. This explains why black middle class Africans had and still have a strong drive towards the acquisition of titles, degrees and senior positions. In Chapter 2.2.3 (page 49), we saw that the preferred careers were those of teachers, clerks, clergymen, and entrepreneurs. A. Vilakazi confirms that “in terms of rank, in the status positions the top people belong to the professions, then come the tradesmen who practise crafts, like tailors, shoe-makers, carpenters, who share their honours with business men. Money has not yet taken pride of place from book learning”.<sup>105</sup> For educated Africans, money did not necessarily confer a high social position. Recently, however, this has changed. In the post-Apartheid era, other possibilities of entering the economy, previously not open to black South Africans, have opened up new perspectives. Now, theoretically, everybody can be involved in local and global markets. This has led to a shift in prestige away from previously highly respected vocations like teaching or the ministry towards leading positions in the capitalist economy or the state. Money and consumer goods have become new symbols of status. This tendency is mirrored by the comparatively low number of students registering for courses in the education sector compared with the large numbers of students in the faculties of business and accounting at South African universities.

The majority of my interviewees confirmed that, up to the present day, education and Christianity have maintained a central position for the choral community: Leslie Nkuna, a composer who comes from Valdesia near Pietersburg, uses the centrally Christian idea of bringing light into the darkness to describe the importance of education in his life:

We were in darkness: we did not know God, we did not go to schools, for education, we had no hospitals. These are the three things that the [missionaries] did in our area: religion, education, and hospitals. They gave me these things, the light... There is another thing: education. We were in darkness, we didn't know how to write, we didn't know how to read, we didn't know any other language like English or Afrikaans or whatever the language, we only know Tsonga language. Now they brought light about education. I wrote a lot about that. I wrote a lot about religion: the mission stations that they formed, the schools that they built.<sup>106</sup>

Edward Mngadi, who is Supervisor for Music in the Department of Arts and Culture in KwaZulu Natal, is convinced that

up to today good schools are those schools that were traditionally missionary schools. Missionary schools have a tradition of good results, of history, of some of the great big shots in poetics and elsewhere. They were trained there, in those schools; and they were semi-whites in everything they did... some of them were even said to be emancipated. So they enjoyed a few rights of the whites, because they were

<sup>104</sup> In Zulu, a “schoolteacher” is an *umfundisi wasesikoleni*. The verb *funda* means learn or go to school. It is interesting that a second meaning of this verb depicts learning in the context of a musical rehearsal associated with wedding dances and songs. *Fundisi* literally means “one who influences others”. This can either be someone in the position of a teacher or someone active in the ministry. Consequently, Doke and Vilakazi translate the noun *umfundisi* either as “position as teacher” or “state of being a Missionary or Minister”. That the choirs use *uteacher*, which is, of course, derived from English, is another indication of the degree of imitation and Western influence. C. M. Doke and B. W. Vilakazi, *Zulu-English Dictionary*, (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 1990).

<sup>105</sup> A. Vilakazi, 1962: 108-9; it is interesting to note that throughout his life, Mweli Skota never received wages as he regarded this as inappropriate for a member of the black elite, no matter what his financial difficulties. See J. T. Campbell, “T. D. Mweli Skota and the Making and Unmaking of a Black Elite”, in *The Making of Class*. History Workshop February 9-14, 1987 (Johannesburg, University of the Witwatersrand): 32-3.

<sup>106</sup> Personal communication with Leslie Nkuna, Grahamstown, July 02, 2000.

educated. They had some of their rights and they were proud of that, so they tried to uphold the culture. And you see that in their arts.<sup>107</sup>

All the choirs that I have worked with have had a membership with a high value for Christian teaching and education in general.<sup>108</sup> Education is seen as the single most important factor in developing a Western system of values and achieving social status, being educated assures one considerable prestige. In fact, Langa Nkosi, a respected and influential conductor and adjudicator living in Pretoria, claims that “choirs and being educated ended up in the same thing. Because you can’t expect an uneducated person to enjoy choral music. Even today, that’s how people think... You must be educated, in fact you must be a teacher”.<sup>109</sup>

Realising this, I shall attempt in the second part of this thesis a detailed contextualisation of education and music in a case study of one of the most important mission institutions of Natal, Adams College.

### 3.3 Between Two Worlds: Exclusiveness, Segregation and Rejection

As we have seen in the previous chapter (see 2.2.4, page 52), initially it was the homeless and out-cast black Africans who came to the mission stations, convinced that the missionaries could do for them what they could not do for themselves. For them the missionaries were important protectors, advisors, mediators, and advocates. Furthermore, landless men and women who had no other place to go, eventually found home at the mission stations. Even though they soon realised that they had to trade their old identity for one based on Christianity and Western social and political values, they readily accepted these changes because the “host and chalice conferred a status”.<sup>110</sup> Heathen Africans, as a result, saw the mission-educated black middle class as consisting of “separate people”, and therefore made a decisive effort to exclude mission-educated Africans.

#### 3.3.1 Alienation from Traditional Black Communities

The alienation of black mission communities from their past becomes obvious in an account given by the American Board missionary, Ray Phillips, of an experience he had around 1918 when he attended a rural wedding. Although one has to bear in mind that the report exposes a good deal of missionary prejudice, it gives a good sense of the tensions that must have existed between educated and traditionalist Africans. In addition, it reveals how far the mission-educated Africans had departed from their ancestral roots; they were almost completely prevented from participating in their own culture:

Soon after arrival in South Africa my wife and I went to stay for a time in a native kraal far from civilization. Reason – language study.

We were perspiring over our Zulu lessons one day, trying to straighten out the many different classes of nouns, and stretching our mouths to encompass the difficult Zulu clicks, when a messenger arrived with an invitation to attend a native wedding that afternoon.

<sup>107</sup> Personal communication with Edward Mngadi, Durban, November 16, 1999.

<sup>108</sup> Between September 2000 and March 2001, I conducted a survey using a comprehensive questionnaire in order to obtain a detailed profile of the contemporary *amakwaya* community. The results of this survey made it clear that Christian tradition and education were central to the lives of those singing in *amakwaya* groups today.

<sup>109</sup> Personal communication with Langa Nkosi, Johannesburg, July 20, 2000.

<sup>110</sup> N. Etherington, 1978: 115.

Down slammed our books. We hurried to get ready for the trip over the winding native paths.

We discovered on our arrival that both Christians and heathen had been invited to attend the joyous occasion. On one side of the collection of huts were assembled the heathen; on the other the Christian folk. On the heathen side the wedding dances were being put on by a long line of sparsely dressed men, young and old. They stamped and shouted and sang, looking up into heaven with staring eyes. They were evidently invoking the blessings of the spirits of the departed on the newly-wedded pair. When the dancers lagged there were the women to encourage them by their steady hand-clapping. There also were the equally encouraging pots of home-brew beer containing a powerful "kick".

The side of the kraal occupied by the Christians, however, was quiet and dignified. Here in his black frock-coat was the preacher, vigilant to guard his flock. All were attired, as nearly as possible, like the white people they had seen. And they were seated on European chairs. (Their heathen brethren squatted on the ground.) What could the Christians do to contribute to the joy of the wedding? The pastor solemnly stood up and selected a hymn; they turned to the places, stood up together, and in good harmony sang one of the great hymns of the Church: "Holy, Holy, Holy". Then they resumed their seats. But all the time, on the opposite side of the kraal, the heathen commotion continued without check, the noise rising and falling – stamp, stamp! grunt, grunt! the bursting into song, the waving of the shields, and the vicious jabbing of the spears.

We were looking on from a point midway between the Christian and heathen groups. About us were gathered the children, many of them the sons and daughters of the Christians. Their fathers and mothers were over there sitting quietly on the chairs.

We couldn't help but wonder how this contrast affected the children. Which type of activity appeared to them the more attractive – the quiet hymn-singing of their parents, or the wild shouting and stamping of the heathen? We watched the children's eyes closely following every move of the heathen; open-mouthed in appreciation. Here was real stuff! The dancers were having a good time! We concluded that were we in the position of the young folks, the heathen contribution would appear much the more attractive of the two. In many cases it does. Children of Christian parents find much in heathenism that attracts them and they slip off into the heathen kraals, there to stamp their feet, clap their hands, and shout their songs.<sup>111</sup>

What is shown here is that the new Christians had been divided not only from the "heathen" but also from their own past (to which the children seem at times to wish to return), and that their conversion to Christianity meant a blind, uncritical rejection of the traditional African culture in favour of the culture of the missionaries.<sup>112</sup> The result was an imitative identity that could not be negotiated. Conversion to Christianity was the first step in a process of transformation that would penetrate every sphere of life. This transformation led to the segregation of a small group of black people, who were more or less prepared to follow the missionaries' teaching. Under the influence of the missionaries' total rejection of traditional African culture and their promises of an elite position for their converts, the majority of black Christians were successfully weaned from traditional beliefs and practices. The result was that they often felt contemptuous of traditional customs, beliefs, political institutions, authority, dress, music – in short, all the aspects of African social, religious, political or cultural life that were condemned by the missionaries as being "primitive" or

<sup>111</sup> R. E. Phillips, 1930: 93-4.

<sup>112</sup> There is much criticism of the missionaries that centres on their disruptive effect on tribal life and their undermining of traditional African values. It must, however, be acknowledged that missionaries were the most important agents of "constructive change", with Christianity and education being probably the most important factors. Shula Marks supports the view that in many instances "the lack of sociological understanding on the part of missionaries added unnecessarily to the burden of the Christian convert". However, as Vilakazi argues, the missionary bodies played a vital role in equipping their converts with skills and strategies to cope with modern society and the changes brought by colonising powers. See S. Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion: the 1906-8 Disturbances in Natal*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970): Chapter 3; and A. Vilakazi, *Zulu Transformations*. Pietermaritzburg: (University of Natal Press, 1962): 137f.

“heathen”. To become a Christian meant to turn away from these things.<sup>113</sup> In an interview conducted by David Dargie during a conscientisation course, a black priest from East Africa speaking about the culture of his own people confirmed that this had been the experience of Christians all over Africa:

We used to pray in our own way, we are very religious people, we had our holy places, we had appropriate songs for all occasions – when missionaries came, they took advantage of colonisation. Everything we were doing was bad, was evil, diabolic, sinful, and to be abandoned. We were taught tunes from Ireland, et cetera, and things have been lost. We are not [members of our own nation] nor Europeans. We are a bunch of people hanging there, with no roots.<sup>114</sup>

This act of stigmatising as “heathen” any traditional music, dancing or musical instrument, Musa Xulu argues, had a permanent effect on the consciousness of educated Africans:

Those Africans who chose to become Christians soon refrained from singing, dancing to their music and even mixing with other fellow Africans who were not yet Christians. They actually looked down upon their culture and in most cases were more prepared to join forces with missionaries in crushing African traditionalism. As schools were established alongside church buildings in the mission stations, it was a prerequisite for a child to be Christianised before he could be enrolled in the school.<sup>115</sup>

Xulu, however, oversimplifies matters and is not precise enough when he comes to describing the transition from traditional musical experiences to the new forms of Western music. He is certainly right that the missionaries opposed the use of traditional music and singing both during the service and in the mission schools, thus moulding the musical activities of the mission Africans. The process often left the converts with no real choice but to direct their musical activities towards the forms approved by the missionaries. As Coplan says: “Forbidden to perform the dances and dance songs that had been indispensable to organised social interaction in the traditional community, mission Africans channelled their desire for musical socialisation into Christian congregational singing”.<sup>116</sup> The missionaries’ idea was to transform the Africans arriving at the mission schools so that each would “learn to think and speak like a westerner, and to sing like a westerner”.<sup>117</sup> One has to bear in mind, however, that this transformation was by no means a simple adaptation of Western musical ideas and genres but rather a complex and intercultural exchange. This will become clearer later.

### 3.3.2 Demonstration of Loyalty

I have argued earlier (see chapter 2.3.2, page 58) that the attitude of white South Africans towards the black middle class was characterised mainly by hostility. Black claims for social and political equality were not admitted by the white communities of South Africa. The following incidents are especially striking examples of a series of painful experiences of the black middle class in their continuous effort to gain respect from the white communities.

<sup>113</sup> Vilakazi substantiates this claim by arguing, “there are two words which the Christians and the educated dread. They are *iqaba* or *umbhedeni*, i.e. a pagan or heathen... who do not belong to any particular church... who show a preference for traditional or tribal ways... – for example, a man who did not build a modern European-style house or have European-style furniture, or did not wear shoes, or whose manners were more traditional than western, as indicated by his attitude to women, to children, etc” (A. Vilakazi, 1962: 99).

<sup>114</sup> D. Dargie, “African Church Music and Liberation”. *Papers presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Symposium on Ethnomusicology* (Grahamstown: International Library of African Music, 1984): 10.

<sup>115</sup> M. Xulu, 1989: 119.

<sup>116</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 29.

<sup>117</sup> H. Weman, *African Music and the Church in Africa* (Uppsala 1960): 115.



During the Anglo-Zulu War of 1878, mission-educated African men gave the greatest possible proof of their loyalty by going off to fight for Natal. When in August 1879, the survivors returned to Edendale “amid the ringing of bells and the singing of hymns”, they prayed that “grateful whites would henceforth do more to make Natal a colony fit for *kholwa* heroes”.<sup>118</sup> About 30 years later, members of Edendale’s *amakholwa* community rendered proof of the extraordinary loyalty of black Christians to the British government. For the purpose of augmenting War Funds for the “Great War”, 1914-1918, Littin A. J. Mtetwa decided to form a choral group which he named The Zulu Union Choir. The choir consisted of Mtetwa as the Conductor, his wife, two daughters, two sons and some cousins. After the troupe had collected a little over £12, they forwarded the money directly to England. A letter written by Edward Wallington, the Queen’s Private Secretary, acknowledges the contribution of the Choir.

Buckingham Palace, 15th March 1918.

Sir,

I have laid your letter and enclosure before the Queen, and am commanded to convey to you an expression of Her Majesty’s sincere thanks for the photograph of your Union Zulu Choir, which you have been kind enough to send for the Queen’s acceptance.

Her Majesty is interested to learn that, under your Conductorship, your Choir of 60 Natives, men and women, have been so successful in their efforts to help our soldiers.

I am,

Yours faithfully,

EDWARD WALLINGTON,

Private Secretary to H.M. the Queen. Mr. Littin A. J. Mtetwa.<sup>119</sup>

Despite all the difficulties the Choir was confronted with, they nevertheless persevered with their venture. It is especially remarkable that many of the obstacles were created by the white community:

What militated most against our happy working of the choir was the perversity of several of the masters and mistresses of the members of the choir, for the choir was composed of servants of the residents of Durban. Many times they refused the members of the choir to leave their premises to go to the practice.<sup>120</sup>

At some stage later the Choir gained such an important position in Durban that the Mayor of Durban agreed to exempt the members from the curfew restrictions. Samuelson reported that, for their performances at important public events or on state visits, the Choir wore badges engraved with the words “For God, King, and Country”.<sup>121</sup> His first comment on the enterprise was: “Now, can anyone tell me that there was ever nobler behaviour than that of this conductor? And yet the Natives have not yet managed to win the hearts of many white people”.<sup>122</sup> Z. K. Matthew’s remarks on the participation of members of the black community in the World War II show a similar disappointment:

<sup>118</sup> N. Etherington, 1978: 164-5.

<sup>119</sup> Quoted in R. C. A. Samuelson, *Long, Long Ago*. (Durban: Griggs, 1974): 208-9.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*: 209.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*: 210.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*: 211.

They [the members of the black community] have offered the greatest service which anyone can render to his county – their loyalty and their lives. It has come as a great disappointment to them that the full measure of their offer has not been accepted, because of the necessity to placate those elements who are not yet prepared to look upon the African as a citizen in the land of his birth.<sup>123</sup>

Members of the middle class also signalled their loyalty to Britain in the form of musical compositions. John Knox Bokwe, for instance, composed a song entitled “Queen Victoria’s Jubilee Ode”, which was used to celebrate the occasion of the Jubilee of Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, at Lovedale in 1887.

### *Queen Victoria’s Jubilee Ode*

*From wild Zambezi’s roaring falls to Table Bay’s grim castle walls,  
Old Afric’ swells thy loud acclaim, VICTORIA, our Queen,  
Whose honor’d name lights Britain’s fame with virtue’s silver sheen.  
Basuto, Xosa, Bechuan, and wild waifs from each roving clan,  
On answer’ring hilltops paeans claim, to thy deserved renown;  
Britons and Dutch, united praise the halo round thy crown.  
No hireling bayonets fence thy throne, Thy towers no regal captives own;  
No need hast thou of lurking spies, but woe to him who rears the torch of treason,  
And defies affection’s clustered spears.  
Great King of kings! Our pray’ we raise may richest blessings crown her days;  
Let guardian seraphs from above, defend our noble Queen.  
May Justice, Mercy, Truth, and Love Aye keep her laurels green.*

Chorus:

*Queen of Britain, brave and free, guard of sacred liberty,  
With loyal hearts, and bended knee, we hail thy gladsome Jubilee.<sup>124</sup>*

Loyalty to the Crown was still strong when Caluza composed the song “Bayete” (Hail Your Majesty) in honour of the Prince of Wales’s visit to South Africa in 1925. The song which combines triadic structure with lyrics that were perceived as “loyal to the core”<sup>125</sup> shows a great deal of faith in Western civilisation and Western values. *Bayete* is usually used to greet the king. The use of this greeting for the Prince of Wales visit has a deep meaning and reveals devotion to the English monarchy.

### *Bayete*

Bayete nkosi.  
Mtwana sakubona.  
Z’yaku bingelel’ ingane zako!  
Bayete nkosi.

### *Hail Your Majesty*

*We salute your majesty.  
Your children are saluting you.  
Rule us, your children!  
Salute, your majesty!*

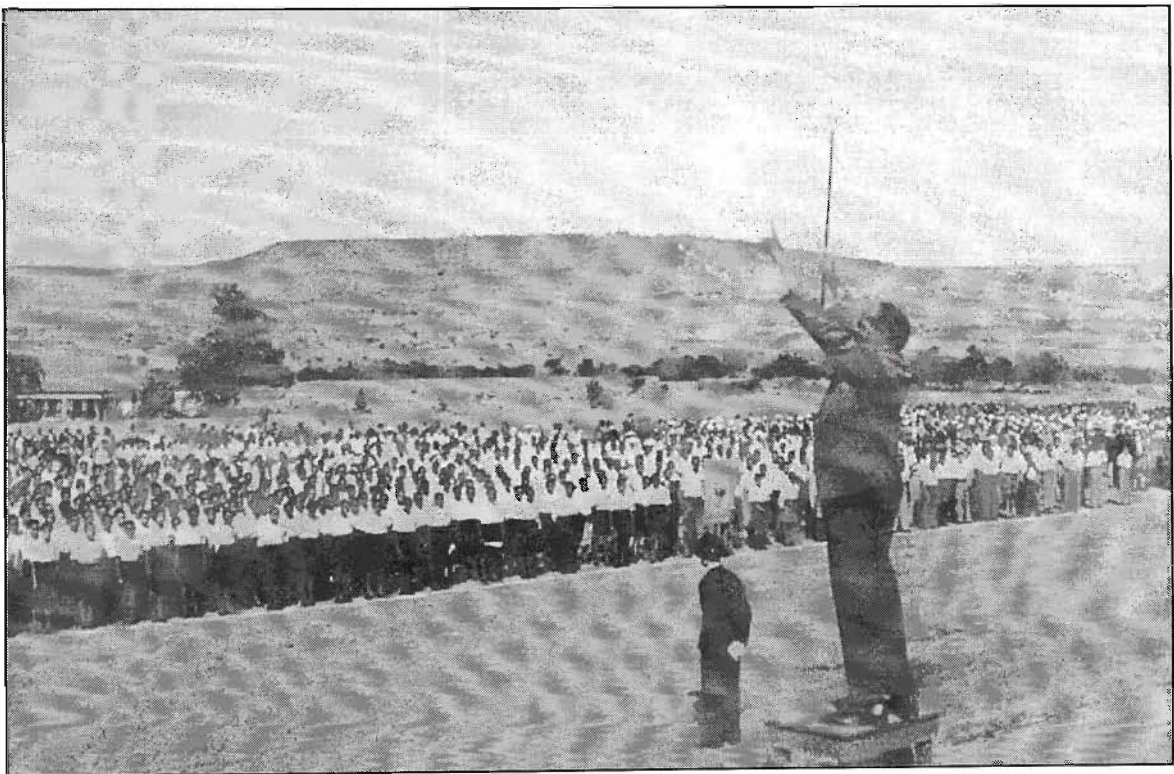
The song was sung more than twenty years later when George VI, accompanied by Queen Elizabeth and the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret, visited South Africa. During their visit to Pietermaritzburg on March 18, 1947, some 6,000 school children, together with more than 20,000 African people, assembled at the racecourse at Scottsville to welcome them. As the Royal party arrived, the choirs “which stood immediately below the dais, broke into song, giving inspired

<sup>123</sup> *Native Teachers’ Journal* (October 1941): 18.

<sup>124</sup> J. K. Bokwe, *Amaculo ase Lovedale* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, fifth edition 1922): 35.

<sup>125</sup> *Ilanga* (September 7, 1928).

renderings of 'God Save the King', 'Abahedeni', 'Nkosi sikelela iAfrika' and 'Bayete'. 'Die Stem' was rendered by means of a gramophone record".<sup>126</sup> Two weeks earlier, on Saturday, 1 March 1947, the Royal party had visited Lovedale. There a somewhat smaller assembly of about 5,000 people, consisting of the staff and the students of Lovedale, Fort Cox, Fort Hare, Healdtown, St. Matthews and pupils from surrounding schools had gathered on the sports field. A mass choir, consisting of the students of the five institutions, had been trained by D. D. T. Jabavu and under his direction sang three songs: E. Sontonga's "Nkosi siklel' iAfrika", "Vuka Deborah" by J. K. Bokwe and "Ntsikana's Bell".<sup>127</sup> Rev. Robert Shepherd recalls that the King was deeply impressed by the anthem "Nkosi Siklele' iAfrika".



**Figure 3.4:** *D. D. T. Jabavu conducts the Massed Choirs during the Royal Visit March 3, 1947 (from: R. Shepherd, Lovedale, South Africa, Lovedale Press, 1971).*

<sup>126</sup> *Native Teachers' Journal*, (April, 1947): 101-2.

<sup>127</sup> For a detailed discussion of these songs and about *amakwaya* repertoire see the third part of this thesis.

### 3.3.3 Isolation of the Black Middle Class

Mission-educated black people were less concerned about their estrangement from traditional African communities than they were about their rejection by their white neighbours. Being caught between two worlds – disliked by the heathen for their deviations from traditional morality, and resented by the white colonists for their adoption of European modes of life – they had little chance of establishing links to other social groups. Daniel Msimango, a resident of Edendale station, expressed his confusion and disappointment over this situation in an article published in 1863: “We are in the light and yet in the darkness. We are in the immediate neighborhood of the white man, and yet we are far removed... Which road are we to take to the right hand or to the left? Are we retreating instead of advancing in civilization?”<sup>128</sup> Petrus, a convert of Indaleni, reduced the question to the simplest terms – “to the natives we are but despised believers, – to the English we are no more than Kafirs” – and added: “The domination of the English is a just and good rule. Your property – your life – is safe. You are in the light. You buy land, and it is your own. Yet we have a grievance... Let us ask the Queen whose people we are? Whether we are still savages, or belong to the white man. Let us ask what law we are under?”<sup>129</sup>

In other words, exclusion from the group to which they aspired and segregation were common experiences for black South African Christians during the nineteenth century and were centrally important for the formation of their class identity. Although I agree with Etherington’s view that the state of polydimensional isolation acted as a powerful spur to material and educational advancement,<sup>130</sup> we must nevertheless keep in mind that the attitudes of black Christians to traditional society and culture were by no means uniform, but tended to be ambivalent. Some argued that old customs could be reconciled with new Christian ideas, whereas others were instrumental in forming councils to enforce Victorian morality.<sup>131</sup>

In this situation, two different ways of responding were open to them: they could commit themselves to political opposition to white policies or they could attempt to create a safe space within the limits of what was conceded to them. Although their economic proximity to the black lower classes created possibilities for “downward identification” and “radicalisation”,<sup>132</sup> the choir people mainly opted for the second alternative. Their highly crafted dresses and performance practices revealed their self-image.

## 3.4 Summary

Having established the theoretical and historical background to issues of identity in the South African context, this chapter has attempted to trace stages in the development of black middle class identity. I have argued that the powerful new influence of Western culture made acculturation attractive. Those who became black middle class South Africans more or less voluntarily uprooted themselves and attempted to “dress out of” (*hlwuka*) their own culture.<sup>133</sup> Those who came to the mission stations were influenced by the assurances of the missionaries that they “were the salt of

<sup>128</sup> *Natal Witness*, (March 27, 1863).

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> N. Etherington, 1978: 115.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*: 143.

<sup>132</sup> J. T. Campbell, 1987: 2.

<sup>133</sup> See S. M. Tinyiko, “African culture, African Intellectuals and the White Academy in South Africa: Some Implications for Christian Theology in Africa”. *Religion and Theology*. Vol. 3: No. 1 (March 1996): 19-42; [Also published in: *Journal of Constructive Theology*. 2:1 (July 1996) 3-30; available on the Internet:

<http://www.unisa.ac.za/dept/press/rt/31/sam.html>].

the earth and were destined to play a leading role in African history”,<sup>134</sup> and took on European values. This is expressed in Johannes Kumalo’s forceful words: “We left the race of our forefathers; we have left the black race and have clung to the white”.<sup>135</sup> The Applications for Exemption discussed in this chapter speak of the endeavour of the first generations of converts to assimilate Western progressive culture and of their desire to cut ancestral roots. Black middle class communities tried to gain the respect of their white models and prove their fitness for the “modern world”. They were eager to render proof that there was a substantial body of educated, progressive, religious, and hard-working Africans, who, having already achieved much in the way of civilised standards, would make trustworthy and loyal allies. Yet despite numerous sacrifices and demonstrations of loyalty, they had to realise that their hopes of being assimilated into Western society would inevitably be defeated by the social and political attitudes of colonial South Africa. In fact, the white communities took the view that in the economic, social and political structures the black African must always remain in a subordinate position.

Realising that their aspirations could not be fulfilled, the black elite began a process of re-orientation, involving a return to traditional roots and ethnic identity. The following chapter will explore this process which was marked by negotiation and an attempt to reconcile tradition and modernity. Choral music played a central role in this development: first, as a manifestation of the new middle class identity, and, secondly, as a way of voicing, literally, their new identity in an eclectic musical form with African lyrics.

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<sup>134</sup> N. Etherington, 1978: 175.

<sup>135</sup> *Natal Witness* (March 27, 1863). See also footnote 15, page 38.

# 4



## Negotiating Tradition and the Modern: Towards a National Culture

*... in so far as the missionaries were here to introduce Christianity it was very good. But throwing away the people's culture it was a great mistake! Many people have not yet accepted themselves, because psychologically you don't feel that sense of belonging. You always think: oh by the way traditionally we are this type of people, but now we have been made to be Europeans and we are not Europeans – But we are not Africans [either] – however, we are in Africa. At the back of the minds of many African people, there is this impression that something has not been fulfilled yet, but we do not regret that missionaries brought the gospel. It came with some mistakes and you may not blame them... When you fail to understand this context you do great injustice.<sup>1</sup>*

We have seen that mission-educated Africans attempted to carve out a prominent position in the new social order of colonial South Africa. Initially they were convinced that this could be best achieved by assimilating Western cultural achievements and by obeying the teachings of the missionary societies that advised them to leave their traditional culture and identity behind. I have argued that 'education' along with 'progress' became the keywords of a black middle class that expected to gain the respect of their white counterparts by proving their fitness for the modern world. However, the struggle of the black middle class to win social and political concessions based on their attainment of 'civilisation' in most cases remained quite fruitless. Contrary to their earlier expectations, they realised by the beginning of the twentieth century that their aspiration towards fuller participation in the social and political life of the community into which they had been drawn economically had been frustrated.<sup>2</sup> Political and social pressures had manoeuvred them into an isolated position: caught between traditionalist Africans, who resented them for their self-conscious superiority and imitation of European culture, and the majority of whites, who considered their aspirations inappropriate, they belonged to no social group. Moreover, their rejection by the white communities had involved them in a downward movement that had narrowed the gap between the elite and the classes beneath. New strategies had to be found to counter the rejection that the black middle class had experienced. By the 1920s, they had become a repressed elite<sup>3</sup>, debarred from the positions for which their education had equipped them. A movement toward cultural revitalisation

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<sup>1</sup> Personal communication with Rev. Nxele and Rev. Myaka, Clermont, May 08, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> J. Blacking, "Trends in the Black Music of South Africa, 1959-1969", in *Musics of Many Cultures: an Introduction*, E. May, ed., (London, Berkley Press, 1980): 198.

<sup>3</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 113.



and nationalism triggered by these experiences grew among mission blacks. They had recourse to symbols to promote their ideas of progress and modernity and to distinguish themselves from the black African ‘masses’. *Amakwaya* choral practice became an important means of communicating their desire for political and social emancipation.

As time went on, more and more leaders of the black middle class began to question the wisdom of rejecting the cultural heritage that they shared with traditional Africans, in favour of an unquestioning imitation of Western values. The early stages of this process of negotiation and emancipation are already recognisable in Charlotte Manye’s comment during the interview in London (see Chapter 1, page 3), where she bemoans the treatment of black people in South Africa and expresses the black middle class desire of being “sufficient unto [themselves]”.<sup>4</sup> Manye’s statement was emphasised by the performance practice, aesthetics and repertoire of the African Native Choir, which voiced the tensions between imitation and negotiation. The process of political and social re-orientation gathered momentum in the first quarter of the twentieth century when members of the black elite started to pursue the concept of a national culture. Skota’s *African Yearly Register*, to which we now turn, is an important document in this process of negotiation and emancipation.

#### 4.1 The African Yearly Register: A Directory of Black Middle Class Identity

*I was keenly conscious of the fact that black South Africans belong to both the Western and African cultural worlds.*<sup>5</sup>

When I was investigating the emergence of the new identity, so crucially important for this small group of educated Christians, I discovered a publication that reads almost like a directory of their ideas and ideals. *The African Yearly Register: Being an Illustrated National Biographical Dictionary (Who’s Who) of Black Folks in Africa*, edited and compiled by T. D. Mveli Skota, can be regarded as a key to the understanding of the aspirations, the ideology and the philosophy of the black elite in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> The book was published in the early 1930s in response to “that most vital problem – the present-day and future social and economic relationships of the white, coloured, and black populations”.<sup>7</sup> What makes the publication unusual is that it affords a glimpse of an elite and their view of themselves at the point of intersection between imitation and negotiation. The book confirmed the status of those who were included: “They were the heroes of the new class, their status



**Figure 4.1:** T. D. Mveli Skota, (*The African Yearly Register*).

<sup>4</sup> *Review of Reviews* 4, no 2 (September 1891): 256.

<sup>5</sup> K. Mngoma, “Khabi Mnogma 75”, in *Musicus* (1998: 42).

<sup>6</sup> T. D. M. Skota ed., *The African Yearly Register* (Johannesburg: R. L. Esson and Co., 193?). Besides Skota, many foremost members of South Africa’s black elite in the early twentieth century, including Sol T. Plaatje and C. Maxeke, née Manye (whom we already know from the African Native Choir), Rev. T. Ndzondza, H. Dhlomo, A. M. G. Champion, J. Gumede, D. S. Letanka, A. Mpanya, W. Mqhaya and C. S. Mabaso, contributed to this unique document. Similar registers were published by James Steward, ed., *Lovedale Past and Present: A Register of 2,000 Names*, Lovedale, 1887; J. X. Mancoe, *The Bloemfontein Bantu and Coloured People’s Directory*, (Bloemfontein, 1934).

<sup>7</sup> T. D. M. Skota, 193?: xi.

was given the legitimacy of print".<sup>8</sup> This publication, J. T. Campbell remarks, is "a self-conscious attempt by Skota and his contributors to define the nature and role of the black elite".<sup>9</sup> They make current the fundamental terms that South Africa's black elite used to describe itself to the world. Skota probably intended to update the book on an annual basis. Although this was never done, the book is one of the most useful reference guides to the South African black elite.<sup>10</sup> It is more than a directory of 'progressive' Africans: it aims at lending the black elite historical depth, social and political importance, and most of all a consciousness of its own reality and role in the socio-political world of twentieth century South Africa.<sup>11</sup>

In this book we find the biographies of people we have already become acquainted with in connection with the choral ventures that took the African Native Choir and The Zulu Choir to England and America. Saul Msane, who "was a good musician, and possessed a deep bass voice",<sup>12</sup> is mentioned, along with Paul Xiniwe and his wife, Elanor. Both "proved to be very good in business. [Elanor] was also a fine musician with a fine soprano voice".<sup>13</sup> Skota includes most of the members of the African Native Choir, and the ideological meaning of its tour runs through the register as a core theme. By embodying similar ideals to those which the choir promoted on its tour, Skota's publication lends support to the view presented in my discussion of the African Native Choir, that the show of identity was indeed a central concern of the emerging black elite. Communicating their desire for political and social emancipation became the most important goal for the members of the black middle class. This becomes clear in the preface to Skota's *Register*:

For years the world has been wanting to know more about Africa and her people. And Africa, on account of her wonderful mineral wealth, has emerged from the dim background to the forefront of international importance. But little or nothing is known of her people. They are deemed to be savages prone to witchcraft, cannibalism and other vices credited to barbarians. Even historians are wont to record the worst that is in some of the great Africans they sometimes mention in their books... In this book the lives of such men as Tshaka, Moshoeshe, Crowther, Tiyo Soga, Montsioa, Khama and others are portrayed by African contributors, and in each case a genuine historical summary has been given to show, without favour, the qualities of these sons of Africa.<sup>14</sup>

At first sight the inclusion of Shaka, Moshoeshe and other important figures of traditional African society seems contradictory to the idea of a publication bent on defining the new identity of the 'progressive' mission-educated black middle class. A closer look at the biographies will help us to understand this apparent contradiction.

<sup>8</sup> T. Couzens, 1985: 16.

<sup>9</sup> J. T. Campbell, 1987: 4.

<sup>10</sup> There was in fact only a reprinting in 1932, but no new edition appeared. There is some evidence that Skota began preparing a new book in the late 1930s, but finally in 1958, he began collecting materials for a new edition of the Yearly Register. The process of publication was marked by an eight year-long struggle for funds and other problems. When *The African Who's Who: An Illustrated Register and National Bibliographical Dictionary of the Africans in the Transvaal* finally appeared in 1966, it sold only seventy copies. The book itself was an anachronism which reproduced much of the first book. (J. T. Campbell, 1987: 38-46).

<sup>11</sup> J. T. Campbell, 1987: 2.

<sup>12</sup> T. D. M. Skota, 193?: 71.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*: 107.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*: xiii.

#### 4.1.1 Ideological Touchstones: Progress and Education

*In the advancement of the nations of the world, where are we... when and how are we going to catch up to these leading nations?*<sup>15</sup>

A thorough investigation of the biographies reveals that the different authors used almost formulaic expressions: certain words and phrases recur throughout the book, in an almost stereotyped fashion.<sup>16</sup> It is safe to assume that the central idioms and repeated phrases point towards values that were commonly accepted among the middle class and form the basis of their identity. I have already mentioned the three-section structure of Skota's *Register* (see Chapter 2.2.3, page 48). Looking at the characteristics of the eighty-five biographies in the first part, Couzens identifies eight formulae that are repeatedly used:<sup>17</sup>

Education (of children or people)	23
Keen interest in welfare	18
Friend of Europeans	17
Progressive	14
Good speaker	14
Hard worker	10
Gentleman	10
Good Christian	8

There must be some significance in the fact that Skota repeatedly used these words and formulaic phrases in the biographies of his "Who's Who" among famous Africans. The word 'education', which appears in more than a quarter of the biographies, the word 'progressive' and the phrases 'friend of Europeans' and 'keen interest in welfare' indicate the educational, social, religious and political dimensions of the whole book.<sup>18</sup> The second part of the book "Who's Who" reveals a similar tendency towards formulaic writing:<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> H. M. S. Makanya, "The Position of the Native in World Development", *Natal Teachers' Journal*, January 1922: 44.

<sup>16</sup> Tim Couzens assumes that this probably can be attributed to the fact that the authors used an early questionnaire-type approach, asking contributors to give particular details (T. Couzens, 1985: 6). As there is no evidence of the existence of a questionnaire, one could assume that the style of the book is that of Skota in his function as editor.

<sup>17</sup> T. Couzens, 1985: 7; (the statistic excludes biographies from foreigners).

<sup>18</sup> T. Couzens, 1985: 7; It is interesting to note that many other publications of the first half of the twentieth century emphasise the importance of academic achievement, education and progress of the middle class Africans. In his autobiography, Matthews for instance refers to these key terms so often that there is no doubt that he regarded education and academic achievement, as his parents had done, as the "key to power and acceptance in the new world" (Z. K. Matthews, 1986: 217).

<sup>19</sup> T. Couzens, 1985: 16.

Progressive	44
Keen interest in welfare	44
Sportsman (mainly cricket and tennis)	28
Music	20
Good speaker	18
Education (of children or people)	14
Hard worker	12
Respected by whites	7
Gentleman	7
Kind	4
Good Christian	3

In the previous chapter (page 50), I have argued that in the nineteenth century, Christianity, Westernisation, education and progress were regarded as synonymous by the black elite. Westernisation came with Christianity: there was no westernised African who was not also a Christian. The black elite were convinced that education was the key towards progress, and that political and social emancipation was to be achieved by “education, and education alone”.<sup>20</sup> Education, Matthews explained, had such an importance for the members of the black middle class because they regarded it as

the weapon with which the white man had conquered our people and taken our lands... the real reason for our defeat was the white man’s education and the black man’s lack of it. Only by mastering the secrets of his knowledge would we ever be able to regain our strength and face the conqueror on his own terms.<sup>21</sup>

The black middle class was well aware that this ‘weapon’ came with great responsibility: “We have been armed with the weapon of knowledge and education”, A. W. Dlamini, President of the Natal Bantu Teachers’ Union, cautioned in 1938, “and our people look to us in the front ranks to break through the foes of our progress, and to open avenues where they and their children will walk. A big responsibility indeed!”<sup>22</sup>

In the late 1930s and 1940s, the voices arguing for adequate education grew increasingly desperate. From that time the Government increasingly took control of ‘native education’.<sup>23</sup> The mission-educated elite feared that this would jeopardise their position even further: “There is no hope in the progress of the Bantu if they are discouraged in acquiring proper education. Progress of the people as a whole cannot be successfully pursued with an illiterate leadership”.<sup>24</sup> Education became the subject of heated debate amongst leaders of the black middle class. *The News of the Week*, Journal of Adams College in Natal, is full of announcements of discussions, debates and lectures featuring this topic. Ken McIntyre of Natal University, for instance, “presented a stimulating talk on the factors which should determine whether Native Education should be basically different from education of other races” at a prayer meeting in 1953.<sup>25</sup> Another notice

<sup>20</sup> *Ilanga* (February 1, 1907).

<sup>21</sup> Z. K. Matthews, 1986: 14.

<sup>22</sup> A. W. Dlamini in *Native Teachers Journal* (July 1938: 385).

<sup>23</sup> For further details about this process see for instance *Ilanga Lase Natal* (May 19, 1951. 15).

<sup>24</sup> “Free Education for Africans”, *Ilanga* (December 28, 1940): 13.

<sup>25</sup> *The News of the Week* (October 30, 1953).

announced a college debate on the topic "Education is the only tool to liberate a nation",<sup>26</sup> and two weeks later "Bantus should be educated in the medium of vernacular".<sup>27</sup> In his function as president of the South African Native Teachers' Federation Z. K. Matthews argued for

an education which will take due account of the fact that [Africans] are living in the modern world, in an environment which includes both Western and African elements linked together indissolubly. Any course which purports to prepare students for a purely African environment as if such a thing still exists in South Africa will not be tolerated by Africans.<sup>28</sup>

This position was taken up recently by King Goodwill Zwelithini on the occasion of the 2001 TIRISANO Schools Choral Eisteddfod. Whereas he emphasized the importance of education, he was convinced "that there is no contradiction between modern-day education and African traditions and culture".<sup>29</sup>

Let us now return to Skota's *Register* and the table of formulaic phrases. According to the criteria implicit in the biographies, the ideal identity of a middle class African would read as follows:

A very progressive person, he would have been educated at one of the prominent mission schools at Natal or the Cape;<sup>30</sup> he would have attended a training college, earning a qualification as a teacher. Having taught successfully for some years, he would have found fulfilment in this position. A model for the community and a hard worker, he would not drink. After some years of teaching, he might have taken the decision to continue his studies at one of the mission seminaries, graduating as a minister and being ordained. In this new position he might have become a powerful preacher and an eloquent speaker, taking great interest in the improvement and welfare of his people educationally, socially, and politically, and consequently being respected by black and white people alike. He might have become a good writer and eventually played a prominent part in the political life of his people. He would have been a father of children who maintained the idea of progress, education and Christianity in an equally respectable way.<sup>31</sup>

The biography of Paul Xiniwe, Skota's father-in-law, who went to England with the African Native Choir, provides a representative example of this ideal:

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. (September 1, 1955).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Z. K. Matthews in his Presidential Address, 1940, of the South African Native Teachers' Federation, in *Native Teachers' Journal* (October 1941: 9).

<sup>29</sup> Address by his majesty the king Goodwill Zwelithini on the occasion of the 2001 TIRISANO schools choral eisteddfod, online available at <http://www.kwazulu.net/King/Tirisano/tirisano.htm>.

<sup>30</sup> A breakdown as regards education shows that Lovedale was the missionary institution attended by the majority by far of those mentioned in Skota's biographies. After Healdtown and Blythwood, the schools in Natal (Ohlange and Adams College) range at the lower end of the statistical range (see T. Couzens, 1985: 6; 10). These figures also show that Lovedale was the most important educational institution for black South Africans: "The significance of Lovedale in the educational development of Africans in South Africa cannot be minimized. The best evidence of this is the great number of leading Africans in the ministry, in teaching, in public service, medicine, law, and commerce, who received their post-primary education at Lovedale". (Z. K. Matthews, 1986: 45-46).

<sup>31</sup> For Skota, it was the way in which children built on their parents achievements, just as he had built on his father's, that supported a prominent black middle class notion 'civilisation' as progressive. The *Yearly Register* is full of remarks on how the older generation had succeeded in conferring elite status on their children. H. M. S. Makanya confirms this observation: "We are all responsible in the advancement of our people's progress. Our fathers have handed it down to us at a certain stage, and it is yours and my duty to hand it down still further advanced to those who shall come after us". (H. M. S. Makanya, "The Position of the Native in World Development". *Natal Teachers' Journal*, January 1922: 46).

Mr. Paul Xiniwe went to Lovedale in 1881 as an advanced student on the recommendation of Rev. Edward Solomon, of Bedford, from whence he came. He had worked previously on the railway as time-keeper and later as telegraph operator. At Lovedale he entered the students' classes in January, 1881. In the second year he obtained the seventy-fourth certificate of competency at the Elementary Teachers' Examination. He became teacher in the Edwards Memorial School, Port Elizabeth. His school was said to stand high in the classification of schools of the district in efficiency. After some years he tired of the teaching profession, and having saved some money, resigned in order to become a business man. He bought property at East London, Port Elizabeth and Kingwilliamstown, and opened stores as merchant and hotel proprietor. At Kingwilliamstown his property was conspicuous, being a double-storey building and known as the Temperance Hotel. In a very short time the Temperance Hotel was known through the Cape Province. Paul Xiniwe took a very keen interest in the welfare of his people. An upright man, honest gentleman, and a thorough Christian and a staunch temperance apostle. He married a Miss Ndwanya, sister of Mr. Ndwanya, a law agent who was respected by Europeans and natives at Middledrift. Mr. Xiniwe was the father of five children. The eldest son, Mr. B. B. Xiniwe, was a law agent at Stutterheim for a number of years; the second son is in Johannesburg; the third, a daughter, Frances Mabel Maud, is the wife of the editor of this book; the fourth, another daughter, Mercy, is the wife of Mr. Ben Tyamzashe, a schoolmaster and an author; and the youngest son, Mr. G. Xiniwe, is a clerk in a solicitor's office, Kingwilliamstown. Mr. Paul Xiniwe died at an early age leaving a widow and five children to look after themselves. Mrs. Xiniwe who, with her husband, had been to Europe as a member of the native choir, was a lady of experience, tact, character and business acumen. Difficult though it was, she maintained her late husband's property, and carried on the business and educated her children. This lady indeed commanded the respect of all who knew her, white and black. Paul Xiniwe was a man of his word. He swore he would never touch liquor. When he became very ill his doctor advised him to take a little brandy, but he made up his mind that he would not do so, although it was said brandy was the only thing that would save his life.<sup>32</sup>



Figure 4.2: Paul Xiniwe (*The African Yearly Register*, 193?)

Skota himself and his family were a “distillation” of black middle class Africans.<sup>33</sup> Apart from his own, Skota includes biographies of his uncle, Ndzimede (born 1848), his father, Boyce (born 1852), his mother, Lydia, and his wife, Frances Mabel Maud (nee Xiniwe).<sup>34</sup> Having established the royal ancestry of his uncle Ndezimende, Skota is very careful to describe his conversion to Christianity and Christian values:

Mr. NDEZIMENDE SKOTA, eldest son of Soshebe Skota, a member of the royal family of the Hlubi Tribe, was born in 1848, at Encwazi, in the district of Kingwilliamstown. His mother was the daughter of Msumasuma and related to Chief Matomela. In his boyhood Ndzimende attended day-school at his home. When about 23 years of age, he went to Port Elizabeth where he spent a number of years. He returned to his home to get married. He was appointed an evangelist and sent to Herschel where he did

<sup>32</sup> T. D. M. Skota, 193?: 109.

<sup>33</sup> For a meticulous biography of Mveli Skota see J. T. Campbell, 1987: 13ff.

<sup>34</sup> T. D. M. Skota, 193?: 84, 256-8.



good work. He was a very powerful preacher and laboured diligently among his people, and soon won hundreds of them to Christianity, some of whom are, to-day, ministers in the Wesleyan Church. In private life he was a quiet man, a gentleman at heart, and a true Christian. He died in 1929 at his home in Herschel.<sup>35</sup>

Skota's father qualified as a teacher at Healdtown Institution and in 1875 became a teacher in Bathurst. Later he was appointed an interpreter at the Magistrate's office in Alexander, and then in Port Alfred and Somerset East. Mveli Skota was born and educated in Kimberley, worked as a clerk at Crown Mines, and in 1912 joined the staff of the ANC newspaper, *Abantu Batho*, of which he became the editor in 1928. In 1920 he cemented his social position by marrying Frances Mabel Maud, daughter of Paul and Elanor Xiniwe, who were part of the African Native Choir. The Xiniwe family was one of the most established in the Cape. Marriages within the small educated class seem to be common amongst middle class Africans, and are an indicator of a closed and cross-linked community.<sup>36</sup> In fact, Skota's publication confirms the belief that the middle class was careful to establish close links among its members. Kinship ties and personal friendship constituted important prerequisites for the formation of an African middle class identity.<sup>37</sup> Z. K. Matthews confirms this:

Those black Africans who first accepted education formed an elite throughout southern Africa. They knew one another, they intermarried even across language divisions, they served together on public bodies such as the African National Congress. They were prepared to make great sacrifices to ensure the education of their children.<sup>38</sup>

Z. K. Matthews married Frieda, the daughter of John Knox Bokwe, in 1928, three years after he went to teach at Adams College. In his autobiography, he recalls what had happened, when he wrote a letter to his father telling him about Frieda Bokwe, whom he had met at Fort Hare: "... he [my father] had quietly been enquiring about the Bokwe family and what he had heard had satisfied him, as indeed one might have expected".<sup>39</sup> Middle class families were very careful about status and religious attitudes when expanding their kinship ties through marriage.

#### 4.1.2 Factors of Negotiation: The Formula "Was Respected by Europeans and Natives Alike"

This is yet another phrase that is used frequently throughout the *Register*. The fact that Skota was very careful to include this criterion in many of his biographies is an important indicator of change in the identity of the black middle class, whose ambition in the nineteenth century had been directed towards separation from traditional societies and values. Skota might have had a variety of motives. He might have been for the most part motivated by the desire for widespread popularity. The black elite were very conscious of how other communities (especially, of course, the white society) perceived them. Even though their ambition was to become part of Western progressive culture, rejection by the traditionalists would mean a damaging loss of popularity. Though the African elite rejected many of the traditional values, they were often keen to be "respected by Europeans and natives alike". In other words, it might have simply been a mark of success to have earned the respect of both black and white.

<sup>35</sup> T. D. M. Skota, 193?: 84.

<sup>36</sup> Mercy Xiniwe, another daughter of Paul Xiniwe, married Ben Tyamzashe, a famous music teacher, choral conductor, and composer. Also see R. H. Davis, 1979: 19.

<sup>37</sup> Schools played an important role in establishing these lasting bonds. See Chapter 2.2.2; also Chapter 4.1.1.

<sup>38</sup> Z. K. Matthews, 1986: 120.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*: 82.

Their motives, however, as I shall argue, are more complex, and point towards the process of negotiation and a turning away from simple imitation of European values. There is clear evidence in African society of a rising consciousness of ethnic identity, starting in the late nineteenth century and gaining importance in the first quarter of the twentieth century.<sup>40</sup> In September 1932, S. B. Ngcobo published an article taking a critical stand on assimilation, adaptation and imitation: "It is our belief that the progress of a people must start from the elements of their own 'kultur'".<sup>41</sup> He concludes by stating: "We Natives are now beginning to be self-confident as a race; we would like to have a voice – in administration of our affairs even to a small extent". This development was part of the emergence of an African national culture, which I will discuss in detail later in this chapter. The core concept here was to establish a way of negotiation between tradition and progress. The inclusion of traditional communities was a central part of this concept, as A. W. Dhlamini, President of the Natal Bantu Teachers' Union, argued in the 1930s: "We look forward to the time when greater understanding and friendship will obtain amongst all races – the Abantu, Europeans, and Asiatics – who have to work together for the South Africa of the future".<sup>42</sup> The leaders of the black elite who called for reconciliation and the integration of old customs were well aware that 'progress' and 'modernisation' could be achieved only by including traditional communities in the process. By the twentieth century, more mission-school educated Africans believed that a satisfactory self-image could not be built entirely on adopted European models. Thus the black middle class began to promote co-operation with and integration into traditional African communities. The following comment by Benediction Mngome Zulu, an Adams College student in the early 1940s, is representative of the growing criticism that eventually led to the demand within the black middle class for a less exclusive approach:

There is no doubt at all that economically speaking the prosperity of this country industrially and commercially lies in the education and civilisation of the Bantu proletariat... Unless we realise that we, especially our leaders and the so-called educated section of our people, bear a serious responsibility to the race as a whole, the clamoring for education, political and economical rights will continue to be a talk full of sound and fury which signify nothing. It is the educated African who has failed dismally to be a light to his people. Indeed, the educated African has proved himself to be the worst enemy of his own race.<sup>43</sup>

A similar position was held by Albert Luthuli, eventually leader of the African National Congress (ANC). He was convinced that in order to "build a progressive, united African nation... rural folk and city people had to co-operate; and the highly educated and the most backward had to be brothers".<sup>44</sup> The idea was to break down the barriers among various black ethnic groups. From early in the twentieth century leading figures in the African community strove to eliminate ethnic discrimination in order to work towards a national black African solidarity. This is expressed, for instance, in one of the songs, titled "Wonk' Um'nt' Onsundu" (The Whole Brown Community), that Dube in 1911 published in his Zulu Songbook, *Amagama Abantu*:

<sup>40</sup> S. B. Ngcobo, "The Development of the Native Reserves" in *Iso Lomuzi*, September 1932, Vol. 2: 26-27; 31.

<sup>41</sup> Ngcobo's use of the Afrikaans word "kultur" in an English sentence may be a reminder that the 1930s, when he wrote this, was a period when Afrikaners were taking great interest in their own "kultur".

<sup>42</sup> A. W. Dhlamini, President of the Natal Bantu Teachers' Union, in his Presidential address during the twentieth annual conference at Ladysmith (*Native Teachers Journal*, July 1938: 34).

<sup>43</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (May 1943: 14).

<sup>44</sup> "Busy Bee", *Ilanga*, June 30, 1951. Quoted in T. Couzens 1985: 352.

*Wonk' um'nt' Onsundu*

*Let the whole Brown Community become one!  
 Let the whole Brown Community be of one moulding, like cement!  
 We say this to the Sotho, to the Xhosa, to the Shakan [Zulu],  
 To the Mozambican, by the Zambesi river.<sup>45</sup>*

The inclusion of traditional communities and the call for unity with the traditionalists is also the theme of one of Hamilton John Makhoza Masiza's songs, "Vukani, Mawethu!" ("Wake Up, My Countrymen!"). Masiza (1894-1955), a composer of choral music, was born at Somerset East in 1894, educated at Grahamstown Public School, and obtained his Teacher's Diploma at Healdtown Institution, near Fort Beaufort in the Cape. He was one of the first group of students to further their studies when the University of Fort Hare began to offer advanced studies for Africans. His desire to further his general education extended to the field of music; through the Curwen Memorial College, in London, he gained his "Licentiate in Tonic Sol-fa" by correspondence. Masiza's compositional activity began late in life when in 1930 he set to music the hymn, "Bawo Baxolele", written by his father John Masiza, who was a Methodist minister. Among his most important works are two cantatas, "Emnqamlezweni" (At the Cross) and "Uvuko" (The Resurrection), and the well-known hymn, "Hamba Kahle". In his song, "Vukani, Mawethu!", Masiza blames the fact that "all other nations trample on us", on the black people themselves: "We are not united, we don't trust each other". The song was published in the first volume of *South Africa Sings: African Choral Repertoire in 'Dual Notation'* edited by Mzilikazi Khumalo.

*Vukani, Mawethu!*

Hai, usizi lomnt'omnyama eAfrika!  
 Zonk'izizwe zisibeka phantsi kwenyawo.  
 Senze ntoni?  
 Ityala likuthi.  
 Sinobudenge,  
 Sisemnyameni,  
 Sinomona,  
 Asivani, asithembani.  
 Koda kube nini, Nkosi? Koda kube nini, Bawo?  
 Zonk'izizwe zisibeka phantsi kwenyawo.  
 Koda kube nini, Nkosi?  
 Koda kube nini, Bawo?  
 Vukani, mawethu!  
 Nimanyane;  
 Ityala likuthi,  
 Vukani!

*Wake up, My Countrymen!*

*Oh, how sad the plight of a black person in Africa!  
 All other nations trample on us.  
 What have we done?  
 The fault lies in us.  
 We are foolish,  
 We wallow in darkness,  
 We envy each other's achievements,  
 We are not united, we do not trust each other.  
 How long, O Lord? How long, O Father?  
 All other nations trample on us.  
 How long, O Lord?  
 How long, O Father?  
 Wake up, my countrymen!  
 Let us be united;  
 The fault lies in us,  
 Wake up!<sup>46</sup>*

It is interesting to see that early attempts at reconciliation and integration were morally dubious in that the black middle class, in their dealings with the colonial authorities, sought to secure their own interest. Especially at the end of the nineteenth century it is evident that mission-educated black Africans, "while asserting to be spokespersons for all Africans" in fact were reserving for

<sup>45</sup> J. L. Dube, *Amagama Abantu awe Mishado, Imiququmbeol, Utando, nawe Mikelelo no Kudhlala* [Bantu songs for weddings, dances, love, side-stepping and recreation], (Ohlange Institute, 1911?).

<sup>46</sup> J. S. M. Khumalo, ed., *South Africa Sings: African Choral Repertoire in 'Dual Notation'*, Vol. 1 (Johannesburg: SAMRO Scores, 1998.): 22.

themselves “the claim to full citizenship”.<sup>47</sup> Although they worked for the conversion of their fellow Africans, they championed a system of social stratification that excluded the great majority of Africans from its benefits, demanding that legislation and other governmental action should clearly differentiate between the black middle class and the working-class.

#### 4.1.3 “Heroes of the Past” and the New African

*We have been led out of the desert of Fear, Hatred and Ignorance, to the light of Christianity and civilization... we should also lead those who need our guidance... Our lives should be exemplary [sic] to them... In the fields of Science, Literature, Art and Music, we are welcomed as pioneers.*<sup>48</sup>

Although intent on promoting the identity of the new black elite, Skota included in his *Register* “the heroes of the past”: Shaka, Moshoeshe, Moroka and others. In this context, Skota’s interpretation of history is noteworthy and in a way supports our interpretation: in identifying with elements of the past, he was obviously trying to reconcile progressive values and African traditions. The achievements and values of traditional society were transformed by the black elite so as to support their notions of progress and the modern: “[j]ust as eighteenth-century England co-opted Classical Greece and Rome in its art, its architecture, etc., the black petite-bourgeoisie wanted a little of the heroic past to rub off on itself”.<sup>49</sup> This becomes clear in the biography of Shaka.<sup>50</sup> The first part of his biography offers a rather neutral historical account of Shaka’s life and success as a warrior, whereas in the second part Skota ascribes to him many of the values highly regarded by the black elite:

He had absolute discipline in the land. He was King, judge and administrator, also a philosopher, a poet and a musician.

When the European settlers arrived in Natal in 1823 they found Tshaka reigning. He did not illtreat them, but extended to them every hospitality. He requested the foreigners to teach his people their language so that they could be understood. The Europeans had come to trade, fight and conquer, and it must have occurred to Tshaka that they were strong and clever since they had conquered the waves of the ocean and landed in Africa. A number of men were selected to be sent to Europe to be taught, but for reasons unknown to Tshaka, these men were never sent to Europe but were kept at the Cape where they did not learn much...

Tshaka was a thinker – on one occasion he killed a beast and painted the floor of a hut with its blood. This he did without being seen by anybody, and then summoned all the witch doctors in the land to a great feast at his kraal. When the doctors were assembled he took them one by one to the hut with the blood on its floor, and asked them the cause of the blood. It is said many so-called doctors failed in this test.

Tshaka was a very busy man, being his own Field-Marshal, Minister of War, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prime Minister, Administrator, Political Agent, and King. He was also engaged in research work. This is indeed a big task for any man, even under the most favourable circumstances. That Tshaka, like William

<sup>47</sup> R. H. Davis, 1979: 30. For a detailed account of the social structure of African society, see Chapter 2.2.1.

<sup>48</sup> J. K. Ncubane, “The Role of Adams College in the Life of the Bantu”. *Iso Lomuxi*, November, 1935: 15-6.

<sup>49</sup> T. Couzens, 1985: 17.

<sup>50</sup> The importance that Skota grants to Shaka is evident in the three-page biography accorded him, significantly longer than the average single paragraph entries. For an interesting discussion of the significance of Shaka in the construction of Zulu identity see C. Hamilton and J. Wright, “The beginnings of Zulu identity: The image of Shaka” in *Indicator SA* 10, no. 3: 43-46.

the Conqueror, was a great man nobody can doubt, and to state that he was a cruel King is to pay a man who broke virgin ground and founded a nation the poorest compliment. Had there been no Tshaka there might never have been a proud Zulu nation. In Tshaka's day there was no need to have an army of detectives and a force of police. Every man and woman had perfect respect for law and order. Tshaka was well built, tall and indeed a fine specimen of a man. Strict as he was, hundreds of civilised Zulus to this day swear by Tshaka. Whatever may be said, the Zulus are indeed a fine people, well developed physically, good natured, full of humour, and as brave as lions.<sup>51</sup>

As we see from this entry, the biography of Shaka contains many of the values that the black elite admired. Moreover, the use of the formulaic phrases, identified above, creates the prototype of the progressive African who resembles the educated, de-tribalised elite. For this reason, one is tempted to conclude that the biography of Shaka is strongly coloured by middle class perceptions:

- Shaka was the progressive and brave leader, a friend and admirer of Europeans, who extended every hospitality to them without ill-treating them;
- He not only supported the idea of education but requested the education of a number of men whom he sent off to Europe to be taught – proving his keen interest in the welfare of his people;
- Shaka was a busy man engaged in various positions (hard worker); even committed to research work (progressive and an academic);
- Although the term 'gentleman' is not used, Shaka is described as "well built, tall and indeed a fine specimen of a man";
- The remarks about the 'witch doctors' hint at the critical attitude of the middle class to traditional practices.<sup>52</sup>

Tim Couzens points out that, paradoxically, the emerging elite perceived this 're-interpretation' not as a distortion of history but rather as a way of fulfilling it. Shaka is made a pioneer of the "New Africans" whom Dhlomo's poignantly calls "progressive thinking African intellectuals and leaders... [The new African] knows where he belongs and what belongs to him; where he is going and how; what he wants and the methods to obtain it".<sup>53</sup> Thus Shaka's biography, written from a black middle class perspective in the 1930s, reveals a great deal about the new identity of the black middle class and their attempt to integrate traditional African values with progressive and modern notions. However, this identity continued to be marked by ambivalence about the past. On the one hand, the "New Africans" were convinced that Christianity and Western education were indispensable for African enlightenment, and thus championed Christianity and education for having brought 'civilisation' to the 'heathen'. On the other hand, they were conscious that traditional ethnic identity provided a crucial historical grounding and a broad social basis for political action. The black elite indeed was negotiating between two worlds. They were Africans of "putative royal blood", yet, as we have seen in the first chapter, they had discarded traditional garb for high Victorian dress: the European style hats, and the walking stick. In other words, they bridged "the chasm

<sup>51</sup> T. D. M. Skota, 193?: 101-3.

<sup>52</sup> In his 1943 article, "Shaka's Plan for Freedom and Reconstruction", Vilakazi accuses Shaka of having dealt a "death-blow" to the witchdoctors, the "capitalists of the old Zulu society." (*Ilanga Lase Natal*, July 31, 1943; quoted in T. Couzens, 1985: 321). For Herbert Dhlomo's view of Shaka's achievements, see T. Couzens, 1985: 323.

<sup>53</sup> H. Dhlomo, quoted in T. Couzens, 1985: 33. Herbert Dhlomo expressed this idea in a series of two articles published in 1945. In the second article, "African Attitude to the European", he divides Africans into three groups: "Tribal African", "Neither-Nor African" and "New African". Although it would seem that Dhlomo is the first to introduce the concept of a "New African", in effect, he was referring to Skota's .....class. Moreover, he had divided that class into two: those who were the "collaborator-extremists" and the "true-progressive". (See T. Couzens, 1985: 32-37).

of colonial society, preserving that which was redeemable in the African past while inculcating the values and styles of the modern world".<sup>54</sup>

When Skota warned that "...the moment the race as a whole discards its culture, it at once breaks its backbone and may be crippled for all time",<sup>55</sup> he was inspired to some extent by the pioneering ideas of black American thought. A central figure in promoting black American ideas was James E. Kwegyir Aggrey, a West African by birth, who spent more than twenty years studying and teaching in America. He toured South Africa early in 1921 and was enthusiastically received by whites and blacks alike.<sup>56</sup> The monthly newsletter of Adams College, *Iso Lomuzi*, contains a number of articles dealing with aspects of black American thought. Samuel Mubika, for instance, submitted an article entitled "Some 'Aggreyisms'". He wrote:

At this time of my country's life I am anxious that Africa should be civilised, not westernised, and that the civilisation should be Christian. We want a Christian civilisation and then thus together with the best in our own culture we may make a definite contribution to twentieth century civilisation... Dr. Aggrey stood for co-operation of White and Black. To be Aggreys of tomorrow, we should co-operate... overcoming barbarism, heathenism, tribalism, nationalism and other obstacles against the African Progress.<sup>57</sup>

The black middle class had gained first-hand experience of European and American culture by the end of the nineteenth century. As we have seen in Chapter 1.1 (page 5), musical renditions by travelling minstrel groups left lasting impressions on their African audiences; even more important, was the news of black educational achievements in the United States. The concerts of groups like McAdoo's American Jubilee Singers inspired their African counterparts to use performances as a means through which they could declare their own 'progressive' identity. The recognition of the crucial role of performance led to the English tour of the African Native Choir in 1891. Thus this tour can be regarded as an early attempt to promote the new 'progressive' identity of the black elite. This could be taken as intimating an embryonic notion of an African national culture.

During her trip to America, Charlotte Manye, as a member of the African Native Choir, established important links between the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E. Church) and the South African Ethiopian Church. This would have far-reaching effects in the development of independent churches in South Africa. In letters written to friends and relations back home, she mentions the wonderful progress that was being made by black Americans, particularly in education and church related work. Another traveller was John L. Dube, who attended Oberlin College in the U.S.A, where he came under the influence of Booker T. Washington, and on his return to South Africa, in 1901 established the Ohlange Institute.

Those who went to England and America perceived themselves as cultural and intellectual mediators between two worlds. It is important to note that many of those mentioned in Skota's *Register* held the positions of interpreters, clerks, teachers, ministers and journalists, which equipped them to mediate between the dominant white culture and subordinate indigenous culture.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> J. T. Campbell, 1987: 7.

<sup>55</sup> T. D. M. Skota, quoted in J. T. Campbell, 1987: 5.

<sup>56</sup> T. Couzens, 1985: 83.

<sup>57</sup> H. S. Mubika, "Some 'Aggreyisms'" (*Iso Lomuzi* November 1943, Vol. 12, No.2): 14-5.

<sup>58</sup> See J. T. Campbell, 1987: 10.



#### 4.1.4 “A Philosopher, a Poet and a Musician”

*To an African, singing is to talk – is to confide; everything that is life is their music.<sup>59</sup>*

Interesting aspects of Skota’s biography of Shaka are the artistic and humanist merits ascribed to him as “a philosopher, a poet and a musician”. For the black elite, potential for leadership would have been gauged by the individual’s rhetorical, philosophical and musical competence. When working on his *Register*, Skota was therefore careful to mention Shaka’s competence in these areas. The importance of music is further emphasised by Skota as he ascribes musical abilities to many prominent leaders of the African elite. These include Tiyo Soga, who “composed a number of hymns of great merit”; Davidson Don Tengo Jabavu, whose “recreations are Music (violin, piano, and choir conducting)<sup>60</sup>”; Lutuli, whose “...hobby was music”; and Chief Shadrach Zibi, who was a “teacher, choir Conductor and interpreter”.<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, Skota’s contemporary, John Mancoe, in his own register, *The Bloemfontein Bantu and Coloured People’s Directory* (1934), likewise mentions music as a marker of status. The author writes that he hopes to give the public “an insight into the general progress made by the Bloemfontein Bantu and Coloured people commercially, socially and economically and the high standard of sportsmanship and music that has been attained by them within the last thirty years”.<sup>62</sup>

Mancoe uses formulae and code words similar to those of Skota’s ‘progress’, ‘sportsmanship’, ‘good Christian’, and so forth. Musical interests and especially the ability to sing are often ascribed to individuals perceived to be progressive. Janet Twayi he mentions, for example, as being very popular and admired for her musical abilities: “It was truly said by one of the members of the audience that her voice resounds in the ears while you sleep”,<sup>63</sup> and “...her voice is that of a nightingale. Her clear voice penetrates the hall and holds audiences spellbound”.<sup>64</sup> Like Skota, Mancoe stresses Western values. The aesthetics of a clear voice resembles the Western ideal of voice production, and the concept of an audience that listens ‘spellbound’ to a performance is a Western idea. African performance practice does not exploit the skills of individual experts, but is rather group-oriented, aiming at the participation of the entire community.

This emphasis on general musical abilities, and in particular singing, seen in the registers of both Skota and Mancoe, is relevant for our study of the development of *amakwaya*. I shall argue that singing, and the composition of songs, began to be an important expression of a collective consciousness. Put differently, *amakwaya*, developed into a means at mobilising the black middle class, and can be regarded as a response by mission-educated Africans to their experience of exclusion and segregation. Before returning to this in the last section of this chapter, I will look at the notion of national culture, which entails a process of negotiation and a rejection of the previously uncritical imitation of European modes of life and values.

<sup>59</sup> S. J. Khosa quoted in Douglas Reid, “In Conversation with S. J. Khosa: Composer and Music Educator”, in *Ars Nova*, Vol. 24, 1992: 24.

<sup>60</sup> Note that the elitist European music culture is evident in these performance practices. Performances by traditional groups did not make use of a conductor in the same way as was the case in European music performance. The *umbhidi*, an important figure during the wedding ceremonies, had a very different function.

<sup>61</sup> T. D. M. Skota, 1937: 92; 159; 174, 288-89.

<sup>62</sup> J. X. Mancoe, *The Bloemfontein Bantu and Coloured People’s Directory*, (Bloemfontein, 1934): V.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*: 25.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

## 4.2 Emancipation and the Quest for a National Culture

*It is a good sign that there are now many Bantu in South Africa who devote some of their time to the study of the history and traditions of their own people. They have realised that it is not wise to abandon these altogether.<sup>65</sup>*

The attempt to integrate African traditional culture with the progressive European culture culminated in the conceptualisation of a form of national culture by the leaders of the black elite. It is important to keep in mind that the search for a national culture did *not* entail the rejection of Western cultural values and the Victorian ideals of progress and exclusiveness. It was rather a search for an all-encompassing concept negotiating African heritage, Christianity, Western values and notions of progress. Musically, this process of negotiation is manifested in the development of the *amakwaya* repertoire, this is, African eclectic choral compositions and neo-traditional songs, and their characteristic performance practice (see Part Three of this thesis).

### 4.2.1 Interest in Traditional Music

The interest shown by European comparative musicologists in African musical traditions during the 1920s seems to have played a certain role in the black middle class's effort to re-connect with its ancestral roots. Hugh Tracey, who at that time was making his first field recordings, focused attention on the idea of preserving traditional indigenous music. Discussions by comparative musicologists were to influence a choral Conductor and composer, R. T. Caluza, one of the most important African musicians.<sup>66</sup> In a combined lecture-concert, given at Ohlange Institute, Caluza advocated the "uplift of the African music among the young and old Africans" and encouraged a change in the mindset towards traditional music: "Our music has always been said to be primitive. But such a word is not fit. Instead I call it indigenous".<sup>67</sup> This statement proves that, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, the black middle class had begun to emancipate itself from missionary ideas. These efforts brought about a change in missionary education policy. In the nineteenth century, school syllabuses were marked by an almost exclusively Western orientation informed by the following doctrine:

On the one hand, education ought not to result in removing the African who possesses it away from his own people either in sympathy or effort. On the other hand, account must be taken of the fact that the contact of the African with Western civilisation, both in rural as well as urban areas in South Africa, is becoming much more intimate.<sup>68</sup>

The introduction of African traditional music into church services became an important issue of debate, resulting in conflicting positions. First, some felt a deep concern that "Native music would paganise our Christianity";<sup>69</sup> then there were those who favoured the adaptation of African traditional music to the religious context; lastly, there were those who would have liked "Native

<sup>65</sup> N. J. van Warmelo, "Study of Zulu Customs and Traditions". *Native Teachers' Journal* (April 1930: 148).

<sup>66</sup> See *Native Teachers' Journal* (July 1936: 143); A detailed discussion about the importance of the field trips as part of Caluza's pedagogical work at Adams College can be found in Chapter 6.2.4.

<sup>67</sup> *The Torch Bearer* (Vol. 4, No. 2, December 1936): 18-9.

<sup>68</sup> R. H. W. Shepherd, 1971: 106.

<sup>69</sup> H. Tracey, "Native Music and the Church". *Native Teachers' Journal*, January 1932: 110.

church services [to be] accompanied only by Native tunes consecrated to the Church".<sup>70</sup> According to Hugh Tracey, the numbers of those who would have liked to see the exclusive use of European music in the churches were steadily declining. With reference to the second option, Tracey noted: "There have been comparatively few adaptations either of Native or European tunes that have met with success, the results being often most unlike what they were intended to be".<sup>71</sup> I will discuss the problems of adapting of hymn-tunes to the vernacular words in Chapter 5.3.2 (page 138).

The dismissive attitude to African music that marked early missionary teaching changed by the beginning of the twentieth century, to some extent, under the influence of informed criticism such as that of A. T. Bryant: "It is a habit with Europeans to treat all primitive music with ridicule... this can arise only from lack of sympathy or lack of knowledge".<sup>72</sup> In a similar statement, Mark Radebe, who was at the forefront the black middle class's search for cultural autonomy and national culture, blamed the early missionaries for the conscious suppression of "a music characteristic of our race psychology". Radebe argued, "all forms of Bantu art came into dispute; all that was beautiful, pleasurable or gay in life came under their ban. Folk music was especially abhorred. Folk dances were strictly prohibited and the folk song was made a serious transgression".<sup>73</sup> Radebe felt that "a distinctive Bantu music" had to be based on "the only real Bantu music, namely, its folk music" and therefore urged the integration of traditional elements in a new national music:

By proper development Bantu music could be freed from its manifest limitations and made the vehicle for the expressions of a truly national music. Traditional songs are intimately associated with Bantu history and lie very near the heart of the people. In this music, there is a mass of characteristic material. We know that the innate value of speech lies in traditional associations and connotations and this is equally true of music which is as much a language as speech itself... Music to be truly national must be based on the idiom of the people. Those most valuable achievements in musical history have been essentially national in spirit.<sup>74</sup>

This new view was widely discussed and regularly propagated through events like the "Heroes of Africa Day" celebrated at Adams College. In an article published in *Iso Lomuxi*, V. Pule, a student at the College, left a record of the festivities held in 1942. Music, which framed the event, was used in an almost propagandistic manner:

There were also choral songs by the school choirs A and B, conducted by Mr. Caluza and Mr. Bopela respectively. These were African songs composed by Africans. Also the Praise Songs by students of different nationalities some of whom proved 'Heroes in the Making' ... The day was closed with the Bantu National Anthem.<sup>75</sup>

The idea of collecting traditional music also came from another source. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, an expanding South African school of anthropology was beginning to develop new theories about cultural contacts. Central to this discussion was the "continuity and stability of African social institutions in the urban context, and the continuing links of African city dwellers with their rural background".<sup>76</sup> As Inspector of Music in the Natal Education Department Percival Kirby had already, in 1919, upheld the maxim that "the natives must develop along their own

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> *Native Teachers' Journal* (April, 1920): 107.

<sup>73</sup> M. Radebe, "Bantu National Music". *U.W.B.*, July 9, 1932; quoted in T. Couzens, 1985: 70.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> V. Pule, "Heroes of Africa Day". in *Iso Lomuxi* (November 1942: 11).

<sup>76</sup> V. Erlmann, 1991: 149.

lines".<sup>77</sup> He argued that though "there is no doubt that, at any rate for the present, the musical training of the Native will have to proceed along European lines", it was nevertheless crucial for him "to draw his inspiration from the life and language of his own people... if he is to achieve anything permanent in creative musical art".<sup>78</sup> To Kirby self-development was preferable to blind imitation. Hugh Tracey seconded Kirby's views:<sup>79</sup> "The singing of European songs by African children is of doubtful value. Not only are the songs inappropriate, but they become mere exercises in imitation".<sup>80</sup> In a statement that reads as a kind of self-criticism, Tracey reflected on how the missionary societies and the colonial powers had forced their culture on the subordinate African culture:

It is perhaps this cloud that we have brought with us that has either obscured the potential beauty of Native music and art and its rightful position in native life, or forced us to ignore the possibility of his having anything beautiful in this life that we have not imported and tried to graft into him; as incongruously as attempting, say, to decorate an old carved font by hanging pictures all over it.<sup>81</sup>

In the Preface of his book *Ngoma* (1948), Tracey refers to the changing mindset of the African black middle class and its quest for a national culture: "[T]he appearance of this work is perhaps symptomatic of the Africans' increasing interest in their own music, and their revolt against the dark days of intolerance which threatened to extirpate all indigenous arts and replace them with the distorted imitations of others".<sup>82</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Negotiating Past and Present: Manifestations of African Culture

These ideas did not go unchallenged. Bronislaw Malinowski, for example, Professor of Anthropology at the University of London in the 1930s, objected that he could "not understand the real meaning of the phrase 'educating the Bantu along Bantu lines'". This, he argued, "seems to lead to dressing the Bantu up in re-tribalised clothes and making him dance before visiting dignitaries. There is a great deal of sham and unreality about this style of top-dressing".<sup>83</sup> A very similar position was taken by the leaders of the black elite, who criticised Tracey's line of reasoning as not taking their ideas of a national culture into account. On the surface Tracey's call for "self-development instead of blind imitation" might appear to promote their concept of a national culture, but on closer inspection, his critics claimed, its effects would be quite different. Herbert Dhlomo accused Tracey of being "prejudiced against getting the Africans deep into European culture. ... He [Tracey] didn't think one could appreciate native culture and at the same time appreciate white".<sup>84</sup>

<sup>77</sup> *Native Teachers' Journal*, (October, 1919), see also the report of the Provincial Committee on Native Education 1944-1946: 51, 53.

<sup>78</sup> *Native Teachers' Journal* (October 1919); By the late 1930s, this view had gained ground when Kirby argued for "the deliberate recognition of indigenous music by all educationalists". For a detailed treatise on the subject of African music see: P. Kirby, "African Music", in *Handbook on Race Relations in South Africa*, E. Hellmann, ed., (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1949): 619-27.

<sup>79</sup> Both were members of the music advisory committee at Adams College and at times gave talks at this mission institution, which partly are published in *Iso Lomuzi*. See for example *Iso Lomuzi* (November 1935): 8-9.

<sup>80</sup> H. Tracey, "Review of 'An African Song Book'", *Native Teachers' Journal* (April 1947): 117.

<sup>81</sup> H. Tracey, "Native Music and the Church", *Native Teachers' Journal*, (January 1932): 113-114.

<sup>82</sup> H. Tracey, *Ngoma: An Introduction to Music for Southern Africans*. (Cape Town: Longmans, 1948b): x.

<sup>83</sup> *Ilanga*, (September 14, 1934): 9.

<sup>84</sup> H. M. S. Makhanya cited in T. Couzens 1985: 53. Couzens argues that though this might not be an entirely accurate reflection of Dhlomo's position in 1941, it certainly was his position until at least 1935.

Dhlomo's criticism of Tracey is justified if one looks at one of the talks in which he discusses the proposed College of Music at Adams College.<sup>85</sup> After arguing that "a writer who intends his book to be read by his compatriots does not write in a language foreign to him", Tracey concluded: "However beautiful and useful European music is to Europeans, it can have very little importance to Africans".<sup>86</sup> Tracey held the view that it was essential for African composers to interpret the emotions and reflect the mentality of their own culture, in "the language and symbolism best understood by their own folk... The African who manages to learn to play the piano and becomes conversant with the whole European repertoire has achieved only an imitative faculty, daily and hourly attained by thousands upon thousands of white boys and girls".<sup>87</sup> This was not at all what the black elite wanted. In the context of oppressive white racism, their quest for a national culture was by no means a call for a re-connection with African traditional roots that was exclusive of European influences, but rather a matter of negotiation.

In the field of music the transformation from pure imitation to negotiation plays an important role. Eclectic African composers like A. A. Kumalo, Caluza, B. Tyamzashe and P. J. Mohapeloa discovered the value of their traditional heritage and gradually introduced elements of traditional music into their compositions, looking for a balance between the traditional and the modern (see Chapter 12, page 297). Such aims led to black South African composers' working exclusively in the area of choral music, and establishing a unique form of performance practice. In the competitions organised by the choral community a specific form of repertoire has been maintained to the present day. It includes three distinct categories: neo-traditional African songs, eclectic African compositions, and Western items. These will be investigated in more detail in Chapter 10 (page 273).

### 4.3 Music of the Elite: Manifestation of a National Music

*...we trust the day is quickly coming when a leading interest of Native and Missionary and educational spheres will be the development of this, our vineyard. Awaken, O youth of Africa! "Bananas" and "Blues" and "Flappy Feet" and all such rubbish have had too long an innings.*<sup>88</sup>

The dilemmas facing those who expounded a new national culture, so far as its musical expression was concerned, were highlighted by Mark Radebe and others. The whole attitude of the black elite to African culture was full of ambiguities. There was no objection to war dances, Radebe argued, "provided they are staged by the enlightened Bantu. When they are staged by the uncivilised, it is a sign of retrogression, because... he has no inducement to progress".<sup>89</sup> Another example of the peculiar and almost contradictory positions taken up by the black middle class in endeavouring to come to terms with African traditions is to be found in a report entitled "Music for our People", written by Simon Ngubane, choirmaster at Adams College in the 1940s. He mentions that a song

<sup>85</sup> See Chapter 6.2.2 for a detailed discussion about the setting up of the College of Music at Adams Mission, Am-nazimtoti.

<sup>86</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (November 1935): 8.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*: 9.

<sup>88</sup> *The South African Outlook* (June 1, 1931).

<sup>89</sup> *Bantu World*, April 16, 1932 quoted in V. Erlmann, "Black Political Song in South Africa: Some Research Perspectives", in *Popular Music Perspectives*. D. Horn ed., (Salisbury: May and May, 1985): 197.

recital given by Margaret Mzolo left a lasting impression on him because of “how effective the Zulu folk song sounded when sung by a cultured voice on the Concert stage”.<sup>90</sup>

### 4.3.1 The Meaning of Song in African Culture and its Relevance to *Amakwaya*

*My voice that's like an instrument to me.*<sup>91</sup>

There is a strong indigenous tradition of singing in South Africa. Its music, unlike the instrumental and percussion-based music of more northerly Africans, has always been predominantly vocal. Drums and other instruments have played a role, mainly in solo performances, but have never been the main means of musical expression. In group dances, still performed today, for example, at rural weddings, the singers provide their own dance music without instrumental accompaniment.<sup>92</sup> Communal singing, according to Meki Nzewi, has always been an important part of celebrations, ceremonies and recreation. In South African Nguni communities, song and dance created and reaffirmed the social values, practices and ideas of the community, and positioned members of the community in relation to their kin, to the ‘great-great one’ (*nkulunkulu*), to the ancestral spirits.<sup>93</sup> An interviewee noted: “...music is a process of conducting relationships, coordinating the societal systems, coping with the realities of human existence and probing the supernatural realm of forces”.<sup>94</sup>

Performance practice in the West is unlike that of traditional African society, where everyone is expected to take an active part, and the division between audience and performer does not exist. The Zulus have a special term to refer to someone who is musical. He or she is referred to as *igagu*. Gabriel, a chorister in the Durban-based SA Singers, explained to me that *igagu* denotes an ‘intellectual person’ and is “very much related to the culture of choral singing. One would expect that an *igagu* has got musical intellect [and] that he picks up musical lines fast and is able to realise Tonic Sol-fa”.<sup>95</sup> In contrast there is also a name for somebody who cannot sing or dance, which is regarded as a great shame by the community. Such a person is called *idliwa*, or even worse, *ibhimbi*, someone who is hopelessly unmusical.

Among South African Nguni, music is regarded not only as an expression of one’s creativity, but as a powerful means of communication with the ancestral world and the natural environment. Thus music creates a strong feeling of community. Men, women, and children join in spontaneously, no matter what their status or function in the society, and “any individual who has the urge to make his voice heard is given the liberty to do so”.<sup>96</sup> These customs were recently alluded to by Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Minister of Home Affairs, at the preview of the “Birth of an African Opera” at the Playhouse in Durban:

Music and song play an important function in our nation. They express how chorally we perceive and experience life, and mark joy and sorrow, love and war, and each of the recurring seasons. They manifest

<sup>90</sup> S. Ngubane, “Music for our People”. *Inkundla ya Bantu* (September 10, 1947): 8.

<sup>91</sup> Dladla, Thembelihle, Pietermaritzburg Choral Society, KwaZulu Natal, interview questionnaire, January 30, 2001.

<sup>92</sup> For more details on the importance of singing during the traditional wedding ceremony see Chapter 11.1.

<sup>93</sup> M. Nzewi, *Music of Life: Music is Alive in the Service of the African Life*, unpublished manuscript. See also, H. Weman, 1960, *African Music and the Church in Africa*, Uppsala: Svenska Institutet för Missionsforskning, 1960; C. M. Bowra, *Primitive Song*, London, 1962; and M. Xulu 1989: 31–4, and D. Coplan, 1985: 23.

<sup>94</sup> M. Nzewi, *Music of Life: Music is Alive in the Service of the African Life*, unpublished manuscript.

<sup>95</sup> Personal communication with Gabriel, chorister of the SA Singers, Durban, May 03, 2002.

<sup>96</sup> F. Bebey, *African Music: A people's Art* (London: Harrap, 1975); quoted in E. Pewa, “The Chorus”: *A Re-Africanisation of Hymn Singing in Schools and Churches*, Thesis submitted for the BA Honours in Ethnomusicology. Durban, University of Natal, 1984: 27.



the ethos and pathos of our nation. Other nations have consigned the expression of their culture to writing or buildings while, since time immemorial, the Zulu nation has consigned it to music, dances and rituals. For this reason, music is one of our most important cultural expressions.<sup>97</sup>

In most Bantu languages there is no word for music, as music is almost always connected to song, and songs are expected to convey an important message. In their Dictionary, C. M. Doke and B. W. Vilakazi translate the word 'music' as *umculo*. This is interesting since *umculo* or *ingoma* are words generally used for song: *ngihlabelela umculo* would then mean "I sing a song". Furthermore, the verb *goma* means to "speak emphatically", which shows that music in the southern African context was traditionally perceived as an emphatic way of communicating. It has also been pointed out to me that the noun *isigomela* refers to a "semicircle or arc formed by men at a dance [and expresses] the set-up of a group of people that are speaking out".<sup>98</sup>

In pre-colonial times, singing served as a means of communication. In traditional Nguni society it was possible for a singer to sing a message that would have been unacceptable in direct speech: in song even figures of authority could be challenged, for example, the king or the chief. This, according to Isaac Tlou, a Conductor and adjudicator from the Gauteng area, has a bearing on the history of *amakwaya*, in particular during the Apartheid era:

In Africa we sing for every occasion. When a child is born we sing, when we are happy we sing, when we are sad we sing, when we bury the dead we sing, so we sing throughout. Now during the political upheavals people will not talk... People wouldn't talk. They would look at this thing and they would sing about it. Because if you speak, police will arrest you. So most of the information was relayed through music. So we sang about Mandela ... we had a picture from him through music. All these events. Even when we go to bury our dead they will complain, they will moan, they will talk about it through music. So that's how it went. Then it began – in fact everybody was a singer. That's why when the ANC meets today, they sing. Even people who were dissatisfied in job, strikes whatever they do, they sing.<sup>99</sup>

All this throws light on the central role of choral singing in the formation of identity. Caluza, for instance, was well aware of using music as a means of intensifying a message and raising it to a higher level of expression. In a lecture given at Ohlange Institute he stressed his view that "music is the high speech of the Language, when you want to express a feeling, it is more understood in music".<sup>100</sup>

It is not surprising that members of the black middle class turned towards choral music, since "if there is an assurance of civilised advancement it can be found in beautiful singing, especially in concerted singing".<sup>101</sup> Margaret Bhengu, a student at Adams College in the early 1940s, considered "the human voice [to be] the best instrument".<sup>102</sup> The person who sings becomes the musical instrument, and experiences music in a more immediate way than an instrumentalist, who can experience and express music only through the musical instrument outside his/her body. Although brass instruments and, in some few cases, the piano were taught at mission schools,<sup>103</sup> the musical activities of students were largely confined choral singing. Whereas outside the sphere of mission influence black Africans readily adopted the use of Western instruments like the concertina and the guitar, middle class musical performers eschewed these instruments, and turned to the a cappella rep-

<sup>97</sup> Mangosuthu Buthelezi, April 18, 2001.

<sup>98</sup> C. M. Doke and W. B. Vilakazi, *Zulu-English Dictionary*, 1990.

<sup>99</sup> Personal communication with Isaac Tlou, Johannesburg, February 11, 2001.

<sup>100</sup> *The Torch Bearer* (Vol. 4, No. 2, December 1936): 19.

<sup>101</sup> *Ilanga* (June 23, 1911).

<sup>102</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (November 1943): 18.

<sup>103</sup> See Chapter 6 for more information on the musical activities at mission schools.

ertoire. A distinct change occurred towards the second half of the twentieth century, however, when musicians like Khabi Mngoma, one of the most influential figures in the *amakwaya* community, started to include piano accompaniment for the performances of the Western classical repertoire. This had an important effect on repertoire and the performance practice. In the late 1950s, Mngoma started the Soweto-based Ionian Music Society, which consisted of various choral groups and an orchestra used for accompanying them. This project rated highly in *amakwaya* circles and had a crucial influence on the development of the genre, which I will discuss in more detail later (see Chapter 13.2, page 215).

Choral performance made possible the symbolic realisation of elite ideals “and the formation of a tangible collective self-image”.<sup>104</sup> Mark Radebe, “chief ideologist” in music for the educated elite, reflected on the middle class concept of art in the early 1930s: “The purpose of art is not expression but communication, and this is especially true of literature and music”.<sup>105</sup> Members of the black middle class regarded music and singing as their “national talent” and argued for its extensive development.

The deeper and more realistic purpose of our music is the positive building of our nation on the cultural plain [sic]. If the magnitude of this campaign has reached unprecedented heights it is only because music is the only talent we can develop to the international level without any restrictions.<sup>106</sup>

Music, Radebe declared, is “our contribution to the variegated whole of human life... it can be nothing else at the moment”.<sup>107</sup> This, as we will later see in more detail, led to the black middle-class placing emphasis on competitions, by means of which they hoped to “produce [not only] singers but musicians – composers of world standard”.<sup>108</sup> In music and singing, the black elite saw the possibility of achieving their goal of emancipating themselves, and of drawing level with and even excelling the white communities.

This discussion demonstrates the intermediate cultural position in which this social group found itself and the possibilities that were inherent in such a situation. Concerts and competitions involving mission-trained performers became highlights in the social life of elite Africans, and choral groups became a central and indispensable part thereof. Simon Ngubane, choirmaster at Adams College in the 1940s, referring to the Inanda Centenary Choir, pointed out: “...this Choir as a musical institution is as important as the Hall, the clinic and the other noble schemes that Inanda intends to set up”.<sup>109</sup> The institution of choral groups became as important as other symbols of Western culture.

But how did members of the middle class define their musical practice in relation to that of other black South African groups?

<sup>104</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 114.

<sup>105</sup> M. Radebe, “Bantu National Music”, *U.W.B.*, July 9, 1932; quoted in T. Couzens, 1985: 70.

<sup>106</sup> *Journal of the Transvaal United African Teachers Association, TUATA* (June 1962): 4.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*: 4.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> S. Ngubane, “Music for Our People”, *Inkundla Ya Bantu* (September 10, 1947): 8.

### 4.3.2 Musical Contention and the Middle Class Fight Against “Musical Intoxication”

Elliot Pewa remarks that, throughout the twentieth century, members of the middle class were careful to disassociate themselves from the music of the illiterate or semi-literate working-class:

...some forms of musical performance in urban areas have shown that there is a certain measure of contention between the literate and the illiterate within the black community. This is particularly evident in forms like *isicathamiya* music, which has been left to the care of the illiterate or semi-literate migrant workers, most of whom stay in the hostels. The schooled musician, who categorized himself a class above *isicathamiya*, found his way to *makwaya* singing. The two groups have never had joint concerts. Even the behaviour of their audiences is quite different.<sup>110</sup>

This division, clearly, would create an obstacle to the use of singing as an expression of a “national culture” encompassing all groups. Members of the black middle class could not understand, let alone identify with, the music that “stemmed from the intensely competitive and power-riddled context of the urban labour market, slums, and degraded rural lifestyle”.<sup>111</sup> Walter Nhlapho, for instance, wrote about an *isicathamiya* competition that he attended in February 1941, saying that this “primitive art was less singing but more shouting”.<sup>112</sup> According to the *isicathamiya* celebrity, Joseph Shabalala, leader of the internationally acclaimed group Ladysmith Black Mambazo, “most of the educated people did not appreciate [*isicathamiya*]”.<sup>113</sup> This statement is endorsed by the record that Joshua Radebe, Conductor of the Pietermaritzburg Choral Society, made of his impressions when he left his rural home, where he was closely associated with a mission station, in order to take up a teaching post at Amakholwa High School near Edendale, Pietermaritzburg.

I was very excited to come to a sort of town place. But I was shocked: I went to a concert and I was shocked. I was shocked finding people singing *isicathamiya* and enjoying themselves. At my place in the country we have outgrown this *isicathamiya* thing, it's no longer there. [I wondered,] what type of place did I come to? We are feeding these people with a type of food that they don't understand. They have not reached a level of understanding what involvement is here in this kind of thing. They are culturally backwards. I really don't want to insult the people, but I think they are culturally backwards.<sup>114</sup>

Pewa's, Nhlapho's and Radebe's statements are indicative of the fact that the musical scene for most of the twentieth century in South Africa, tended to be sectionalised along social lines. However, during my research (1999-2002), I saw *amakwaya* groups beginning to organise joint concerts with groups performing urban music and dance such as *maskanda*, *isicathamiya* or *indlamu*. Joshua Radebe himself, for instance, organised such a concert for November 21, 1999, that included the Mchunu Gumboot Dance Group and Memela with his team of *indlamu* dancers. A similar event was staged a year later in the Cathedral at Pietermaritzburg, on November 26, 2000.

Veit Erlmann maintains that there has been some exchange between different South African musical genres since the first half of the twentieth century:

By the late 1920s and early 1930s, performance genres were anything but separate categories reserved for specific class uses. IsiZulu-speaking, urban mission-educated musicians performed Western music and

<sup>110</sup> E. Pewa, 1995: 29.

<sup>111</sup> V. Erlmann, 1996: 76.

<sup>112</sup> *Bantu World* (February 22, 1941); quoted from V. Erlmann, 1996: 76.

<sup>113</sup> Joseph Shabalala quoted from V. Erlmann, 1996: 295.

<sup>114</sup> Joshua Radebe (Pietermaritzburg Participatory Action Research Group 14<sup>th</sup> meeting May 18, 2000).

ragtime in the style of Caluza known as *imusic* and *iRagtime*, at the same time maintaining a strong interest in *isiZulu*, a category that comprised traditional material arranged for choir.<sup>115</sup>

When speaking of “partially overlapping contours of elite performance repertoires and early *isicathamiya*”<sup>116</sup> Erlmann is clearly referring to the modernised, neo-traditional *izingoma zomtshado* (wedding songs), hymns which up to the present are part of the repertoire performed by *amakwaya* and by *isicathamiya* groups.<sup>117</sup> The attitude of the black elite to urban music genres like *iRagtime*, was, however, as sources reveal, characterised by ambivalence. The 1920s was a period of large scale black urbanisation. In the city lack of organised entertainment helped increase the number of *shebeens*, and European and American ragtime and jazz became the rage for both black and white.<sup>118</sup> The black elite adopted a critical attitude towards the inroads made by jazz, and made a strong effort to place as much social distance as possible between themselves and the *marabi* culture.<sup>119</sup> Mark Radebe, who taught music at Adams College, in the 1920s, published a number of articles under the pseudonym of “Musicus”, in which he designated jazz as “a species of musical intoxication”<sup>120</sup> that was doomed to extinction:

... king jazz is dying! His syncopating, brothel-born, war-fattened, noisedrunk, [reign] is now in a stage of hectic decline. Like many of the great frauds of the centuries, he has reigned long but not without some good result. Despite all the bang and smash, jazz could never have the longevity of the most trivial rondos of Haydn, for instance, because the music for the most part was built upon an entirely artificial basis. What jazz is is a perversion of some of the remarkable syncopating rhythms to be found in the Native music of many races.<sup>121</sup>

It is interesting that Radebe is attacking jazz not only in relation to Western classical music, but also traditional African music. In this we can see a manifestation of Radebe’s concept for national music. Herbert Dhlomo agreed with Radebe that the music of the great European composers, Beethoven, Chopin and others, was “more fascinating, more beloved, more real and more popular than most of our living jazz composers”.<sup>122</sup> His cousin, R. R. Dhlomo, struck similar chords when referring to the “jazz disease” and its being “a sickness or rather a plague”.<sup>123</sup> The reference to disease and intoxication was not entirely metaphorical but rather suggests that this kind of music was disapprovingly associated with *shebeens* and brothels. In many of his songs R. T. Caluza took up the theme of the evils of the city, for instance, in “Ingoduso” (Fiancée), “Ubhungca or amaOxford Bags”, “Kwamadala” (at Madala), “Emathawini or Excuse me Please”, “Inthandane” (The Orphan) and “Kwathi Belele” (While they were sleeping).<sup>124</sup> Missionaries tried to protect their communities by constantly warning them against urban evils. Langa Nkosi remembers how their concern dictated

<sup>115</sup> V. Erlmann, 1996: 59.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> See Chapter 10.1 and 11 for a detailed discussion.

<sup>118</sup> For a detailed treatise on early South African jazz, see C. Ballantine, *Marabi Nights: Early South African Jazz and Vaudeville* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1993).

<sup>119</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 114.

<sup>120</sup> “Jazzmania”, *U.W.B.*, February 11, 1933; quoted in T. Couzens, 1985: 56; see also “The Native Teachers’ Column”, *Ilanga Lase Natal*, April 10, 1925.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> H. Dhlomo quoted in T. Couzens, 1985: 76.

<sup>123</sup> “Jazzing Graze”, *Ilanga Lase Natal*, August 5, 1927; quoted in T. Couzens, 1985: 57; Rolfes Robert Reginald Dhlomo, a student of Ohlange who later went to Amanzimtoti Institute started writing a fairly regular column, sometimes under his own name, sometimes under the pseudonym “Rollei Reggie”, for *Ilanga Lase Natal*.

<sup>124</sup> See Lovedale Solfa-Leaflets and E. Mngadi, *The Socio-Political Relevance of R. T. Caluza’s Song Texts*, Thesis submitted for the Degree of BA Honours of Music. University of Durban Westville, 1997: esp. 45-55.

a culture of musical performance in the mission schools that occasionally led to conflicts between the missionaries and their pupils:

At school the teacher would expect us to do something formal. That would be choral music. But there would be informal music again which used to be called jazz. It was influenced by America plus the likes of Miriam Makeba, all those jazz ladies. The songs that they sang went straight to the mission stations and the young girls and boys outside school they would sing those pieces, harmonise them in a ragtime fashion and they would call it jazz. But there would be smaller groups [meaning, they would form smaller ensembles], and in most cases they would do medleys. Beautiful. But now that was not formal music according to the teachers, because to the teachers you had to sing something very formal and something formal has had to go through notes. If the music is not notes first before you get into music, that's not the right type of music. Otherwise you would be a – what they called – in Zulu *irabi*, which means you are following the *marabi* style...if you did this, you were not respected. That's why they sort of forced you to sing some kind of compositions. During those times, they did not like choirs to sing Negro Spirituals either, because again Negro Spirituals were not very formal.<sup>125</sup>

The missionaries did not, however, rely only on teaching and preaching to get their message across to their communities, but introduced programmes that aimed at organising and controlling their leisure times in order to meet the “physical and recreational needs of the people in adequate fashion”.<sup>126</sup> As I shall show later in more detail, missionaries like Ray Phillips of the American Board of Commissioners initiated cultural and sports clubs, social centres and a variety of other institutions that involved educated Africans in lectures, discussions and debates as well as concerts, dances, and other less serious forms of recreation (see Chapters 7.1, page 177, and 8.3.1, page 219).

The black elite were convinced that “a powerful mission school performance culture was necessary as a defence against the ‘debased’ ragtime, *marabi*, and jazz so popular among all classes of Westernising Africans”.<sup>127</sup> This view might, of course, have been partly influenced by colonial educational authorities taking the position that “the only means of destroying unworthy rubbishy songs and meaningless melodies such as are often found in Ragtime songs, is to teach classical music to Natives. Teachers, as the recognised leaders of their people, can, if they will, revolutionise in time the whole field of Music in Natal and Zululand”.<sup>128</sup> One of the most important measures taken to counteract the “jazz disease” and to realise and promote the concept of a national culture was the setting up of the first African music festival, which was to become known as Transvaal Eisteddfod, held for the first time in December 1931. The Festival, which aimed at preserving and developing “the individuality of Native music and, concurrently, to encourage the finer refinements of European music”,<sup>129</sup> became an important platform for middle class African interaction.<sup>130</sup> Mark Radebe, who was largely responsible for the establishment of this Festival, believed that

the problem of African music must eventually be solved by Africans. The ‘*Marabi*’ dances and concerts, and the terrible ‘jazz’ music banged and wailed out of the doors of foul-smelling so-called halls are far from representing real African taste. They create wrong impressions. The Transvaal Bantu is to be

<sup>125</sup> Personal communication with Langa Nkosi, Johannesburg, July 20, 2000.

<sup>126</sup> R. E. Phillips, 1938: 291.

<sup>127</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 115.

<sup>128</sup> W. J. Gumede reporting from a “Vacation Course in Music” held at Marianhill in 1930, where at the opening of the course C. Wright, Music Organiser at the Education Department, spoke to teachers of various Training Colleges. *Native Teachers' Journal* (October 1930): 37.

<sup>129</sup> Programme to the first Transvaal Bantu Eisteddfod, held in Johannesburg at the Bantu Men's Social Centre, December 2-5, 1931. (Africana Collection of the William Cullen Library at University of the Witwatersrand/Johannesburg).

<sup>130</sup> I will discuss the aims, as well as the importance, of this choral event in more depth in Chapter 8.1.

complimented in the circumstances on the annual Eisteddfod, which, to a great extent, will help to abolish the 'Marabi' menace.<sup>131</sup>

The inclusion of traditional music at the Festival never signified a departure from the middle class's ideas of progress and modernism. By organising the Transvaal Eisteddfod, Radebe intended to create a platform for members of the black middle class to express their conviction that individual talent, educational qualifications, and Christian values should determine one's status in society, not skin colour.

Important agents in the promotion of the concept of a national culture were touring choral groups like the immensely popular Ohlange Choir conducted by R. T. Caluza. His music was a central feature in the repertoire of these choirs, which aimed at projecting an identity that was simultaneously 'civilised' (Western), internationally black, and traditionally African. Caluza's work, mainly because of the inclusion of African-American elements, was classified as "jazz". A reader of *Ilanga Lase Natal* pointed out in a letter to the Editor: "There is no name in music libraries for [Caluza's] music but for lack of an apt word we call it jazz. Jazz music is somewhat inferior to the sort of music found in Caluza's compositions".<sup>132</sup> That Caluza's admirers regarded his music as a basis for a national music and a national culture, is supported by R. R. R. Dhlomo's tribute to him: "We always experience new, patriotic enthusiasm in our hearts [because of] these songs which have regenerated many a soul – songs [and] which have rekindled our zealous patriotic aspirations".<sup>133</sup>

The tours of the Ohlange Choir aimed, among other things, at lifting "the name of Ohlange sky high, but also [at placing] Natal on the level with the other aspiring countries".<sup>134</sup> Dhlomo's remarks conjure up memories of the tour of the African Native Choir, which aimed at demonstrating to the outside world that there were indeed 'civilised', educated, and hard working Africans engaged in a struggle for recognition. R. T. Caluza's tours throughout South Africa served a similar purpose, and promoted the idea of a national culture by emphasising the values that the black elite regarded as most essential:

To-day, – the name "Ohlange" sets our hearts beating with pride – because it is there where R. T. Caluza started his great work. It is there where he found willing singers. It is there where the present wreath of social enthusiasm was kindled... When those songs are sold everywhere, when they are sung in high and low places – then, not only will Caluza triumph, but every Blackman, who claims to have any welfare of his race at heart. For those songs will spell –

"The progressive Native,  
See how he progresses;  
Oppressed and shunned by others;  
He rejoices in the fact – that this is the land  
For which his sires died – so he  
Aspires! Aspires ! Aspires!"<sup>135</sup>

<sup>131</sup> Musicus, "African Music for the Africans", *U.W.B.* November 11, 1933; quoted in T. Couzens, 1985: 71.

<sup>132</sup> "African Music: Where Is It?" *Ilanga*, February 10, 1933.

<sup>133</sup> *Ilanga*, February 15, 1924.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*



#### 4.4 Summary

Whereas the first generation of mission-educated Africans tended to accept the superiority of Western culture uncritically, the following generations grew increasingly critical of what they were taught by the missionaries at the mission stations. Norman Etherington makes the observation that “a general trend saw patterns of dependence gradually replaced by patterns of independent action”,<sup>136</sup> or as one of the converts stated: “heretofore we have been children and have followed our missionary; now we are men and may think and act for ourselves”.<sup>137</sup> The first signs of this change occurred in the late 1880s when many mission-school Africans were beginning to wonder whether they had been wise to trade “the birthright of [their] cultural heritage for a Western pottage of unattainable goals and unkept promises”.<sup>138</sup> A strong sense developed that a satisfying self-image could not be built entirely on adopted European models.

This process was triggered by the black middle class experience of rejection and social isolation. Educated blacks found themselves in an ambivalent situation, cut off from their own cultural heritage, on the one hand, and dogged by feelings of cultural inferiority to white people, on the other. Whereas the Applications for Exemption from Native Law (see Chapter 3.2, page 72) speak of their desire to construct a black middle class identity by imitating Western values, Skota’s *Illustrated National Biographical Dictionary* shows them defining themselves as “New Africans”. This register not only appeals on behalf of the black middle class for recognition by the white rulers: it is a directory of black ideas and ideals. Many of those whom Skota mentions in his *Register* are the “New Africans” categorised by H. Dhlomo as “progressive thinking African intellectuals and leaders”. While the ‘New Africans’ were aware of their position as progressive and educated people, and had at the same time a growing consciousness of their ancestral heritage. “The New African knows where he belongs and what belongs to him; where he is going and how; what he wants and the methods to obtain it”.<sup>139</sup> The attitude of “New Africans” to members of the lower classes was distinctly different from that of the first generation converts. They no longer rejected their traditional heritage, but attempted it into their conception of a new African national culture. They saw themselves as providing leadership for those previously left behind in a ‘savage state’.

Their experience of rejection and isolation had an important effect on the musical activities of the black middle class. Given the political, social and economic restrictions of the world in which they lived, the black middle class turned towards cultural attainment, and especially the development of a syncretic African choral tradition, in order to define and express a distinctively African concept of modern civilisation. In the process of creating the idea of a national culture, educators like Mark Radebe had constantly to reconcile feelings of pride in African cultural achievement, on the one hand, and feelings of inferiority to Western culture and progressivism, on the other. This resulted in inconsistent and contradictory positions: any effort made to preserve the “folk music which is our most treasured cultural inheritance” was praised and any failure to assimilate Western progressivism was condemned as reactionary and a sign of the cultural backwardness of Africa.<sup>140</sup> Despite their re-evaluation of African traditions, the black elite often disapproved of the musical practices of other black South African social groups, both traditional and urban. At the time when ragtime and jazz became the rage in both black and white communities, they tried to counteract the “jazz disease” by endorsing a mission school performance culture. The Transvaal National Eisteddfod was

<sup>136</sup> N. Etherington, 1978: 141.

<sup>137</sup> A. Grout to Clark, Jan. 28, 1869 (ABC 15.4, VI.) quoted in N. Etherington, 1978: 142-43.

<sup>138</sup> D. Coplan, 1995: 30; see also the discussions published especially by Rev. William Gqoba, successor of Rev. Tiyo Soga, in the Lovedale mission circular *Isigidimi sama Xhosa (Kaffir Express)* between 1884 and 1888.

<sup>139</sup> H. Dhlomo quoted in T. Couzens, 1985: 33.

<sup>140</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 118; *Bantu World* (April 16, 1932) and (October 21, 1933).

established in 1931 in order to realise and promote their concept of a national culture. Important agents in the promotion of this national culture were touring choral groups like Caluza's Ohlange choir. It should be noted that to this day *amakwaya* groups tend to view their musical practice as superior.

Choral singing enabled the black middle class symbolically to express its own image. Thus it can be regarded as an important part in the process of negotiating the traditional and the modern, and as a powerful tool in constructing and communicating class identity and consciousness. The conceptualisation of an African national culture was a crucial element in the development of this choral practice. Whereas initially early mission converts were required to reject their own musical culture, black middle class began to redefine their attitude towards traditional music as African nationalism took hold in the early twentieth century. This led to the development of eclectic African compositions, and later brought about the synthesis of Western and traditional musical elements.

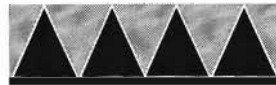
This process of negotiation was to become characteristic of *amakwaya* groups throughout the twentieth century. It shaped individual identity and touched every aspect of the choral tradition, from performance practice to repertoire and aesthetics. When, in August 1975, Khabi Mngoma was invited by the University of Zululand to structure a music programme, his expressed intention was "not to divorce blacks from African music but to make them realise that... they must draw from both [the Western and African] worlds, because they belong here".<sup>141</sup>

Since *amakwaya* came into being because of the influences to which Africans were exposed at the mission stations, the second part of this thesis will begin by looking into important effects of the missionary enterprise in the formation of *amakwaya* practice, tracing the development of music and in particular choral singing at the mission stations and mission schools (Chapters 5 6 and 7). Chapters 8 and 9 will discuss important aspects of *amakwaya* performance-practice, including the almost exclusive orientation towards competition.

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<sup>141</sup> K. Mngoma, "Music Teaching at the University of Zululand". *Papers presented at the 1<sup>st</sup> Symposium on Ethnomusicology, Rhodes University*. (Grahamstown: International Library African Music, 1981): 18.

PART TWO



**Music:**  
**The Context of Performance**



## Music at the Mission Station and the Importance of the Hymn

*The music that everybody learned was the foreign music and then it went into us, more than our own music – especially after being trained in a missionary school. The other music was really ignored... In some places it was pronounced clearly it was heathen music... Missionaries were almost successful in rooting out traditional music, as they were successful in bringing the gospel. They were successful in throwing away all that was African, introducing the Gospel and the European culture and everything of it with music, education and all... Missionaries from overseas did a lot for that part of Africa. This is why – although they are no longer church schools – there is some influence of the church even in schools today.<sup>1</sup>*

Z. K. Matthews remembers his first day at Lovedale, the impression that this school left on him, the future possibilities of life it presented its students, but also the responsibility that came with it:

Through Lovedale's gates one passed into the wonderland of education, the same kind of education, we thought, which had given the European his all-conquering power, his ability to master the Africans, who were so much more numerous and knew the land so much better. Here was the school from which some of the teachers whom I had regarded with awe had come, and here was I, on the threshold of a career that might lead me as it had led them, to positions of trust, respect and honour in our community. Here I was among boys and young men who had come from all parts of the country in search of the same treasure, an education that would move us ahead in the world into which the Europeans had thrust us.<sup>2</sup>

Before the Nationalist Government fully took over black education with the powers it had appropriated in terms of the Bantu Education Act (1954), African education was mainly in the hands of missionaries of various denominations (see 2.2.2, page 45). In this chapter I want to show that music and especially singing played a central role in the process of proselytisation.<sup>3</sup> The use of music for religious purposes, as well as the teaching of it, as Percival Kirby has remarked, followed European ideals and European methods: "In Music, which was almost exclusively vocal, this was the desideratum, for the singing of hymns in four part harmony had been insisted upon throughout

<sup>1</sup> Personal communication with Rev. Nxele, Clermont, May 08, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Z. K. Matthews, 1986: 33.

<sup>3</sup> See also D. D. Hansen, *The Life and Work of Benjamin Tyamzashe: A Contemporary Xhosa Composer*, Rhodes University: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1968: 2.

Natal for many years, even in African primary schools, and I found that it would be quite impossible to eradicate the practice".<sup>4</sup>

With their use of sacred music which had strong European elements, the missionaries started a process which changed the cultural identity both of their converts and, as a consequence, of the majority of black South Africans. Thus the historical development of *amakwaya* choral practice started at the mission stations, since it was there that

an interesting marriage took place. A marriage between hymnody based on Western four-part functional harmony which has a prescriptive dominant melodic line, and indigenous and folk music with its inherent call and response format, simple harmonic structure, abundance of parallel fourths, fifths and octaves and a rather complex interwoven rhythmic patterning. This marriage gave birth to *makwaya* which became the form of expression for mission-educated Africans and converts... And choir singing soon became the order of the day among mission-educated Africans.<sup>5</sup>

We will now examine in some detail the role music and singing played at the mission stations. This will make clear that the musical practices introduced by the missionaries at the mission stations, which had a far-reaching impact on African culture as a whole, were responsible for the development of *amakwaya*.

### 5.1 *Umculo amakholwa* – “Christian Music and Music of the Whites”

*To sing in a choir or to play the harmonium or the piano was to submit proof of one's place in the community of the civilised.*<sup>6</sup>

Prof. Mzilikazi Khumalo is convinced that *amakwaya*

was the music that *amakholwa* now [Khumalo speaks of the second half of the nineteenth century] used; they no longer used the traditional music. So they are using this to identify them as people that are closer to the people that use this type of music. Therefore it was something that really identified them. When we speak of music, for instance, in Zulu, we sometimes speak of *umculo wamakwaya* (music of choirs); but we also say *umculo wamakholwa* (Christian music). And when they sing *umculo wamakholwa*, sometimes they don't really mean “Christian music”, but they mean “music of whites”.<sup>7</sup>

The important role that education played in the colonial missionary project in South Africa from the very beginning has considerable relevance for the research into the history of *amakwaya* and its choral practice.<sup>8</sup> Langa Nkosi confirms that Christian education and Christian music, introduced mainly by the mission societies, had a formative influence in the formation of *umculo amakwaya*, as its members were recruited exclusively from the pool of mission-educated Africans. Nkosi goes on to describe the important influence of mission institutions:

<sup>4</sup> P. Kirby, “African Music South of the Zambezi”, in *Essays on Music and History in Africa*, Klaus P. Wachsmann, ed. (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1971.): 248.

<sup>5</sup> P. J. Nhlapho and Sibongile Khumalo, 1993?: “The Hymn and Christianity” (no page numbers).

<sup>6</sup> V. Erlmann, “Africa Civilised, Africa Uncivilised: Local Culture, World-system and South Africa”. *Journal of the South African Musicology Society, SAMUS* (Vol. 14, 1994): 14.

<sup>7</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, November 20, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> See W. A. Saayman, “Subversive Subsistence: Z. K. Matthews and Missionary Education in South Africa”, available online: <http://www.geocities.com/missionalia/saayman.htm>. Originally published in *Missionalia* (*Journal of the Southern African Musicological Society*).

But now on this other side most of the people who come from missionary schools and missionary stations would train to be teachers, to be nurses and the like. So obviously, in the community, in Christmas time they have got what they call *ihlabla* [a Christmas tree]<sup>9</sup> ... This *ihlabla* in fact based on what used to happen among the Africans, where you would have – after the coming together of a tribe or whatever – just a sing-along together. So now, this sing-along had some Christian influences and Western harmonies. Anything that came this new thing was incorporated in what was there, and education was incorporated throughout. So there was this view that in order to be acceptable, [you had to] sing the educated people’s music, which is the music from the West... So that’s how the choirs started. It started in the mission stations, it started in the schools, and most of the composers we have were teachers.<sup>10</sup>

By training their converts, the missionaries intended not only to equip them to serve the expanding mission field by becoming teachers and evangelists, but furthermore to build a nucleus of Christian disciples who would actively spread European cultural values.<sup>11</sup> The mission-educated black middle class became the main source of black schoolteachers whose views mainly determined the practical content of music education in the twentieth century. Couzens confirms that the mission schools, reproducing a mainly English educational system,<sup>12</sup> were the places where “modes of behaviour, values, forms of speech” were most effectively inculcated in the emerging middle class.<sup>13</sup> That music and especially singing played a central role in the process of proselytisation becomes particularly obvious with the Tonga, a Bantu group that today lives in Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Botswana. For them the cultivation of singing by the missionaries had such importance that they say “*ndiyanda kurimba*” (I want to learn to sing) in order to communicate their desire to join the Church.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The Christmas tree was introduced to Africa by missionaries. *Ihlabla* stands as a synonym for Christmastide activities. Apart from the exchange of Christmas presents, choral singing was an important part of the festivities. (Personal communication with Vera Maria Kubeka, Durban, January 11, 2001.)

<sup>10</sup> Personal communication with Langa Nkosi, Johannesburg, July 20, 2000.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*: 229-30.

<sup>12</sup> “Lovedale: Its History and Its Hopes. Three-quarters of a Century of Missionary Effort”. *The Christian Express*, (July 1, 1916): 103.

<sup>13</sup> T. Couzens, 1985: 353.

<sup>14</sup> B. Sundkler, *The Christian Ministry in Africa*, (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1960): 299.



## 5.2 Early Musical Encounters: Missionaries and their Music

*But do remember that even in the church there were groups that were taught how to sing the hymns by the priest. So that people didn't just listen but they were actually taught how to sing the hymns correctly.<sup>15</sup>*

Thulasizwe Nkabinde suggests that “the first major influence of missionaries on African music was in church: hymns taught in four parts – soprano, alto, tenor and bass – and Western harmonies”.<sup>16</sup> Early reports, diaries and letters show that the missionaries used hymns as a medium to frame, depict and emphasise the Christian message in their mission work. Hymn singing was associated to such an extent with the “educated Native” that Anthony Trollope, who visited South Africa in the 1870s, commented in his travel diaries:

Out in the world, as I have said before, among the Europeans who regard the Kafir simply as a Savage to whom pigeon-English has to be talked, it is asserted broadly that all this education leads to no good results – that the Kafir who has sung hymns and learned to do sums is a savage to whose natural and native savagery additional iniquities have been added by the ingenuity of the white philanthropist.<sup>17</sup>

Even though this statement reveals Trollope’s critical view of the colonists’ mindset, it also indicates the importance of the singing of hymns and psalms in mission education. Elsewhere Trollope notes a common view that “the Kafir is a very good fellow, and may be a very good servant, till he has been taught to sing psalms and to take pride in his rapidly acquired book learning”.<sup>18</sup> Trollope’s observations confirm that colonists wished to see the mission-educated black Africans not as members of a new middle class, but essentially as ‘savage’. As we have seen earlier, the colonists rejected the missionary endeavour of educating the ‘savages’, arguing that this would turn good ‘savages’ into bad ones. (see 2.3.2).

Be this as it may, it is obvious that by the latter part of the nineteenth century, the teaching of hymns was to have an important influence on mission-educated Africans. One might speculate, however, on whether the ‘hymn’ in the context of these quotations stands for a specific genre of religious singing or, more generally, for a musical approach that was distinctly Western and which set the mission-educated black Africans apart from their traditional background.

Many early reports of missionary thought and endeavour show a lack of sensitivity towards the cultural richness into which they had stepped. At no point was a thorough effort undertaken to inquire into the musical practice of the people they found upon their arrival. It is therefore clear that at the time the missionaries arrived in South Africa they were not sufficiently equipped to understand and value the subtleties of African music and song. To put it more explicitly, missionaries “lacked all appreciation of what was good and useful and of what was genuinely valuable in the

<sup>15</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, November 18, 2000.

<sup>16</sup> Personal communication with Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Johannesburg, November 21, 2000; see also D. D. Hansen, *The Life and Work of Benjamin Tyamzashe*, (Grahamstown: Rhodes University, Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1968): 2.

<sup>17</sup> J. H. Davidson ed., *South Africa by Anthony Trollope: a Reprint of the 1878 Edition* (Cape Town: Balkema, 1973): 175.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*: 166.

culture they encountered”.<sup>19</sup> George Champion, one of the first American missionaries in Natal, for example, described “scenes of heathenism” in his journal entry for March 24, 1836:

On [the] occasion of a girl’s arriving at a certain age the youth around assemble. Dancing it is called, but it was such a scene of confused noise [–] clapping & shouting continued all last night, & a part of today [–] that Satan seemed to rule the hour. Some of the songs are very indecent. This evening it began as usual for the night, but a little reasoning ended it, & I have my time in peace.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, in a letter dated 1 January 1839 the Wesleyan missionary, Richard Giddy, gives an account of his attempts to root out traditional customs and ceremonies among the Barolong at Thaba Nchu (Rolong Mission) in the Bechuana District:

I feel happy also in saying that Bechuana customs and ceremonies are considerably on the wane. The native dance is in some instances kept up; but I frequently go at the time of the dance, oppose it, and preach to those who are willing to hear. A considerable number frequently leave the dance, draw around the missionary, and listen to the word of God.<sup>21</sup>

In southern Africa, music making has always been closely linked to bodily movement; therefore a distinction between music and dance seems meaningless. The term *ngoma*, over a wide Bantu-speaking area, has a double meaning as it may describe both a song and a dance. On the one hand, *ngoma* may be a dance song performed at a festival, especially that of the first-fruits (*ingoma yenkosi*), and, on the other hand, it may describe a hymn or sacred song, even a Church hymn (*izingoma zase-sontweni*).<sup>22</sup> It was especially this fusion of sound and movement, of emotion and motion, that the missionaries disapproved of. To them this practice seemed to have sexual overtones and was therefore regarded as highly indecent. The main reason for their opposition to traditional music was, however, their conviction that traditional music entrenched the traditional religious beliefs of the people. Traditional ceremonies were closely connected to song and dance: “When there was a death or if there was a cleansing ceremony, these things went with song, with music”.<sup>23</sup> The process of prohibiting the converts from performing traditional music and restricting them to Christian music, was equated to moving them away from their ‘heathen’ beliefs. In other words, missionaries used music and hymnody in particular, as an agency of transformation, as a way to transfer Christian ideas to their converts.

The missionaries had been successful in imposing their mindset upon their converts. It is interesting to read that for Tiyo Soga<sup>24</sup> and his fellow missionary and later biographer, J. A. Chalmers,

<sup>19</sup> D. D. Hansen, 1968: 1.

<sup>20</sup> A. R. Booth ed., *Journal of the Rev. George Champion: American Missionary in Zululand 1835-39*, (Cape Town: C. Struik, 1967): 58.

<sup>21</sup> K. Schoeman ed., *The Wesleyan Mission in the Orange Free State 1833-1854 as Described in Contemporary Accounts* (Johannesburg: Human & Rousseau, 1991): 42.

<sup>22</sup> See C. M. Doke and B. W. Vilakazi, *Zulu-English Dictionary*, (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1990).

<sup>23</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, November 20, 2000.

<sup>24</sup> In an interview, the prominent *amakwaya* composer S. J. Khosa reports that Soga “was born into a musical family; [his] father was a minister of religion who received some of the first missionaries of the Assemblies of God [missionaries from Canada]”. Soga’s father wrote a few hymns that appear in the Tsonga hymnbook entitled ‘Mhalmhala’ (“The Trumpet”). (Reid, 1992: 11). Further information about Tiyo Soga can be found in J. A. Chalmers, “Tiyo Soga: a Page of South African Mission Work”, *The Christian Express* (February 1, 1878); D. Williams, *Umfundisi: A Biography of Tiyo Soga 1829-1871* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1978), and D. Williams ed., *The Journal and Selected Writings of the Reverend Tiyo Soga*. (Cape Town: A. A. Balkema, 1983). See also W. A. Saayman, *Christian Mission in South Africa – Political and Ecumenical* (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 1991): 58-64 for a detailed discussion of Soga’s ambivalent position with regard to Xhosa traditions and his role in African nationalism and Black politics.

“the kafir people are deficient in poetry and music”<sup>25</sup> Soga’s perception of traditional music being a “deafening howl of...women making music for dancers” clearly typifies missionary reactions in the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup> In the singing of hymns, the missionaries saw an opportunity of overcoming the “deficiencies” and the “deafening howl” of traditional music. For them singing became almost of ideological importance. There is no doubt that, besides dress and housing (see 3.2.1), music represented an important marker of transition from heathenism to Christianity and ‘civilisation’. This becomes clear in one of George Champion’s remarks: “In another part amid the chat and noise of the village, I hear some humming their monotonous song and now above it the pleasant sound of psalm singing from a house in which are my two interpreters”.<sup>27</sup>

Driven by this vision, they condemned traditional African music, stamping it simply as heathen, and went for the only possibility that seemed to be feasible to them, which was to eradicate every aspect of traditional music associated with pagan dancing and other rituals. When they introduced to their converts the music that they had brought from Europe they did not attempt any amalgamation with African musical styles. In the African hymns, for instance, they adopted no traditional African elements except the vernacular language. In the introduction to his selection of Negro spirituals, Alexander Sandilands took the view that “much of the early hymn-making for the Christian Church in Africa was an unhappy yoking of British and American tunes to badly translated chunks of unidiomatic vernacular prose, clipped into the right number of syllables to fit a ‘line’”.<sup>28</sup>

### 5.2.1 Historical Development of the Hymn

It is not my intention at this point to trace the long historical development of the hymn, which goes back to the Greek word *hymnos* (a song in praise of gods or heroes set to the accompaniment of the cithara): this is unnecessary in our context. However, a short account of the development of Christian hymn singing would facilitate a better understanding of both the repertoire and the teaching methods used by the early missionaries arriving at South Africa.

As early as the sixteenth century, the congregational hymn of the young Lutheran church in Germany initiated a tradition of vernacular hymns replacing the previously used corresponding Latin hymns. This was the first step towards a popularisation of hymn singing that involved the congregation more actively in church music. These hymns, published for instance by Jacob Gutknecht in his *Achtliederbuch*<sup>29</sup>, were characterised by the use of vernacular language, folk imagery, and strophic form.<sup>30</sup> Subsequently, Lutheran hymns became the prototypes of the nineteenth-century congregational hymn. The English hymn before the Wesleyan revival was mainly Lutheran in impulse. John Wesley and his brother, Charles, influenced by Isaac Watts (1674-1748), based their work on the fundamental principle that church songs should express the thoughts and feelings of the singers. They were convinced that “words and tune were alike aimed to arouse the emotions of a religiously awakened congregation”, and made hymns a central feature of their worship.<sup>31</sup> The first Wesleyan hymns were written in the 1730s, and in time the brothers composed and popularised a body of several thousand hymns covering every aspect of religious life. By modelling the hymns partly on the popular musical style of the day, reminiscent of concert or

<sup>25</sup> J. A. Chalmers, 1977: 358; quoted in V. Ertmann, 1983: 134.

<sup>26</sup> It must be noted though that mainly as a result of his travels to Europe, Soga changed his attitude and started to respect and promote the value of traditional music.

<sup>27</sup> A. R. Booth, 1967: 39.

<sup>28</sup> A. Sandilands, *A Hundred And Twenty Negro Spirituals*, (Morija: Morija Sesuto Book Depot, 1981): 3.

<sup>29</sup> J. Gutknecht, *Achtliederbuch: Etlich Christlich lider*, 1523/24.

<sup>30</sup> D. Randel, *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (London: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1969): 386.

<sup>31</sup> S. Sadie ed., *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, (London: Macmillan, 2001): 849: Hymn §IV.

theatre music, the Wesley brothers created a type of religious music that suited the contemporary taste.<sup>32</sup> The Methodists quickly gained a reputation not only for their hymn tunes but also for their singing practice, which involved the whole congregation standing and joining in. Many were attracted by the spectacle of thousands of people singing. In looking back to the importance of the Wesleyan Revival, *The Methodist Churchman* concluded: "...it is almost impossible to overestimate the widespread and beneficent influence which the Evangelical Revival exercised over all classes of the English people of that period". Special reference was made to Methodism in South Africa, where "the early Wesleyan missionaries created a profound impression on the people of the Cape".<sup>33</sup>

The nineteenth century saw an abundance of hymnbook publications, culminating in the publication of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* in Britain in 1861.<sup>34</sup> In an attempt "to consolidate the hymn-books, Anglican and others, which had appeared in the previous hundred years or more",<sup>35</sup> this collection popularised a distinctive type of hymn tune characterised by rhetorical devices of repetition and rich emotional harmonies. It was immensely successful and soon after the first publication became something of a national institution, helping to ensure that "the wholesome practice of hymn-singing won an accepted place in Church, School and Home".<sup>36</sup> By 1869 the annual sales were about half a million copies, and by 1881 almost seventy percent of London parishes had adopted it.<sup>37</sup> The musical setting of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* became influential far beyond the boundaries of England, and copies of this hymnbook reached South Africa not only through the Church of England but also in the hands of the missionaries of other denominations.<sup>38</sup>

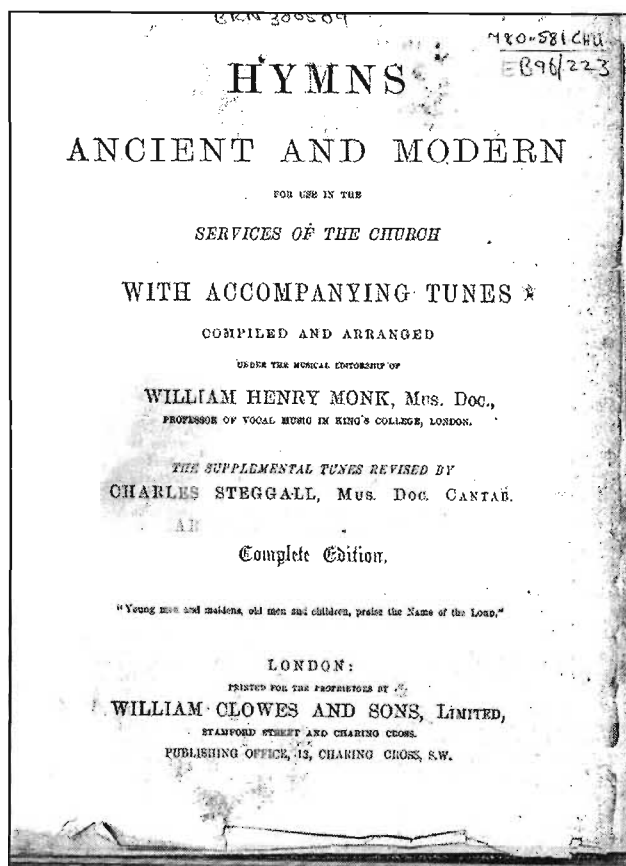


Figure 5.1: "Hymns Ancient and Modern"  
(2nd edition 1875)

<sup>32</sup> See B. L. Manning, *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts* (London, 1942); also E. Routley, *The Musical Wesleys* (London: Jenkins, 1968).

<sup>33</sup> "Cape Town Honours John Wesley-Inspiring United Meeting" in *The Methodist Churchman* (June 06, 1938).

<sup>34</sup> An index to this hymnbook can be found on the Internet under: <http://www.oremus.org/hymnal/amr.html>.

<sup>35</sup> W. H. Monk ed., *Hymns Ancient and Modern For Use in The Services of The Church: With Accompanying Tunes* (London: William Clowes & Sons, 1922): vi.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*: vii.

<sup>37</sup> S. Sadie, 2001: 850, Hymn §IV

<sup>38</sup> See B. Smith, "South African Christian Music" in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social & Cultural History*, Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport, ed. (Cape Town: David Philip, 1997): 317.

### 5.2.2 The American Revival Hymn: Moody and Sankey

Another important aspect in the development of the popular hymn was distinctively American. In the revival meetings, American Methodists started to use popular music in a less restrained way, as well as hymn texts in a popular idiom. Other revival movements soon followed this trend, and during the second half of the nineteenth century revival hymns were a huge success. Although from a musical point of view they might be worthless, they were very effective in attracting many to the churches. They had catchy tunes, which were often based on popular tunes of the time, marked by a vigorous beat with syncopation and by a simple harmonic structure, often using only the three basic chords I, IV and V. The refrain was nearly always repeated after each verse. Camp meetings organised by the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) saw the production of hymns, and others originated from the Salvation Army. The evangelical movement culminated in the work of Moody and Sankey. Ira David Sankey, born August 28, 1840 in Edinburg, Pennsylvania, was a great leader of congregations and choirs. In 1870, Sankey, a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, became song leader for Dwight Moody's revivals and made the gospel hymn a popular song, presenting the format of verse-chorus-verse-chorus in a way that gave the songs emotional appeal. In making the hymn a popular song, Sankey evoked the charm of popular music and used it as an instrument of religion to convert people. Early in 1871 he travelled with Moody to England as well as to urban areas in the eastern United States, "reducing the population of hell by a million souls"<sup>39</sup>. With the assistance of his friend, P. P. Bliss, Sankey compiled a songbook, *Gospel Hymns and Sacred Songs*, which included most of his most popular hymns and which popularised numerous songs by other writers, like "The Ninety and Nine", "Rock of Ages", "Onward, Christian Soldiers", "Whiter Than Snow", "It is Well With My Soul", and "Jesus Loves Me".

Sankey's *Gospel Hymns* (1875) became extremely popular because of their inspirational character, and by the early 1880s Sankey's publishing ventures grew to tremendous proportions. His Gospel Hymn series, numbers one to six of which were published between 1875 and 1891, contains hundreds of hymns still widely used. Several editions of these enjoyed sales that totalled millions of copies in many languages. Miss Day, a teacher at Amanzimtoti mission in the 1870s, reports that she "sang English words to the chants. 'Oh, give thanks unto the Lord!' and the Lord's Prayer; also 'Almost persuaded', and 'Knocking, knocking,' from Sankey and Bliss's new book"<sup>40</sup> during one of her teaching sessions.

The missionaries were thoroughly acquainted with the tradition of hymn singing, so popular in the Western church. When they came to South Africa, they brought with them the musical as well as the liturgical essentials of their churches. Invited by Schreuder of the Norwegian Mission Society, the missionaries of the Hermannsburg Mission Society, upon their arrival at Port Natal in 1853, "made a spectacular entrance into Durban harbour with all the missionaries on deck, Luther's hymn 'Eine Feste Burg Ist Unser Gott' blaring from trombones and trumpets".<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> I. Sankey, "My Life and the Story of the Gospel Hymns" (*The Sunday School Times*, Philadelphia, 1907).

<sup>40</sup> Miss Day, "Vacation Work", in *American Zulu Mission: Extracts from The Journal Life and Light For Women*, 187?, (Copy in Durban: Killie Campbell Library): 56-58.

<sup>41</sup> T. Smith quoted in Elphick, 1997: 93.



### 5.3 To Sing Like a Westerner: the Practice of Singing Hymns and Psalms

*What I'm trying to say is that choral music and church music is almost the same. From Sunday school and from pre-school you start singing the same thing – no traditional music no indigenous music – nothing.<sup>42</sup>*

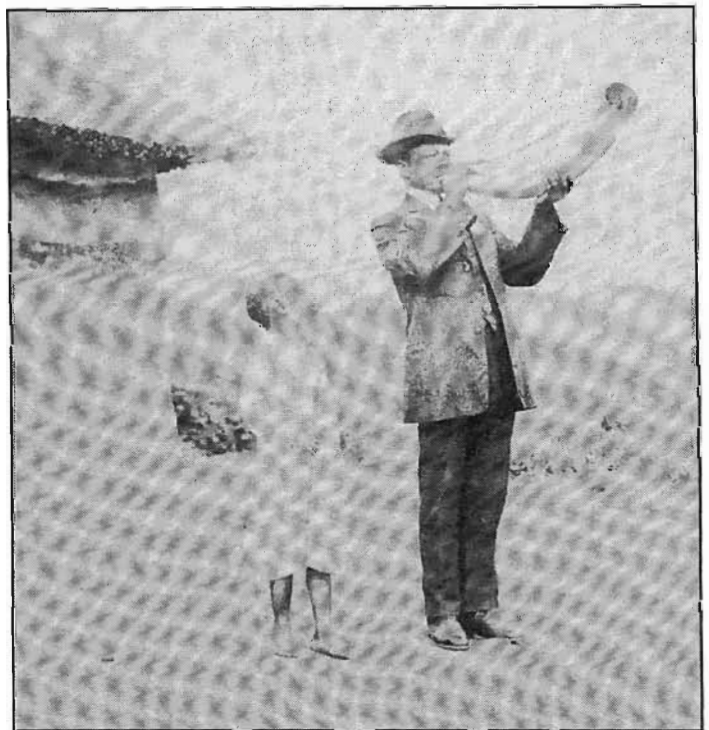
A report published in the journal, *Life and Light for Women*, written by L. M. P., possibly a certain Lady Pinkerton, describes a “service in a Native Chapel” held some time in the 1870s. It is worth to quoting a lengthy passage from this report, as it gives an interesting insight into the circumstances of early missionary work:

#### SERVICE IN A NATIVE CHAPEL.

I have just returned from a service in the chapel, and think you will be interested in a description of the building, and of the people who worship there every Sunday.

The chapel was built by the Rev. Mr. Stone, who lived here twenty years. It is about sixty feet from the stationhouse, in a straight line. And now, as we are at the door, we will enter. If you have a long dress, I advise you to hold it up; for the floor is the earth, cemented with a preparation made from cow's dung. The roof is thatched; but there is no ceiling. Next to the thatches are the heavy beams not smooth and painted, but rough, just as they were taken from the woods. The walls are cemented. Six windows, three on a side, give us light. Around the sides, and scattered here and there, are benches made of rouble planks, with sticks in each end for legs.

But our attention is called to those who occupy these benches every Sabbath. On one side are the men, on the other the women. Here and there among them are unclothed people from the native kraals.<sup>43</sup> But scan the station-men, or believers. They, of course, are clothed; and in many of their faces, you see energy, intelligence manliness. On the other side, the women would attract your eye in their neat calico dresses. They are of all ages, from the infirm old lady to the bright little girl by her side. If we turn to the heathen women, the sight is not so pleasant. Some of them are entirely destitute of clothing: others wear a small blanket fastened around the lower part of the body. Their faces are painted with red clay, from the ear to the chin, on both sides. Some paint, also, around the eyes and nose. Reeds or sticks a foot long, and as large round as your finger, are in their ears. Brass bands are worn on ankles and wrists; and bands of grass encircle the upper part of the



**Figure 5.2:** *The call to service at Adams Mission (KCL, Brueckner Papers)*

<sup>42</sup> Personal communication with Rev. Nxele, Clermont, May 08, 2000.

<sup>43</sup> David Wolff reports from the Hermannsburg Mission: “The bell signals the beginning of the service. The baptised and those who are aspiring to baptism, usually sit on benches, on one side the men, on the other side the women. The heathen crouch on the floor behind the Christians. On some stations also the Christians have to sit on the floor”. D. Wolff, *Unter den Sulu: Vierzehn Jahre Missionsarbeit in Südafrika*, (Hermannsburg, 1914): 61. (Translation: M. D.)



arms. They grease their bodies from head to foot, and fix up their woolly hair in all kinds of shapes. The women bring their babies with them. They are always tied to the back of the mother with a piece of cow-skin, their little feet sticking out at each side.

But they have taken their places by this time; and we will see who is to speak to them from the word of God. It is a native by the name of David. He gives out a hymn; and they all stand and sing heartily native words to the tune of "Zion". They are fond of music; and many of them, with training, make good singers. David then gives, not what would be called a sermon, but a good Methodist talk. The congregation numbers sixty or seventy, and is very orderly. After another hymn, they go out. (L. M. P.)<sup>44</sup>

The Sunday service was, of course, an important aspect of mission work as the missionary then had the opportunity to assemble and address his community. Besides the liturgical elements, music and especially singing was of central importance: Many early reports of missionaries give a picture of the reciting and singing of hymns interspersed with reading of passages of the scripture. The hymns were used to frame the message that the missionaries wanted to get across to their new converts. Frederick Hale has left the following account: "Worship has proceeded as follows: first one of the hymns that I have translated; then a short prayer and the Lord's Prayer; then the sermon. Usually I then have those assembled recite the Ten Commandments... Finally, we sing another hymn".<sup>45</sup>

It is interesting to see that at one mission music was used not only during the service, but at an afternoon singing lesson on Sundays, which was also organised by the missionary. That the converts were attracted by his cultivation of singing is made clear in an account written in 1914 by David Wolff, a German missionary from the Hermannsburg mission society. He reports that his converts were fervent and indefatigable singers, who were quite keen to learn the new songs the missionary taught them:

On a number of occasions during the Sunday service, the congregation sings – one could not say until they get tired, because singing never makes our Zulu Christians tired... It must be about three o'clock when the afternoon service is finished. After the married people have set off for their homes, the missionary gathers the young people for singing lessons... New songs are taught and old ones repeated. These singing lessons during the afternoon are very helpful. They prevent our people from many useless, immoral, and deceitful things. Thank goodness that the people enjoy singing so much! If we would not stop them, they would sit until deep into the night, carrying on singing.<sup>46</sup>

The singing of congregational hymns remained routinely a part of twentieth-century church services, school assemblies and music lessons, as I observed during my fieldwork. Reverend Myaka from Clermont near Durban, for example, explained to me that these musical experiences left a lasting impression on him: "Having gone to schools for twelve years in some cases having been forced to sing hymns every day mornings and afternoons at school. When you grow, you are forced to carry a hymnbook. It really gets into your blood. It becomes yourself".<sup>47</sup> Leslie Nkuna maintains that at one stage he knew by heart all the hymns that his mother taught him from her hymnbook:

I started singing in a very early age. During the evenings as we were sitting around the fire my mother used to teach us the church songs. That was the music that prevailed during those days. We picked it up from the hymnbook and from the church... They were in parts, but that was not notated, you will find lyrics only. My mother was very intelligent and she was a good singer, she was able to sing all parts. I had

<sup>44</sup> L. M. P. (Pinkerton?), "Service in a Native Chapel", in *American Zulu Mission: Extracts from the Journal Life and Light for Woman*, 187?, (Copy in Durban: Killi-Campbell Library): 337.

<sup>45</sup> F. Hale ed., *Norwegian Missionaries in Natal and Zululand: Selected Correspondence, 1844-1900*, (Cape Town: Van Riebeck Society, Second Series No 27, 1997 for 1996): 27.

<sup>46</sup> D. Wolff, 1914: 63.

<sup>47</sup> Personal communication with Rev. Myaka, Clermont, May 08, 2000.

elder sisters and a brother. So [when] they were still very young she could teach them all the parts, alto, soprano, bass for my elder brother, and then I sang tenor. Every evening we used to learn new songs. By the age of twelve, I could sing the whole hymnbook, I knew all the songs... there were almost 120 and I could sing all of them in tenor and also in soprano. My mother was not educated, she had only passed grade 6 (standard 4). But she was good. And then we went on like that; at school we used to sing in choirs. We had infant, junior, intermediate and senior-choirs. But I learned music already before I went to school when I was four years only, I already could sing with my mother. She could already lead me in singing. So it was easy for us later.<sup>48</sup>

Even today the singing of hymns at assemblies and morning prayers is rated very highly in the schools. Reverend Myaka records his experience of the students and the staff at the schools where he teaches:

[Although] the Government Gazette [announced] at least twice a week is enough to spend on prayers in the mornings... they will never go to classes without prayers and hymns. They pray every morning and afternoons. There is freedom, nobody is compelled. So the choirs could choose a different repertoire if they want... But they want to sing Lutheran hymns.<sup>49</sup>

### 5.3.1 Antiphons, Psalmody and African Vocal Tradition

Vocal ensembles and part-singing were, of course, known in traditional southern African communities long before the missionaries arrived. Observers were aware of the elaborateness of their vocal musical practice. For instance, the writer, William Charles Scully, who is closely linked to the Eastern Cape, noted that many of the Native songs and chants are very intricate compositions, in which the different parts are adjusted to each other with indigenous nicety... such part songs are probably extremely old, and have reached their present development very gradually.<sup>50</sup> The “intricate compositions” Scully is speaking of are polyphonic rather than homophonic in structure, and therefore unlike the hymns brought by the missionaries. David Rycroft describes the main characteristics of traditional Nguni music as follows:

They have no traditions of drums or drumming. Their communal music is essentially vocal, and antiphonal in form. In any choral song there are at least two voice-parts, singing non-identical texts, and the temporal relationship between these parts observes the principle of non-simultaneous entry. Sometimes this is realised through simple alternation of leader and chorus lines, ... But overlapping phrases are far more common ... as this gives rise to polyphony. There is usually no common cadence point where the parts achieve a combined resolution. Instead, each voice, in its turn, returns to its starting point and the process is continually repeated. When there are more than two parts, additional voices are either dependent or independent of the two main parts, in their temporal relationship. A minimum of two parts, entering non-simultaneously, is a fundamental feature, and so deeply is this concept felt, that an isolated singer if asked to demonstrate a choral song, will not just render a single voice part, but will attempt to present the essentials of at least two parts, by jumping from one to the other whenever a new phrase-entry occurs.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Personal communication with Leslie Nkuna, Grahamstown, July 02, 2000.

<sup>49</sup> Personal communication with Rev. Myaka, Clermont, May 08, 2000.

<sup>50</sup> W. C. Scully, *By Veldt and Kopje*, (London: Fisher Unwin, 1907): 285; also see Nora Scully and William Charles Scully, “Kaffir music”, in *The Pall Mall Magazine* (1897).

<sup>51</sup> D. Rycroft, 1977: 222.

These features can be found in traditional compositions like the clan songs (*amabubo*), or the old Zulu bow songs performed, for instance, by Princess Magogo on the *ugubhu* or *umakhweyana* bow (with divided string, see Figure 5.3).<sup>52</sup>

The fundamental concept of the bow songs is the two-chord pattern, described by David Rycroft as “Root progression”. These are two major triads either a semitone apart (for example B-C in most songs of Princess Magogo), or a whole tone (F-G in the case of Xhosa bow songs discussed by David Dargie).<sup>53</sup> The alternation of these two “roots” provides the basic tonal foundation of the songs, functional equivalent of harmonic progression in Western music. Ntsikana’s hymn “Ulo Tixo Mkulu”, which I mentioned in the first chapter in connection with the concerts of the African Native Choir, is also based on the alternation of the two root notes, F and G (see 1.2.1, page 17).

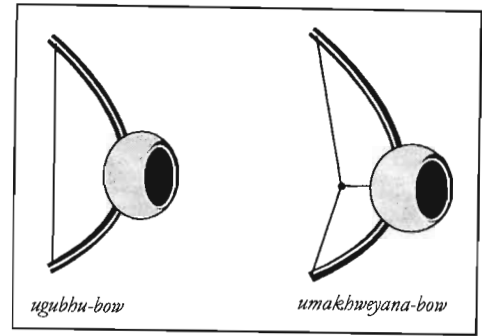


Figure 5.3: Different forms of music bows.

**Ulo Tixo Mkulu - Ntsikana's Great Hymn**

*ad lib.* *tempo*

U - lo Ti - xo o - mku - lu ngo - se - zu - lwi - ni.

U - lo Ti - xo o - mku - lu ngo - se - zu - lwi - ni.

The image shows two staves of musical notation for the hymn "Ulo Tixo Mkulu". The top staff is in 4/4 time and features a melody line with a tempo change from *ad lib.* to *tempo*. The bottom staff is in 4/4 time and features a harmonic accompaniment. The lyrics are written below the notes. A vertical grey bar highlights a specific section of the music in the second system.

Figure 5.4: *Ulo Tixo Mkulu* (J. K. Bokwe, *Amaculo ase Lovedale*).

African music belongs to an oral tradition, which means that compositions were not notated but kept alive and handed down to the next generation by performance. Ntsikana Gaba (c. 1780-1821) was still part of this culture and never notated his compositions. It is therefore difficult to ascertain

<sup>52</sup> Mntwana (Princess) Magogo kaDinizulu Buthelezi (1900-1984) was the daughter of the Zulu king, Dinuzulu KaCetshwayo (1868-1913). D. Rycroft describes her as the greatest living authority on Zulu music and an accomplished performer of the *ugubhu* bow. For a more detailed account on the performance practice of *amabubo* see Bongani N. Mthethwa, “The Re-Incorporation of Musical Instruments In the Performance of Isaiah Shembe’s Hymns: A Report on Phase 1”, *Papers presented at The 10<sup>th</sup> Symposium on Ethnomusicology* (Grahamstown: Rhodes University, 1991: 121), see also D. Rycroft, “Stylistic Evidence in Nguni Song”, in *Music and History in Africa*, (K. P. Wachsmann ed., (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971): 213ff.

<sup>53</sup> See D. Rycroft, 1975/1976: 64-5; D. Rycroft, 1977: 221; and D. Dargie, *Xhosa Music: Its techniques and Instruments, with a Collection of Songs* (Johannesburg: David Philip, 1988): 7; see also Chapters 11.2.6 and 13.1.1 for discussion related to the music bow.

the shape of Ntsikana's original composition and to imagine how his hymn sounded in the early nineteenth century.<sup>54</sup> Although the first transcriptions of the text were made as early as 1822, it was only over fifty years later, in November 1876, that John Knox Bokwe published an arranged version of this hymn in *Isigidima sama-Xosa* (The Xhosa Messenger) and some years later in his songbook, "*Amaculo ase Lovedale – Lovedale Music*"<sup>55</sup>.

J. K. Bokwe's notation of the hymn reveals a distinct deviation from the root progression F-G. In bar 5, we find a dominant chord on C (see Figure 5.4, highlighted in grey). This is very atypical of the musical grammar of the bow songs or of Zulu music in general, which is based on the overtone structure of the musical bow.<sup>56</sup> The bow is a one-stringed instrument that can produce only the two fundamental notes mentioned above and a series of corresponding natural harmonics, which can be emphasized by opening or muting the resonator (a calabash or the oral cavity). The songs accompanied by the *ugubhu* bow usually employ a hexatonic scale derived from these harmonics (see Figure 5.5).

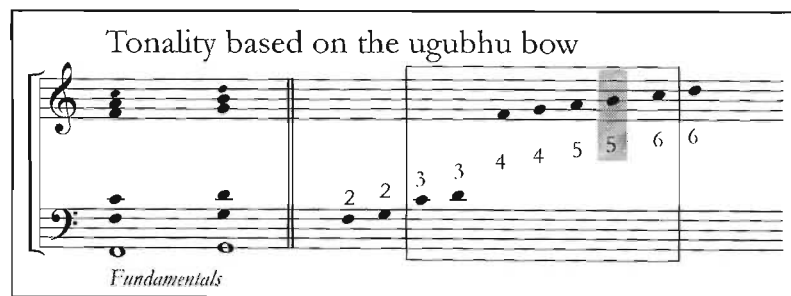


Figure 5.5: Tonality of the *ugubhu* bow.

Now the note E is not available in the hexatonic scale based on the fundamentals F and G, and it is therefore very unlikely that Ntsikana's original composition made use of a C major chord, of which E is the third. Observe also the alteration of the note B. In the first bar we find a descending line sung by the soloist or the leader. Here Bokwe incorporates a B flat, which in the context of the tonality of F major, is the fourth degree above F. When the group answers, however, Bokwe alters this note and puts a B natural, creating a major chord on II. This phenomenon is a noteworthy deviation from the hexatonic scale of the *ugubhu* bow described above. As regards at the harmonics of the given root notes F and G, the fifth harmonic of the root G would be a B-natural, resulting in an augmented fourth interval above F (in grey). Therefore the B flat in the first bar seems to be a result of Western training.<sup>57</sup> In other words, Bokwe's notation of Ntsikana's hymn is a manifestation of the clash between the two musical systems and an important example of an attempt to negotiate between both traditions. I will come back to this important aspect later (see Chapter 12, especially Chapter 12.2.1, page 307).

Let us now return to the bow songs performed by Princess Magogo in order to look at some other features of the traditional African musical system. Apart from the root progression, evident in all the bow songs analysed by David Rycroft, the songs use short, constantly repeated musical

<sup>54</sup> David Dargie has done useful research attempting to reconstruct the original composition and its performance practice. D. Dargie, "The Music Of Ntsikana" in *South African Journal of Musicology* 2 (1982): 7-28; see also J. Hodgson, *Ntsikana's "Great Hymn", A Xhosa Expression of Christianity in the Early Nineteenth Century Eastern Cape*, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, Communications 4 (Cape Town 1980).

<sup>55</sup> J. K. Bokwe, 1922.

<sup>56</sup> See also: P. Kirby, "The Recognition and Practical Use of The Harmonics of Stretched Strings by The Bantu of South Africa" *Bantu Studies* 6, 1932.

<sup>57</sup> See Chapter 13.1.



phrases that create a formal structure with a distinctively cyclical character. One cycle can be made up of twenty-four or more beats. Some songs are in more than one part, but in every part, a single cyclic pattern is performed repeatedly without structural alterations. Improvisation does occur but introduces only variations upon the original musical material. Owing to their cyclical nature and the root progression, those songs do not have cadences “of the Western type... [and] no functional hierarchy of discord and concord seems consistently operative”.<sup>58</sup> In a great number of African song one can find at least two different parts performed at the same time. These parts are usually not performed in a homophonic way. The entries of the different parts are staggered, and never begin or end at the same time. In Zulu bow music this means that the voice enters at a certain point within the bow phrase and often ends within the next bow phrase, creating an overlapping relationship.

All these features also apply to traditional unaccompanied choral music such as the Zulu dance-songs.<sup>59</sup> When solo songs are performed without the backing of a group of singers, the performer takes on a double role, singing the lead part in antiphonal relation to the simulated “chorus” provided by the bow. The instrument performs the function of the choral part, and the same principle regarding the non-simultaneous entry of parts operates. A sort of call-response (*hlabela*-‘lead’ and *landela*-‘answer’) occurs. Many of the choral dance-songs were indeed composed and performed by an individual singer using the bow for self-accompaniment, and only later made their way into unaccompanied choral songs in which the instrument was replaced by a group of singers.<sup>60</sup>

Another form of religious singing, well established and closely related to the development of the hymn, is the metrical psalm.<sup>61</sup> Reverend Myaka sees an interesting connection between the call-response structure of traditional African music and the antiphonal structure of psalmody as sung by the missionaries and their congregations:

I think the traditional music was more of antiphons. A leader would start and the group will respond using maybe the same words, or the same melody, or a leader will make a statement and people affirm that. So if a leader would start then “mocking the opponent”, the group will respond in the same way by exaggerating or saying “that’s right”. I find that in the church music there is that especially in the chanting of the psalms or even the liturgy of the church, it follows that pattern. It’s more or less Gregorian. It’s one of the very old forms, and in the Zulu music, there is some connotation. It is interesting for me to find the similarity of *call and response*. Maybe it is in the human nature, of human expression. For instance in the psalm of David where the leader would say: “Praise God for he is good” and the group will say: “His steadfast love endures forever”. And he continues to recite the history of Israel and again the group will say: “His steadfast love endures forever”. It’s almost the same thing in the traditional music. The leader will start and then people will respond. In that pattern.<sup>62</sup>

The psalms played a central role in the mission stations and were regularly used during service and morning assemblies. A note issued to the students at Adams College, read:

<sup>58</sup> D. Rycroft, “Nguni Vocal Polyphony”, *The journal of the International Folk Music Council* – Vol. 19 (1967): 103.

<sup>59</sup> For a study of the dance-songs, see D. Rycroft, 1967: 88-103.

<sup>60</sup> D. Rycroft, 1975/76: 63; also see H. Weman, 1960: 49ff. Chapter 11 will present a detailed analysis of central features used by the traditional South African musical system (see particularly 11.2).

<sup>61</sup> The Psalms of the Holy Bible were the original hymns of the Jewish people, the most popular being the Psalms attributed to King David, who lived in the tenth century BC. Until the eighteenth century, psalm singing (psalmody) was the predominant form of musical worship in most churches. Thereafter psalmody was largely replaced by the popular devotional hymns of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Isaac Watts, Crosby, John Wesley...). The practice of psalmody entailed singing a short refrain in an antiphonal setting. Also see C. Blume, “Hymn” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume VII, available online: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07595a.htm>.

<sup>62</sup> Personal communication with Rev. Myaka, Clermont, May 08, 2000.

The following responses, taken entirely from well known Psalms, should be committed to memory. They will be frequently used in chapel services:

*V: O come, let us sing unto the Lord*

*R: Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation (Psalm 95)*

*V: O Lord open my lips,*

*R: And my mouth shall show forth thy praise (Psalm 51)*

*V: I will praise the Lord as long as I live*

*R: I will sing praises to my God while I have any being (Psalm 146)<sup>63</sup>*

I agree with Reverend Myaka that the antiphonal nature of the psalms must have been very attractive to the early black Christians because of their similarity with the call-response structure predominantly used in African music. There is, however, another interesting aspect that I would like to add to Myaka's observation. Praise poetry (*izibongo*) was an important art form in Nguni society, used to praise the deeds of an important person, a chief or a successful warrior.<sup>64</sup> Literally translated, the term *ukubonga* means to praise loudly by songs or orations. The *imbongi* who acted as the poet in the community was a herald, announcing the arrival of the chief on important occasions by singing or reciting his praises and those of his ancestors. The psalms of David work in a very similar way to *izibongo* and may be regarded as the "praise poems" of Christianity.

*O Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Who hast set thy glory above the heavens.*

*Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength,  
because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.*

...

*O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! (Psalm 8)*

Like the traditional praise-poem, the psalms repeat phrases, and the repetitions create a specific rhythmic effect, which has an affinity with the repetitive nature of traditional African song material. These songs often consist only of short melodic patterns with words restricted to one single stanza instead of a long text.<sup>65</sup> This circumstance seems to have contributed to the ready adoption of the hymns and psalms by the black Christians. Some hymns based on psalms became enormously successful in *amakwaya* community. "The Lord is my shepherd", for instance, adapted from the twenty-third psalm, became a central item in the repertoire performed by practically any *amakwaya* group.

In traditional African music, there is no idea of having specialised choirs. There might be a group of singers that start and lead a performance, but generally everyone is involved in the rites and ceremonies of life. An *amahubo* clan song, for example, involves all the members of the family, while the elders take the position of leading the performance. A similar performance practice can be observed during a wedding ceremony, where wedding choirs competing against each other represent the families of the groom and the bride. Dances and songs specially composed for the occasion are performed in the context of a social activity in which all the wedding guests can take part.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Note titled "Responses" (Adams College Manuscript Collection, File 12, Durban Killie Campbell Librar, no date).

<sup>64</sup> An interesting ceremony that takes place during the wedding celebrations is the *thethelela* ceremony. Here the fathers of the bride and the groom, or their representatives, informally compete for status, and have the opportunity to show off their oratory and or poetic skills. The bride's father, the visitor, would be the first to take to the stage. He would call the family of the groom by their praise names, introduce his daughter and her ancestry, and finally go on to enumerate the lineage of his clan by name in the proper sequence and sing their praises.

<sup>65</sup> See 11.2.2 for a discussion of the philosophical relevance of repetition in sub-Saharan African music.

<sup>66</sup> For a detailed discussion of the traditional wedding ceremony see 11.1.



### 5.3.2 The Impact of Language: African Hymnbooks and the Translation of Hymns

*And they did everything in their power to make the hymn even more acceptable to the Africans... An attempt was made to translate Western hymns into African languages. But as most African languages are tonal, this resulted in an ill-fitting prose. The translations also distorted the musical language in the songs.<sup>67</sup>*

In 1910, *The Christian Express* remarked: "...the hymns are sung with pleasure in the music but often with no consciousness at all, or at best with only a confused sense, of their meaning... The hymns are capable of becoming one of the most effective parts of the service, yet it is to be feared they are often mere pleasing sounds, 'signifying nothing'"<sup>68</sup>

With the intention to make their services as intelligible as possible to their audience, the missionaries started to translate the hymns into vernacular. Language naturally was a key factor and knowledge of the vernacular was a *sine qua non* for a meaningful communication between the missionaries and their prospective converts. After a short while, however, they had to realise that this resulted in enormous problems. In nearly all southern African languages, each word has its individual tone, its melodic shape, which means that the relative levels of the syllables help to determine the meanings.<sup>69</sup> The character of a melody, the emotion and the intensity of the message contained, is not only strongly linked to the inflection of the words, but also furthermore determined by the stress of certain words and the pitch used in a certain context.<sup>70</sup> Languages such as Xhosa, Zulu or Sotho have also a characteristic falling-rising-falling sentence-tone: the first phrase begins high, falls (through the steps of the word tone) and ends lower; the next phrase begins high again. In 1948 E. Westphal published an interesting study of the relevance of linguistics to African music research. In a field research project he began to realise the importance of the correct intonation when he heard African herd-boys whistling apparently unmusical 'melodies' to one another. He found out that these 'melodies' were in fact derived from speech and that the boys had developed an ability to converse fluently by imitating the intonation of any word without its phonetic speech sounds.<sup>71</sup> This suggests that traditional African music is closely linked to the speech tones of the languages spoken. The falling sentence tone and its emotional context can be observed excellently in the bow songs performed by Princess Magogo.<sup>72</sup>

The translations done by the missionaries resulted in compositions in which the "European melodies set to African words take no account of sentence-tone, and make nonsense of word-tone, thus altering the meanings of words, or rendering them meaningless altogether".<sup>73</sup> Since hymns are

<sup>67</sup> Nhlapho and Sibongile Khumalo, 1993? (no page numbers).

<sup>68</sup> "English Hymns in Missionary Institutions" in *The Christian Express* (January 1, 1910): 5.

<sup>69</sup> See H. H. Wängler, „Über Beziehungen zwischen gesprochenen und gesungenen Tonhöhen in afrikanischen Ton-sprachen“, in: A. Simon (Hrsg.), *Musik in Afrika*. Berlin: Museum für Völkerkunde, 1983: 58-65.

<sup>70</sup> See H. Tracey, "Native Music and the Church". *Native Teachers' Journal*, (January 1932): 111.

<sup>71</sup> E. Westphal, "Linguistics and the African Music Research". *Newsletter of the African Music Society* (Vol.1, No.1 June 1948): 15.

<sup>72</sup> Refer for example to the recordings by H. Tracey, *The Zulu songs of Princess Constance Magogo KaDinuzulu* (phonorecord), Johannesburg, Gallo, 1973; D. Rycroft, "The Zulu Bow Songs of Princess Magogo", *African Music Society Journal*, (Vol. 5, No. 4, 1975/6).

<sup>73</sup> D. Dargie, "Christian Music Among Africans" in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social & Cultural History*, Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport, ed. (Cape Town: David Philip, 1997): 320; see also P. Kirby, "African Music", in *Hand-*

generally arranged in such a way that all the verses are sung to the same melody, the task of the translators was as a rather complicated, if not totally impossible, one:

For the meaning of a poem can be captured in a prose explanation of the poetic idea re-written in a new language, but verbatim translations are seldom a success; which is the case with many of the hymn translations. Further, the translators made no effort to incorporate idiomatic Zulu nor did they make any effort to incorporate Zulu thinking patterns.<sup>74</sup>

From the 1880s the missionaries attended to this issue during their annual conferences. In 1883, Rev. Goodenough suggested the formation of a committee to consider the translation of hymns and to advise appropriate publications: “It has been generally recognised that our English sacred music is not well adapted to Zulu hymns. But it has not been so clearly seen what the difficulty is or how it can be remedied”.<sup>75</sup> After giving a long and detailed account of the different aspects why “our English hymns are not suited to the native hymns”, he concluded:

Great violence is done to the language in that every word of more than one syllable will be mispronounced. No one would think of tolerating this in the singing of English hymns. It would so jar and grate upon the ear that most persons would prefer no singing of hymns to such mutilation of the poetry and language. Then as a practical result the very object of sacred song – to lead and call out devotional feelings – would be in a great measure defeated. It is most easy now, when the tune fits the hymn, to catch the words as they are sung by a choir or congregation; ... There can be no question that it is much more difficult, even for natives, to catch the Zulu words as usually sung, than it would be if they were sung to a tune of the same rhythm as the hymn. Sacred song can never be a power in our Native Churches until tunes can be adapted to the Zulu hymns.<sup>76</sup>

In a report presented at a conference held in July 1885 at the Mercury Lane Schoolroom in Durban, the committee criticised samples of the hymn-books that were already in use or which were in the process of compilation at that time. It was felt that “the natives needed something more simple and easily acquired. A melody, easily learned and easily carried in the memory, and a harmony free from difficult and complexity”.<sup>77</sup>

The difficult task of creating satisfactory translations of English hymns persisted into the twentieth century and many committees set up to revise hymnbooks were concerned to produce “original hymns and tunes”, but had to admit in the end that “the problem of producing African words to fit music written for European words was insoluble”.<sup>78</sup> James Deter Taylor made an interesting attempt to get “a number of hymns of a truly African character, as to both words and music” included in the revised edition of the Zulu hymn book *Amagama Okuhlabelela* (the hymnbook of the American Board Mission) by offering a prize of £5 for the best original Zulu hymn. His specifications were that “the hymn must not be a translation of a hymn in English or other language... [that]

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*book on Race Relations in South Africa*, Ellen Hellmann, ed. (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, Published for the South African Institute of Race Relations, 1949): 620f.

<sup>74</sup> A. Vilakazi, *Shembe: the Revitalisation of African society*, (Johannesburg: Skotaville 1986): 136.

<sup>75</sup> H. D. Goodenough, “Sacred Music in Native Churches. The Adaptation of the Music to Zulu Hymns”, *Natal Missionary Conference 1877-1950*, manuscript at Durban: Killie Campbell Library.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> J. Bruce, “Zulu Hymnology and Hymnody”, *Natal Missionary Conference 1877-1950*. (manuscript at Durban: Killie Campbell Library).

<sup>78</sup> *Amaculo eChurch* (Johannesburg: The E.L.D. Trust, Department of the Church of the Province of South Africa, 1982): iii. (University of the Witwatersrand, manuscript collection Provincial Executive Office (PEO) – vernacular hymns: AB 2668; 1983); also *Report on the Conference on African Church Music*, Roodekrans, December 5-7, 1967: 25-32.

the Zulu hymn should express in a truly African way Adoration, Worship, Thanksgiving, Spiritual Aspiration, Penitence, Consecration, or other religious emotions or experiences".<sup>79</sup>

Valuable insight into this concern is provided by a collection of manuscripts, housed at the University of the Witwatersrand, which testifies to the involvement of James A. Calata in revising the musical content of hymn-books.<sup>80</sup> Calata co-operated closely with John Knox Bokwe, and to a letter addressed to the Chancellor of the Diocese of Grahamstown he attached a manuscript of Bokwe that "shows the absurdity of singing hymns with unfitting tunes".<sup>81</sup>

In his article, "Native Music and the Church", Hugh Tracey joins in the discussion about the problem of a meaningful reconciliation of Western and African elements in church music in southern Africa. He deliberates on a number of arguments, eventually coming to the conclusion that the inclusion of any foreign music is not necessary for the establishment of a new African church music.<sup>82</sup> Steering the discussion away from the idea of negotiating the two musical cultures, he expresses the view that "natives will themselves be able to compose their own church music, which must have a far greater national appeal than any other foreign compositions", with settings of verses which the entire congregation would be able to sing and understand.<sup>83</sup> Tracey links this process to the middle class quest for the creation of a National music that we discussed in the previous chapter (4.3, page 110). "The advantage behind such a movement in Native church music would be that Rhodesian Natives may yet lead the Bantu in the creation of a national art that will yet take its place amongst the great arts of the world". He concludes: "We must be prepared to base our activities and judgements upon new standards, even possibly to the complete exclusion of our present activities".<sup>84</sup>

<sup>79</sup> J. D. Taylor, "Zulu Hymns", in *The South African Outlook* (April 1, 1940): 79.

<sup>80</sup> *Calata Papers* (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand): A 1729. James Arthur Calata was an Anglican clergyman and African nationalist. He was born in Rabula, near Keiskammahoek, on 22 June 1895, the son of James and Eliza Calata of the Ngqika tribe.

<sup>81</sup> *Calata papers*: A 1729: H1; and document by J. K. Bokwe: H2.

<sup>82</sup> H. Tracey, 1932: 111.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*: 112.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

## 5.4 Hymn Singing: Medium of Promoting Christianity

*You see what the priests realised, was that the thing that the black people loved most was singing. And therefore if you had to impress upon them, you had to use this thing that they loved most. And so the churches started with the church music and the church choirs. And it was building on just what the people had been using. Their most important form of expression, of artistic expression. So definitely singing was used as a vehicle to produce Christian ideas.<sup>85</sup>*

It is easy to see why the early missionaries made choirs and communal singing a central aspect of their evangelisation and teaching. Rev. Nxele is convinced that

it is a first stage of easier communication and then a promotion of their work. So if one reads about missionaries, they talk of reading and writing, and then introducing their hymns, their melodies... It's easier for him [a missionary] to repeat the melody over and over to his students who could not read and write but at some stage could hum the song and then eventually introducing the words.<sup>86</sup>

Singing is one of the parts of a church service in which the congregation can take an active part. The missionaries were convinced that "active participation impresses the memory more than passive participation. The words of the hymns will linger in the scholar's memory longer than those of sermons". Therefore they regarded hymn singing as an important factor "in the production of spiritual impressions"<sup>87</sup>. The missionaries were encouraged to develop and nurture hymn singing by the instructions given by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Colossians: Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. (Col. 3:16-17)

Another passage, from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, was of relevance to the missionaries: "...be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:18-20).

There was also a practical consideration that encouraged the missionaries to use hymns and psalms as a way of promoting Christian ideas. Soon the missionaries realised that having a choir lead the singing made it easier for them to conduct church services in the European way: The newsletter of the Ohlange Institute printed a note in December 1938, observing "that the formation of a church choir would be the most useful thing that would help us to know hymns, and also some songs that have been ordered for the purpose"<sup>88</sup>. The idea was to train a small group of converts that would eventually be capable of taking the lead in singing, thus familiarising the community with the new repertoire of hymns and psalms. According to Thulasiswe Nkabinde, the missionaries

<sup>85</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, November 20, 2000.

<sup>86</sup> Personal communication with Rev. Nxele, Clermont, May 08, 2000.

<sup>87</sup> *The Christian Express* (January 1, 1910): 5.

<sup>88</sup> P. A. Gasa, "Church Choir". *The Torch Bearer* (December 1938): 22-3.



“were quite effective with hymns, and would teach hymns a day before the assembly. By using small groups and choirs to prepare the hymns and then present it during the assembly, they were successful in spreading the hymn to the whole school”.<sup>89</sup>

The missionaries did not in fact originate this idea, for in Europe a similar practice had long been used. In their Preface, the compilers of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* remarked that they were “concerned to provide settings which should be not too elaborate to be rendered by a congregation supported by a choir of average ability”.<sup>90</sup> The benefits of this practice for the missionaries, however, went beyond that, since the choirs made an effective instrument first to develop and later to impress a European style of singing on to the community. According to a Cape Superintendent of Education, the endless singing of hymns – with English or ill-adjusted Xhosa words – was one of the main disciplinary methods to keep pupils occupied.<sup>91</sup> This “endless singing of hymns”, however, had a much deeper function than that of keeping students or converts occupied: it reached a psychological level. The musical practice that the missionaries had established at the churches and schools involved a steady repetition of the same songs not only at the stage of training but later in the services and the school assemblies. Because of the formulaic structure of hymns and psalms, this routine brought about a recapitulation of central key words that in the end proved to be efficient in instilling Christian doctrine into the converts. The scripture lessons, religious instructions and prayers, which were always combined with singing, were intentionally used by the missionaries to compete with the music of traditional African social life.

We know that the missionaries were quite interested in ensuring that the converts understood the message of the hymns. That is one of the reasons that they started to produce translations of the hymns at a very early stage. In a report on schools printed in the *Native Teachers' Journal*, the common practice of hymn singing was criticised: “The singing of the morning hymn was not sweet enough, and English hymns should not be chosen, as the younger pupils cannot understand what is being sung... even the older pupils did not know what they had been singing”.<sup>92</sup>

So anxious was the author of the report that the meaning of the hymns should be understood and grasped by all the students that he gives the following advice: “Even if Zulu hymns are used, the words of the hymn being sung should appear on the board or on a special chart”.<sup>93</sup> A similar note advises the teachers that “in singing, suitable hymns should be chosen, each preceded by a short explanation of what it is about”.<sup>94</sup>

Hymn singing took a central place as mission schools usually “devoted at least 45 minutes a day to religious instruction and prayers”.<sup>95</sup> In *The News of the Week*, a weekly letter circulated at Adams College for the purpose of announcing upcoming events, there is a rather detailed plan for every day of the week.<sup>96</sup> Hymn practice was scheduled for every Sunday at 6.45 p.m., and it almost seems as if this practice was the event around which all others were organised. The main purpose of the weekly hymn practice was to introduce new hymns to the children and to prepare for the morning assemblies and the service on Sundays. This seems to have been a common practice and at Umzumbe Home, one of the few schools for African girls, the girls were “taught the principles and

<sup>89</sup> Personal communication with Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Johannesburg, November 21, 2000.

<sup>90</sup> W. H. Monk, 1922: ix.

<sup>91</sup> B. Hirson, “Year of Fire, Year of Ash. The Soweto Revolt: Roots of a Revolution?”, (London: Zed Press, 1979) quoted in V. Erlmann, 1983: 135.

<sup>92</sup> O. E. Emanuelson, “Reports on Schools; Greytown Government”. *Native Teachers' Journal* (October 1931): 8.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.; see also “Hymn Variations in Primary Schools”. *Native Teachers' Journal* (January, 1930): 85.

<sup>94</sup> D. Benzies, “Our Library Table: Worship in School”. *Native Teachers' Journal* (October, 1935): 43.

<sup>95</sup> A. Vilakazi, 1961: 129.

<sup>96</sup> *The News of the Week* (Adams College Manuscript File 4, Durban: Killie Campbell Library).

practices of Christian life ... each week the girls learn a beautiful anthem which they sing in Church on Sunday".<sup>97</sup>

The musical education of the converts was of such central importance that it was not unusual for specialist teachers to be sent to smaller mission stations on a sort of outreach programme. Miss Day, a teacher at Amanzimtoti mission in the 1870s, reports on such a teaching trip, which took her first to Umvoti station, where she met with Rev. Rood for the annual missionary meeting and then to Mapumulo:

After coming [to Umvoti], each day I gave to music an hour or two in the morning and all the evening. The afternoons I took for calling on the people. Thus a week and a half were spent, when an opportunity came for me to go to Mr. Abraham's station, Mapumulo, nearly thirty miles to the north-west... While in Mapumulo, I sang with the school-children and the people from three to four hours every day, and was grateful to see their interest increase until the end. Although they were not able to learn as rapidly as those who have been taught more, some of them were very persevering, and careful to get every note right; and they succeeded in learning several new tunes, taking the soprano, base [sic] and tenor... It is very hard work to sing tenor or bass, and to sing each part over and over again, as one must do for them to learn the parts, since they depend entirely on the ear. I enjoy it very much, but find my voice nearly gone after singing three or four hours without an instrument. There is no instrument in the church or school, either at Umvoti or Mapumulo; so that I am obliged to depend entirely upon my voice... Last evening, the young people came into the parlor to sing. It is quite surprising to see how readily they learn new tunes. We sang English words to the chants. "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord!" and the Lord's Prayer; also "Almost persuaded", and "Knocking, knocking" from Sankey and Bliss's new book.<sup>98</sup>

In the early twentieth century, missionaries became alarmed at the growing practice of using hymns out of their proper context. Dr. J. L. Dube expressed this concern in 1911, in the Preface to his songbook, *Amagama Abantu*. It was the first secular Zulu songbook, produced by Dube so as to "bring an end to the bad habit that has been spreading within the black community, of taking the Lord's music and dancing to it because of a dearth of recreational music".<sup>99</sup> From this time the secular vernacular texts began to be used in connection with a music that remained close to the mission hymn style. Bongani Mthethwa remarked:

The repression of musical activities in mission stations, leaving the people with the hymn as the only choice for all their musical activities, led to the modification of the hymn. The hymn therefore had to become a work song, a love song, wedding song and many other ceremonial situations, including sheer performance of music for pleasure.<sup>100</sup>

The secularisation of hymn-style singing was significant not only for the members of the mission-educated middle class, but became a major factor of musical innovation in almost every South African musical genre.

<sup>97</sup> *Ilanga* (June 12, 1911).

<sup>98</sup> Miss Day, 187?: 56-58.

<sup>99</sup> J. L. Dube, *Amagama Abantu awe Mishado, Imiququmbeol, Utando, nawe Mikelele no Kudhlala* [Bantu songs for weddings, dances, love, side-stepping and recreation], (Phoenix, Natal: Ohlange Institute, 1911?).

<sup>100</sup> B. Mthethwa, "The Songs of Alfred A. Kumalo: a Study in Nguni and Western Musical Syncretism". *Papers Presented at the Sixth Symposium on Ethnomusicology*, A. Tracey, ed. (Grahamstown: ILAM, 1988): 28.



## 5.5 Musical Innovations, Structural Influences and the Secularisation of the Hymn

*Because of the obviously very keen oral tradition, those harmonies were picked up and then they infiltrated into our singing. Especially in areas which were Christian areas, mainly along the coast along Kwa Zulu Natal and even in the Cape before the Christians moved inland.<sup>101</sup>*

It is important to understand the sweeping effect that the musical education imparted by the missionaries had on their converts, resulting in *amakwaya* choral practice. When mission-trained musicians started to compose in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, they initiated a long tradition of mainly choral compositions both secular and sacred. Composers like John Knox Bokwe, Rev. Tiyo Soga and Enoch Sontonga, who in 1897 composed the Xhosa hymn, *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* (God bless Africa)<sup>102</sup>, built almost exclusively on their experience of the hymns and psalms taught by the missionaries. In most of their compositions the only African aspect was the vernacular lyrics. The musical structure, the shape of the melodies and the choice of harmonies, however, were almost exclusively influenced by Western music. At this point it is enough to say that the musical background of early composers was mainly restricted to the mission stations and the musical practice introduced by the missionaries. I will, however, return to the historical development of African *amakwaya* choral compositions at a later stage of this thesis, when I look at the repertoire performed by *amakwaya* groups.<sup>103</sup>

Musa Xulu remarks that “hymns no longer feature in most schools in Kwazulu and Natal” and have been replaced by “*amakhorasi* which are more in line with the African thought patterns on song structure”.<sup>104</sup> Xulu is certainly correct in his observation that the practice of hymn singing has undergone a decisive process of change. One must not forget, however, that elements of the current singing practice show the influence of the Western hymn. Nearly all the neo-traditional music that exists today in South Africa has evolved from the African encounters with European culture, and hymns in particular can be regarded as an important source of most the musical genres performed by black South Africans today. Bongani Mthethwa agrees that “modern African popular music is an offshoot of the baroque hymn. The baroque hymn is therefore the most influential music genre in South Africa today”.<sup>105</sup> According to Musa Xulu, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the secularisation of the hymns was responsible for the emergence of many new musical styles,

<sup>101</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Johannesburg, July 18, 2000.

<sup>102</sup> Enoch Mankayi Sontonga, from the Mpinga clan of the Xhosa nation, was born in the Eastern Cape circa 1873. He obtained his training as a teacher at Lovedale Institution and was later sent to a Methodist mission school in Nancefield, near Johannesburg. In 1897, Enoch Sontonga composed “Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika” (God bless Africa), which became the most famous South African freedom song. It was the anthem of the ANC for decades before becoming part of the official national anthem of South Africa after the first democratic elections in April 1994. The tunes of the national anthems of Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe are based on this same hymn.

<sup>103</sup> See Chapter 12 for a detailed discussion on the historical development of South African choral compositions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

<sup>104</sup> M. Xulu, “Socio-Political Change and the National Anthem in South Africa: A Critical Appraisal of ‘Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika’”. *Papers Presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> Symposium on Ethnomusicology*, Rhodes University, 1991 (Grahamstown: International Library of African Music, 1995): 165.

<sup>105</sup> B. Mthethwa, 1988: 28; Mthethwa’s use of the term ‘baroque’ is probably a misuse of the term. Nineteenth century hymns derive from the hymns of the Lutheran Church that were composed in a simple harmonic form that opposed the complexities of baroque polyphony. See above, 5.2.1 for more details.

which he regards as “secularised [versions] of the hymn”. These styles include “wedding songs, *isicathamiya*, instrumental forms like *mbhaganga*, the choruses as sung in the schools, and political songs”.<sup>106</sup> The mission-educated elite was not, however, overly happy about this development.

The common denominator of almost all neo-traditional and modern African music in South Africa is the chord formula I-IV-I<sup>6/4</sup>-V-I that consists only of the primary triads of a given key.<sup>107</sup> This formula evolved from a number of different influences. European church music, especially in the form of the hymn, African-American music (notably minstrel and ‘Coon’ songs, Gleees and Spirituals), and brass band music for marching played a decisive role in the development of the formula. Hymn compositions are generally in a verse form, with a clear harmonic structure that generally does not involve modulation. Their foursquare melodic structure differs significantly from the traditional musical techniques of free-moving parts in overlapping call-and-response pattern. The influence of the music performed at the mission stations and the schools was by no means restricted to the musical content and the structure of the songs. Certain patterns of performance practice and behaviour were forbidden, as dancing and in fact any body movement was banned by the missionaries. The church choirs had to stand and sing “like statues, conforming to the rigorous European time pattern”.<sup>108</sup> Mission institutions and schools were at the forefront of introducing these innovations to African society and consequently started a process of musical acculturation. Their main vehicles were brass bands and choirs. We shall learn more about this process in the next chapter when looking at music education at Adams College.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Europe, America and Africa became involved in an important and complex exchange of musical culture. European traders and American missionaries, settlers and travellers took musical forms along to their destinations and thus initiated a process of exchange. Product of this are for instance African-American musical forms, in which European military band and church music merges with African elements brought to America with the slave trade. We have seen in the first chapter that spirituals and minstrel songs, products of this multidimensional exchange, were performed in South Africa by touring choirs from America like McAdoo’s troupe, leaving an enormous impression on the audience (see Chapter 1.1, page 5). Their performances initiated a musical revolution that was to leave a lasting imprint on urban African musical styles. The elements of this musical revolution, which eventually led to the development, for example, of the I-IV-I<sup>6/4</sup>-V-I formula, need fuller investigation. It would be interesting to trace the influences and mechanisms that led to the establishment of this chord progression so characteristic of South African music.

Apart from influencing secular musical styles, the hymn itself underwent ‘Africanisation’. I have argued that towards the end of the nineteenth century the African middle class entered a phase of reorientation, manifested in the quest for an African national culture. The growing sense of the need to return to their own roots had an important impact on the missionaries who became aware that “African music speaks to Africans better than European music ever can, and that the use of such music would make the church belong more to the soil of Africa and the lives of the people themselves”.<sup>109</sup> One reason for the change of policy was that the European churches came

<sup>106</sup> M. Xulu, 1989: 119-120.

<sup>107</sup> I will discuss the correlation between the root progression (I-II) and the development of the I-IV-I<sup>6/4</sup>-V-I ostinato in more detail in Chapter 11.2.6.

<sup>108</sup> T. Nkabinde, “Africanisation of The Baroque Hymn”, unpublished paper: 1.

<sup>109</sup> D. Jenkins and D. Stebbing, *They Led The Way: Christian Pioneers of Central Africa*. (Salisbury: Oxford University Press, 1966): 71; quoted in E. Pewa, “The Chorus”: *Re-Africanisation of Hymn Singing in Schools and Churches*, Thesis submitted for the BA Honours in Ethnomusicology. (Durban, University of Natal, 1984): 7.

increasingly under pressure when the stress on African values resulted in the formation of many separatist churches. I need briefly to discuss this development.

The Ethiopian churches, founded in the 1880s in opposition to white dominance, had generally continued to use the hymns they inherited from the missionaries.<sup>110</sup> The Zionist churches, which initiated an attempt to express Christianity in an African way, have been very innovative in their worship. Singing appears here to be a vehicle through which prayer is felt and the ministry of the Holy Spirit carried out. An important figure in bringing this about was Isaiah Shembe (1867-1935) who introduced African elements into his hymn composition and through whom the combination of music and dance became a central aspect of worship. It is unnecessary to go into detail here: the development of the separatist churches has little relevance to the development of *amakwaya* since “many adherents of African religion, and of Zionist Christianity, are ‘uneducated’ [i.e. have not received a formal Western education], and since many are from the ‘lowest’ social groups”.<sup>111</sup> It is, however, interesting to note that Ekuphakameni, the headquarters of the Nazarites (*AmaNazaretha*), founded by Shembe, is geographically situated at the centre of a very progressive community and on all sides surrounded by former mission stations. Ohlange Institute, for example, was only about a mile from Ekuphakameni village. This explains why there was quite some exchange between the mission community and the independent church community of Isaiah Shembe. Vilakazi and Dube, both teachers at Ohlange Institute, lived in “close contact with the Nazarites”, which is the reason why both published papers about Shembe and his church.<sup>112</sup> Although observers described this community as “a museum of old African customs and practices”, Shembe’s background was strongly influenced by missionary teaching and education.<sup>113</sup>

One important product of the process of re-Africanising hymn singing in schools and churches is found in the development of the ‘chorus’. Elliot Pewa<sup>114</sup> argues that these modifications or innovations are characterised by the fact that

a hymn is given a very heavily accented rhythm that will prevail throughout. This accent induces body movement or dances to accompany the hymn. Each verse is usually organised to fit into some chord sequence that will include chords I, IV, V and I... Four-part harmony is employed but the application of this may not always be very accurate, according to Western musical grammar.<sup>115</sup>

Apart from the prevalent rhythmic elements and the simple and almost omnipresent harmonic formula mentioned by Pewa, ‘the chorus’, or ‘Africanised hymn’, has a call and response structure, which is an important feature of the performance practice. However, the most distinguishing feature of ‘the chorus’ is the introduction of accompanying body movements, gestures, hand clapping and dancing that make the performance of Pewa’s ‘chorus’ a holistic experience involving both body and mind. This is perhaps the reason for the popularity of ‘the chorus’. By singing and

<sup>110</sup> For a more detailed discussion see J. Blacking, “Intention and Change in the Performance of European Hymns By some Black South African Churches” in Geoffrey Moon, ed. *Transplanted European Music Cultures*, Miscellanea Musicologica: Adelaide Studies in Musicology, vol. 12. (Adelaide, Australia: University of Adelaide, 1987).

<sup>111</sup> D. Dargie, “Christian Music Among Africans” in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social and Cultural History*, Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport, ed. (Cape Town: David Philip, 1997): 323.

<sup>112</sup> A. Vilakazi, *The Revitalization of African Society* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1986): 4.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.: 45; for further details on Shembe hymn see J. Dube, *uShembe* (Pietermaritzburg, 1936); Bongani Mthethwa, “Western Elements in Shembe’s Religious Dances”, *Papers Presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Symposium on Ethnomusicology* (Durban: University of Natal, 1982): 34-37; David Dargie, “African Church and Liberation”, *Papers Presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Symposium on Ethnomusicology* (Durban: University of Natal, 1984): 11-12 and E. L. Roberts, *Shembe, The Man and His Work*, Thesis submitted for the degree of Masters in Philosophy, Pretoria: UNISA.

<sup>114</sup> E. Pewa, 1984.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.: 12.



dancing together, the congregation or any other performing group experiences a sense of community, of belonging, that has an almost therapeutic effect. In Pewa's view, the neo-traditional wedding songs "carry the same elements that we see in 'the chorus'. In this way traditional music is promoted".<sup>116</sup>

Usually a well known 'chorus' leader is responsible for leading the congregation or the choir, but there are times when any member of the community "who feels he has the inspiration" is encouraged to perform the leading part of 'the chorus' by singing the "call".<sup>117</sup> This impromptu leader may eventually join the group permanently. One can observe this practice today at church gatherings and on informal occasions. Pewa remarks that the singing of 'the chorus' seems to break through all social barriers among the singers, as can be seen in the "personal involvement, fraternity or brotherliness that is displayed by participants".<sup>118</sup> The fact that anybody can take the place of a leader or conductor leads to a new freedom of leadership. This raises a number of questions regarding the African notion of social and political hierarchy. Traditional African leadership has been defined in terms of a hierarchical system and a code of conduct that was strictly respected by all the members of the community. Every individual was said to be integrated in a social system that assigned a very specific position to its members, and this is evident in *amakwaya*, especially in the performance of Western repertoire, and, moreover, in its structure as an organisation. However, when 'the chorus' is included in the performance, any interested and talented member of the choral ensemble may become the conductor or leader for the time being. The fact that the same thing can happen in the performance of neo-traditional wedding songs, supports Pewa's view that 'the chorus' and neo-traditional performance practice are closely related. When rehearsing or performing traditional wedding songs, *amakwaya* groups do not necessarily have the same single leader for different songs. With many choirs it can be observed that whoever knows a song is welcome to step in front of the group in order to teach the song and the supporting steps and gestures. With this part of the repertoire, a communal approach is much commoner than in the more 'sophisticated' repertoire of African composed (eclectic) songs or compositions from a Western background. Thus there exists at the core of the Africanisation of the hymn a principle of freedom of leadership which is integral to the performance of traditional songs. It appears from this that the perception that the hierarchical structures of traditional African society ought to be questioned.

The process of secularisation also brought about a politicisation of hymn singing resulting in one of the most powerful vocal expressions in twentieth century South Africa: protest and freedom songs.

### 5.5.1 Message Transformed: Songs of Protest and Freedom

*People wouldn't talk... because if you speak, police will arrest you. So most of the information was relayed through music. So we sang about Mandela... we had a picture from him through music.*<sup>119</sup>

Although Mzilikazi Khumalo laments the fact that being interpreted as "protest [songs]... unfortunately is the fate of a number of folk songs, [which] are all too often construed in the narrower context of local socio-political conditions", protest against oppression and exploitation has always

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.: 27.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.: 16.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.: 15.

<sup>119</sup> Personal communication with Isaac Tlou, Johannesburg, February 11, 2001.

been an important aspect of almost all South African musical genres.<sup>120</sup> As with other choral groups like *isicathamiya*, *amakwaya* groups used music as a mouthpiece to voice sentiments about their situation in the socio-cultural context of South Africa. Political activity amongst *amakwaya* composers started in the late nineteenth century when, under the influence of such men as Tiyo Soga, John Knox Bokwe became to realise that music could very well be used as a vehicle for political ideas. It is interesting that mission-educated black Christians used the same vehicle that the missionaries used to promote their teachings for Christianity, to voice their own political protests.

There is a long tradition of articulating disapproval of the social and political situation in South Africa through song, and many composers of the nineteenth and twentieth century wrote choral works that express their feelings, mostly in a rather concealed way, but sometimes more openly. J. K. Bokwe, Enoch Sontonga (who composed “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrica” in 1897)<sup>121</sup>, and, later, R. T. Caluza took the hymns that the missionaries had taught them and placed them in a political context. Many of Caluza’s songs, like the well known “Silusapo or iLand Act”, composed in 1912, are critical of the white authorities, pointing to actual events that worried and angered blacks. Hamilton John M. Masiza, who composed “Vukani, Mawethu!” (Wake Up, My Countrymen), Todd Matshikiza with his famous “Hamba Kahle” (Go Well) and “Uxolo” (Peace), which was commissioned for the seventieth birthday celebrations of the city of Johannesburg in 1956 and banned shortly afterwards, and Mzilikazi Khumalo with his first composition “Ma Ngificwa Ukufa” (When I Die), are just a few examples of the many black African choral composers who used their music to voice their feelings about the political situation in South Africa. Let us now return to the process of secularisation of the hymn.

In the 1930s and 1940s, when resistance to white domination grew in the urban areas, a new type of song grew out of the composition of hymns. Because of the strict government control and a rigorous practice of censorship, the black communities started to attach provocative lyrics to church hymns. This took mainly the form of contrafactum, the substitution of one text for another without changing the tune. This resulted in an important form of secularisation of the hymn, with the words moving away from the biblical pieties. With the message camouflaged in innuendo, political protest or the expression of veiled criticism by means of song became a realistic option.<sup>122</sup> As a result the hymn moved out of the context of the church, and began, “integrating the symbols of the struggle: Mandela, Sisulu and the great Albert Luthuli. Somlandela Jesus became Somlandela Luthuli (we follow Luthuli)”.<sup>123</sup> George Mxadana, the Conductor of Imilonji KaNtu Choral Society, a Johannesburg based choir that was very involved in the political struggle, explains:

We would take a hymn and just change the words. Anybody who wants to arrest us has to prove conclusively that we are not singing a church song. So that was a very, very good way of approaching these things. So we took the music and imposed very strong political statements. Like for example “iSouth Af-

<sup>120</sup> M. Khumalo, ed. *South Africa Sings*, Vol. 1. (Johannesburg: SAMRO Scores, 1998): 48; see also V. Erlmann, “Black Political Song in South Africa: Some Research Perspectives”, paper presented at the 2nd International Conference on Popular Music Studies, in: David Morn ed. *Popular Music Perspectives 2*, (Salisbury: May and May, 1985.)

<sup>121</sup> For Baleka Mbete this is a very important song “because it is about the liberation of our people and saying God must bless them. So you find an interplay between feelings of calling on your god, calling on your creator, calling on your ancestors to also assist you to also communicate with your creator when you are so deeply involved in this very serious business of trying to liberate your country”. (B. Mbete, in “South African Freedom Songs: a Documentary”, Maybuye Centre 2000); see also Chapter 12.2.2.2 for more details about “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrica”.

<sup>122</sup> See L. Dontsa “Performing Arts and Politics in South Africa”, *Papers Presented at the Sixth Symposium on Ethnomusicology*, A. Tracey ed., (Grahamstown: ILAM, 1988): 9-15.

<sup>123</sup> Pallo Jordan, Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, in “South African Freedom Songs: a Documentary”, Maybuye Centre, 2000).

rica izwe Lethu” (“South Africa is our land”). [*singing*] Now that is: “I’m seeing the Africa that does not have an end”. But those are the words we put in whereas the song [meaning: the original lyrics] itself is talking about Jerusalem. So we changed the words from Jerusalem to South Africa.<sup>124</sup>

The politicisation of hymns, Mxadana continues, became a “powerful tool” of voicing criticism and building a new form of unity, thus making Christianity relevant to the situation the black communities of South Africa found themselves in:

People now suddenly realised that the hymns that we are singing within the church, some of them did not have relevance to our political struggle. But by changing those tunes was conscientising the Christians to realise that Christianity does not happen in a vacuum: it happens in the land where people are living, and it’s got to be relevant. If Christianity has got to help, it’s got to help in terms of the enhancement of the people. Whether it would be political, whether it would be religious, whether it would be social, whether it would be economical. It has to help in that aspect... what we saw was that the churches were actually now beginning to take those lyrics and those words and were beginning to use that very effectively. So you will be going to a church situation and people will be singing a song like that. There could be police informers, there could be anybody, and I would have loved to see the police, the South African government coming into a church and picking everybody in the congregation because of something that was political... So we were able to use church music and the music generally as another form of conscientising our people. As another form of saying: South Africa will be free one day.<sup>125</sup>

When in 1948 the National Party came into power, the system of racial segregation – Apartheid – was rigorously enforced through law in every aspect of life. After the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 the struggle intensified and grew increasingly desperate. People again used the hymns with a topical political content to create powerful resistance songs that bound them together in the face of violent oppression. African rhythms were integrated into new forms of expression involving especially dance and bodily movement, formerly banned by missionaries.<sup>126</sup> John Matshikiza, the son of Todd Matshikiza, explains the influences that led to the emergence of freedom songs:

Maybe what makes South African Freedom songs different is the number of influences that are assimilated into them. First of all based on African musical forms but the origins, the style of the freedom songs that are sung, ironically is based on the style of singing that was built up through churches... So it has a double kind of message simply in the medium because it is a musical scale that was adopted but it has been established on very firm African roots to produce a particular kind of musical expression that talks about freedom and that uses certain hidden codes, some hidden and some un-hidden codes to deliver that message of freedom.<sup>127</sup>

It must be noted, however, that only a small percentage of *amakwaya* groups actively participated in the political struggle, “because most people were afraid to be identified with politics”.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>124</sup> Personal communication with George Mxadana, Johannesburg, February 17, 2000.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> The incorporation of African elements in the hymn led to the emergence of a sort of ‘war-dance’ called *ito-toyi*, which characteristically accompanied freedom songs. The young cadres of the African National Congress and the United Democratic Front first introduced this dance, which was performed during the protest marches. “They would be marching in rhythm as they run and chant slogans. And then there would be much rhythm. And there were all sorts of slogans that were being said as they were marching. All this running and what not you see there were a lot of political slogans. They called it *toyi-toyi*. You see, you feel a lot of that in the later composers. Their music is influenced by that. It’s more militant and some of it is triumphant”. (Personal communication with Zakhele Fakazi, Marianhill, November 5, 1999). See also D. Dargie, 1997: 326.

<sup>127</sup> J. Matshikiza in “South African Freedom Songs: a Documentary”, Maybuye Centre 2000.

<sup>128</sup> Personal communication with Isaac Tlou, Johannesburg, February 11, 2001.



Individuals from the choirs did, of course, participate in rallies and demonstrations, but many choirs felt that this “was a dangerous thing. Some did get involved, like Imilonji KaNtu Choral Society. That choir sang lots of political music. But I mean it was exceptional. The majority wouldn’t do that because it was just too risky to do”.<sup>129</sup>

Joshua Radebe recalls that, during the Seven Day War, which was fought in the Greater Edendale Valley outside Pietermaritzburg between the 25<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> of March 1990, his college choir decided to keep on singing as their form of ‘warfare’ or protest. Radebe, who was teaching at Imbali Training Institution near Pietermaritzburg at the time, remembers:

[O]ne day at school, you see there were these clashes between the political parties, they were shooting one another right on the school premises – guns went bam, bam, bam... I was practicing with my choir. I stopped and said: Are we going on? They said: “We are doing our thing; they are doing their thing”. Also, they understood what was going on, but they did not want to be involved in the bloodshed: “If they are fighting a battle in that way, we are fighting a battle in our way”. The prize is the same, we are not going to stop singing [to] fight because singing must go on – fighting to achieve a purpose must go on. These must complement one another to achieve one aim: liberation.<sup>130</sup>

The political contribution of the choirs was of vital importance, however, and almost all parts of the repertoire were used to communicate protest. George Mxadana explains:

Whenever we used to sing those songs we used to have a political understanding. [Mendelssohn’s] “Be not afraid” – for us it was not just a song that’s been written somewhere. It was a song that we were using to express the political situation in South Africa... Nobody could come to us and say to us, you know, you are being political, because we did not write the songs... But we are using that song to express our aspirations and our situation in this country.<sup>131</sup>

The choirs would sometimes even emphasise their co-opted interpretation of the songs by including a short message before the performance:

... we would have somebody in the choir saying we are going through this political trauma but we as black people has to stand together. And this song is a tribute to the efforts and the wishes of the black people. We would do that. So that you already change the mind of the people when they listen to it then they look at it differently.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>129</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, February 13, 2001.

<sup>130</sup> Personal communication with Joshua Radebe, Durban, SABC, 30. November 2001; for more information on the seven Days War see: Lou Levine, ed. *Faith in Turmoil: The Seven Days War* (Pietermaritzburg: Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness, 1999).

<sup>131</sup> Personal communication with George Mxadana, Johannesburg, February 17, 2000.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

## 5.6 Summary

I have traced the use of music at the mission schools (and in particular of the hymn) in some detail because this influence was crucial for the emergence of *amakwaya*. The small groups that were formed by the missionaries to lead the singing during the service gradually extended their repertoire and developed a distinctive and in many respects unique choral practice. This process happened, above all, in the schools where singing in a choir was soon to become an important part of the leisure activities. To attribute the advance of *amakwaya* solely to mission education would miss an important factor that was a precondition conducive to the fast and efficient development of the genre. There is a strong indigenous precedent for choral singing that missionaries put to use in their teaching and ministerial strategies (see Chapter 4.3.1, page 111). It was also at the schools that one of the most important features of *amakwaya* performance practice was initiated: the urge to compete. Inter-house competitions and the annual school competitions organised by the Teachers' Associations grew into the multitude of competitions that today form the backbone of *amakwaya* practice. Before we examine the development of the competition circuit of *amakwaya*, the following chapters will examine in some detail the form, role and direction that music education and especially singing took at the mission stations and at their schools. This will mainly be done in form of a case study of Adams College, one of the finest and most influential schools operating in Natal before the Bantu Education Act was passed in 1954.



## Music Education at Adams College

The emergence of *amakwaya* was in the first place grounded in congregational singing, but of equal importance was the role played by the mission schools. In this chapter I will focus on one particular mission school, Adams College. We have already seen that education was one of the key values on which the *amakeholwa* built their aspirations. A student at Adams College expressed this in the early 1940s when he wrote, "...the school teaches young people and equips them with the weapons with which they may fight for their places in the societies of civilised people".<sup>1</sup> And on the side of the missionaries, education was promoted as a necessary component of the conversion to Christianity. I will investigate in more detail what role music education played in the process of creating a choral movement that today is one of the major musical activities of black middle class communities.

A useful insight into the early mission schools is given by Anthony Trollope in the 1870s. In his travel diaries he remarks that it is "impossible not to be moved to enthusiasm by what [he] saw at Kafir schools".<sup>1</sup> Another visitor, Victor Murray, wrote up his experiences of schools in Africa in his book, *The School in the Bush* (1929). The schools at South African missions, in particular Lovedale, founded in 1824 by the Presbyterians, left a lasting impression on him: "...the place itself is somewhat overwhelming for a visitor, especially when one comes into South Africa after visiting the small schools of territories further north".<sup>2</sup> This is an indication of the importance of South African schools, which in the course of the nineteenth century gained fame throughout Africa, with a number of students arriving from outside South Africa to study at the most renowned institutes – Zonnebloem, Lovedale and Healdtown in the Cape, and later Adams College in Natal and St. Peter's in Johannesburg. These nurtured the intellectual aspirations of black middle class Africans, who hoped, as we have already seen in the discussion of the tour of the African Native Choir, to succeed in their endeavour to achieve social and political emancipation.

In nineteenth century Natal, advanced education for Africans was provided by four secondary schools.<sup>3</sup> The American missionaries established two influential training institutions: the most important one, the Amanzimtoti Training School (later renamed Adams College), was established on a permanent footing in 1865, and the Inanda School for Girls, the oldest school for African girls in South Africa, was opened by Mary K. Edwards on March 1, 1869.<sup>4</sup> Inanda was originally designed to give girls from the station schools of the American Board Mission an opportunity for further

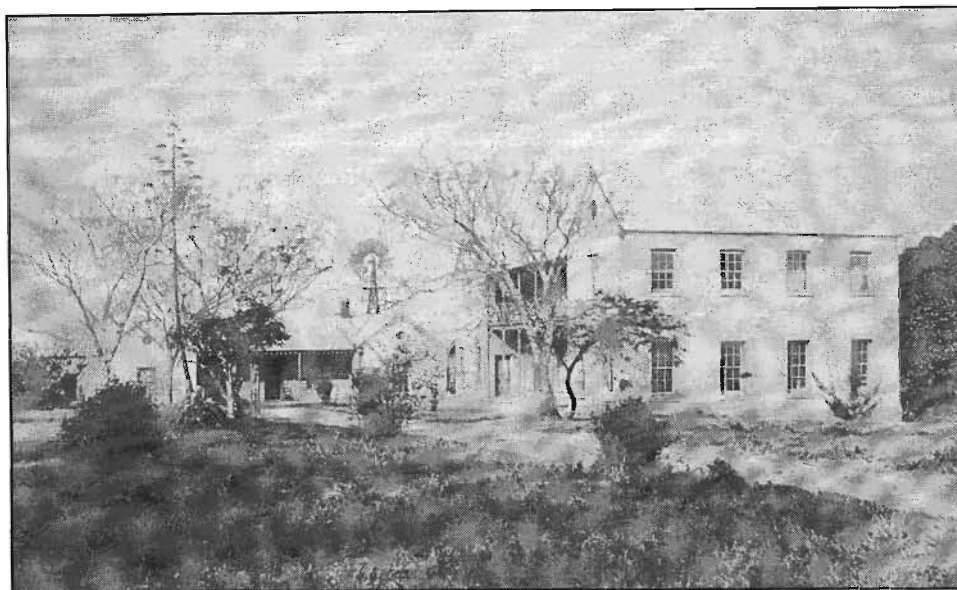
<sup>1</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (November 1942): 24.

<sup>2</sup> A. V. Murray, *The School in the Bush: A Critical Study of the Theory and Practice of Native Education in Africa* (London: Longmans, 1929): 114-5.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed study of Mission education in Natal in the first half of the twentieth century, see I. E. Hodne, *Missionary Enterprise in African Education: the Co-operating Lutheran Missions in Natal, South Africa, 1912-1955, a documentation* (Stavanger: Misjons Hogskolens forlag, 1997); also E. H. Brookes, *The History of Native Policy in South Africa from 1830 to the Present Day* (Cape Town: 1924): especially 54ff and 93ff.

<sup>4</sup> Lovedale, however, had pioneered coeducation, having received girls already six years earlier. See *The Christian Express*, (July 1, 1916): 105; R. Hunt Davis presents a detailed analysis of the development of African education in the Cape Colony between 1864 and 1900 in his Ph.D. dissertation: R. Hunt Davis, *Nineteenth-Century African Education in the Cape Colony: A Historical Analysis* (Thesis submitted at the University of Wisconsin, 1989): 238-90.

training in the “arts of home-making”.<sup>5</sup> Missionaries recognised the fact that “young men being trained at Amanzimtoti Training College as teachers and ministers needed wives well-trained as home-makers and well-grounded in Christian character and knowledge if their own influence was to be wholly uplifting”.<sup>6</sup> Girls, the missionaries argued, “who [had] imbibed the same ideas of progress which we suppose the young men to have received”,<sup>7</sup> would later become the educated wives typical of *amakholwa*.



**Figure 6.1:** *Inanda Seminary for Zulu girls* (KCL, Inanda MS collection).

At Edendale, the Wesleyan missionaries had established a “training institution”, which had functioned intermittently in the early 1870s. About 1870, the Presbyterians founded a Training School at Pietermaritzburg. The 1870s and the 1880s saw a sustained growth in the field of education, which continued for the remainder of the century. As both the quantity and the quality of the schools increased, a steadily widening educational base became one of the most important features of the black middle class.<sup>8</sup> The further development of mission schools was seriously impeded and in most cases put an end to by the introduction of “Bantu Education” in June 1954. The new legislation required the schools to change their educational policy.<sup>9</sup> Most of them, however, ceased to exist because they chose not to work within the constraints of the new Act.

In the field of music, Lovedale in the Cape and Adams College in Natal were arguably the most important and influential institutions. Many students at these schools later became influential and important conductors, composers or choristers of *amakwaya*. Lovedale, for example, produced such important figures as the Rev. Tiyo Soga, the first African to be ordained a minister of the Presbyterian Church in South Africa, Z. K. Matthews, who took up a post as teacher at Adams College in 1925, and John Knox Bokwe, who became one of the most important early composers of *amakwaya*. Formal education for indigenous South Africans was introduced at the Cape long

<sup>5</sup> *Native Teachers' Journal* (April, 1951): 453.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Elijah Makiwane during his presidential address to the Native Educational Association (NEA) quoted in R. Hunt Davis, 1979: 18; see also *Imvo*, January 26, 1885.

<sup>8</sup> By 1929 about sixty blacks had obtained university degrees from overseas, seventy-seven from Fort Hare had passed the University Matriculation and ten had graduated at the University of South Africa. See *Native Education Before The Great* (Ilanga, 9. August, 1929).

<sup>9</sup> See also 2.2.2 for further details about the Bantu Education Act.

before Natal, but for my purposes it makes sense to concentrate on Adams College in Natal, drawing where necessary on important sources from the rest of South Africa. The following considerations are pertinent to this choice.

My research base is Durban, where I have worked with numerous choirs from the surrounding townships. My interviewees often referred to their experiences at Adams College and their training at this institution. Secondly, the Killie Campbell Africana library of the University of Natal houses an important collection of documents and manuscripts relating to the American Board Mission and to Adams College and the affiliated Amanzimtoti Training College in particular. Furthermore, Adams College played a major role in the field of music education through its influence on a number of prominent students who later became leading figures of *amakwaya* community. Moreover, it was in Amanzimtoti that the Bantu College of Music was opened in 1936, the first of its kind in South Africa. Theodore Reuben Caluza, one of the foremost composers and choir conductors of the early twentieth century, was appointed as head of this Music School. Important students of Adams College and the Music School were, among others, Mark Radebe and Khabi Mngoma, who both became leading black music educators and choral conductors in South Africa. Like many other former students of Adams College, Mark Radebe returned to Amanzimtoti and joined Z. K. Matthews as a teacher at the College.

We turn now to a sketch of the events leading to the establishment of Adams College and to the aims and nature of its music programme.

## 6.1 The Establishment of Adams College

### 6.1.1 The American Board Mission

The American Board Mission, with its headquarters at Boston, was the second missionary society (after the Anglican Church) to arrive in Natal. Established in June 1812 the Board aimed to send out missionaries to foreign lands.<sup>10</sup> These missionary activities were concentrated first in India, and it was only in 1834 that the Board turned its attention to South Africa. Between 1812 and 1837, it grew to be the most comprehensive body of its kind in the United States.

In 1834 six missionaries and their wives were commissioned for service in South Africa. These were Daniel Lindley, Alexander Wilson, Henry Venable, George Champion, Aldin Grout and Newton Adams, who was to become the founder of the new mission school in Amanzimtoti. They left Boston December 3, 1834 on board the Burlington and arrived in Cape Town, February 5, 1835.<sup>11</sup> Three were destined for an “interior mission”, and the others, including Adams, for work in the coastal area of Natal. As mentioned earlier, their initial aim was to convert the Zulu nation in one generation (see 2.1.2). However, in this they failed dismally, and already by 1839 they realised that, owing to changing political circumstances as well as the Zulu lack of response, they had to alter

<sup>10</sup> See J. D. Kotze ed., *Letters of the American Missionaries 1835-1838* (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1950): 3 and J. du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions 1868-1935*, (London: Longmans and Green, 1911): 219.

<sup>11</sup> *Iso lomuzi* Vol. 3 (October 1933): 16; E. H. Brookes, C. Webb, *A History of Natal* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1987), 42-8; also N. Etherington, 1978: 27; and O. D. Dhlomo, *A Survey of Some Aspects of the Educational Activities of The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in Natal as Reflected in the History of the Amanzimtoti Institute 1835-1956*, Thesis submitted for the Degree Master of Education (University of Zululand, 1975): 2-8. For an interesting report about the journey of the missionaries from Boston and the arrival in South Africa, see the letter that Lucy Lindley, wife of Daniel Lindley wrote to her brother on February 2, 1835 in *Iso Lomuzi* Vol.4 (June 1935): 2-3.

their initial plan, aiming no longer “at the conversion of *nations*, but of *individuals*”.<sup>12</sup> Indeed it took the American missionaries ten years of hard labour before they were able to baptise their first convert, Mbalasi Makhanya, on June 26, 1848.<sup>13</sup>

Political events had overtaken the missionaries. In February 1838 the tension between the Voortrekker party under Piet Retief and the Zulu chief, Dingane,<sup>14</sup> culminated in an attack on and the slaughter of Retief’s party.<sup>15</sup> As a consequence of these events, missionaries who had hoped to start working in Zululand, were forced to withdraw.<sup>16</sup> Efforts to establish missions in Zululand were finally given up in 1842 when King Mpande, who came to the throne in 1840, attacked Aldin Grout’s mission station. The American Board Mission realised the advantages of confining their attention to Natal, where by 1851, they had established a chain of twelve stations situated along the coast from Umthwalumi in the south to Maphumulo in the north.<sup>17</sup>

Mission work was further influenced by another political development. The establishment of British rule and a British community significantly altered the political and economic structure of the region. After 1843 an increasing number of British settlers arrived in Natal, and by 1858 their numbers had risen to over 8,000.<sup>18</sup> Missionaries were not overly pleased about this development. When they had set out on mission enterprises in Natal, they were expecting to find themselves *in terra incognita*, a mission field without the threat of disruption from white communities. In fact, they regarded any kind of white influence as dangerous for the new converts and feared that the prospects of success in a land overrun by white settlers were dim. Disillusioned by this development, Daniel Lindley reported to Boston: “...this is already a white man’s country”.<sup>19</sup>

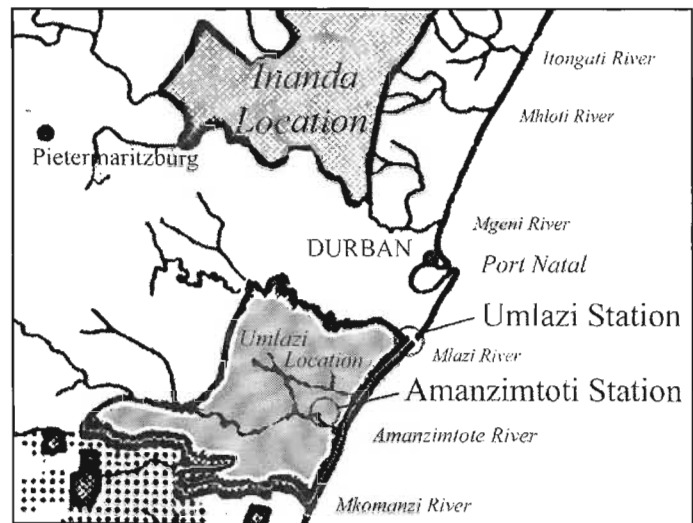


Figure 6.2: Durban, Umlazi and Amanzimtoti around 1869

<sup>12</sup> Lindley to Anderson, July 17, 1839, ABC 15.4, II.

<sup>13</sup> Mbalasi Makhanya was the wife of the chief of the Amaqwabe, who lived between the Thukela and Nonoti Rivers, before Shaka dispersed them. Mbalasi lost her husband in the war between the Amaqwabe and the Zulu. At the time when Dr. Adams arrived at Umlazi, she settled near the mission station. The circumstances that brought Mbalasi Makhanya to the mission station can be seen as typical pattern for the early converts, who often came from far away, having lost their homes in war, or were outcasts from their families or communities. (J. du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions 1868-1935*, London: Longmans and Green, 1911): 231.

<sup>14</sup> Dingane ruled the Zulu Kingdom from 1828 to 1839, after assassinating his brother, Shaka.

<sup>15</sup> For more detailed discussion: Andrew Duminy, Bill Guest ed. *Natal and Zululand from earliest times to 1910 – a new history* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1989), especially Chapters four and five.

<sup>16</sup> For an excellent study of the events leading to the destruction of Zululand and its integration into the British colony see J. Guy, *The Destruction of The Zulu kingdom: The Civil War in Zululand, 1879-1884* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1979).

<sup>17</sup> For details see: A. F. Christofersen, *Adventuring with God: The Story of the American Board Mission in South Africa*, ed. Richard Sales (Durban: Robinson, [ca.]1967): 32-3.

<sup>18</sup> L. M. Thomson, “Co-operation and conflict: The Zulu Kingdom in Natal”, in *The Oxford History of South Africa*, Vol.1, L. M. Thomson and M. Wilson, ed. (Oxford, 1969): 380.

<sup>19</sup> Lindley to Anderson, (December 1, 1937), in N. Etherington, “Kingdoms of This World and The Next: Christian Beginnings Among the Zulu and Swazi”, in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social and Cultural History* Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport ed. (Oxford: Currey, 1997): 91.



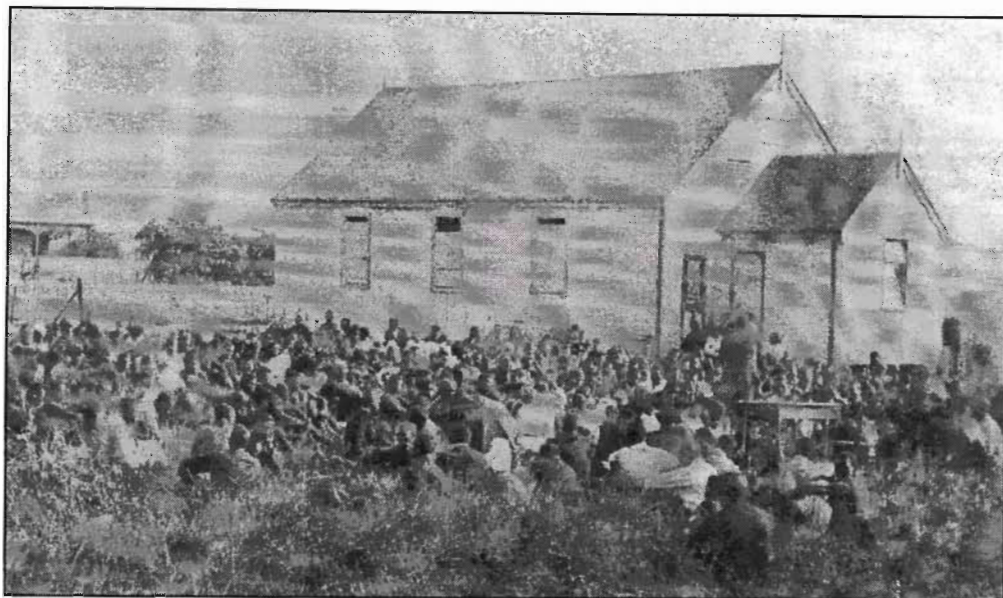


Figure 6.3: Church at Adams Mission ca. 1903 (KCL, Brueckner Papers)

### 6.1.2 Amanzimtoti Mission and Adams College

The first mission station that Dr. Newton Adams opened in Natal was situated in Umlazi where he worked for almost a decade as preacher, doctor, and teacher.<sup>20</sup> In the 1840s, the settlement at Durban was growing rapidly and the influence of white settlers on the mission station at Umlazi, which was close to Durban, grew increasingly unsatisfactory.<sup>21</sup> Consequently in 1847 Adams transferred his station further down the south coast to the Amanzimtoti area where he had established an outstation some time before. At Amanzimtoti Adams built a larger day school and a church for the congregation. Seeing the great potential of “Native helpers”, he made plans to start a training seminary. In order to get funds for his plans, Adams applied for a grant of £60 in 1849.<sup>22</sup> But the Board turned down his request and his plans were realised only four years later after his death in 1852, by his successor Rev. Rood. Rood’s instruction were to open a school for those who were capable of education beyond the level provided in the normal day school. Up to that point, the government had made no significant effort to provide state education for the African communities of the colony. The missionaries, by contrast, had developed fairly elaborate schemes to foster the education of their converts. The establishment of the Amanzimtoti Institute or the Amanzimtoti Seminary (as it was called before it became known as Adams College) was one such scheme. The idea was to train African ministers and later teachers for the mission work of the Board, and thus to create self-governing, self-supporting African Congregational communities. Up to 1849 missionaries had

<sup>20</sup> Newton Adams was born on August 4, 1804 at East Bloomfield, Ontario County, New York State. He was the eldest child of Joseph and Eunice Adams, who originated from Connecticut. In 1829 Adams qualified as a medical doctor and practised as a physician for about five years in his hometown. Only a few months before leaving to South Africa, he married Sarah, a schoolteacher in Cleveland, Ohio. (Shiels, R. A. *The first American Medical Missionaries in Southern Africa: Newton Adams and Alexander E. Wilson*, unpublished manuscript, Cape Town, National Library of South Africa).

<sup>21</sup> See Mary W. Tyler Gray, *Stories of The Early American Missionaries in South Africa*, (Johannesburg: P. C. Westwood, [ca.]1935): esp. 43f; further details about the history of Adams College can be found in Susan M. Du Rand, *From Mission School to Bantu Education: a History of Adams College*, M.A. Thesis, University of Natal.

<sup>22</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* Vol. 4 (June 1935): 20.

trained their assistants individually, and whenever a station or outstation school was established, a nucleus of outstanding students was selected to assist with the tuition of others. This system of training Africans as monitors and 'Native' helpers was modelled on that of the Lancasterian Schools, developed and refined in London in the late eighteenth century.<sup>23</sup>

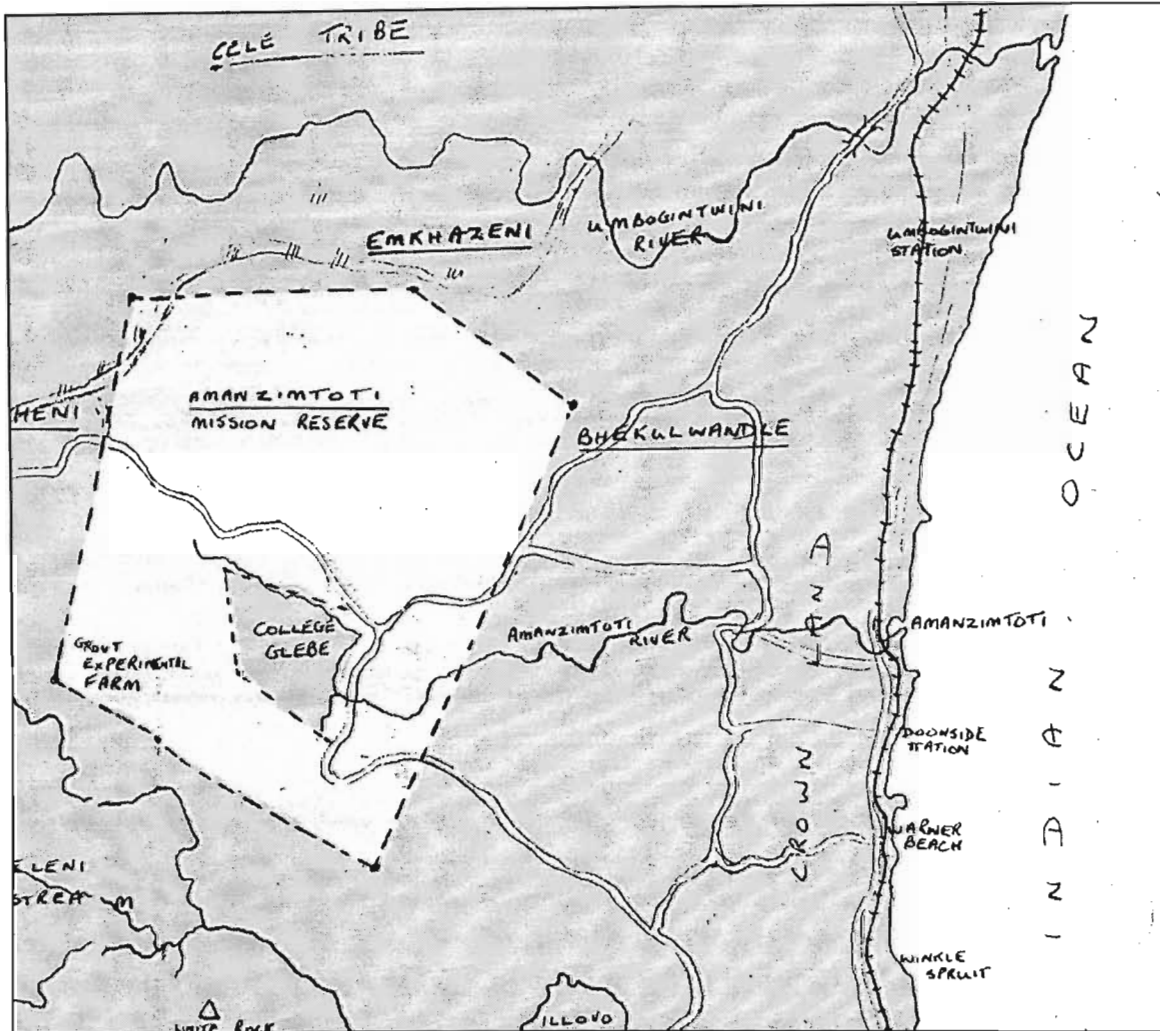


Figure 6.4: Map of Amanzimtoti Mission Station (KCL, Manuscript Collection Adams Mission).

To keep the costs of the school low and as a contribution to their living expenses, the students were required to do three hours of manual work daily. School reports show that manual labour was an important feature of Adams's educational programme, which combined "pastime and useful activities with instruction making as far as possible the educational process natural and pleasant".<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> The main feature of the Lancasterian School, named after their founder, Joseph Lancaster, who opened his first school in 1798 in Southwark, London, was the use of monitors. With the assistance of students who acted as monitors, one teacher could give tuition to a great number of children. Although Lancaster charged a small fee, no interested pupil was refused admission if he was not in a position to pay for the tuition. The monitors were chosen from among the best students of the advanced class. Monitors were honoured for their service either by offering them free tuition or by paying them a small fee. This system, of course, proved very attractive for African children attending mission schools. Besides being given the possibility of earning a small financial reward, the students could compete with one another for being put into this position. See: O. D. Dhloho, 1975: 33-4; and Wilson to Anderson, March 21, 1836 in D. J. Kotze, *Letters of the American Missionaries 1835-1838* (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1950): 103-7.

<sup>24</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* Vol.4 (June 1935): 19.

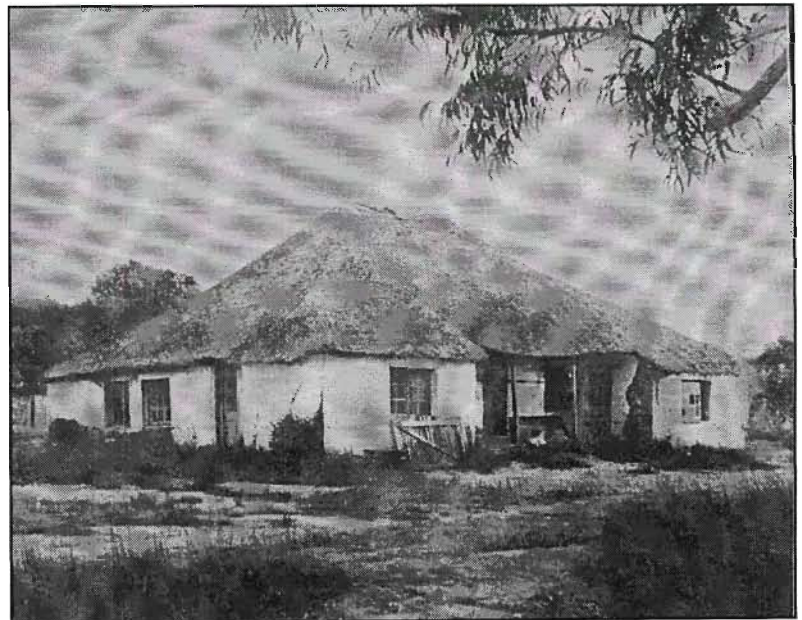
This idea was later formalised in order to fill the leisure hours of students with activities which might be at once useful and moral. Extramural activities which were educational were to become an important characteristic of Adams College and consequently of the whole community it served. I will explore later the ways in which students were expected to take part in the various activities at the college, especially, music. The growth of the Amanzimtoti mission was rapid, and the college became one of the finest and most influential training institutions for Africans, drawing students from all over Southern Africa. In its heyday, it comprised a teacher's training college, a high school, a theological college, an industrial school, and a Music School.

## 6.2 The Content of Music Education

### 6.2.1 The Early Years

As we have seen in the previous chapter, singing from the start played a central role in the missionaries' work of evangelisation. The singing of congregational hymns, especially, had the most profound musical influence on early converts at the mission stations.<sup>25</sup> Within a short time, missionaries started to include formal education in their work of converting Africans.<sup>26</sup> Their motivation for this undertaking was twofold. Apart from their main interest, which was Christianising the Africans, they felt a strong sense of responsibility to direct the informal training which Africans were receiving every day by their very contact with white people, into the right channels.

In order to "add the salt of moral training" to the process of education, the missionaries initiated Sunday Schools, which mostly concentrated on consolidating aspects of Christianity.<sup>27</sup> These early forms of Mission schools offered religious instruction to black adults and children who lived near the mission station and who did not attend the mission schools on a full time basis. Singing played an important role at these schools. In May 1837 Newton Adams reported from his station at Umlazi:



**Figure 6.5:** First substantial school house at Adams College, ca. 1843  
(KCL, Brueckner Papers)

<sup>25</sup> In an article published in 1949, Kirby gives a valuable account of the history and the state of music and musical education among the black communities in South Africa. P. Kirby, "African Music", in *Handbook on Race Relations in South Africa*, Ellen Hellmann ed. (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, Published for the South African Institute of Race Relations, 1949).

<sup>26</sup> For a valuable contribution to this discussion see Risimati Samuel Khandlhela, *Marianhill Mission and African Education, 1882-1915*, Durban, 1993. Thesis submitted for the Degree of Masters in History. Durban, University of Natal, 1993: 7.

<sup>27</sup> R. H. W. Shepherd, *Lovedale, South Africa 1824-1955* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1971): 27. For further discussion of Sunday Schools see 7.1.2.



The children's school is opened by singing a hymn, which is first repeated by one of the boys, and prayers. Then follows an examination upon the subject of the previous Sabbath, and the recitation of hymns and passages of scripture in English and Zulu. A few passages of scripture are then read and explained, and the school is closed with singing. The adult school is held under a large tree near our dwelling, and is conducted much in the same manner.<sup>28</sup>

Music education, it is clear, was almost exclusively a matter of teaching hymn tunes out of hymnbooks.<sup>29</sup> These were often compiled or composed by the missionaries themselves and printed at stations like Edendale, Amanzimtoti and Lovedale, where a printing press was among the first things the missionaries set up. The first printings were chiefly of hymnbooks and bible translations, which suggests that they were the literature most widely used at the mission schools.<sup>30</sup> Some of these hymnbooks give us some idea of early music education at the mission stations. S. P. Stone, for instance, in a hymnbook he compiled in the 1860s, lays down the procedures for the lessons in musical notation, and directs that hand signs and hymn tunes especially should be taught to *abafundi ekuvukeni*, the new converts (literally: students who wake up). These lessons were referred to as "Izimfundiso zoku kapa abafundi ekuvukeni" (lessons for new converts).<sup>31</sup>



Figure 6.6: Early school teaching, no date (KCL, Brueckner Papers)

<sup>28</sup> Adams to Anderson, Umlazi, May 15, 1837 in Kotze, 1950: 175.

<sup>29</sup> See also A. L. Behr and R. G. Macmillan, *Education in South Africa*, Pretoria, 1966: 89.

<sup>30</sup> See R. H. W. Shepherd, 1971: 6.

<sup>31</sup> S. P. Stone, *Incwadi yokuhlabelela e neZimvunga zeBandhla li ka Keristu*, American Zulu Mission?, 1862?; This early hymnbook, to be found in the Killie Campbell Africana collection, consists of nine pages of instructions, twenty pages of hymns with music and thirty-one pages with words only. The exact details of this particular copy are difficult to establish as its original cover and publication date are missing.

Further information about education at the mission schools is provided by the school syllabuses set up by the missionaries. So far as elementary education in general was concerned, the European model was uncritically applied.<sup>32</sup> Although some missionaries may have been influenced by the ideas of Social Darwinism, on the whole the objective of the missionaries was to enable Africans to reach the same levels of cultural progress long attained by Europeans.<sup>33</sup>

The Native School Report of 1876 reveals that instruction was given mainly in the elements of speaking, reading and writing the English language, and simple arithmetic. Other subjects mentioned are elementary geography, drawing, hygiene, sewing, music and scripture.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, there are very few documents available for a detailed analysis of early musical training at mission schools. From the available material it seems obvious that in most nineteenth century schools music education consisted in the preparation of songs which formed part of the church service or were used at school assemblies and other school functions. It was only in the twentieth century that the school curricula for music education began to include components other than singing.

An illustrative timetable published in 1921 in the *Native Teachers' Journal* suggests that two periods on two different days should be set aside for singing for the whole school, and one lesson of "Music" assigned to the different grades. In addition the first period each day was to be devoted to "Opening Hymns and Prayers, Drill or Games".<sup>35</sup> Actually the schools quite frequently deviated from the times officially allocated in the curricula to music education and singing. In a report on Tulini sub-primary school published in 1927, S. R. Dent complains: "...[two and a half hours] is far too much time for singing. Three periods of [twenty] minutes each should be quite enough".<sup>36</sup> When visiting the Government school at Howick the same year, Dent had a similar impression that "...too much time was devoted to singing throughout the school...[t]hese matters should be adjusted".<sup>37</sup>

At most schools instrumental music was not catered for at all. One reason for this was that, with rare exceptions, the Education Department did not provide musical instruments.<sup>38</sup> The use of singing was promoted in publications like A. M. Jones's *The Music Makers*, which recommended to the teachers that "most of the lesson should be spent in singing songs".<sup>39</sup> In his handbook containing lesson notes for music teachers, Elwyn Rees suggests the following structure for a lesson of thirty minutes duration for Standards I to VI:<sup>40</sup>

- a) Voice exercises: 3 or 4 minutes... five or six suitable voice exercises
  - b) Sight Reading: about 12 minutes.
  - c) Songs: about 15 minutes.
- Each lesson should conclude with the singing of at least one song which the class knows.

<sup>32</sup> See P. Kirby, 1949: 620.

<sup>33</sup> Refer also to my earlier discussion in 3.2.2 of how missionaries provoked feelings of inferiority in their converts; also Yvonne Huskisson, *A Survey of Music in the Native Schools of the Transvaal*, Thesis submitted for the M.A. degree in Music. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand: 213.

<sup>34</sup> Native School Report for 1876, Natal Archives PMB 1|1|29; see also O. E. Emanuelson, *A History of Native Education in Natal Between 1835 and 1927*, Thesis submitted for the degree of Masters in Education, Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1928: 107.

<sup>35</sup> *Native Teachers' Journal* (January 1921): 54.

<sup>36</sup> S. R. Dent, "Reports on Schools: Tulini Sub-primary". *Native Teachers' Journal*, (July, 1927): 190.

<sup>37</sup> S. R. Dent, "Reports on Schools: Howick Government". *Native Teachers' Journal*, (July, 1927): 192.

<sup>38</sup> P. Kirby, 1949: 624f.

<sup>39</sup> A. M. Jones, *The Music Makers: Suggestions on Music Teaching for African Teachers* (London: Longmans, Green, 1943): 10.

<sup>40</sup> E. Rees, *Rudiments of Music and Lesson Notes for Teachers* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shuter, 1966): 15-16.

Despite the concentration on vocal music, the time spent on singing was not used always effectively, and Cyril Wright, Music Organiser at the Education Office in Pietermaritzburg, felt that “far more could be achieved by regular and systematic practice”.<sup>41</sup> His report on music examinations at the Training Colleges reveals that, apart from the testing of theoretical knowledge<sup>42</sup>, the rendition of songs took a central position in the examination. Important criteria in the assessment of the students were the choice of repertoire, the knowledge of the lyrics and the interpretation of the words. A similar report published a year earlier remarked that “...in many cases students knew very little about the story of the song, the meaning of the words, of terms, of phrases; many words were pronounced wrongly, final and initial consonants were omitted”.<sup>43</sup> Wright made a point of noting that in the rendition of songs the students of Adams College outdid all other schools, as they “...not only prepared the requisite number of songs and also fulfilled the conditions with regard to the knowledge of words of one verse, but in no case did the choice of one year overlap that of another. The three grades have a repertoire of more than fifty good songs”.<sup>44</sup>

Some years earlier Percival Kirby in his position as Instructor of Vocal Music at the Education Office at Pietermaritzburg had already commented on the vocal development at mission training colleges. With regard to tone and diction he felt: “...an improvement has been made with the expression, and... students are becoming more and more free from those unpardonable vices of the uncultured singer, slurring and scooping. Still more attention should, however, be paid to quality of tone, rather than to quantity”.<sup>45</sup>

In those years, Kirby took a rather reactionary view of African music, which to a certain extent reveals the predominant colonial stereotypes. He goes on to say in his article:

[T]he Native has been over praised for his music. He has indeed an aptitude for it up to a certain point, but it is not so marvelous as is usually supposed. His so-called natural harmony is of the simplest, and is no guarantee of musicianship. The real test is to give him a part-song to learn which contains real part-writing, and harmony beyond the usual ‘vamping’ chords. In many cases it will be seen that the Native will rather simplify the structure of the music, than take the trouble to execute it properly, unless he is compelled to do so.<sup>46</sup>

The cited statements are characteristic of the attitudes of the white community in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and represent the core argument for modelling music education as a whole in conformity with the European example. The guiding principle and central aim was “to introduce an appreciation of a better type of music”.<sup>47</sup> With this in mind, Cyril Wright emphasised that there should be at the schools

a generous latitude in the choice of music and a constant adherence to the very best National songs of all countries, melodies of Handel and Bach, of Beethoven and Schubert, the lyrics of Schumann, the best of Mendelssohn’s *Songs Without Words*; all these might serve at the beginning and be succeeded in

<sup>41</sup> C. Wright, “Music in the Training Colleges”. *Native Teachers’ Journal* (April, 1926): 94.

<sup>42</sup> “Questions were given to test the candidates’ knowledge of (1) the chev  (French) time-names, (2) their ability to beat time correctly..., (3) their knowledge of the elementary principles of Voice Training for schools... and (4) 9 simple ear-tests in ‘time’ and ‘tune’ and the two combined.” (C. Wright, 1926): 94.

<sup>43</sup> *Native Teachers’ Journal* (January, 1925): 240.

<sup>44</sup> C. Wright, 1926: 94; see also *Native Teachers’ Journal* (January, 1925): 240; see also *The News of the Week* (October 26 – November 2, 1945).

<sup>45</sup> P. Kirby, “Vocal Music in Native Training Colleges”. *Native Teachers’ Journal*, (October, 1919): 34.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (December 1936): 6.



due course by movements of sonatas, symphonies, quartets, classical songs, excerpts from oratorios and cantatas, and scenes from operas.<sup>48</sup>

Thus singing, which continued to serve as an important means of framing church and school events, was assessed according to European standards of aesthetic and performance practice. The views of S. D. Ngcobo, Secretary of the Natal Native Teachers' Union, reviewing their Fifteenth Annual Conference held in 1933 at the American Board Mission Church, in Durban, are typical of the general mind-set of these days. His writing is reminiscent of the black middle class's discussion of the formation of a National Culture.<sup>49</sup>

On Wednesday in the American Board Zulu Church a grand concert was staged by the teachers. In this concert jazz music was banned, and most of the music was of a classical and polished order. Some of the notable items were:

"The Song That Reached My Heart" – by Miss H. Goba

"Just A Little Love, A Little Kiss" – by Miss Faith Caluza

"Steal Away" – by Miss Florence Sibisi (Johannesburg)

"Worthy is The Lamb"

"The Glory of The Lord" from Handel's *Messiah* – by the Adams Group<sup>50</sup>

We will later see that the emphasis on Western compositions at the mission schools had a decisive influence on the repertoire of *amakwaya* groups (see Part Three).

From the 1920s onwards, the range of music education has gradually extended,<sup>51</sup> culminating in the opening in 1936 of the South African College of Music for black students. Established in Amanzimtoti after long years of planning, it owed its genesis to the initiative and personal efforts of the liberal senator, Edgar Brookes, and Ngazana Luthuli.<sup>52</sup>

### 6.2.2 Broadening the Content of Music Education: The College of Music at Adams College

Commenting on the founding of the South African Bantu Board of Music and on the establishment of eisteddfodau in Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth<sup>53</sup>, an editorial of *The South African Outlook* speculated in 1931:

The day must surely come when at some concentration of the Bantu population like Johannesburg, or at some institution for higher education such as Fort Hare, there will be inaugurated a School of Bantu Music and Arts, for not before this takes place will Bantu music attain weight and momentum enough to move with rapid strides.<sup>54</sup>

This vision indeed materialised less than five years later, not at any of the places hoped for (nor at the all important Lovedale Institution where the first Music School had been established) but at

<sup>48</sup> C. Wright, "Music in Schools". *Native Teachers' Journal* (April, 1929): 12.

<sup>49</sup> See 4.2 for the discussion on African national culture.

<sup>50</sup> *Native Teachers' Journal* (October 1933): 23. The report of the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, held in Pietermaritzburg, July, 1934, reads similarly: "On Wednesday evening a grand concert was staged by the teachers. Music here was of a classical and high order..." *Native Teachers' Journal* (October 1934): 52.

<sup>51</sup> This is for instance recognisable in Kirby's brief analysis of official school syllabi of the different provinces in the late 1940. (P. Kirby, 1949: 623).

<sup>52</sup> Ngazana Luthuli taught at Adams with Albert Luthuli in the 1920s, but the two were not related. Ngazana assisted Caluza with the notation of his compositions in tonic sol-fa.

<sup>53</sup> See Chapter 8 for a detailed discussion of the historical development of eisteddfodau and competitions.

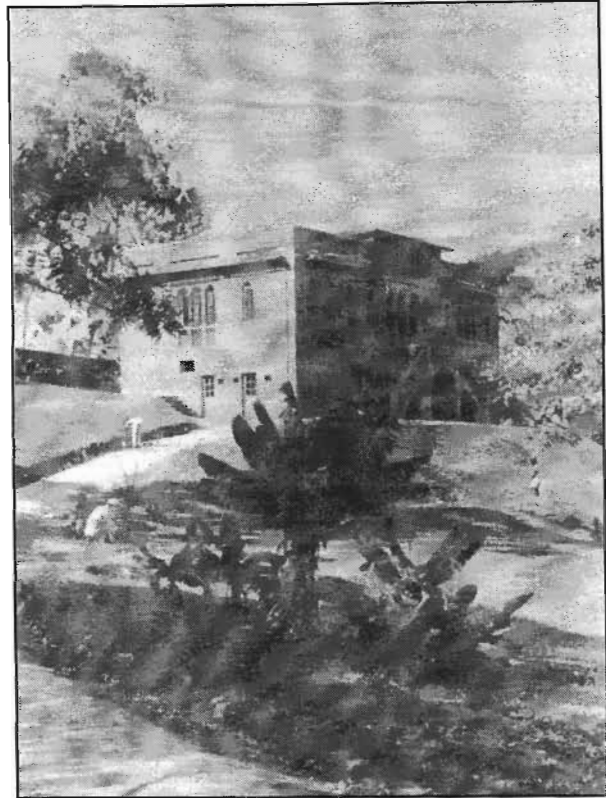
<sup>54</sup> *The South African Outlook* (June 1, 1931).

Adams College. In his presidential address published in the *Native Teachers' Journal* in 1936, Albert Luthuli, himself a distinguished choral Conductor at Adams College in the 1920s, remarked that this school “[would] help to develop the latent musical ability Africans seem to possess”.<sup>55</sup> The idea was also that the College of Music would place “Adams College on the map as one of the leading educational centres for the Bantus in South Africa”.<sup>56</sup> Hugh Tracey contributed a long article in *Iso Lomuzi*, discussing his vision of the proposed Music School at Adams College, “with the opening of [whose] doors enters a host of interesting possibilities”. He describes the central purpose of this school as giving to “the Native composer”

the tools with which he may build for himself a structure best suited to his distinctive genius... The new School of Music will have the wonderful opportunity of bringing to these minstrels the advantages of western science. They in their turn will supply the originality and the inspiration which will make African music not only world famous, but, more important still, increasingly enchanting to their own folk.<sup>57</sup>

As a result of a gift of two thousand five hundred dollars from Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Richards, the plans for the proposed College of Music could be finalised.<sup>58</sup> Edgar Brookes’s vision was to offer advanced musical courses at a later stage. At the beginning, however, it proposed to introduce music into the High School curricula, as well as in the Training College. It was intended to “encourage school choirs and a school orchestra, as well as to develop fuller knowledge and appreciation of music throughout the institute”.<sup>59</sup> Brookes’s idea was that students should be offered “the very best of the world’s music without stint, but at the same time... pay attention to the preservation of Bantu music and its adaptation to modern conditions”.<sup>60</sup>

When Brookes looked for a director of the new department at Adams College, his first choice fell on R. T. Caluza, who had a reputation as a versatile specialist in many disciplines including “African Music, Methods of teaching music, Psychology of Music, Conducting, Theory of Music, Harmony, Orchestration and Composing”.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, in his compositions he had successfully combined traditional African and Western elements, and can be seen as contributing towards the



**Figure 6.7:** *School of music, Amanzimtoti, 1936.*  
(Killie Campbell Library, Durban)

<sup>55</sup> *Native Teachers' Journal* (January 1936): 75.

<sup>56</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (December 1938): 4.

<sup>57</sup> H. Tracey, “H. Tracy [sic] Discusses the Proposed College of Music”. *Iso Lomuzi*, (November 1935): 8.

<sup>58</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (June 1935): 5.

<sup>59</sup> E. H. Brookes, *Iso Lomuzi* Vol.4 (June 1935): 13.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> O. D. Dhlomo, 1975: 94.

creation of a national culture. In 1936 he was appointed as Head of the School of Music<sup>62</sup>, and *Iso Lomuzi* advertised “Professional Music Courses” beginning in 1937.<sup>63</sup> The new School was an instant success and drew a number of talented students from all over South Africa. At the Natal Bantu Teachers’ Union annual conference in 1937, A. W. Dhlamini, president of the Natal Bantu Teachers’ Union, congratulated Adams College. Its contribution towards the ideas of creating an African national culture is given special emphasis:

This is a departure which promises much for the future. Mr. Caluza, by collecting our songs and giving them artistic setting, is doing a great service to Bantu Music, and he is at the same time introducing Bantu Music to the great world of music as a whole. Also, by his work a useful link between Bantu and Western culture is being formed.<sup>64</sup>

In 1938 Caluza could report on a very successful first year. Not only had all his students passed the music examination of the University of South Africa “with flying colours”, but also groups of them had achieved great success in a variety of activities. The success of Caluza’s work in demonstrating the importance of music at Adams College was confirmed by the decision of the American Board to erect a new building to house the School of Music, which was formally opened by Senator F. S. Malan on October 12, 1940.<sup>65</sup>

Students signing up for the newly introduced higher degree studies<sup>66</sup> could register for the following subjects:

**A) Theoretical Subjects:**

- Music Appreciation
- School Music Material (i.e. music suitable for Infant Classes, Primary Schools, intermediate Schools, High Schools and Training Colleges)
- Music Methods
- Bantu Music. In this course, students will be brought in touch with the songs composed by Bantu composers. Indigenous Bantu music for all grades will be collected and notated by the students. The forms, scales etc., of the Bantu songs will be studied.

**B) Practical Subjects:**

- Band Instruments<sup>67</sup>

Although the School of Music had several pianos that the students were allowed to “use on payment of two shillings and sixpence to practice playing staff [notation]”,<sup>68</sup> there are contradictory reports as to whether before 1947 there was a teacher available to offer piano lessons for the students. Instrumental training was directed mainly to the playing of wind instruments used in the

<sup>62</sup> *Iso Lomuzi*, (June 1936): 2; and *Iso Lomuzi* (May 1943): 12; for a detailed study of Caluza see: V. Erlmann, 1991: Chapter 5 and T. Couzens, 1985: 55-6.

<sup>63</sup> *Iso Lomuzi*, (June 1936): 15.

<sup>64</sup> *Native Teachers’ Journal* (July 1937): 109.

<sup>65</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (March 1941): 8.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* (June 1936): 15.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* (December 1936): 9.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* (May/November 1946): 8; The Manuscript Collection at the Killie Campbell Library contains an inventory compiled in 1956 of the school furniture. This list specifies more than six pianos. (Inventory list: 15, 17, 18, 20); see also *Iso Lomuzi* (September 1932): 18.

brass band.<sup>69</sup> The two bands established at the College were apparently very popular, and so many students who were not studying at the School of Music showed an interest in joining these bands that not all of them could be supplied with instruments. Among the objectives of these bands – Band A and B – was to give the students the opportunity of learning to read music, and it was emphasised that they should avoid playing by ear.<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately, the reports published in *Izo Lomuzi* do not indicate what form of notation (staff notation or tonic sol-fa) was used by the ensembles. However, there is clear indication that some effort was made to teach the principles of staff notation to the students. The choral groups, however, never adopted staff notation. The fact that almost all mission schools and training institutions promoted the use of tonic sol-fa resulted in *amakwaya* groups being almost exclusively confined to repertoire notated in tonic sol-fa. Without doubt this system of musical notation has numerous advantages when it comes to working with amateur groups on less complex compositions. Serious limitations, however, quickly become obvious in the case of more complicated music and also because of the limited repertoire available. As tonic sol-fa continues to play an important part in both the training of *amakwaya* groups and in the development of their repertoire, the next section is concerned with an outline of the origin and structure of this musical tool.



**Figure 6.8:** Brass Band St. Francis College, Marianhill 1900 (*Marianhill Archive*)

<sup>69</sup> Generally keyboard playing seems to have played an important role for the converts. D. Coplan, for instance, reports that church organs and the small harmonium had an enormous effect on the Cape Nguni musical culture: “Westernised Africans, in their desire for conspicuous symbols of civilisation, often gave the harmonium priority over other European domestic ‘necessities’”. (D. Coplan, 1985): 37.

<sup>70</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (June 1937): 7; see also *Iso Lomuzi* (June 1937): 6.

### 6.2.3 Tonic Sol-fa: Historical Development of a Musical Tool

*Tonic sol-fa is the type of notation that we were taught by the missionaries. We were not taught staff notation. That was the easiest way of teaching us. We used to compose war songs... even wedding songs for different occasions – but we did not know how to notate that. You just form it through your head and you pass it on.*<sup>71</sup>

Although J. Maphumulo remembers in his “Reminiscences of Amanzimtoti Seminary” that “Miss Day taught English and Music; both the staff notation and the tonic sol-fa”,<sup>72</sup> the emphasis at the mission schools was clearly on using tonic sol-fa as a musical tool. Despite this restriction, Cyril Wright in 1946 complained of “almost complete musical illiteracy amongst the African people ... many children leave school with little knowledge of the tonic sol-fa notation and none at all of the staff. The few songs they know have been picked up by ear”.<sup>73</sup> Two years later, in a report on practical music, he observes:

the sight-reading is passable in the tonic sol-fa notation but weak in staff, the weakness being due to the fact that students are unready in transition from staff to sol-fa... There is far too much use of the sol-fa notation as a means in itself rather than as a means to an end. The real medium of musical notation is the staff.<sup>74</sup>

He therefore suggested that schools should make “much more use of the staff notation and less of the sol-fa in their general practice”. Wright’s objections seem to have had no impact on the situation as his successor E. Rees noted less than a decade later: “It is disturbing to find that there are still quite a number of schools which have no lines painted on the board for use in music lessons. Far too many excuses have been given which cannot be accepted”.<sup>75</sup>

Tonic sol-fa owes its existence to the drive to improve congregational singing in Britain during the third decade of the nineteenth century, and its introduction into South Africa followed soon after as a result of its popularity and enormous success. Mission societies started to use it as a tool to teach hymns to their converts. The following wide dissemination of Curwen’s system and of music printed in tonic sol-fa led to the almost universal adoption of this system at schools and churches in South Africa.

John Curwen (1816-1880) was an English congregational minister who taught himself to read music from a book by Sarah Glover that introduced him to the idea of tonic sol-fa.<sup>76</sup> Religious and

<sup>71</sup> Personal communication with Leslie Nkuna, Grahamstown, July 2, 2000.

<sup>72</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (December 1936): 26; also see See Mary W. Tyler Gray, [ca.]1935): 68.

<sup>73</sup> *Native Teachers’ Journal* (January, 1946): 46.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*: 122-3.

<sup>75</sup> *Bantu Teachers’ Journal* (April, 1955): 292.

<sup>76</sup> In 1832, D. Sower introduced an English system of solmisation designed to assist the teaching and practice of sight singing. This system was taken up and developed further by Sarah Ann Glover (1785-1867) as Norwich Sol-fa. Curwen’s biographical information and his version of the tonic sol-fa system is taken from the article on Curwen written by Bernarr Rainbow in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Stanley Sadie, ed. Volume 5 (MacMillan, 1980), *The Musical Standard* (London, 1862-1871), furthermore the following online-resources available at: <http://www.helicon.co.uk>; <http://www.wiki.hu/literacy.htm>; [http://www.lib.umd.edu/MUSIC/Curwen.html#N\\_1](http://www.lib.umd.edu/MUSIC/Curwen.html#N_1) and Ivor Darreg available on <http://www.ixpres.com/interval/darreg/SING.HTM>.

social ideals of equality motivated him to create and promulgate an entire method of teaching based on this idea, for he believed that music should be the inheritance of all classes and ages of people. At considerable expense to himself, he published his own writings, which included a journal

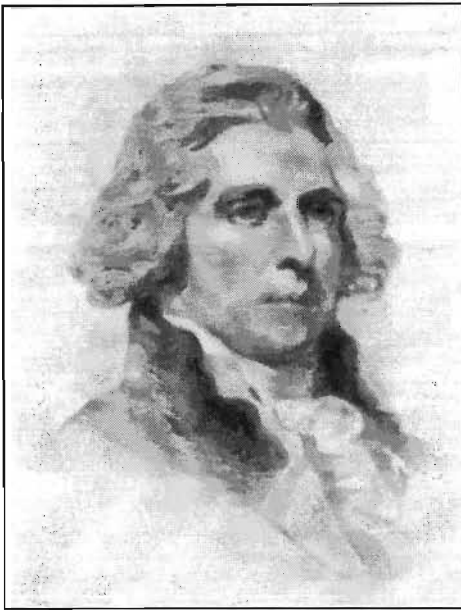


Figure 6.9: John Curwen (1816-1880)

entitled *Tonic sol-fa Reporter and Magazine of Vocal Music for the People*. After 1864 he resigned his ministry to devote most of his time to what had become a movement in mass music education.<sup>77</sup> Curwen's idea of making music easily available for everybody was taken to Africa in the process of colonisation, especially by the missionaries. A. M. Jones claims that a London missionary at Fort Beaufort, Christopher Birkett, introduced tonic sol-fa into South Africa as early as 1855.<sup>78</sup> When the missionaries started to teach hymns to their congregations and their students, they chose tonic sol-fa, which proved to be very effective, enabling them to teach the reading of music in a short time. Birkett, who taught at the Wesley Sunday School Union in Grahams-town, was so successful teaching hymns and part songs to the Xhosas who attended that he presented a series of concerts in February 1864, in which he performed a: "Te Deum", "Jubilate", "Sanctus" and "God Bless the Prince of Wales".<sup>79</sup> Following the English model of tonic sol-fa competitions (organised, for example, through the London

Tonic Sol-Fa College), Fred Farrington initiated a special Municipal Shield Competition for schools in the Eastern Cape to encourage further introduction of the sol-fa system. When in 1897 the first competitions were held at Port Elizabeth, East London and other major centres, the success exceeded all expectations. Before long, thousands of school children competed in these annual choral competitions in which a series of tonic sol-fa exercises and a two-part song were sung to sol-fa hand signs given for each independent voice. The winning choir was awarded a floating trophy, while every chorister of the successful choir also received a book prize.<sup>80</sup>

The singing of music notated in tonic sol-fa was an important moulding experience for mission-educated black Christians. The singing of church hymns, especially, seems to have left a lasting impression on the converts. Leslie Nkuna, a composer from Giyani in the Northern Province, claims, "I got more knowledge of singing in notes more especially in tonic sol-fa from the hymnbook".<sup>81</sup>

The popularity of tonic sol-fa was such that members of *amakwaya* groups often aimed at further education in this discipline. When the African Native Choir toured England, some of its members took additional sol-fa classes.<sup>82</sup> From the end of the nineteenth century onwards, the correspondence degree offered through the Tonic Sol-Fa College in London<sup>83</sup> became a very prestigious

<sup>77</sup> For a description of how a teacher would have used Curwen's method see Watkins Shaw, *Some Great Music Educators*, Kenneth Simpson, ed. (London: Novello, 1976).

<sup>78</sup> A. M. Jones, *African Hymnody*: quoted in D. Coplan, 1985: 33.

<sup>79</sup> C. G. Henning, "The Introduction of the Tonic Sol-fa System into the Eastern Cape". *Journal of the Department of Music Examinations* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, Vol. 4. 1&2 1976): 46.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*: 50.

<sup>81</sup> Personal communication with Leslie Nkuna, Grahamstown, July 2, 2000.

<sup>82</sup> See V. Erlmann, 1999: 44.

<sup>83</sup> In 1853, pupils and supporters of the tonic sol-fa method formed an association under the presidency of John Curwen. About 10 years later, they established the Tonic sol-fa College of Music. See P. J. Simelane, "The Method".

*TUATA*, official organ of the Transvaal Untied African Teachers' Association (December 1965): 13-4.



symbol of music literacy. John Curwen established this College in 1869, which was just over a hundred years later transformed into the Curwen Institute. In 1905 a growing interest among Africans in studying for a Tonic Sol-Fa College certificate led to the nomination of Charles Holy, at that time director of the Durban Musical Association, to act as a representative of the Tonic Sol-Fa College.<sup>84</sup>

The use of tonic sol-fa gained momentum in the twentieth century as many composers were convinced that the repertoire “aimed at Africans, particularly the Southern Africans... had to be in tonic sol-fa notation”.<sup>85</sup> Despite some critical voices, coming particularly from white educators and musicians, there was common agreement with the views expressed by Alexander Sandilands:

...this system, so foolishly disregarded and disused in many quarters to-day, has been the immense boon to Africa that it was to great numbers of simple people in England, Scotland, and Wales in late Victorian and Edwardian times. In Africa, it has done, and is still doing, what nothing else has done or could do: it has put good music within the reach and ability and comprehension of Africans.<sup>86</sup>

Though Curwen did not actually invent tonic sol-fa, he is to be credited with developing a distinctive method of applying it to music education, in respect of both rhythm and pitch. Tonic sol-fa is a system of musical notation without staves and notes, which uses a combination of letters and other symbols to indicate pitch and rhythm, and is based on the principles of solmisation (French: *solfège*; Italian: *solfeggio*) in order to simplify the sight-reading and teaching of music.<sup>87</sup> The use of syllables to represent the sounds of the notes of the scale goes back to the eleventh century when Guido d’Arezzo used the initial tones of the *Hymn to St. John* (ut, re, mi, fa, so, la) as a mnemonic device to train singers. The hymn proceeds from one note of the scale to the next at the beginning of each line of the text. Thus an association between each scale tone and the syllable at the beginning of the line is made:

*ut queant laxis*

*resonare fibris*

*mira storum*

*famuli tuorum*

*solve polluti*

*labii reatum*

*Sancte Joannes!*

Guido’s idea was adapted into two different systems of solmisation: one that uses the absolute (fixed doh) form, and another in relative (moveable doh) form. Whereas in England, Sarah Glover and John Curwen popularised the moveable doh sol-fa, Kodály and his associates used the tonic sol-fa system in Hungary in the fixed doh form, where the name for each note of the scale is sung without regard to the modulations that occur during the piece. In the movable doh system, the doh can be moved to any pitch throughout the piece. In other words, when a modulation occurs, the location of the doh is shifted and the new doh is indicated above the notation. The idea is that doh should be the current tonic with the other notes being related to this tonic. Thus, Curwen’s sol-fa treats the different positions of doh in a relative manner, not as a fixed-pitch. The strong point of this system is that it emphasises the relationship between the degrees of the scale and therefore develops a feeling for tonality even when the tonal centre shifts.

<sup>84</sup> *Ilanga* (February 24, 1905): 4.

<sup>85</sup> A. Sandilands, 1951: 9.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Solmisation refers to the application of the sol-fa syllables to the degrees of the scale.

Curwen adapted Guido’s syllabic system in his system of tonic sol-fa by recasting the solfeggio-syllables for his British choristers as *Doh Ray Me Fah Soh Lah Te*, abbreviated as *d r m f s l t*.

**d r m f s l t d'**  
 (Do Re Mi Fa So La Ti Do)  
 (DOH RAY ME FAH SOH LAH TE DOH)

	<i>b</i>	#
	do'	
	ti	
ta		li
	la	
le		si
	so	
se		fi
	fa	
	mi	
me		ri
	re	
ra		di
	do	

Figure 6.10: Table of accidentals

The substitution of “Te” for Guido’s “Sa” was made to avoid the duplication of the letter “s” in the abbreviations. Upper and lower octaves can be sufficiently indicated by a simple stroke placed behind the letters in a higher or lower position. Accidentals are indicated by change of vowel (see Figure 6.10).

Curwen’s method of notating rhythm depends basically upon the bar-line and the colon. The bar-line performs the same function as in staff notation; the colon precedes every weak beat within a bar. Short bar lines indicate time divisions and there are a number of subdivisions between these. Double dots (: ) separate beat from beat; single dots are used when a beat has to be divided into a half-beat, commas to divide half-beats into quarters. Horizontal lines show that notes are held. Rests are not used and silence is indicated by vacant space. The following notation of “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika” contrasts both systems, tonic sol-fa and staff notation (see Figure 6.11).

Nko-si Si-ke-le - l'i - A - fri - ka,  
 Doh is G  
 | ḍ .t, :d .r | m :m | r :r | d :- |

Ma - lu - pha - ka - nyi - sw'u - pho-ndo lwa - yo,  
 | m .m :r .m | f :f | m .m :m | r :- |

Figure 6.11: Tonic sol-fa and staff notation of “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika”

In addition to the syllables, John Curwen applied hand-signs for each of the tones of the scale. This idea is also borrowed from Guido, who had developed a sort of sign language known as the Guidonian Hand. Whereas Guido's method included only parts of the hand and figures, John Curwen developed a set of clear and vivid hand-signs using the whole hand to reinforce visually and kin-aesthetically the high/low and intervallic relationship between the pitches being sung. This system proved to be very suitable for the missionaries because it enabled their teaching melodies to their converts quickly and effectively.

The fact that African music was traditionally an oral culture facilitated the adoption and use of tonic sol-fa. Features like the hand signs and the easy structure of the notation, which was not based on pitch but on interval relations, made this system the ideal tool for teaching hymns to their converts. As a result of an almost exclusive use of this form of musical notation, sol-fa rapidly became the basis of musical education among African choirs.<sup>88</sup> The consequence was that the choirs were more or less restricted to sol-fa transcriptions distributed, for instance, through Curwen's Music School and his publishing house: Curwen & Sons. This, of course, had an enormous influence on the repertoire of the choral groups. Since, as David Coplan remarks, sheet music was expensive and not very easy to come by, many songs were transmitted aurally at choir concerts and competitions, and rehearsed without the aid of written scores. Often conductors and choirs acquired new material by attending competitions and eisteddfodau, where they memorised some of the most popular songs.<sup>89</sup> This practice, along with the excessive repetitions necessary in the process of teaching a new song, might have contributed to the present convention of performing exclusively without scores. Although there are sources that describe the practice of using the hand-signs, the teacher usually wrote the song which was about to be taught, on the blackboard.<sup>90</sup> In the early 1930s, a choir member of the Students' Christian Association Choir (S.C.A. Choir) at Adams College complained that although

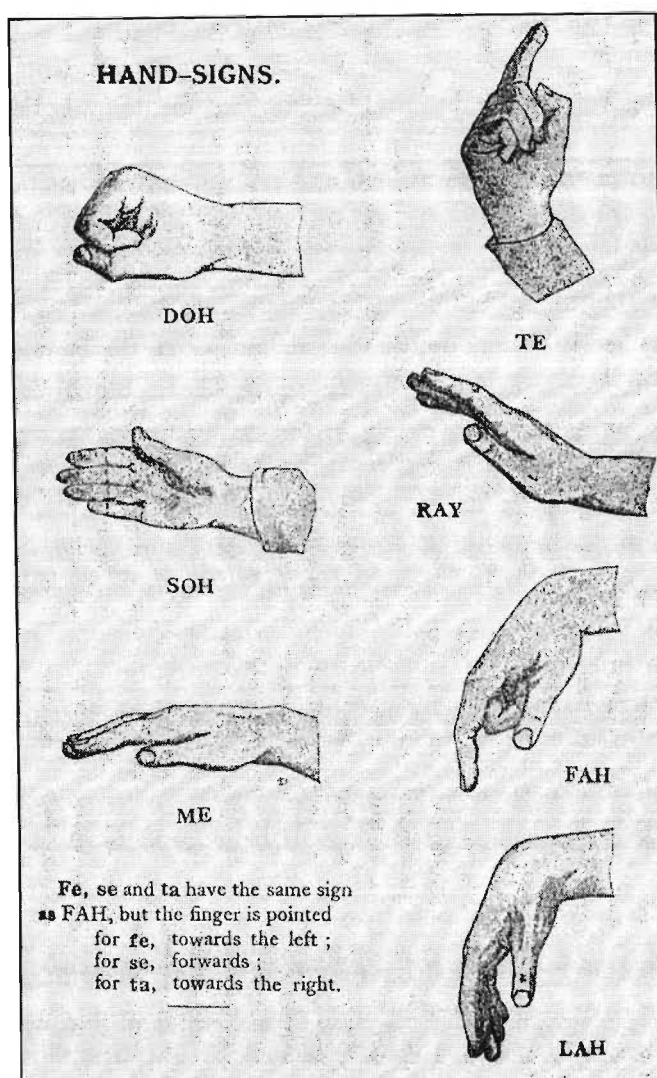


Figure 6.12: Tonic sol-fa hand signs drawn by K. Tenyane, Lovedale; published in: Hilda M. Parker, *The Teaching of Class Singing* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1953).

<sup>88</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 33.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.: 37.

<sup>90</sup> See, for instance, Hilda M. Parker, *The Teaching of Class Singing*, Lovedale: The Lovedale Press, 1953: 47; this book became widely spread among teachers and *amakwaya* conductors after E. A. Tlakula, chairman of the TUATA music committee, recommended its use in 1960. (*TUATA*, December 1960: 13).

“this choir has done and is doing promising work... one serious handicap under which it labours is the lack of suitable song-books necessitating the use of the already over-taxed blackboards of the school”.<sup>91</sup> The usual method was to have the students sing their parts with the sol-fa syllables and repeat the melody over and over again until it was known almost by heart. Leslie Nkuna, a composer of *amakwaya* music, remembers this process well: “We had to write notation on the chalkboard in tonic sol-fa. But then the teacher was pointing to the blackboard with the stick. Until you got used to it”.<sup>92</sup> A transition to the lyrics of the song could be attempted only once the choristers had become sufficiently accustomed to the melody, knowing the music almost from memory.<sup>93</sup>

Up until today the Curwen system of tonic sol-fa remains the foremost teaching tool at schools and in *amakwaya* groups, and rehearsal techniques have changed little. In the course of my fieldwork, I frequently came across choirs for whom the conductors had written the whole song on large sheets of paper taped to the wall. In each case the choir gathered around the paper, and the conductor, stick in hand, was busy teaching his choristers their respective parts. Once they knew the song sufficiently, which in most cases took a number of weeks, the rehearsals continued without notation as the choristers were expected to sing from memory. Although Curwen’s original intention was to employ sol-fa initials only as an approach device to help the beginner, students of tonic sol-fa started to rely exclusively on tonic sol-fa notation. As a result, they became entirely dependent upon publications using their familiar notation. In a similar way, this fact has become one of the major obstacles encountered by *amakwaya* groups that wish to extend their repertoire today. Failure to integrate the learning of sol-fa with an understanding of staff notation, I will argue later in more detail, seems to have manoeuvred *amakwaya* into a musical cul-de-sac (see 12.1.1 and 13 and Epilogue).

#### 6.2.4 Traditional Music and Fieldwork

When Caluza assumed his new function as Head of the School of Music, he followed Brookes’s vision of preserving traditional music and adapting it to modern conditions. There are indications that traditional music already played an important role at Adams College before the School of Music came into existence but Caluza’s intention was to emphasise this development.<sup>94</sup> Consequently “two black folk traditions – traditional Zulu music and Negro spirituals – were to become key themes” of the School.<sup>95</sup> Caluza’s turn towards the integration of traditional African music into his music teaching resulted in field trips modelled pretty much along the lines of those of Hugh Tracey, who in the 1930s was making his first field recordings.<sup>96</sup> There was indeed an exchange of ideas between Caluza and Tracey, whose expertise on indigenous music was highly

<sup>91</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (September 1932): 28.

<sup>92</sup> Personal communication with Leslie Nkuna, Grahamstown, July 2, 2000.

<sup>93</sup> Also see H. Weman, 1960: 118-9.

<sup>94</sup> In 1935 the South African Broadcasting Corporation (S.A.B.C) aired a programme from the Durban studio featuring music from Adams College. The “Amanzimtoti Royal Entertainers” with their leader William Mseleku held the stage presenting “a representative sample of the Native songs sung in their own homes in Zululand.” The programme was compiled from Zulu folksongs the students and their conductor Mseleku had collected during their frequent research activities. (*Iso Lomuzi* Vol. 4, June 1935): 13-4.

<sup>95</sup> *Iso Lomuzi*, Vol. 4, No 2 (June 1936): 2; see also V. Erlmann, 1991: 150; and 7.2.4 in this thesis.

<sup>96</sup> See also 4.2.1. for a detailed discussion about the emerging interest of the black middle class to re-connect to their ancestral roots in the context of an African national culture. There I also mentioned the role European ethnomusicologists in African traditions seem to have played in this development.

respected at the School of Music: “We had the pleasure and the privilege of listening to Captain Tracey, an authority on Bantu Music from Durban, lecturing on “Traditional Bantu Music”<sup>97</sup>

The ideas about the preservation of traditional music, like those that Caluza had brought with him when he returned from his studies at the Hampton Institute of Music, were gaining general currency: “There is a tremendous amount [of Bantu music] that must be written down and sung, and the teachers should take the lead in this work”.<sup>98</sup> In April 1938, students set out with Caluza on a field trip to undertake research into “Bantu Indigenous Songs” and to see the First Fruit Ceremony performed by Chief Langalakhe and his community at Hemuhemu.<sup>99</sup> During the ceremony, which lasted three days, the students studied “tribal songs, sung only on this occasion [meaning: during the First Fruit Ceremony]”. There was a noteworthy incident at the close of the ceremony when the students were invited by Chief Langalakhe to his home to have tea. Having been asked by the chief to sing for him, they presented some hymns, and were quite astonished when he joined in the singing, supporting the bass part: “They did not know that he could sing hymns”.<sup>100</sup> Evidently the missionaries’ musical influence extended well beyond the boundaries of the mission station and had an impact even on the traditional communities. The students, however, as records of the impressions they gained in the course of the three days show, were alienated from their own traditional culture, which they perceived as “weird and strange”.<sup>101</sup>

The idea of researching and preserving African music and culture was not restricted to institutions like Adams College. It was regarded as being of such importance that the *Native Teachers’ Journal* repeatedly published guidelines and comments on fieldwork. In a long article entitled “Study of Zulu Customs and Traditions”<sup>102</sup> N. J. van Warmelo points out the importance of “collecting all the information we can obtain with regard to the history, tradition and customs of the Bantu of South Africa”. He goes on to launch an appeal to the teachers, who “in most cases... teach in country schools in close contact with the population – old men and others who could tell them things we do not yet know”, to assist in the researching and preserving African cultural heritage. In order to assist the teachers, van Warmelo offers them guidelines for ethnographic fieldwork:

Now, there is only one way of obtaining good material, and that is, to write down the *actual words* of the man who gives the information. I have found the following method the best for getting good results. You first make sure that your informant, preferably an old man, really knows what he is talking about. Ask others whether he is reliable. You explain to him that you want to be told everything about a certain matter, but that you know nothing about it, and you are afraid of forgetting what he says, so you want to write it down. He will want to tell you quickly, but you must show him that he must dictate his words slowly. We do not want *your* words, we want *his* word. You will allow him to dictate what he pleases without interrupting him. You write down exactly what he says, whether you understand it or not... In this way you obtain material that can be of real use to others, because it is what an expert has said in his own words.<sup>103</sup>

Adams College established courses in “Bantu Music” and fieldwork, besides offering professional music courses linked to music examinations of the University of South Africa,<sup>104</sup> and an entrance examination was held in order to classify the students according to their abilities. The

<sup>97</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (November 1942): 12.

<sup>98</sup> *Native Teachers’ Journal* (July 1936): 143.

<sup>99</sup> A report about this field trip can be found in *Iso Lomuzi* (December 1938): 3-4.

<sup>100</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (December 1938): 3.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*: 3-4.

<sup>102</sup> N. J. van Warmelo, “Study of Zulu Customs and Traditions”. *Native Teachers’ Journal* (April 1930: 148-51).

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*: 150.

<sup>104</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (December 1936): 9; (December 1938): 3; and (June 1936): 15.

syllabus consisted of two years of preparation for the teaching of music in Primary and Intermediate Schools and Training Colleges. In the first year, the focus was on a thorough mastery of the rudiments of music. In the second year, students were instructed in “Practice Teaching, Methods of Teaching Music, Playing Brass and Woodwind Instruments, Conducting, and Music Appreciation”.<sup>105</sup> A College diploma was awarded to those completing the course. To those who wished to take higher degree studies for university diplomas and a degree in music, a three-year special training course was offered. Examinations were held in harmony, counterpoint, piano and singing.

In spite of all these achievements, the Education Department at this time had not yet designated posts for specialist music teachers at black schools. This turned out to be a major obstacle for Adams as the students that the training college turned out were not employable in their specialised field. However, in a letter to the College, the Department promised, “[this] is a fault that will be rectified as qualified teachers become available”.<sup>106</sup> The letter assured the Principal that it was policy to acknowledge certified teachers holding additional specialist qualifications and that it was indeed “possible to foresee the day when holders of your Music Diploma will receive appointment”.<sup>107</sup> Nonetheless the Education Department discouraged students from specialising and studying solely for a music diploma.

### 6.3 Summary

This chapter has focussed on Adams College as a case study and has evaluated available material regarding music education at this influential school. School syllabuses and school reports allow the conclusion that music education, especially in the early years, emphasised the training of choirs in songs that were part of church services. Although at the beginning of the twentieth century music education was to some extent rethought, this functionality was maintained as music education chiefly meant the preparation of songs that were used at school assemblies, school functions and other such occasions. Furthermore, the method of instruction derived mainly from that of European elementary education. For the historical development of *amakwaya* it is significant that music education put a great emphasis on vocal music at the expense of instrumental music.

When in 1936 the first South African School of Music offering training opportunities for black students opened its gates at Adams College, the quality of black education in Natal was enormously enhanced. Stirred by ideas of creating black national culture, the new institution had as one of the objectives the integration of African cultural heritage and formal schooling. Thus a new course in “Bantu Music” offered at the School was designed to bring the students in touch with the songs composed by black composers. Central features of the Music School were the field trips, which were conducted regularly in order to collect, notate and study indigenous music. Although the idea of preserving traditional music received growing public support, along with Caluza’s attempts to integrate the Western and the African heritage and to find a way of negotiation that would do justice to both traditions, music education continued to be modelled more or less on European methods. In a synopsis published in 1949 Percival Kirby observed: “The general tendency throughout the Union is to teach African children European music, or African-composed music constructed chiefly after European models, and the choice of song is left largely to teachers”.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>105</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (June 1937): 7.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> P. Kirby, 1949: 624.



More recently, Khabi Mngoma, an important figure in black music education, who was himself trained at Adams, has also criticised the fact that in South African schools, music education is not related to and does not draw from the proliferation of musical styles in African society. He explains that

the teaching of music in African schools is tentative and limited, firstly by lack of facilities and secondly by a lack of music teachers adequately equipped for their task... As far as the formal structures of African education are concerned, nothing is really provided by way of specialist training for the music teacher... the curricula are rudimentary and the amenities poor.<sup>109</sup>

Teachers, he goes on, are not “adequately steeped in the musical culture of their pupils to the extent that their own training included an African music dimension and orientation. What is given pride of place in the teaching programmes is Western music, to the virtual exclusion of African music”.<sup>110</sup>

One of the reasons why the task of creating a culture that would include both African and Western elements proved difficult, was that the integrationist white liberals who assisted in this process were “paternalistic cultural organisers and educators [who] often judged African performances by Western criteria”.<sup>111</sup> This not only inhibited the emergence of a national culture with its own aesthetics, but also intensified the African middle class’s sense of inferiority. In our own day, this has finally led to a situation where music education in South African institutions has primarily promoted esoteric and elitist classical Western music to the exclusion of musical traditions and forms existing in South Africa.<sup>112</sup> Despite the resulting “mono-cultural Western music education”, however, there has been a strong tendency to ‘indigenise’ Western musical traits by adopting and adapting Western music, as in the development of the African composed *amakwaya* repertoire.

The tendency to prefer European music has changed little in the course of the twentieth century, and at present Western music has remained the focus at schools. The amount of attention and time given by the choirs to learning a Western repertoire is still disproportionate. Furthermore, it is alarming that music as a discipline is given a peripheral position and consists for the most part of class singing, with the aim of preparing a group of students for the daily morning assemblies or for one of the numerous competitions.<sup>113</sup> The teaching is done mainly by rote, and little attention is given to the appropriate development of reading skills, either in tonic sol-fa or staff notation. The often rather elementary musical background of teachers dictates the level of singing.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, most musical activity occurs in the sector of co-curricular instruction, formerly called extramural activities. It is only when choirs are preparing for competitions that music is granted an important status, to the degree that “many schools come practically to a standstill just before choir competitions while the choir practises all day”.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>109</sup> K. Mngoma, “Music in African Education”. *Proceedings of The First National Music Educators’ Conference*, Christine Lucia, ed. (Durban: University of Natal, Department of Music, 1986): 116.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 114.

<sup>112</sup> K. Mngoma, “The Teaching of Music in South Africa”. *South African Journal of Musicology (SAMUS)* 10 (1990): 121.

<sup>113</sup> I am talking mainly about the schools at the townships from where most of the black choirs originate. There is a significant difference between the privately run and the ‘elite’ government schools that often have a well-equipped music department, and those schools predominantly attended by black students from underprivileged families.

<sup>114</sup> M. Oerson, “School Music Education as Administered by The Department of Education and Culture”. *The South African Music Teacher* (December 1988): 113.

<sup>115</sup> G. Smith, “Aspects of School Music in Black Education”. *The South African Music Teacher* (June 1988): 13.



## Leisure-time and the Role of Choral Singing: with Special Reference to Adams College

*In all these colleges and schools, what was the most important artistic form that was used for expression? Choral music. Because what else was done? Very little craft work, very little painting. Very little of these other things were done in all our schools and colleges. And the main thrust for artistic expression that the children and the staff and all the people in the committees had was music. So it's always been our main spring [to] express our artistic selves.<sup>1</sup>*

The predominance of singing in music education at black schools, as demonstrated in the last chapter led, together with the singing in church, to an early promotion of choral groups at the mission stations. In developing this point, this chapter will look into the role choral groups played at Adams College, particularly in the context of leisure-time activities. This will lead on to an exploration of the competition culture, which plays a central role in contemporary *amakwaya* practice.

### 7.1 Organising and Moralising Leisure-time

All missionaries and mission stations upheld the dignity of labour and condemned laziness.<sup>2</sup> This work ethic, naturally had a strong effect on their teaching programmes, and it was not only the working hours of their converts that concerned them. Recreation, they noted, “forms an essential part of the school curriculum, and is indispensable for the healthy development of mind and body”.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, they were quick to realise that extra-mural activities, involving education and recreation, were essential to the full development of the students: “The eyes of the teacher should follow his pupils when the school bell indicates the end of the day’s lessons, and he should influence the non-school recreational activities of his children”.<sup>4</sup>

In 1929 Bernhard Huss of the Marianhill Mission Station published a long article in the *Native Teachers’ Journal* in which he emphasised the importance of organised leisure-time in the urban context:

The most common wrong recreation people indulge in is the use of alcohol. The strenuous and anxious mode of life of many people, the scarcity or absence of wholesome and palatable food, the ignorance of

<sup>1</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, November 20, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> See A. Vilakazi, 1962: 119.

<sup>3</sup> *Native Teachers’ Journal* (July, 1937): 90.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* (July, 1937): 90; Also see C. W. M. Gibbins, *Bantu Education in South Africa*. (Killie Campbell Manuscript Collection): 32.

the proper way of preparing food, few opportunities of social exhilaration and festivity, these and similar conditions combine to establish and confirm in many people the habit of depending upon intoxicants for physical enjoyment and refreshment. Besides drink there are still other wrong methods of recreation, various kinds of coarse self-indulgence and stupefying amusements, e.g. the smoking of hemp, dagga, opium, gambling, dancing and similar noisy amusements, especially during the night time and often until dawn. Such things contribute more or less to the moral, intellectual, physical and economic ruin of the individuals who indulge in them or partake of them, and are consequently not methods of recreation, but rather ruination.<sup>5</sup>

The problem related to the abuse of alcohol, and the influence in general of the urban environment was a constant missionary concern. The missionaries obviously did not always succeed in their “effort to keep [their flock] out of contact with the cruder life of the ‘Location’ – the drinking and fighting and beer-brewing and gambling”. According to Z. K. Matthews, “...their failure was inevitable. They could not keep us insulated”.<sup>6</sup> By the time Huss’s article appeared, in which he lays down some guidelines for leisure-time activities at African schools, it is evident that the organisation and moralisation of leisure-time had become an important part of the missionary endeavour to provide safeguards and moral directions for their protégés. The expression ‘moralise’ in the sense of ‘rendering moral’ has been used from at least 1930 to describe efforts to fill the spare time of black people with activities acceptable to Christians. Ray E. Phillips, in *The Bantu are Coming* (1930), writes of “the whole great problem of moralizing the leisure time of natives”.<sup>7</sup> Tim Couzens<sup>8</sup> in 1985, quoting Phillips, uses the same word, which I have therefore adopted. Huss was able to point to the Village Clubs formed in England in 1918 as an example of an organisation concerned with the development of social recreational and educational activities such as lectures and musical and dramatic entertainment. Referring to a publication of Dr. Jesse James entitled “Education in Africa”, in which he argues for the proper use of leisure-time, Huss insists that

[natives] must not only be taught to work effectively, but also to play healthfully... Guidance for the pupils in wholesome recreation should be provided even in the lowest type of school. The possibilities of recreation for the improvement of physical life and morals are too vital to be omitted in any school. The best of the Native games and especially music offer much material for the resourceful teacher.<sup>9</sup>

The fundamental idea in organising the leisure-time of the students at the mission schools was to inculcate godliness, cleanliness, industry and discipline.<sup>10</sup> Norah Mkhize, one of the students attending the Training College at Amanzimtoti in the early 1940s, remembers:

We clean the campus. We sweep and dust the school every day. On Saturdays we scrub the floors and sweep the yards and roads. We always have our meals at regular times. The girls dining hall is separated from the boys dining hall but in the same building. We are always marked for late coming in the dining hall or class-room or chapel. For one mark we work for the whole hour... We always have something to

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. (July 1929): 8-9.

<sup>6</sup> Z. K. Matthews, 1986: 12

<sup>7</sup> R. E. Phillips, *The Bantu are Coming: Phases of South Africa's Race Problem*. (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1930).

<sup>8</sup> T. Couzens, *The New African: a Study of the Life and Work of H.I.E. Dhlomo*. (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985).

<sup>9</sup> *Native Teachers' Journal* (July 1929): 9.

<sup>10</sup> James Steward 1887: xii; quoted in Grant E. Olwage, “Exhibiting Choralism, or Africans on Stage: A Second Take”. Unpublished paper presented at the annual conference of the British Forum for Ethnomusicology, April, 2001: 4.

amuse us on Saturdays such as football match, bioscopes, concerts, lectures or socials... On Sundays we usually have the S.C.A. [the Students Christian Association] discussions or classes.<sup>11</sup>

Denouncing everything as heathen that was linked to African tradition, the missionaries encouraged only those activities that tended towards “spiritual growth, moral and cultural progress” and the formation of a “clean, useful, and noble character”.<sup>12</sup>

In the following section I want to investigate the various facets of the leisure-time scheme set up at Adams College. The students could participate in a variety of extramural activities. *The News of the Week* regularly reports on the rich variety of school life that included talent nights, concerts, dramas, music appreciation classes, discussions, talks, fancy dress and hat nights, table games, screenings of educational or religious films, sporting activities like football, tennis, basket ball, debating teas and inter-school competitions. Generally participation in the various activities offered was voluntary, as the official policy at Adams College was to grant “a large measure of freedom and responsibility to its students”, with the idea that discipline should be more “co-operative than authoritarian”. This concept seems to have worked, as student activities were in a large measure student-organised.<sup>13</sup> G. Miller, a member of the staff, remarks in a contribution to *Iso Lomuzi* that he has “been rather struck by the fact that here at Adams the students have much scope for initiative and leadership in the various societies which form part of our college life”.<sup>14</sup>

Compulsory activities for the whole school were held only once a week, every Wednesday afternoon, when every student was required to take part in any of the events that were specifically scheduled for that day.<sup>15</sup> We shall see that choral music played a central role in this scheme, which was conceived to complement the work done during the school hours. In 1937 Edgar Brookes, Principal at Adams College, was able to announce that “our choirs under Mr. Caluza’s leadership have shown us what a combination of passion and discipline can produce”, which suggests that the idea of disciplining and moralising the students with choral singing had proved to be highly successful.<sup>16</sup>

### 7.1.1 The House System

Leslie Nkuna, a composer of the *amakwaya* tradition recalls his time as a student of Valdezia High School:

...you know we had “Inter-houses” at school, we were divided into groups so that we were able to compete on ourselves. That competition was in September. You see, we had three houses, that is: Livingstone, Washington, Alexander and so on. The Principal used to give us some pieces of music and then we had to learn those songs on our own and compete it on a certain day. That is where I got very much interested in music. To see myself conducting like my teachers – oh, that was a great thing to me. You know I felt now I’m developing.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (Vol. 13, No. 1-2, May-November 1944): 20.

<sup>12</sup> *Native Teachers Journal* (July 1937): 89; see also (July 1929): 64-6.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* (July, 1951): 532.

<sup>14</sup> G. Miller in *Iso Lomuzi* (May-November 1946): 21.

<sup>15</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (May 1942): 17-8.

<sup>16</sup> E. H. Brookes in the editorial of *Iso Lomuzi* (June 1937): 1.

<sup>17</sup> Personal communication with Leslie Nkuna, Grahamstown, July 3, 2000.

At Adams College a house system modelled on that of English public schools provided the necessary structure for the profitable organisation of leisure-time.<sup>18</sup> The students were divided into groups with each group being given a name. Any student who distinguished himself either in sports, music or academic work brought honour to his house.<sup>19</sup> The system was thus used to encourage competition in school life, and the competitive spirit in turn fostered diligence and encouraged discipline. There was even a points system used to keep up discipline in school life in general.<sup>20</sup>

### 7.1.2 Sunday Schools

Another important institution embodying the leisure-time concept at Adams was the Sunday school. The students were given "...hymns and memory work from the Bible to give them an idea and develop their interest in reading the Bible".<sup>21</sup> When the necessary preparation was completed, the students were sent as teachers to different outstations every Sunday "to meet [their] delighted scholars".<sup>22</sup> The Sunday school system was born out of the need to train promising converts to assist the missionaries. The students seem to have been ready to endorse the view that "we who have heard the invitation [to join the Christian community] should pass it on to other people who have not heard of it, and persuade them to accept it".<sup>23</sup>

A report from 1942 shows that Sunday school groups were quite popular at Adams, and the College counted "thirty Sunday Schools Teachers, who according to the usual process, [were] distributed to various outside schools, which [were] within the radius of six miles from the college".<sup>24</sup>

However, Sunday School instruction was not restricted to religion, as children were taught "games and songs and also how to spend their Sundays usefully".<sup>25</sup>

### 7.1.3 Scouting, Pathfinders and Wayfarers

Another important institution, along with the Sunday Schools, was that of the Pathfinder and Wayfarer movement, based on the ideas of Robert Baden-Powell's Scout Movement. Baden-Powell developed his ideas of Scouting with Rudyard Kipling in the late nineteenth century when Britain was still trying to come to terms with the effects of urbanisation. Baden-Powell's ideas crystallised during the Anglo-Boer War at the turn of the century, and, as is well known, were influenced by his contact with African culture and customs.<sup>26</sup> Ironically the scouting movement had then to be read-

<sup>18</sup> For further details about the house system at Adams College see: *Iso Lomuxi* (November 1942): 22-3 and Dhlomo, 1975: 103.

<sup>19</sup> See *Native Teachers' Journal* (October 1937): 14 and *Iso Lomuxi* (November 1942): 22-3.

<sup>20</sup> This scheme included the allocation of 100 total marks per week, which were divided according to the following system: "Neatness of cottages: 30; Campus care: 6; Punctuality at meals: 42; Punctuality on Saturday and Sunday evenings: 6; General behaviour at meals, study etc.: 16."<sup>20</sup> (*Iso Lomuxi*, May 1942): 7; see also (*Iso Lomuxi*, May-November 1945): 15-6.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*: 28.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* (November 1942): 7.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*: 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* (November 1950): 25.

<sup>26</sup> As noted in the *Native Teachers' Journal* (April 1928 :150-151), the "many ideas and practices learnt from the Zulu people" were transformed by Baden-Powell, who "has shown his greatness by the way he has taken some Native practices and converted them to useful, clean and uplifting purposes". Pathfinders, Wayfarers and Scouts were in some ways organised along very similar lines to the social system of the traditional African society. An abstract of the laws of the Pathfinders at Adams College, supplied to the *Native Teachers' Journal* (April 1920: 108) by W. C. Atkins, shows the following organisational structure:

justed and renamed for “the needs of Native boys and girls”,<sup>27</sup> with the aim of developing “good citizenship among non-European boys through the formation of their character”.<sup>28</sup> Thus were born the Pathfinder and the Wayfarer Movements, which, using teachers as leaders, soon became of considerable importance for the African schools. Ray Phillips, a missionary of the American Board Mission, who in 1918 was in South Africa to assist a social welfare programme in Johannesburg, recognised the use of the native scouting organisations and encouraged the formation of these groups as a means of “[enforcing] discipline in young folks” and moralising the leisure-time of black urban communities.<sup>29</sup>

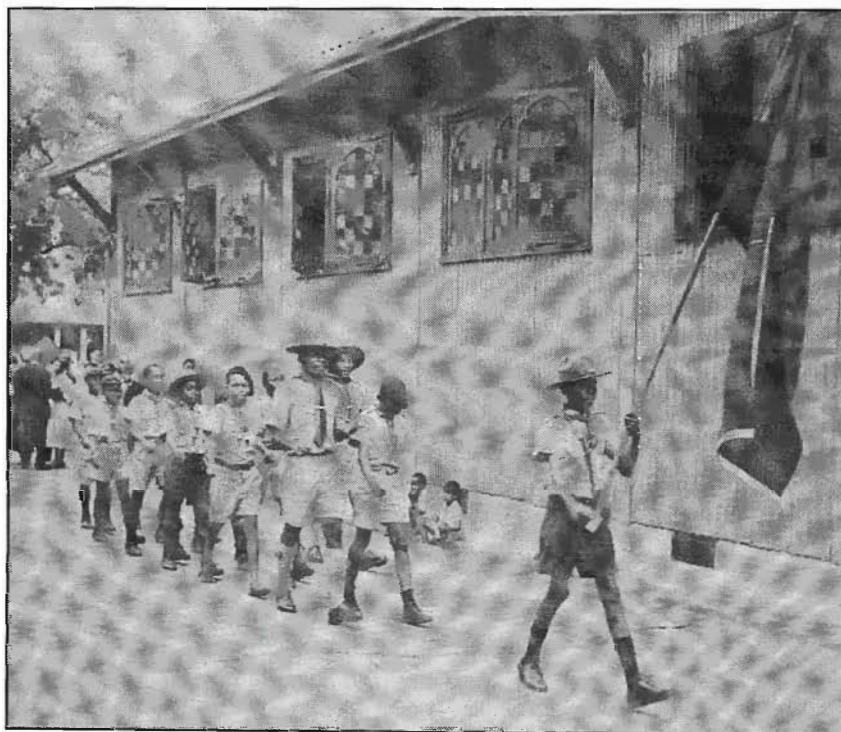


Figure 7.1: Pathfinders (KCL, Inanda Manuscript Collection)

In 1926, inspired by a further visit of Baden-Powell to South Africa, J. A. Reuling introduced the Pathfinder movement at Adams College.<sup>30</sup> The aim was that it should assist in elementary education, provide meaningful recreational activity, and promote spiritual growth by “gradually eradicating undesirable propensities [and] teaching the boy not only good citizenship, but also practical Christianity”.<sup>31</sup> The movement embodied the missionaries’ idea of organising and moralising the leisure-time of the students.

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“Officers shall be as follows: Chief (the Missionary, or older helper); Assistant Chief (if necessary); and Indunas appointed by the Chief from among the members as the leaders of each tribe of eight boys... Eight boys in the Pathfinders shall have an Induna appointed by the Chief and shall choose a tribe name and have a tribe yell. The Induna shall be directly responsible to the Chief for the good conduct of his tribe and for the faithful discharge of tribe duties”.

<sup>27</sup> *Native Teachers Journal* (April 1928): 150.

<sup>28</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (October 1933): 24.

<sup>29</sup> R. E. Phillips, 1938: 300-1; for more details about the work of R. Phillips see Chapter 8.3.1.

<sup>30</sup> *Native Teachers Journal* (April 1928): 149.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* (July 1953): 259. See also *Iso Lomuzi* (November 1942): 21.



As a later writer pointed out, it

demands of its followers loyalty to God and Country, kindness to others, and the preservation of physical fitness, mental soundness, and moral rectitude. [Therefore it] cannot but help those that work for the moral and cultural progress of the African race... It includes exercises for soul, the mind, and the body. It advocates all that is clean, useful, and noble... and it despises the artificial, fickle, and often immoral recreation of town life.<sup>32</sup>

The picture being painted here is of a new ethos which would gradually define the value-system of the emerging black middle class, and throw light on the character of *amakwaya* tradition up to the present day.<sup>33</sup> This new mentality is illustrated by A. W. Dhlamini, President of the Natal Bantu Teachers' Union, who in 1938 could report in his presidential address at the twentieth annual conference at Ladysmith: "The Pathfinder and Wayfarer movements are gaining ground in our schools, and they no doubt provide valuable outlets for the physical, mental and moral development of our youth, taking the place of the primitive institutions that provided for these outlets".<sup>34</sup> Such statements leave little doubt that some of the prejudices of the missionaries had all but colonised the minds of black leaders. Be that as it may, for the members of this 'progressive elite', Pathfinder and Wayfarer groups provided a realistic methodology in their striving to "build a progressive, united African nation"<sup>35</sup> by reconciling old concepts and customs with progressive Western ones.

Music played an important role in the Scouting movement. At the camps, singing served not only as an entertainment around the campfire but also as a discipline involving various tests from which badges could be won.<sup>36</sup> The *Native Teacher's Journal* gave an account of the activities at a district Pathfinder camp held in 1946: The "Pathfinder Scouts put over numerous stunts and songs for the entertainment of the visitors, all of which were well received. There is no need for me to speak of the perfect blending of native voices".<sup>37</sup>

At Adams College, the Pathfinder and Wayfarer groups decisively contributed to the musical life at the school. A report published in *Iso Lomuzi* represents a concert given on October 7, 1933 as being "a great eye-opener of what can be done by bringing good and sweet influences to bear on the lives of boys and girls in the Training Colleges". Choral singing, the report goes on to suggest, is an essential means of improving discipline and morality at the schools: "Our school up till now has not made action songs and drill-exercises a main feature of its activities... judging from the tenor of the concert, we can look forward to seeing our students doing their respective parts with more grace and precision".<sup>38</sup> It is obvious that singing was important as an expression of Pathfinder and Wayfarer ideals and became firmly rooted in the leisure-time scheme of the black middle class,

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. (July 1937): 89. See also (July 1929): 64-6.

<sup>33</sup> The Pathfinders and Wayfarers epitomised the values of the black middle class not only in the adherence to Christian doctrine but also in their loyalty to Britain. New members of the movement had to take the following oath: "I promise on my honour that I will do my best to: (1) Do my Duty to God and the King, (2) Help other people at all times, and to obey the Pathfinder Law. (3) To keep myself strong in body, wide awake in mind, and clean in soul..." (Ibid. April 1928: 108) And pass a test that included giving "the History and Composition of [the] English Flag" (Ibid.).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. (July 1938): 38.

<sup>35</sup> "Busy Bee", *Ilanga*, June 30, 1951, quoted in T. Couzens, 1985: 352.

<sup>36</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (May 1933: 22); this was also confirmed for me by Leslie Nkuna (Personal communication with Leslie Nkuna, Grahamstown, July 3, 2000). Pathfinder and Wayfarer groups also featured in concerts: see, for instance, the report of a Pathfinder concert staged a fund raising concert at Greyville. *Ilanga* (November 23, 1940).

<sup>37</sup> *Native Teachers Journal* (July 1946): 118.

<sup>38</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (November 1934).

since from the third Transvaal African Eisteddfod onwards, Pathfinders and Wayfarer groups were given separate categories in which to compete.<sup>39</sup>

Thus the house system, the Sunday schools and the Scouting movements constituted the scaffolding on which a moral system was built. We turn now to look at the specific role of music-making in imparting and consolidating discipline as an important element in the life-style of the emergent black middle class.

## 7.2 Choral Music, Performance, Discipline and the Role of Singing

*And it's my talent to sing... if you have the talent you must use it. Then where can I use my talent if I can't use it in the choir?*<sup>40</sup>

I have argued that music and especially singing played a central role in the educational programme of Adams College. The participation in singing was not restricted to a handful of enthusiasts. Every student was encouraged and, to some extent, even expected to take part in various activities, ranging from community singing and hymn practice, which was held on the weekend as a fixed item of the school timetable,<sup>41</sup> to singing in the various choral groups that operated even during the holidays.<sup>42</sup>

The organisation of concerts was undertaken on a regular basis in order to give the students the opportunity to meet experienced performers.<sup>43</sup> A distinguished visitor, for instance, was the soprano, Rose Alper, accompanied by Adelaide Newman, who gave a recital on 19 September, 1945.<sup>44</sup> Besides organising concerts the College frequently invited guest lecturers in order to foster the exchange of ideas with other institutions.<sup>45</sup> One such visit is mentioned in a notice published in *The News of the Week* on 31 October, 1952: John Ngcobo who had just returned from a trip to England “delighted the staff with a charming account of his study of music in England and his experiences there and on the continent”.<sup>46</sup> A week after he had lectured on his experiences during his overseas trip, John Ngcobo gave a song recital at the College.<sup>47</sup>

The students obviously enjoyed the musical activities offered at Adams, which were of a high standard, and quite willingly took part in them.<sup>48</sup> Right from their first day there they were introduced into this rich musical life. It was a tradition to have at the beginning of each year a social concert to welcome the *musha* (new students) to the college. Daniel Dube remarked on a Freshers' Concert held in 1943 where he was thoroughly impressed when

<sup>39</sup> Programme of the third Transvaal Bantu Eisteddfod, held in Johannesburg at the Bantu Men's Social Centre, December 11-15, 1933. (Africana Collection of the William Cullen Library at University of the Witwatersrand/Johannesburg); for more information on the Transvaal African Eisteddfod see Chapter 8.1.

<sup>40</sup> Jane Motlhabane, Bloemfontein Serenade Choir, Free State, questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>41</sup> See *News of the Week* (August 10 – August 17, 1945) and (February 1 – February 8, 1946).

<sup>42</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (November 1942): 8.

<sup>43</sup> *News of the Week* (June 7, 1956); also (May 24, 1956).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* (September 14 and 21, 1945).

<sup>45</sup> *The News of the Week* mentions one such screening on May 15, 1953, when a “bioscope” with the title “Song of Love: The Story of Schumann” with Kathrine Hepburn and Paul Heweid was presented to the students.

<sup>46</sup> *The News of the Week* (October 31, 1952).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* (November 7, 1952).

<sup>48</sup> G. N. Munyama, “School Life at Adams”. *Iso Lomuzi* (March 1940): 21.

almost throughout the night the old-comers give one a hearty welcome by the singing of the popular song "Sanibonani Basha"... The new aspirants and leaders are given a full chance to display their skills in all activities.<sup>49</sup>

The concerts were a kind of talent show where the new students were encouraged to perform to the older ones, and also an ideal place for members of the student ensembles to look for new recruits.<sup>50</sup>

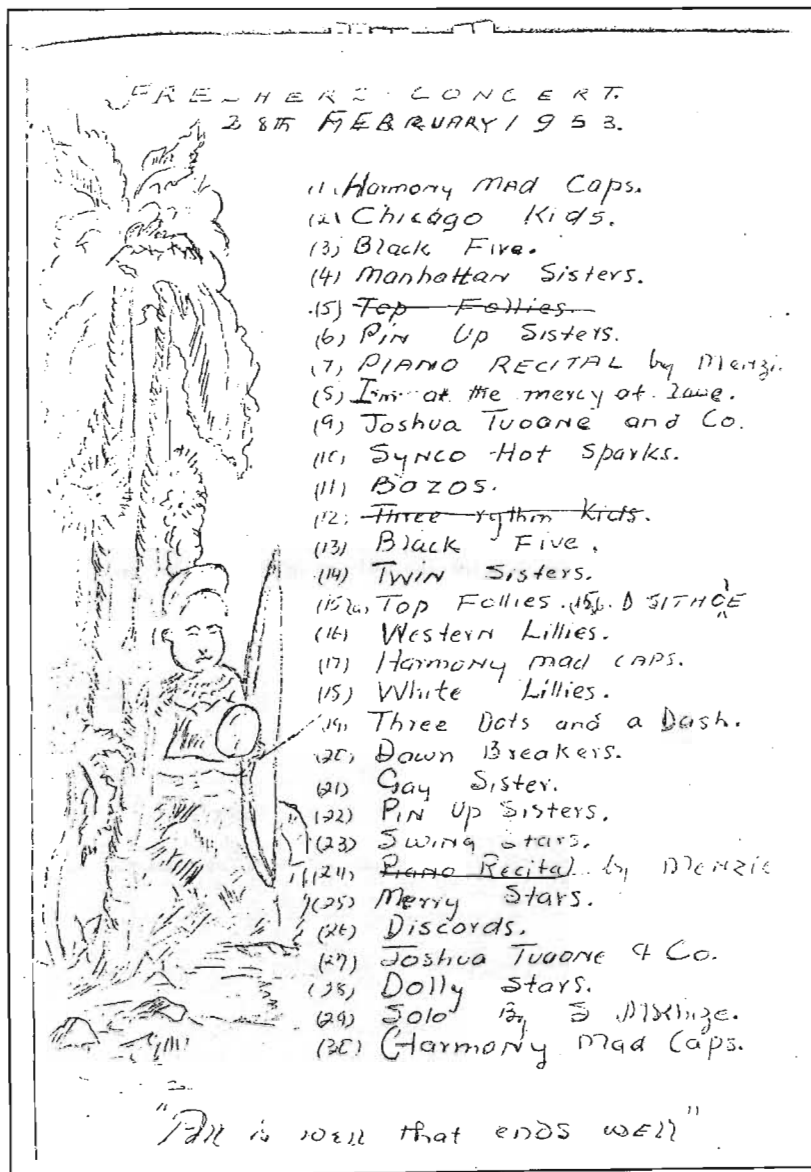


Figure 7.2: Programme of a Freshers' Concert, held February 28, 1953 at Adams College (KCL, Adams Mission Manuscript Collection)

Similar to the Freshers' Concerts were the Talent Nights, which were organised to showcase artistic skills as well as to entertain the students. These events often took the form of competition in English and Zulu story-telling, recitations, and solo and ensemble singing.<sup>51</sup> Some students emerged

<sup>49</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (May 1943): 16.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* (June 1937): 8.

<sup>51</sup> *The News of the Week* (October 21, 1955) and (March 9 – March 16, 1944); see also *Inanda Seminary Papers* (November 25, 1950).

as promising singers and were consequently promoted beyond the bounds of school events. One such talent was Khabi Mngoma, who later became not only an important music educator, but also one of the most important figures of *amakwaya*. The *News of the Week* of 9 May 1952 reports that he and one other artist performed compositions “by Mozart, Haendel, Schubert and Mohapeloa”.<sup>52</sup>

Mngoma proceeded to make a name for himself in the musical life of Johannesburg, and, as an *Ilanga* journalist claims in a review of a concert staged in Durban early in 1956, was highly regarded in both white and African communities:

The Johannesburg popular tenor, Mr. Khabi Mngoma, displayed his talent to a shamefully small but highly appreciative audience at the Wesley hall some weeks ago. Mr. Mngoma has been highly commented on in one of the local European Journals. I found him very attentive to the sensitivity of his voice and positively talented as a lyric tenor. He was supported by Lucas Mtembu, Petty Masuku and the Durban Teachers Choir (conducted by Mr. H. A. O. Zondi) who are all popular on the local entertainment stage. This recital, organised by Mr. S. Z. Chonco, the former secretary of the Durban Cultural Committee and a keen soccer fan, was in aid of a charitable organisation. Some more, Brother!<sup>53</sup>

Adams and Lovedale colleges influenced social and musical life outside the mission stations and mission schools not only in training concert performers, but also in establishing musical evenings as a significant form of entertainment for the educated middle class. Functionally musical evenings replaced the traditional beer-parties, which had an important social effect in traditional black communities. On one such evening Benjamin Tyamzashe, an important *amakwaya* composer of the Eastern Cape, and his wife entertained a few friends. The guests

gathered round the harmonium and sang such songs as “Rwá Rwá Rwá”, “Watsh’ uNomyayi”, and “Abafan’ bas’ eNgqushwa”. English songs were also sung, old Victorian favourites such as “Sweet an Low”, “How can I bear to Leave Thee”. They even played and sang “Italian Salad” (published by Curwen). They also sang church hymns for pleasure...<sup>54</sup>

### 7.2.1 Singing, Drill Exercises and Discipline

*These missionaries concentrated on the bible and also in teaching our parents the hymns from the hymnbook. And that was all. And discipline. They were very good. Otherwise we could have been hooligans and so on. We grew up in a very mild, good area.*<sup>55</sup>

We have seen that, after the missionaries had detected their converts’ fondness for and receptivity to singing, they thought of ways to put black musicality to practical use in order to pursue their purposes. This resulted in the formation of small groups of converts who were eventually able to take the lead in singing and consequently familiarise the community with the hymns and psalms, which were used as an important vehicle for promoting the teachings of Christianity. Church choirs based on European models were formed. It was soon apparent that “the Native [was] ... an instinc-

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. (May 9, 1952).

<sup>53</sup> *Ilanga* (January 7, 1956): 9, “Musical Topics Galore”.

<sup>54</sup> D. D. Hansen, “The Life and Work of Benjamin Tyamzashe a Contemporary Composer”, Occasional Paper Number Eleven (Grahamstown: Rhodes University, Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1968): 8.

<sup>55</sup> Personal communication with Leslie Nkuna, Grahamstown, July 3, 2000.

tive part-singer”, with a “natural bent” for singing,<sup>56</sup> and that singing in general and the experience of belonging to choral groups in particular could be used effectively for many purposes other than assisting the teaching of Christianity through song and “making morning and evening ‘Prayers’...inspiring”.<sup>57</sup> The most important objective of this missionary choralism was to “Civilise the Native”. In fact their two aims – “Christianising” and “Civilising” – were closely interrelated, as we can see from the procedures followed at Lovedale Institution: “If possible, we avoid doing things twice. When a man is Christianised – that is, when the great change has really taken place in him – he is generally civilised as well; or he will become more so day by day. He will appear clothed, and in his right mind, and the change will continue”.<sup>58</sup>

The achievement of self-discipline through education and adherence to that discipline were seen as the essential elements in the realisation of the ‘civilising’ and Christianising mission. These two ideas are, as already mentioned, linked in the symbol of *light*,<sup>59</sup> understood not only in the religious context (as a symbol of salvation), but also in a secular context (as a symbol of education, civilisation and modernisation). Leisure-time activities like Sunday School groups, the Pathfinders and the Wayfarers helped to nurture their identity as “the torch bearers of the African race”.<sup>60</sup> Participation in choral groups was regarded as a highly suitable and effective way of assisting pupils to assist and fulfil these ideas. They were encouraged to participate in “class singing and drill [exercises] to take pleasures [sic] in the useful and graceful things of life that can be done in large companies”.<sup>61</sup>

In fact drill and singing had a close relationship and were usually used in combination in order to introduce students to the regulated timetable of Christian study and leisure. When R. T. Caluza was invited to speak at the New Fellowship Conference held in 1937, he “illustrated his remark by songs contributed by the special choir” [probably the Adams College Quintette].<sup>62</sup> In addition to the musical presentation the participants were entertained with “the splendid demonstrations of rhythmic skipping and ball throwing given by Maritzburg girls trained by Miss Grainger, and bamboo pipe playing by the Merchiston boys taught by Mr. George Robertson”.<sup>63</sup>

When Lovedale advertised for a tonic sol-fa teacher, the job description specified experience in drill exercises as an essential qualification.<sup>64</sup> This is obviously not a coincidence as songs were usually used to accompany the drill exercises and dance routines. Clarence Gibbins mentions in her *African Song-Book*, published around 1946, that she regards especially the songs printed in the vernacular section of the book as “useful... accompaniments for exercises in the drill lessons”.<sup>65</sup> The use of vernacular songs at mission schools was only gradually developed in the early twentieth century mainly as a result of the debate about the establishment of a national culture, as I have shown earlier. The missionaries removed their former ban on traditional music and sanctioned the introduction of traditional music and dances in the schools on condition that the music and dances were used properly, that is, “to develop coordination between mind and muscle, which is the outstanding feature of a civilised and fully developed man”.<sup>66</sup> As a result of this change in policy, folk dancing

<sup>56</sup> *Native Teachers' Journal* (January, 1928): 92.

<sup>57</sup> L. M. Forrest, “Our High Schools”. *Native Teachers' Journal* (January, 1926): 57.

<sup>58</sup> James Steward quoted in R. H. W. Shepherd, 1971: 37.

<sup>59</sup> See Chapter 1.2.1 for a discussion of the significance of *light* in the construction of black identity.

<sup>60</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (November 1942): 8.

<sup>61</sup> *Native Teachers' Journal* (October, 1931): 55.

<sup>62</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (June 1937): 4.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Christian Express* (June 1, 1906): 152.

<sup>65</sup> C. W. M. Gibbins, *An African Song-Book*, 1946? (Killie Campbell Library, Durban).

<sup>66</sup> C. W. M. Gibbins, *Bantu Education in South Africa*. (Killie Campbell Manuscript Collection): 32.

was introduced in a number of schools. The following report prompts interesting conclusions as to the morality of appropriating traditional dancing for Christian purposes:

Folk dancing has found a place in the curriculum at St. Chad's. The music is supplied by a gramophone and the dancing is mainly recreative, the lecturer being present as coach and as a sort of master of ceremonies. The work is of real value. Whilst satisfying the instinct for, and the enjoyment of, rhythmic movement there is the added stimulus and discipline... Like academic subjects it exercises the brain and develops memory and quickness of thought, like games and physical training it develops the body, calling every muscle into play in free and yet controlled movement, and like all other forms of art it stimulates the mind and trains the emotions. In conclusion it is clear that the standard of attainment is higher than in former times.<sup>67</sup>

Alongside drill exercises, choral music was obviously regarded an important tool for moralising and disciplining the pupils during school as well as in leisure-time. In the May 1967 edition of its quarterly *TUATA*, the Transvaal Teachers' Association reminded their readers of the importance of singing at the schools: "A School that sings well, works well; for true singing cannot take place in a discontented or sullen atmosphere".<sup>68</sup> The interviews I had in June 2000 with Principals and teachers in and around Pietermaritzburg made it clear that the disciplining potential of choral practice is regarded to the present day as one of the main reasons for establishing choirs. According to Joshua Radebe, Conductor of the Pietermaritzburg Choral Society, any Principal "will experience good discipline at the school when there is a choir of students who are disciplined... A school that has a choir has a core of disciplined children. From there, it may spread throughout the school".<sup>69</sup>

This view was seconded by Thulasizwe Nkabinde, who said: "...schools that have choirs are the most disciplined schools. Students in a choir are disciplined and they produce the best result at the school".<sup>70</sup>

When, as part of a questionnaire, I asked the choristers to specify what they thought they needed to develop in order to be good singers, I expected answers along the line of vocal production, tone quality, regular practice, listening skills, mastering notation and sight singing, taking care of your voice, and the like. Many of these were indeed named by various interviewees, but it was surprising to find that a number of replies directly or indirectly related to the importance of discipline. Ephraim Leotwane spoke for many choristers when he said: "You definitely need to be disciplined, you need to be punctual. Punctuality is something very important coming to music. Listening – you need to... listen very well, attentively".<sup>71</sup> Leon was convinced that to be a good singer and to be disciplined was one and the same thing: "Good singer? Discipline – first thing. Then you must go to school where they train your voice: knowing how to breathe correctly, know how to project. That's the most basic things [sic]".<sup>72</sup>

According to Xolani Cele, a chorister of the Imizwilili Choral Association, singing in a choir helps you to be disciplined, "because to listen for the period of four hours to one person teaching you a song, that needs a person who is dedicated – a person who is disciplined. And in most cases, people who are singing are disciplined".<sup>73</sup> Usually, discipline was conceived of as a willingness to submit to authority: "To be committed and to commit yourself and be patient and to be obedient"

<sup>67</sup> C. Wright and E. Williams, "Folk Dancing". *Native Teachers' Journal* (April 1943): 97.

<sup>68</sup> *TUATA* (May 1967): 16.

<sup>69</sup> Joshua Radebe, Participatory Action Research Project Pietermaritzburg, 16<sup>th</sup> meeting, June 1, 2000.

<sup>70</sup> Personal communication with Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Johannesburg, November 21, 2000.

<sup>71</sup> Ephraim Leotwane, Gauteng Choristers (Johannesburg), interview questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>72</sup> Leon, Mhluzi Choral (Mpumalanga), interview questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 03, 2000.

<sup>73</sup> Xolani Xele, Imizwilili Choral Association, interview questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 03, 2000.



is what Obakeng Modisa and Ignatius Tebimo, two choristers from the St. Mary's Senior Choir, (Northern Cape) who took part in the Finals of the National Choir Festival at Cape Town in December 2000, agreed were the essential characteristics of a good chorister.<sup>74</sup>

During my fieldwork I had the opportunity to work with various school choirs in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, and was able to observe, both at rehearsals and in performances, the nature of the discipline to which the students were subjected. At almost all school choir competitions that I attended, I noted how rigidly the students moved on and off stage, how they stood tightly packed on the stage with their arms behind their backs, and how little they appeared, in their very controlled performances, to be delighted or moved by the music they were singing. Their stiffness is caused by the rehearsal practice typically used at the schools where a great deal of time is spent on drilling the students for competitions. One dire experience of this still lives in my mind from the time when I visited a choir at Sinamuva Public Primary School in Imbali near Pietermaritzburg. The teacher was busy preparing the choir for the annual school choir competition. By the time I arrived the children had already rehearsed the whole morning, and the expressions on their faces were rather apathetic, to say the least. The whole rehearsal, characterised by mere drill, appeared to serve only one purpose: the winning of the forthcoming competition. With the teacher standing in front of the choir, a plastic tube in his hand, urging the students to "tighten and pull in their tummies", and to "raise their chests", I was reminded of Henry Weman's account of his observations of African choirs in the late 1950s:

One admires the drill at practices, the performance, though seldom free from mistakes, and the vocal purity often exhibited; under the direction of the teacher, they are able even to carry out the crescendo and diminuendo in a way which would be the envy of many European school choirs. But in this kind of song, the impression that here is something which has been learned off is never entirely dissipated. This is further emphasised by the rigid bearing and fixed gaze; they are doing their duty, without inner conviction or spontaneous expression.<sup>75</sup>

Some of the more successful adult choirs continue to enforce a very strict code of conduct on the choristers in order to ensure discipline. In the case of the highly successful Durban based choir, the Durban Serenade Choral Society, the executive committee expects every member of the choir to adhere to the following:

### CODE OF CONDUCT

- I. No chorister will be allowed to have permanent membership of any choir other than DSCS [Durban Serenade Choral Society].
- II. Permanent membership of the chorister's own **church/workplace/school** choir is however, **allowed**.
- III. Any performance(s) with a choir, which is not suggested in Point 1 & 2, will have to be approved by management. *It will be the duty of the chorister involved to inform management and get approval.*
- IV. In exceptional cases where time does not allow for prior approval such a performance has to be reported immediately after its occurrence.
- V. A member of the DSCS will be expected to sign a contract with the choir validating his membership.

<sup>74</sup> Obakeng Modisa and Ignatius Tebimo, St. Mary's Senior Choir (Northern Cape), interview questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 03, 2000.

<sup>75</sup> H. Weman, 1960: 120.

- VI. Punctuality during choir activities has to be observed by all members of the choir. Such activities include but are not limited to: **rehearsals, performances, meetings & functions.**
- VII. The attendance at activities suggested in point 6 is **compulsory**. A valid reason will have to be advanced in circumstances where a chorister fails to avail himself.
- VIII. A member may not take an extended break from choir activities without a valid explanation.
- IX. Management reserves the right to bar a chorister from participating in any of the choir activities.
- X. In furtherance of point 8, every chorister will have a file (kept by Admin. dept.) where any **misconduct or misbehaviour** will be recorded.
- XI. Misconduct and misbehaviour that has a potential to bring the name of the choir into disrepute or impact negatively the activities of the choir will be a *punishable offence*. Such misbehaviour or misconduct includes but is not limited to: **talking and playing during rehearsals, speaking ill of others, threatening violence against fellow choristers, failure to obey reasonable instructions.**
- XII. Punishment for the above mentioned forms of misbehaviour or misconduct will be determined by the Disciplinary Committee.
- XIII. No chorister will be elected into the **committee or any structure warranting responsibility/accountability** if his record of behaviour and conduct is questionable.
- XIV. No chorister may hold office in the DSCS if he is not a paid up member. This does not include persons (non-chorister) who may be contracted to do certain jobs for the choir.
- XV. An office bearer of the structures suggested in point 13 would have to give a report at the end of the term of office. It is compulsory for committee members to give these reports annually during the choir AGM's whilst members in structures warranting responsibility and accountability may do so the executive committee of the choir.
- XVI. The choir can have recourse to a vote of no confidence in instances where an official is abusing or over stepping his line of authority.

### General recommendations

- Compulsory end of year functions where good behaviour will be rewarded.
- Asset register be established.
- Choir uniform be kept in one place.
- Funeral scheme.
- Birthday celebrations.
- Financial reports every three (3) months.

It is striking that the choristers themselves should agree to this code of conduct and perceive such strict regulations as necessary for successful cooperation and for providing a well-defined and safe space. Discipline is, however, only one of the features that make *amakwaya* groups so different from other forms of ensemble music making. Linked to the issue of discipline is that of respectability, as Jane Motlhabane emphasises in describing her motivation to join the Bloemfontein Serenade Choir. She says,

when I'm coming from work, I'm just coming to make food for my husband and my child and then I run to the practice and then after that I'm tired, I am going to rest. You can't find me in the taverns and so on. To keep myself out of the many things that can keep me. You know there are other women that sit at home after this and we gossip and we drink and then I am out.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>76</sup>Jane Motlhabane, Bloemfontein Serenade Choir (Free State), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

In a similar comment Steve Lukhele insists that as a chorister you have to “behave yourself, be good – do right things, leave out all the drugs and alcohol”.<sup>77</sup> Both these comments bring to mind the missionaries’ warnings of the sinfulness of shebeens,<sup>78</sup> as does the remark of Bernhard Huss of Marianhill Mission, already quoted, on the leisure-time for the morally problematic urban situation.

The whole missionary enterprise has, in the second half of the twentieth century, been called into question as it was tainted by elements of racism and imperialism. Yet choirs continue to bear heavy symbolic weight and to have integrative and disciplinary power, as we will see in Chapter 9.3.2.1 (page 255). And further consideration has to be given to how the integrity of the tradition is to be secured under conditions of global competitiveness. To this end, in the remainder of this chapter we will seek to uncover the origins of *amakwaya* tradition so far as concerns the structure of the choirs, and also their repertoire. We continue to focus on the example of Adams College.

### 7.2.2 Choirs: Tours and Repertoire

*Singing in a choir – a waste of time?*<sup>79</sup>

The musical standard at Adams seemed to have been particularly high compared with that of other schools, and the choral groups especially made an impression on Cyril Wright, who visited the school in 1937 in his capacity as Musical Organiser of the Education Department:

Choral work is becoming one of the happiest features of the musical activity. The advantage of conducting group-performances of the prescribed folk songs is recognised in all the Colleges and the aspect of the more ambitious choral ensemble is not neglected. Adams College possesses a choir which compares favourably with good European standards: Edendale has built up an extensive repertoire. The establishment of special choirs is setting standards of attainment in type of music to be performed, in tone quality, and in interpretation.<sup>80</sup>

By 1946 two main choirs were established at Adams College. Their duties were to entertain the school on Sundays and the annual Speech Day, at closing concerts and at other events where the school needed internal or external representation.<sup>81</sup> Besides these two established choirs, there were various other choral groups that contributed to the musical life of the College. According to Ambrose E. Vezi, who attended Adams in the 1940s, “all these choirs ... to a very large extent improved the musical activities of the school”.<sup>82</sup> I drew attention above to the fact that at Adams College a large measure of freedom and responsibility was granted to the students, which was also reflected in the (often student-organised) student activities. There were a number of smaller ensembles as well as student choirs. Groups rehearsing on a regular basis were the Basuto choir, the Xhosa choir, the Zulu choir, the Carpenters choir, the Male Voice choir, and the Student Christian Association (S.C.A.) Choir, and there were others formed on a more temporary basis. As Beniah Mfeka reports, each year towards the close of the school term students would organise themselves into choral groups according to the train routes they took from their homes to Amanzimtoti.<sup>83</sup> Community Singing was another regular musical activity handled entirely by students. Though the

<sup>77</sup> Steve Lukhele, Wesselton Choristers (Mpumalanga), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>78</sup> See Chapter 4.3.2.

<sup>79</sup> F. E. Mtimkulu, “Music at Adams College”. *Iso Lomuzi* (May–November 1944): 12.

<sup>80</sup> *Native Teachers’ Journal* (October 1937): 24; *Ibid.* (April 1943): 97.

<sup>81</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (May/November 1946): 8.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*; see also (September 1932): 18.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* (May 1934): 32.

student groups usually chose their own leaders, the teachers occasionally appointed students officially, mainly as assistant conductors for the main choirs in which they had distinguished themselves. Both students and teachers welcomed the various ensembles as a means of exercising skills in singing and conducting, and also of training leadership.<sup>84</sup> Forbese Mtimkulu, a student of the Training College, offers some insight into the choirs at Adams College in the early 1940s:

Our choirs namely Choir “A” and “B” are pulling on well under the conductorship of Mr. E. Cele and Mr. S. Ngubane. These choirs sing on Sundays at our Church. We have two Male Voice Choirs – one under Mr. Jerry Motlabi and the other under Mr. S. Ngubane – the Male Voice Choir under Mr. Motlabi helps us a great deal in Chapel in that it keeps time of songs that are being dragged by the congregation – while that one conducted by Mr. S. Ngubane is bringing the male students who do not sing to be able to sing. This was also proved during the closing concert. They sang the ‘Grandeur’ (by Wagner) very well, much to the pleasure of most of the students... We have also to consider our Bantu Staff Mixed Choir and their Male Voice Quintette singing during the closing concert. I will ask the students who have formed choirs or who still think of forming any choir to have the Bantu Staff Male Voice Quintette as their standard and be able attain better success.<sup>85</sup>

The experience of Simon Ngubane is an example of the importance of student ensembles in assisting the training of future conductors. He was among the first students at Adams School of Music, where he obtained the Music Teachers’ Diploma under R. T. Caluza. During his time at Adams he was a member of the original Adams Quintette under Caluza, and he took a leading role in the Adams Touring Choir as an assistant conductor. His musical training at Adams was comprehensive and included not only Theory of Music (his subsequent career) but also “seven years of the Bel Canto method of singing”.<sup>86</sup>

Gradually the functions of the choirs were widened to include:

- musical duties of the morning assemblies,
- providing music at functions internally and externally,
- representing the school at the competitions.

The duty of structuring the morning assemblies never lost its significance and throughout the existence of Adams the school choirs at the mission schools were required to sing for the daily assemblies and the church services. A new regulation was passed in the early 1950s for the formation of a combined choir for this purpose, and it was made even more strict a year later.<sup>87</sup> The reasons for these administrative measures must remain a matter of speculation, but it seems that the choral competitions were already beginning to overshadow the other duties of the choristers. The next chapter will deal with the increasing tendency of school choirs to enter for competitions, a development that contributed to the emergence of community choirs. I will show how, in the course of the twentieth century, competitions became the backbone of *amakwaya*.

Besides providing music for the morning assemblies and the church services and performing various other functions at the school, the choirs played an important role in representing the school in the outside world.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. (September 1932): 18.

<sup>85</sup> F. E. Mtimkulu, 1944: 12-3; there is a long article on the role that R. T. Caluza played in promoting vocal groups at Adams College in *Iso Lomuxi* (March 1940): 23.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> *The News of the Week* (February 27, 1953): News and Announcements, *Iso Lomuxi* (November 1950): 25; see also *Iso Lomuxi* (June 1938): 5 for more information about the origins and the objective of the S.C.A. Choir.

### 7.2.3 Representing the Alma Mater

Since the late nineteenth century it has been common practice for school choirs as well as other choral groups to reach not only for local acclaim, but also to go on tour to other centres or even overseas. Inspired and motivated by the tours of black minstrel groups, mission-trained groups embarked on such tours as that of the African Native Choir, which was organised to raise money for an industrial school in the Cape Province. A similar purpose led about fifteen years later to the establishment of the Ohlange Choir. In 1908 John Dube tried to improve the strained financial situation of his College by taking a brass band on fund-raising tours around the country. The undertaking proved so successful that from around 1912 the choir of the College was sent on missions to major towns in Natal as well as to Johannesburg.<sup>88</sup> Adams College, with Caluza as driving force, and other mission institutions followed this lead. There were manifold reasons why the mission schools sent their choirs on tour through South Africa and in some cases over the country's borders. Besides the objective of fundraising and winning possible new students, those tours helped to spread the central ideas of the mission institutions.

For the mission societies, "exhibiting choralism" served to showcase the validity of their "civilising mission",<sup>89</sup> from which the government had long withdrawn and which Social Darwinism, in the 1890s and early decades of the twentieth century, was seeking to discredit. We can recall that one of the aims of the tour of the African Native Choir to England was to communicate an identity that was marked by modernity, education, 'civilisation' and progressivism. Stage presentation and performance spoke of their eagerness to showcase their achievements. Touring choral groups were used extensively in missionary propaganda. When on July 4, 1911, missionary anniversary celebrations were held in the Durban Town Hall, *Ilanga Lase Natal* specifically commented on the "fine art of singing" that was one of their main achievements. With respect to the group of about 300 singers, an editorial declared: "If there is an assurance of civilised advancement it can be found in beautiful singing, especially in concerted singing".<sup>90</sup> Taking up white fears of the 'black peril',<sup>91</sup> the editorial suggests that, as a result of the choral presentation, "we ought to see and acknowledge that the foolish term 'black savage' does not apply in the least, and therefore only falls back on the angry user of such a saying".<sup>92</sup>

The missionaries themselves saw the presentation of choirs on stage as the ultimate demonstration of the success of their efforts, and urged "those who fidget themselves into all sorts of ridiculous [sic] opinions" to attend the concert as "it will advance them a step in the progression in their life".<sup>93</sup> By means of choral singing, the column concluded, "the native people have a chance given them to prove to the world that they are progressive, and especially to that little world of adverse thinkers in this Southern land who would like all Europeans to suppose that the Bantu are fossils".<sup>94</sup>

In this context an exhibition organised by Lovedale is of particular interest. This exhibition was held in July 1912 with the intention to show "in what directions the native has been changed and

<sup>88</sup> V. Erlmann, 1991: 121.

<sup>89</sup> G. E. Olwage, "Exhibiting Choralism, or 'Africans on Stage' – A Second Take", unpublished paper presented at the annual conference of the British Forum for Ethnomusicology, April, 2001; For some ideas in the following discussion I am indebted to Grant Olwage, who is currently researching on the mission's political use of choralism in the late-nineteenth-century Cape.

<sup>90</sup> *Ilanga* (June 12, 1911).

<sup>91</sup> G. W. Hardy, *The Black Peril* (London: Holden and Hardingham, 1914).

<sup>92</sup> *Ilanga* (June 12, 1911).

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* (June 23, 1911).

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

uplifted by Christian missions".<sup>95</sup> As part of the exhibition, nightly performances of mission-trained black choirs were presented in order to underpin the message of transformation from 'savage' to 'civilised' black. To make the message unmistakable, 'bioscope' screenings of "characteristic scenes from native life" preceded the appearance of the choirs, which were introduced on stage as "a tribute to the missionary enterprise".<sup>96</sup> The exhibition was perceived by the *Cape Times* as "an opportunity for ocular demonstration of mission work [and an] answer to those who doubt or deny the use of missions".<sup>97</sup>

Choral performances seem to have supported the missionaries' claims successfully:

the visit of these 300 native singers has been something of a revelation to the public of Cape Town, no less on account of their admirable behaviour than on the score of their vocal performances. They commended the cause of missions, and provided an argument for them, which appealed to many people much more than addresses and reports.<sup>98</sup>

The practice of exhibiting choralism continued to be important as a means of promoting the image of a progressive black middle class. When King George VI and Queen Elizabeth visited South Africa in 1947, invited as a demonstration of South Africa's solidarity with the Commonwealth, their itinerary included Lovedale. There, an assembly of about 5,000 people consisting of the staff and the students gathered on the sports field. A mass choir consisting of the students of Lovedale, Fort Cox, Fort Hare, Healdtown, and St. Matthews, trained and conducted by D. D. T. Jabavu, embellished the ceremonial occasion (see Chapter 3.3.2, page 90). R. H. W. Shepherd, Principal of Lovedale, recounts that King George was deeply impressed by the singing of the choir and that the King remarked to him that "he had not realised how much was being done for the education of the African people".<sup>99</sup>

Touring choirs were of crucial importance in the historical development of *amakwaya*, for the performances of touring mission choirs helped to spread and popularise the idea of choral singing among all black South African middle class communities. It was not unusual for members of the enthusiastic audiences at these concerts to decide to set up their own choirs. With performances that were perceived as being "of a very high order, altogether different to what are known as Native concerts elsewhere",<sup>100</sup> the visitors shaped the performance practice and repertoire of other choirs. They also helped to build middle class pride, and contributed to the establishment of a national African culture. When the Dundee Native Choir, on a fundraising tour, visited Newcastle in 1903, where they gave a concert at the Market Hall, "Mr. Cele, the choir conductor... [and] ten ladies who were putting on white garments" impressed the audience to such an extent that a reviewer commented: "[W]ho can say that Black people are trailing behind their white counterparts in the progressive task?"<sup>101</sup>

For the choristers, touring was always a highly motivating experience. In 1919 D. D. T. Jabavu took the College Choir on tour to all the major cities and towns of the Cape. For Matthews this was

<sup>95</sup> *Cape Times*, (July 8, 1912): 8, quoted in Olwage, 2001: 7.

For a similar undertaking see the pageants organised by the mission schools. See for example *Native Teachers' Journal* (April, 1952): 151.

<sup>96</sup> *Cape Times* (July 2, 1912), quoted in Olwage, 2001.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* (July 11, 1912): 6, quoted in Olwage, 2001: 8.

<sup>99</sup> R. H. W. Shepherd, 1971: 130.

<sup>100</sup> *Iso Lomuxi* (May 1933): 20.

<sup>101</sup> *Ilanga* (May 01, 1903): 2.



a very impressive experience.<sup>102</sup> At East London he saw the sea for the first time, and in Cape Town he visited the House of Parliament, where he attended a meeting of the African National Congress. Above all, the concerts in which the choirs had participated were successful: "In Cape Town, as everywhere else, our Choir was an immense success and was flatteringly compared to the Sistine Choir of Rome and the Royal Welsh Choir which had also recently toured the country".<sup>103</sup>

Another important group whose tours had an impact on the communities around South Africa was the Inanda Native Singers, conducted by A. J. Ncamu. During their tours they were received enthusiastically as "an outstanding choir", giving "world class performances" in a series of concerts presented to African as well as European audiences.<sup>104</sup> From the 1930s, prompted by the presence of Caluza at Amanzimtoti, the Adams College Choir undertook equally extensive tours, visiting some of the most important towns in Natal and other centres outside the province, including Johannesburg, Pretoria, Kimberley, Bloemfontein and Kroonstad, where the students were "exposed to a wide range of different musical events and influences".<sup>105</sup> In a special column *Ilanga Lase Natal* acknowledged the effort of the Adams College Choir, and praised it as

perhaps the best Bantu Choir in South Africa. The choir has sung for European and Bantu audiences and is noted for its varied programme ranging from indigenous Bantu songs to European classics. Besides singing in many European churches and halls, it has broadcast several times. Mr. R. T. Caluza M.A., B.Sc. (Music), is the best known Bantu composer and conductor of the day.<sup>106</sup>

The newspaper included the tour schedule of the choir for December 1939 and January 1940, which consisted of the following dates and places:

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<sup>102</sup> In his autobiography, Z. K. Matthews recalls his time at Fort Hare. His chorus master was D. D. T. Jabavu, the eldest son of John Tengo Jabavu, who was the founder of the newspaper *Imvo*, published at Kingwilliamstown. The career of D. D. T. Jabavu was exceptional in that he went abroad and obtained a BA degree in English and Latin at the University of London. Jabavu played a decisive role in pressing for the establishment of a University College for Africans that would make education available for them up to tertiary level. The idea of such a university had already been conceived in 1878 by James Stewart, who had come to South Africa in 1867 as second Principal of Lovedale Missionary Institution, but it was not until February 1916 that the South African Native College was formally opened, not far from Lovedale and on the other side of the Tyhume River. Apart from teaching Latin and Bantu languages, Jabavu was responsible for musical activities in the early years of Fort Hare. He "played the piano and violin and delighted to let his great voice rise in powerful song. His greatest gift was as a conductor of choirs" (Z. K. Matthews, 1986): 52-3. He organised and trained the College Choir and a double-quartet that consisted of Z. K. Matthews, Garrett Xiniwe, Sainty Plaatje, Rosebery Bokwe, Attwell Madala, Ishmael Mompoti, Robert Nqandela and Frank Mogale. Many of the students that enrolled at Fort Hare came from highly respected and influential mission-educated families. Rosebery Bokwe was the son of Rev. John Knox Bokwe, and St. Leger (Sainty) Plaatje was the son of Solomon Plaatje, the prominent African editor and political leader in Kimberley. After leaving the university, they became leading figures in the social and political life of twentieth century South Africa.

<sup>103</sup> Z. K. Matthews, 1986: 53.

<sup>104</sup> *Ilanga* (June 03, 1904): 2; see also (May 20, 1904), (January 06, 1905): 3 and (February 03, 1905): 2.

<sup>105</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (December 1938): 4.

<sup>106</sup> "Mr. Caluza and his Choir on Tour". *Ilanga* (November 18, 1939): 6.

Wednesday	13th	Dec. ...	Durban
Thursday	14th	„ ...	Maritzburg
Friday	15th	„ ...	Kokstad
Saturday	16th	„ .....	„
Monday	18th	„ ...	Tsolo
Tuesday	19th	„ .....	Umtata
Thursday	21st	„ ...	East London
Friday	22nd	„ .....	„
Saturday	23rd	„ .....	„
Tuesday	26th	„	Kingwilliamstown
Wednesday	27th	„	Fort Beaufort
Friday	29th	„	Port Elizabeth
Saturday	30th	„ .....	„
Monday	1st	Jan ...	„
Tuesday	2nd	„ .....	„

**Figure 7.3:** Tour schedule of Adams College Choir, Dec. 1939/ Jan. 1940  
(*Ilanga*, Nov. 18, 1939)

Apart from touring, Adams College choirs participated intensively in the music life of Durban. In 1953 Adams collaborated with the Durban Municipal Orchestra and presented a concert for Europeans in the City Hall, which “received high recommendation in the press”.<sup>107</sup> In fact, in the late 1940s and 1950s, Adams College choirs and vocal ensembles were regular guests in Durban to make musical contributions to various celebrations and functions as well as representing the College in local eisteddfodau.<sup>108</sup>

We have already seen that Adams College could pride itself on its smaller choral groups as well as some student ensembles. One of the most successful and well known of these was a vocal quintet, which, formed in 1936 under the auspices of Caluza, consisted of Simon Ngubane, Luke Fakude, Walter Sibiyi, Erasmus Mlambo and Enoch Chieza as founding members. The first outstanding performance of the Quintette, as it called itself, was given at a reception that was held at the City Hall in Pietermaritzburg in 1936. The group played an important role in the demonstrations and lecture-recitals that Caluza gave throughout the country,<sup>109</sup> and, at one stage extended to a septet, continued to exist well into the 1940s with different members.

The regular performances that these students gave at Adams College and places like the Bantu Social Centre<sup>110</sup> in Durban were received with great enthusiasm. One section of the Bantu Social Centre in Durban was the International Club whose objective was to present lectures and musical programmes: “Well-known European artists like the Mayoress (Mrs. C. R. Brown), Miss Lancashire and others”, appeared with “Bantu Talent... in a series of monthly concerts”.<sup>111</sup> A reviewer of *Ilanga Lase Natal* writing about a performance given by the Adams Septette, which was regularly called upon to perform at the International Club, considered the group to be

<sup>107</sup> *The News of the Week* (September 25, 1953).

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* (May 21, 1954) and (August 15, 1952).

<sup>109</sup> *Iso Lomuxi* (March 1940): 23.

<sup>110</sup> The Social Centre worked on the principle of moralising leisure-time in a problematic urban environment. The first of these centres, which organised health facilities and games, lectures, and concerts, was established in Johannesburg in the 1920s. Other major cities in South Africa followed later. I will come back to these important institutions in more detail later (see 8.3.1).

<sup>111</sup> *Ilanga* (May 20, 1944): 10; (July 1, 1944): 12.

a fine combination. Their sense of balance, harmony, team work and colour is splendid. It was unfortunate that one [of] their best numbers, *Go Down Moses*, came at the beginning of the programme. The Septette opened rather nervously and the first two numbers suffered therefore. Later, feeling they had the audience on their side, they sang with confidence. The Septette must not be too stiff and dull and serious even when the music is light and gay. Appearance and personality count very much on the stage. But for these trifling slips, the group triumphed.<sup>112</sup>

The Septette along with soloists like the locally highly acclaimed Margaret Bhengu featured in the “Bantu Talent Nights” that had been introduced at the Bantu Social Centre by Mr. S. T. Manzana in 1944. Though there was dispute about the conception of the Talent Nights,<sup>113</sup> the first concert in the series was a sweeping success, and an audience of “about 530 – including some 60 Europeans, some nurses and pupils from colleges – listened to some fine items”.<sup>114</sup> According to the report of Lilian L. Blackeby and Cyril Wright, both Examiners in the Education Department, the success of the Septette reflected the general high standard of singing at Adams College:

A great improvement is noticeable in choral technique. The singing has become more significant and more attention is paid to artistic finish. The best soprano tone was found at Marianhill, the best ensemble at Adams. These two Colleges will, when the 7<sup>th</sup> degree of the major scale is conquered, and the English vowels are purer, be able to give choral concerts which will challenge comparison with those given by a first-rate choral society.<sup>115</sup>

#### 7.2.4 The Structure of the Repertoire

I have already mentioned some important aspects of the development of repertoire at the mission stations and mission schools in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. My main concern at this point is to investigate the scope of repertoire at Adams College in its heyday when the Music School had for some years been under the guiding influence of Caluza. The range of the programme presented at the Music Festival, which was held on October 11, 1941 in the School of Music outdoor amphitheatre, reflects the rich musical life at Adams and features the sectionalised repertoire so typical of *amakwaya*. Besides pieces by European ‘classical’ composers the programme presents a number by African composers, including the students themselves, and African traditional songs, some collected by the students during their fieldtrips.<sup>116</sup>

##### 1. Choir “A”

O Saviour Friend	Handel
Soldiers’ Chorus (from the opera Faust)	Gounod
Conductor: W. M. J. Mseleku	

##### 2. Solos by Margaret Bhengu

##### 3. Choir “E”

Chirichiribim	Pestalozza
Conducted by Mrs. Dube	

<sup>112</sup> “Busy Bee: The Weekly Review and Commentary” in *Ilanga* (June 3, 1944): 10.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*:11 in letter to the editor by Stanley Gasa, ‘Talent Night’.

<sup>114</sup> “Busy Bee: The Weekly Review and Commentary”, *Ilanga* (June 3, 1944): 10; and (July 15, 1944): 12. See also *Ilanga Lase Natal* (July 29, 1944): 12.

<sup>115</sup> L. L. Blackeby and C. Wright, “Practical Music 1948”. *Native Teachers’ Journal* (January 1949): 124.

<sup>116</sup> The programme is published in *Iso Lomuzi* (November 1941): 12-4.

**4. Training College Male Quintette**

Massa's in de [sic] Cold Ground  
Cast Thy Burden Upon The Lord

Foster  
Mendelssohn

**5. Xhosa Mixed Quintette**

Unikiwe

Jorha

This song is about a Xhosa lady who wishes to marry a certain Xhosa man against her parents' wishes. By much persuasive argument, including a handsome lobola, the parents' consent was eventually obtained and everything ended happily.

**6. Choir of T4 and T3 Music Students**

Umzi Wase Kapa

G. J. M. Sidiyo

A song about Cape Town, its people and industries.

Amanzimtoti

[Solomon Podile]

This describes the beach picnic which is held annually by Adams students and staff.

Conductor: Solomon Podile [a student at Adams College]

**7. Solo Songs by Miss M. Bull****8. Male Voice Duet by Peter Maleka and Arnold Msane**

The Holy Child

Easthope Martin

**9. Students' Christian Association Choir [SCA]**

Send the Light

John Knox Bokwe<sup>117</sup>

Lift up Your Heads (from The Messiah)

Handel

Conducted by S. Dube

**10. Piano Solo by Mr R. C. Ellis****11. Choir "B"**

Intokozo

A. A. Kumalo<sup>118</sup>

Praise the Lord

Conducted by Mr. Bophela

**12. Duet by Margaret Bhengu and Ida Nonaguza**

On the Wings of Music [sic]

Mendelssohn

**13. Adams College Male Voice Quintette**

Lo-Mhlaba

A. A. Kumalo

A song about the effect of the coming of the white man on the southern coastal Natal regions.

Quinisela we Mfowethu

O. L. Mbatha

An appeal to Africans to endure domination by other nations with courage and fortitude.

**14. Choir "A"**

Siyambonga uDr. Richards

R. T. Caluza

This is a Zulu song composed in honour of Dr. Richards of Honolulu, who made possible the building of Adams School of Music by a generous gift of money, doubling the amount already received from South Africa.

Phesheya eLondon

[W. M. J. Mseleku]

A humorous action song describing social life in London

Conductor: W. M. J. Mseleku

The concert closed with the singing of "Die Stem Van Suid Afrika" and "God Save the King". The programme of a concert given by R. T. Caluza and his Adams College Choir at the Bantu Social Centre on November 7, 1936 demonstrates the sectionalised repertoire even more clearly.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>117</sup> For more information about this song see Chapter 1.2.1.

<sup>118</sup> For more information about this song see Chapter 3.1.3.

<sup>119</sup> Programme at Adams Manuscript Collection, (Killie Campbell Library): KCM 70/8

**Classics:**

“Magnify, Glorify”	Root
“Hymn to the Trinity”	Tschaikowsky
“Break forth O Beauteous Heavenly Light”	Bach
“Solo Selections by Ezekiel Mogale”	
“Praise Ye the Father”	Gounod
“As Torrents in Summer”	Elgar

**Spirituals**

“Wasn’t that a Wide River”  
 “In Bright Mansions Above”  
 “Lord I Want to be a Christian”

**Zulu Songs**

“Ukwanda Kwaliwa Umthakathi”  
 “Bayete” [composed by Caluza himself]  
 “Izizwe Ezimnyama”

It is interesting to note that Caluza, like conductors of present-day *amakwaya* groups, started his concerts with the European ‘classic’ repertoire followed by African compositions and traditional songs. The inclusion of traditional repertoire reflects the ideal of a national culture, integrating traditional and modern elements. Caluza, as we have already seen, contributed considerably towards this development.

Up to the present day traditional songs, on the one hand, and hymns and other pieces by European composers, on the other hand, are firmly anchored in the sectionalised *amakwaya* repertoire. Another influence that the American missionaries at Adams College always brought to bear upon their students, has lost most of its importance. In the first half of the twentieth century, spirituals and ‘plantation songs’ were still firmly rooted in the musical programmes of all choral groups at Adams College and enormously enjoyed by the students. In the second half of the century, these items have featured less often in the programmes of *amakwaya* groups.<sup>120</sup> In a contribution published in *Iso Lomuzi*, M. V. Bhulose fervently recounts his memories of an occasion when Mrs. Luthuli’s choir had been entertaining the Motherwell Football Team from Scotland that had paid a visit to Adams College in 1934: “And the Negro Spirituals! Have you heard how happily the boys and girls sing them? If not, what a pity! When they are singing “Way over Jordan”, “We’re almost home”, and “Keep a-inching along”, you seem to find yourself in one of the United States cotton fields”.<sup>121</sup>

The interest in spirituals was, however, not restricted to the musical life of Adams College. On the second Bantu Talent Night presented at the Durban Bantu Social Centre on 14 July 1944, the McCord Zulu Hospital Choir conducted by S. T. Manzana presented a programme of spirituals which delighted the audience. A review of their performance appeared in *Ilanga Lase Natal*:

Very seldom does one hear the Negro Spiritual given its colour; and the training of the McCord’s Zulu Hospital Choir which brought forward the remarkable beauty of their simple melodies of slavery days is a high tribute to Manzana’s musicianship. Most outstanding items of the evening were “Deep River”, “Were You There”, “Steal Away To Jesus”, “Live Humble”, “Walk in Jerusalem”, and “My Soul is a

<sup>120</sup> See *Iso Lomuzi*, (May/November 1946): 8.

<sup>121</sup> M. V. Bhulose, “Sweet Music”. *Iso Lomuzi* (October 1934): 7; see also (October 1934): 13 for more details of the choirs involved and the programme rendered during that occasion.

Witness” – which were done with perfect understanding and – to quote the daily press “with great artistry”.<sup>122</sup>

In 1948, the second year of its existence, the Johannesburg Bantu Music Festival still treated “Mixed Negro Spirituals (10-40 voices)” and “Male Negro Spiritual (10-40 voices)” as a separate category and prescribed as set pieces “Standing in the Need of Prayer” and “Ezekiel Saw the Wheel”.<sup>123</sup> The reviewer in *The Star* commented: “The Negro spirituals which ended last night’s programme again demonstrated the natural affinity of town-dwelling natives for the plantation songs of their American cousins”.<sup>124</sup>

The interest in spirituals goes back to the late nineteenth century when the tours of minstrel groups like the Virginia Jubilee Singers and the Orpheus Myron McAdoo’s American Jubilee Singers brought the black middle class into contact with African-American culture (see Chapter 1.1, page 5). Besides African-American folk songs, and instrumental music and variety acts like dancing and juggling, their repertoire included spirituals, ballads, glees and songs from the ‘classical’ repertoire. On the opening night they would present spirituals such as “Steal Away to Jesus”, “Go Down Moses”, “The Gospel Train”, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” or “Good news, chariot’s coming”.<sup>125</sup> On the following nights, they provided items for “the colonial taste and featured ballads, glees and songs from the classical repertoire”.<sup>126</sup> In the first part of this thesis, where I discussed the crucial influence of touring African-American minstrel groups on the black middle class of South Africa, we saw that the talks that occasionally accompanied the music created a great deal of enthusiasm in black middle class communities for both the cultural and political achievements of black people in North America. As a result of this encounter, *amakwaya* groups not only began to introduce the music of their American models into their programmes but also initiated the process of rediscovering the value of their own traditional music, which eventually became part of the quest to create a national culture.

The fact that spirituals have featured less and less in choral concerts of the second half of the twentieth century coincided with the growing awareness among the black middle class of their own culture. Alexander Sandilands’s collection *A Hundred and Twenty Negro Spirituals*, with its first edition printed in 1951, came at a time when the interest in spirituals had started to decline in favour of other repertoire.<sup>127</sup> Sandilands’s objective was to make available, “for my friends the African teachers, pupils, ministers, and people, a small but authentic and representative collection of the Negro Spiritual”. Justifying his effort, he argues that “this now famous music which was born away in Africa’s exile, but which retains its African idiom, still strikes a chord in true African hearts”.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>122</sup> *Ilanga* (July 29, 1944): 12.

<sup>123</sup> Festival Programme, Johannesburg Bantu Music Festival, October 1948.

<sup>124</sup> *The Star* (December 20, 1947).

<sup>125</sup> Numerous examples about the fact that McAdoo and other minstrel groups introduced their South African audiences to “Negro Spirituals” can be found in *Imvo Zabantsundu* (March 30, 1895) or (December 19, 1995); see also T. Couzens, 1985: 87.

<sup>126</sup> V. Erlmann, 1991: 34.

<sup>127</sup> A. Sandilands, 1951.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*: 3.



### 7.3 Summary

After the missionaries had discovered that education through recreation was of crucial importance for the physical, mental and moral development of the students, they made the management of physical as well as the intellectual space of the students an important part in their educational endeavour. The control of leisure-time activity included setting up Sunday school groups, Scouting groups, sporting events and choral ensembles. Singing proved to be very popular with the students, thanks to their “natural bent” for singing.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, singing, especially in ensembles, turned out to be a highly effective tool for disciplining and moralising the students. The missionaries regarded the discipline of all forms of education as essential in realising their ‘civilising’ and the christianising mission.

Exhibiting choralism became a major strategy of the missionaries to demonstrate the success of their endeavours. At Adams, ensembles and choral groups, including those operating on student initiatives, were regularly requested to represent the College at functions, celebrations and (with growing frequency) competitions. In fact, competitions encapsulated many of the qualities so important to the missionaries as well as to their converts’ discipline, progress, and success, and were therefore encouraged at the mission stations. I have demonstrated that many activities, like the inter-house competitions in elocution, sports, or athletics, were geared towards competing with other groups at school or with other schools. In the case of choral music, competitions soon became an important means of motivating the students.

With growing confidence, the students were convinced that “there are few nations or races that beat the Africans in Vocal Music”, and started to aim at “raising the standard [even] higher”.<sup>130</sup> Competitions played a central role in achieving this aim, and by the end of the twentieth century had become, for children and adults alike, the distinguishing mark of *amakwaya* choral practice.

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<sup>129</sup> *Native Teachers’ Journal* (January, 1928): 92.

<sup>130</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (May-November, 1944): 13.



## From Schools to Communities: The History of *Amakwaya* Competition

*So these choir competitions in my mind without doubt are one of the single most important influences in choral music in South Africa ... if we look back in history, ... the main input came from the school choir competitions, from ATASA, which these school children spilt over into adulthood and adult choirs – and the idea of the competition with the parents involved in [meaning adults becoming involved in competitions], became a tremendous thing in the early 1970s and 1980s.<sup>1</sup>*

Today the influence of school competitions is widely recognised. George Mxadana, now Chairman of the National Choir Festival (NCF), is convinced that eisteddfodau and competitions played a decisive role in the development of *amakwaya*. He feels that if choral music had not been promoted through the competitions, “there would be isolated things somehow today. But today you go to church choirs, you go to communities – I mean I can tell you right now that in almost every region you will not find less than 50 choirs. And it’s growing”.<sup>2</sup>

Ludumo Magangane, Chairman of the NCF adjudicators’ panel and Conductor of Bonisudumo Choristers from Springs near Johannesburg, emphasises the fact that this development started with the school choir competitions: “When I say music competitions are big in the country, these were ultimately started by the schools, by teachers”.<sup>3</sup>

As we have seen in the previous chapter, public performances and competitions have long been dominant features of the African choral tradition. The staging of inter-house and inter-school competitions were an important feature at the mission schools where students tried to excel individually or as groups in various disciplines ranging from sports to debating and other arts. In the first half of the twentieth century, competitions became increasingly formalised. A report published in 1932 states that “in numerous schools competitions have undoubtedly become commonplace”.<sup>4</sup> Within a short time, promoted through Teachers’ Associations, competitions became of such overriding importance for the school choirs that the final stages of preparation for a competition brought normal school life practically to a standstill.

The governing bodies of the schools supported the idea of participation in competitions for various reasons. By introducing inter-school contests, the mission institutions hoped not only to raise the standard of music by disseminating knowledge and cross-fertilising the efforts of various

<sup>1</sup> Personal communication with Douglas Reid, Pretoria, February 14, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Personal communication with George Mxadana, Johannesburg, February 08, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Springs, July 19, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> B. Mafelebane, “Competition”. *The Junior Clerk* (December 1932): 11.

schools and districts, but also to promote choral singing in communities.<sup>5</sup> Competitions were also regarded as the ideal means of fostering the ideals of discipline, progress and success and thus realising the ideals of the missionaries and later of the black middle class. All the stages of these events – from the preparation to the actual contest – proved to be effective elements in the scheme, set up by the missionaries to supplement the processes of formal education.

As I have argued earlier, competitions and concert tours were in many cases arranged and encouraged at the mission schools in order to display the progress of pupils (see Chapter 7.2.3, page 192). The missionaries hoped that these events would attest the importance of their civilising mission. This wish to display their achievements was not restricted to the mission institutions, however. When in the early 1930s competitions became increasingly popular, Teachers' Associations and education departments regarded concerts and school choir competitions "as useful and effective propaganda in the spread of education".<sup>6</sup> A report published in the mid-1940s by S. J. Newns, Inspector of Music in the Cape Education Department, claims to have "found that the readiest way to effect an improvement in the largest number of ordinary schools was by means of Choir Competitions".<sup>7</sup>

Exhibiting choralism also played an important role in the political strategies of the black middle class, as I have shown in some detail in the case of black South African choirs touring Britain, America and Canada from 1891 to 1893. It was a central intention of these tours to enable the choristers to render proof of their progress in civilisation. The motives that were behind these tours still inform the presentation of choral groups at competitions, which provide an ideal space for exhibiting the moral and cultural progress of the black middle class and its elitist self-image.

The fondness for competitive choir singing does not, however, lack indigenous precedents. For instance, an elaborate programme of different activities, all more or less of a competitive nature, is a central feature of the traditional wedding, from the preparation stages to the festivities of the actual wedding day. Besides events like stick fighting, *ngoma* dance, young people's dancing contests and the ceremony of the fathers, the one most relevant to our concerns is the competition between two choral groups set up by the families of the bride and the groom. Each family strives to outdo the other in artistic excellence and to prove its superiority.<sup>8</sup>

Today the performance practice of *amakwaya* is manifested almost exclusively in form of competitions.<sup>9</sup> In fact they have become the major driving force that keeps this choral tradition alive. Because of this, the present chapter will explore the development of *amakwaya* contests from those at the schools to the most prestigious contemporary event, the annual NCF.

<sup>5</sup> Notes on the programme of the Natal Native Teachers' Union, *Native Teachers' Journal* (January 1933): 98.

<sup>6</sup> *Native Teachers' Journal* (July 1931): 167.

<sup>7</sup> *South African Outlook* (January 01, 1946): 8.

<sup>8</sup> See also Chapter 11.1 for a detailed discussion of the traditional African wedding ceremony.

<sup>9</sup> In an address to the Music in Schools Symposium held in May 2000, Kader Asmal emphasised the fundamental differences in approach between schools, with "former white schools practising more formal, exam-driven teaching of music in the curriculum, and black schools excelling in choral music and extra-curricular choir competitions." A copy of this address is available online: [http://education.pwv.gov.za/Media/Speeches\\_2000/May\\_2000/Music.htm](http://education.pwv.gov.za/Media/Speeches_2000/May_2000/Music.htm).

## 8.1 Mark Radebe and the Transvaal Eisteddfod

*Again this is from my music teacher [Khabi Mngoma] who said when I interviewed him, the person who started choir competitions or choir festivals is his own teacher, Mark Radebe in Johannesburg here. First, it started on a small scale, where there would be even instrumental competition on piano and then soloists and choirs. And it then started getting popularity and drawing choirs from around Transvaal. Pretoria, even choirs from Pietersburg area came through.<sup>10</sup>*

Formally organised choral contests in South Africa started in the early 1930s with the Transvaal Eisteddfod. The initiative to start a festival modelled on the Welsh Eisteddfod came from Mark Radebe, one of the chief theorist of African national culture, together with the two well-known composers, Benjamin Tyamzashe and Hamilton Masiza. The idea was discussed at a conference of black music enthusiasts, which was convened in Kimberley in 1929. In a circular letter, announcing the 1929 meeting, the close relation of art and politics becomes obvious.

An unbiased perspective of Bantu affairs, be they political, industrial or religious, reveals a prevalent restlessness that has its origin in the unsound economic position of the Native of this country. Governments may legislate, political and industrial leaders eclipse Mark Antony's rhetorical feats, and religious institutions plead and intervene, but in the last analysis the SOLUTION of this economic problem will be found to rest with the Native himself. With a view to discussing ways and means whereby we may through Art contribute our share to this SOLUTION, we, the undersigned invite a Conference of Musicians and all devotees to the Muses, to meet at Kimberley on Friday, 29th June, 1929.<sup>11</sup>

By agreeing on the important role of the arts, this meeting prepared the ground for the inauguration of a music association. The South African Bantu Board of Music (SABBM) was founded by Mark Radebe and Hamilton Masiza on the principle that "the future history of the African depends largely on his achievements in art, literature, music and invention"<sup>12</sup> and followed these guidelines:

1. Awaken interest in musical talent
2. Promote interest in African Music
3. Discover how to use music for the glory of God and the melioration of social and cultural conditions
4. Establish a Bantu Academy of music
5. Research and collect Bantu folk music
6. Encourage and publish Bantu composers
7. Hold concerts for funds, publicity, study and appreciation.<sup>13</sup>

At the core of the SABBM programme was the organisation of a festival to achieve these aims. In 1931 the first African music festival, which was called the Transvaal Bantu Eisteddfod, was held

<sup>10</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Springs, July 19, 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Circular letter from H. M. J. Masiza, M. S. Radebe and B. J. P. Tyamzashe, 27 March, 1929 (Skota Papers, Africana Collection of the William Cullen Library at University of the Witwatersrand/Johannesburg).

<sup>12</sup> "Africans Hold Musical Festival at B.M.S.C". *Bantu World*, November 1933, quoted in T. Couzens 1985: 71.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in D. Coplan 1985: 116.

at the Bantu Men's Social Centre (BMSC) in Eloff Street, Johannesburg.<sup>14</sup> The main object of the Transvaal African Eisteddfod was "to preserve and develop the individuality of Native music and, concurrently, to encourage the finer refinements of European music".<sup>15</sup>

**Transvaal Bantu  
Eisteddfod.**

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**The First Bantu Musical Festival  
in South Africa.**

---

**COMPETITIVE**

**Floating Trophies (Shields and Cups) and other prizes  
will be awarded.**

---

**TO BE HELD IN  
JOHANNESBURG**

**— AT THE —  
BANTU MEN'S SOCIAL CENTRE.**

---

**WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY, FRIDAY & SATURDAY.**

2nd.                      3rd.                      4th.                      5th.

**DECEMBER, 1931.**

**PRICE 3d**

*Figure 8.1: Announcement of the first  
Transvaal Bantu Eisteddfod  
(William Cullen Library/Wits University)*

<sup>14</sup> A similar Eisteddfod was organised by the South African Bantu Board of Music in July 1931 in Port Elizabeth.

<sup>15</sup> Programme for the first Transvaal Bantu Eisteddfod, held in Johannesburg at the Bantu Men's Social Centre, December 2-5, 1931. (Africana Collection of the William Cullen Library at University of the Witwatersrand/Johannesburg).

Furthermore, in accordance with the constitution of the SABBM, the organisers intended

- To offer inducements for the diligent study and practice of Music, European and Bantu, and kindred subjects;
- To bring to public notice promising musicians;
- To interest the Bantu race in good music and local talent;
- To bind together those who love music, for the common purpose of advancement not only in the European, but also Bantu Musical and kindred arts.<sup>16</sup>

These formulations have to be seen, to say again, against the background of the mission school objectives of enriching and organising leisure, and the new desire for a national culture (see Chapters 7, page 177 and 4.2, page 107 respectively).

By 1934 the Transvaal African Eisteddfod<sup>17</sup> had achieved nation-wide recognition, and as Coplan points out, had become an important platform for “middle class African interaction, which sharpened the definition and consciousness of their class identity”.<sup>18</sup> The programme featured a variety of disciplines: the musical section included “native trained choirs”, male, female and mixed quartets, solo and band instrumentalists, brass bands and even performers on traditional instruments, as well as a literary section with vernacular and English recitations. From 1932 dance events became increasingly popular and featured folk dancing and Western dances like the waltz, the slow foxtrot, and the quickstep.<sup>19</sup> The prescribed repertoire of the first Transvaal Eisteddfod required choirs to perform a “Bantu piece by a Bantu Composer in either Zulu, Xhosa or Sesutho [sic] language”. As a second item, various Western pieces<sup>20</sup> were prescribed for the different categories. Adult choirs, for instance, had to present the “Hallelujah Chorus” from Handel’s *Messiah*, whereas senior school choirs were expected to present Arthur Sullivan’s “The Long Day Closes”, and junior school choirs sang Parry’s setting of “I was Tossed by the Winds”. The practice of prescribing an African composition alongside a Western composition still prevails today. An alteration made in present day competitions like the NCF is the introduction of an ‘own choice’ piece, which can be taken out of any category of the sectionalised repertoire. By its second year the Transvaal Eisteddfod had achieved enormous popularity, as is evident in the extension of the choral section. While the first Eisteddfod in 1931 featured only mixed choirs, church choirs, male choirs and school choirs, the 1932 festival provided for nine different categories.

Mark Radebe’s establishment of the Transvaal Eisteddfod was closely linked to the process of conceptualising an African national culture. The festival aimed, as the organiser put it “to preserve and develop the individuality of Native music and, concurrently, to encourage the finer refinements of European music”. In the process of negotiation between the traditional and the modern, the African elite hoped, through achievements in the artistic and intellectual fields displayed in the eisteddfodau, to promote traditional culture and also to gain social and political recognition from the dominant white communities.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> From the second year, the name of the festival was changed to Transvaal African Eisteddfod.

<sup>18</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 116; see also V. Erlmann, 1983: 142.

<sup>19</sup> Programmes to the first and second Transvaal Bantu Eisteddfodau, held in Johannesburg at the Bantu Men’s Social Centre (Africana Collection of the William Cullen Library at University of the Witwatersrand/Johannesburg); see also *Umteteli wa Bantu* (September 10, 1932).

<sup>20</sup> The term “Western Music”, to the present day, is commonly used by the choirs to designate Western art music. “Traditional Songs” are modernised versions of songs taken from African folk repertoire, and “African Repertoire” stands for formally composed pieces by African composers.



The black elite saw the eisteddfodau as implementing the concept of an African national culture in two ways: on the one hand, as assisting with the preservation of “traditional tunes ere the rapid spread of civilisation (the diffusion of mechanical exotic music) wipes them out”,<sup>21</sup> and, on the other hand, as contributing to the fight against the “musical intoxication” of the *marabi* culture.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Mark Radebe, who was regarded the “father of the Bantu Eisteddfod”,<sup>23</sup> repeatedly commented on the importance of the Transvaal Bantu Eisteddfod, “which to a great extent, will help to abolish the ‘Marabi’ menace”.<sup>24</sup> With these aims in mind, Radebe and his associates hoped that the eisteddfodau would eventually supersede working class *ingoma ebusuku* (*isicathamiya*) and coon song competitions.<sup>25</sup> However, in the intended promotion of classical music in preference to jazz and *marabi*, the black elite had not realised that modern popular music was not only deeply rooted in working-class life in the cities, but was popular amongst members of the middle class themselves. Despite all the effort put into the development of meaningful recreation at mission schools, from the mid-1920s middle class Africans were tiring of ‘*makwaya*’ and concerts based on Western performance practice, where the audience was meant to sit down and listen without being able to participate. African-American urban music like Ragtime and Jazz gave way to Euro-American popular music that swept South Africa and created a craze among westernised Africans for recreational dancing.<sup>26</sup> In referring to this development, Z. K. Matthews complained: “...dancing has crowded out the kind of group singing we used to do”.<sup>27</sup> Choral singing had then to compete with activities like formal ballroom dancing, which became an important arena for social competition. Here the participant competed for social status and recognition through the symbols of westernisation, such as dress, dance skills and ‘civilised’ manners.<sup>28</sup> The format of middle class entertainment that was adopted because of this development was a combination of concert and dance: concerts, choir competitions, meetings, and functions were followed by a second part where the audience could socialise while dancing. In the following years, ballroom dancing temporarily displaced choral singing in the arena of social competition. In fact, in the late 1920s, westernised Africans became so keen on dancing like middle class whites that R. R. R. Dhlomo commented with concern: “At present all that is considered of special interest by our enlightened people is dancing week in and week out”.<sup>29</sup> Dancing became, in the years that followed, so important for the black middle class that, in a letter to the editor of *Ilanga Lase Natal*, Stanley Gasa argued for the rescheduling of the talent nights which were organised at the BMSC on Saturday evenings. Gasa suggested arranging them for Sundays: “We shall be free to go to them... and have Saturday evenings for our own earth creeping but

<sup>21</sup> *Iso Lomuzi*, (September 1932): 11.

<sup>22</sup> *Umteteli wa Bantu* (November 11, 1933); furthermore “Jazzmania”, in *Umteteli wa Bantu* (February 11, 1933); and “The Native Teachers’ Column”, *Ilanga Lase Natal*, April 10, 1925; see Chapter 4.2 for a detailed discussion about Radebe’s concept of an African national culture.

<sup>23</sup> *Ilanga* (May 19, 1951): 15.

<sup>24</sup> “Musicus”, “African Music for the Africans” *Umteteli wa Bantu* (November 11, 1933).

<sup>25</sup> The influence and the continued popularity of minstrels and vaudeville in the early decades of the twentieth century troubled members of the middle class. This led to an extensive argument against this “Jazzing craze”. (*Ilanga*, August 5, 1927).

<sup>26</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 129.

<sup>27</sup> Z. K. Matthews, 1986: 66.

<sup>28</sup> E. Pewa claims that even in sport, competition for status made Africans seek the ‘civilized’ forms, such as soccer, cricket, tennis and boxing. In Kimberley, for instance, at the close of the nineteenth century, cricket became a popular sport amongst those blacks who aspired to higher social status. (E. Pewa, 1995): 28-30.

<sup>29</sup> *Ilanga* (August 5, 1927).

never-the-less satisfying amusements – dances”.<sup>30</sup> We will see that, stimulated through leisure-time schemes and finally in the late 1970s, through the introduction of prize money, the interest in choral singing regained momentum. Towards the end of the twentieth century, participation in choral contests became one of the most important activities of the black middle class.

The term “Eisteddfod” itself, one of the few Welsh words to have entered the English language, was important in the South African context. The term literally means a sitting (*eistedd*, to sit) and came to be used all over the world to refer to a competitive cultural festival or celebration of the performing arts.<sup>31</sup> The well-known International Eisteddfod, held annually in Llangollen in early August, was founded in 1947 with the aim of bringing people of all nations together in music.<sup>32</sup> What is interesting from our point of view is that the black elite were well aware of the social significance of these festivals, and felt “indebted to the Welsh who were also an under-privileged community for this direct statement of our [own] cultural and artistic aims”.<sup>33</sup> In particular, the fact that, for the Welsh, the eisteddfod was a symbol of national identity in which unity and brotherhood were promoted and shared through literature, music, and dancing, proved to be a common point of reference. In organising their own eisteddfod, the black elite followed similar aims. Thus the eisteddfod was not regarded as mere public entertainment but rather as an institution for promoting national identity, establishing and advancing educational and cultural standards, stimulating growth and progress, and cultivating taste. The continued importance of this aim may be seen in the fact that in 1978, sponsored by South African Airways, the NCF sanctioned an award of two air tickets for the Best conductor, enabling the winner to attend the Llangollen international music festival in north Wales.<sup>34</sup> This award was discontinued, however, some years later when the Conductors started to develop mannerisms and concentrated almost exclusively on impressing the adjudicators rather than on effective conducting.<sup>35</sup>

The idea of eisteddfodau was not new to South Africa when the black middle class communities began to use this concept for their purposes. In a 1964 monograph on the musical development of the National Eisteddfod of South Africa, Hermine R. van Hoogstraten traces the beginnings of the Johannesburg Eisteddfod, which later became known as National Eisteddfod of South Africa, back to 1896, when, “exclusively Welsh in character”, it was organised by a group of Welsh miners.<sup>36</sup> In 1899 *The Star* announced that, encouraged by the success of the previous year’s festival, “the Witwatersrand Cambrian Society [which was the organising body] has definitely decided to make the Eisteddfod an annual event in Johannesburg”.<sup>37</sup> The success of the festival was such that in 1910 the Mayor of Johannesburg acknowledged the work done by the Eisteddfod organisers, which he

<sup>30</sup> Letter to the editor by Stanley Gasa, “Talent Night”. *Ilanga* (June 03, 1944): 11; see also Chapter 7.2, on the objectives of the Talent Nights at the Bantu Men’s Social Centre.

<sup>31</sup> See J. Heinecke, *Einführung in die Walisische Sprache*, Berlin: Lannion, 1999 and Hywel Teifi Edwards, ed. *The Eisteddfod*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990. More information of the history and the current institution of Eisteddfodau can be accessed online: <http://www.eisteddfod.org.uk/>. An excellent introduction to the Eisteddfod has appeared on the BBC website, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/catchphrase/eisteddfod/>.

<sup>32</sup> The idea of a competitive gathering of musicians and poets has had a long tradition in Wales. The first recorded Eisteddfod took place in Cardigan in 1176, though the word itself was not recorded until 1523, when the event became regulated as a competitive test of professional aptitude for bards.

<sup>33</sup> Opening address of Chief T. R. Pilane at the opening of the Fourth National Eisteddfod, July 1965 quoted in *TUATA* (September 1965): 24; see also *Bantu World* (December 15, 1932) and D. Coplan, 1985: 120-2.

<sup>34</sup> *National Choir Festival Newsletter* (No.1, 1998).

<sup>35</sup> Personal communication with Douglas Reid, Pretoria, February 14, 2001.

<sup>36</sup> “The Eisteddfod in South Africa”. Eisteddfod Programme, 1931: 20.

<sup>37</sup> *The Star* (March 31, 1899); quoted in H. R. van Hoogstraten, *Development of the National Eisteddfod of South Africa*, Johannesburg 1964: 10.

felt had been especially valuable in a young country like the Transvaal.<sup>38</sup> The festival developed from a one-day event in 1896 to a vast institution with a fortnight of morning, afternoon and evening sessions presenting a variety of sections. By 1951 the Eisteddfod had assumed the proportions of a major cultural competition in Southern Africa, featuring sections in vocal and instrumental music, literature, dance, and elocution. The number of entries had grown from 150 in 1899 to almost 2,000 in 1916.<sup>39</sup> This trend continued: the total number of entries received in 1939 was more than 5,000, including thirty-two choirs. Ten years later the year of the Golden Jubilee of the National Eisteddfod of South Africa saw the participation of almost 10,000 competitors. In 1942 a separate school choir section was introduced, a surprisingly late move considering how long the festival had been running and the fact that the declared aim of the festival was to educate rather than entertain.<sup>40</sup> Though there is no indication that black choirs were represented at the National Eisteddfod of South Africa, there is no doubt about the fact that the black elite knew of this event. In particular the choral contests, which “undoubtedly attracted the greatest keenness and occasioned the strongest rivalry” at the National Eisteddfod, proved to be very attractive for the black middle class.<sup>41</sup> It is therefore not surprising that the National Eisteddfod of South Africa acted as a role model for the Transvaal Eisteddfod. Evidence shows that the organising body of the Transvaal Eisteddfod not only used the Eisteddfod Syllabus of the National Eisteddfod, but was also assisted with an annual donation granted from its organising body, the Witwatersrand Cambrian Society.<sup>42</sup>

Following the lead of the National Eisteddfod and the Transvaal Eisteddfod, various organisers launched competitions in all parts of the country.<sup>43</sup> In 1935, the *Bantu World* reports on the inaugurations of numerous eisteddfodau and music competitions.<sup>44</sup> Though most eisteddfodau and competitions were organised along the lines of the National Eisteddfod, some significant modifications were made so as to incorporate the concept of an African national culture developed by Radebe and others. This led, for instance, to the convention of including specific categories like African musical instrument, action songs, African folk dancing, and a literary section with vernacular recitation in the Eisteddfod programme.<sup>45</sup> Teachers’ Associations in particular recognised the benefits of these events and started to organise their own eisteddfodau, which deviated from the original concept, however, by their increasing emphasis on the choral aspect. This development also affected the Transvaal African Eisteddfod, which by 1939 became known as the Transvaal African Teachers’ Eisteddfod (TATE) because it was organised by the Transvaal African Teachers’ Association. Under the new organising body, the piano section was dropped and the competition shifted towards attracting school choirs and teachers’ choirs.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>38</sup> *The Star* (May 24, 1910): 8, in van Hoogstraten, 1964: 4.

<sup>39</sup> *The Outspan* (January 21, 1949), in van Hoogstraten, 1964: 34.

<sup>40</sup> Van Hoogstraten, 1964: 42.

<sup>41</sup> *The Star* (May 25, 1917): 4, in van Hoogstraten, 1964: 43.

<sup>42</sup> Van Hoogstraten, 1964: 53.

<sup>43</sup> See D. Rycroft 1959: 25-30.

<sup>44</sup> In Valdezia (where D. C. Marivate, an influential *amakwaya* composer was teaching at the local school and training various choirs), the “first Bantu Eisteddfod” was inaugurated by the Zoutpansberg Joint Council. Another report from the Pietersburg district tells of a music competition instigated by the local African Teachers’ Association. *Bantu World* (July 13, 1935), (October 26, 1935).

<sup>45</sup> See programme of the third Transvaal Bantu Eisteddfod, held in Johannesburg at the Bantu Men’s Social Centre, December 11-15, 1933. (Africana Collection of the William Cullen Library at University of the Witwatersrand/Johannesburg); also: *Bantu World* (July 13, 1935).

<sup>46</sup> K. Mngoma, 1981: 17.

## 8.2 School Choir Contests and the Role of Teachers' Associations

*In fact I must say the school music competitions were something of a marvel in the country. I mean they used to be absolutely, absolutely excellent. There is nothing to compare with a school choir competition.<sup>47</sup>*

The success of the Transvaal Eisteddfod resulted in the formation of numerous provincial organisations, and it was in particular the Teachers' Associations that were instrumental in co-ordinating local efforts. When in 1965 the Transvaal United Teachers' Association (TUATA) looked back on twenty-one years of singing, it was felt that the year of the first competition would "for ever remain memorable in the annals of our Association for it was then that an epoch-making event – the Provincial Eisteddfod – was successfully launched". There was general agreement that "the Eisteddfod... which has become our stage is to us a rich legacy".<sup>48</sup> In fact, to use the words of E. A. Tlakula, at that time Chairman of the TUATA music committee, competitions and eisteddfodau grew "into such an obsession that it is unthinkable to think of the work of schools without linking it with singing".<sup>49</sup> The importance ascribed to the competitions becomes clear in a contribution to the commemorative publication of *TUATA*, the organ of the Transvaal United Teachers' Association, when it celebrated its twenty-first anniversary of music competitions. In I. E. Zwane's view, "music eisteddfodau are a necessity as they are a factor that contributes, in no small measures, to the heights that our schools should *all* reach as a matter of course. At the moment it is clear that those who have failed to realise this fact are helping to lower the standards in our schools".<sup>50</sup> Here Zwane is thinking of an improvement not only in the musical standard of schools: choral contests, in his opinion, contribute on various levels towards transforming a school. His comments on the impact of school choir competitions are idealistic and effusive: "The return of a victorious choir excites the community, raises the morale of all the pupils, and raises the spirit of greater activity in the school. From that moment onwards the school's status is enhanced". According to Zwane, the confidence of the winning choir permeates the whole school, "infecting all who are in that campus". As a result, the students "simply fly to school with a smile... are very receptive and respond magnificently" and "the work intramurally is approached with a newly-found enthusiasm by teachers who know what it feels like to be successful". He goes on even to maintain that "neatness becomes the second nature of both the persons of the pupils and the school premises". This would naturally lead to a situation where "the school soon surprises itself with good results". Zwane concludes by claiming that a successful school would enter a phase of enormous expansion:

There are schools that have grown from a one-teacher-school to a staff of more than twenty teachers because of the organisational role of the Music Competitions. It is also true that neighbouring schools, not interested in this time-wasting activity have had their numbers depleted to the extent that only the captain of the ship (the Principal) had to remain alone with his sinking ship. Teachers, like all normal

<sup>47</sup> Personal communication with George Mxadana, Johannesburg, February 08, 2001.

<sup>48</sup> E. A. Tlakula, "Twenty-One Years of Singing". *TUATA*, official organ of the Transvaal United African Teachers' Association (December 1965): 18.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> I. E. Zwane, "The Music Eisteddfod: its Significant Role in the Organisation of the School". *TUATA*, (December 1965): 16.

people, prefer to associate themselves with what succeeds, and abhor failure, and strive to dissociate themselves most vocally from it.<sup>51</sup>

The steadily increasing emphasis on competitive choral events, however, also provoked criticism. Teachers' Associations became so preoccupied with the organisation of competitions that they were accused by their critics of doing little else.<sup>52</sup> This claim seems somewhat exaggerated as the Associations did indeed follow other objectives.<sup>53</sup> It is a fact, however, that the organisation of choral contests was without doubt their most significant and publicly most appealing activity. Today most stakeholders in the choral community agree that "the most enduring and biggest choral competitions have been those run by the Teachers' Associations".<sup>54</sup> Indubitably their dedication contributed enormously to the present situation where *amakwaya* has grown into one of the most important musical traditions in South Africa's black communities. In the early 1940s, teachers' organisations all over the county started organising school choir competitions in their provinces, and, according to Percival Kirby, by the late 1940s choral contests had become "an important feature of musical educational life":

In the Cape such competitions are official and are held annually at from sixty to seventy centres, choirs often travelling great distances to compete. The Inspector of Music acts as adjudicator. Suitable songs are prescribed but, in addition, each choir sings a song of its own choice. The tendency is for them to select English songs. Trophies are given for the best choirs. In Natal choir competitions are a feature of many African entertainments, and there is in Durban a flourishing organisation, the Natal Coloured Cultural Society... For these contests the departmental inspectors generally invite trained European musicians to act as adjudicators.<sup>55</sup>

Although it is not my intention at this point to portray the complex historical development of the various Teachers' Associations of South Africa, which was marked by many schisms and at least as many amalgamations, a brief overview of those Associations influential in the development of *amakwaya* competitions seems necessary.<sup>56</sup>

The complex history of the various black Teachers' Associations, marked by grievances about the conditions at schools, is interestingly linked to the development of *amakwaya* competitions. The formation of Teachers' Associations early in the twentieth century had a number of motives, in particular the desire for greater economic benefits. Among the oldest Teachers' Associations, and the most active in organising competitions, are the Transvaal United African Teachers Union (TUATA)<sup>57</sup> and the Natal Teachers' Union (NATU) initiated twelve years later.<sup>58</sup> The Cape

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> *TUATA* (December 1965): 3.

<sup>53</sup> See for instance M. R. Mamabolo, "T.U.A.T.A: What it stands for". *TUATA*, (December 1966): 5-7.

<sup>54</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Springs, July 19, 2000.

<sup>55</sup> P. Kirby, "Indigenous Music", in Hellmann, 1949: 624; see also H. Weman, 1960: 121.

<sup>56</sup> A report on the situation of Teachers' Associations in South Africa published by the South African Institute of Race Relations in 1992. (M. Bot, "The Politics of Teacher Unity", *South African Institute of Race Relations*, No. 1/92, April 1992). Further relevant material can be accessed at the Africana Collection of the William Cullen Library at University of the Witwatersrand/Johannesburg and at the University of South Africa. The UNISA Documentation Centre for African Studies, which was established in 1974 with the aim of collecting historical and contemporary documents concerning the Black, Coloured and Indian communities in Southern Africa, holds especially interesting documents and archives of various African Teachers' Associations in South Africa. For relevant online resources on the internet: <http://www.naptosa.org.za>; <http://www.sadtu.org.za>.

<sup>57</sup> TUATA evidently originated from two Teachers' Associations founded in 1906: the Northern and the Southern Transvaal Native Teachers' Association. In 1919, those two bodies were amalgamated as Transvaal Native Teachers' Association (TNTA) later renamed into Transvaal African Teachers' Association (TATA). In 1950 TATA split but re-

Teachers' Union (CATU) and the Orange Free State Teachers' Association (OFSATA) followed their lead in organising choral contests outside the stipulations of education departments. Ludumo Magangane recalls TUATA:

That's the one that started with school choir competitions. It was originally Transvaal African Teachers' Association and then for some reason, the teachers quarrelled among themselves. Then there was a breakaway group. Now there were two groups: the Transvaal African Teachers Association and then Transvaal African Teachers Union. The Union mainly organised competitions in the rural areas – the Association was mainly in the urban areas. Later on then they made peace and they became TUATA, the Transvaal United African Teachers' Association.<sup>59</sup>

The Transvaal and Natal not only spearheaded choral contests, but in most cases schools from these two provinces took winning positions and the positions of runners-up. From the early years of choral contests, these schools always set standards at the various competitions. This becomes especially obvious in the results of the fourth National Eisteddfod, held at Batswana College, Mafeking on July 3, 1965:<sup>60</sup>

	Section	Song	Position	Choir	Province	Marks
<b>ADULTS [Teachers' Choirs]</b>	Duets	"On Wings of Song"	1	Meadowlands	Tvl.	222
			2	Ladybrand	O.F.S.	219
			3	Edendale	Natal	210
	Trios	"These are the Lovely Things"	1	Meadowlands	Tvl.	177
			2	Durban	Natal	170
			3	Bethlehem	O.F.S.	162
	Vernacular	"Rorisang Morena"	1	Durban	Natal	270
			2	Meadowlands	Tvl.	246
			3	Thaba Nchu	O.F.S.	244
			4	Mafeking	N. Cape	233
	English	"When His Loud Voice in Thunder Spoke"	1	Durban	Natal	231
			2	Jabavu	Tvl.	213
			3	Mafeking	N. Cape	204
			4	Bloemfontein	O.F.S.	196
	Double Quartettes	"For He shall Give His Angels Charge over Thee"	1	Benoni-Brakpan	Tvl.	135
			2	Edendale	Natal	132
3			Taung	N. Cape	114	
4			Thaba Nchu	O.F.S.	83	
<b>PRIMARY</b>	English	"A Franklyn's dogge Laped" "A Style"	1	Dube	Tvl.	222
			2	Ashdown	Natal	210
			3	Mlakalaka	S. Cape	188
			4	Bernard	N. Cape	183
	Afrikaans	"Loof die Heer"	1	Marquard	O.F.S.	206
			2	Woody Glen	Natal	197
			3	Dube	Tvl.	182
			4	Mlakalaka	S. Cape	175
			5	De Aar	N. Cape	173

united eight years later as TUATA. For further information see E. M. Phago, "A Short Review of the History of the Teachers' Association in the Transvaal". *TUATA* (December 1966): 7-13.

<sup>58</sup> The origin of NATU goes back to December 1907, when a group of teachers held their first conference at Edendale. They called their organisation the Northern Natal Native Teachers' Association. In 1912, it was decided to amalgamate with the Coast Teachers' Association. As a result of this merger, the Natal Bantu Teachers' Union (BNTU) was formed six years later, which was eventually renamed NATU. (Natal African Teachers' Union, *Programme to the Golden Jubilee in 1968*: 6, 32; Killie Campbell Library: manuscript collection); see also "The Native Bantu Teachers' Union: Silver Jubilee". *Native Teachers' Journal* (January 1944): 32-3.

<sup>59</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Springs, July 19, 2000.

<sup>60</sup> *TUATA* (September 1965): 25.



	Vernacular	“Isipho saBantu”	1	Dube	Tvl.	237
			2	De Aar	N. Cape	232
			3	Marquard	O.F.S.	231
			4	Ekusizaneni	Natal	227
			5	Mlakalaka	S. Cape	219
<b>POST-PRIMARY</b>	Vernacular	“Izwe Liyaduduma”	1	Ingwemabala	Natal	179
			2	Hebron	Tvl.	179
			3	Bensonvale	S. Cape	168
			4	Impumelelo	O.F.S.	165
			5	Barolong High	N. Cape	163
	English	Hymn to Music	1	Isibonelo	Natal	180
			2	Barolong High	N. Cape	142
			3	Bantu High	O.F.S.	130
			4	Kwa-Phakama	Tvl.	126
			5	Bensonvale	S. Cape	121

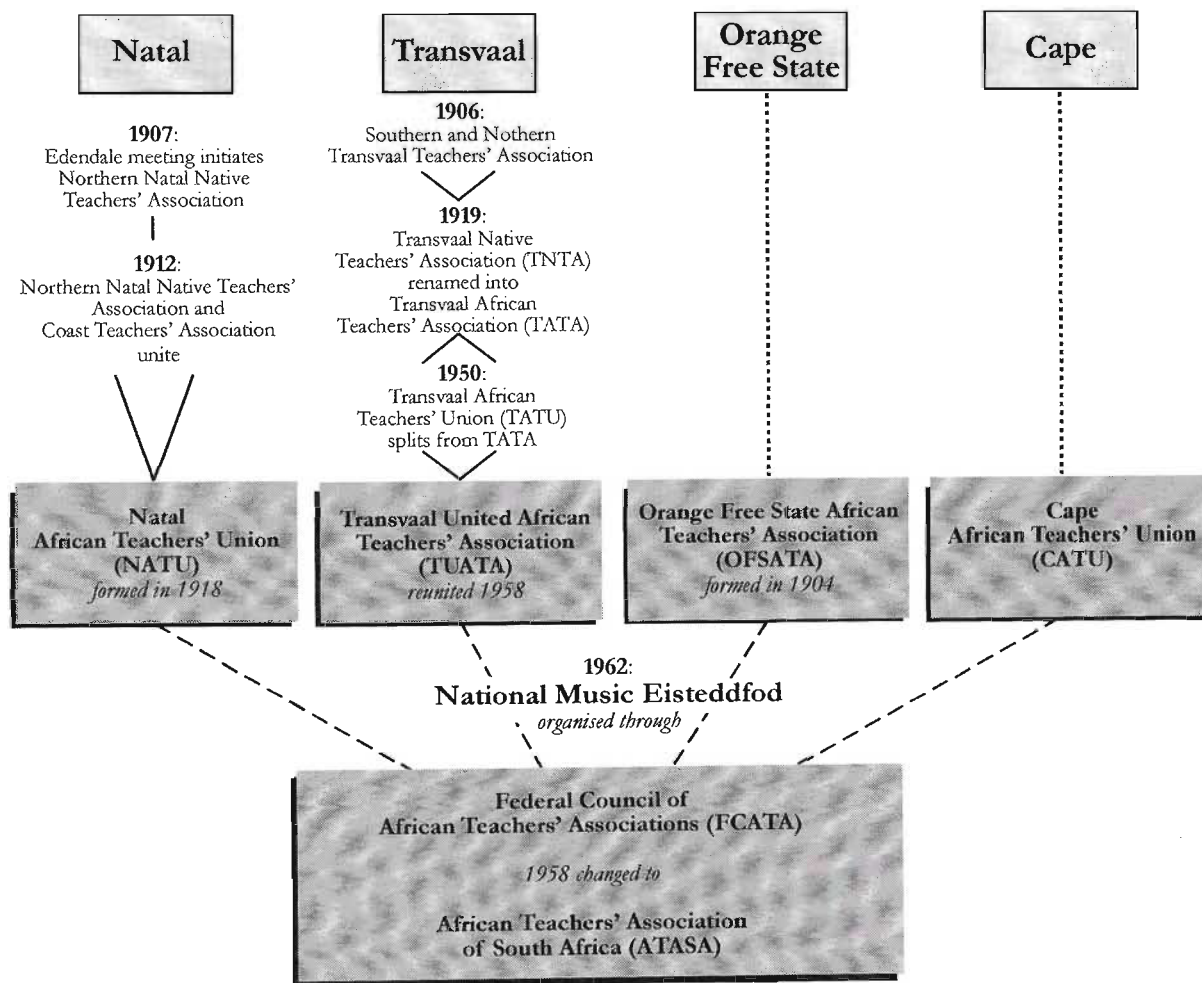


Figure 8.2: Diagram of South African Teachers' Associations and related events mentioned in this thesis

Considering that musical contests played an important role at many schools from the beginning of the twentieth century, it seems surprising that the Teachers' Associations did not take up the idea of formalised competitions from their inception. In the case of NATU, for example, it was only in 1933 that Albert Luthuli, at that time secretary of NATU, observed:

There is no reason why our branches should not encourage teachers to organise athletic and other forms of sport in their schools and then the Branch might organise inter-school sports. Music affords another chance for helpful activity which could be organised into inter-school activity. Some elementary music competition could be organised; this would certainly help to raise the standard of music in some schools and districts. Organised school or community debates in Zulu could be established much to the benefit of the school or the community; inter-school or inter-district debating teams could be organised afterwards.<sup>61</sup>

The fact that Luthuli's suggestions coincide with the success of the Transvaal African Eisteddfod indicates that this event inspired Teachers' Associations to organise their own choral eisteddfodau.

### 8.2.1 ATASA and the National Music Eisteddfod



**Figure 8.3:** "... in a sea of joy" TUATA competition 1961

In the March 1962 edition of the *TUATA Newsletter*, E. A. Tlakula published the notice that "our 1962 Music Competition will be unusual in that, after our usual provincial competition in Pretoria, there will be a further contest in Bloemfontein".<sup>62</sup> The National Music Eisteddfod was a result of the decision by the different provinces to combine their efforts and inaugurate a periodic national music festival under the auspices of the Federal Council of African Teachers' Associations (FCATA), an umbrella body of the provincial Teachers' Associations, the name of which was later changed to

African Teachers' Association of South Africa (ATASA).<sup>63</sup> The idea was to co-ordinate and extend the efforts of provincial music competitions and to foster music for its spiritual and cultural wealth. In order to facilitate these aims, FCATA introduced an elaborate organisational structure for the carrying out of annual provincial competitions. Participating choirs started at branch level, and only the successful choirs proceeded to district, zone, and region in order to qualify for the national Finals where the provincial finalists vied with each other for national honours in the form of floating trophies, diplomas, and other prizes (see Figure 8.4).<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> *Native Teachers' Journal* (January 1933): 98.

<sup>62</sup> *Transvaal United African Teachers' Association Newsletter* (March 1962): 16.

<sup>63</sup> *TUATA* (December 1961): 19.

<sup>64</sup> Teachers' choirs had their own scheme and competed only at district level in order to proceed directly to provincial and finally national eliminations.



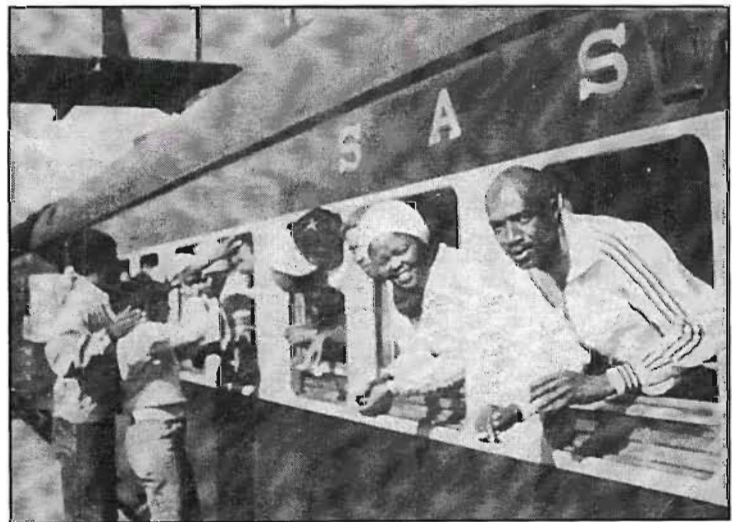
**Figure 8.4:** *Process of elimination introduced by the Federal Council of African Teachers' Associations.*

This system is still in place today, and each year tensions during the process of elimination at the different levels build up to fever pitch when the choirs battle to participate in the Finals, which are usually held in July. Though the first national Finals were held in Bloemfontein, in the later years, the venues rotated amongst the four provinces. In order to facilitate transport to the national Finals, TUATA hired a train and subsidised the trip for the participating choirs.<sup>65</sup> Ludumo Magangane spoke of his memories:

In fact, when the national Finals were in other provinces, away from the Transvaal, TUATA would actually get a special train to take choristers of the schools that had won [the provincial elimination] and the teachers from Johannesburg station to wherever the competition will going to be – at a reduced fare – and that's why the train was called TUATA Special. It used to be very, very exciting just to get in.<sup>66</sup>

The trip was one of the highlights for the students as some of them had never travelled on a train or even left their hometowns. Ray Kantuli, who went on the train several times as a chorister and later as a teacher, described the memorable adventure emotionally:

It's a long travel, yes, but we won't sing because we will be spoiling our voices. But we will sing when we come back. Sometimes the teacher will say "all right, people, let us rehearse the song that we are going to compete at". Yes, in the train! Then we will sing. Where there are deviations, then we correct it. But we won't sing a lot when going to the competition, just to preserve the voices. Even the food that we eat, we don't just eat junk. There is a certain menu that we had to follow in order to have sweet voices, like eggs – uncooked eggs – egg under cheese, not eating sweets. Just something that will give you strength when you sing... Sometimes, because I'm a poet, in the morning I used to look at the valley. Then I start writing, appreciating the valley. Appreciating the nature... But when we came back we were celebrating. That's where we used to compose songs. Just this short songs like "Tshotsholoza" [singing], you know – to also sing away time. The hours will be nothing, just minutes.<sup>67</sup>



**Figure 8.5:** *TUATA Special, Johannesburg station (TUATA, December 1982).*

<sup>65</sup> See for instance *TUATA* (June 1962): 29.

<sup>66</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Springs, July 19, 2000.

<sup>67</sup> Personal communication with Ray Kantuli, SABC Johannesburg, February 14, 2001.

Although FCATA called their event the National Music Eisteddfod, the original ideas of the founders of the Transvaal Eisteddfod were for the most part lost. This becomes clear in the objectives set down by FCATA:<sup>68</sup>

- (a) To create a keen musical atmosphere in all African Schools so as to evoke latent talent.
- (b) To develop African Music and to encourage the study of European Music.

On the surface, these aims may seem to reflect the ideals of the Transvaal Eisteddfod. A closer examination, however, reveals an ideological shift: no longer was the formation of a national identity of immediate concern but rather the fact “that our competition brings honour to the individual school, conductor and community”.<sup>69</sup> Whereas the original idea of the eisteddfod was to stimulate growth and progress, and to cultivate taste in various art forms, the National Music Eisteddfod concentrated its efforts exclusively on choral music. The first national event held in Bloemfontein in 1962 catered only for school and teachers choirs competing in the following categories:<sup>70</sup>

- Senior A Primary, of not more than 60 voices  
[targeting higher primary schools with Standard six classes],
- Secondary A, of the same No. of voices  
[targeting high schools and training schools],
- Teachers' Choir of the same voices,
- Teachers' Double Quartet.

This development is not, however, specific to the National Music Eisteddfod, but may be observed as a general tendency in practically all African organised eisteddfodau from the 1960s onwards. The trend continues to the present day, for contests and festivals have lost the diversity of the original eisteddfodau and in most cases cater for choirs only. We will later see that, because of this process, competitions like the prestigious NCF became the nerve centre of *amakwaya*, keeping the tradition of choral music alive.



**Figure 8.6:** *Arrival back home from the National Eisteddfod in Port Elisabeth, July 2, (TUATA, September 1966)*

<sup>68</sup> *TUATA* (December 1961): 22.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* (June 1962): 4.

### 8.2.2 Post-Apartheid Developments in School Choir Competitions

On May 5, 1999, S. T. Ngesi wrote in a letter to the Editor of the *Daily Dispatch*, a daily newspaper published in East London:

I appeal to the Minister of Education and his MECs to quickly and decisively ban music practice and music competitions during tuition time. Music competitions and the practising which precede them are the biggest cancer to teaching and learning in black schools. This old and outdated tonic solfa music system is what black teachers like most. From March to May, music practice takes up most of the tuition time.<sup>71</sup>

Ngesi's comment came at a time when the Department of National Education was working on a proposal to unite all types of music and music-related competitions in one single national event. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century school choir competitions played a major role in shaping the performance practice of *amakwaya*. However, at the beginning of the twenty first century, a decisive change in the competition circuit was initiated by the Ministry of Arts and Culture. Until then, choral competitions had been organised successfully by the various Teachers' Associations and, especially during the previous two decades, had attracted corporate sponsors at both provincial and national levels. This practice was brought to an end by the Department of Education, following a recommendation by Kader Asmal, the Minister of Education, who deplored the fact that insufficient active teaching and learning time was being devoted to the basics of reading, writing, and numeracy. He expressed his concern that many schools used only forty percent of the maximum teaching time, because of absenteeism, teachers and pupils arriving late and leaving early, and schools starting after the beginning of term and closing before the end. Moreover, he argued, too many other activities, such as choir practices, consumed valuable classroom time.<sup>72</sup> The Department of National Education found in particular that the sheer numbers of different school music competitions were adversely affecting the education of pupils.<sup>73</sup> It therefore recommended that from 2001 only one national competition a year should be organised. This move formed an integral part of Asmal's new policy under the motto "Tirisano: Working Together to build a South African Education and Training System for the 21st Century".<sup>74</sup> To accomplish his 'call to action', a national steering committee was established to identify latent talent and to unify, organise, coordinate and monitor school music competitions and festivals for all public and private schools in the country. Mzwandile Matthews, an important yet controversial member of the *amakwaya* community, is currently heading the steering committee in his capacity of Director of the Department of National Education. He was the driving force behind the realisation of Asmal's concept in the sector of music education, and he masterminded the Tirisano Eisteddfod.

Concerns about the disruptive nature of school competitions do not lack precedents. Already in 1931 the National Education Department had announced that school concerts and competitions "must not, either in their preparation or in their being held, interfere with the ordinary work of the school". The fact that "some teachers use the preparation for the concert as an excuse for slacking off in the school work and for departing from the time-table for a couple of weeks before the clos-

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. (December 1961): 21.

<sup>71</sup> S. T. Ngesi, "Minister Must Stop the Music". *Dispatch* (May 5, 1999), available online, <http://www.dispatch.co.za/1999/05/05/editoria/LET3.HTM>.

<sup>72</sup> G. Warren-Brown, "Kidz Krises". *Leadership* (February 2000); available online, <http://www.leadership.co.za/issues/2000feb/articles/kidzkrises.htm>.

<sup>73</sup> *Dispatch*, (Saturday, March 23, 2002), available online, <http://www.dispatch.co.za/2002/03/23/easterncape/SCHOOL.HTM>.

<sup>74</sup> See [http://education.pwv.gov.za/Tirisano\\_Folder/Tirisano\\_Index.htm](http://education.pwv.gov.za/Tirisano_Folder/Tirisano_Index.htm).



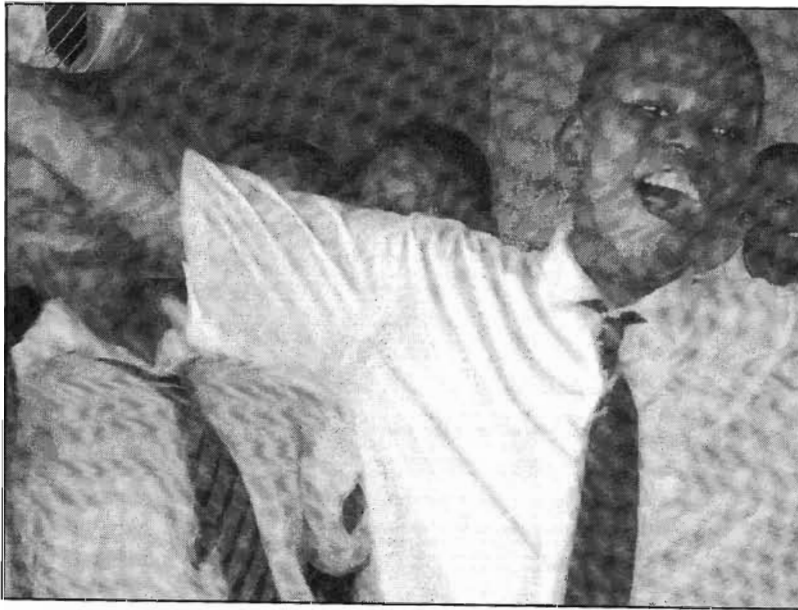
ing” was strongly criticised.<sup>75</sup> While recognising that “the high standard of choral music is due, to a large extent, to the efforts made when preparing choirs for the music competitions”, P. J. Simelane, a prominent composer of the *amakwaya* tradition who worked as an assistant Inspector of Schools in the Krugersdorp circuit, warned three decades later:

The problem that arises is due to the fact that teachers usually got to the extent of neglecting their normal school work when preparing choirs for the competitions. Preparing choirs for competitions is an extra-mural activity that should not interfere with normal school lessons. This practice is being discouraged by the Department of Bantu Education. The ever-keenness to win is a very unfortunate result of these competitions.<sup>76</sup>

Both comments can be seen as part of an ongoing discussion and this is further evident, for instance, in the publications of *TUATA*:

We cannot, however, ignore the critics, the fair-weather critic. They elect to attack the principals, the teachers, the parents, and the Teachers' Association on the singing in schools, and music competitions... The critics say far too much singing is done at the expense of the lessons. The Teachers' Association is strongly opposed to men and women who will conduct singing at wrong times because they are lazy to do work or because they think winning a trophy for the school is more important than teaching. Music is an extra-mural activity, and must be treated as such.<sup>77</sup>

In view of the fact that the participation in competitions can, in the final stages of preparation, cause school life to come to a standstill, the proposed coordination and control of music and music-related activities make sense. Ideally, the concept of pooling the efforts of all teachers' unions, government resources, public sector support, and musical performance by learners, should “pro-



**Figure 8.7:** Choristers of the Phila Combined School, Umlazi, preparing for the ‘big day’ (March 2001)

duce a better organised school choral festival which will benefit learners more than before”.<sup>78</sup> Some of those affected by the move have, however, noted a potentially negative factor – the danger of overriding the principle of ‘subsidiarity’, doing at a higher level what could well be done at a lower. A committee which takes the sole responsibility, not only for prescribing the repertoire but also for determining the adjudicators, might limit the development of school choral traditions and thus limit the development of *amakwaya*. All choirs might follow the path defined by the organisers and

<sup>75</sup> *Native Teachers' Journal* (July 1931): 167.

<sup>76</sup> P. J. Simelane, *Report on the Conference on African Church Music*, (Roodekrans, December 5-7, 1967): 35-6.

<sup>77</sup> *TUATA* (December 1965): 3.

<sup>78</sup> King Goodwill Zwelithini, address on the occasion of the Tirisano School Choral Eisteddfod, Durban, 2001; available online: <http://www.kwazulu.net/King/tirisano/tirisano.htm>



adjudicators of the competitions instead of launching into diverse programs that would ensure development in a much broader sense. In the case of Tirisano, there is a real danger of choirs working exclusively towards a single event with a specific repertoire and aesthetic. In fact many in the choral groups have not entirely accepted the new structures.<sup>79</sup> Many are refusing to follow Tirisano policy and continue to prepare for and attend competitions which are still being organised by Teacher's Associations.

### 8.3 Adult and Community Choirs

*The people who had sung in schools would sing, obviously, even after they had left schools. So the adult choirs developed. That developed a new set of people that would sing: that was now the adults. The people who had gone through the school system, they wanted to continue with music and they did the same. So the ATASA music found itself engendering the singing of the adults. First of all, it was teachers choirs but it ended up changing to adult choirs.<sup>80</sup>*

Although there were early examples of community choirs like the Edendale based Zulu Choir or the African Native Choir, choral ensembles in the past were for the most part made up of students rather than adults. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, however, choral singing, which had started as a school culture, began to expand into the communities. By the 1920s, thanks to their experience with choral ensembles at schools, African teachers had established a number of adult choirs. Ludumo Magangane remembers at that time teachers

continued with these school choir competitions until the teachers themselves thought: but why don't we form teachers' choirs? Because we conduct school choirs, yes, but we don't have teachers' choirs. They

<sup>79</sup> I do not want to go into the details of the complex political issues that have unfortunately caused quite some disturbance in the choral community. It seems that Tirisano might partly be the result of a power struggle among the various forces involved. Despite considerable efforts on my side, Matthews unfortunately never made himself available to me for comments on these important issues. Various informants (names withheld because of the sensitivity of this issue) have described him to me as "a very good choral director", "a highly intelligent man", "a man with incredible ambitions, but a power hungry man". After a period of disagreement with the National Choir Festival (NCF), in which no compromises were made, he eventually decided to establish his own choral organisation, the South African Choral Music Association (SACMA), with the intention of creating an umbrella body for all the provincial choral associations. Many of my informants agreed with the following assessment of this Association: "...the way they have run the competition has been reasonably good, except that the whole thing was hinging more around individuals than the community. It was more individual things than the community. And you will find that within that organisation there are one or two people that are holding the power and the rest of the other people really just become points of that power" (personal communication, Johannesburg, February 2001).

Generally it was felt that "SACMA went beyond the bounds in order to try to control the whole choir-scene in South Africa. They played their cards in the wrong way" (ibid.). SACMA's attempt to gain power by requiring choirs to choose between competitions organised by the NCF and those organised by SACMA failed, since most of the choirs remained faithful to the NCF. This was particularly the case in KwaZulu Natal, where many choirs "wouldn't have anything to do with that – they say, we stay independent, we're not going to be dictated by SACMA" (ibid.). Moreover, irregularities regarding the allocation of funding resulted in the withdrawal of sponsorship by the South African Breweries, which had supported SACMA and its choral competition for two years.

<sup>80</sup> Personal communication with Langa Nkosi, Johannesburg, July 20, 2000.

then formed teachers' choirs. These would then also compete on provincial level and in other provinces teachers formed Teachers' Associations.<sup>81</sup>

George Mxadana, Chairman of the NCF management committee, added:

Because people that left school that were singing at choirs at school needed to find an outlet. And the church choirs became too small for them and the church choirs were not challenging enough for them. They had to get involved in other adult choirs. And that's why you had people like the Carpe Diem Music Organisation, you had the Ionian Music Organisation, you know all these names that were coming up. This was the result of people wanting to find an outlet of getting into other organisations where music would be much more challenging. And that's when we started having people like the Messiah Choir, which was brought together to sing *Messiah*, a massive choir of more than 200 voices.<sup>82</sup>

Teachers' choirs were, however, few in numbers until various forces instigated the further development of adult choirs in the second half of the twentieth century. The Transvaal Bantu Eisteddfod, though originally aiming at school choirs, started to promote teachers' choirs and adult groups from 1963 onwards, when the FCATA included teachers' choirs in their Eisteddfod as a separate competing section. This move was welcomed by the choral community because it offered "many teachers the opportunity of continuing with their singing",<sup>83</sup> and was "a clear sign of cultural majority".<sup>84</sup> The Johannesburg Bantu Music Festival (BMF), established by the Recreation and Community Services under the Johannesburg City Council, from its outset concentrated on adult groups rather than on school choirs. Whereas in the first year of its existence, only "six prominent choirs"<sup>85</sup> from the Johannesburg area competed against one another, the following year provided wide-ranging solo and choral sections, which included church choirs, female choirs, male choirs, double quartets and trios.

The importance of the Johannesburg Bantu Music Festival for the development of *amakwaya* clearly lay in the fact that it took the rich choral tradition that had developed at the schools into the wider community, and thus significantly contributed to the process of shaping contemporary *amakwaya* contests like the prestigious NCF. In conception both festivals may be seen as performing the function of the leisure-time schemes introduced at the mission schools. The following section will explore the further development and the implementation of such schemes in communities outside schools.

### 8.3.1 Ray Phillips and the Organisation of Leisure-time

The question of how Christian students were to spend their leisure hours, as we saw in the previous chapter, did not escape the attention of the mission school educators. Adams College is example here and similar programmes could be found in schools throughout South Africa.<sup>86</sup> From the 1920s, missionaries and teachers emphasised the importance of leisure-time schemes for communities outside mission schools. At the Thirteenth Annual Conference of the Natal Native Teachers, it was argued that

<sup>81</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Springs, July 19, 2000.

<sup>82</sup> Personal communication with George Mxadana, Johannesburg, February 08, 2001; for more details about the Messiah Choir, see Chapter 13.2.1

<sup>83</sup> M. Khumalo, *TUATA* (September 1966): 4.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* (June 1962): 4.

<sup>85</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 169.

<sup>86</sup> See for instance Matthews detailed report about Ford Hare: Z. K. Matthews, 1986: 66.

the many temptations besetting young people in towns gave the teachers many opportunities for splendid community service, though the main responsibility of guarding against such temptations should naturally rest upon the employers and the municipalities and the Government. Various clubs and organisations (e.g., Reading Clubs and Pathfinder Troops) could do much valuable work, in which the teachers could render wonderful assistance.<sup>87</sup>

Whatever the precise subjective intentions of the mission school authorities were in fostering such schemes, the social effect was to provide the necessary relaxation for the workers, which would allow them to return refreshed to the job the next day. What is at issue here is, to use Marxist terminology, the daily reproduction of labour power. More was involved, however. The missionaries might have thought in terms of saving their converts from the sinful attractions of shebeens and brothels, which flourished in the townships, but the white government regarded such schemes as useful for its own political aims. The government's interest in African recreation was in fact a response to the rapid transformation of the black urban population and the emergence of political forms that were seen as being a potential threat to white rule.<sup>88</sup> That leisure schemes were effective is suggested by the fact that Eddie R. Roux, an organiser of the Communist Party, complained in 1935 that they affected the political activity of black urban Africans, and, by keeping them engaged in social meetings, lectures, concerts and debates, "helped them to forget their troubles".<sup>89</sup>

Programmes to control and influence the leisure-time activities of black Africans in most urban centres were introduced in the 1920s and more actively from the 1930s onwards.<sup>90</sup> The schemes introduced by government and corporate bodies were not only based on the ideas developed by the missionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but often involved missionary bodies which assisted with the implementation. This was, for instance, the case with the Johannesburg's Municipal Non-European Affairs Department, which drew heavily on the social services of the American Board Mission.

In order further to understand the relevance of the leisure-time schemes to the development of the Bantu Music Festival, we should turn our attention to the work of Ray Phillips, a missionary of the American Board Mission. Phillips was sent to South Africa in 1918 to assist in a social welfare programme instituted by the Reverend Frederick B. Bridgman on behalf of the American Board Mission.<sup>91</sup> For more than thirty years, Phillips was engaged in the work of adapting the programme to the needs of African people on the Witwatersrand. As a result of his involvement with black communities in the city and the mining compounds, Phillips recognised that neither offered adequate leisure-time opportunities and recreation facilities for Africans. Believing that "whoever captures the leisure time of the people, gets the people", and that "a people's character is moulded by

<sup>87</sup> Report of the Thirteenth Annual Conference of the Natal Native Teachers in *Native Teachers' Journal* (October, 1931): 47; valuable information can also be found in Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone, (eds.), *Industrialisation and social change in South Africa: African class formation, culture, and consciousness, 1870-1930* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1982).

<sup>88</sup> V. Erlmann, 1991: 65.

<sup>89</sup> R. E. Phillips, 1938: 311.

<sup>90</sup> A forerunner of the leisure-time schemes was the prominent South African Improvement Society created to cultivate the public use of English among Africans by sponsoring readings, lectures, displays of elocution, and debates. See *Diamond Fields Advertiser* (August 23, 1895) and D. Coplan 1985: 40. Some valuable information can be found in the third Chapter of Tim Couzens' book *The New African*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985.

<sup>91</sup> Similar schemes were developed and implemented at Durban by the American Board Missionaries James Dexter Taylor and J. McCord.

the kind of investment made of their free time”,<sup>92</sup> he saw about organising and moralising the leisure time activities of urban black Africans, in order to “build up their bodies and their character”.<sup>93</sup>

Phillips, who was active in assisting the development of the Bantu Men’s Social Centre (BMSC), saw it as the great task of the missionary “to devise a ‘Social Gospel’” that would solve the “whole great problem of moralising the leisure time of natives in the city and country alike”.<sup>94</sup> To do this, he said, “...we must capture the physical and mental life of these young men during six days of the week” and not just at the church service on Sunday; “the Church must create Playground Associations, Recreational Agencies, extend Guiding and Scouting activities – must move to capture the leisure of millions”.<sup>95</sup> An important prerequisite in devising such a scheme, Phillips argued, was to “get a grip on the facts of the case”. This led to research into the question: “What do natives do with their leisure time?”<sup>96</sup> A survey produced the following details about the predominant interests of black Africans living and working in the cities and the mining compounds.<sup>97</sup>

Activities	Percentage very interested	Percentage frequently participating
Education	81,3	63,8
Listening to the radio	78,8	74,9
Improving the home	72,0	45,4
Music	64,8	53,8
Housework	59,4	54,0
Entertaining friends	57,4	37,9
Shopping	56,5	38,7
Making extra money	55,4	34,9
Church activities	54,1	46,6
Cooking	53,5	51,8
Reading	51,7	44,6
Playing records	51,5	40,9

When interpreting this table, one has to bear in mind that Phillips does not differentiate among the African communities. His statistics seem problematic, as he treats urban blacks as a homogenous sector of South African society, which they definitely were not. It might be true that many had common interests, but there were certainly notable differences among sub-groups, for instance, the migrant workers living on the mining compounds and the members of the black middle class employed, for example, in the transport business. A. Epstein argues that leisure-time activities such as performing arts speak in plain terms about the diversity of the emerging African communities and their distinctive cultures.<sup>98</sup> Veit Erlmann’s findings amplify Epstein’s argument by unveiling a hierarchy of cultural practices, leisure time activities, and performance genres,

<sup>92</sup> R. E. Phillips, *The Bantu in the City: A Study of Cultural Adjustment on the Witwatersrand*. (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1938): 38.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> R. E. Phillips, *The Bantu are Coming* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1930): 58.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> R. E. Phillips, 1938: 233.

<sup>98</sup> A. Epstein, *Politics in an Urban African Community*, (Manchester, 1985): 300; quoted in D. Coplan, 1985: 232.

corresponding to the social stratification of the black population in the cities. In this system, Erlmann argues,

gambling and *ingoma* dancing clearly seem to have occupied the lower ranks, associated as they were with the least urbanised segments of the migrant workforce. Soccer and *isicathamiya*, by contrast, were regarded as somewhat more prestigious leisure time pursuits. Boxing, ballroom dancing, or classical music, however, signalled the fact that a person had crossed the fine line that separated the mass of labouring poor from the thin layer of preachers, teachers, and clerks that constituted South Africa's black middle class.<sup>99</sup>

For urban black Africans, the appropriation of symbols that came with the different leisure-time activities provided a possibility of status differentiation. Organisations that targeted these activities actively reinforced such differentiation of status, perhaps as a way of preventing black solidarity.

Phillips's table reveals that in urban black society most of the leisure time interests centred on home and church. What is conspicuous is the overriding interest in education. This, however, is an area where the undifferentiated statistics are problematic. As we have already seen, mission-educated urban blacks yearned for intellectual fulfilment and material improvement, and as a means of achieving these ends, they incorporated a wider set of leisure-time interests than that of any other black South African socio-economic group. Learning to play different Western musical instruments, singing in a choral group, attending concerts and recitals, reading and creative writing were popular areas of leisure time activity. This points to the essential argument of this thesis: that these Western leisure activities were regarded as symbols of progress and proof of their membership of a 'civilised' society.

As a result of his findings, Phillips concluded that "ample outlets should be provided urban African youth for their physical energies".<sup>100</sup> Within a short period of time, interest in leisure-time musical activity had increased to such an extent that musicians from all over Africa realised that "Johannesburg, with its dance-hall bands, its musical festivals, its many concerts, offered many chances to Bantu artists".<sup>101</sup> Among those who tried to gain a foothold were several past students of Adams, who, according to a report in *Iso Lomuzi*, were "making contributions in this field. One or two were members of the Johannesburg Bantu Eisteddfod committee".<sup>102</sup> In the 1930s, eight halls were made available for functions, meetings, and concerts for Johannesburg's black population. These halls also served as venues for a popular form of specifically middle class entertainment which combined concert and dance: concerts, choir competitions, meetings, and functions were followed by a second part where the audience could socialise in dancing. Interestingly, Phillips is careful in his report to stress the fact that those events were in accordance with missionary thinking, as "the European type of dance is followed exclusively".<sup>103</sup>

The BMSC established in 1924 in Eloff Street Extension, Johannesburg, was the "biggest African social institution of the kind in South Africa".<sup>104</sup> It was conceptualised by Frederick Bridgman of the American Board of Missions as a cultural centre offering Educational, Athletic, Literary, Musical, Dramatic, and other social activities. The BMSC was to blacks, in terms of status and prestige, what the Rand Club was to whites. Similar institutions modelled on the BMSC were established in other major South African cities. For example, in Durban there were already a

<sup>99</sup> V. Erlmann, 1996: 118.

<sup>100</sup> R. E. Phillips, 1938: 245.

<sup>101</sup> H. I. E. Dhlomo, "The Activities of Some Past Students of Adams in the Reef", in *Iso Lomuzi*, (September 1932): 11.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> R. E. Phillips, 1938: 292.

<sup>104</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 115.

number of popular dance halls, including the Seme's Club and Ematramini, the disused tramway sheds in Alice Street. But after the 1929 Beerhall Riots, the Municipality closed down many of the dance halls and passed regulations for the control of others. Thus the new Bantu Social Centre (BSC), established in October 1933 by the Municipal Native Administration Department with the support of a number of liberal organisations, was established at a time when the Durban City Council was clamping down on dance halls and other venues where African people could meet after working hours. The centre, which was managed by Edendale-born composer Alfred Assegai Khumalo, an important *amakwaya* conductor and composer, was to provide the urban black community with alternatives to the rowdy life of shebeens and beer-halls, and furthermore to channel African leisure time and recreation away from politics and trade unionism. Situated in Queen Street in a disused warehouse, the centre had facilities for film shows, concerts, billiards, boxing and other forms of entertainment. It was later moved to Victoria Street and to Beatrice Street, where it became a very popular venue for concerts and discussions. Against the intention of the initiators, it also served as an important meeting place for political organisations and trade unions. Although most events were open to everyone and the BSC discouraged ethnicity, members of the working class looked upon this institution as "a 'high hat' club of the white man's 'good boys'".<sup>105</sup> When Durban's BSC later became the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), it continued to provide a venue for recreational and sporting activities, and became a popular venue for the *isicathamiya* all-night competitions.

A central idea of the Bantu Social Centre idea was the creation of bonds between the white and black population and promoting cultural exchange. In order to foster the process of what he called "discovering the other man",<sup>106</sup> Phillips advocated the introduction of discussion and debating groups, which were named Gamma Sigma Clubs. Occasional concerts, musicals and dances were organised, and the meeting sometimes featured European speakers. Phillips hoped to broaden the activities of club members, promote mutual understanding, and educate black and white opinion, especially in the discussion of race issues among black people and liberal Europeans. The fact that black members were regarded by their white visitors as being "a keen, intelligent, cultured group, deserving of trust and a larger measure of consideration", made the *amakholwa* members of those clubs feel deeply satisfied.<sup>107</sup> The Gamma Sigma Clubs were partly informed by the efforts of the black elite to create an African national culture. In creating links between Africans and white liberals, these clubs nurtured the identity of middle class Africans who were trying to avoid slavish imitation of Europe, on the one hand, and the artificial revival of tradition, on the other.<sup>108</sup> Other leisure-time schemes were initiated by the black communities themselves. The Bapedi Club, for instance, founded by Maketa Thema as a football organisation, later became a social club motivated by the desire to "do something to keep people out of the streets on Sundays and keep them away from drink".<sup>109</sup> These leisure-time schemes seem to have been effective. A survey done in August 1933 shows that organising sport and music events and competitions and other activities like the

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<sup>105</sup> R. E. Phillips, 1938: 303. Many of the leisure-time schemes, in fact, missed out the black working class all together. Considering all the activities within reach, in the 1930's, one might assume that there were plenty activities available to all black citizens. A closer look, however, reveals that these activities targeted school children and educated blacks. For the majority of people living in the townships, little was done to offer adequate leisure time activities.

<sup>106</sup> R. E. Phillips, 1930: 191ff.

<sup>107</sup> R. E. Phillips, 1938: 302.

<sup>108</sup> See Chapter 4.2 for a detailed discussion on African national culture.

<sup>109</sup> Maketa Thema, interview with R. E. Phillips, 1935, quoted in R. E. Phillips, 1938: 295.



screening of films had resulted in a seventy-five percent decrease in drunkenness and alcoholism in the townships of Johannesburg.<sup>110</sup>

“To keep people off the streets” and to further education must be regarded as key objectives for educated black Africans. To the present day, they are important for choristers joining *amakwaya* groups. Many of the people I interviewed mentioned meaningful use of leisure-time as one of the most important motives for joining choirs, and argued that participation in choirs kept them off the streets and away from the bad influence of alcohol. Often these considerations were impressed on the children by their parents in order to keep them away from bad company. Here I again quote Jane Motlhabane, chorister in the Bloemfontein Serenade Choir:

...the choir keeps you out of many things – you know, we have tried to keep our kids out of the street. To keep them – after hours – to keep them busy to the choir. After that we go to bed – you can’t find your children in the street and what. ... This is why I also took my daughter to the choir – to keep up busy. [We rehearse] every day! For three hours. Especially when we come to performances like this....<sup>111</sup>

JZM Sambo, the celebrated Master of Ceremonies of the NCF, remarked during the twenty-third Finals held in Cape Town in December 2000:

You will never find someone who is a choral singer involved in crime. We say never this will happen! Choral singing keeps us from the streets and busy, this is something, which is marvellous. So the choirs do community development which is very important. We keep young people busy with something that educates and is enjoyable at the same time.<sup>112</sup>

Leisure-time schemes not only stimulated the performance and competition culture of urban black Africans, but also initiated a culture of music-making in the home, particularly amongst middle class families. Phillips remarks that a number of African homes have pianos or organs. Some thirty boys and girls in Johannesburg are receiving instruction under Mrs. Motsieloa in piano playing. The annual recital of these children is looked forward to with interest.<sup>113</sup>

### 8.3.2 The Johannesburg Bantu Music Festival

Towards the end of 1947, the efforts to moralise the leisure-time of urban black Africans culminated in the establishment of the Johannesburg Bantu Music Festival (JBMF), initiated by John Connell, City Director of Music, in conjunction with the Non-European Affairs Department of the Johannesburg Municipality.<sup>114</sup> A joint music committee, comprising employees of the Johannesburg City Council and “an impressive list of elite African cultural leaders”,<sup>115</sup> administered the festival, which was usually held in October, after the teachers’ competitions. In order to foster cultural exchange, and because the City Council felt that “immigrants and visitors might be interested”, the festival made “arrangements for the admission of Europeans to watch the festival”.<sup>116</sup> The JBMF,

<sup>110</sup> R. E. Phillips, 1938: 311.

<sup>111</sup> Jane Motlhabane, Bloemfontein Serenade Choir (Free State), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000; also see Chapter 7.2.1.

<sup>112</sup> J. Z. M. Sambo, comment at the National Choir Festival Finals, Cape Town, December 2000. Sambo has served more than 30 years as Master of Ceremony (MC) for various choral competitions. The MC of the National Choir Festival, but makes an important contribution to the specific performance practice of these events. Further research should be done to establish the details of this aspect.

<sup>113</sup> R. E. Phillips, 1938: 298.

<sup>114</sup> *The Star* (December 12, 1947).

<sup>115</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 169.

<sup>116</sup> *Rand Daily Mail* (December 18, 1947).

which took “the form of a competition open to all non-European choirs and individuals in the municipal area”,<sup>117</sup> was organised along the lines of the Transvaal Bantu Eisteddfod. This becomes clear from the official aims printed in the programme of the second Festival held in 1948:

- To encourage a love of music and promote talent among the African people.
- To raise the standard of performance and sense of appreciation.
- To introduce to Johannesburg audiences the best African and European music.

This close relation to the objectives of the Transvaal Native Eisteddfod is not surprising in view of the fact that Mark Radebe also filled the post of President of the JBMF Committee. The Festival started as a choral Eisteddfod, with only six prominent choirs, competing under the supervision of choirmaster Lucas Makhema, who acted as Secretary of the Committee.<sup>118</sup> In the second year the programme had already expanded beyond choral music and covered a whole week of various contests including band competitions, ballroom dancing and elocution.<sup>119</sup> Khabi Mngoma remembers that the band section, which proved to be very popular, was a direct result of the leisure-time schemes: “...the city council had organised brass bands for their cleaning staff, people who manned their various refuse removal services – over weekends. They were migrant labourers, so over weekend they were kept busy being provided with instruments”.<sup>120</sup>

Leisure-time schemes served as a guideline in the music Committee’s aim of stimulating cultural activity, combating apathy and preserving traditional African music in all sections of the



Figure 8.8: Programme, Johannesburg Bantu Music Festival, October 1948.

<sup>117</sup> *The Star* (December 17, 1947).

<sup>118</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 169. Coplan’s finding, which seem to be based on an article published by *The Rand Daily Mail* (October 11, 1965), contradicts a report published in *The Rand Daily Mail*, which states that in the festival, which lasted two days, “twelve choirs will compete, singing in English and in four of the African languages. These have been trained by the one full-time and three part-time African choir leaders employed by the municipality. There will also be solo singing, elocution competitions, and special items will be given by Mr. Ezekiel Buck Mogala, the African tenor”. *The Rand Daily Mail* (December 18, 1947).

<sup>119</sup> Festival Programme, Johannesburg Bantu Music Festival, October 1948; also see *Rand Daily Mail* (October 05, 1948).

<sup>120</sup> Khabi Mngoma, interview with Ludumo Magangane, University of Zululand, May 1997. I am indebted to Ludumo Magangane who made a transcript of this interview available to me.

Brass bands were, however, introduced not only in connection with the leisure-time schemes set up in the 1920s and 1930s. The tradition of bands was promoted greatly by the contribution of the Salvation Army Church, which had a strong music tradition based on brass instruments. Many choral conductors and composers, like Mzilikazi Khumalo, Khabi Mngoma and Mark Radebe, were brought in contact with band music through their affiliation with the Salvation Army Church. See K. Mngoma, 1998: 43.

community.<sup>121</sup> The preservation of traditional music became one of the main concerns of the JBMF. In the first year, Hugh Tracey was invited to give a lecture in order to promote traditional music,<sup>122</sup> and during the 1948 competition a whole day was devoted to performances of action songs, dramatic sketches and traditional songs and to the use of traditional instruments. Soon the Festival became the most important national black cultural event of the year and provided an essential cultural experience for middle class and working-class performers by including all the different styles of composition and performance current in the country. In 1956, ten years after its inauguration, the Festival reached its heyday with some 4,500 competitors from all parts of the country taking part in as many as eighty-four separate sections for “brass bands, jazz groups, crooners, and instrumental soloists of all kinds, and providing sketches, puppet shows, ballroom and even ballet dancing”.<sup>123</sup>

Towards the late 1950s, the JBMF began to decline when co-operation between white civic officials and the black members of the joint music Committee was impeded by restrictive Apartheid regulations. A cause for frustration for all blacks involved in the Festival was the increasingly tense political situation and the growing resistance in black organisers and performers to the master narrative of white musicians, who not only made programme and artistic decisions, but promoted conformity to European standards in almost every discipline. Soon, working-class Africans began to see the JBMF as another “affair for the whites’ good boys”, and gradually ceased participating.<sup>124</sup> Although the Festival continued to be a major cultural event for black middle class African until 1956, the frustrations involved had already started to disappoint the expectations of middle class participants and elite leaders. As a direct result of this frustration and in an attempt to “create a cultural front in their struggle towards self-determination”,<sup>125</sup> black elite leaders turned away from the JBMF. An initiative that gained in importance at this time was the Syndicate of African Artists. Khabi Mngoma and Ezekiel Mphahlele had founded this organisation in 1948 in an attempt to “foster better artistry, to safeguard black South African artists against exploitation, to make available a bursary for art studies, and to sponsor charity concerts”.<sup>126</sup> In the 1950s the Syndicate sponsored concerts with the intention of promoting cultural identity and socio-political aspirations. Whenever possible, the organisers made a point of paying the performers, thus opposing the “patronising taint of amateurism attached to the trophies awarded by the JBMF”.<sup>127</sup> Mngoma and Mphahlele, with Isaac Matlare, also started a magazine called *Voice of Africa*, designed to provide a commentary on issues affecting black South Africans. The magazine, which contained literary criticism, political articles and musical and educational reviews, was, however, banned after twelve issues, and in 1952 the Syndicate members were brought to court for subversion. The reason was that Mngoma had criticised the Eiselen Report that preceded the proclamation of laws on racially segregated education laid down in the Bantu Education Act of 1953. As a result, Mngoma, Mphahlele and Matlare were dismissed from their teaching posts.<sup>128</sup>

The following years became increasingly difficult for black performers. When in 1944, four years before the Nationalist Government came into power, Walter Nhlapho complained that “in this racialistic city, Bantu are forbidden admission into the ‘holy of holies’ City Hall”, concerts

<sup>121</sup> [http://www.classicalmusic.co.za/Pages/in\\_the\\_wings.htm](http://www.classicalmusic.co.za/Pages/in_the_wings.htm)

<sup>122</sup> *Rand Daily Mail* (December 20, 1947).

<sup>123</sup> D. Rycroft, “Zulu Male Traditional Singing”, *Journal of the African Music Society*, (Vol.1, No. 4, 1957): 35.

<sup>124</sup> S. Wilson, Interview with D. Coplan, September 16, 1976; quoted in D. Coplan, 1985: 169.

<sup>125</sup> *Bantu World* (March 5, 1955).

<sup>126</sup> *The Star* (May 3, 1952).

<sup>127</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 170.

<sup>128</sup> Khabi Mngoma, interview with Ludumo Magangane, University of Zululand, May 1997.

involving collaboration with white musicians were at least possible in various other venues, though they usually required special permission.<sup>129</sup> In the 1950s, fewer and fewer permits were granted, and non-whites were not allowed to perform either for a white audience or to be present at a concert which featured a white artist. Often the problem was concealed by the fact that few Africans could afford the cost of seats even if they were admitted. There were fewer still who could manage the cost of transport and other essentials to get to and from concerts.<sup>130</sup> Mathaela-Michael Masote, an influential choral Conductor who also contributed decisively to the establishing of black orchestras in South Africa, recalls that acquiring even the most basic conducting skills at this stage was not easy. He used to borrow a municipal overall from the City Council and, wearing it, slip into the Johannesburg City Hall during SABC orchestra rehearsals. Standing at the side doors he could observe and learn.<sup>131</sup>

Harassed by the police and the Government, many blacks turned to political agitation or left the country. Sheila Masote, the wife of Michael Masote, gave the following account of how Apartheid legislation restrictions cut into their lives and the lives of those around her:

I was born into a happy family... my father and mother both teachers. They stayed in the best place—Orlando West where you'd find the elite, the Mandelas, the Masekelas, the Sisulus, the Matthews... This was a beautiful place. My father [Zephania Mothopeng] was a cultural man – he was the first Chairperson of the Johannesburg Bantu Music festival that brought forth eisteddfodau, ... I married a highly cultured man the only man, the only black in Africa who holds a licentiate in violin teaching. He established the first black orchestra. I know what I'm talking about – but all this has crumbled. I had a family that was home and togetherness. That was destroyed. I couldn't realise any dream. As a young girl I lost role models, because at the time, in the sixties, that was when everybody left... The communal living crumbled, because of the system and the Special Branch. My father and mother were dismissed as teachers... my brother went into exile... My other brother turned into an alcoholic. He became violent... I used to go for ballet with ribbons in my hair, the only daughter in a well off family... we read, we talked politics, I'm not saying this to brag but to tell you what cultured, educated society existed in Orlando West... then people were arrested and others went into exile... this whole world crumbled.<sup>132</sup>

During these difficult times, music, and especially *amakwaya* performance, remained a significant bond among interested people. The performance and competition culture that had developed through the various eisteddfodau served to express grievances and aspirations. In that sense, they represent the sequel in the struggle for identity and recognition that had characterised black middle class communities since the nineteenth century. In Chapter 10 (page 358) we will see in more detail that black musicians, because of growing political restrictions in the early 1960s, had to rely on their own ingenuity to create forums for development. As a result various groups were formed like the Jubilee Orchestra, the Ionian Music Society, the Carpe Diem Choir, the Pretoria Adult Choir and the legendary Soweto Teachers' Choir, with its musical director, Jabu Mazibuko.

The importance of the JBMF for the development of *amakwaya* lies particularly in the fact that the Festival sought to take over and broaden the eisteddfodau of the Transvaal African Teachers' Association. By widening the efforts of the Teachers' Associations to include the promotion of adult choral groups, it contributed fundamentally to the popularity of *amakwaya* practice in black communities throughout South Africa today. In this respect the Festival, which “fizzled out in the

<sup>129</sup> W. Nhlapho, “This is Johannesburg”. *Ilanga* (November 11, 1944).

<sup>130</sup> *The Rand Daily Mail* (September 25, 1965).

<sup>131</sup> M.-M. Masote quoted in Iliska Crossley, “A Messiah for the Rainbow Nation”, available online: [http://www.classicalmusic.co.za/Pages/in\\_the\\_wings.htm](http://www.classicalmusic.co.za/Pages/in_the_wings.htm).

<sup>132</sup> S. Masote quoted in Antjie Krog, *Country of my Skull* (Johannesburg: Random House, 1998): 56-7.



1970s”,<sup>133</sup> can be seen as paving the way for the NCF, at present the “biggest and most prestigious event of its kind in the southern hemisphere”,<sup>134</sup> with more than 300 choirs auditioning annually. The NCF has had a significant influence on the performance practice and the aesthetic of *amakwaya*. The next section will outline this influence in some detail, beginning with an account of the origin of the festival itself.<sup>135</sup>



Figure 8.9: Programme of the Ford Choirs and Contest 1983

<sup>133</sup> Khabi Mngoma, interview with Ludumo Magangane, University of Zululand, May 1997; The Johannesburg Bantu Music Festival took place between the years 1947-1975. See also Khabi Mngoma, *Choral Technique – a Guide for the Chorister, Conductor and Adjudicator, with Historical Aspects of a Choral Tradition among Black South Africans*, Ford Choirs in Contest organised by Future Marketing, (Ford South Africa, 1980): 3.

<sup>134</sup> *Drum* (February, 1992): 32.

<sup>135</sup> Ludumo Magangane, presently Chairman of the NCF adjudication panel is currently in the process of compiling a detailed history of this event and Douglas Reid, who served the NCF for many years as an adjudicator, intends to include his experiences as a Chairman of the adjudicators' panel in a semi-autobiographical publication *Music Through my Eyes*.

### 8.3.3 Khabi Mngoma and the National Choir Festival

Contrary to the popular belief,<sup>136</sup> Khabi Mngoma did not initiate the idea of the festival, as he himself admitted: “The Ford Motor Company did try somebody else”.<sup>137</sup> Ludumo Magangane confirms this:

When I interviewed Khabi Mngoma two years before he died, I indicated this to him, everybody says you started the NCF. He says no, he did not. And I said who? Ford started the competition. And the competition was mainly for black choirs. And then Ford settled the competition because they wanted more visibility in the black communities as a car company.<sup>138</sup>

It all started in 1978. The Company looked for a field where it could launch a marketing campaign. One of the main reasons was that increasing foreign criticism of South Africa’s Apartheid policy affected her trade relations with foreign companies. Ford “recognised the need to contribute towards preserving the cultural heritage of South Africa” and decided to broaden its development programme in order to justify its continued involvement in the country.<sup>139</sup> After considering the question of how to support black communities, Ford allowed the choice in this public relations exercise to fall on choral music since the growing interest in and popularity of choral events, and particularly competitions, promised wide exposure. Another reason was that Ford intended to target the black middle class, which made *amakwaya* the most suitable area of investment. Ford entrusted Future Marketing, an event managing company, with developing a concept of a choral competition and bringing it to realisation:

Ian Bernhardt and Mr. Davidson were running an agency, a promotion agency called Future Marketing. They – as a promotion agency – were asked by the then director [D. B. Pitt] of the Ford Motor Company to come up with a scheme of establishing a choir festival, which would increase or promote the image of the Ford Motor Company. The company had to justify its stay in the country – South Africa – and must be seen to be contributing to improving the quality of life of Black people. So they came up with this idea.<sup>140</sup>

The result was branded as Ford Choirs in Contest. The first competition, which attracted thirty choirs from the Johannesburg area,<sup>141</sup> proved to be problematic, as Ludumo Magangane remembers:

So in the first year – I know the first year was 1978 because I with our church choir took part in those finals – competitions did not go according to how Ford liked them to go... [the problem was] the whole organisation, even getting choirs and all that, because the people who were involved, they were not musicians themselves, just professionals running a PR company who were asked to put this choir competition together.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>136</sup> For instance Khabi Mngoma, *Study of the Musicology of African Music in South Africa*, unpublished MS quoted from I. M. Burger, 1990: 378ff; also D. Reid, “The Old Mutual/Telkom National Choir Festival: a 1999 Choral Perspective”, in *Ars Nova* (Vol. 31, 1999 & Vol. 32, 2000): 58.

<sup>137</sup> Khabi Mngoma, interview with Ludumo Magangane, University of Zululand, May 1997.

<sup>138</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Springs, February 12, 2001.

<sup>139</sup> D. B. Pitt, in the foreword to Khabi Mngoma, 1980.

<sup>140</sup> Khabi Mngoma, interview with Ludumo Magangane, University of Zululand, May 1997.

<sup>141</sup> P. J. Nhlapho, and Sibongile Khumalo, 1993?: Section 3, *The Eisteddfod* (no page numbers); the Programme for Ford Choirs 1982 contradicts Nhlapho’s and Khumalo’s findings by stating that thirty choirs from all over southern Africa had enrolled in the inauguration year of the festival.

<sup>142</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Springs, February 12, 2001.



Ford realised from this initial setback that, in order to meet the requirements for a successful choral event, it had to consult someone who knew the choral tradition intimately. Future Marketing started to look “for famous names in choral music – and that was Khabi Mngoma. So they went to him and asked him to come over and help them. Give this competition some better shape...”<sup>143</sup>

In an interview, Khabi Mngoma told Ludumo Magangane about his involvement with Ford Choirs in Contest:

Ian Bernhardt [from Future Marketing] had known of my involvement with the Johannesburg Bantu Music Festival. They asked me to put a proposal or a modus operandi of how to run a festival. So I put that book together to serve that purpose, and they felt, it had such practical advise on going about sorting out various things that they would like to print it, and called it Choral Technique.<sup>144</sup> It was actually – the grip was to provide a modus operandi on how to set up a festival, to make it what it is now.<sup>145</sup>

The booklet not only provided a concept for Ford Choirs in Contest, but became a sort of bible for the participating choirs. They regarded it as a manual for success in the competitions. As a result, it had an enormous impact on the musical ideas and performance practice of the choirs.

At the time when Ford approached him, Mngoma had already made a name for himself and was respected as “one of the best choral music conductors and trainers in education”.<sup>146</sup> One of his theories that assumed virtually the status of a dogma was that “tempered pitch in which Western music is conceived, is different in its sounds from acoustical pitch which obtains in all African singing”.<sup>147</sup> I will discuss later and in more detail the theoretical context and the consequences of this statement, which had an important effects on *amakwaya* tradition (Chapter 13.1, page 350). With his “model choir”, as he called the Ionian Choir, and the Ionian Music Society, formed in the early 1960s, Mngoma had caused a major stir in the choral tradition. When he was asked to develop a strategy for the Ford Choirs in Contest, he saw an ideal platform for the wider dissemination of his ideas. George Mxadana, now the Chairman of the NCF management committee, explains:

[Mngoma’s] whole initial idea was to promote the standard of choral music in the African communities. Now why do I say to promote the standard of choral music in the black communities? As you well know that the black people sing extremely well but there was the question of how can we actually sing to tempered pitch? Because the problem of going off pitch sometimes. But in order to enhance this talent then it was necessary to begin in train people properly to sing in one pitch and introduce the accompanied music.<sup>148</sup>

However, it was not only this idea of raising standards that started to attract choirs in increasing numbers to the first sponsored choir competitions for adult choirs. Previously the winners of choral contests had been awarded trophies and certificates. For the first time in the history of *amakwaya* the concept of a corporate sponsor ensured a material incentive for the champion. Ludumo Magangane describes the impact that this innovation had on the choirs:

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> K. Mngoma, 1980.

<sup>145</sup> Khabi Mngoma, interview with Ludumo Magangane, University of Zululand, May 1997.

<sup>146</sup> Personal communication with George Mxadana, Johannesburg, February 08, 2001.

<sup>147</sup> K. Mngoma, 1980: 11-12. George Mxadana added another interesting aspect to Khabi Mngoma’s concept: “music is a form of communication and during the Apartheid era certain things could be sung but certainly not said. So music became a very good vehicle to be able to do that expression”. (Personal communication with George Mxadana, Johannesburg, February 08, 2001).

<sup>148</sup> Personal communication with George Mxadana, Johannesburg, February 08, 2001.

... those competitions from Mark Radebe's time up to the TUATA and ATASA times, the choirs that did win, only won trophies and maybe certificates. That's all that they won. ... And with no sponsorship for those competitions, a choir that had won, to a large extent had to transport itself to where the Finals would be – unless with a small subsidy from the body that had organised the local elimination. But otherwise the schools had to see to it that they raise funds or whatever, the parents had to pay for the children to go to either the provincial finals or the national Finals. But then with Ford coming to the picture for the first time there was prize money to be won – only at the finals, not at the eliminations. But choirs that had won the eliminations would be transported to the finals. Completely, they would be bussed over and they would be accommodated in a hotel. Whereas with these school choir competitions if you had won – I myself was exposed to that a number of years while I was teaching – you would actually be accommodated in a normal school, not a school with dormitories, just a normal classroom. Then you just come in and shift desks and put two blankets on the floor or whatever or on the desk themselves and sleep there... But at times we would get into nearby houses, just to request to be given the bathroom, and people would open their houses for teachers and for kids as well. So to have a nice wash, dress up for the competition, and come back and sleep.<sup>149</sup>

The son of Khabi Mngoma, Linda Mngoma, who now works as a concert organiser in Johannesburg, considers the commercialisation and the introduction of prize money to be responsible for the fact that many other initiatives in the field of choral music “died a natural death”.<sup>150</sup> Money was indeed a great incentive for the choirs and the practice of offering prizes for the winners proved to be a stimulating factor in the choral community. To the present day, choristers and their conductors talk excitedly about the inauguration year of Ford Choirs in Contest, when Ford donated a sixty-five seater bus to the Soweto Teachers' Choir, the winner of the competition. Thus the prospect of winning became even more desirable for the choirs. As a result “adult choirs mushroomed. [Singing] was not only a thing for the schools and the churches [anymore,] but even for the communities! Just because of this competition, because of the prizes and so on, those incentives. And that helped to develop the standard of choral music”.<sup>151</sup>

Thulasizwe Nkabinde's comment touches on the important fact that, by targeting adult choirs, church choirs and choirs from tertiary institutions, this contest was instrumental in developing choral music further in the communities. Ford Choirs in Contest, which eventually developed into the NCF, took up some important concepts developed in earlier competitions – by pioneers like Mark Radebe. In its focus on adult choirs, the NCF followed the leads of the Johannesburg Bantu Music Festival, which aimed to promote talent outside the schools. In fact the introduction of the Ford Choirs in Contest had a revolutionary effect on the composition of the choral community. Even though, prior to 1976, choral singing was popular amongst black middle class (as we have seen in the case of the various touring choirs coming from the communities), the common understanding was that choral music was more of an activity for school children, their teachers and maybe their parents than for adults.<sup>152</sup> This perception was, of course, largely conveyed by the choral contests, which were with some exceptions promoted and handled by Teachers' Associations. Moreover, up to the time of the Ford Choirs Contest, the adult sections of almost any competition, including those of the Johannesburg Bantu Music Festival, attracted chiefly teachers' choirs. This explains Thulasizwe Nkabinde's claim that “the teachers' choirs [were] the forerunners of what [are] now referred to as community choirs”.<sup>153</sup> He argued that the community choirs came into being when

<sup>149</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Springs, July 19, 2001.

<sup>150</sup> Personal communication with Linda Mngoma, Johannesburg, SABC, February 16, 2001.

<sup>151</sup> Personal communication with Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Johannesburg, SABC, July 17, 2000.

<sup>152</sup> Nhlapho, 1993.

<sup>153</sup> Nkabinde, 2000.

members of the communities started to join the teachers' choirs. In a later interview, Nkabinde explained in more detail that, before Ford Choirs in Contest,

there was no adult choir competition. You see, the Teachers' Associations, when they started their competitions, they used to have a category of adult choirs, as one category. And it didn't kick off very well, because you'd, for instance, have only two choirs from KwaZulu Natal and one choir from Transvaal. So they had that category of the adult choirs – they used to call it the teachers' choirs... It was just a category within the framework of the Teachers' Associations. You understand? But the concept of the adult choir competition was started by the NCF, which was sponsored by Ford that time. The NCF promoted the idea of adult choirs.<sup>154</sup>

Adult choirs not only developed out of teachers' choirs, but drew heavily on school resources. In most cases, adult choirs were conducted by teachers and used school facilities for their rehearsals. Although the majority of choristers were recruited from outside the school, conductors tended to fall back on good singers from their school choir and on teachers for additional support. This has not changed to the present day, as Joshua Radebe, Conductor of the Pietermaritzburg Choral Society, indicates: "I was relying on students of my school choir. They were fireworks, by four o'clock they were here".<sup>155</sup> This seems to be common practice, as Edward Mngadi, who works as Music Advisor for the KwaZulu-Natal Education Department, confirms: "Those people, they belong to adult choirs when they are still in schools. And if you came from a school that had good music you want to continue with it even outside school. And that is what they are doing. The more and stronger the choirs in schools, they get over to the communities".<sup>156</sup>

Within a short time, Ford Choirs in Contest grew to an event that in its sixth year drew 180 entries from twelve regions.<sup>157</sup> The amount of money invested in this choral event correspondingly increased during the last decades of the existence of the project: together with the income earned for running the Festival (in 1983 an amount of R645,000 was spent for the organisation of the competition whereas today the sponsors allocate more than two million rand) the prize money for the different categories has increased. This has certainly contributed to the fact that today the NCF is the most prestigious choral music event of South Africa.

When Ford eventually decided, because of political pressure, to sell the South African branch of their company to South African Motor Corporation (SAMCO), the competition was continued with the new sponsors and under the management of Co-ordinated Marketing. In the following years, after a number of changes, the event eventually became the NCF, co-sponsored by Old Mutual and Telkom. The annual provincial eliminations are usually held from August to October and the successful choirs meet for the national Finals in the last weekend of November or the first weekend of December. Whereas in the early years Khabi Mngoma had acted as chief adjudicator, in 1985 the system of a panel of adjudicators was introduced. Thulasizwe Nkabinde recalls that even then the influence of Mngoma was decisive, as "the majority of the panel at the NCF were the products of Prof. Khabi Mngoma".<sup>158</sup>

The system is still in place today whereby a panel of adjudicators, commonly referred to as "the table", reach their verdict 'by consent', as one of the adjudicators explains: "We all give a mark and then we discuss the mark and then we look if something is very close or something like that".<sup>159</sup>

<sup>154</sup> Personal communication with Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Johannesburg, SABC, February 15, 2001.

<sup>155</sup> Joshua Radebe (Pietermaritzburg Participatory Action Research Group 14<sup>th</sup> meeting May 18, 2000).

<sup>156</sup> Personal communication with Edward Mngadi, Durban, November 16, 1999.

<sup>157</sup> Souvenir Programme Ford Choirs, National Finals, Johannesburg, Milner Park Showgrounds, December 1983.

<sup>158</sup> Personal communication with Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Johannesburg, SABC, February 15, 2001.

<sup>159</sup> Personal communication with Peter Louis van Dijke, Cape Town, December 16, 2000.

The system originated, as George Mxadana explains, in the suggestion that the adjudicators should be brought together to “form an association of adjudicators or a panel of adjudicators where they could discuss matters of common interest and make sure that they are speaking in one voice”.<sup>160</sup>



**Figure 8.10:** “The table“ of adjudicators for the African Song, NCF finals 2000, Cape Town (from left : Isaac Tlou, Hugh Magagula, Ludumo Magangane, Ros Conrad, Griffiths Khanyile)

There is, however, some controversy about this as there “are many people who don’t want the adjudicators at the NCF to sit and talk”.<sup>161</sup> The practice of adjudication by consent is often criticised by choirs who feel that it is likely that a strong voice on the committee might dominate the process of decision-making. They argue that the committee could easily become corrupted. It is true that adjudicating ‘by consent’ disguises disagreement and results in a seemingly united judgement, and if the adjudicators were asked to come to their own conclusion and their individual marks were added to reach an overall result, the process might be more just. Douglas Reid remembers that school choir competitions in the 1960s used a system where

they had three different adjudicators – two or three. And then they put one on the desk there and one on the desk there and one on the desk over there and each one adjudicated. And then they took your adjudication and your mark from you and a separate panel added up the three and got the average of the three and then announced the winners and so on.<sup>162</sup>

Another problem that the choral committee has with the adjudicators’ panel is that the panel itself nominates new members. Isaac Tlou, a member of the NCF adjudicators’ panel, describes the prerequisites for and the procedures of nomination:

<sup>160</sup> Personal communication with George Mxadana, Johannesburg, February 08, 2001.

<sup>161</sup> Personal communication with Douglas Reid, Pretoria, February 14, 2001.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*



We have to submit a survey: it must be a known choral music practitioner. We must know that he can train the choir. He must have academic musical training. For example, he must have at least a BA or a higher degree in music... we are discussing this in the bosberaad. We will judge the person as he comes. We will look at exactly what he has.<sup>163</sup>

Some of the choirs are highly critical of the fact that “they are all academics in the panel – theory academics”. What they would rather see are adjudicators who have had more experience in the field of singing. As one conductor explained to me,

[the NCF] is a singing competition! It’s different from a music competition, because you don’t play instruments there. You don’t play instruments, you don’t write in theory, you don’t do all other aspects of music. We just sing. So to me I rather identify it as a singing competition. And it should be handled by singing teachers.

Criticism of the adjudicators of the NCF has grown in recent years. After the Finals in Cape Town in December 2000, Ephraim Mlangeni, director of the Soweto Fuba School of Music, wrote to the editor of *The Sowetan*:

Adjudication is another problem [of the NCF]. If the festival does not look into this it will kill the spirit of choral music. It is interesting to note that adjudicators are actually the management of the festival. It is a bit unfair for some people to want to do it all and not give others an opportunity to share their musical expertise. There is a great pool of adjudicators in the country and the festival should open up for other people to share their expertise, and stop making the national event exclusive to a chosen few.<sup>164</sup>

Be this as it may, Ford was instrumental in creating a wealth of new choirs in the communities, and it became “the envy of many other companies” as the success of its intervention made them realise the investment potential of community-based choral competitions and festivals.<sup>165</sup> To use the words of Douglas Reid, who served as Chairman of the adjudicators panel for a long time, the festival “was a central one, ... it proliferated right throughout the country”.<sup>166</sup> Among the major festivals are:

- Caltex-Cape Argus Massed Choir Festival, held in May in Cape Town;
- The two Nation Building Massed Choir Festivals, held in Johannesburg in September, and in Durban in November, both festivals sponsored by Caltex, SABC1 and *The Sowetan* newspaper. This is an annual event, which was started in 1993. The mass choir item always forms the climax of the programme;
- Sasol Choral Festival every August in Bloemfontein;
- Transnet SATICA (South African Tertiary Institutions Choral Association), staged in Johannesburg in September;
- Oude Meester features choirs that represent the various radio stations under the South African Broadcasting Corporation. Each choir sings a song of its own choice. At the end a massed choir presentation of the choirs involved.

Though the focus of the choral community is on competitions, some non-competitive festivals have gained importance in recent years. An outstanding example is the Sowetan/Caltex Nation Building Massed Choir Festival, which, held annually at the Standard Bank Arena in Johannesburg, has become a sort of monument in the history of *amakwaya*. The festival was initiated by Aggrey

<sup>163</sup> Personal communication with Issac Tlou, Johannesburg, February 11, 2001.

<sup>164</sup> E. Mlangeni, “Choir Festival was Badly Run”. *The Sowetan* (December 27, 2000).

<sup>165</sup> *National Choir Festival Newsletter* (No.1, 2000).

<sup>166</sup> Personal communication with Douglas Reid, Pretoria, February 14, 2001.

Klaaste, the editor of *The Sowetan* with a view to bringing hope and prosperity to African communities torn apart by violence. Mzilikazi Khumalo and Richard Cock, two active South African musicians, jointly share the musical directorship of this project. They are responsible for selecting the compositions to be performed and prepare the twenty choirs, which take part by invitation. The event is a spectacular one, with the Nation Building Orchestra, a racially integrated orchestra, and a mass choir of about 1,000 voices performing in the Standard Bank Arena, Johannesburg. The festival is also a platform for young aspiring soloists, who are chosen through audition.

There are many other smaller bodies that organise music contests in the black community, like the Dan Homes Music Contest, which since its inception in 1982 has catered for adults only, and the Imvunge Choral Music Festival, first formed in 1993 to promote adult choirs in KwaZulu Natal.<sup>167</sup> Furthermore churches such as the Methodist, AME, Lutheran, Presbyterian and the Dutch Reformed churches, hold denominational choir competitions.

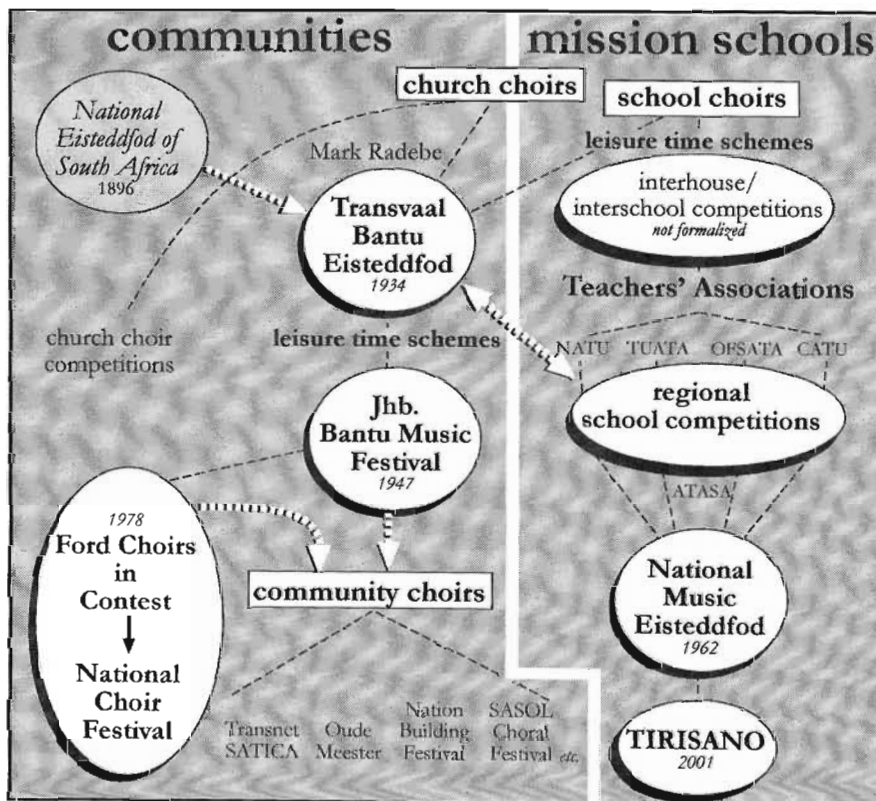


Figure 8.11: Development of eisteddfodau, choral contests and festivals

## 8.4 Summary

This chapter has traced the development of *amakwaya* eisteddfodau, choral contests and festivals from the early informal school choir competitions, to the NCF, the backbone of contemporary choral practice. The development of choral contests in the public sector started in the early 1930s with the Transvaal Eisteddfod. I have argued that this initiative was grounded, first of all, on the missionaries' conception of organising and moralising the leisure-time of their converts, and, secondly, on the search of the black middle class for cultural autonomy within the framework of an African national culture. In taking over the Welsh concept of eisteddfodau, Mark Radebe, the

<sup>167</sup> See E. Pawa, 1995: 112-113 and Imvunge Choral Music Festival, (Minutes, 8 November, 1992).



“father of the Bantu Eisteddfod”,<sup>168</sup> aimed at the promotion of the educational and cultural standards and a sense of national identity. Motivated by the concept of an African national culture, Radebe sought to preserve and develop the individuality of Native music and at the same time encouraged the “finer refinements of European music”. The negotiation between tradition and modernity, the endeavour to integrate African and Western elements, remains an important aspect of *amakwaya* practice.

The success of the Transvaal Eisteddfod had a stimulating effect on the Teachers’ Associations, which started to set up competitions for their own members. Whereas initially these competitions were organised only on a provincial level, the various teachers’ organisations soon began to co-ordinate local efforts. The result was the National Music Eisteddfod, which was inaugurated in 1962 under the auspices of the Federal Council of African Teachers’ Associations (FCATA), an umbrella body of the provincial Teachers’ Associations, which later became the African Teachers’ Association of South Africa (ATASA). The effect of the increasing involvement of Teachers’ Associations was that competitions grew “into an obsession... it [was] unthinkable to think of the work of schools without linking it with singing”.<sup>169</sup> School competitions remain a central aspect of music education at schools to the present day. This was brought about by the continuous involvement of various Teachers’ Associations and from the 1980s by the emergence of corporate sponsors. For the past two years, however, these competitions have been on the brink of termination, as the Department of National Education has decided to unite all types of music competitions and music-related activities in one single national event. Though there are undoubtedly many arguments in favour of this latest development, Tirisano is the subject of controversy not only amongst the Teachers’ Associations, but also among various other members of the community who feel that this move represents a deplorable depletion of the rich variety of competition practice.

The NCF that developed out of the Ford Choirs in Contest started in 1978. It was based on previous concepts but introduced a decisive innovation. For the first time in the history of *amakwaya* a corporate sponsor provided a material incentive for the champion. The prospect of winning substantial prize money of thousands of Rands proved to be very attractive to the choirs, and has generated a highly competitive spirit among them. As a result the number of adult choirs has rocketed. Other significant innovations included prescribing pieces with accompaniment, at first with piano, and in recent years with orchestra, and creating separate categories for large and standard-sized choirs.

The competition uses a repertoire format that makes the inclusion of Western and African items mandatory. In Part Three, I will examine in more detail the history, the relevance and the contemporary tendencies of the sectionalised repertoire of *amakwaya* tradition as it is used today in competitions and festivals. In the following chapter I will discuss why it is that all those involved favour competitive festivals, and what the consequences are of today’s *amakwaya* groups’ reliance on competition for providing them with the main opportunities for performance.

<sup>168</sup> *Ilanga* (May 19, 1951): 15.

<sup>169</sup> *Tlakula* 1965: 18.



## Competition: Performance, Meaning and Motivation

*No man or woman who has a heart beating in his breast can afford to stay out of competition today.<sup>1</sup>*

By the end of the twentieth century, competitions had become the main focus of black African choirs. The excitement surrounding these events captured the imagination of a new generation. Just how they were capable of inspiring enthusiasm at schools has been eloquently described by I. E. Zwane of the Transvaal Native Teachers' Association, in an 1865 report. It is worth quoting in full:

What, may be asked, has the Music Competition got to do with the organisation of the school? Before Music Competitions, as we know them, came to being, schools took part in some type of singing. Apart from school concerts nothing else called for a high standard of singing except choir singing. Gradually, the standard of choir singing grew higher. The moment Music Competitions became the order of the day, a number of changes were noted. The choir conductor changed from being an ordinary person. He assumed a different status. He was preparing a choir for the Provincial Eisteddfods. The fact that he still had to enter for our elimination contest, at some stage, did not matter. This hurdle seemed non-existent. This rebirth of the teacher naturally flowed out and radiated to his choir. They became "non-ordinary" pupils. They belonged to "The Choir" that was to proceed to some distant city – Pretoria, or what have you. They became the envy of the non-singers – the crows of the school. As the competitions drew nearer, the parents felt the impact of this "movement". They had to attend to the wardrobe of the young ones. What parent would accept a second role in matters affecting its offspring? Fares had to be collected and submitted. This involvement brought the parents closer to the school. They were like warriors going out to battle whose fortunes were the fortunes of the whole community. The choir members were afforded the opportunity of seeing places they had never dreamt of in their young lives. This is still the feature of our present competitions. The teachers themselves accompanied the school choir to lend not only moral support, but also to visit places and see faces. Many a young teacher has met his better half in these outings. The competition period also served and still serves as a reunion for teachers.<sup>2</sup>

According to Zwane, choral competitions have developed into a kind of status symbol. Promoted by the schools, this interest soon spread into the communities. Mokale Koapeng, one of the most innovative composers and conductors in *amakwaya* community today, confirms that there are a large number of choirs that "exist for nothing else but competition. So they hop from one competition to the other".<sup>3</sup> At first glance the competitive side of music performance might seem to be of secondary importance. Why, in this case, this is not at all apt needs to be explained if we are properly to understand and critically evaluate this side of *amakwaya* tradition. What are the origins of this "urge to compete and win"?<sup>4</sup> In this chapter a sympathetic account of the 'lived experience' of

<sup>1</sup> I. E. Zwane, (December 1965): 15-6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Personal communication with Mokale Koapeng, Johannesburg, Parkhurst, February 13, 2001.

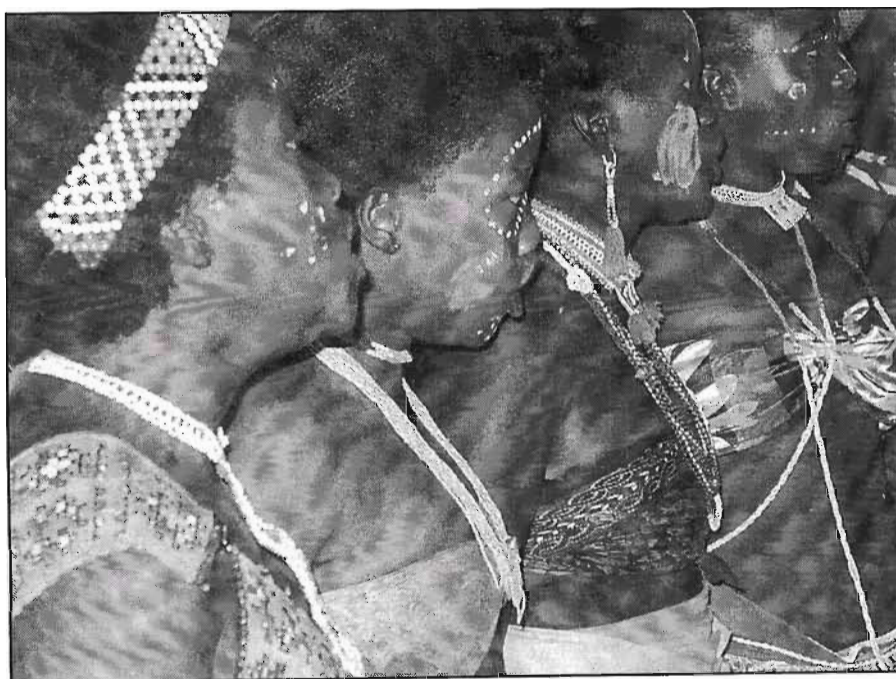
<sup>4</sup> E. Pewa, 1995: 146.

various members of the choral community will be given, largely in the words of the performers themselves. Some critical comments will then follow.

In order to understand this development, we have to reconsider our discussion of the role played by choral singing as a symbolic expression of black middle class identity (see Chapter 4.3.1, page 112). Increasingly competitions became a platform for expressing the ideas and ideals of a national culture. For a people largely without political or economic power, artistic excellence and its exhibition became symbolically significant. An intense focus on competition is also noticeable in other South African musical communities. Joseph Shabalala, leader of the internationally renowned *isicathamiya* group, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, remembers:

In 1966 was the year when we first went to the hall for performances. During the years 1964-1965 we just practiced after work, but we were not engaged in performances. Even then, going to the halls, I did it because my group-mates were constantly begging me since they wanted to test and measure their capabilities, since they have been practicing for so long that we should also go to other people and also enter for competitions to test ourselves.<sup>5</sup>

The widespread interest in contest amongst various forms of South African performance culture has its roots in the traditional life of South African black communities.



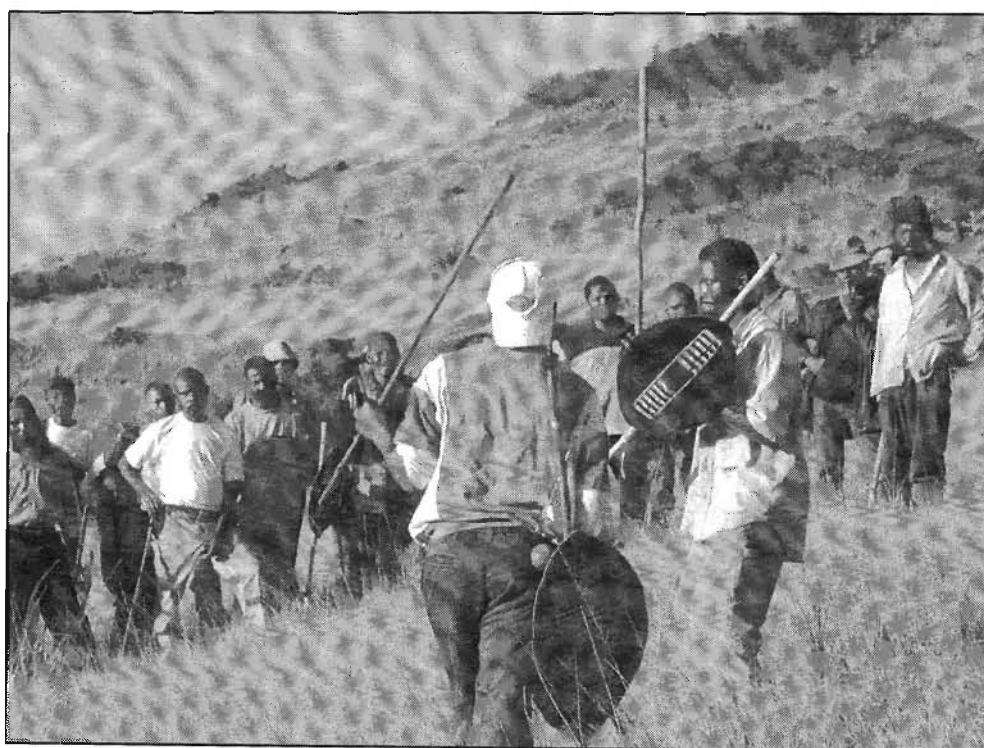
**Figure 9.1:** School choir competition, Bizana, Eastern Cape, May 2000

<sup>5</sup> Shabalala, J. quoted in V. Erlmann, 1996: 290.

## 9.1 Traditional Roots

*Competition to Africans is a way of life.*<sup>6</sup>

The practice of challenging one another has always been an important part of social life in black South African communities. According to Elliot Pewa, Lecturer at the University of Zululand, who wrote his Masters dissertation on music competitions and their influence on the choral genre, “competitiveness is one of the central characteristics of Zulu music”.<sup>7</sup> Present day music competitions, he says, “reveal aspects of African traditional cultural behaviour and, on occasions, some transformations”.<sup>8</sup> In traditional Zulu and other South African ethnic groups, competition is not confined to music or dance: other forms of contention include games, bullfighting and stick-fighting. The rationale of such contests is the training they provide in the development of social skills and behaviour. In Zulu society boys learn from traditional contests many of the skills that become important in later life. Zulu men are expected to be strong in the most difficult situations, to retaliate when provoked, but also to be witty and eloquent when the social occasion requires it. The image of *inkunzi* (bull) is applied even to those who excel in song, dance or soccer performance. Pewa explains that “the power of the metaphor lies in the fact that the bull is a strong animal that easily overcomes other animals by means of physical force”.<sup>9</sup> According to Linda Mngoma, stick fighting has always been an important test of excellence. He recounts that formerly when people met each other it was a customary for them to “greet each other and ask for a challenge. An *inselele* [stick fight challenge], which became like a sparring match, was like greeting this person”.<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 9.2:** *Competition in stickfighting during a wedding at Izingolweni (April 2001)*

<sup>6</sup> E. Pewa, 1995: 15.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*: 93.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*: 109.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*: 39.

Challenging other people was also done through musical performance. In fact, music competition has always been an integral part of Zulu social activities, such as weddings, beer-drinking, and meat-eating parties. In the traditional Zulu wedding ceremony, which is perceived by the ethnomusicologist Musa Xulu as “a musical event”,<sup>11</sup> the proceedings culminate in group singing and an elaborate programme of choral dances. On such occasions, choral groups representing the bride’s party (*umthimba*) and the groom’s party (*ikhethe*) strive to outdo one another in artistic excellence. No adjudicator is assigned, and the people themselves decide who the better performers are. I will come back to this important event later when discussing the origins of the neo-traditional repertoire performed by *amakwaya* groups (see Chapter 11.1, page 285).

The importance in Zulu culture of physical prowess and artistic skill is manifested in the concept of an *isoka*, the ideal young man who is very much loved by the young girls and generally very popular with his age-group – in short, the idol of the village. According to Absolom Vilakazi, such a man would be “skilled in stick fighting, and would probably excel in song and dance. A coward would have very little chance of becoming an *isoka*”.<sup>12</sup>



Figure 9.3: Molopo Choral Artists, NCF, Johannesburg, December 2001.

## 9.2 Competition Transformed

*We want to reach out into the international arena and compete with the best in the world. So the choirs must grow. And growing does not only mean sing better, it also means understand the world we live in.*<sup>13</sup>

The traditional spirit of competitiveness assumed new forms in urban life, where symbols of status ranged from the possession of Western consumer goods to intellectual achievements in education. To have an impressive stage presence and to be well dressed became the symbols of sophistication for members of the black middle class. Pewa points out that “tribal values were no longer

<sup>10</sup> Personal communication with Linda Mngoma, Johannesburg, SABC, February 16, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> M. Xulu, 1989: 142.

<sup>12</sup> A. Vilakazi, *Shembe, The Revitalization of African Society* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1986): 24.

<sup>13</sup> Personal communication with Chris Mhlongo, Durban-Westville, November 18, 1999.



articulated through bull-fights and stick-fights, but through leisure time activity".<sup>14</sup> The sport encouraged by urban municipalities, and music and dancing, all played an important role in continuing competitiveness as a cultural practice and value.<sup>15</sup>

When looking at the importance of competition in an urban context, it is essential to keep in mind that cultural practices cannot be investigated without considering socio-political circumstances. Though the efforts of *amakholwa* to achieve a sense of identity and self-worth by imitating Western culture had failed, the felt need for this was as persistent as ever. Competitive music events thus became a viable means of demonstrating their ability to excel in performance and to rise to "world-class levels",<sup>16</sup> which to the present day seems to be one of the main aims of *amakwaya*.

Apart from conveying messages to the outside world, competitive events serve the purpose of establishing strong bonds within both the choral community and the choir itself. It is the desire to compete that brings people together and therefore strengthens social bonds. The urge to be part and stay part of prestigious events is the force that keeps choristers rehearsing incessantly. Since competition is possible only when all the players involved accept and adhere to rules agreed upon, dedication to the common cause can become a major binding force for the participating individuals. This seems to be true for the competitive choral practice of other musical practices, like *isicathamiya*, where a limited community of choirs and their supporters come together each Saturday night.

As I have said earlier, in the context of black South African traditional communities, the identity of a man or woman was shaped in the comparison with others, if not necessarily in contests with them. Thus for the members of *amakwaya* groups competitive performance presents an opportunity to build prestige and respect. One indicator of a group's superiority, for instance, is the volume level it is able to achieve. By overpowering the other groups in terms of sheer vocal force, one can 'make oneself heard' as well as respected. This might seem to be rather crude as an aesthetic, but Israel Dzungare, Conductor of the Chitungwiza Harmony Singers (Zimbabwe), clarifies this point. Commenting on the finals of the National Choir Festival (NCF) 2000, he remarked that, in order to be a respected singer, "you must have a lot of energy – that is a better sound. And the shaping of the mouth, the tongue itself, and the cleanliness again. It affects the sound".<sup>17</sup> Thulani Maqungo, a member of the Gauteng based Tsakane Adult Choir, had a similar perception: "First of all you got to have power. Because without power, you are nothing. In some way you got to be supported by singing. And if you don't have power, really, you cannot survive".<sup>18</sup>

Another marker of superiority lies in a group's dress. Most choirs have a number of different robes, for, as Thembelihle Dladla of the Pietermaritzburg Choral Society explains: "...when you come to the stage on Sunday... you must come with another uniform than the one you showed off on Saturday".<sup>19</sup>

That there is nowadays an enormous interest in the competitions is beyond dispute. By exploring this interest, we will uncover more of how this elite class in South African society understands itself, and this in turn will allow us to make an informed critique of the role that competitions play in the musical, and indeed even in the political, scene. The following section examines the choristers' self-understanding of the competitions.

<sup>14</sup> E. Pewa, 1995: 59.

<sup>15</sup> See also Chapter 7 for more details of organising and moralising leisure-time.

<sup>16</sup> George Mxadana, Chairman of the NCF, in *Newsletter of the Old Mutual/Telkom National Choir Festival* (Nr 2, 2000): 1.

<sup>17</sup> Israel Dzungare, Chitungwiza Harmony Singers (Zimbabwe), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Thulani Maqungo, Tsakane Adult Choir, (Gauteng), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>19</sup> Thembelihle Dladla, Pietermaritzburg Choral Society (KwaZulu Natal), interview questionnaire, January 30, 2001.





Figure 9.4: St. Mary's AME Choir, NCF, Cape Town, December 2000

### 9.3 The Lived Experience: Exploring the Importance of Competition

*Competition... here we are showing our culture, values and norms.<sup>20</sup>*

"We are number one!" chants Thulani Mzobe of the Durban Serenade Choral Society as he and his fellow choristers storm the stage in a celebration of their victory.<sup>21</sup> Again, Chris Mhlongo, Chairman of the Durban-based choral association, Imvunge, is delighted because once again a choir from his stable has made it to the top. "It was for a moment like rising with the Good Hope Centre and floating around the world". Still in disbelief about what has happened in the past minutes, singers in other choirs hang their heads in disappointment. It is Sunday afternoon at Cape Town's Good Hope Centre. The last choir has just left the stage, enabling the adjudicators to deliver their comments and announce the winning choirs of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Old Mutual/Telkom National Choir Festival. This is what the twenty-two contesting choirs have incessantly worked towards during the past twelve months. "I can't believe that the Simon Estes Choral Group did it again. That is already the third time this choir has beaten us!" says Ephraim Leotwane, a twenty-eight year old bass of the Gauteng Choristers. Although he is convinced that "most of the choirs are looking for Gauteng Choristers because we are really good", he admits that "we have to work harder to win next year". In looking for an explanation for the decision of the adjudicators, he asks his fellow choristers: "What happened today with our soloists?"

This incident, which I witnessed in Cape Town, in December 2000, is a familiar one at many competitions. "There is only one winner – and this winner takes it all", commented Sidwell Mhlongo, Conductor of the Gauteng Choristers, when I congratulated him on achieving second

<sup>20</sup> Xolani Cele, Imizwili Choral Society, questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 03, 2000.

<sup>21</sup> The following quotations were recorded during the 23<sup>rd</sup> NCF Finals held at the Good Hope Centre in Cape Town (December 03, 2000).

position. (Sidwell had asked me to assist him with the preparations for this competition.) To my surprise, he did not seem at all delighted at our success. Quite to the contrary, he considered the second and third positions to be a defeat. This seems to be a common perception amongst the choral community, for I experienced a similar reaction two years earlier from Mongi Mzobe of the Music Paragons at the International Convention Centre, Durban, in December 1999. He was annoyed about the decision of the adjudicators, whose competence he regarded as very questionable.

The Finals of the National Choir Festival, the “biggest, oldest, and most prestigious choral event in southern Africa”,<sup>22</sup> held each year during the first weekend of December, mark the peak of the choral year. They provide an opportunity for choristers to measure themselves against other choirs from around the country. It is at this annual ‘moment of truth’ for the choral community that the champions of the year are chosen. The choirs work very hard to prepare for this crucial weekend: choristers, conductors and the organising committee devote countless hours to preparation.



Figure 9.5: *S.A Singers celebrating their triumph, (NCF, Johannesburg, December 2001)*

Obviously a desire to win is in a sense at the bottom of any competition. Yet there seems to be a special urgency in the *amakwaya* community that makes the members of the choirs concentrate almost exclusively on these events. Koapeng, who is very critical of this exclusive concentration on competition, has lost a number of choristers owing to his decision not to take part in competitions:

When we started, we were about forty-five [choristers]. The first thing I said, I said, “Guys”, in my first rehearsal with them, I said, “no competitions”. I then stated my reasons and said, “I’m sorry, that’s a non negotiable one”. Right, by June, I had twenty-five choristers. The sound was very small... But I’ve come to appreciate a chamber or a smaller choir. Perhaps it’s because of my extensive travelling and exposure.<sup>25</sup>

In another case, the choristers of the Durban Serenade Choral Society managed to overturn the decision of the Choir’s executive committee, who had felt that, since they had won the Finals

<sup>22</sup> Programme of the 23<sup>rd</sup> NCF Finals, Cape Town, 2001: 1.

<sup>23</sup> Personal communication with Isaac Tlou, Johannesburg, February 11, 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Programme of the 23<sup>rd</sup> NCF Finals, Cape Town, 2001: 1.

<sup>25</sup> Personal communication with Mokale Koapeng, Johannesburg, Parkhurst, February 13, 2001.

several times in a row, “this competition to us constituted no challenge any more”.<sup>26</sup> The feeling of those who supported the idea of not entering the competition was that it might be time to try to develop beyond the restrictions of competitions.

Mhlongo describes why it is so important for choirs to take part in choral contests. In his experience, choirs make sure they are part of the competitions “because they want to beat the best choir, and it helps them in raising the standards”.<sup>27</sup> He emphasised that the issue of repertoire development is central to most choral competitions organised in South Africa today. When asked to explain his understanding of this development in more detail, he argued that competitions “force the choirs to raise the standards. [Choirs] have to look at certain aspects of music and they [have to] go out and do research and do all sorts of things because they want to do better. So competition is helpful in that sense”. To support the choirs in this effort, the various choral competitions offer one-day workshops, which aim mainly at familiarising conductors with the prescribed repertoire. From the perspective of the audience, Mhlongo argues, competitions are more attractive than festivals: “Our audiences believe that [at competitions] the choirs do their best”.<sup>28</sup> Thanduxolo Zulu, an *amakwaya* veteran, agrees that “concerts are not interesting for black audiences, few people would come. They don’t like sitting and watching, they want to have fun, they want to participate, they want to come in and out when they want and sing along. Competitions are used by the black audience in that way: they are participating”.<sup>29</sup> This can be witnessed at almost all choral competitions today.<sup>30</sup>



Figure 9.6: SA Singers celebrating their triumph, NCF, Johannesburg, December 2001

### 9.3.1 The Motivation

In order to understand why there is such continuing enthusiasm for competitions, I conducted a series of direct interviews, using a questionnaire, with choristers from various choirs around the country (see above, Introduction, section on Methodology, for a detailed description of the interview questions). The questionnaire aimed at uncovering the experiences of those interviewed and their attitudes towards competitions.

A general observation of almost all interviewees was that competition maintains a feeling of excitement after a long time of preparation. “Competition is what we are working for”, says Maqungo.<sup>31</sup> For Musa, one of Ludumo Magangane’s Bonisudumo Choristers, the concentration on the event overshadows almost every aspect of life. Apart from what he does at the rehearsals, he says, the Conductor “must tell the choristers what to eat, what to drink, what not to eat and what not to

<sup>26</sup> Personal communication with Thabo Gumede, Durban, October 30, 2002.

<sup>27</sup> Personal communication with Chris Mhlongo, University of Durban-Westville, November 18, 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Personal communication with Thanduxolo Zulu, Durban, Playhouse, May 23, 2000.

<sup>30</sup> A short account of my experiences during the school competition in Bizana, Eastern Cape can be found in Chapter 10.3 (see page 278).

<sup>31</sup> Thulani Maqungo, Tsakane Adult Choir (Gauteng), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.



drink because it plays an important role”.<sup>32</sup> Whereas in the weeks following a competition conductors are often left to work with less than half of the choir, in the run up to the next competition this picture changes and the attendance of the choir members picks up radically. Andile Radebe explains: “Choristers go away for quite a long time and then come back later for the competition. This has been happening for years”.<sup>33</sup>

An important incentive for choirs to participate in competitions is the prospect of winning trophies and prize money, which in the case of the National Choir Festival amounts to tens of thousands of Rands. But there are a number of other factors motivating the conductors and choristers to put in a considerable amount of time preparing for ‘battle’.<sup>34</sup> It is worth looking at these in some detail.



**Figure 9.7:** *Choir members celebrating, (NCF, Johannesburg, December 2001)*

### 9.3.1.1 Seeing Places, Meeting People and a Sense of Belonging

An obvious attraction in belonging to a choir is the opportunity to travel and visit places. According to Modisa Obakeng and Ignatius Telebimo, choristers in the St. Mary’s Senior Choir, participating in competitions “is like tourism to us. It’s a great thing because it’s for the first time we came here to Cape Town”.<sup>35</sup> Maureen Ngubane, who sings for the Pietermaritzburg Choral Society, also regards travel as something that motivates her to take part in competitions: “I like to go and see places. That’s what I like about competition, you know? We don’t always have it here in Maritzburg. Sometimes it’s in Durban, sometimes it’s in Ladysmith or Newcastle”.<sup>36</sup> Travelling is an opportunity

<sup>32</sup> Musa, Bonisudumo Choristers (Gauteng), interview questionnaire, February 12, 2001 (some of the choristers choose to remain anonymous or to give only their first names).

<sup>33</sup> Andile Radebe, Pietermaritzburg Participatory Action Research Group, 14<sup>th</sup> Meeting, May 18, 2000.

<sup>34</sup> *Die Banier* Cape Town (June 1962).

<sup>35</sup> Modisa Obakeng and Ignatius Telebimo, St. Mary’s Senior Choir (Northern Cape), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>36</sup> Maureen Ngubane, Pietermaritzburg Choral Society (KwaZulu Natal), interview questionnaire, January 30, 2001.

for the choristers to escape the ordinariness of their lives. It challenges them and offers new experiences.

Moreover, competition creates community out of a group of individuals. Endorsing the group-dynamic effect of competition on the choirs, Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Conductor of the Johannesburg SABC Choir, agrees that socialising “is a very important aspect”.<sup>37</sup> Not only the common cause, but also the more general experiences like the trip on the bus or the shared hotel accommodation, have an important bearing on the identity of the choir and weld the members together. Put differently, it is because of these experiences that they perceive themselves as a group within the school or community. This was clearly an important experience for Ben Xatasi, a conductor from Johannesburg, who felt in the early 1960s that for the choristers the choir became “a family affair”.<sup>38</sup>

T. Zulu argues that, with so much uncertainty in their lives, the one thing that offers people a fairly stable framework is the choral community. For the choristers, he goes on to explain, belonging to a choir is “something fairly permanent in a situation where there is little permanence”.<sup>39</sup> For Kagisho Diphame of the Molopo Choral Artists, this sense of belonging even exceeds “the spirit of friendship [as] we feel the spirit of a family”.<sup>40</sup> Choristers are even prepared to give up old identities for their choirs. “I don’t have time for my friends now”, Oscar Mbeswa Ngubane from Pietermaritzburg says, “I’ve given up on that. But I’ll sacrifice everything for music and I can sacrifice my friendship with my friends”.<sup>41</sup> A similar urge to be part of the choral community is expressed by Falithenjwa Mkhize, Organiser of the Durban Serenade Choral Society, who told me that “for [him] the choir resembles a certain lifestyle”:

I can’t be without singing, I can’t be without the choir – without the choir it’s like being hungry. So when I wasn’t able to go to the rehearsals or I haven’t seen the choir for some time, I feel quite hungry and I feel the desperate need to return. There is something missing in my life when I am not able to be with my choir.<sup>42</sup>

Muntu Lukhozi told me how the decision to join the Gauteng Choirsters and his participation in his first choral contest at Ladysmith changed her life:

Before I joined the choir, most of the time I was just at home and just reading. I am not used to being with people and laughing and talking and you know. So I had to take it upon myself that this is a different environment and I have to try and fit. So they were going to the competitions in Ladysmith. That was four weeks after I joined. And I said I am going to go with them because I need to get to know them. And I did. They had organised the transport and we had to contribute a certain amount to be able to go there and to sleep in a hotel. But my sisters work there so I was going to sleep with them... Then, when we came back, there is this woman who normally trains the choir, she does train the choir and she will sing the solo in one of the songs that we are going to perform in Cape Town. She is trained as a musician. She had a girl there and this girl fell in love with me and we started playing and I completely let it go. And I was like myself. And when we came back it was so nice to be with them. So there was still that bit of uneasy feeling between her mother and I but it was ok, because we can’t let it go like that and just become friends. But when I went back to work I was like missing them so much and I was thinking maybe I should give her a call. I knew where she worked and I thought I just give her a call and I did and

<sup>37</sup> Personal communication with Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Johannesburg, November 21, 2000.

<sup>38</sup> Ben Xatasi in *The Rand Daily Mail* (April 16, 1964).

<sup>39</sup> Personal communication with Thanduxolo Zulu, Durban, Playhouse, May 23, 2000.

<sup>40</sup> Kagisho Diphame, Molopo Choral Artists (North West Province), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>41</sup> Oscar Mbeswa Ngubane, Pietermaritzburg Choral Society (KwaZulu Natal), interview questionnaire, February 14, 2001.

<sup>42</sup> Personal communication with Falithenjwa Mkhize, Durban, Playhouse, August 31, 2000.

she was very happy and from then we became friends and very close friends. It made me so happy to join this choir because at least I found friendship. Like I said I almost spent my time all alone at home – I stay alone here as I said, my family is in Durban. So it made me very happy because I know if she is not at my house, I will be at her house. Depending on the shifts we are working. So yes, now I do socialise with them [the choristers of the Gauteng Choristers] outside the choir environment.<sup>43</sup>



**Figure 9.8:** *Last instructions, Durban Serenade Choral Society, (NCF, Johannesburg, December 2001)*

### 9.3.1.2 Competition: Spirited Measuring

*...having a goal, to say, I want to take position one.*<sup>44</sup>

Most importantly, Thabane Sello asserts, competitions are an essential means of evaluating “where you stand compared with other choirs, compared with other provinces”.<sup>45</sup> Whereas some choristers like Dzangare are happy that he and his fellow choristers are good enough to take part in the NCF Finals, others are satisfied only when they return home victorious. When we go home, says Israel, “we are stars in Zimbabwe, even if we don’t win”.<sup>46</sup> Sibusiso Sotsaka of the Pietermaritzburg Choral Society argues that competitions “are very important for us because it’s there where you can measure yourself with other choirs. How far have you gone with your standard or with the preparation with the understanding of the song... What is the use of practice and not giving the people what you are doing”.<sup>47</sup>

According to Leon, a chorister of Mhluzi Choral based in Mpumalanga, participation in a choral contest, is as a matter of “testing... the power of the choir. How far we can go in beating other

<sup>43</sup> Muntu Lukhozi, Gauteng Choristers, interview questionnaire, November 18, 2000.

<sup>44</sup> Thulani Maqungo, Tsakane Adult Choir (Gauteng), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>45</sup> Thabane Sello, Maseru Vocal Waves (Lesotho), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>46</sup> Israel Dzangare, Chitungwiza Harmony Singers (Zimbabwe), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>47</sup> Sibusiso Sotsaka, Pietermaritzburg Choral Society (KwaZulu Natal), interview questionnaire, January 30, 2001.



choirs, [or else] to see how far we are away from other choirs. If we are far below the other choirs we try to pull up our socks and to get them”.<sup>48</sup> This is supported by Ray Kantuli, an *amakwaya* veteran, who sees it as a logical consequence of the spirit of competition that “if you see somebody doing something good and you have got a constructive jealousy, you want to be above that person”.<sup>49</sup>

Competitions, as we have seen before, are the culmination points of long months of preparation. When the day of competition finally arrives, the choirs commonly perceive being measured against other choirs to be essential. Says Maqungo,

I mean you have got to prove yourself of what you are doing. We don't have to rehearse and rehearse and rehearse only... You see, we also have got to prove a point to say: this is what and why we are rehearsing. You can not go to a competition having not prepared, and we can't allow the situation that we just sing maybe to entertain people, say to be invited in the weddings and so on and so on. It's unlike preparing for a concert – it's different... you got a goal – you're going there in that competition, having a goal, to say, I want to take position one.<sup>50</sup>



**Figure 9.9:** *Getting ready for the competition, choristers of the Durban Serenade Choral Society, NCF, Johannesburg, December 2001)*

<sup>48</sup> Leon, Mhluzi Choral (Mpumalanga), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>49</sup> Personal communication with Ray Kantuli, SABC Johannesburg, February 14, 2001.

<sup>50</sup> Thulani Maqungo, Tsakane Adult Choir (Gauteng), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

## 9.3.1.3 Being at Centre-Stage

*We put ourselves on the stage to see where we are.<sup>51</sup>*



Figure 9.10: Polokwane Choral Society, NCF, Johannesburg, December 2001

The desire to be on stage is universal among performers. It is, however, the special urgency of this desire in *amakwaya* and the way the choirs adapt Western concepts of performance and competition to their needs that makes their performance practice different. Thembelihle Dladla regards the choral contest as a ‘moment of truth’. It is an excellent opportunity, she argues, to “put ourselves on the stage to see where we are”.<sup>52</sup> The idea of ‘being at centre-stage’ is an important one for the choristers: the stage is a space for competing, for showcasing talent and communicating identity.<sup>53</sup> In a number of my interviews, ‘stage’ is an important word used in contexts like “getting ready for the stage”, “seeing how they [other choirs] sing, how they present themselves on stage” and “banning a choir from singing on stage”.<sup>54</sup> Both conductors and choristers alike envisage taking their place on stage after the long hours of rehearsals prior to a competition. But for the choirs, the stage has a meaning that goes beyond that of a ‘battle-ground’. Whereas in traditional Nguni society everyone was encouraged, even required, to participate in music-making and dancing, Western culture has developed the idea of a highly specialised, professional musician. The concept of a performance that distinguishes between performer and audience is a Western construct, which is not applicable in the context of South African black traditional practices. Zakhele Fakazi explains: “When Zulus celebrate they don’t sit like Western people right through the performance, but the audience is part

<sup>51</sup> Thembelihle Dladla, Pietermaritzburg Choral Society (KwaZulu Natal), interview questionnaire, January 30, 2001.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> For a discussion of *amakwaya* and its negotiation of notions of identity, see Chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>54</sup> Mathilda, Bonisudumo Choristers (Gauteng), February 12, 2001; Maureen Ngubane, Pietermaritzburg Choral Society, KwaZulu Natal, interview questionnaire, January 30, 2001; Thembelihle Dladla, Pietermaritzburg Choral Society, KwaZulu Natal, interview questionnaire, January 30, 2001.

of the performance".<sup>55</sup> The significance of this performance practice can be further clarified by reference to the concept of 'stage'. When traditionally orientated black South African communities celebrate, communal music making and dancing will simply happen at any central spot. Western culture, by contrast, has created the 'stage' – a symbol of the division between those who listen and those who entertain. *Amakwaya* conductors and choristers perceive the fact of being literally placed above the audience as granting considerable status and power. Moreover, the very nature of this elevated, highly organised space has an important bearing on performance practice and aesthetics. During the competitions choirs make sure that they conform to the necessary 'stage etiquette' and present themselves in a 'civilised' and Westernised way. The rules of this stage etiquette are carefully guarded by the Master of Ceremonies and by the adjudicators, who base their assessment of a choir partly on its stage presentation. Peter Louis van Dijk, for instance, a member of the NCF adjudicators' panel, considers "stage presence [and] the way they [the choirs] posture on stage" to be important.<sup>56</sup> This is confirmed by the comments of Ros Conrad, who, when speaking on behalf of the adjudicators' panel at the NCF Finals at Cape Town in December 2000, judged that the "moving on and off the stage was done in a professional way with confidence... most choirs showed a good posture".<sup>57</sup> For the conductors and choristers, the fact of 'being on stage' has much to do with showing their abilities in order to achieve popularity. Obakeng and Telebimo regard "competitions [as giving] you the chance to make your choir popular. That is why we came here, to sing, we are looking for popularity".<sup>58</sup> Every choir that I worked with was very conscious of the fact that it was important to promote the choir's image wherever and whenever possible. During the Finals of the NCF in Cape Town, Tshepo Moreothata from the Kimberley Spoornet Choir, for example, was very concerned that "people realise what potential our choir has".<sup>59</sup>

#### 9.3.1.4 To Be Part of a Winning Team

*Join a choir... a winning choir!*<sup>60</sup>

Given these attitudes it is not surprising that in his response to the questionnaire, Thabane Sello, who sings with the Lesotho based Maseru Vocal, should highlight the importance of 'being part of a winning team': "And it was very nice for me to join a choir... a winning choir. Because I don't think anyone likes to be associated with losers".<sup>61</sup> A similar position was taken by Thokozani Ndolomba, a chorister of the Pietermaritzburg Choral Society, who felt that "if you join a choir which is not successful, you waste your time... you want to be successful, you want to be recognised and known".<sup>62</sup> To be part of a winning choir makes you proud, argues Sello: competitions are "a very important part of history for me, something to tell my kids about, because we are given a certificate... I can frame that for even the whole of my kids and my friends can see: oh this guy,

<sup>55</sup> Personal communication with Zakhele Fakazi, Marianhill, November 05, 1999.

<sup>56</sup> Personal communication with Peter Louis van Dijke, Durban, December 06, 2000.

<sup>57</sup> Dr. Ros Conrad, giving the judgements of the adjudicators at the end of the NCF Finals, Cape Town, December 03, 2000.

<sup>58</sup> Modisa Obakeng and Ignatius Telebimo, St. Mary's Senior Choir (Northern Cape), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>59</sup> Tshepo Moreothata, Kimberley Spoornet Choir, questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>60</sup> Thabane Sello, Maseru Vocal Waves (Lesotho), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Thokozani Ndolomba, Pietermaritzburg Participatory Action Research Group, 14<sup>th</sup> meeting, May 18, 2000.

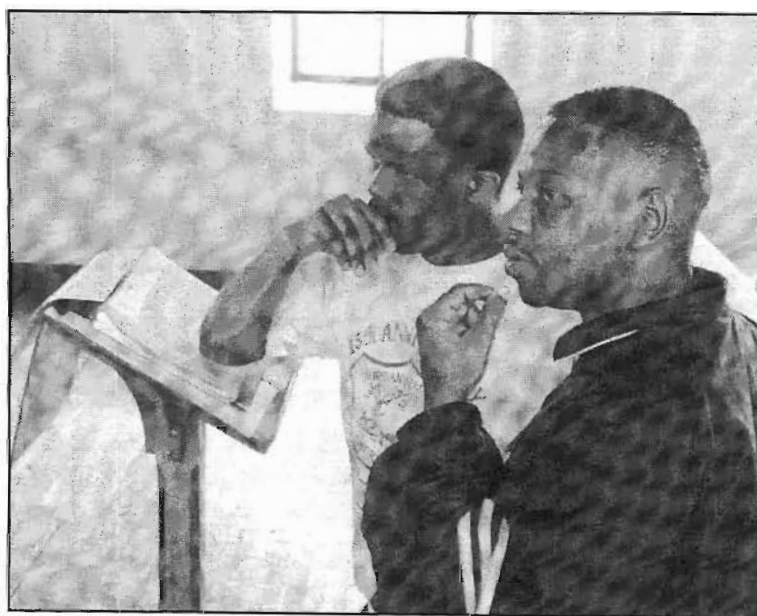


jo!”<sup>63</sup> Fasion Zondi is very proud to report that “we always were the winning choirs because of the conductors I’ve met. Even at school I usually got winning positions”.<sup>64</sup> When the winning streak of the Pietermaritzburg Choral Society came to an end and there was no hope of the choir’s regaining the form it had had at the beginning of the 1990s, Zondi left it in order to join the more promising SA Singers. Although I said earlier that choirs become family for the choristers, loyalty to the conductor and the fellow choristers seems to be partly determined by the success of a choir, and in that respect the comparison to ‘family’ is clearly inappropriate (see Chapter 3.1.3, page 69). Magangane describes that, after a series of failures at competitions, “choristers will feel there is no progress. They are tempted to try another choir. So you will find that there is lots of movement from one choir to another”.<sup>65</sup>

### 9.3.1.5 Being a Soloist: to Showcase Talent and Become Popular

*Definitely I need to be a soloist, if I can.*<sup>66</sup>

What seems to be exceedingly desirable for members of *amakwaya* groups is the prospect of excelling as soloists. This was confirmed by Peter Morake, Membership Officer of the South African Music Rights Organisation (SAMRO), who claimed “every chorister’s vision is to be a soloist”.<sup>67</sup> The inclusion in the repertoire of extensive solo passages allows for the display of individual skills. The selection of soloists before a competition is a kind of contest in itself. This process can often last for weeks and every chorister tries to do his or her best to attract the attention and approval of the conductor and the committee. I witnessed this procedure repeatedly when I was coaching choirs for the annual NCF. In order to decide upon which soloist should participate in the 2001 NCF, the Durban Serenade Choral Society elected a special selection committee and developed a specific selection procedure by means of a detailed questionnaire. After the most promising soloists had been selected, the final process of deciding on the most satisfying combination of soloists took several days. As the total number of choir members by far exceeded the maximum number of choristers allowed on stage, each member of the choir had to go through a similar selection process in order to secure his or her bus ticket to the Finals (see Figure 9.11 and 9.12).



**Figure 9.11:** *Thabo Gumede and Siyabonga Pi' Ngcobo from the Durban Serenade Choral Society discuss the line-up of the choir*

<sup>63</sup> Thabane Sello, Maseru Vocal Waves (Lesotho), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 03, 2000.

<sup>64</sup> Fasion Zondi, SA Singers (Durban), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 03, 2000.

<sup>65</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Springs, July 19, 2000.

<sup>66</sup> Ephraim Leotwane, Gauteng Choristers (Gauteng), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 03, 2000.

<sup>67</sup> Personal communication with Peter Morake, Johannesburg, SAMRO, February 09, 2001.

**TENTATIVE LINE UP FOR THE NCF PROJECT - 2001**  
BLESS THE GLAD EARTH WITH HEAVENLY LAYS by J F Handel

	SOPRANOS	CONTRALTOS	TENORS	BASSES
1	27. Mazya	Mhlangeni	Nkululeko	Sau
2	28. M. J. Zulu	Zulu	Zulu	Tobe
3	29. Mazya	Zanele Moko	Tham	Kiloyi
4	30. C. L.	Moko	Sandile	Mike
5	31. B. Ndlovu	B. Ndlovu	Blomo	Lugongolo
6	32. G. Nkomo	Thambo	Blomo	J. Yane
7	33. Madoli	M. Yadi	S. Yadi	J. Yane / Ngqweni
8	34. Wa	S. Yadi	S. Yadi / Moko	Etattemba
9	35. S. Yadi	Moko	Moko	Thambo
10	36. M. Yadi	M. Yadi	S. Yadi	Dominique
11	37. M. Yadi	Thambo	S. Yadi / Solly	Zandi
12	38. M. Yadi	M. Yadi	M. Yadi	Moko
13	39. M. Yadi	M. Yadi	M. Yadi	S. Yadi
14	40. M. Yadi	M. Yadi	M. Yadi	Z. Yadi
15	41. M. Yadi	M. Yadi	M. Yadi	Nyabuze
16	42. M. Yadi			
17	43. M. Yadi			
18	44. M. Yadi			
19	45. M. Yadi			
20	46. M. Yadi			
21	47. M. Yadi			
22	48. M. Yadi			
23	49. M. Yadi			
24	50. M. Yadi			

19/4/01

Figure 9.12: The line up of the Durban Serenade Choral Society for the Finals of the National Choir Festival in Johannesburg, 2001



Figure 9.13: Indlamu, (Izingolweni April, 2002)

During my interviews I became aware that today many members of *amakwaya* groups aspire to be soloists. Oscar Ngubane, for example, hoped “to be a soloist maybe when the time goes on. I think that’s all I want”.<sup>68</sup> In a similar vein, Ephraim Leotwane declared: “Definitely I need to be a soloist, if I can”.<sup>69</sup> The custom of the individual stepping out from the group is rooted in traditional Nguni musical performance practice. While it allows everyone to join in, it also offers all participants the opportunity of sharing their individual skills.

Thus African performance practice may be seen to incorporate the dialectic of identity discussed earlier, recognising the claims of both the group and the individual (Chapter 3.1, Page 65). This is evident in the Zulu *indlamu* dance performance, which today is often part of a traditional wedding ceremony: the singing and clapping of the entire group is juxtaposed to the

<sup>68</sup> Oscar Mbeswa Ngubane, Pietermaritzburg Choral Society (KwaZulu Natal), interview questionnaire, February 14, 2001.

<sup>69</sup> Ephraim Leotwane, Gauteng Choristers (Gauteng), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 03, 2000.

dancing of individuals, who step out in front of the group. This concept, one might argue, is manifested even in the structure of most Nguni music (e.g. call and response and cross-rhythms).<sup>70</sup>

The marked preference for compositions with solo passages seems to relate to traditional black South African concepts of performance. The urge to showcase individual skills in the form of solo parts has had an important effect on the development of *amakwaya* repertoire and accounts for the gradual drift towards a preponderance of works taken from oratorio and, more recently, opera. For demonstrating vocal skill, opera takes first place. Choristers, like Thabo Tabane from the Ga-Rankuwa West U.R.C. Choir, are proud of having mastered opera, which apparently is regarded as one of the most difficult parts of the repertoire: “When I talk of limitations, initially I thought: Well, there is no choir which can perform an opera song all by itself. You need maybe people from Europe and stuff like that. But it’s possible, they [referring to choirs like the Durban Serenade Choral Society and the Simon Estes Choral Group<sup>71</sup>] did. They sang the ‘La Traviata’ song, very excellent!”<sup>72</sup>

Though most of the choral singers interviewed stress the achievement factor as being the main motivation for going to competitions, there are also some choristers, like Khanyo Gabuza of the Pietermaritzburg Choral Society, who are convinced that winning is only one important aspect: “I think, winning is not all that, that’s why you don’t just give up when you lose. You are not going there just to win, win, win, win. No! You want to learn and also have fun”.<sup>73</sup>

### 9.3.1.6 Competition – a Learning Experience

*Being a clever singer you must learn while they [other choirs] are singing. You don’t have sit down and relax – sit down and pick some notes! That’s what makes you be successful.*<sup>74</sup>

Zondi, who sings with the SA Singers, a choir that was formed in 2000 by a breakaway group from the Durban Serenade Choral Society, thinks that the measuring of choirs against one another is of central importance in competitions. Choral contests, he adds, encourage “[us] to test ourselves... and to see the best choir and try to imitate them. In fact it is important to see where our level is compared to other choirs”.<sup>75</sup>

The urge to be victorious spurs the choirs carefully to analyse their shortcomings at the competitions in order to improve their position in the following year. Ray Kantuli explains that the driving power behind choral contests is “constructive jealousy, which tells you that you want to be above that person”.<sup>76</sup> In that sense, Kantuli continues, competition becomes an effective method of “[correcting] ourselves”.<sup>77</sup> This mechanism of correcting shortcomings in a process of self-critical evaluation determines training for the following year. Zondi explains: “To listen to the others, it’s good for me. I learn the way they sing. I can feel that this choir is so good in a way that I try to

<sup>70</sup> See Chapter 11.2; also E. Pawa, 1995: 93.

<sup>71</sup> A choir named after the African-American bass singer.

<sup>72</sup> Thabo Tabane, Ga-Rankuwa West U.R.C. Choir (North-West Province), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>73</sup> Khanyo Gabuza, Pietermaritzburg Choral Society (KwaZulu Natal), interview questionnaire, February 14, 2001.

<sup>74</sup> Sibusiso Sotsaka, Pietermaritzburg Choral Society (KwaZulu Natal), interview questionnaire, January 30, 2001.

<sup>75</sup> Fasion Zondi, SA Singers (Durban), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 03, 2000.

<sup>76</sup> Personal communication with Ray Kantuli, SABC Johannesburg, February 14, 2001.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.



imitate. And we go and practice”.<sup>78</sup> A similar point was made by Dzangare who emphasised that “we must know why they [other choirs] have beaten us. We fix all those mistakes and make corrections. By doing that, the standard is very high. Next time when we come, we beat them. So we keep our standard”.<sup>79</sup> In other words, by igniting the ambition of choirs, competitions become a learning experience and a means of improving their standard. The observation at competitions of other, potentially better choirs in order to learn from them is important for conductors and choristers alike. Sello is convinced that “it’s a good lesson, to hear other choirs. We are going to get some things which we didn’t know before, you know. The way they sing, they stand, their clothes, I mean they wear, you know. But especially how other choirs sing, you know”.<sup>80</sup> Tabane regards the development of skills as an integral part of *amakwaya* competition: “If we were to sing and sing without competing we definitely wouldn’t have enough to develop. By competing all the year I have to train and be in a better position to beat someone. And in that way it develops my music skills”.<sup>81</sup> This is why Musa from the Bonisudumo Choristers recommends that her fellow choristers take part in competitions: “Actually I like to recommend that to other choir members, to join the choirs which compete. Because it’s really improving the standard of the choir because you are competing – and if you know that you are competing, you do your best”.<sup>82</sup>

Winning choirs, especially if they prove their quality over a number of years, become a source of inspiration. Maureen Ngubane pointed out that the Durban Serenade Choral Society became a model for her: “their sound is like wonderful – almost perfect”.<sup>83</sup> The interviews reveal that conductors and choristers not only copy victorious choirs but also look for models outside the choral community. Sello, for instance, is convinced that “if you want to be a good singer, you have to do exactly what you copied from someone you like, example Pavarotti. Most of us want to sing like Pavarotti”.<sup>84</sup>

Given these representative views, it is not surprising that many choirs attend the competitions as part of the audience though they may not yet be in a position to compete. Thokozani Ndolomba, who participated in the Pietermaritzburg Action Research Group, was determined to organise a trip to the finals of the school competitions because she felt her choir should “see other children singing because they have no idea at all what real choir music is”.<sup>85</sup> Joshua Radebe encouraged her in this, arguing that it is an essential experience for a choir to “see other children on the stage – what they sound like, how much clapping there is, how much fun there is. They will refer to what they have seen”.<sup>86</sup> The interest in improving the standard by attending competitions is especially obvious in the most prestigious of all choral contests, the NCF, where every year choirs from all over southern Africa are part of the audience. During the Finals in Cape Town a number of choirs and individual choristers from as far as Botswana, Zimbabwe and Zambia hope to gain enough insight into the standard of the competition to be in a position to attend future competitions as participants. Dzangare told me that he and his choristers were strongly motivated to come all the way from

<sup>78</sup> Fasion Zondi, SA Singers (Durban), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 03, 2000.

<sup>79</sup> Israel Dzangare, Chitungwiza Harmony Singers (Zimbabwe), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>80</sup> Thabane Sello, Maseru Vocal Waves (Lesotho), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>81</sup> Thabo Tabane, Ga-Rankuwa West U.R.C. Choir (North-West Province), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>82</sup> Musa, Bonisudumo Choristers (Gauteng), interview questionnaire, February 12, 2001.

<sup>83</sup> Maureen Ngubane, Pietermaritzburg Choral Society (KwaZulu Natal), interview questionnaire, January 30, 2001.

<sup>84</sup> Thabane Sello, Maseru Vocal Waves (Lesotho), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 03, 2000.

<sup>85</sup> Thokozani Ndolomba, Pietermaritzburg Participatory Action Research Group, 15<sup>th</sup> meeting, May 25, 2000.

<sup>86</sup> Joshua Radebe, Pietermaritzburg Participatory Action Research Group, 16<sup>th</sup> meeting, June 01, 2000.

Zimbabwe to Cape Town so as to “copy from these good choirs. For us to come here we have to learn from other choirs”.<sup>87</sup> When asked what precisely he expected to learn, he explained:

I learn the tone of other choirs and how they pronounce the words. And the articulation of modes [meaning interpretation]: you know, painting the song to be nice, how do they do it? About uniforms. How they stand, how the conductor conducts the choir, the rapport between the conductor and the choirmaster. They [my choristers] learn to stay in the tone projection. Organising the choir... there are lots of things to learn from them. Everything I copy from them. Because we are the defending champions of the Northern Province. Now we want to keep that standard a high. So we have to rethink – because the good choirs – especially the choirs from Port Elizabeth, Cape Town – ja, good choirs. So we have to learn from them so that we keep on winning on our side.<sup>88</sup>

The fact that choristers of *amakwaya* groups use the competition as an opportunity to improve their own standard distinguishes them from other South African vocal groups such as *isicathamiya*. During his fieldwork, Eliot Pewa observed that the singers in *isicathamiya* groups “never bothered to make sure that they sat in the hall and listened critically to other choirs for their own improvement”.<sup>89</sup>

I will argue later in more detail that this learning process, which is largely spurred by the desire to “imitate the winning choir”, runs the danger of being rather limiting. The exclusive focus of choirs on competition means that they concentrate only on fulfilling the requirements set up by the organisers and adjudicators of competitions. Little or no emphasis is put on understanding the music or honouring individual interpretation. The fact that the winning choirs to a considerable extent dictate the direction of development for the following year results in a standardisation of performance practice and aesthetic. As a result, musical achievement is reduced largely to a matter of scores and ratings.

### 9.3.2 The Process

#### 9.3.2.1 How to Win a Competition

After exploring the motivation of conductors and choristers to take part in competitions, I now ask: “What must a choir do in order to win a competition?” I put the question to the choristers and conductors first.

According to Telebimo you have to present yourself very confidently on stage as “everything there depends on confidence”.<sup>90</sup> Diphame stresses the fact that, without dedication, there is no way a choir can be successful. Discipline at the rehearsals and an undivided attention to the sometimes tedious work of rehearsing the prescribed pieces are key elements of success.<sup>91</sup> Tsepo Pefole, a chorister of the Port Elizabeth Technikon Choir, insists, on the other hand, that you must be “really, really, really educated. Not only educated. Also: to have qualified musicians – you know expert musicians – would be a big plus”. This is of particular importance, he concludes, because “right now

<sup>87</sup> Israel Dzangare, Chitungwiza Harmony Singers (Zimbabwe), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> E. Pewa, 1995: 128.

<sup>90</sup> Ignatius Telebimo, St. Mary’s Senior Choir (Northern Cape), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>91</sup> Kagisho Diphame, Molopo Choral Artists (North-West Province), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

we are looking at globalisation and making sure that we are like world standard".<sup>92</sup> Other interviewees like Leon are more specific: "Your projecting must be good, the voice quality must be good, the tonal quality has to be good as well".<sup>93</sup> In a similar statement, Lukhozi emphasises in a very precise way what is of importance when performing on stage:

We must be able to blend each part: like soprano, we have to try and equalise our voices and not try and compete with one another because I have a beautiful voice or whoever has a beautiful voice. And if you could try and do that as a soprano, and then altos do the same thing and then tenors and basses and then combine all of that and make it just one sound, so that you don't get all these different voices. If it's a choir we need just one sound.<sup>94</sup>

If you want to be successful, Jane Motlhabane concludes, you have "to do many things that the conductor [tells] you".<sup>95</sup> Kantuli suggests that it is not only the instructions of the conductor that the choristers should listen to and try to follow as closely as possible:

It's the remarks of the adjudicators, that's where we listen. We will take notes of the remarks made by the adjudicators because we know some of these adjudicators are gonna be there in later competitions. So we are going to sing the way they want us to sing. That bar number so it's not (*singing*), it's (*singing*). That chromatic, you must respect that chromatic. Then at the end, it says fortissimo. Then you must do as the signs are telling you.<sup>96</sup>

What do adjudicators regard as essential features of a good choir? Isaac Tlou, a Conductor and adjudicator from Pretoria, who works for the National Arts Council highlights the following aspects:

First, we look at the general choral sound and at the general performance of the choirs. Number two, we look at the intonation. Is it a good intonation? If it's an African piece we look at the rhythm again. Are they able to put the rhythm across correctly? Because most of the compositions have got a rare rhythm. So we have to check on the rhythm that goes with intonation. We got the purity of diction, I mean the purity of vowels: whether the vowels are pure... Then the significance of consonants.<sup>97</sup>

As far as the interpretation of the different parts of the sectionalised repertoire is concerned, Tlou comments:

most of the English pieces are light in character. It's not a heavy music. Let me perhaps divide the music. I use only two eras. If you look at baroque era, although it's moving music, but it's not as heavy as the African traditions here. Our songs are very big, very tight as far as sound is concerned. So we want people to differentiate – if they are singing in the baroque era, they are singing an African song, or they are singing a classical song, you must be able to see a Mozart coming out. You must be able to see that this person can identify with the era. And it must be flexible to suit the different sections.<sup>98</sup>

Similar points are made by Peter Louis van Dijk, a composer and Conductor who is invited regularly to adjudicate various competitions around the country:

<sup>92</sup> Tsepo Pefole, Port Elizabeth Technikon Choir (Eastern Cape), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 03, 2000.

<sup>93</sup> Leon, Mhluzi Choral (Mpumalanga), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>94</sup> Muntu Lukhozi, Gauteng Choristers, interview questionnaire, November 18, 2000.

<sup>95</sup> Jane Motlhabane, Bloemfontein Serenade Choir (Free State), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>96</sup> Personal communication with Ray Kantuli, SABC Johannesburg, February 14, 2001.

<sup>97</sup> Personal communication with Isaac Tlou, Johannesburg, February 11, 2001.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

The first thing I look for is how true they are to the score. I say by just doing what the music says, you have already won seventy percent of the competition. The next thing comes into the understanding of what you are singing about. That's the sort of spiritual dimension. The technical dimension is the stylistic approach, whether you do the trill or not. The third thing comes in, of course, the presentation. In terms of the visual aspects, then we start looking at things like blending and balance in the choir.<sup>99</sup>

CHOIR NUMBER: 43 ITEM 1: ACCOMPANIED

CHOIR NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

SONG TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_

ADJUDICATORS' ASSESSMENT - ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 10

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Intonation				✓						
Chromatics				✓						
Style					✓					
Diction					✓					
Phrasing					✓					
Expression					✓					
Dynamics					✓					
Choral Sounds					✓					
Accuracy				✓						
Tone				✓						
Rhythm				✓						
Freedom				✓						
Understanding of Text					✓					
Blend & Balance				✓						

GENERAL COMMENT

*Too heavy sound for the song. Rough tone for personal female voices. Watch phrasing. Entries not together. Intonation weak.*

A. M. Mphahlele  
ADJUDICATORS' SIGNATURE

7/5/99  
DATE

"Choir name to be filled in AFTER adjudication"

OLD MUTUAL Telkom

Figure 9.14: Adjudication form: audition sheet – National Choir Festival 1999

Many of my interviewees referred to a small booklet with the title *Choral Technique*, written by Khabi Mngoma as a guide for choristers, conductors and adjudicators. This publication seems to have become something of a sourcebook for the choral community. Apart from dealing with various aspects of choral techniques, the booklet offers very detailed criteria for judging choirs.<sup>100</sup> Mngoma suggests a mark sheet that is divided into six sections under the following headings:

- Accuracy – deals mainly with intonation (10%),
- Tone – deals with the quality of the voices, also blending of voices (10%),
- Diction – deals with vowels and consonants (10%),
- Rhythm – accuracy, clarity and flow of rhythms (10%),
- Phrasing – deals with the shape, as well as the attacks and releases of phrases (10%),
- Interpretation and General Effects – the total impression of the song (50%).

<sup>99</sup> Personal communication with Peter Louis van Dijke, Durban, December 06, 2000.

<sup>100</sup> See Khabi Mngoma, *Choral Technique – a Guide for the Chorister, Conductor and Adjudicator, with Historical Aspects of a Choral Tradition among Black South Africans*, Ford Choirs in Contest organised by Future Marketing, (Ford South Africa, 1980): 19-23; 36-29.



Today, most adjudication forms are structured in a similar way (see Figure 9.14). With the publication of this booklet, Mngoma intended to give clear guidelines on how a competition should be run. His instructions seem to have been widely adopted by most choral associations, Teachers' Associations and adjudicators. Mngoma remarks with satisfaction: "After the publication of the book on choral technique, people had an idea about how to get ready for a competition, whereas before, we did not know what we were going to hear. All the competitions became better organised".<sup>101</sup> In time, however, his suggestions became so strictly adhered to by choirs and conductors that Mngoma added with concern: "There were some choir conductors who followed the prescriptions of the book as much as possible, but had still lost. So they felt it was pointless to have a book".<sup>102</sup> It seems that the choirs attempted to follow the instructions given to them, for one reason only: to win the competition. We will later return to this important issue when discussing the limiting influences of *amakwaya* competition culture.

### 9.3.2.2 To Please the Adjudicators – to Fight the Adjudicators<sup>103</sup>

*At the competitions they [the adjudicators] want to see only if the choirs sing according to the rules and expectations.*<sup>104</sup>

As an organised social activity, choral singing is also subject to pressures that tear apart and divide rather than build up and unite. Even some of the previously mentioned motivations might not be conducive to what is best for *amakwaya*. That there is a danger of too exclusive a concentration on competitive events that can become destructive, may be observed to some degree in the *amakwaya* tradition.

The comments of the choristers quoted above draw attention to many of the criteria laid down by the organisers and adjudicators of choral competitions. Members of the choirs are well aware of what is expected from them, and know how they have to present their songs if they are "to please the adjudicators".<sup>105</sup> Tabane points out that there are a number of skills that the adjudicators are looking for: "Phrasing, releases, diction, intonation, all those things. So as a choir you need to prepare along this lines. And obviously you'll have a correct musical expression. Concentrate on the voice projection, your phrasing, your intonation, all those things".<sup>106</sup> Tabane was convinced that it is important to "please the adjudicators" if you want to win: "You know if you follow this competition over the years, I think it's very important for us to follow the conditions they [the adjudicators] are using".<sup>107</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.: 17.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Scholars have so far not paid much attention to the phenomenon of the adjudicator in South African choral traditions. This is not only true for *amakwaya* but also for other traditions, as, for instance, *isicathamiya*. Yet the judge is a central figure with much influence. Leading questions for further investigation could be: How do *amakwaya* groups negotiate with the judge? What is a judge supposed to know? What artistic profile is the judge supposed to have?

<sup>104</sup> Personal communication with Linda Mngoma, SABC Johannesburg, February 16, 2001.

<sup>105</sup> See also P. Opondo, "Festivals, Competitions and Celebrations in Kenya and South Africa: Their Educational Role within National Frameworks", paper presented at the 23<sup>rd</sup> International Society of Music Education World Conference July 1998, (University of Pretoria, 1998).

<sup>106</sup> Thabo Tabane, Ga-Rankuwa West U.R.C. Choir (North-West Province), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.



The adjudicators' remarks determine the nature of the work done by the choirs in preparing for the next year's competition, and the disappointment of a choir that tries meticulously to follow the adjudicators' guidelines but fail to win, is understandable. Choirs often disagree with the decisions of the adjudicators and dismiss any criticisms, saying that they will not allow themselves to be intimidated.<sup>108</sup>

Conflicts between choirs and adjudicators have a long history. In a letter to the Editor of *The World*, a member of the choral community complained in 1967:

Sir. Please allow me to express my feelings about what happened recently at Pretoria when the TUATA held their teachers' competitions. I was singing in one of the Johannesburg teachers' choirs. I listened to all choirs which competed but no choir reached the standard of the Boksburg Teachers' choir, under the baton of Mr. F. Kunene. They deserved first position both in English and vernacular. We were all convinced that they are going to represent us at Durban, but to my surprise the choirs which sang badly won. Is the TUATA aware of this unhealthy link between adjudicators and conductors?  
MUSIC LOVER, Mofolo North<sup>109</sup>

Another report in the same paper shows that choral contests could become grim affairs because of conflicts between choristers and adjudicators.

One of the outstanding highlights of our cultural life on the Reef is the annual Eisteddfod, which is the climax to the music competitions between the best choirs of teachers and students from the whole of the Transvaal. This event has become so popular that only the big Kwa-Thema Hall can accommodate the audience-and even that hall is becoming too small. Unfortunately this event has this year been partly marred by dissatisfaction about the judging and by threats to a conductor and competitors. One of the best choirs was forced by threats, and consideration for the safety of its members, to stay from the Eisteddfod. It is no wonder that parents in general are beginning to be restless about their children competing at this contest... Every effort must be made to ensure that the judging is done under conditions which inspire the confidence of the competitors and the public. We appreciate that the complaints and the threats stem from the keenness of the competitions, but we must appeal to the competitors and their supporters to play the game. It would be a pity if the wrangling we sometimes see in sport – the attacking of referees and their decisions – should enter our premier cultural event. Threats to rivals, hooliganism and unfair methods can only do harm and bring our cultural highlight into disrepute.<sup>110</sup>

The seriousness of these conflicts has by no means diminished at the present day, as Richard Cock, who refuses to become associated with competitions, confirms: "Competitions sometimes are taken very serious, ranging from death threats to physical attacks of adjudicators after the competition".<sup>111</sup> Cock may be thinking of a particular incident where adjudicators had to take cover under the table because chairs and other things were thrown at them. Douglas Reid recalls the circumstances of this incident, which happened at the regional elimination stage of the NCF:

What had happened was that the competition took place. They had it at the Jameson Hall at the University of Cape Town, a venue that was too small. It was raining outside. They had packed people into this venue, so that you couldn't even breathe. They were right on top of each other. And then three adjudicators at the table, myself being one. In order to cope, we needed a secretary, who would table up the results and all the rest of it. And what happened unfortunately, was... the choir that came third, in fact came fourth. In looking at all the numbers – everything was under pressure – we had mixed up the third

<sup>108</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Springs, July 19, 2000, and Issac Tlou, Johannesburg, February 11, 2001.

<sup>109</sup> *The World*, June 20, 1967; quoted in *TUATA* (September 1967): 32.

<sup>110</sup> *The World*, June 09, 1967; quoted from *TUATA* (September 1967): 32.

<sup>111</sup> Personal communication with Richard Cock, Johannesburg, February 06, 2001.

and the fourth position. A mistake by the secretary and, of course, by the adjudicators that were there. We should have been checking through things. But at the end of a competition everybody wants to know the results before you can even think. And after the results were announced, there was a whole to-do at the back – so we were rushed out, even Peter Morake and the secretary. And while we were waiting, I looked at the results and I discovered that three and four were the wrong way around. It was one point difference. So Peter went in and announced that straightaway – Gosh! People stormed, they took the typewriter, they threw the typewriter across the floor and they were all upset. So what we had to do, a public apology was made immediately. And it was decided – because money was involved as well – that in fact an award should be made to both choirs. And the one choir that had got third place now said that they were ruined because they were now fourth and they had been told they were third. The choir that was fourth said that *they* were ruined because they should have been third and they were announced fourth. A press conference was called... and it went out on the air, a public apology was made, that the wrong result was announced and that an award would be made to both choirs: that they both had been good choirs and there was just a single point difference. I tell you, you'd have thought the world had come to an end.<sup>112</sup>

In an attempt to find an explanation for the behaviour of the choirs on that occasion, Reid said that “their pride had been hurt. They accused the adjudicators of not knowing what they were doing. It [competition] indeed is the biggest thing in their lives, musically... when they didn't win, then the adjudicator was against them. And then the adjudicators don't know their jobs. Everything is pointing at the adjudicators but never at their choir”.<sup>113</sup> Koapeng, who is critical of choirs' exclusive concentration on competitions, confirms that at competitions, “stakes are high... There is a lot to lose in a competition. What if a choir comes and says: but we did what the professor said we should do, why are we not winning? I've seen people wanting to beat up an adjudicator, in the seven years that I was playing the piano for the National Choir Festival”.<sup>114</sup>

The latest scandal to receive heated and controversial discussion was the dubious decision of adjudicators at the 2001 NCF in Johannesburg, where, after being the champion for four years in a row, the Durban Serenade Choral Society lost its title as National Champions to the SA Singers. The legitimacy of this decision seemed all the more doubtful because it may have been made in response to complaints that the four year long winning streak of the Durban Serenade had started to dampen the enthusiasm of other choirs. Choirs had threatened the organisers of the NCF that they would stay away if the Durban Serenade were to keep on winning year after year. This put a great deal of pressure on the organisers and adjudicators. Magangane, Chairman of the adjudicators' panel at the Festival, confesses:



**Figure 9.15:** *Ludumo Magangane announces the results, NCF, Johannesburg, December 2001*

<sup>112</sup> Personal communication with Douglas Reid, Pretoria, February 14, 2001.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Personal communication with Mokale Koapeng, Johannesburg, Parkhurst, February 13, 2001.

When [the Durban Serenade Choral Society] won last year I thought for myself now they are creating a problem for us. It is obviously good that they are able to defend their winning, but then we are dealing with conductors the bulk of whom are not professional... Some of them say, look, we can't penetrate that choir. Many will say, but the same choir wins all the time and we are being demoralising and all that. But you got to work to be there. You can't just dish out points because we feel these guys now have been doing it for the fourth time and somebody else must win.<sup>115</sup>

In order to avoid similar controversy in the future it would seem to be necessary to change the regulations for participation in competitions. One possible solution might be to invite the winning choir the following year not as a competitor, but as a champion choir, paid for entertaining the audience. Additionally, the opportunity of presenting a whole programme at an evening concert perhaps with an orchestra, might be given to winning choirs as an extra reward and on educational grounds.

Dzangare accepts the fact that adjudicators are only human and therefore fallible: "An adjudicator is a person like us. He is not a computer or an angel".<sup>116</sup> However, not all choristers are as tolerant as he. Lunga, for instance, confesses that she is very critical when it comes to the decisions of the adjudicators. Not only the adjudicators, but "also we choristers do the judging. You can hear a choir when he is off pitch. You also say, no, we sung better than them".<sup>117</sup> Her fellow chorister Mathilda agrees that, when a choir sings, "we are also an adjudicator. The choir did this and the choir did that. You pick up points from the competition. And maybe that choir was better than us, or it was above us".<sup>118</sup> As far as the training of adjudicators is concerned, Koapeng comments, "I've always wondered why we don't have a programme for training adjudicators. To be honest, a lot of adjudicators go by experience only".<sup>119</sup> A training programme, he concludes, would help the adjudicators to make better, and informed decisions.

### 9.3.2.3 To Safeguard Knowledge: Keeping Other Choirs at Bay

*In the wide field of play, competition is believed to produce infinite zest and ardency in the game.*<sup>120</sup>

The doggedness shown by the choirs in preparing for competitions is further matched by the way they try to shield their preparation from other choirs. Says Joshua Radebe: "Competing choirs must only hear our song on the day of the competition. It must be a surprise to other choirs and the adjudicators".<sup>121</sup> The degree to which some choirs are careful to safeguard the interpretation of the prescribed pieces was driven home to me in the disturbing experience I had in September 2000. For the whole year, I had been travelling to Pietermaritzburg every Wednesday in order to assist Radebe, Conductor of the Pietermaritzburg Choral Society, with the training of his choral group. He was also a member of the Action Research group that I had started early in 2000 with various conductors in Pietermaritzburg in order to develop a cross-cultural methodology of choral instruction. Thus we had established what I thought to be a fairly close and open relationship. I was therefore

<sup>115</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Springs, February 12, 2001.

<sup>116</sup> Israel Dzangare, Chitungwiza Harmony Singers (Zimbabwe), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>117</sup> Lunga, Bonisudumo Choristers (Gauteng), interview questionnaire, February 12, 2001.

<sup>118</sup> Mathilda, Bonisudumo Choristers (Gauteng), February 12, 2001.

<sup>119</sup> Personal communication with Mokale Koapeng, Johannesburg, Parkhurst, February 13, 2001.

<sup>120</sup> Mafelebane, 1932: 12.

<sup>121</sup> Personal communication with Joshua Radebe, Pietermaritzburg, March 14, 2001.

flabbergasted when he objected to my bringing Falithenjwa Mkhize, Administration Director of the Durban Serenade Choral Society, and Sipho, one of Mkhize's choristers, to a rehearsal of his choir.



Figure 9.16: Joshua Radebe, (Pietermaritzburg, July 2000)

That day I had been busy with Mkhize coaching a school choir in Umzimkhulu. As I had promised Radebe to assist with the piano accompaniment of Brahms's "How lovely are thy dwellings fair" in the evening, I had to drive straight from Umzimkhulu to Pietermaritzburg. As I had taken Mkhize with me in my car, it was the obvious thing to ask him if he would not mind going to Pietermaritzburg after we had finished in Umzimkhulu. In Pietermaritzburg, I told Radebe and the choir that we were on our way back to Durban and that Mkhize had been with me the whole day. The rehearsal went ahead and, after finishing, we set off back to Durban. When I returned to Pietermaritzburg the following week, Radebe was furious with me for bringing 'guests' to his choral practice,

arguing that "no choir would go and visit another competing choir so close to the competition".<sup>122</sup> It is of utmost importance, he pointed out, to "keep tension by maintaining the surprising moment. The preparation must be kept secret. This is part of the thrill of competition. You have taken the factor of surprise away by bringing these people to our rehearsal". It worried him very much that the Durban Serenade "now knows which song we sing". What is more, he complained, they "have experienced the way we sing the song – even singing the song with us. Those people did really take chances".

My action was perceived by Radebe and members of his committee as an "act of violence". They felt spied upon by Mkhize, whom they accused of "attempting to find out if we are still strong". Moreover, he said, "they also want to pick up any weak point in our singing to emphasise this when we go for the competition. You really shouldn't have brought those people", Radebe declared over and over again. "You should rather have gone straight back to Durban and rather miss the rehearsal".

This incident, which brought to an end our working relationship, reveals a number of things. Firstly, it is another proof of how seriously the choirs take competitions. It also shows the amount of politics involved in the choral community, and, lastly, it is an indication of the tensions that exist between Radebe's choir and the Durban Serenade. Admittedly it was unfortunate to take members of the Durban Serenade, of all choirs, to the rehearsal. I found out only later that it was this very choir that had dethroned the Pietermaritzburg Choral Society in the mid-1990s after they had been national champions for years. Moreover, after years of collaboration, their pianist, John Mitchell, had left Pietermaritzburg in order to join the Durban Serenade. To Radebe, this move had been a clear act of betrayal: "He left us behind although we always cared for him. But this was the time the

<sup>122</sup> The quotes are taken from a discussion that took place in Pietermaritzburg, September 07, 2000 with Joshua Radebe and his committee members.

Durban Serenade became successful”. Pianists, he argued, “mustn’t even play for different choirs”. After this incident he asked me to decide whether I wanted still to work with the Pietermaritzburg Choral Society, emphasising that “we only want you to be with us when you don’t help another choir”. This was a promise that I was neither able nor prepared to make. It was distressing that such a long period of collaboration should have come to an end, with Radebe saying: “We would rather like you not to come any more when you are with a Durban choir at the same time”.

Perhaps this is an extreme case of an almost paranoid fear that, by gaining insight into one’s interpretation, other choirs might weaken the chances of one’s success at the competitions. However, it seems to be true that choristers and conductors attend competitions hoping to learn about the weaknesses of other choirs. In their final rehearsals, they then work especially on those points in order to impress the adjudicators when it is their turn on the stage. Kantuli explains:

Because if maybe let’s say this month Transvaal is singing. Then people from other provinces will come and listen to this choir and say, ag, we are going to beat this choir. We have listened to this choir, bar number five or bar number eleven, they don’t sing the correct notes. That’s incorrect. That’s how we used to win.<sup>123</sup>

## 9.4 Competition: the Negative Aspects

*Competitions are a big thing in this country, a very big thing. Some choirs just don’t think there is any other thing they can do outside competitions.<sup>124</sup>*

We have examined the significance that the choristers themselves attach to the competitions, showing both their constructive and destructive sides. We will conclude our critical appraisal of *amakwaya* competitions by noting four tendencies that might endanger the development of this choral practice:<sup>125</sup>

### Exclusive focus on competition

- breaks up unity within the choral groups and in the wider choral community
- discourages continuous choral activity in all its aspects
- results in a limited repertoire
- leads to uniformity in aesthetics and performance practice

Since the first point has been discussed above in the context of quarrels and destructive rivalry among choirs I will elaborate only on the other three factors.

<sup>123</sup> Personal communication with Ray Kantuli, SABC Johannesburg, February 14, 2001.

<sup>124</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Springs, July 19, 2000.

<sup>125</sup> Particularly in the field of school music, recent years have seen the emergence of a substantial body of literature concerned with the discussion of positive and negative effects of competition. David Conrad, a music educator from Illinois, has published an overview of the most important literature (available online at: <http://www.coe.ilstu.edu/jabraun/students/dlconra/litrev.html>); other relevant resources can be found at: <http://lrs.ed.uiuc.edu/students/cunningh/Testing-Assessment-Competition>; see also K. L. Wolff, “The Non-musical outcomes of music education: A review of the literature” in *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, Vol. 18, No. 3, (1978): 234-241.



### 9.4.1 Competition Discourages Sustained Choral Activity

*Many of our choirs don't see any other life for a choir outside a competition*<sup>126</sup>

Magangane admits: "It's good to have competitions, because competitions force you to work towards a certain standard. But then what is maybe a pity is that many of our choirs don't see any other life for a choir outside a competition".<sup>127</sup> Magangane suggests that the choirs take competitions too seriously, and that the focus on winning tends to become an obsession for members of the choral community. In a similar way, Nkabinde is very concerned about the fact that "some choristers think music means competition".<sup>128</sup> It is alarming, he says, that for a number of choirs the day of the competition

marks the end of the rehearsals until the next competition comes up. To me it is a wrong approach because it doesn't develop the choristers. But on the other hand if you just leave it to a festival all the way, they tend to relax and say it is a festival. They don't take it seriously; they won't show a lot of commitment in terms of attending rehearsals because they know that even if I'm not sure of a song I can still perform – it's just a festival. So it drops the standards.<sup>129</sup>

*Amakwaya* groups that take part exclusively in competitions tend to think of nothing else but their image during the competition. For this one performance, Nkabinde points out, the choirs often practice many months. "And then in the competition it only takes three minutes for that choir either to win or lose... this is dispiriting. Some choristers leave disgruntled and they only reassemble the following year when the competition is coming up again".<sup>130</sup> To make a single performance determine the success of a whole year's work is a precarious venture. Lack of success is likely to have a negative effect on the motivation of the choir. Failure on the day of the final becomes very depressing for the choirs. This is manifested, for instance, in the flow of choristers from the less successful to the champion choirs. Two major problems connected to the exclusive concentration of *amakwaya* groups on competition become apparent: firstly, the focus on a rather small body of literature, and, secondly, the restricted development of aesthetics and performance practice.

### 9.4.2 A Limited Body of Repertoire

*The problem with the competitions is that it doesn't widen the scope of the choristers in terms of repertoire. They spend too much time on the two or three competition songs instead of developing and doing other works and widening their scope of repertoire.*<sup>131</sup>

The few choral pieces prescribed by the organisers of the competitions (usually three Western compositions and two eclectic African compositions) are on the whole the only repertoire tackled

<sup>126</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, SAMRO Johannesburg, July 18, 2000.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Personal communication with Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Johannesburg, July 17, 2000.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

by the majority of *amakwaya* groups throughout the year.<sup>132</sup> This is substantiated by Koapeng, who explains that, because of the regional eliminations that usually takes place around July,

the choirs have the first half of the year to prepare... then they get over with regional eliminations then they have a month or two to do whatever they want to do, then they prepare for the finals. Now that's the thing with the National Choir Festival. Therefore, there is very little that they do regarding their own repertoire within that period because there is so much attention and focus on competition songs.<sup>133</sup>

Though there is certainly some truth in Mzilikazi Khumalo's opinion that the competitions help to improve the standard of choral singing in South Africa, "because actually they force you for a period to focus on a limited number of songs and build up a very good standard of those songs. [It is] a good discipline",<sup>134</sup> I would like to respond that one has also to be aware of the dangers involved in an exclusive concentration on those few compositions. Nkabinde is amongst those members of the choral community who are worried about this development.<sup>135</sup> He warns that the fact that "everyone is doing the same songs again and again, instead of each one choosing his own things",<sup>136</sup> has an extremely narrowing effect on the repertoire of *amakwaya* groups as a whole:

It is quite common in this country that a song that has been prescribed for a competition is performed by almost all the choirs because another association might prescribe the same song, and then another one the same song, really... :the scope of the repertoire with South African choirs gets limited because of these competitions.<sup>137</sup>

Musa Nkuna, a composer and soloist who recently completed his studies at Rhodes University, argues against the prescription practice of the organisers of competitions. He heatedly complains that the persons responsible are always prescribing "the same thing... This means that a lot of Western compositions are not sung because these competitions always prescribe the same thing: Haydn, Handel, Mozart".<sup>138</sup> Although one might argue that development has occurred in the kind of songs prescribed for choral competitions (Chapter 13, page 349), Nkuna is certainly right that over the years the choice of repertoire has remained fairly conservative. Fortunately, Nkabinde adds, "there are other choirs that are not only concentrating on the competitions. Then they do other things – although there are not too many choirs having this approach".<sup>139</sup> Examples of choirs attempting to develop beyond the restrictions of choral competitions are rare. Only a few choirs, like George Mxadana's choir, Imilonji KaNtu, and Magangane's choir, Bonisudumo Choristers, have turned their attention away from competitions in order to explore other possibilities. Magangane told me that it was only "after the competitions [that] we were able to start working on [whole] oratorios. I felt, no, if we want to continue with oratorios and masses and other things, we can't

<sup>132</sup> Since the mid-1990s, choirs participating in the NCF can choose from a limited number of compositions, whereas before there was one single prescription per year that each choir had to prepare.

<sup>133</sup> Personal communication with Mokale Koapeng, Johannesburg, Parkhurst, February 13, 2001.

<sup>134</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, SAMRO Johannesburg, July 18, 2000.

<sup>135</sup> The problem of a limited repertoire of prescribed competition pieces seems not to be a recent development. In referring to the competition practice of school choirs, the Transvaal Teachers' Association published a bulletin in the early 1960s drawing attention to the exclusive concentration of school choirs on competitions: "The one other matter which needs attention of principals is that singing does not die after the competition as it is the case in some schools. The excuse is that of songs: that there are no new songs to teach." (*TUATA*, December 1961): 19.

<sup>136</sup> Personal communication with Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Johannesburg, July 17, 2000.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> Musa Nkuna during a workshop for conductors held at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, in connection with the New Music Indaba, July 02, 2000.

<sup>139</sup> Personal communication with Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Johannesburg, July 17, 2000.

continue with competitions".<sup>140</sup> As the choir has won several times at the National Choir Finals, Magangane manages to justify his decision by telling his choristers: "We have achieved our goal... people do know about Bonisudumo. So then there is nothing else more we need to prove".<sup>141</sup>

### 9.4.3 Competition: a Constricting Factor?

*...such endeavours and such establishments  
pave the way for uniform development, you  
know*<sup>142</sup>

Tsepo Pefole cautions that, despite all the positive effects that competitions like the NCF undoubtedly have, "such endeavours and such establishments pave the way for uniform development, you know".<sup>143</sup> My observation of a number of choral groups, especially in my close collaboration with the choirs that I was privileged to coach for various competitions, certainly confirms Pefole's claim. The guidelines of the adjudicators are internalised and followed by the conductors and choirs to such a degree that competitions tend to become standardising forces. Competitions, Tabane maintains, definitely influence the way he trains his choir: "Like I say, if you come here you realise that choirs are improving here. So basically it's a matter of inspiration... that's where we get some tips".<sup>144</sup> But it is not only tips that choirs are after when going to competitions. Dzangare agrees that the criteria set by the adjudicators have an important influence on the way he trains his choir. After going home, "we look at those mark sheets. We know where we were now. We try to fix those mistakes".<sup>145</sup> Here we see that the driving power behind the attempt to follow advice given by the adjudicators is not so much the wish to improve the musical abilities of the choir but rather to learn how "to please the adjudicators" in order to impress them at the next competition. This central concern of the choirs to meet the specific expectations of the adjudicators is evident in the comment of Maqungo: "Because you take a person like Mr. Magangane, you know his style, you know his interpretations. You know what he is expecting... So on the day, if you see Mr. Magangane, you know what he is expecting... once you disappoint him, then you are out".<sup>146</sup>

Adherence to the comments of the adjudicators is especially dangerous as adjudicators tend to grant very little freedom to the competing choirs when it comes to the interpretation of the prescribed pieces. As mentioned earlier, the workshops offered by the organisers of the competitions aim mainly at communicating the specific requirements choirs have to fulfil when presenting a prescribed piece. With their goal of winning in mind, choirs often uncritically submit to the rules of the adjudicators – rules that in many cases are only relevant in the context of competitions.

In an article entitled "Revitalizing Choral Music Competitions", D. C. Yeni, Conductor of the Khombindlela High School Choir, Empangeni, argued that "the effect of a competition can be disastrous if the teacher-conductors get so immersed in a race to 'win' that they forget about the aesthetic pleasures to be derived from the competition".<sup>147</sup> As the sole aim of the choirs is to present the prescribed repertoire perfectly, the performance of these pieces tends to become over-polished, thus running the danger of becoming somewhat sterile. Moreover, contestants 'play it

<sup>140</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Springs, July 19, 2000.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.: December 03, 2000.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.: December 02, 2000.

<sup>145</sup> Israel Dzangare, Chitungwiza Harmony Singers (Zimbabwe), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>146</sup> Thulani Maqungo, Tsakane Adult Choir (Gauteng), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>147</sup> D. C. Yeni, "Revitalizing Choral Music Competitions". (*Educamus*, Vol. 39, No.2, 1993): 20.

safe' and rarely engage in creative risk-taking.<sup>148</sup> Teresa Amabile argues that creativity is reduced when competing for rewards. She is convinced that "people will be most creative when they feel motivated primarily by interest, enjoyment, satisfaction, and challenge of the work itself – and not by external pressures".<sup>149</sup>

The amount of drill the choirs invest in 'perfecting' their competition pieces often results in the opposite's being achieved. This became obvious to me in the course of my involvement with various choirs, when, for example, I was asked to coach the SA Singers for their preparation for the 2002 NCF. While working with them, I realised how, after a number of months of rehearsing exclusively the three pieces in preparation for the competition, four to five days per week, over and over again, the Choir's performance became increasingly stale and empty. When I suggested to the Conductor, Vuzi Khanyile, that he should consider including a variety of repertoire to give the training a different perspective, he replied that this, to him, meant losing valuable rehearsal time. He felt that he would rather spend all the time available in preparing for the competition and perfecting the pieces that counted for this important moment.

It was surprising to find that he placed little emphasis on achieving a deeper understanding of the prescribed pieces or communicating this to the choir. When I started working with the Choir in September 2002, three months before the competition, they already knew very well the prescribed chorus, "Wer ein holdes Weib errungen", from Beethoven's *Fidelio*. When I asked the choristers about the context of the opera and about the subtext of the prescribed chorus, it became clear that they had not given these aspects any thought at all. It was striking to see that after all these months of preparation they had relied purely on the musical language and never asked themselves what the opera *Fidelio* was about. In fact, it seems that, rather than encouraging creative dealing with and a deeper understanding of music, the exclusive concentration on competitions reduces musical qualities to scores and ratings: many exciting aspects of choral performance are left out.

But it is not only the comments of the adjudicators that have an important influence on the preparation of the choirs. Winning choirs are regarded as successful adherents to the rules set by the adjudicators. Therefore it is not surprising that those choirs usually become icons whose performance practice, stage appearance and aesthetics are imitated by the defeated choirs in the hope of impressing the adjudicators the following year. Dzangare, for instance, is convinced that "we must know why they [other choirs] have beaten us. We fix all those mistakes and make corrections... Next time when we come, we beat them".<sup>150</sup>

I agree with Koapeng when he says that determination and doggedness are not substitutes for the joy of performing music in a lively and individualistic way. He laments: "We tend to lose the spirit of a performance, we lose the warmth, we lose so much because we are so concerned with one aspect: competition. But what I'm trying to say is that there are other aspects to a performance".<sup>151</sup>

<sup>148</sup> A. Kohn, "How to Succeed Without Even Trying". *Psychology Today*, Vol. 20, No. 9, (1986): 22-24, 26-28.

<sup>149</sup> T. Amabile, quoted in A. Kohn, "Art for Art's Sake". *Psychology Today*, Vol. 21, No. 9, (1987): 55.

<sup>150</sup> Israel Dzangare, Chitungwiza Harmony Singers (Zimbabwe), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 02, 2000.

<sup>151</sup> Personal communication with Mokale Koapeng, Johannesburg, Parkhurst, February 13, 2001.





**Figure 9.17:** *Presentation of Trophies, TUATA, December 1965*



**Figure 9.18:** *Presentation of Trophies, NCF 2001, Johannesburg*



## 9.4 Summary

We can now place competitions in a broader context. I have argued that the urge to compete has strong indigenous precedents. When transferred into the urban context, the spirit of competitiveness assumed new forms and contexts. The establishment of leisure activities such as sports or music groups played an important role in this process of transformation as they were replaced traditional forms of contest. Besides being a platform to display talent, choir competitions proved to be an ideal framework for the shaping and communication of the choirs' middle class identity. *Amakwaya* contests were ideal vehicles to promote the conception of an African national culture. First, *amakwaya* contests put a well-defined distance between the black working class and the educated black middle class. In other words, choir contests became an important means of countering the *marabi* culture of the urban centres. It is in this context that *amakwaya* competitions can be regarded as a part of the struggle for social recognition and achievement based on Western criteria (Chapters 3.2.2, page 80 and 4.3.2, page 114). *Amakwaya* competitions were, however, not only a means of keeping a distance from the black working class. More importantly, they became a medium of competing, on a symbolic level, with the white communities. Having realised that economic and political competition with the white communities was not feasible, mission-educated black South Africans had recourse to the symbolic form of musical competitions. Competitions represented a safe space in their struggle for recognition and emancipation: here they could render proof that they were capable of achieving 'world-class standards' and draw level with the white people.

*Amakwaya* competitions have without doubt yielded a number of positive results. Many of the choristers and conductors quoted above have revealed how the competitive spirit encourages them to achieve the highest level of success. The prospect of challenging other choirs motivates them. It is this goal that binds the members of a choir together socially. Competitions are also social events that provide choirs with the opportunity of observing and interacting with other choirs. Though this is usually marked by a highly competitive spirit, it nevertheless stimulates development and may enhance the level of musical performance. In addition to the peer observation and evaluation that helps the choirs improve their own standard, the comments made by the adjudicators play an important role in spurring and directing development. The long period of preparation for the contests fosters the team spirit of the choirs. In the course of my fieldwork, I frequently witnessed how choristers made the rehearsals a real team effort. Members of the Pietermaritzburg Choral Society, for instance, met regularly to help those having problems with their parts to catch up with the rest of the choir. Finally, success in competitions enhances the reputation of a choir, giving prestige and promoting self-affirmation.

Competitions may, however, prevent real development because of their tendency to promote conformity. In order for competitions to work, people must be measured by the same standard. The same rules must apply to each player, and the game must be played the same way each time. Yet the very nature of creativity is to initiate something new in defiance of standardisation.<sup>152</sup> To be creative means to be uniquely individualistic, idiosyncratic and daring. Competitions, however, may check spontaneity and freedom of expression.

The current competition culture puts a great deal of responsibility in the hands of organisers and particularly adjudicators. Nkabinde is one of a small number of important musicians in the current choral scene who are obviously aware that *amakwaya* groups "spend too much time on the two or three competition pieces instead of developing and doing other works and widening their scope of

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<sup>152</sup> R. Miller, "A Dysfunctional Culture: Competition in Music". *Music Educators Journal*, Vol. 81, No. 3 (1994): 31.

repertoire".<sup>153</sup> So far, however, no innovative attempt from the official side has been made to revise the current competition practice. Quite to the contrary, in order to keep the competitive element alive, organisers and adjudicators are prepared even to fix results, as allegedly happened in the case of the finals of the NCF held in Johannesburg, 2001. Thus *amakwaya* runs the danger of manoeuvring itself into a situation where further development is made difficult or even impossible.

Despite the widespread popularity of competitions, there is a growing number of members of the choral community who argue against the practice of concentrating exclusively on competitions. The main thrust of their criticism is that competition places too much emphasis on a single performance. They would like to see the creation of more opportunities where choirs can start to develop individual ideas, free from the pressures of competition. Music festivals that mount workshops, concerts and discussions could provide a healthy atmosphere for competition. However, so far, very few choral events deviate from the competitive framework. One major problem seems to be the securing of funding for festivals, which are regarded by potential sponsors as being less prestigious. Until alternatives to competition are developed and are made attractive to choristers and conductors, the contest format will continue to dominate the choral scene. This situation will certainly not change as long as the motivation for improvement rests mainly on "being successful at the competitions".<sup>154</sup> Organisers and adjudicators, for their part should be more concerned with the quality of the musical experience that choirs have at the competitions than with the public relations side of the events.

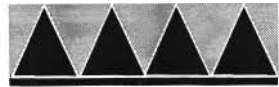
The third part of this thesis will explore some important aspects of the sectionalised repertoire presently in place at the main competitions like the National Choir Festival. It will investigate the genesis and the aesthetic of the repertoire, and show how both the choice of repertoire and its sectionalised nature reveal the attempt, in *amakwaya* performance practice, to negotiate tradition and the modern in a way that is characteristic of the black middle class throughout its history.

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<sup>153</sup> Personal communication with Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Johannesburg, July 17, 2000.

<sup>154</sup> Chris Mhlongo, Chairman of Imvunge Choral Association in an address at the inauguration of the SA Singers. Durban, April 30, 2000.

PART THREE



**Repertoire:  
Negotiation,  
Tradition and the Modern**



## The Sectionalised Repertoire of *Amakwaya*

*"Advanced music is Western music", says Sibusiso. "But we do African music too", he says, referring to his choir's repertoire. "Wedding songs<sup>1</sup> are very popular. You see, we sing to suit everybody. And there are the battle songs of old but now they are set in an urban area... These songs have an African rhythm but they have become westernised through urbanisation".<sup>2</sup>*

Following on from our discussion of the historical development and the importance of competitions for *amakwaya*, this third part will deal with the question of repertoire. In dealing with some aspects of the repertoire as they are manifested today at the main competitions such as the National Choir Festival, I want to facilitate an understanding of the genesis, the arrangement and the aesthetic of the sectionalised repertoire of *amakwaya* groups. Needless to say, this topic is highly complex: the repertoire includes various categories of African, Western and syncretic styles. My aim, therefore, is simply to point out some important developments.

### 10.1 The Sectionalised Repertoire

*Amakwaya* repertoire today characteristically consists of neo-traditional songs,<sup>3</sup> which are modernised versions of songs taken from African folk repertoire, Western art music, mainly of European origin, and finally African choral works by mission-trained composers, which are eclectic in form and incorporate African and Western element to differing degrees.

Coplan traces the development of the sectionalised repertoire back to the first quarter of the twentieth century, when *amakwaya* repertoire was already "divided into three distinct categories by Zulu participants: *amagama eMusic* (British and African popular choral and light classical songs), *amagama 'sizulu* (traditional songs arranged for choir), and *amagama eRagtime* (American popular songs and local pieces in ragtime style)".<sup>4</sup> It is surprising that Coplan does not mention the works of African composers in his categorisation even though there is evidence that *amakwaya* groups did include the works of African choral composers in their performances. This is clear, for example, in the programme of the African Native Choir that I examined in Chapter 1.2.1 (page 14). Although the Choir presented mainly English part songs, hymns and some traditional wedding songs, Ntsikana's

<sup>1</sup> Wedding songs refers to a variety of different song styles performed during the traditional wedding ceremony (e.g. *inkondlo*, *umgqo*, *umphendu* and *isigekle*). See also Chapter 11.1.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in *Natal University Focus* (Vol. 4, No. 2, 1993): 18.

<sup>3</sup> Caesar Ndlovu refers to the neo-traditional folk songs as *ixitibili* (sounds). See Ndlovu, C. "Red-Carpet Treatment of Western Classical Music in Black South African Music Competitions". Papers Presented at the 14th Symposium on Ethnomusicology, Rhodes University (Grahamstown: International Library of African Music, July 1997): 102.

<sup>4</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 72.

“Ulo Tixo Mkulu” took pride of place in some of the concerts as an opening item. Today Ntsikana Gaba (c. 1780-1821) is regarded as the first and most important of the early *amakwaya* composers, as we will discuss in more detail in Chapter 12.2.1 (page 307). The compositions of Ntsikana and those of the first generation of mission-trained composers like Tiyo Soga<sup>5</sup>, John Knox Bokwe<sup>6</sup>, John L. Dube (1871-1946)<sup>7</sup>, Enoch Mankayi Sontonga (1873-1905)<sup>8</sup> and A. A. Kumalo (1879-1966)<sup>9</sup>, were being performed by *amakwaya* groups at least from the late nineteenth century and deserve to be included as a distinct category. Apart from suggesting a revision of Coplan’s categories, I want to mention another detail in relation to contemporary performance practice.

I have suggested that contemporary *amakwaya* groups structure their repertoire according to three distinct sections, with neo-traditional songs, Western art music, and African eclectic compositions. Though Coplan’s categories reflect the situation at the beginning or the twentieth century, it is clear that *amagam ‘sizulu* and *amagama eRagtime* have later merged in the new category of neo-traditional songs. The fact that *amakwaya* performers today refer to the dance style of neo-traditional songs, which are in slow tempo, as *ukurega*, is an indication of this process.

This short account of the genesis of the sectionalised repertoire is intended to facilitate understanding of why today *amakwaya* groups have a very specific performance practice where, as Zakhele Fakazi, Secretary of Imvunge Choral Society, puts it, “you do Western pieces and then you do African pieces, and then you start dancing. That is standard... When they have movements, then it’s wedding songs”.<sup>10</sup> The point that I want to emphasise is that it is on the sectionalised repertoire that almost all performances of *amakwaya* groups are based, and that, with the distinct function and meaning of its various parts, this distinguishes them from other choral practices. The choice of repertoire, ranging from simple borrowing in the case of neo-traditional wedding songs to the wholesale imitation of Western aesthetic and performance practice, reveals to what extent *amakwaya* groups mediate foreign influences. The attempt to integrate the traditional and the modern in their performance practice is not only linked to the concept of Mark Radebe’s African national culture but can also be regarded as a manifestation of the negotiation process characteristic of the black middle class throughout its history. In the first part of this thesis, I have argued that imitation of Western models by black middle class communities was a sign of their commitment to progress and achievement. Thus Sam Shabalala, an important theorist of contemporary *amakwaya*, can say that people do not “regard you as a proper musician if you don’t sing Western music”.<sup>11</sup>

The strict adherence to a sectionalised repertoire is a sign of the cultural isolation and alienation experienced by the members of *amakwaya* since the late nineteenth century (Chapter 3.3, page 85 and Chapter 4, page 93). This condition affected every sphere of the daily life of the black middle class to which *amakwaya* members today still largely belong, and their choral practice, to say it again, is a compromise or negotiation among their various identities, none of which is by itself

<sup>5</sup> Soga began composing around 1849 after he had returned from Scotland. At that time, he began working in church ministry, evangelising and teaching catechism, in Chumie, in the Eastern Cape. For further information about Soga see D. Williams, *Umfundisi: A Biography of Tiyo Soga 1829-1871* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1978).

<sup>6</sup> J. K. Bokwe, 1922.

<sup>7</sup> J. L. Dube, *Amagama Abantu awe Mishado, Imiququmbeol, Utando, nawe Mikelele no Kudhlala* [Bantu songs for weddings, dances, love, side-stepping and recreation], (Ohlange Institute, 1911?).

<sup>8</sup> Sontonga’s most important contribution as a composer was without doubt “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika”, a hymn-like tune that today forms the first part of the official National Anthem of South Africa accepted by the Cabinet on May 17, 1995. For a detailed discussion of this composition, which has played a major role in the history of South African choral music, see Chapter 12.2.2.2.

<sup>9</sup> A. A. Kumalo, *Izingoma zikaKumalo* [“Songs of Kumalo”], (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1967).

<sup>10</sup> Personal communication with Zakhele Fakazi, Marianhill, November 05, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Personal communication with Sam Shabalala, Durban, SABC, March 07, 2000.



experienced as sufficient or definitive. Thus the repertoire defied the attempts of Apartheid South Africa to fix social and ethnic identities in isolation from, or even in opposition to, one another. That this cultural negotiation still continues today is evident in their inclusion of neo-traditional wedding songs as a sign of their desire to remain true to their ancestral roots, just as their inclusion of Western compositions is a sign of their continued aspirations towards a 'modern' way of life. The section of choral works composed by black African composers may be viewed as a distinct attempt to reconcile these two cultural elements.

## 10.2 Visual Representation

It is interesting to note that visual aesthetics support the impression of this segmentation. For choirs participating in competitions and festivals it became common practice to wear elaborate robes when presenting Western set pieces and to change into traditional attire for the rendition of traditional songs. Lunga from the Bonisudumo Choristers explains why it is that they have various uniforms: "We do have the one which is suitable for summer, we do have the one with a jacket suitable for winter. And then we do have the traditional one, suitable for both seasons. It depends on which activity we are going to perform for".<sup>12</sup>

Musa Xulu observes that choirs would even "wear Sotho attire for Sotho songs, Zulu attire for Zulu songs, Xhosa attire for Xhosa songs and colonial type attire for western type songs".<sup>13</sup> To understand the historical contest, we have to return briefly to a point made in Chapter 1, where I argued that the African Native Choir was negotiating identity through the medium of dress during their concerts in England. In the first half of the programme they dressed in "sundry African costumes singing in the Kaffir tongue" but changed to "European dress" for the second half.<sup>14</sup> This, I suggested, should be seen in relation to current clothing and dress etiquette, which was amongst the most morally charged aspects of the mission education. For the middle class African, change of dress became the most obvious symbol for leaving traditional social life behind in order to enter the modern Westernised world. I have argued earlier that dress and tidiness were foremost concerns of the missionaries (Chapters 1.2.2, page 23 and 3.2.1, page 77). Once they had internalised these ideals, clothing became for the converts a key means of showing their improvement in 'civilisation'. The practice of changing their dress for the various parts of the repertoire is, for contemporary *amakwaya* groups, an act of shifting identity. Dress is thus a sign of the process of negotiation and of the desire to merge the inner and outer selves, and facilitates the process of becoming completely immersed in the diverse requirements of the segmented repertoire. Apart from the status that Western designed robes gives to the choristers, uniforms have great relevance for them, as a form of identification as a group. Lastly, dress becomes an expression of protest and a sign of emancipation for the *amakwaya* performers. Edward Mngadi explains: "The attire that native Africans used to wear, was seen [by the missionaries] to be uncivilised and heathen. That is why nowadays you will find some choirs coming in their traditional attire... They are trying to go back to what was taken away from them by the missionaries".<sup>15</sup> The effects of the aesthetics of dress on *amakwaya* performance practice are complex and need fuller investigation.

<sup>12</sup> Lunga, Bonisudumo Choristers (Gauteng), questionnaire Johannesburg, February 12, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> M. Xulu, 1995: 164.

<sup>14</sup> *The Christian Express* (May 1, 1891).

<sup>15</sup> Personal communication with Edward Mngadi, Durban, November 16, 1999.



Figure 10.1: *Molopo Choral Artists, NCF, Johannesburg, December 2001*

### 10.3 Phenomenology of the Sectionalised Repertoire

The following section will investigate the importance and function of each section of *amakwaya* repertoire as seen by the performers themselves. When asked whether the choirs and their conductors favoured any one part of the repertoire, Fakazi replied: "...you know what will happen here, the conductors will go more for the African pieces well composed and the Western pieces well composed. Because the traditional wedding songs you don't have to learn them. You don't have to have copies. They don't take them so seriously".<sup>16</sup>

In an interesting discussion that occurred during a meeting with the Action Research group that I had initiated in Pietermaritzburg, conductors from various community and school choirs supported Fakazi's statement. Even though they agreed that they enjoyed wedding songs, they were more interested in classical songs: "Our music is the classical music: how to handle the notes, how to project the voice, we enjoy it... Just when we are relaxed, we sing wedding songs. But when we are in business, it's classical... We enjoy the classical music to the point of crying. Classical music – that is why we come together".<sup>17</sup>

Andile Radebe, who conducts a school choir at Sinamuva Public Primary School in Imbali near Pietermaritzburg, prefers "to have a good choir that is good when it comes to the classical music than a choir that excels when it comes to wedding songs".<sup>18</sup> This preference becomes obvious, as Andile Radebe admits:

<sup>16</sup> Personal communication with Zakhele Fakazi, Marianhill, November 05, 1999.

<sup>17</sup> Ntombizodwa M. Majola, Thembelihle Dladla, Thokozani Ndolomba, Andile Radebe, Joshua Radebe, (Pietermaritzburg Participatory Action Research Group, 12<sup>th</sup> meeting, May 04, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> Andile Radebe, Pietermaritzburg Participatory Action Research Group, 12<sup>th</sup> meeting, May 04, 2000.

We don't really give [wedding songs] time to practise. We practise them during the last rehearsal [before the performance] and then we sing it the following day. We never just spend a week or two or three just practising wedding songs. We never give it time... you can wake up in the morning, you assemble people and sing it and entertain people for the whole night. In fact in our days we would go to a concert not knowing one song. We would go outside, practise, go in and present. People would go excited. Go outside and practise... For the whole night.<sup>19</sup>

Joshua Radebe, Andile's father adds: "... we know these wedding songs, we have grown up with them, so you don't even need to learn that thing, you go and just take your start. So it's just something we are not very serious about. It's just waste our time".<sup>20</sup>

One of the reasons for the inclusion of Western repertoire seems to be the challenge that 'classical' compositions pose to the choristers and the conductor. "Western compositions", they argue, "[are] a new thing to us, it's a foreign thing, we want to master it".<sup>21</sup> It is in the performance of Western compositions, which are regarded as "the serious part of the repertoire", that choirs want to impress, by demonstrating that they are capable of mastering "also the difficult music". Performance becomes a way of demonstrating achievement. The fact that most competitions prescribe only Western and African eclectic compositions emphasises this point. Though choirs are encouraged to sing neo-traditional songs as part of the own-choice category,<sup>22</sup> the tendency is for them to rather choose another Western composition. This, in fact, has led to the questionable trend of *amakwaya* groups presenting operatic scenes in their entirety.

For Joshua Radebe, African eclectic compositions

are still simple so far. They are not as complicated as the Bachs and the Mendelssohns but they are set in the pattern of the Western pieces, so they are very important. But Brahms, Mendelssohn and Bach, those are terrible! You sing until you don't know where you are – but we enjoy it. In fact, it is the difficulty that brings fun to the whole thing.<sup>23</sup>

Fakazi has a similar understanding of the demands made by Western compositions. He feels that "when you sing a Western piece, you concentrate. You know there are these semitone intervals and the chromatics, which are very difficult to execute".<sup>24</sup>

With these compositions, Fakazi goes on to argue, the nature of the music and the performance practice are very different from traditional African concepts. It is interesting that he should perceive African music as effortless and sincere, granting the performer space and opportunities for improvisation. This is in stark contrast to sophisticated, intellectual Western music, where you have to be careful to "walk along the line" the composer has laid out:

This person who has composed the song has done the line, and you must be very careful when you walk along this line. You are more careful and very conscious of what you are doing. Whereas in the traditional song it's natural. You don't have to think, it comes naturally. You feel it, it comes from you, it's

<sup>19</sup> Joshua Radebe, Pietermaritzburg Participatory Action Research Group, 12<sup>th</sup> meeting, May 04, 2000.

<sup>20</sup> Personal communication with Joshua Radebe, Pietermaritzburg, March 14, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Joshua Radebe, Pietermaritzburg Participatory Action Research Group, 12<sup>th</sup> meeting, May 04, 2000.

<sup>22</sup> This is not to be confused with the three categories of the sectionalised *amakwaya* repertoire. Participation in the NCF, for example, requires the performance of two prescribed pieces, one taken from the Western and one from the African eclectic repertoire. A third piece can be chosen from any of these three categories and is referred to as the "own-choice category".

<sup>23</sup> Joshua Radebe, Pietermaritzburg Participatory Action Research Group, 12<sup>th</sup> meeting, May 04, 2000.

<sup>24</sup> Personal communication with Zakhele Fakazi, Marianhill, November 05, 1999.

more spontaneous... I don't know, maybe the style of the Western music, all these chromatics and difficult intervals.<sup>25</sup>

Sam Shabalala feels that it is imperative "to expose the choirs to the culture of Western music [because] you must go through Western music before you can understand African songs".<sup>26</sup> It is interesting that he should regard training in Western music as prerequisite for the understanding of African compositions. Here he highlights not only the fact that African compositions are to a large extent affected by western influences, but also makes the debatable assumption that you have to be an educated and trained musician in order to understand African eclectic compositions.

Even though traditional songs do not get the same attention during the rehearsals as the other parts of the repertoire do, they nevertheless have a very important function at performances, as Fakazi emphasises:

A choir can't just restrict and sing only serious pieces from Western or African composers. How do you entertain? I mean you won't be able to entertain people. Because this is where everybody feels free. When it is this Western, you listen to a Haydn, you sit and listen, through the passages and at the end big applause. But this traditional, you can give a whistle in between. The listener is more involved... So actually they [the choristers] entertain the audience with something that is relaxed. They sing it in the end because it takes away the voice. You know movement and singing at the same time, you can't do that and then sing [Western repertoire].<sup>27</sup>

Mngadi, a seasoned choral Conductor himself, knows that the audience expects a good choir to entertain with

these traditional songs [which] are mainly wedding songs, songs that are known, that are used by everyone... You start the song and other people know it... it's easy to get into them and they are moving songs for the audience. The audience likes it very much, even if it's a Western type of a concert. But if you go into these songs, everyone cries. You have to. You can't just leave it without getting into it. It relaxes everyone.<sup>28</sup>

Audience participation and the need to let the audience enjoy itself after going through the serious part of the repertoire are key features in the performance practice of *amakwaya*. In the rather informal second part of these concerts, the choirs and their audiences alike release the tensions set up by the earnestness of the first part in a way that is regarded by my informants as rooted in African cultural practices. At this stage of the performance both the choir and the audience are transformed: members of the audience start participating, and the function of the conductor changes as he turns around and faces the audience, merging with the choral group and giving up his prominent position. Furthermore, the choristers communicate more directly with the audience, not only through their singing, but also through the medium of movements and gestures. At this stage, the highly organised separation of performers (choristers, conductor, pianist etc.) and audiences that exists in the presentation of Western as well as African eclectic compositions, where interaction is not intended, vanishes.

Of all the competitions and festivals that I have attended during the past years, I shall never forget a school competition, which was organised at Bizana, Eastern Cape, in May 2000. I was invited to conduct a workshop for the regional choirs and accompany them on the piano during the

<sup>25</sup> Personal communication with Zakhele Fakazi, Marianhill, November 05, 1999.

<sup>26</sup> Personal communication with Sam Shabalala, Durban, SABC, March 07, 2000.

<sup>27</sup> Personal communication with Zakhele Fakazi, Marianhill, November 05, 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Personal communication with Edward Mngadi, Durban, November 16, 1999.



competition the following weekend. The contrast between the reception of Western and formally composed African compositions and that of neo-traditional songs was remarkable. Whereas the audience – carefully watched by the Master of Ceremonies – had kept fairly quiet throughout the serious part of a choir’s presentation, they rose from their seats, and, bursting into song, stormed towards the stage as soon as the choir had finished the prescribed pieces. The whole audience participated in this spectacular celebration of singing and dancing as the choir left the stage. It took the Master of Ceremonies a long while before he could calm the audience and persuade them to return to their seats so that the following choir could take their position on the stage. The desire of the audience to take an active role in the proceedings of the competition is palpable even in the most formalised and prestigious competitions, as in the Finals of the NCF, where the audience often joins in with the choirs when they are performing traditional songs. At such a moment, all persons present join in celebration: everyone becomes a performer. Henry Weman had an experience similar to mine in the early 1960s:

...the reaction of the general public, both white and coloured, was interesting. They all naturally received the European songs politely enough, but interest waned as the evening progressed, as the general hum of conversation indicated. However, as soon as some choirs broke with convention and produced a native song with its accompanying movements and dance, interest among both groups quickened; that choir had made immediate contact with the public, and everyone listened eagerly. The scene took on life and movement, and the public responded.<sup>29</sup>

Xulu has written about traditional African ceremony and celebration, using the example of Zulu culture:

...it is not always easy to distinguish between performers and audience... it would first appear as if everybody present is a performer. This is because a Zulu musical event is not only the concern of a few selected performers. It is the concern of everyone present. Making music is not just singing. It is also ululating by the women (*ukukikiza*), whistling by men (*gashiya*), war-like chanting by women and young girls, and general excitement which leaves room for spontaneous reaction to the situation. What is important is that nobody should feel out of place, and everybody does something to enjoy himself and to express his feelings about the ceremony. The only way people make sense out of a ceremony is to participate.<sup>30</sup>

When choosing set pieces for the competitions, the repertoire committee considers various factors: the choirs should enjoy the songs, the songs should not be too difficult, and the songs should be attractive to the audience.<sup>31</sup> In fact the desire to make competitions more attractive to the audience was a major motive for the introduction of own-choice pieces and traditional songs at the NCF. Khabi Mngoma stressed the “popular acceptability” of the works prescribed for the competitions: “[T]he compositions must offer a musical challenge, some excitement, and it must be enjoyable at the same time, for both the performers and the audiences alike. If one is preoccupied with musical advancement only, one would have to choose more difficult works, especially in the Western repertoire section”.<sup>32</sup>

In the following chapters, I will look at some important aspects of the sectionalised repertoire and give some direction as to where further research is necessary. I decided against a sequence of chapters that would mirror the current performance practice of *amakwaya* groups today, whereby a choir starts with Western repertoire, proceeds to African eclectic compositions, and finishes with

<sup>29</sup> H. Weman, 1960: 121-22.

<sup>30</sup> M. Xulu, 1989: 35.

<sup>31</sup> Personal communication with Sam Shabalala, Durban, SABC, March 07, 2000.

<sup>32</sup> Khabi Mngoma, interview with Inge M. Burger, May, 1985; quoted from Inge M. Burger, 1990: 383.



the more relaxed neo-traditional African songs, accompanied by movement and dance. What made me reverse this order and put the discussion of traditional songs first was the fact that the historical development of neo-traditional songs was of essential importance in the development of composers of the *amakwaya* community, and that many of the issues dealt with in this section are relevant for the understanding of those discussed later when dealing with the Western and African eclectic repertoires.



## Neo-traditional Songs

*... it came from the mission stations, where they changed the wedding songs and put in the Western harmonies... So the [neo-traditional] wedding songs came about that way.<sup>1</sup>*

The end of the nineteenth century saw the creation of a new song style, which amalgamated traditional song material with Western influences. Prompted by the teachings of the missionaries and their promotion of Western hymns (Chapter 5, page 123), choral groups blended African melodic and polyphonic features with the Western choral idiom. Ludumo Magangane emphasises that at the church the converts

sang the hymns, which are in four part harmony and the missionary also played the organ. Because of the obviously very keen oral tradition, then those harmonies were picked up and then they infiltrated into our singing. So all this influence of the four-part harmony therefore comes from the church... from [there it spread] into the schools and from the schools into the community.<sup>2</sup>

African traditional songs, like those performed at weddings with their distinct antiphonal structure of call – response, were performed in four-part harmony, with African movements and in accordance with Western vocal aesthetics. Reverend Myaka from Clermont explains that the transformation of indigenous songs came about when people started “to bring in some tenor”:

They want to bring in chords. [However,] it’s off then. When you do this, you spoil the indigenous song because in Zulu it is almost unison. It is unison at different octaves. [When] people with high voices sing – they will sing it in high octave and people with low voices in a lower octave: that’s indigenous. You will find that there are six parts sung but in one key, only different octaves.<sup>3</sup>

Myaka’s description of bringing “in some tenor” is to the point. Formerly traditional songs, like Zulu *amabubo* songs, had been sung in a polyphonic two-part structures, in which men and women sing mostly octaves, a fact which favoured the transition to Western four-part harmony.<sup>4</sup> The act of harmonisation involves the addition of inner voice parts between the bass line (men), and the soprano line (women), which Myaka describes as “[bringing] in chords”, and this can be seen as a pivotal moment in the creation of the neo-traditional song style.

<sup>1</sup> Personal communication with Langa Nkosi, Johannesburg, November 20, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Johannesburg, SAMRO, November 18, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Personal communication with Rev. Myaka, Clermont, May 08, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> In almost every African song, one can find at least two different parts performed at the same time. These parts are usually not performed in a homophone way. The entries of the different parts are staggered, and never begin or end at the same time. See for instance D. Rycroft, 1967 and J. H. Nketia, *The Music of Africa*, New York: Norton, 1974: Chapter 14.

Promoted by touring choirs like Caluza's Ohlange Choir, the Westernised, hymn-based wedding songs, with their characteristic carefully synchronised movements, became popular throughout South Africa. The chief driving force behind the popularity of neo-traditional songs was an emerging interest in the African cultural heritage, which came about in the late nineteenth century when members of the black middle class started to question the uncritical assimilation of Western cultural values. I have noted above (Chapter 4.2, page 107) the fact that the rejection and partial isolation of the emerging black elite by both the white and the traditional African communities led to a crisis in which middle class Africans realised that a satisfactory self-image could not be built entirely on adopted European models. However, even when the black middle class started to devote their efforts to the re-discovery and the integration of traditional values, ideas of modernisation and progress were still at the centre of black middle class aspiration. This led to their having an increasing pride in their cultural inheritance, on the one hand, and feelings of cultural inferiority, on the other. The educated African musical solution to the problem of how to draw upon the resources of the traditional performing arts without abandoning their quest for 'civilisation' and progress was to modernise traditional song material. The result was the creation of neo-traditional songs that avoided slavish imitation of Europe without succumbing to a revival of tradition that might have been artificial. We shall later see that the emerging African nationalism also had a crucial effect on mission-trained African composers, who started to shift their attention towards integrating Western elements in traditional African song material, thus creating a syncretic choral tradition.

In content, these songs deal with different subjects taken from everyday life: for example, there are love songs, songs about work, religious songs. In the course of the twentieth century, they were also used as vehicles of protest and political opposition. In the 1990s, triggered by the political changes, songs emerged that praised "the new found freedom, Mandela [and] all that type of thing".<sup>5</sup> Being part of the oral culture, these songs were and still are in a state of constant flux, reflecting and communicating the experiences of the performers. The song "Ngo 1940", for example, reveals the conflicting demands of tradition and progress (see Figure 11.1). The tensions between the two become obvious in the fact that the song uses neo-traditional African idioms to communicate the progressive achievements of the urban black middle class. Fakazi says about this song:

It depicts what was happening in those years. People were riding bicycles and they were going to the tea-rooms and have a cup of tea. Pointing at the progress and a new class of people. It's historical. And the flavour is more on the wedding song mood. Because they also tell history. That was what was happening in this time, that's very interesting. Because the tea that you were having was classified. Either you had tea with a saucer, that was made up in a saucer, and sometimes you had just a mug. And then there was the tea with the cup and saucer and milk and sugar, that was a special thing: educated people. So the *isicwicwicwi* were those sophisticated ones. They were drinking that kind of tea. The others were drinking from the mug.<sup>6</sup>

Neo-traditional songs mainly in the form of action-songs and modernised wedding songs were promoted by competitions. In the late 1990s, Khabi Mngoma stated that "the recent inclusion of Folk Music Sections in choral contests has stimulated communities to increase group-composition activities".<sup>7</sup> In the case of the NCF, for instance, the organising committee "divided the competition into Western songs and African music [formally composed eclectic compositions], and the section on traditional African music".<sup>8</sup> Whereas formal African and Western compositions were

<sup>5</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Springs, February 12, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication with Zakhele Fakazi, Marianhill, November 5, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> K. Mngoma, Proceedings at ISME, 1998: 428.

<sup>8</sup> Personal communication with Rev. Nxele, Clermont, May 08, 2000.

prescribed, neo-traditional songs were performed in the ‘own-choice’ category. This move was not as successful as anticipated by the organisers, because the choristers and conductors demanded ‘real music’. They were convinced that “real music, [was] Western music”, arguing that “it [was] a waste of time to do the traditional music”.<sup>9</sup>

Figure 11.1: “N’go 1940”.

To promote further the performance of the traditional African repertoire, the committee of the NCF decided, in 2000, to introduce a trophy and prize money to honour the best rendition of an African traditional song. This decision was partly taken with a view to entertaining the audience with spectacular and colourful renditions, which were supposed to form a contrast to the more serious presentations of prescribed Western and African compositions. Since then, the choirs have started to present elaborate displays of singing and dancing in the neo-traditional song section.

<sup>9</sup> Personal communication with Rev. Myaka, Clermont, May 08, 2000.



Figure 11.2: Rural wedding in Natal ca. 1900, Marianhill Archive

### 11.1 Tracing the Historical Roots: the Process of a Traditional Zulu Wedding

*And you see, if you listen to those songs, they are really just purely African in rhythm, more than anything else... with wedding songs, you'll find that they are of two different types: there are those that are from the older sort of African music and those that are from the later one. And most of what people use now, is what comes from the later section of wedding songs. And that's why these wedding songs are wedding songs that are mostly just rhythm, more than anything else. [demonstrating].<sup>10</sup>*

Because of the influences at the mission stations, traditional wedding songs (*izingoma zomtshado*) were probably the first part of traditional Zulu repertoire to be westernised. From the late nineteenth century, traditional wedding songs such as dance-songs taken from *inkondlo*, *umgqo*, *umphendu* and *isigekle* became important source material for neo-traditional songs performed by *amakwaya* groups.<sup>11</sup> Music has an important function in the wedding ceremony as it connects the various stages of the proceedings. In fact, it is the music which makes the wedding happen, for “in the case of a traditional wedding without the music, there is no wedding. The music is the

<sup>10</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, February 13, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> J. Clegg, “Towards an Understanding of African Dance: the Zulu isiShameni Style.”. *Papers Presented at the Second Symposium on Ethnomusicology*, Rhodes University, 1981 (Grahamstown: International Library of African Music, 1984): 11; and M. Xulu, 1989: 130.





**Figure 11.3:** *Wedding in Izingolweni area, arrival of the bride's party, April 28, 2001*

wedding”.<sup>12</sup> Competitive group singing and choral dancing occur at the culmination of traditional Zulu wedding ceremony. For this occasion, known as *ukwaba*, choral groups representing the bride and bridegroom’s families perform their own repertoire of songs simultaneously, each family striving to outdo the other in artistic excellence.

The wedding ceremony provides an opportunity to take sides, either with the bride’s party (*umthimba*), or with the groom’s party (*ikebetho*). These names are also used when referring to the two opposing choral groups for the day. The group that elicits the greatest amount of excitement and support from the bridal couple and their guests is usually judged to be the winner.<sup>13</sup> Ululation (*ukulilizela* or *ukukikiza*) is commonly recognised as a gauge of success. Other factors are the number of dancers the groups attract and the amount of time the couple spend with each competing group. Mzilikazi Khumalo remembers that the guests at the wedding ceremony

used to indicate their appreciation... [by awarding a] small present – a little sweet or a handkerchief or whatever. And you know in a sense that was very interesting because in a sense it indicated the appreciation of the audience of the two choirs. And the choir that got the most gifts was the winning choir for the day. You didn’t need an adjudicator, the people had adjudicated.<sup>14</sup>

On some occasions “the choir with the shorter repertoire, that is, the choir which starts to repeat items already sung, is then proclaimed the losing choir, and the one with more repertoire is a winning choir”.<sup>15</sup> Besides performing new compositions, the choirs change and improve songs that have been performed at previous weddings. As Linda Mngoma says, they “try to change old songs and produce a different version in order to excite people next time”.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> M. Xulu, 1989: 130.

<sup>13</sup> E. Pawa, 1995: 88-89.

<sup>14</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, July 18, 2000.

<sup>15</sup> M. Xulu, 1989: 123-124.

<sup>16</sup> Personal communication with Linda Mngoma, Johannesburg, SABC, February, 16, 2001.

All songs are performed in the spirit of competition, and no group wants to lose. Therefore, after all negotiations connected to *lobola* have been concluded and the wedding day agreed upon, preparations are made by the choral groups, consisting of local young people, to compose and rehearse (*ukufundela*) songs for the wedding. The two groups meet at the homes of the bride and the groom, respectively. On the very first day of the rehearsal, a leader known as *umbhidi* is appointed. The group members expect that he should “be able to inspire them, like a commander in an army. A person, who is strong in character, a person who knows how to move, who can move himself. How to sing, who can sing himself”.<sup>17</sup> His function is, however, different from a conductor in the Western sense as he does “what [the group] is doing. Not like a conductor in the Western music, where you stand and do something different from what they are doing. Here you show them by doing it”.<sup>18</sup>

These people, Khumalo recalls, “were severe”:

I remember when I was a small boy in Zululand, I used to join these choirs, because I loved traditional music... you know I remember how very strict the conductors were. To make sure that everybody sang accurately and also to make sure that everybody took the correct steps... he [the *umbhidi*] would beat us up if we did wrong things. It was a very severe thing.<sup>19</sup>



Figure 11.4: *The Umbhidi – wedding in Izingolweni area, April 28, 2001*

<sup>17</sup> Personal communication with Edward Mngadi, Durban, November 16, 1999.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, July 18, 2000.



Figure 11.5: *The bride's party (umthimba) wedding in Izingolweni area, April 28, 2001*

The wedding ceremony is completed when the bride dances her *inkondlo kamakoti*. This is the bride's "principal wedding dance and its performance represents an important moment in a woman's life".<sup>20</sup> This is a proud moment for the bride as she graduates from one peer group to the next. The performance of the *inkondlo* marks her transition from girlhood to womanhood. Moreover, this dance is an opportunity for demonstrating her musicality (*ubugagu*). Finally, the term *ukusinelwa* (to be danced for) refers to both

the successful performance of the *inkondlo* and consequently the completion of the wedding ceremony.<sup>21</sup> Wedding songs are an integral part of a wedding to the present day, as Fakazi confirms: "A traditional wedding without them is not complete. Even if people are in white with black tie, because they come from the church, they do it. The choir will sing this kind of music with movements".<sup>22</sup>

Fakazi goes on to give a lively account of the proceedings of the wedding day, which is worth quoting in full:<sup>23</sup>

When they are talking about lobola, it's very quiet ceremony... [Later], during the wedding ceremony which usually starts on a Friday, with the slaughtering of the beasts, there will be the group from the groom's side and the group from the bride's side, trying to out-sing each other – that's wedding songs. They even walk to each other and then they mix. You see, you have to concentrate, they are really walking to each other, and you know, you lose your song. It's sort of competition. If a choir has got more bass, then it really will knock the other one out. Because the bass has got power. The shriller voices – I don't know – maybe it is because the bass underlines the whole song. But the choir with more bass has got dignity and respect. Oh hey [laughs] just flexing with the other choir – but it is only good spirit. And then on Saturday just as the bride comes out of the house, they will sing and accompany her to the car with a lot of ululating. The same thing happens on the other side. And then when they are going to the church you know it's this 'na na na na' and they are singing and doing the ceremony. After that then it starts again. But there is a ceremony at the wedding where the bride is been now accepted into the family of the groom. It's a very serious ceremony that one. She has to dance and then they talk and then they say a little bit about her, what sort of person she is: is she healthy, does she have a problem... If you have problems, come to us, we will show you how to treat these things. You see. This is where the truth is said. This is usually done at the kraal in the rural areas, but in the townships, it's just in the yard. And when that is done, then they start out-singing each other. Then everybody is dancing, and the bride will dance her last dance with her old family and her friends who are not married. Because now she won't

<sup>20</sup> R. Joseph, "Zulu Women's Music". *African Music* (1989): 69-70.

<sup>21</sup> See E. Pewa, 1995: 80-1.

<sup>22</sup> Personal communication with Zakhele Fakazi, Marianhill, November 5, 1999.

<sup>23</sup> See also L. H. Samuelson, *Zululand: its Traditions, Legends, Customs and Folklore* (Durban, Griggs and Co., 1974): 113ff.



associate with unmarried women anymore. She will be associated now with married women. And she won't be dancing with unmarried women anymore. She belongs to married women now, even wherever she goes now, she doesn't even sit with unmarried women. And she dances now, it's a hell of a dance, she can dance her heart out. Then they are joined together, they are singing together, the two groups now. They are singing together and all dancing together, showing some skills. And that's it.<sup>24</sup>

It is noteworthy that Fakazi emphasises the importance of a strong bass-line, which is to be found in other traditional ceremonial songs, like *amabubo* among the Zulu and *mohobelo and mokorotlo* among the Sotho. There is some indication that the predominance of the bass may be rooted in the sonorities of the stringed bow instrument. The fundamental or root-note is the loudest in the series. In other words, the chord produced by a bow has the bass as its strongest note.<sup>25</sup> We will later see that a liking for a strong bass-line has had an important effect on the structure of African eclectic compositions, in which composers often pit the bass line against the upper voice parts. Each of the two entities maintains its own rhythmic and melodic character, creating polyphony in a call – response form.

In the following section, I want to give a brief analysis of the various elements that characterise neo-traditional songs as sung today by *amakwaya* groups.

## 11.2 Factors of Negotiation: African and Western Elements in Modernised Wedding Songs

### 11.2.1 Oral Culture

*At a wedding we just hear a song and I will teach it to my children. It will sound slightly different from what I heard. It's never exactly the same because nothing was ever written down.*<sup>26</sup>

In African culture the passing on of knowledge was always done orally. Songs, for instance, were never written down, but passed from one generation to the next by means of performance. Princess Constance Magogo KaDinizulu, an important authority on traditional Zulu music and an expert on the *ugubhu* bow, told Rycroft in an interview how she was informally introduced by her grandmother to the music of her culture: "When I was a young girl, I slept in the huts of my grandmothers, the wives of King Cetshawayo, and one could not escape hearing a great deal of our traditional music".<sup>27</sup>

In an oral culture the community itself becomes the archive, so to speak, preserving knowledge of content and performance. In music, the younger generation learns the principles of performance practice by being actively involved from an early age. This means that, in contrast to current classical traditions in the West, African traditions emphasise the creative handling of musical material. The modern Western concern with authentic performance practice is foreign to African

<sup>24</sup> Personal communication with Zakhele Fakazi, Marianhill, November 5, 1999.

<sup>25</sup> See Khabi Mngoma "The Correlation of Folk and Art Music Among African Composers". *Papers Presented At The Second Symposium On Ethnomusicology*, Rhodes University, 1981 (Grahamstown: International Library of African Music, 1984): 62.

<sup>26</sup> Joshua Radebe, Pietermaritzburg Participatory Action Research Group, 12<sup>th</sup> meeting, May 04, 2000.

<sup>27</sup> D. Rycroft, "A Royal Account of Music in Zulu Life". *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (London: University of London, Vol. 38, part 2, 1975, S. 351).

musicians, who do not aim at an *opus perfectum* or *opus absolutum*, but at meaningful communication in a certain socio-cultural context. Thus they continually adapt songs to specific situations, making them relevant to the performers and listeners alike.

Today, neo-traditional songs still owe much to the oral tradition, which affects both their content and performance. These songs are not notated, collected, or compiled. Because of the way the songs are handed on from one choral group to the other, changes in the structure and text, sometimes even in the harmony or the melody, are frequent. As a result, there is often more than one version of the same song in existence.<sup>28</sup> In some instances, songs are changed in order to make the rendition more remarkable and memorable for the audience. The teaching of this part of the repertoire is still done orally, which means that those that know and sing a song teach it to the other members of the group. Fakazi explains the process of rehearsing neo-traditional wedding songs today: The conductor or a chorister just

starts the melody... you don't even give the parts. As long as they hear the soprano, they would just tune in somehow. And there are some people who are not gifted and there are others that would say we know the bass. Then comes the tenor, and the alto. They will do variations, but normally, that is never written down. And the steps: somebody thinks of something... and when you see the steps, it's more on the traditional, and a little bit of Latin-American. And then you see something like the modern dance. Such things. Anything that will be rhythmic put in. There is no rule.<sup>29</sup>

Fakazi touches on an interesting aspect of African singing practice: the improvised harmonisation of melodies. Joshua Radebe explains that this is because

our ear is trained. But you don't have to go to school to be able to harmonise, we just do it. The ability to harmonise is a natural thing. In fact, it has gone down from generation to generation. When we grow up, we always hear two, three, four parts, not just one part and it becomes very boring for us to sing one line only: ... Children fall to sleep.<sup>30</sup>

I will return to this practice later, in order to show its relevance to African eclectic compositions.

### 11.2.2 Cyclic Form and Repetition

The most notable feature of neo-traditional songs is that they are cyclical in form. I have already mentioned the importance of regular repetition in connection with the bow songs of Princess Magogo (see page 134). In contrast to the principle of thematic development in the classical symphony of the nineteenth century, for instance, the musical material in these songs is not subjected to conflict and resolution. The music of sub-Saharan Africa is based on the establishment of recurring patterns that are sustained for a long time. Culminating moments such as occur at cadences in Western music, and the alternation between consonance and dissonances are foreign to this music. The repetition of a single pattern per part, performed without structural alterations, is of essential importance to most traditional music found in sub-Saharan Africa. One may perhaps see here an association with the cyclic events of nature like the steady succession of the rainy season and the dry season. In the words of *amakwaya* composer, S. J. Khosa, "African music [is] very essential, very

<sup>28</sup> M. Xulu, 1989: 120.

<sup>29</sup> Personal communication with Zakhele Fakazi, Marianhill, November 05, 1999.

<sup>30</sup> Personal communication with Joshua Radebe, Pietermaritzburg, October 05, 1999.



close to my heart. When I sing it, simplistic as it may sound and very repetitive, it is its functional nature that is the crux of the matter. It holds the whole African people together".<sup>31</sup>

In Western classical music, repetition is commonly regarded as being monotonous, whereas in the African context, repetition has a different meaning. It creates the impression of a steady flow of musical energy, like the cyclical recurrence of events in nature. Some consensus exists that the process of exploration is not a horizontal but rather a vertical one; it is not the development towards a definite conclusion but rather the setting up of a space that allows the fathoming of the profundity and the complexity of musical material, that is of central interest.<sup>32</sup> Ultimately this influences the perception of time, which is not perceived as a sequence of events but as a kaleidoscopic extension of the present. Another aspect linked to the cyclic form is the restriction of the text to a short phrase which is continuously repeated.<sup>33</sup>

Ngiyamthand' uSimelan'

I (IV) I<sup>6</sup>

V I

Figure 11.6: "Ngiyam' thand' uSimelan'" – first part

<sup>31</sup> S. J. Khosa quoted in Douglas Reid, "In Conversation with S. J. Khosa: Composer and Music Educator". *Ars Nova*, Vol. 24, 1992): 24.

<sup>32</sup> J. M. Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979): 112.

<sup>33</sup> For more information see A. Vilakazi: "Shembe: the Revitalisation of African Society" (Johannesburg: Skotaville 1986):145; also Chapter 5.3.1 above. There are, however, some vocal styles, for example, in the traditional music of South Africa's Bantu, where songs use more than a single phrase. These are generally reserved for solo presentation.

### 11.2.3 Call-Response

To illustrate further important structural elements and characteristics of neo-traditional songs, I have chosen “Ngiyam’ thand’ uSimelan” (I love Simelani), a wedding song which was sung to me by my students at the University of Natal in 2000 (see Figure 11.6). Like most neo-traditional wedding songs today, “Ngiyam’ thand’ uSimelan” reveals distinct interchanges between leader and chorus. When performed at a wedding ceremony, the leading part (call) would be sung by the leader of the choir (*umbhidi*), but when presented formally on stage by an *amakwaya* group, this part would be taken by all sopranos. There are two forms of call-response: the antiphonal and the overlapping (see Figure 11.7). In wedding songs the distinctive call-response form results in an overlapping of parts, which is the commonest form of African polyphony: one voice part (*blabela*) starts with its pattern and at some point before the end of the phrase, the second part (*landela*) enters.<sup>34</sup> This principle operates in Zulu bow music, where the voice enters at a certain point within the bow phrase and often ends within the next bow phrase, creating an overlapping relationship. In fact, in these songs, the instrument serves the function of the chorus. Many of the choral dance-songs were composed and performed by an individual singer using the bow for self-accompaniment, and only later were transformed into unaccompanied choral songs in which the instrument was replaced by a group of singers.<sup>35</sup>

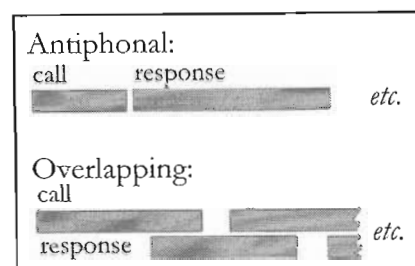


Figure 11.7: Forms of call – response

### 11.2.4 Interlocking and Interrhythm

The interplay of the parts, referred to above, produces a phenomenon that ethnomusicologist Meki Nzewi calls “interrhythm”.<sup>36</sup> Figure 11.8, taken from bar two and three of the song, “Ngiyam’ thand’ uSimelan”, illustrates the interlocking of the call and response patterns. It is clear that the potential energy of the song is released only by the simultaneous performance of all the rhythmic and melodic patterns involved. When a black South African musician attempts a performance without the backing of other singers, he jumps from one part to another in order to outline the polyphonic interplay whenever a new entry occurs.<sup>37</sup> This interdependence of parts was demonstrated to me during my first visit to South Africa in 1995, when a girl sang the song, “Shosholoza”, constantly jumping from part to part (see Figure 11.9)

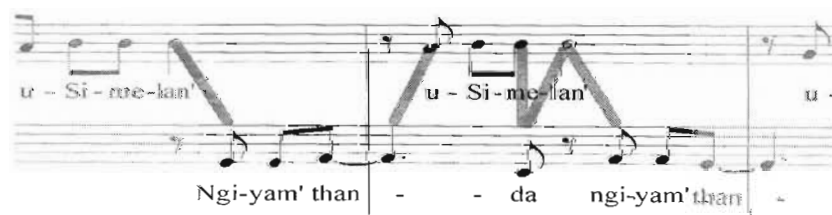


Figure 11.8: “Ngiyam’ thand’ uSimelan” – interrhythm and interlocking

<sup>34</sup> See also H. Weman, 1960: 49-58, and A. C. Jordan, *Towards an African Literature – The Emergence of Literary Form in Xhosa* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1973): 18.

<sup>35</sup> D. Rycroft, 1975/76: 63; also see H. Weman, 1960: 49-ff.

<sup>36</sup> M. Nzewi, *Musical Practice and Creativity* (Bayreuth: IWALWA-Haus 1991).

<sup>37</sup> See also D. Rycroft, 1967: 90.

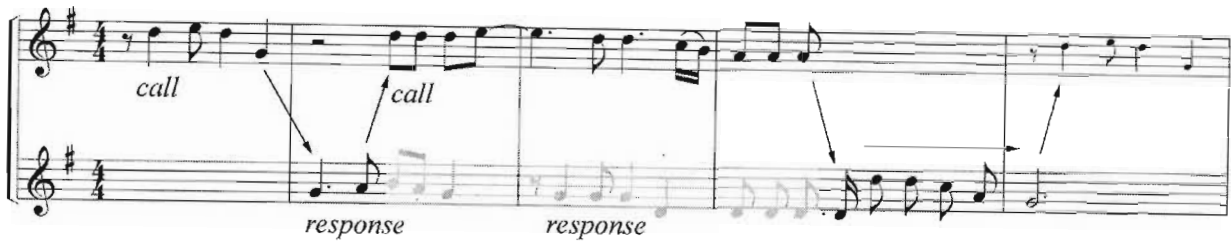


Figure 11.9: “Shosholoza” – interlocking parts as performed in 1995 in Durban.

### 11.2.5 Falling Melody Lines

As Rycroft has argued, the use of falling melody lines, echoing the falling speech tone patterns of Nguni languages, is the norm in the traditional music of South Africa.<sup>38</sup> Although in neo-traditional wedding songs, the speech-tone requirements of the words and the sentence intonation are frequently overridden, the song “Ngiyam’ thand’ uSimelan” reveals traces of these linguistic characteristics. Related to the falling speech tone pattern is the falling of the suffix of the word *than-da*, which is a representation in music of a tonal glide originating from the portamento pitch-glides of traditional Nguni speech.<sup>39</sup> We will later see that these tonal slurs in the form of ‘grace-notes’ become an essential feature in the re-Africanisation of the formally composed *amakwaya* repertoire of composers like Mzilikazi Khumalo.



Figure 11.10: “Ngiyam’ thand’ uSimelan” – falling melody lines.

### 11.2.6 Root Progression and the Development of the I-IV-I<sup>6/4</sup>-V-I Ostinato

An examination of the harmonic structure of “Ngiyam’ thand’ uSimelan” reveals a progression based on a particular type of cadence Western art music (I-IV-I<sup>6/4</sup>-V-I). It is interesting to note that this harmonic formula is to be found not only in neo-traditional songs performed by contemporary *amakwaya* groups, but is also used in almost all forms of South African neo-traditional music, including vocal pieces in the *isicathamiya* tradition and instrumental forms like *mbhaganga*. The ‘African’ use of the I-IV-I<sup>6/4</sup>-V-I ostinato is, however, different in effect from the European ‘classical’ cadence: the move to the dominant chord is not perceived as a building up of tension or the concluding tonic as the release of this tension. As might be expected after my discussion of ‘repetition’ earlier, the aural impression is of a cyclical nature as every part returns repeatedly to the beginning of its respective pattern. After a while, this results in a continuum that often effaces the sense of the patterns beginning or ending.

<sup>38</sup> D. Rycroft, “Speech-tone/Melody Relationship in Southern African Music”, in J. P. Malan ed., *South African Music Encyclopaedia* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1979-1986): 69-70. Further details can be gleaned from Kwabena J. H. Nketia, 1975.

<sup>39</sup> See D. Rycroft, 1971: 236.

Traditional Nguni compositions like clan songs (e.g., Zulu *amahubo*), or bow songs (e.g., those of Princess Magogo) are based on a two-chord harmonic pattern (root progression). These are two major triads one tone apart, represented either as a semitone (Zulu bow songs), or a whole tone (Xhosa bow songs). The alternation of these two root-notes with the respective overtones provides the tonal foundation of the songs. In Chapter 5.3.1 (page 134) I used Ntsikana’s hymn “Ulo Tixo Mkulu” to illustrate the root progression. There I argued that Bokwe’s version of Ntsikana’s hymn reveals a distinct deviation from the concept of the root progression. Bokwe’s ‘adjustments’ were prompted by his mission training, and especially by the Western hymns taught by the missionaries. These ‘adjustments’ are the early signs of the emergence of the I-IV-I<sup>6/4</sup>-V-I ostinato, which became a stylistic feature of all traditional songs towards the end of the nineteenth century. Root progression has many affinities with the I-IV-I<sup>6/4</sup>-V-I ostinato (e.g., both are cyclical). The following arrangement of the Xhosa song, “Jikel’ emaweni ngiyahamba”, by the Manhattan Brothers elucidates the process of transformation. The group recorded the song in 1954, with the following harmonisation (see Figure 11.11).<sup>40</sup>

Figure 11.11: “Jikel’ emaweni ngiyahamba” – Manhattan Brothers

The melodic content of “Jikel’ emaweni ngiyahamba” originates in the performance practice of bow songs. This is evident from its harmonic structure, which is originally based on the root progression G-A derived from the two-chord harmonic pattern of the bow. A performance of the song with the music bow would be as follows (Figure 11.12).<sup>41</sup>

Figure 11.12: “Jikel’ emaweni ngiyahamba” – root progression

<sup>40</sup> Gallotone GB 2103 (December 22, 1954). African-American groups like the Mills Brothers had a strong influence on the Manhattan Brothers, a close-harmony group from Pimville, which later became part of Soweto.

<sup>41</sup> David Dargie recorded a version of the “Click Song”, uGqongqothwane, performed in 1983 by Mrs Nofinishi Dywili in the Lumko District. A comparison of this recording with the interpretations of Miriam Makeba reveals a process of adaptation similar to that discussed in the case of “Jikel’ emaweni ngiyahamba”. See D. Dargie, *Xhosa Music: its Techniques and Instruments with a Collection of Songs* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1988): 19ff.

In order to play any particular note of the melody, the player of the bow must sound the necessary fundamental. In other words, each note of the melody is associated either with the lower or the upper triad (G or A), and the bow player shapes the melody by amplifying selected overtones. The listener's impression is of a constant shifting between the two tonal patterns. Besides the fundamental tones and the melody, an harmonic pattern is audible as the chords of overtones are heard, faintly but constantly.

In the Manhattan Brothers' version, the second bar is harmonised with an A-major chord. This harmonisation corresponds with the root progression, and the alternation between the two chords produces the impression of shifting tonality. The third bar of the Manhattan Brothers' version deviates essentially from the root progression in that they introduce the dominant chord on D. Both the C and the F# of this chord are not producible on the bow and show the influence of Western tonality.

In the song, "Ngiyam' thand' uSimelan", the harmonisation of the first entry (response bar 1; see Figure 11.13) exemplifies an interesting hybrid form, something between root progression and Western tonality. The harmony wavers between the first inversion of the second degree (f#-minor) and the fourth degree (A-Major) with an added sixth, but the melody of the response (notes E and F#) shows an affinity to the principle of the root progression. This is disguised by the harmonisation, however, with the f#-minor chord followed by an A-Major chord.



Figure 11.13: "Ngiyam' thand' uSimelan"; bar 1

### 11.2.7 Performance Practice

The relevance of Western choral practice to that of *amakwaya* may be seen in the act of singing together in a mixed group. Among the Nguni, songs were assigned to different functions, different age groups and different sexes. To participate in songs and dances that were not appropriate to one's own group would have been perceived as a social and cultural *faux pas*. As Elliot Pewa remarks, "it would be a shame to find a man dancing among women or dancing a women's dance or dancing like a woman". He goes even further in saying that, "generally it is a shame to do anything 'like a woman does it'".<sup>42</sup> The fact that in the choral groups at the mission stations the sexes were made to perform together singing in different parts must be seen as an important break with tradition. We have to keep this development in mind when discussing *amakwaya* practice and especially the repertoire of neo-traditional wedding songs in which both men and women sing and dance together, for, according to Pewa, in traditional society it would have been "a defilement for different sexes to dance hand-in-hand or front-to-front".<sup>43</sup> The process of negotiation also affected the performance practice of traditional songs. In the presentation of neo-traditional songs, Joshua Radebe sets great store by the "proper projection of the voice" and insists that

...even if it's traditional... the sound must be correct. In every song... traditional or otherwise, I want that sound... You still make the correct sound, but movement must not spoil that sound. If I can hear that a person because he starts moving makes a wrong sound, I say no, I want this sound! If you are moving, still, I want this sound!<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> E. Pewa, 1984: 17.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Personal communication with Joshua Radebe, Pietermaritzburg, October 05, 1999.



One last element that I want to mention briefly is the use of movement in South African neo-traditional songs. When performing traditional songs, *amakwaya* groups use accompanying actions, such as dance steps in which a variety of bodily movements are repeated. Some mimetic gestures illustrate what the words say, and make the references and implications more forceful. Others are, however, merely rhythmic actions, like hand clapping or stamping the feet, to emphasise certain points in the tune. Movement, Edward Mngadi argues,

is important. It's the movement, it's the understanding, it's the feeling – the voice as well, because you will find that you start a song with everyone singing. But as they get into the song, the singing comes down and the movement goes up. It's the action that is important... you can take hours to polish up the movements. We concentrate on the movement: the uniformity, if it needs to be uniform, how the leader is involved. Because there must be a leading person who is a very strong leader.<sup>45</sup>

Even though Mngadi stresses the importance of movement, it is important to understand that in the performance of this repertoire, words, music, and movement form a single entity. It is not possible for one to last for a long time without the others, and a song performed without one of these elements remains incomplete and its message is weakened. As with traditional *ibubo* (Zulu clan songs), dancing begins a few moments after the singing has begun and proceeds concurrently with it.<sup>46</sup> I have argued earlier that body movements, gestures, hand clapping and dancing makes the performance of 'choruses' a holistic experience for the performers and audience alike (see Chapter 5.5, page 146). When a choir on the stage starts its performance of traditional songs, the audience usually joins in with dancing, singing and clapping. Thus the performance of traditional songs has a unifying force, creating community by bridging the gap between the audience and the performers.<sup>47</sup> Whereas the Western repertoire and the formally composed African repertoire are presented in the Western manner with the choir formally facing the audience, the traditional songs are performed in a manner more congenial to an African audience. Movement becomes a key moment in this communication. Mngadi explains that when you want to express yourself, "you have to move, you have to show that you feel it. Movement affects the sound and the voice: it's more of expression and understanding. So it communicates quite well with the audience. It's within them, it's in them".<sup>48</sup>

When a new song is being learnt, every member of the choral group is welcome to contribute ideas as to the development of appropriate dance routines. Thus the performance of the neo-traditional repertoire is not determined by the formative influence of a single conductor. The chorister who has developed the song and the dance routine usually becomes the leader.

<sup>45</sup> Personal communication with Edward Mngadi, Durban, November 16, 1999.

<sup>46</sup> See M. Xulu, 1989: 137.

<sup>47</sup> For a discussion about the social relation of performer and audience see also Christopher Small, *Music-Society-Education* (London: John Calde, 1977): 37.

<sup>48</sup> Personal communication with Edward Mngadi, Durban, November 16, 1999.

### 11.3 Summary

In music the educated African's solution to the problem of avoiding the danger of a slavish imitation of Europe without succumbing to an artificial revival of tradition was to modernise traditional songs. This process happened in two stages.

In the first stage, traditional African wedding songs, with their distinctive antiphonal and polyphonic call–response structure, were performed in four-part harmony with African movements and Western vocal aesthetics. Traditional wedding songs (*izingoma zomtshado*) were probably the first to be westernised at the mission stations. From the late nineteenth century dance-songs taken from the wedding ceremony (*inkondlo, umgqo, umphendu* and *isigekle*) became important source material for neo-traditional songs performed by *amakwaya* groups. At the present day, these wedding songs remain a central part of a wedding. They are performed in a spirit of competition, and a wedding without the competitive performance of two choral groups, representing the families of the bride and groom, is considered incomplete. The second stage in the modernisation of traditional songs followed in the first quarter of the twentieth century: traditional dance-songs arranged for choir (*amagama 'sizulu*) were blended with American popular song styles and local ragtime styles (*amagama eRagtime*) that had become popular amongst *amakwaya* groups.

One of the foremost promoters of neo-traditional dance songs was R. T. Caluza, who, with his Ohlange Choir, popularised throughout South Africa the westernised, hymn-based wedding songs with their characteristic carefully synchronised movements. Later, neo-traditional songs were also promoted through school competitions and festivals. More recently, the committee of the National Choir Festival has decided to introduce a trophy and prize money to honour the best rendition of traditional African song. This step was taken to revive traditional African music, and to entertain the audience with spectacular and colourful renditions, forming a contrast to the more serious presentations of prescribed Western and African compositions.

Section 11.2 of this chapter discusses the various elements that characterise neo-traditional songs as sung by *amakwaya* groups today.

#### European elements:

- four-part structure (soprano, alto, tenor, bass)
- I-IV-I<sup>6/4</sup>-V-I ostinato
- the performance practice of neo-traditional songs tends to be shaped according to European ideals of sound aesthetics (e.g. “polished” vocal sound, blending of voices) and formal stage presentation

#### African elements:

- single stanza
- cyclic structure
- pattern composition
- call-response
- flexible rhythmic structures: poly-rhythm, multiple downbeats, syncopated rhythms, interlocking and inter-rhythm
- descending melody lines
- traces of root progression
- bass ostinato
- emphasis on a strong bass sonority
- improvisation (leader)
- cultural transmission (oral)
- dance, movement, gestures



## African Eclectic Compositions

When referring to the African composed repertoire, members of the *amakwaya* community use the term 'eclectic' to describe those works that integrate elements of the African and Western traditions. This adds an interesting aspect to our discussion, worth further investigation. The word 'eclectic' can be used on a pejorative sense, denoting simply a 'lumping together'. But originally it referred to an intelligent selection of elements from various sources to combine them in a new entity.<sup>1</sup> Eclecticism may be a more or less reflective weighing of different influences, principles, experiences, perspectives and value systems in order to create a view or style which is something of a compromise, involving a selection from various sources that are consciously amalgamated into something new. Can this be said of the eclectic compositions of black South African composers? Guiding questions for further investigation into the meaning of eclecticism in African choral compositions might be: is there a conscious and reflective process of selection from the various sources involved? Is the approach of the composers marked by mere imitation of those sources and to what degree are the composers 'borrowing' from them? Can shifts in the quality and degree of borrowing from outside sources, either Western or African, be perceived in terms of historical periods? What is the contribution of the composers, what are the creative elements? Are the composers consciously detaching their music to old, conventional, traditional and limiting rules and contexts, or freeing it from them? Is the degree of eclecticism a personal matter, or does it depend on the training and experience of the individual composer, or the dominant influences on him?

In the following discussion, I want to address some of the most important issues and try to give an outline of the historical development of South African eclectic compositions. We will later see that the styles of African composers allow a rough categorisation, which is determined mainly by the degree to which Western or African musical aspects and traditions are used. As might be expected with the development of new styles, this categorisation is marked not by rigid periods, but by fluid transitions. Before I go on to deal with periodisation, I want to emphasise the relevance of eclectic African compositions to the main concerns of this thesis. I have argued that a process of negotiation was by the twentieth century a mark of black middle class communities. Whereas assimilation and imitation were the main strategies of early missionary converts in the struggle to

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<sup>1</sup> Webster's *Dictionary* defines "eclectic" as the "selection of doctrine or elements from various and diverse sources according to their presumed utility or validity, usually for the purpose of combining them into a satisfying or acceptable style, system of ideas, or set of practices." (Webster's *Third New International Dictionary*, (Chicago: Merriam-Webster, 1986): 719-20; see also online under: <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=eclectic>). The term "eklektikos" comes from *eklegein* to select, from *ex-* out and *legein* to gather. The "Eclectics" was the name originally given to a group of ancient philosophers who, from existing philosophical beliefs, tried to select the doctrines that seemed to them most reasonable, and who out of these constructed a new system. Eclecticism as a movement may revolutionise not only content, but also style. In architecture, for instance, eclecticism brought freedom from the canons of tradition and opened new possibilities for creative expression by reinterpreting and integrating older or foreign styles. For more details see also: *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* available online at: <http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/e/eclectic.htm>.

win the recognition of the dominant European culture, these strategies changed decisively towards the turn of the century when black Christians began to question their former rejection of the cultural heritage that they shared with other Africans, in favour of Western values. This re-thinking came at a time when the black middle class, caught between their own culture and Western culture to which they aspired, found that they did not belong completely to either. In redefining their identity they began to conceptualise ideas of a national culture that included both traditional and Western values. Their growing awareness of their African roots, which culminated in the black consciousness movement and later in the idea of the African Renaissance, had a formative influence on *amakwaya* composers and the stylistic development of their compositions.

When dealing with *amakwaya* compositions one is confronted by a wide variety of styles which themselves contain sub-styles. Because of the diversity that occurs even within individual linguistic groups, a comprehensive account is not possible here. I will be largely concerned with discerning the main stages in the development of African eclectic compositions. First, however, I would like to examine the technical processes to be found in the work of various composers.

## 12.1 The Process of Composing

Whereas in the classical European tradition composers are necessarily formally trained, in the African context, the composing of music is not considered to be an activity to be left to experts.<sup>2</sup> Following an old tradition, the community encourages anyone who feels the inclination to express himself in music, and may come to accept him as a composer. This practice means that many African composers have little or no formal musical training at all, as Leslie Nkuna, a composer from the Northern Province, says: "Most African composers, more especially the most dynamic ones, are not made: they are naturally gifted. It's an inborn thing. Most of them haven't gone to school to learn how to compose, to learn music. It came naturally to them. There is no school for that. Nobody can teach you how to compose".<sup>3</sup>

Although this has changed somewhat at the present day, and some composers are beginning to take up formal musical studies, it is true that they usually grow out of a choral community and gain their experience informally by taking part in choral singing from their early youth. It is important to understand that African composers, even when they become professional, are very much part of their communities, who assess their output and support them by commissioning compositions as set pieces for competitions. Repeated commissions are a measure of the composer's popularity, and the endorsements of his style and status.<sup>4</sup>

Being trained informally, *amakwaya* composers have found inspiration in various styles of music ranging from European classical to African folk music. A strong influence throughout the history of *amakwaya* to the present day seems to have been hymns, as Isaac Tlou explains:

I'm a composer myself. I started composing as early as 1970. I did not have a study in harmony. I did not have study in any musical education. So I will get the melody and a hymn book to see (*singing: so, do, do', ti, la...*) then I look at the harmony from there. Where there is a *do*, the altos have *la* then I write... I use the hymn to get the chords correct. Until I went to university where I began to study the chords themselves,

<sup>2</sup> K. Mngoma, 1984: 61.

<sup>3</sup> Personal communication with Leslie Nkuna, Grahamstown, July 02, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> K. Mngoma, "Music and Ubuntu". *Proceedings of the 23<sup>rd</sup> World Conference of the International Society for Music Education (ISME)* Pretoria 1998: 428.

the harmonies and what have you. That's why most of our accompanists in our churches even the secular music, they can't read music. They do it by rote.<sup>5</sup>

Hymns had a formative influence on the first generation of *amakwaya* composers, who more or less exclusively copied hymnal structures in their compositions. Given this fact, it seems contradictory that Musa Nkuna, a composer and singer who graduated at the University of Durban-Westville and at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, should describe the process of composing as follows:

[*Amakwaya*] composers don't think of a chord like this. Like when you think of a chord like C G E C. They actually write out a melody like that: soprano line first and then they don't look at this what is on top, they just write a second melody for the next part. They all seem to start soprano first for eight bars and then they go tenor for eight bars... They are not trying to harmonise each note.<sup>6</sup>

Here Nkuna draws attention to a type of composition that is marked by a horizontal rather than vertical approach. Given the monodic and homophonic character of most hymns, this seems to be surprising. The practice is, however, rooted in traditional African processes of composition. Benjamin Tyamzashe, an *amakwaya* composer born in 1890, describes his method of composition as follows: "I get an idea, then I write it down, usually the soprano. Then I add the other lines. At the end I try to get a good bass line and may afterwards change some notes in the alto or tenor".<sup>7</sup> This horizontal approach to composition is reflected in the way African choral groups improvise harmonies, which, as I have already mentioned, plays an important part in the performance practice of neo-traditional songs. When singing a song, the singers just add other voices to the melody and thus create harmony. Singers are able to conceive of harmonies inherent in each melody.<sup>8</sup> This practice, Tlou explains, becomes something like a second nature as "we are harmonising things right from childhood. A child will sing soprano. As the child grows; then the voice will change to alto, change to tenor, change to bass, automatically. We don't tell them that you must now sing this part, they develop with it".<sup>9</sup> As a result, Nkuna concludes, "[Y]ou find the chords in African music are always the same. You can never find 'advanced chords'. You will never find a chord maybe that has a note that resolves differently on the next chord. You always find consonances".<sup>10</sup>

Though this technique of improvising harmony derives partly from the harmonisation of hymns, which, as I have already suggested, led to the emergence of the I-IV-I<sup>6/4</sup>-V-I formula, it also shows the influence of the root progression of traditional bow music, for instance, where harmony parts move in parallel. Singers often improvise parts that tend to move in the same pitch direction as the melody. The effect of this parallel movement, which in the Western context is regarded as incorrect, becomes an idiosyncrasy of the musical style.<sup>11</sup> Nkuna's statement that in "African music... [you] can never find 'advanced chords'", suggests that some composers, in the process of discovering Western ideas, have lost an understanding of traditional musical procedures.

Musa's father, Leslie Nkuna, a prolific composer from the Northern Province, describes his approach to composition:

<sup>5</sup> Personal communication with Isaac Tlou, Johannesburg, February 11, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Musa Nkuna during a workshop for choral composers of the *amakwaya* tradition organised as part of the New Music Indaba, Grahamstown, July 2, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> B. Tyamzashe, quoted in D. D. Hansen "The Life and Work of Benjamin Tyamzashe a Contemporary Composer", Occasional Paper Number Eleven (Grahamstown: Rhodes University, Institute of Social and Economic Research): 28.

<sup>8</sup> K. Mngoma, 1984: 62.

<sup>9</sup> Personal communication with Issac Tlou, Johannesburg, February 11, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Musa Nkuna during a workshop for choral composers of the *amakwaya* tradition organised as part of the New Music Indaba, Grahamstown, July 2, 2000.

<sup>11</sup> For further details see D. Dargie, *Xhosa Zionist Church Music* (Johannesburg: Hodder and Stoughton, 1987).



I think of a theme then I write lyrics. You can write lyrics if you have got a good theme then you look at how the lyrics are. Is it a sad lyric, is it a joyful lyric, is it a praising lyric – you see, you judge by yourself. Then start notating... With most of us after having written the lyrics I can stay for about two, three, four, five days without touching it anymore. Without notating anything, and still, you know my brains are still searching what to write now until I get into a gear. With me in particular after writing the lyrics, that's the poetry of the whole thing, I sometimes, you know, put it on my headboard just like that and sleep. I know when I wake up something will have come up. More especially when I'm really serious about composing. Sometimes when I'm driving, more especially when I'm alone, you know from here [Grahamstown] to Port Elizabeth, it can take me five hours, more especially when I am alone. As I'm alone I'm singing, new melodies come, then I just stop and I write.

The fact that Leslie Nkuna starts with writing the lyrics is significant. In Chapter 5.3.2 (page 138) I pointed out that all Bantu languages of southern Africa are tone languages. This means that each word has its individual tone, its melodic shape. Since the relative levels of the syllables help to determine meaning, compositions have to respect the intonation of words and the sentence-tone in order to communicate the correct meaning of words. A composer who disregards this fact runs the risk of rendering the lyrics meaningless. Leslie Nkuna gives an example:

Saying: "the bird is flying high". Now you come to notation (sings: so, do re mi fa so)... Did you realise I have said *the* bird. Now *the* bird would be different. You have started with notes, instead of starting with the lyrics... but there is a disadvantage when you try to fit in the lyrics in the notation that you have written. You see, you may find that what you have written as lyrics may not easily fit into the tune that you have written.<sup>12</sup>

When asked about the process of composing, many *amakwaya* composers emphasise that their work is often a result of some form of mystical experience and seldom just an intellectual construct. To Leslie Nkuna, songs sometimes come

in a form of a dream. Which is not very usual, but it occurs in some instances... sometimes you see a choir rendering an unknown song. Then when you wake up you sometimes forget what you dreamt about, more especially the sounds that you heard. But sometimes you still remember the sounds that you dreamt about and then you sit down and take it.<sup>13</sup>

This seems to be a common experience for composers from other South African musical traditions. For the musical compositions of Joseph Shabalala, leader of the *isicathamiya* group Ladysmith Black Mambazo, for instance, dreams are a major source of inspiration.<sup>14</sup> In Zulu thinking and belief, dreams are a way of communication with the ancestors, and "composition by analogy becomes a means of integrating the self in the overarching entity of the ancestral lineage".<sup>15</sup> Like diviners, who derive their power from dreams, a musician communicates with his ancestors in his sleep and receives songs for them. Isaiah Shembe, for example, did not see himself as a composer and believed that different heavenly messengers brought each of his religious hymns to him. Bengt Sundkler reports from his personal communication with Shembe Jr. that Isaiah Shembe "sometimes had auditions of a girl's voice singing the hymn, and immediately after the audition he [Isaiah] would write it down".<sup>16</sup> Shembe Jr, who also wrote a number of hymns,<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Personal communication with Leslie Nkuna, Grahamstown, July 02, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> V. Erlmann, 1991: 289.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.: 302.

<sup>16</sup> B. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961): 194.

<sup>17</sup> See Nos. 223-26 in the *Nazarite Hymnbook*.

reported that the inspiration of his hymns came through visions: “In his dreams he sees a blackboard before his eyes. On the blackboard, the hymn is inscribed, and the visionary has only to copy it from memory”.<sup>18</sup> A strong belief in the Nazarite Church is that, whenever a hymn is sung, the original unseen heavenly messenger who delivered the hymn becomes pleased. When singing the hymn, the congregation must, however, be careful not to offend him, for instance, by not singing all the stanzas, or singing the hymn incorrectly.<sup>19</sup>

Composers find motivation in the fact that their work enables them to communicate with the audience and thus develop and express their sense of identity. Makaya Mjana, musical director of the Joy of Africa Choir, declared: “I’m not looking down on choirs but I find that I’m being influenced mostly by the audience. There is that thing in me that says I want to impress the audience... through the choirs”.<sup>20</sup> This struggle for identity and recognition characterises the history of the South African black middle class, and it was in the creation of their own music that members of this community found an important way of communicating their ideas and proving their ideals and cultural progress.

### 12.1.1 Tonic Sol-fa: Implications of a Musical Tool

*Tonic sol-fa was brought by the whites and it epitomises the whole concept of Western music – formalised music, music that was written down.*<sup>21</sup>

In Chapter 6 I pointed out that, brought by the missionaries in the nineteenth century, tonic sol-fa became an important musical tool at the mission stations (see Chapter 6.2.3, page 167). For *amakwaya* composers who emerged out of a culture that was exclusively oral, notation was a novel experience. This experience had several significant implications for the process of composing and the stylistic development of compositions. Moreover its impact was so far-reaching that it became the determinant factor in the entire performance practice of *amakwaya* groups. In the understanding of Gabriel, a chorister of the Durban based SA Singers, tonic sol-fa notation “epitomises the whole concept of Western music. The music is supposed to be very much structured, very much disciplined. It is a very English way of doing it – standing stiff, be disciplined, be organised, sing exactly what is written down. This is not the concept of African music at all”.<sup>22</sup>

In an article published in 1985, P. J. Simelane, a prolific *amakwaya* composer, took stock of the dissemination and propagation of more than a century of music written in tonic sol-fa notation:

As 99.9 per cent of all songs sung in Bantu schools are written in the tonic sol-fa notation; as 90 per cent plus of all the hymns are sung in Bantu Churches are in the tonic sol-fa notation; as 75 per cent plus of the members of famous Bantu choirs sing the Oratorios and Cantatas in tonic sol-fa, we cannot escape the fact that the tonic sol-fa notation provides the most used and the best understood notation, and that it is the simplest way to the VOCAL repertoire. We have no instruments in our schools so we are in a way restricted to VOCAL music [original emphasis].<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> B. Sundkler, 1961: 194.

<sup>19</sup> A. Vilakazi, *Shembe: the Revitalisation of African Society* (Johannesburg: Skotaville 1986): 140.

<sup>20</sup> Makaya Mjana during a workshop for choral composers of the *amakwaya* tradition organised as part of the New Music Indaba, Grahamstown, July 2, 2000.

<sup>21</sup> Personal communication with Gabriel, a chorister of the Durban based SA Singers, Durban, May 30, 2000.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> P. J. Simelane, “The Tonic Sol-fa Method”. *TUATA* (December 1965): 13.

When S. T. Ngesi on May 5, 1999 criticised the tonic sol-fa system as “old and outdated”<sup>24</sup> in a letter to the Editor of the *Daily Dispatch*, a newspaper published in East London, he provoked the following answer from Mzwandile Matthews:

Tonic sol-fa was never and is not outdated. Maybe Ngesi has recently been introduced to staff notation, which is neither new nor modern, but is another type of notation which can be used in music. Although staff notation is regarded as an international musical imperative in the Western musical tradition, tonic sol-fa has an advantage which staff notation does not have. I need to emphasise though that, despite the shortcomings of the tonic sol-fa notation, this country has managed to produce some of the best choirs in the world. In fact, musicians in the Western tradition are now keen to establish the actual choral technique and training methods that are employed by South African choirs to produce such rare but revered choral sounds.

He also adds for our interest

PS. I am employed by the National Department of Education as Director: Coordination. I am also the founder and conductor of The Matthews Singers, who are based in Port Elizabeth.<sup>25</sup>

In a follow up, P. E. Merafi supported Matthews’s view:

BRA Matthews, your response to ST Ngesi (DD, May 21) refers. You hit the nail on the head. Remember the Johannesburg Bantu Music Society (now the famous Soweto Teachers’ Choir); the interdenominational choir from Bloemfontein; there was one from Nongoma in Natal and the Mohlokeng Methodist Choir, to name but a few. What made the choirs receive both national and international acclaims and accolades? Tonic sol-fa notation. When we did the *Messiahs* and *Israel in Egypt* (Judas Maccabeus) etc, it was in tonic sol-fa notation. We could stand our ground (we still can) and compete with the likes of the London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus and The Mormon Tabernacle Choir and others with ease and beat them “six-love, six-love”.<sup>26</sup>

This discussion may be seen as part of a long continued debate about the advantages and disadvantages of tonic sol-fa.<sup>27</sup> It is certainly true that *amakwaya* groups have been successful in developing a distinctive and resourceful choral tradition. However, I very much doubt that it is tonic sol-fa notation that “made the choirs receive both national and international acclaims and accolades” as Merafi claims. Rather, I want to argue that for both composers and choirs, that exclusive use of tonic sol-fa has severely limited artistic expression and development.

It is a truism that any form of musical notation inevitably has shortcomings.<sup>28</sup> Any attempt to reduce the complexity of music and sound to a two-dimensional set of symbols is necessarily deficient. In the case of African music, transcription seems to be even more problematic because music is often closely related to movement and dance. Even when no actual dancing is performed with certain songs, one finds that imagined dance movements determine the structure and the content

<sup>24</sup> S. T. Ngesi, “Minister Must Stop the Music”. *Daily Dispatch* (May 5, 1999), available online, <http://www.dispatch.co.za/1999/05/05/editoria/LET3.HTM>.

<sup>25</sup> M. Matthews, “SA Produced Outstanding Choirs with Tonic Sol-fa.” *Daily Dispatch* (May 21, 1999), available online, <http://www.dispatch.co.za/1999/05/21/editoria/LET9.HTM>.

<sup>26</sup> P. E. Merafi, “SA Choirs can Stand Their Ground.” *Daily Dispatch* (June 4, 1999), available online, <http://www.dispatch.co.za/1999/06/04/editoria/LET12.HTM>.

<sup>27</sup> See for instance H. Weman, *African Music and the Church of Africa* (Uppsala, 1960): 119.

<sup>28</sup> This is true not only for African music, but also for compositions from a European background. When we think about a recitative in a Baroque piece, the notation only gives an approximate idea of the actual result. This is also true for arias especially of the seventeenth and eighteenth century when the score was commonly loaded with indications for ornaments, shakes, mordents and the like. The precise way in which these are to be rendered is often a matter of debate.

of the music. Consequently transcription that is concerned only with the aural elements and ignores the relation of sound and dance, almost inevitably leads to misconception and misrepresentation. It seems obvious that it is difficult to develop a way of transferring or (should we say) reducing this complexity to a form of written representation that does justice to it. Whereas, for example, Hugh Tracey and David Dargie have attempted to devise new forms of notation that aim at being more accurate and appropriate for music from African cultures, some black academics reject the idea of notation altogether, arguing that

notation is not meant for African music... African music must be described according to African terms, according to African criteria. Africans do not worry about preserving music in any case because the process of performance is *per se* preservation. If the society accepts that music, it will live. If they reject it, it will disappear.<sup>29</sup>

There is something to be said for this position, as the concept of notation is completely foreign to the oral tradition of African culture. Songs and other compositions are traditionally preserved in performance practice. This means that African music is dynamic and ever changing in accordance to the spirit of the times. Songs that have survived are those that have remained interesting to the public. Often there is no 'prototype', and the idea of preserving the composition through notation makes no sense. I do not want to embark on a detailed discussion of the shortcomings of different forms of notating African music but rather to summarise the most immanent problems of tonic sol-fa in the context of *amakwaya* tradition.

It is obvious that the inherent problem of tonic sol-fa notation is that it gives no graphic idea of the shape of the music. In other words, evenly printed tonic sol-fa scores give no visual equivalent of melodic lines. When working with my choral studies students at the University of Natal, I was often made aware of them cutting up melodic lines when rehearsing a song. The reason for this was obviously rooted in the fact that tonic sol-fa notation is a one-dimensional tablature, consisting of a mere string of letters that do not communicate any idea of the form or shape of musical lines. The misreading of musical lines is further aggravated by the fact that the usual practice of the choirs is to learn new songs by singing the tonic sol-fa syllables. As one of my students said, commenting on the work he had done with his student group in previous weeks: "I have started with the notes, but we haven't come to the lyrics yet".<sup>30</sup> This does not permit any idea of the actual phrasing of the music to develop. Peter Louis van Dijk, a Conductor and composer from Cape Town who is part of the National Choir Festival adjudication panel, feels that the result of such procedures is that "you could be singing a telephone directory and that's about how much understanding there is".<sup>31</sup> The changeover to the actual lyrics of the song happens only when the choristers are fairly well acquainted with their parts. This practice is problematic, as the choristers usually sing a song with a sort of 'nonsense' text for a considerable period, often not aware of the meaning of the lyrics. During this time, the conductor often does not pay attention to the development of musical expression either. In this process, the singers have to deal with a sort of 'double text'. One of the major limitations of the system is that it is very difficult to co-ordinate text and melody. During my fieldwork and teaching at the University of Natal, I gained the impression that bridging this gulf is difficult and time-consuming. This observation corresponds with the experience of Richard Cock, who has worked with a number of *amakwaya* groups as a conductor and concert organiser:

<sup>29</sup> C. Ndlovu, "Should African Music Be Notated?" *Papers Presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> Symposium on Ethnomusicology*, (Grahamstown: Rhodes University 1991): 135.

<sup>30</sup> Banks Basenkakgos Mabusa, September 5, 2002.

<sup>31</sup> Personal communication with Peter Louis van Dijk, Cape Town, December 6, 2000.

Working with tonic sol-fa is a slow business. And I think it's death actually, because it doesn't give you any idea of the shape of the music or the shape of a phrase or anything. It's all just letters on a page. And it's a real problem for me. But I don't think we are going to change that system quickly. So we just have to live with it.<sup>32</sup>

Another problem of this system is that all parts of the choir have to sing different syllables at the same time. My experience has been that this fact promotes a habit of singing one's own part without taking the context into account. Joshua Radebe, Conductor of the Pietermaritzburg Choral Society, one of the most successful choirs of the 1990s, confirmed that conductors as a rule encourage a practice of "listening to one's own part in order not to get lost".<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the ostensible self-sufficiency of the parts leads most conductors to make the fatal mistake of drilling the various melodic lines, without reference to their harmonic or melodic context. Radebe disclosed his method of making the choristers of each part "sing their line through. Put them together, they mess it up, o.k. Make them sing again, until they know what to sing after what. Once they know what they have to sing, it's not easy to be distracted by something else. Just be patient, give them enough time".<sup>34</sup>

The result is that the parts start 'fighting' with one another, the volume of sound spirals up and the music ends with uncontrolled shouting. To ignore essential choral techniques such as blending of the parts and the individual voices is counterproductive. If the conductor needs to practise the music without the text, it would be better to choose a common neutral syllable and sing it softly so as to improve the blending of voices.

The limitations of tonic sol-fa become particularly obvious when it is used for compositions that contain many chromatic lines, modulations to distant keys, or complex rhythmic structures. Not only is the range of the Western repertoire available in tonic sol-fa transcription limited, but also the range of possibilities in the compositions of *amakwaya* composers. Musa Nkuna felt very restricted by the system: "here is also a lot of limitation of what one can write when it comes to tonic sol-fa. Everything in tonic sol-fa is written in terms of crotchets. You don't think about other note-values and if you were thinking of 5/8, for instance, how would you notate that kind of thing? It's actually impossible".<sup>35</sup>

One observation made during a workshop for *amakwaya* composers organised by Michael Blake, who taught composition at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, was that tonic sol-fa was very limited when it came to the notation of rhythm. The fact is that "there is no way to distinguish crotchets from quavers", which makes the notation of complex rhythmic contexts impossible.<sup>36</sup> The system, which is "barely adequate for the simplest diatonic music, [is] quite unable to reflect African rhythm".<sup>37</sup> This gravely affected *amakwaya* composers who in the twentieth century were increasingly working towards the inclusion of African traditional elements in their compositions. Mzilikazi Khumalo, for instance, commented: "As a composer I sometimes know that I want a choir to sing in this particular way [but] I don't know how to represent that note, I don't know how to notate it".<sup>38</sup> Despite of the efforts of some composers to extend the possibilities of tonic sol-fa notation, some ideas still cannot be represented at all accurately. I shall later discuss in more detail how this

<sup>32</sup> Personal communication with Richard Cock, Johannesburg, July 21, 2000.

<sup>33</sup> Joshua Radebe, Pietermaritzburg Participatory Action Research Group, 14<sup>th</sup> meeting, May 18, 2000.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.: May 11, 2000.

<sup>35</sup> Personal communication with Musa Nkuna, Grahamstown, July 02, 2000.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Blake during a workshop with African Choral composers in Grahamstown, Rhodes University, July 02, 2000.

<sup>37</sup> D. Dargie, "Christian Music Among Africans", in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social and Cultural History*, Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport, eds. (Cape Town: David Philip, 1997): 320.

<sup>38</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, July 18, 2000.



affects not only rhythmic but also melodic features, such as grace notes and slurs, in the compositions of Khumalo.

One important point that I would like to make is that the use of this system tends to discourage choristers and conductors from playing an instrument. During his fieldwork in the late 1950s, Henry Weman noted the emphasis on vocal music at the mission stations and schools and complained: “The outdated use of the tonic sol-fa system means that development is slow and uncertain, and that instrumental instruction is virtually impossible”.<sup>39</sup> Particularly when it comes to a keyboard instrument, it is almost impossible to read or write even a simple accompaniment written in tonic sol-fa. This is one of the reasons why piano tuition was never offered at mission schools on a large scale, even when, as discussed earlier, the content of music education was expanded, as at Adams College. Even after the establishment of the Music School at Adams, singing took the central part and very few students learned a keyboard instrument, though encouraged to do so. This has resulted in the lack of trained conductors and of *répétiteur* pianists who can effectively use a keyboard instrument to familiarise the choir members with their parts or help them with problems of intonation.

For the conductors, tonic sol-fa scores constitute an almost insurmountable problem. When written as a score, even simple homophone structures become unclear and almost unintelligible. For instance, it is difficult to grasp a chord at a quick glance. Every note has to be deciphered and put into the wider context: one cannot visually pick up a pattern, as is the case with staff notation. When it comes to music that is more complex, it becomes impossible for the conductor to keep an overall view and to follow all parts at once.

Tonic sol-fa not only poses structural problems that limit the expressiveness of composers, but is also restrictive in terms of repertoire available. Conductors and choirs have to rely on the music available in this form of notation. Langa Nkosi, a Conductor and member of the National Choir Festival adjudication committee, explains that

the people that were at the forefront got a lot of pieces especially of the works from the Novello writings, which were written in tonic sol-fa. So something that is available most of the time came from England. If you would have something coming from Germany it would be written in staff notation. So that would be a problem because we use Curwen’s kind of writing. So that was what was taught at school.<sup>40</sup>

It seems obvious that the system prevents *amakwaya* groups from experiencing a richer and more complex repertoire in both Western and traditional African music. Some members of the choral community are outspoken about this fact and complain that the exclusive use of tonic sol-fa notation “is causing a problem with African choral music to an extent [that] it is unable to move forward because of problems of notation”.<sup>41</sup>

Without doubt, the tonic sol-fa system also has a number of advantages. It is a successful teaching tool, and instils a very good idea of intervallic relations in the choristers. A possible solution to the present dilemma would be to use it as an introduction to, or in conjunction with, staff notation. Cyril Wright, in his role as Education Officer for Natal, wrote in 1926: “Tonic Solfa notation leads up to and helps the understanding of the staff notation”.<sup>42</sup> Used on its own, however, and as an end in itself, “it’s no good [and] very limiting”,<sup>43</sup> in Richard Cock’s opinion.

<sup>39</sup> H. Weman, 1960: 118.

<sup>40</sup> Personal communication with Langa Nkosi, Johannesburg, July 20, 2000.

<sup>41</sup> Personal communication with Musa Nkuna, Grahamstown, July 02, 2000.

<sup>42</sup> C. Wright, “Music in the Training Colleges”. *Native Teachers’ Journal* (April, 1926): 95.

<sup>43</sup> Personal communication with Richard Cock, Johannesburg, July 21, 2000.

## 12.2 Periodisation of African Eclectic Compositions

*You can realise that at the beginning when the black people started composing songs their songs almost fell on the same line with the hymns because they were used to singing hymns in the church. They almost used that type of style for their own compositions. But then gradually they came out of the style, and now it's far better, they can compose different types of things.<sup>44</sup>*

In the following section, I want to give a brief overview of *amakwaya* composers and work out a periodisation of their stylistic development. Five periods can be distinguished, with Ntiskana Gaba being regarded as the precursor of this choral tradition. Ntsikana, as we will see, takes up an extraordinary position in his compositions. The works of the first group of composers, who emerged from the mission stations almost fifty years later, show that many of the features of Ntsikana's compositions, which are today regarded as embodying a genuine African aesthetic, had been lost. John Knox Bokwe and the composers in this first group merely imitate the melodic and harmonic structures of hymns taught to them by the missionaries. This imitation must, of course, be seen in the wider context of identity issues discussed in the first part of this thesis.<sup>45</sup>

Until roughly the first decade of the twentieth century, African vernacular words were the only African element in *amakwaya* compositions: musical structures were largely Western. Emerging ideas of an African national culture resulted in increased use of traditional musical and verbal elements. This eventually led to the development of a style in which the composers used elements from other cultures to varying degrees, creating a transcultural synthesis.

The 'Africanisation' of *amakwaya* compositions took place in different stages. African rhythmical structures were the first elements to be included, and melodic and stylistic features followed in the second half of the twentieth century. The composer who spearheaded many of these developments was Mzilikazi Khumalo. With *uShaka Kasenzangakhona*, he created a large-scale work which is based on the European form of oratorio, but uses many African elements. His most recent development is the composition of an African opera. This undertaking has provoked interesting and, at times, heated discussions regarding the future development of African composition, just as the current trend of *amakwaya* groups performing scenes from opera as their 'own-choice' pieces at competitions has done as to the future direction of the choral tradition in South Africa.

*Amakwaya* compositions reflect the process of identity formation undertaken by South Africa's black middle class, and show *amakwaya* composers progressively re-connecting with their traditional culture as the twentieth century moves on. The proportions in which the various elements are combined, however, are in a state of constant flux. Starting with an almost exclusive imitation of Western musical structures and ideas, composers by the end of the nineteenth century were increasingly looking for ways to find their own style. They never gave up Western elements completely, and all periods reveal a clinging to European ideas. This is noticeable even in the latest development, the composition of an African Opera, which attempts to integrate a Western art form and African content. This shows that the process of negotiation has remained a central concern of *amakwaya* to the present day. The problem they face is how to incorporate the modernity of the

<sup>44</sup> Personal communication with Leslie Nkuna, Grahamstown, July 3, 2000.

<sup>45</sup> See particularly Chapter 3 and 5.3.

West without denying their African roots. In order to emphasise the growing confidence apparent in this negotiation process, we will now go through these stages in turn.

### 12.2.1 First Period

#### Ntsikana Gaba: An African Prophet and his Music

Ntsikana Gaba, born around 1780, was the son of the famous chief Ngqika, and is generally considered the first Xhosa Christian. He is a rather mysterious figure in the history of early Christianity in South Africa.<sup>46</sup> In about 1815 he experienced strange visions in which he saw bright rays of light striking the side of his favourite ox and a raging wind arising out of the blue sky. After these signs, Ntsikana converted to Christianity and began to formulate the rudiments of an indigenous Christian theology.<sup>47</sup> At the centre of Ntsikana's worship stood a set of hymns, the composition of which was sparked by his mystical experiences and visions. Four of these have survived to the present day:

- “Intsimbi ka Ntsikana” – Ntsikana's Bell
- “Dalibom ka Ntsikana” – Life Creator
- “Elinqukuva lika Ntsikana” – The Round Hymn
- “Ulo Tixo 'Mkulu” – Thou Great God (The Great Hymn)

Janet Hodgson has carefully described how Ntsikana's hymns were handed down.<sup>48</sup> Although it seems that the lyrics were first written down as early as 1822, the music was transmitted orally for half a century. John Knox Bokwe notated and published Ntsikana's compositions in *Isigidimi Sama-Xhosa* (The Xhosa Messenger) in 1876. Other versions were published in *The Christian Express*, and finally his song collection, *Amaculo Ase Lovedale* (Hymns of Lovedale), appeared in 1885. Bokwe himself had learnt the hymns from his grandparents, who had been disciples of Ntsikana.<sup>49</sup>

Today Ntsikana is regarded as the distinguished precursor of composers in the *amakwaya* tradition. In his compositions, which occupy a special position in the repertoire of South African choral groups, he created a style that is described by Mzilikazi Khumalo as



**Figure 12.1:** Ntsikana Gaba  
(Illustration based on a sketch by  
Elizabeth Williams)

<sup>46</sup> For a detailed discourse of Ntsikana's historical roles see “The Making of a Prophet”, V. Erlmann, 1999: 112-8; further information can be gleaned from J. Hodgson *Ntsikana's “Great Hymn” A Xhosa Expression of Christianity in the Early Nineteenth Century's Eastern Cape* (Cape Town: Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1980); and “The Genius of Ntsikana”, a paper presented at the Conference on Literature and Society in Southern Africa, held at the University of York, September 8-11, 1981 (University of York, Centre for Southern African Studies, 1981). See also J. K. Bokwe, *Ntsikana: the Story of an African Convert* (Lovedale: Lovedale Mission Press, 1914); and *Ntsikana: the Story of an African Hymn* (Lovedale: Lovedale Mission Press, 1904). Also B. Holt, *Joseph Williams and the Pioneer Mission to the South-eastern Bantu* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1954: especially 105-27). For a recording of Ntsikana's hymn see *Xhosa Music for Study: Ntsikana's Songs (Church and Traditional Performances): Bow Songs, Dances and Boys' Songs from the Lumko District, 1980/1981*. (Delmenville: Lumko Music Department, 1981): Lumko Music Tapes, 43.

<sup>47</sup> For the circumstances leading to Ntsikana's conversion see B. Holt, 1954: 105ff. Also, J. K. Bokwe, 1914: 8ff.

<sup>48</sup> J. Hodgson, 1980: 11-21.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*: 68.

all African. There is nothing Western in it... [in the nineteenth century,] there were very, very few such songs. He [Ntsikana] felt that we don't have to follow Christianity and worship God in exactly the same manner as white people do. He felt that we should use our own ways of worshipping when we worship God.<sup>50</sup>

For Khumalo, Ntsikana's compositions are an important source of religious and musical inspiration:

He was trying to put little pieces of music to each part of worship: the "Bell Song", for instance, was when he was calling the people to come to worship... like ringing the church bell, calling people to come. (*singing "Intsimbi ka Ntsikana"*): Come, come all of you, you children too, come. He is calling them to worship. And then when they are all seated, (*singing "Dalibom ka Nsikana"*): Here is the creator of the world, of the school, etc. etc. And then when they are all settled now, (*singing "Elinqukuva", the Round Hymn*): This is the great God, who is above in heaven. They are all small different songs that form part of the worship. So worship was in small sections where the singing was in the music of the people. It was quite amazing.<sup>51</sup>

The singing at the Kat River Mission, where Ntsikana heard the preaching of the first missionary among the Xhosa, J. T. van der Kemp, and later Joseph Williams from the London Missionary Society, had been mainly confined to Dutch hymns.<sup>52</sup> These were alien in musical style and language to the black converts. In his compositions Ntsikana attempted to make Christian doctrine more accessible to the people. Though inspired by missionary teaching, his compositions are rooted in African tradition, as revealed in the musical structure and style. For Khumalo the importance of Ntsikana is that, in formulating Christian theology, he achieved an African distinctiveness:

Ntsikana song is a Christian song, [he] was a Christian. But you see, he was not a Western man. And he used black music to worship Christ, which was in traditional style. (*singing*) It's unbelievable, it's just so beautiful.<sup>53</sup>

In contrast to later missionary converts, Ntsikana continued to live among his own people and maintained cultural continuity by infusing Christian elements into Xhosa traditions. He used a wide range of imagery and symbolism relating to fighting, hunting and pastoral life to convey the message. With these symbols and images, Ntsikana was able to reach beyond the people's intellectual consciousness and engage with them on the emotional level. Thus elements of the old culture became 'carriers' of change. His fourth composition, "Ulo Tixo 'Mkulu" ("Great Hymn"), for instance, is based on a Xhosa *umdudo* (wedding song)<sup>54</sup> and uses the form of a praise-poem (*isibongo*).<sup>55</sup> Ntsikana, who before his conversion was a celebrated singer and actor, was obviously highly conversant with important traditional art forms.<sup>56</sup> However, whereas in the traditional praise-poem the ancestors or rulers are addressed, Ntsikana's praises in his "Ulo Tixo 'Mkulu" are for the Christian omnipotent God, the creator, defender and protector.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, November 20, 2000.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*; see also J. K. Bokwe, 1914: 18.

<sup>52</sup> For details about the Christian beginnings among the Xhosa see J. Hodgson "A Battle for Sacred Power: Christian Beginnings among the Xhosa" in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social and Cultural History*, Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport, ed. (Cape Town: David Philip, 1997): 68-88.

<sup>53</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, February 13, 2001.

<sup>54</sup> V. Erlmann, 1999: 127.

<sup>55</sup> D. Dargie, 1988: 4-5, 105.

<sup>56</sup> J. Hodgson, 1980: 23.

<sup>57</sup> For a detailed discussion see Chapter 1.2.1 (page 17).

In the previous chapter (11.2, page 288) on neo-traditional songs, I have shown how a number of African elements are amalgamated in the modernised wedding songs performed today by *amakwaya* groups. Some of these elements can be found in Ntsikana’s compositions. All four compositions reflect the structure of traditional songs, where the call (*blabela*) and response (*landela*) of a leader and chorus determine the cyclical form of the music.



Figure 12.2: J. K. Bokwe’s autograph of Ntsikana’s Hymn – Ulo Tixo Mkulu (Cory Library, Rhodes University, Grahamstown)

NTSIKANA’S HYMN. Arranged by JOHN KNOX BOKWE.  
KEY F.—Gravely.

<p><i>ad lib.</i></p> <p>s :- f   f, f, m : r</p> <p>U - lo Tixo omku-</p> <p>fe : m   fe : m</p> <p>r : d   r : m</p> <p>fe : m   fe : m</p> <p>r : m   r : d</p>	<p><i>tempo</i></p> <p>l : l   l : l   s :-   s :-</p> <p>fe : fe   fe : fe   m :-   m :-</p> <p>r : r   r : r   d :-   d :-</p> <p>fe : fe   fe : fe   m :-   m :-</p> <p>r : r   r : r   d :-   d :-</p>
<p>l : s   l : s   m : s   r : m   d : l<sub>1</sub>   s<sub>1</sub> : s<sub>1</sub></p> <p>fe : m   fe : m   d : m   l<sub>1</sub> }</p> <p>r : d   r : m   d : d   d } : m   d : l<sub>1</sub>   s<sub>1</sub> : s<sub>1</sub></p> <p>U - lo Ti - xo o - mku-lu ngo - se - zu - lwi - ni.</p> <p>fe : m   fe : m   m : s   r : s   m : r   d : d</p> <p>r : m   r : d   d : d   s<sub>1</sub> : d   m<sub>1</sub> : r<sub>1</sub>   d<sub>1</sub> : d<sub>1</sub></p>	<p>l : l   l : l   s :-   s :-</p> <p>fe : fe   fe : fe   m :-   m :-</p> <p>r : r   r : r   d :-   d :-</p> <p>fe : fe   fe : fe   m :-   m :-</p> <p>r : r   r : r   d :-   d :-</p>

Figure 12.3: Ntsikana’s “Ulo Tixo Mkulu”, from *Amaculo ase Lovedale*

Bokwe’s arrangements of the Ntsikana hymns are characterised by falling melodic lines and frequent tonality shifts between the first and second degrees of the scale (root progression). In Chapter 5.3.1. (page 134), I have shown how this shifting harmonic pattern of major triads in the “Great Hymn” originated in the use of musical overtone patterns of the music bow. The alternation of these two root-notes with the respective overtones provides the tonal foundation of this composition. Although there is no recorded evidence, it seems likely that Ntsikana’s hymn-singing was accompanied by dancing.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>58</sup> A. C. Jordan, *Towards an African Literature: The Emergence of Literary Form in Xhosa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973): 20; and J. Hodgson, 1980: 11.



Using various recorded versions of the “Great Hymn”, Dargie shows that, despite their ‘Africanness’, there are numerous non-Xhosa elements in Ntsikana’s compositions.<sup>59</sup> These include deviations in the falling melody lines, some alterations and misinterpretations of the melodic and harmonic content (for instance, the dominant seventh chord), some adjustments of pitch and the rhythmic structures, and the dependence on the bar line.

Many of these elements may be attributed to the fact that by the time Bokwe attempted his notation, oral transmission had to some extent reshaped Ntsikana’s original compositions. Bokwe himself, who (as we will see in the following section) was heavily influenced by missionary teaching and exposed to the performance practice of Western hymns, may have adjusted or even ‘corrected’ those compositions in the light of his own musical experiences. The attempt to notate Ntsikana’s hymns in tonic sol-fa itself must be seen as problematic as it forces the compositions into a rigid melodic and rhythmic grid, necessarily effacing individual features in the original. Going back to the problems of notation discussed earlier in this chapter, it becomes clear that a reconstruction of the ‘original’ from Bokwe’s tonic sol-fa notation is not entirely possible. Despite Dargie’s and Hodgson’s valuable attempts to reconstruct Ntsikana’s original compositions, their views of performance practice remain pretty much in the area of speculation.<sup>60</sup> I agree with Veit Erlmann who argued, when referring to Dargie’s research: “[I]t is more than open to question whether an authoritative *Urtext* can be established by means of such a comparative analysis”.<sup>61</sup> Ntsikana’s compositions are part of an oral tradition, and have been handed down from one generation to another. This means that any description, transcription, or recording bears the mark of a long process of reworking and appropriation. All one can say is that Ntsikana’s compositions belong to a tradition of performance practice that is marked by vitality, flexibility and responsiveness to changing circumstances: in other words, by a process that keeps compositions topical and interesting.

Later we will see that in the mid-twentieth century, there was a revival of Ntsikana’s compositions when composers, including Khumalo, sought inspiration in them in an attempt to ‘Africanise’ *amakwaya* compositions.

<sup>59</sup> D. Dargie, “The Music of Ntsikana”. *South African Journal of Musicology (SAMUS)* 2, 1982): 9-27. For further discussion on traditional music, see D. Dargie, 1997: 322-3; and D. Dargie, 1988: 105-6, 197-207; V. Erlmann, 1999: 124-9.

<sup>60</sup> There are only few reliable documents, predating Bokwe’s transcriptions, that describe the performance of Ntsikana’s music. John Philip of the Church of Scotland, for instance, who observed a performance of the “Great Hymn” sung “in a low and monotonous native air”, provided one of the first accounts of Ntsikana’s compositions written by European travellers and missionaries. (J. Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, London, 1828, quoted in R. H. W. Shepherd, *Bantu Literature and Life*, Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1955): 164. Statements like these, however, reflected centuries of negative European views on African music, which Heinrich Lichtenstein perceived as “insufferable to a musical ear and... little better than a deadened howl”. (Quoted in J. Hodgson, 1980): 68.

<sup>61</sup> V. Erlmann, 1999: 125.

### 12.2.2 Second period

#### Early Choral Composers and the Imitation of Hymns

*The missionaries came with their songs from overseas and taught us. Then we developed from there. That's why you find that the early compositions were almost hymn like.<sup>62</sup>*

It is remarkable that, after Ntsikana's death, more than thirty years passed before the first generation of composers from a mission school background emerged. Their music was very different from the works of Ntsikana as they were modelled closely on the hymns taught by the missionaries. Given the fact that towards the mid-nineteenth century, Ntsikana had already attained the status of a prophet and his compositions enjoyed wide popularity – certainly one of the reasons why Bokwe published a series of notations of Ntsikana's hymns between 1878 and 1914 – it seems surprising that the generation following Ntsikana did not attempt to continue this tradition. Asked for an explanation of this, Khumalo argues that, unlike Ntsikana, who remained independent when formulating and practising his indigenous Christian theology,<sup>63</sup> the first generation of mission-educated composers was firmly integrated into mission station life and strongly influenced by the missionaries:

You have to understand the difficulty that most people have gone through: the Christian church did not like African traditional music, in fact, [when] they spoke about African traditional music, they said it was pagan music... Yes, it was something that was very beautiful, but which was forbidden us – our *own* thing forbidden us!<sup>64</sup>

The fact that Bokwe was able to publish his songbook *Amaculo esoLovedale* through Lovedale Press, suggests that missionaries did encourage the use of church music composed by these converts.<sup>65</sup> Browsing through hymnbooks published in the nineteenth century, however, reveals that not a single hymn was composed in a traditional African musical style, taking up Ntsikana's model. In most cases, melodically, harmonically and rhythmically, those compositions were purely Western in idiom.

In the first part of this thesis, we saw that the missionaries demanded that their first converts should commit themselves to Christian belief exclusively: they had to be members of the mission church, in most cases residents of the mission station, and were prohibited from maintaining any form of contact with their 'heathen' communities. Missionaries aimed at separating their converts from their traditional way of life so as to mould a new identity secure from 'heathen' influences. The converts were quick to adopt the missionaries' doctrine, and soon developed a marked craving to be progressive and 'Europeanised' in all aspects of life. In the field of music this meant that they needed to be proficient in the singing of hymns, and "the blessings which came with the White

<sup>62</sup> Personal communication with Leslie Nkuna, Grahamstown, July 02, 2000.

<sup>63</sup> It is only after Ntsikana's death that his followers joined the new mission at Tyhume near Alice in the Eastern Cape under his instigation.

<sup>64</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, February 13, 2001.

<sup>65</sup> In the Preface to his songbook, *Amaculo ase Lovedale*, Bokwe even acknowledges the "encouragement extended to this humble effort by the Lovedale Mission Press".

man”<sup>66</sup> included a different musical system, which the black middle class Africans readily adopted. The missionaries’ view of African traditional music, which they labelled “heathen” and which was considered to be incompatible with ideas of Christianity and Western civilisation, played a crucial role. The following view is representative:

... two musical systems cannot exist in the present world and develop along separate lines. It is an ancient law of music history that one system has to give way to the other... It is hence our clear duty to give our native Christians a solid basis and a deep comprehension of our musical system in our sacred songs and hymns... We are wholly confident that our native Christians one day will build on the musical system inherent in our hymns their own folk music.<sup>67</sup>

As I have pointed out before, tonic sol-fa notation, which determined the nature of musical education among African converts at schools and churches, played a central role in this process. With the help of this musical tool, conformity to European hymnody was successfully enforced upon the converts. Thus the missionaries instilled an understanding and a way of making music in their converts that was not only foreign, but also diametrically opposed to the traditional African understanding of music, which for them comprised a fusion of song, dance and movement. In other words, most African converts of Bokwe’s generation grew up without any first-hand experience of the cultural milieu of their forbears, and developed a strong aversion to being associated with it. Wherever missionary work had established a group of followers, Western musical principles became firmly entrenched at the expense of local musical traditions. This is substantiated by Musa Xulu, who postulated the existence of “a clear relationship between African elitism, mission station orientatedness, and early written African choral music”.<sup>68</sup> Mzilikazi Khumalo experienced the sweeping success of missionary doctrine in his own family:

My own father was a priest – I always think [he] was a very good man, he loved all the things that were good – but he didn’t like traditional music. And it was because he was such a good priest. You see, this had been instilled in him: that, you see, these heathens are not going to move away from their heathen-ship if they continue on things like this dark music that they sing. They must sing something that is different, which leads you to God and so on.<sup>69</sup>

Reverent Myaka from Clermont near Durban describes the mechanics of this indoctrination, which, in his opinion, are operational to the present day:

Having gone to schools for years, in some cases having been forced to sing hymns every day mornings and afternoons at school – when you grow up, you are forced to carry a hymnbook – it really gets into your blood, it becomes yourself: after five years, you miss doing it. When you become a composer, definitely you do it in the line how you grew up.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>66</sup> *Indaba* June 1863, quoted in T. Couzens, *The New African: Herbert Dhlomo and Black South African Literature in English 1857-1956*, Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Johannesburg, University of the Witwatersrand, 1980: 87.

<sup>67</sup> *Die Brücke* 1929: 6; quoted in V. Erlmann, 1983: 137.

<sup>68</sup> M. Xulu, “Socio-Political Change and the National Anthem in South Africa: A Critical Appraisal of ‘Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika”. *Papers Presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> Symposium on Ethnomusicology* (Grahamstown: Rhodes University, 1991): 166.

<sup>69</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, February 13, 2001.

<sup>70</sup> Personal communication with Rev. Myaka, Clermont, May 08, 2000. The internal bulletin of Adams College, *News of the Week*, for instance, reveals that hymn practice was one of the permanent and central items in the calendar for each week.

In order to illustrate these points, I want to take a brief look at the lives and work of two prominent figures of the first generation of mission-educated composers: John Knox Bokwe and Enoch Sontonga. This period of early choral composers came to a close with John L. Dube's song collection, *Amagama Abantu*, which at the same time documents the beginning of new directions of *amakwaya* compositions.

### 12.2.2.1 John Knox Bokwe: *Amaculo ase Lovedale*

John Knox Bokwe (1855-1922), born in Ntselamanzi, a village near Lovedale, was a leading figure in the nineteenth-century Christian Xhosa community, one of the most outstanding products of Lovedale, where he was educated, and became the first Xhosa ordained minister. As a protégé of Lovedale's Principal, James Stewart, Bokwe was appointed private secretary and head of the telegraph office. Described by T. D. Mveli Skota in his *African Yearly Register* as a "true progressive", Bokwe had a number of talents, which he used during his career as a newspaper editor, a writer, poet and a musician.<sup>71</sup> Z K Matthews remembers the Bokwe family from his days at Lovedale when he became friendly with his fellow student, Rosebery, the son of John Knox Bokwe:

[Rosebery] was a year or so older than I and was already at the school when I arrived there. His family had been associated with Lovedale for generations. His great-grandfather was one of the original small group of converts who came with the missionaries to establish the school on its present site near Alice. His father, John Knox Bokwe, became a minister of the Presbyterian Church and an associate for many years of Dr James Stewart. He served as accountant and treasurer of the Institution and as postmaster at the Lovedale Post Office. He was a talented pianist and an inspired conductor of choirs. His compositions are widely sung by Africans to this day, and his collection of African folk songs is still one of the best of its kind. John Knox Bokwe was short of stature, but a man of such distinguished ability that Africans gave him the name of "Mdengentonga", a Xhosa word that denotes a man short in height but tall in accomplishment... I mention all this not only because the Bokwe family is such a notable one in African life, but because it came to have a special place in my own life too. I not only found a lifelong friend in Rosebery, but some years later his younger sister, Frieda, became my wife... They [the Bokwes] had a piano and we would sing until our lungs would nearly burst. Late in the day we would walk back through the fields, arm in arm, still singing, the two miles back to school.<sup>72</sup>

Music occupied a special place in Bokwe's career. He formed and conducted the choir at Lovedale, and devoted a considerable amount of time to the composition and arrangement of vernacular Christian hymns and sacred songs. In a personal communication with Richard Cock, Frieda Matthews, Bokwe's daughter, reminisced about her father's musical activities:



Figure 12.4: John Knox Bokwe (Lovedale Press, 1914)

<sup>71</sup> T. D. M. Skota, 1937: 7; see also Chapter 3.3.2.

<sup>72</sup> Z. K. Matthews, 1986: 38-40.

My father got a piano and an organ – the organ, of course, was used quite a lot for the church music that he had to have because he was a minister of the Presbyterian Church. It was called the Church of Scotland at that time... he himself had had quite a lot of piano training from Mrs. Stewart, who was the Principal's wife. Apparently, she realised that he was musical because he used to go to the piano and played tunes that she was playing just by heart, you know. He was a very accomplished musician. He had a natural talent for it... I know that my father was always either on the piano or in his study. He had a study, which we didn't really dare to go to because he was so busy, because he had sermons to prepare, he had music to see to. And – he just used to go to the piano, play a few things and we would follow him and find out what he was playing.<sup>73</sup>

Besides of his achievements as a practising musician and editor, Bokwe became the first African composer of national stature. Church and school choirs begged Lovedale press for copies of his compositions.<sup>74</sup> Veit Erlmann notes that

Bokwe's arrangements of the hymns became repertoire standards throughout the country and middle class choirs sang them in literary debating circles and political meetings in early Kimberley, and in mission stations in Natal. For generations to come Bokwe's songs became the daily bread for African school children.<sup>75</sup>

Bokwe's song collection *Amaculo ase Lovedale*, is arguably one of the most important early sources of *amakwaya* compositions. The collection of "about a dozen original songs, set in tonic sol-fa notation", first published in November 1885, contained mainly reprints of songs which from June 1875 had appeared as supplements in *Isigidimi Sama-Xosa* and *The Christian Express*.<sup>76</sup> Bokwe arranged his publication in four parts. Part I contains a section of tunes that "the parents of the present generation were taught to sing in Christian worship".<sup>77</sup> Bokwe justifies the inclusion of these songs on the grounds of their "sacred associations with the past". Ntsikana's hymns are allocated to this section. The second part contains original compositions by Bokwe set to English words. Parts III and IV present songs that Bokwe collected from composers of his generation. Those songs, Bokwe argues, "may be described as the product, or some development of original music in the Native mind – as far as talent in the generation has manifested itself". In a humble way, he evaluates these attempts: "It may not be regarded as of high, or cultured quality, but it is a beginning".

Even though Bokwe did not use traditional African elements in his own compositions, he was aware of the importance of keeping traditional values alive in an emerging new Christian African society that was shaped on the Western model. For this reason, he made notations of Ntsikana's music and subsequently published various accounts of Ntsikana's life. It was a central concern of Bokwe to work towards a solution of the problem that European hymnody interfered with the poetic beauty and the intelligibility of the Xhosa language.<sup>78</sup> Frieda Matthews remembers that *Amaculo ase Lovedale* was an attempt to "[take] hymns, which were written by Western composers and which were being sung and [put] them into classes so they should be balanced in their way – in their singing. Because the English songs had a different balance than the Xhosa ones had – a balance, which would not suit the music".<sup>79</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Richard Cock in conversation with Frieda Matthews, Gaborone, August 12, 1995.

<sup>74</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 30.

<sup>75</sup> V. Erlmann, 1983: 136.

<sup>76</sup> J. K. Bokwe, 1922: iii.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> For the importance of speech and sentence tone in the Nguni languages and its relevance to music see Chapter 5.3.2.

<sup>79</sup> Richard Cock in conversation with Frieda Matthews, Gaborone, August 12, 1995.



In the Preface to *Amaculo ase Lovedale*, Bokwe explains in more detail why he intended to depart “from the usage his own people had grown accustomed to in their religious singing”. In order to counteract badly composed hymns with “diverse accent which simply murders Xhosa in the singing”,<sup>80</sup> he attempted to compose “tunes so as to preserve in *singing* the correct accentuation followed in speaking the Xosa [sic] language”.<sup>81</sup> Even though his compositions caused “linguistic distortions in other directions”, they are the earliest examples of Xhosa verses set to music.<sup>82</sup>

One of Bokwe’s most famous compositions, sung to the present day by *amakwaya* groups throughout South Africa, is “Vuka Deborah”. This composition, originally published in *Amaculo ase Lovedale*, also found its way into Mzilikazi Khumalo’s publication *South Africa Sings*, a collection of songs which “aims at publishing in ‘dual notation’ (tonic solfa and staff notation) the most important items in the standard African choral repertoire”.<sup>83</sup> In recognition of the fact that “Vuka Deborah” is regarded amongst members of the choral community as “the earliest choral song written by a South African black”, the Editors of *South Africa Sings* decided to place it at the beginning of the First Volume.<sup>84</sup> The song must indeed have meant much to Bokwe: his daughter Frieda remembers: “When I was born he was composing ‘Vuka Deborah’ and so my second name is Deborah (*laughs*)”.<sup>85</sup>

## Vuka, Vuka, Debora!

AWAKE, AWAKE, DEBORA! (Judges 5, 12.)

Words and Music arranged by J. K. BOKWE.

KEY D.— <i>Marziale con spirito.</i>	♩
:   :   :   :	d' : - s   d' t : l . s
:   :   :   :	m : - m   m . s : f . m
	Vu - ka, vuka ke De-
d' : s   d' : s   d' : s   s   d' : s	d' : s   d' : s
Vu - ka, Vu - ka, vu - ka, Debo - ra!	Vu - ka, vu - ka,
:   :   :   :	d : - d   d . d : d . d
	Vu - ka, vuka ke, De-
f : f   :   :   :	t : - r   t . l : o . f
r : r   :   :   :	s : - t . r   f : m . r
bo - ra!	m : m   :   : . s
	d : d   :   : . m
t : s . m   t : s	r' : s   r' : s . s   d' : s . s   d' : s
vu - ka, Debo - ra!	Vu - ka, vuka, hla - be - la i - ngo - ma
s : s   :   :   :	s : - s   s . l : t . s   d : d   :   : . d
bo - ra!	Vu - ka, hlabela i - ngo - ma. Ba-
d' : d . s   d' t : l . s	f : -   - : l . l   s : s   l . s : l . t   d' : d
m : d . m   s : f . m	r : -   - : f . f   m : m   r . d : r . t   d : s
raki nyana ka 'Bino-ham,	Suk'u - ti - mb'a - bako aba - ti - njwa,
d' : s . s   d' : d   l : l   : l . d' : s   f . m : f . s	m : m
Vu - ka, Eara - ki, vu - ka!	Suk'u - ti - mb'a - bako aba - ti - njwa.
d : d . d   d . d . d	f : -   - : f . f   s : s   s . s : l . s   d : d
raki nyana ka 'Bino-ham,	

Figure 12.5: “Vuka Deborah” from *Amaculo ase Lovedale* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press 1922, fifth edition)

<sup>80</sup> J. K. Bokwe, quoted in R. H. W. Shepherd, “Help for the Bantu Author”. *Native Teachers’ Journal* (July, 1937): 100.

<sup>81</sup> J. K. Bokwe, *Amaculo ase Lovedale* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, fifth edition 1922): iii.

<sup>82</sup> P. Kirby, “The use of European Musical Techniques by the non-European Peoples of South Africa”. *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, 1959: 39.

<sup>83</sup> R. Buning, “South Africa Sings!” *South African Teacher Magazine* (Nr 133, January 1999); also available online at: <http://www.puk.ac.za/music/samt/133/sings.html>.

<sup>84</sup> M. Khumalo, *South Africa Sings, African Choral Repertoire: in “Dual Notation”* Volume 1 (Johannesburg: SAMRO, 1998): 4.

<sup>85</sup> Richard Cock in conversation with Frieda Matthews, Gaborone, August 12, 1995.

### 12.2.2.2 Enoch Sontonga: “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika”

”Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika”,<sup>86</sup> a hymn-like tune, was composed in 1897 and subsequently adopted throughout virtually the whole of southern Africa as an unofficial national anthem. Enoch Mankayi Sontonga, a member of the Mpinga clan (*isiduko*) of the Tembu people (part of the Xhosa nation), probably born at Lovedale around 1873, wrote the text of the first verse and chorus, and the music. At that time, Sontonga was working at Nancefield near Johannesburg as an assistant at the newly founded Methodist church. D. D. T. Jabavu recalls that in Nancefield, Sontonga constantly composed pieces, both the words and the music, for the use of his pupils, writing them down in tonic sol-fa notation. His songs were performed and popularised by the Nancefield church choir, which was formed by Sontonga himself and gave concerts in the Johannesburg townships in order to boost church funds. It was at the Nancefield Methodist Church that “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika” was sung publicly for the first time, during the ordination of a Rev. M. Bowen, a Shangaan Methodist minister.<sup>87</sup> One of the choir’s extended trips brought them to Durban, where J. L. Dube of the Ohlange Training Institute was so impressed by Sontonga’s songs that he requested permission to include them in the repertoire of his school choir.<sup>88</sup> In the following years Dube’s Ohlange Zulu Choir popularised “Nkosi sikelel’ iAfrika” on their concert-trips.

“Nkosi sikelel’ iAfrika” was translated into a number of languages and used as a national anthem by many southern African states, including Zambia and Tanzania. On January 8, 1912, the song was spontaneously sung after the closing prayer of the first meeting of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC), which later became the African National Congress (ANC). In 1925 the ANC officially adopted it as the closing anthem for all its meetings, where it replaced Caluza’s “Silusapho Lwase Afrika” (We Are the Children of Afrika).<sup>89</sup> In the 1920s and 30s, church gatherings and public meetings used the song increasingly as a closing prayer and “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika” became more and more politicised. For decades, it was regarded as the unofficial national anthem of South Africa by the oppressed, who sang it as an act of defiance against the Apartheid regime.<sup>90</sup> The seven additional verses that the poet Samuel E. K. Mqhayi added to Sontonga’s original first verse were published for the first time in *Umteteli wa Bantu* June 11, 1927. However, there are no standard versions or translations of “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika”, so the words vary from place to place and from occasion to occasion. When the piece is performed by itself, the practice of singing the first stanza in Xhosa or Zulu, and then the Sesotho version, has developed.<sup>91</sup>

Being a staunch Methodist, Sontonga was very familiar with Methodist hymns. “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika” draws heavily on this source. In a critical appraisal of the song, the ethnomusicologist Musa Xulu concludes that

in as much as many people can still argue that ‘Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika’ represents the common meeting ground between Africa and Europe, in reality it does not. It represents African conformity to European command, in the same way as in pseudo-democracy [sic] where people are intimidated until

<sup>86</sup> *Imvubu – Kaffrarian Museum Newsletter* (August 1996, Vol. 8, No. 2).

<sup>87</sup> D. Woods, *The Cape Times* (August 15, 1975).

<sup>88</sup> V. Erlmann, 1991: 120; see Chapter 7.2.2 and 7.2.3 for the relevance of touring choirs.

<sup>89</sup> The song was later published as “Si lu Sapu” or “i Land Act”. Lovedale Sol-Fa Leaflets No. 1C. See V. Erlmann 1991: 119-20. According to P. Walshe, the song became the official ANC anthem between 1913 and 1919. See P. Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism*, 1971: 204.

<sup>90</sup> *Cape Times* (August 15, 1975).

<sup>91</sup> Published through the Morija Mission in Lesotho in 1942 by Moses Mphahlele.

[they] conform to the master's order... However, that it was adopted by an African organisation hardly makes 'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika' an African song.<sup>92</sup>

Xulu's main reasons for regarding Sontonga's composition as solely representing "conformity to the world view of the missionaries" and as not being part of African culture are as follows:

- "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika" belongs to the category of colonial missionary church hymns;
- the very hymnal nature of Sontonga's composition evokes the oppressive practices of the missionaries and colonialists, incorporating purely Western musical idioms and totally ignoring elements that would otherwise have given it an African identity;
- the song is inspired by thought patterns from outside and therefore does not express an African national identity;
- all the nine verses of the hymn hardly express African religious sentiments and African religious practice. For neither the idea of a "descending spirit" nor that of a Creator exists in African cosmology according to which people were not created but emerged from either a bed of reeds or a hole or a mountain of some sort.<sup>93</sup>

**Nkosi Sikelel' i Afrika**

Enoch Sontonga

1

6

13

Soprano

Alto

**Figure 12.6:** E. Sontonga, "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika"  
(Lovedale press, Sol-fa Leaflets No.17)

<sup>92</sup> M. Xulu, "Socio-Political Change and the National Anthem in South Africa: A Critical Appraisal of 'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika", *Papers Presented at the Tenth Symposium On Ethnomusicology*, Rhodes University, 1991 (Grahamstown: International Library of African Music, 1995): 168.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* 1995: 167.

Looking at the composition in the version published by the Lovedale press, Sol-fa Leaflets No.17 (see Figure 12.6), reveals the following characteristics, which form the basis of Xulu's claim:

- the arrangement of the music in four parts;
- melodic structure characterised by melody that rises to a climax, as opposed to the falling melodies of traditional African music;
- use of the diatonic scale;
- a homophone structure as opposed to the polyphony that is achieved in overlapping call-and-response structures or by interlocking melody and countermelody, often improvised;
- a melodic line that is in most cases sung by the highest part (treble part), the other parts complementing the composition only harmonically;
- a harmonic structure that is based on triads as opposed to one which arises out of the polyphonic procedures, harmony in African music being based not on vertical but rather horizontal thinking (for instance the chord of the dominant seventh, which does not exist in African harmony);
- cadential processes that create alternating moments of tension and release alien to the cyclic nature of African song, where repetition of the same material with slight improvised moments plays an important role and where after some time no point of beginning and no point of end are perceivable;
- a stolid rhythmic structure, which stands in stark contrast to the fluid rhythms of traditional African music.

Xulu has a point when arguing that Sontonga relied heavily on Western structures when composing his hymn. There are, however, some details that make "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika" distinctly African. Firstly, one has to notice that the hymn does not modulate at any point, which is "a typical characteristic of African folk songs".<sup>94</sup> Khabi Mngoma substantiates this observation by arguing that J. P. Mohapeloa (1908-1981), a prolific composer, deliberately keeps to one key centre, a "conscious way of keeping and perpetuating the African folk song tradition".<sup>95</sup> Secondly, the second part of Sontonga's "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika" shows a marked usage of call-response structures (bars 11-15). The call by the sopranos – a falling melodic line – is answered by a choral response, which uses only a single harmony. This part is unfortunately left out in the version devised by the Anthem Committee who in 1997 worked out a combined version of "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika" and "Die Stem".<sup>96</sup> Being part of oral tradition, the song underwent a constant process of change, resulting in numerous different versions. The following version, transcribed from a tonic sol-fa manuscript that a school choir from Bizana used during one of my visits, reveals an interesting detail (see Figure 12.7).

In bar 3 this version uses parallel movement of all four parts. Since the use of consecutive parallel fifth and octaves were (and in some instances still are) disapproved of in the teaching of composition in the West, one could, of course, argue that this harmonisation of Sontonga's melody is a grave mistake. While the early compositions of *amakwaya* composers reveal a rather limited number of technical resources, however, it would be to miss the point to describe this music as a product of unskilled composers who have poor grounding in Western music. When one puts this version in the context of the root progression, discussed previously, this harmonisation of Sontonga's hymn does indeed make sense. It would be interesting to examine the autograph of "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika", if one existed, to establish whether Sontonga himself originally used this harmonisation.

<sup>94</sup> K. Mngoma, 1984: 64.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> See Government Gazette Vol. 388, No. 18341, Pretoria, October 10, 1997.





Figure 12.7: E. Sontonga, “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika” alternative version, origin unknown

It becomes clear that Xulu’s argument misses some important points. Though I agree that early *amakwaya* composers were deeply influenced by missionary teaching, I want to argue that the compositions of Sontonga, Bokwe and Tiyo Soga (1829-1871) form an important part of African culture.<sup>97</sup> Their compositions are more than the product of “‘Englishmen’ applauding the music of the dominant culture”,<sup>98</sup> they are manifestations of the complex new identity that the black middle class was busy constructing from the second half of the nineteenth century onward. In so far as they capture the specific socio-political circumstances of an emerging black middle class, they are meaningful at the present day not only as important evidence of colonial subjection, but because they mark the beginning of the development of a genuine South African school of choral compositions. Although the nineteenth century saw some sporadic attempts by *amakwaya* composers to use African elements, the concentrated effort in this direction was made only at the beginning of the twentieth century. A song collection of early *amakwaya* compositions, *Amagama Abantu* (songs of the black community), published by John L. Dube and his wife, Nokutela, represents a milestone in this period of transition.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>97</sup> John Blacking noted that the appropriation of musical elements of the hegemonic culture most obvious in the use of triads and cadences of European hymn tunes “expressed the new relationships and values of urban groups, who expected fuller participation in the social and political life of the community into which they had been drawn economically.” J. Blacking, “Trends in the Black Music of South Africa, 1959-1969” in *Musics of Many Cultures*, E. May, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980): 198.

<sup>98</sup> J. Blacking, “The Value of Music in Human Experience”. *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council* 1: 33-37: 48, quoted in V. Erlmann, 1991: 121.

<sup>99</sup> J. L. Dube and N. Dube, *A Zulu Song Book (Amagama Abantu)*, facsimile reprint (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1996).



### 12.2.2.3 John L. Dube: *Amagama Abantu*

Like Bokwe's *Amaculo ase Lovedale*, this song collection (published in 1911) must be treated as an important source book.<sup>100</sup> The collection comprises thirty-one songs, dating from the early years of the twentieth century. The songs were collected and edited by John L. Dube and his wife. Unfortunately the authorship of the individual items is unstated. What makes *Amagama Abantu* of particular value is that, unlike Bokwe's publication, this collection is the earliest example of secular non-traditional compositions.

For the historical development of *amakwaya*, this songbook was of exceptional value. First, it was a valuable contribution to the mission-educated black middle class's attempt to establish an identity by negotiating a position between past tradition and their idea of the modern. This is manifested in Dube's description of these compositions as being an attempt to establish a corpus of 'respectable' secular music, with no hint of 'heathen' traditionalism. Dube specifies that the publication is meant to be a protective reaction against the practice of using religious tunes for secular occasions and a means of providing the black community with superior music. With this statement, Dube is, of course, in line with the discussion of an African national culture, which at that time was gradually taking shape.<sup>101</sup> Second, the publication marks the beginning of a new direction for choral composers, who were about to free themselves from the rigid influence of the missionaries and to begin to formulate new ideas. Most of the thirty-one vernacular compositions included in *Amagama Abantu*, which was published twenty-six years later than *Amaculo ase Lovedale*, reveal a similar borrowing of Western musical structures, yet there are already signs of composers searching for the reconciliation of tradition and the modern world. This becomes especially obvious in the song "Ik-haya Lami" (My Home) (see Figure 12.8 and 12.9).

#### *Ikhaya Lami*

Ngilikhumbule ikhaya lam?;  
Ham! – Qiz! Ikhaya lam?.  
IFretville iyacwazimul?, ikhaya lam?.  
Ham! – Qiz! ikhaya lam?.

Nokuba ngiphi, ikhaya lam?;  
Ham! – Qiz! Ikhaya lam?.  
IFretville iyakhumbulek', ikhaya lam?.  
Ham! – Qiz! Ikhaya lam?.

Konke kuyize ngekhaya lam?;  
Ham! – Qiz! Ikhaya lam?.  
IFretville le ethandiw', ikhaya lam?.  
Ham! – Qiz! Ikhaya lam?.

Ngibuyisele ekhaya lam?;  
Ham! – Qiz! Ikhaya lam?.  
IFretville iligugu kim', ikhaya lam?.  
Ham! – Qiz! Ikhaya lam?.

#### *My Home*

*I sorely miss my home.*  
*Ham! – Qiz! My home.*  
*Fretville glistens; that's my home.*  
*Ham! – Qiz! My home.*

*Wherever I may be, my home:*  
*Ham! – Qiz! My home.*  
*Fretville is so memorable, my home.*  
*Ham! – Qiz! My home.*

*Everything stems from my home:*  
*Ham! – Qiz! My home.*  
*This beloved Fretville, my home.*  
*Ham! – Qiz! My home.*

*Take me back to my home:*  
*Ham! – Qiz! My home.*  
*Fretville is a treasure for me.*  
*Ham! – Qiz! My home.*

<sup>100</sup> This date is reconstructed by D. Rycroft by means of an advertisement for a book with the title *Amagama Abantu*, which appeared on June 23, 1911, in *Ilanga lase Natal*.

<sup>101</sup> J. L. Dube, 1996: xiii.

**Ikaya Lami**

Key of G

$\left( \begin{array}{l} \text{M} : \text{M} \cdot \text{f} \mid \text{s} : - \\ \text{i. Ngi li ku-mbu} \\ : \mid \end{array} \right)$	$\left( \begin{array}{l} - : - \mid - : \text{r} \\ - - - - - \text{le} \\ : \text{d} \mid \end{array} \right)$	$\left( \begin{array}{l} \text{M} \cdot \text{f} : \text{M} \cdot \text{r} \mid \text{d} : - \\ \text{i - ka-ya lam':} \\ \text{d} \cdot \text{s}, : \mid \text{d} : \text{d} \end{array} \right)$	
	$\left( \begin{array}{l} \text{r} \cdot \text{M} : \text{r} \mid \text{d} : \text{s}, \\ \text{Ham', ham', ham', ham', ham',} \\ \text{ham', ham',} \end{array} \right)$	$\left( \begin{array}{l} \text{Qi - z'i!} \\ \end{array} \right)$	

$\left( \begin{array}{l} : \mid \cdot : \\ \text{d} : \text{s}, \mid \text{d} : - \\ \text{ka ya lam'} \end{array} \right)$	$\left( \begin{array}{l} \text{M} : \text{M} \cdot \text{f} \mid \text{s} : - \\ \text{Ngi li ku-mbu} \\ : \mid \end{array} \right)$	$\left( \begin{array}{l} - : - \mid - : \text{r} \\ - - - - - \text{le.} \\ : \text{d} \mid \end{array} \right)$	
	$\left( \begin{array}{l} \text{r} \cdot \text{M} : \text{r} \mid \text{d} : \text{s}, \\ \text{Ham, ham, ham, ham, ham, ham,} \end{array} \right)$		

Figure 12.8: "Ikaya Lami" Amagama Abantu (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1996: 15)

Figure 12.9: "Ikaya Lami" Amagama Abantu (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1996): 46.

The song conveys the message of “missing my home” by using a musical structure that is strongly reminiscent of traditional African idioms. Throughout the song, the two parts, a male and a female part, form a call–response structure. Moreover, we find that “Ikaya Lami” recalls traditional songs that feature a strong bass sonority. The bass line, which is composed in the form of an ostinato, includes the syllable “ham”, which evokes memories of *amahubo* songs and the “homna” of Ntsikana’s hymns. I will discuss their importance later.

What these compositions have in common is the combination with music of vernacular texts which draw upon various topics ranging from Zulu traditions to topical issues and reflections on

the process of cultural change. This music includes African elements which show a close affinity with Western musical idioms, particularly that of hymns. In this way, *Amagama Abantu* forges “the link between traditional song and modern lyric”.<sup>102</sup> The song “Amaqabuqabu” (Innovations) is a fascinating snapshot of the forces which were responsible for shaping the identity of the mission-educated black middle class, and which therefore became a central theme for *amakwaya* composers (see Figure 12.10).

***Amagabuqabu***

Cikic’ ubici lwako, we, muAfrica.  
 Kangel’ amaqabuqabu, we, muAfrica.  
 Nansi inkanyiso entsha, we, muAfrica;  
 Okudala ku dhlulile, we, muAfrica.  
  
 Vuka ebutongweni, we, muAfrica.  
 Inqubeko i fikile, We, muAfrica.  
 Lahla okudala kwako, We, muAfrica;  
 Kutalela inqubeko, We, muAfrica.  
  
 I qamkil’ imikumbhi yonke indawo,  
 I ku twalele impahla ya sezizweni.  
 Zitimela zabo zi nqum’ izimfunda la,  
 Zi sakaz’ imisebenzi yenkanyiso le.  
  
 Vukake a balele, we, muAfrica.  
 Langa zel’ imfundo, we, muAfrica.  
 Cab’ amahlat’ ezwe lako, we, muAfrica;  
 Tshal’ izilimo ezintsha  
 Yonke indawo.

***Innovations***

*Rub the sleep from your eyes, O African,  
 Behold the innovations, O African.  
 Here is the new enlightenment, O African;  
 Old things have passed away, O African.*  
  
*Awake from slumber, O African,  
 Progress has arrived, O African.  
 Abandon your old ways, O African;  
 Encourage progress, O African.*  
  
*Ships have unexpectedly appeared everywhere,  
 Bringing you cargo from foreign nations.  
 Their trains cut across the meadow lands here,  
 Sowing the works of this civilisation.*  
  
*Arise and shine, O African,  
 Aspire towards education, O African.  
 Clear the forests of your land, O African,  
 Plant new crops  
 Everywhere.<sup>103</sup>*

**Amaqabuqabu**

Key of C  
 UNISON

{	s <sub>1</sub> : - : -		ḍ : - : -		- : ṛ : ṃ		f : s : l		s : - : -		- : - : -	}
{	r. Ci -		ki . . .		. . . c’u-		bi - ci lwa-		ko,			}

{	ṃ : ḍ : ṃ		s : - : -		- : - : -		f : f : - : -		ṃ : - : -		- : - : -	}
	ḍ : s <sub>1</sub> : ḍ		ṃ : - : -		- : - : -		ṛ : ṛ : - : -		ḍ : - : -		- : - : -	
	We, . . .		mu - - -		- - -		A-fri - - -		ca.		- - -	
	s : ṃ : s		d’ : - : -		- : - : -		ṭ : ṭ : - : -		s : - : -		- : - : -	
{	ḍ : - : -		d : - : -		- : - : -		s : s : - : -		d : - : -		- : - : -	}

UNISON

{	s <sub>1</sub> : - : -		d : - : -		- : ṛ : ṃ		f : s : l		s : - : -		- : - : -	}
{	Ka -		nge -		- l’a - ma		qa - bu - qa-		bu,			}

Figure 12.10: "Amaqabuqabu" (Innovations); Amagama Abantu (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1996): 29.

<sup>102</sup> A. S. Gérard, *Four African Literatures: Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, Amharic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971): 198.

However, the message that “progress has arrived” and that “old things have passed away”, did not necessarily mean an exclusive adherence to Western values. The idea of “[planting] new crops” rather pointed towards a synthesis of the old and the new, and a re-discovery of something that was lost. As the compilers state in the Preface to *Amagama Abantu* in 1911: “We want to resuscitate the art of poetic creativity and expertise amongst our countrymen, and to get them to compose”.<sup>104</sup>

The last lines in Dube’s song “Amaqabuqabu” urges Africans to “rise and shine”, especially in the field of education. I have discussed the importance of education for the black middle class in detail earlier (Chapter 3.2.2, page 80), but it is nevertheless striking that education and the importance of gaining knowledge should feature in the works of twentieth-century *amakwaya* composers. One notable example is J. P. Mohapeloa’s “Ts’aba-Ts’aba”, published in his song collection, *Meloli le Lithallere I*.<sup>105</sup>

### “Ts’aba-Ts’aba”

Bana ba Maafrika, lethabeleng thuto  
Se luleleng ts’aba-ts’aba amahy’ brakes.  
Se bapaleng bana le ithuteng,  
Hoba thutho ke eona eo e leng bophelo.

*Children of Africa engage in education  
Avoid idleness  
Children, stick to education  
Because education is life.*

To conclude, it can be said that *Amagama Abantu* foreshadows the subsequent efforts of composers who contributed to the creation of a compositional style that can be considered truly eclectic merging elements from both Western and African musical cultures.

### 12.2.3 Third Period

#### Integration of African Elements: The Use of Rhythm<sup>106</sup>

*But you know, all it is really is just African rhythms, that’s all. It doesn’t yet do all these other things, these other beautiful things that come out of the old [traditional African] type of music. No, it doesn’t do that... This was a movement away from attempting to use Western music only.*<sup>107</sup>

Looking back on the development of *amakwaya* compositions Khabi Mngoma in the early 1980s expressed this view:

up to about 1950 the African composer tried to be as unAfrican as possible. African indigenous music from which he could get his inspiration and ideas was anathema – it had been equated with heathenism and all that was to be rejected and banished from his life. With the upsurge of nationalism among Africans 1950 onwards, there was a conscious effort among those who wrote music to include features of

<sup>103</sup> J. L. Dube, 1996: 29, 84.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.: Preface.

<sup>105</sup> Other examples are: Joe S. P. Motuba’s “Toro” (A Dream) prescribed for the NCF 2000 and P. H. B. Mamabolo’s “Thuto” (Education) which urges parents to send their children to school.

<sup>106</sup> When using the term “rhythm”, black African musicians sometimes refer to the emotion or the mood of the music they are performing. Rhythm becomes a synonym for the message and the deeper meaning of the song. This section, however, uses the term rhythm to denote a patterned configuration of movement in time. Though melody and harmony can have rhythmic implications I use the term rhythm here to express the way in which one or more unaccented beats are grouped in relation to an accented one.

<sup>107</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, February 13, 2001.

their music that were identifiably African. The inclination has been reinforced by the political philosophy of Black consciousness of the 1970's. In spite of the conscious effort to be unAfrican, however, the vernacular texts used imposed an African character on the music with regard to melody and rhythm.<sup>108</sup>

I would like to suggest – in partial disagreement with the above – that the process of including features that were identifiably African set in much earlier. In the first part of this thesis, we saw that white colonists reacted negatively to the idea of sharing their privileges with the aspiring black middle class. Since they failed to become part of the hegemonic white group and were rejected by the traditional African communities that they had left behind, educated black people manoeuvred themselves into an intermediate position. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a process of reorientation began. By this time, the black elite had begun to realise that a realistic alternative to simply imitating Western culture was to incorporate African elements into it in order to open up new perspectives for their future (Chapter 4, page 93).

In the field of choral music, emerging nationalism first manifested itself in rhythmic experimentation. Mainly motivated by a concern about language, composers worked towards rhythmic changes while retaining harmonic and melodic structures that were still largely Western. Khumalo considers compositions of this period to be

just African in rhythm and nothing more... the harmonies are almost sort of Western choral hymnal style harmonies. Like all other black music, composed music started using sort of hymnal calls. Calls of the church hymn. That's what the type of harmony that you get, but it's the rhythms that are different. That overrides that. Because the rhythms are typically African.<sup>109</sup>

The melodies used by the composers were “more like in the Western shape. Because you see the moment it goes to things like *uShaka*, then it's moving away, it's becoming a black melody. And these are not really black melodies: melodically they could be anything, but rhythmically they are African – I think this is the crucial difference”.<sup>110</sup>

Alfred Assegai Kumalo (1879-1966), Reuben Tholakele Caluza (1895-1969), Benjamin Tyamzashe (1890-1990) and Polumo Joshua Mohapeloa (1908-1981) were composers who were inspired by the growing interest of middle class communities in modernised action songs, with their carefully synchronised movements and traditional dances.

An example of the use of traditional dance rhythms in song is to be found in P. J. Mohapeloa's “Mokhotlong”, in which he sings praises to the town where he grew up. The composition is based on the traditional Sotho dance, *seakhi*, in which two groups of three quavers are followed by one of two quavers (see Figure 12.12).



Figure 12.11: J. P. Mohapeloa  
(Archive R. Cock, Johannes-

Lerona hle meholela ea Mokhotlong  
Re motlotlo ka hae la rona...

*We, the children of Mokhotlong  
We are proud of our home...*

<sup>108</sup> K. Mngoma, 1984: 61.

<sup>109</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, February 13, 2001.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.; for more information on Mzilikazi Khumalo's *uShaka Kasenzangakhona* see Robert Maxym ed. *The uShaka Edition* (Bryanston: Maxym Music, 1999).



KEY: G Ka morethetho oa Seakhi

1	2	3
s : m :-   l :- :-   - :-	s : l : l   s :- : l   s :	s : s :-   l :- :-   - : l
m : d :-   r :- :-   f :- .d	d : d : d   d :- .t, : r   t, :	d : t, :-   d :- : f   l, :-
Le rō - na hle me-	ba-na ba MÓ - kho- tlong	Re mo - tlo - tlo
d' : s :-   f :- :-   l :- .fe	s : m : m   s :- .m : f   r :	m : r :-   d :- : l   d :-
d : d, :-   f :- :-   r :- .re	m : d : l,   m :- .s, : r   s, :	d, : m, :-   l, :- : r   l, :-
4	5	6
s :- .m : r   m :- : t,   l, :	s : m :-   l :- :-   - :-	s : l : l   s :- : l   s :
t, :- .l, : f,   d :- : m,   m, :	m : d :-   r :- :-   f :- .d	d : d : d   d :- .t, : r   t, :
ka ha - e la rō - na;	Le rō - na hle me-	ba-na ba Mo - kho-tlong
m :- .d : l,   l :- : r   d :	d' : s :-   f :- :-   l :- .fe	s : m : m   s :- .m : f   r :
m :- .l, : r,   l, :- : se,   l, :	d : d, :-   f :- :-   r :- .re	m : d : l,   m :- .s, : r   s, :

Figure 12.12: P. J. Mohapelo, "Mokhotlong"

Earlier composers also got inspiration for their work from immediate contact with traditional music. In a personal communication with David Rycroft, the composer A. A. Kumalo (Khumalo, in modern spelling) remembered an encounter with traditional music that strongly influenced his compositions:

When I was on Willis Short's farm, as a young boy, before I went to school [it must have been about 1885], there was a gang of Native boys we used to have dances with – of course we were always forbidden by our parents to mix with those boys! We used to do it stealthily! And I remember one of the songs we used to sing when we were dancing what was called *indlamu*.

*Oyidlayo, Oyidlel' ekhishini*

The one who is eating it; the one who is eating it in the kitchen

*Oyidlayo, Oyidlela phezulu*

The one who is eating it; the one who is eating it up above

*Kahle mfana! Kahle M'...*

Careful, boy!<sup>111</sup>

**Leader** (*call*)



O-yi-dla - yo, O-yi-dlel'e-khi-shi - ni, O-yi-dla - yo, O-yi-dle-laphe-zu-lu!

**Chorus** (*response*)



Ka-hle m-fa - na, Ka-hle m', O-yi-dle-laphe-zu-lu, Ka-hle m-fan', O-yi-dlel'e-khi-shi-ni, Ka-hle m'...

Figure 12.13: *Oyidlayo, indlamu* song as sung by A. A. Kumalo

<sup>111</sup> A. Kumalo quoted in D. Rycroft, 1991: 11-12; *indlamu* is a style of dancing and singing associated with Zulu youth. The tempo is usually faster than, for instance, that of *amabubo*, the ceremonial songs sung by the community elders.

This influence, along with those of his mission school background and his experiences at Edendale, was definitely present in Kumalo's first songs in which he tried "to recapture the Zulu idiom and rhythm and modernise it into a Western musical form".<sup>112</sup>



Figure 12.14: R.T. Caluza, 1968

One of the most important composers of the first half of the twentieth century is Reuben T. Caluza. Although some elements in his early songs, like the call-response structure, the non-simultaneous entry of the vocal parts, and the off-beat entries of the upper parts (what Rycroft has called the "near miss" effect), already point towards his later syncopated style, Caluza's early songs generally show limited technical resources. Despite these limitations, songs, like his first published "Silusapho Lwase Afrika" (We are the Children of Africa), composed 1912 (see Figure 12.15), are significant because Caluza, though "not a politically minded man", was very sensitive to any social or political injustice.<sup>113</sup> By choosing themes that made a comment, sometimes satirical, on community life, he started a movement towards the politicisation of the *amakwaya* repertoire. Whereas early composers of the nineteenth century restricted their works mainly to religion, nature or history, Caluza regarded his compositions as mouthpieces for socio-political issues. In his song, "Silusapho Lwase Afrika", that I mentioned

earlier, Caluza refers to the Native Land Act of 1913 (see Chapter 5.5.1, page 147). This act prohibited Africans from owning land in South Africa except within what were called "native reserves".

By raising socio-political issues, Caluza's songs became an important part of the emerging national culture, for they "metaphorically united local (Zulu) traditionalism and a national, 'civilised' outlook in an attempt to sketch the outline of a modern, black South Africa".<sup>114</sup> What made them so popular amongst almost all sections of the black population of South Africa was the fact that they openly voiced a criticism of those members of the black middle class who were slavishly

<sup>112</sup> A. Kumalo quoted in D. Rycroft, 1991: 17.

Benjamin Tyamzashe, in a personal communication conducted by D. D. Hansen, reports that he was exposed to various musical influences during his early childhood years in Kimberley. The influence of Western liturgical or sacred music loved by his father and mother, who were both missionaries, is evident. Tyamzashe remembers a very different musical experience, though, associated with a Mosque which was situated very near his home, and through which he came into contact with Malayan music and the musical abilities of the Malay people, who performed on a variety of instruments for different occasions: "These *amakhoboka* were fine musicians; they were also very good with charms and medicines, and I saw them do some very strange things." (Personal communication D. D. Hansen with Tyamzashe, November 1965, quoted in D. D. Hansen, *The Life and Work of B. Tyamzashe*, Grahamstown, Rhodes University: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1968: 7). During the height of the diamond 'rush', migrant workers and their families gathered in Kimberly from all over southern Africa. Tyamzashe must have been greatly influenced by this in his early childhood, furthermore, it was an experience which exposed him to many cultural influences and new ideas. (During my own research, some of my informants recalled the many different influences they were exposed to in places like Soweto where they not only learnt a number of different languages, but also got some insight into the cultural practices of other ethnic groups living in the neighbourhood.) When at the age of nine, Tyamzashe left Kimberley in order to attend school in King William's Town in the Eastern Cape, he entered a social environment that was closer to traditional Xhosa life and music. He recalls, "we sang the songs of the old people, and the boys' and the girls' songs" (Personal communication D. D. Hansen with Tyamzashe, November 1965, quoted in D. D. Hansen, 1968: 8).

<sup>113</sup> V. Erlmann, 1991: 119.

<sup>114</sup> V. Erlmann, 1985: 195.

imitating Western culture at the expense of their own. Moreover, the fact that Caluza's songs merged topical lyrics in the vernacular with "ragtime", one of the most popular form of musical entertainment of that time, earned the "admiration of all Blacks".<sup>115</sup> The dance movements, referred to as *ukureka*, on which Caluza based many of his songs, contributed enormously to their popularity.<sup>116</sup>

**Si lu Sapo or i Land Act.**

R. T. CALUZA.

KEY B<sub>b</sub>. D.C.

s <sub>1</sub> : d   l <sub>1</sub> : r   t <sub>1</sub> : m   r : r : d   s : m   f : l <sub>1</sub>   s <sub>1</sub> : m   m   r : d   s <sub>1</sub> : m   d   l <sub>1</sub> : r   d	Si lu sa po lwa se A-fri-ka si ka le la i - zwela ki ti Mzu lu no mXo sano	s <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub>   l <sub>1</sub> : l <sub>1</sub>   s <sub>1</sub> : d   t <sub>1</sub> : t <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub>   d : t <sub>1</sub>   l <sub>1</sub> : l <sub>1</sub>   s <sub>1</sub> : d   d   t <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub>   s <sub>1</sub> : d   t <sub>1</sub> : l <sub>1</sub> : l <sub>1</sub>	m : m   f : f   r : s   f : f : m   s : s   f : f   r : s   s   f : m   m : s   s   f : f : m
Si lu sa po lwa se A-fri-ka si ka le la i - zwela ki ti Mzu lu no mXo sano	d <sub>1</sub> : d <sub>1</sub>   f <sub>1</sub> : r <sub>1</sub>   s <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub>   s <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub> : d   d <sub>1</sub> : d <sub>1</sub>   f <sub>1</sub> : r <sub>1</sub>   s <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub>   s <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub> : d   d <sub>1</sub> : d <sub>1</sub>   m   f <sub>1</sub> : r <sub>1</sub>   l <sub>1</sub>		

t <sub>1</sub> : t <sub>1</sub> : m   m   r : d   s <sub>1</sub> : m   d   l <sub>1</sub> : r   d   t <sub>1</sub> : t <sub>1</sub> : m   m   r : d   m : m   f   m : r	Msutuhla-nga na ni Mzu - lunom Xo - sa no Msutuhla-nga na ni - S'ka lange Land Act	s <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub> : d   d   t <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub>   s <sub>1</sub> : d   t <sub>1</sub> : l <sub>1</sub> : l <sub>1</sub>   s <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub> : d   d   t <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub>   d : d   d   d   t <sub>1</sub> : l <sub>1</sub>	r : r : s   s   f : m   m : s   s   f : f : m   r : r : s   s   f : m   s : s   l   s : f
Msutuhla-nga na ni Mzu - lunom Xo - sa no Msutuhla-nga na ni - S'ka lange Land Act	s <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub>   s <sub>1</sub> : d <sub>1</sub>   d <sub>1</sub> : d <sub>1</sub>   m   f <sub>1</sub> : r <sub>1</sub>   r <sub>1</sub>   s <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub>   s <sub>1</sub> : d <sub>1</sub>   s <sub>1</sub> : m   m : m   f <sub>1</sub> : r <sub>1</sub>		

Si ya ka la nga

r : r : m   r : d   d : d   r   d : t <sub>1</sub>   f : l <sub>1</sub>   s <sub>1</sub> : m   m : m   f   m : r	Um te t'o mu bi o wawe le lwa a ma nxu sa, u ku ka le la	l <sub>1</sub> : l <sub>1</sub> : l <sub>1</sub>   l <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub>   s <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub>   s <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub> : d : l <sub>1</sub>   s <sub>1</sub> : d   d : d   d   d   t <sub>1</sub> : l <sub>1</sub>	f : f : f   f : m   m : m   f   m : r   l : f   m : s   s : s   l   s : f
Um te t'o mu bi o wawe le lwa a ma nxu sa u ku ka le la	s <sub>1</sub> : -   s <sub>1</sub>   d <sub>1</sub> : -   s <sub>1</sub>   m <sub>1</sub> : -   s <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub>   s <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub>   d <sub>1</sub> : d <sub>1</sub>   d : t <sub>1</sub> : l <sub>1</sub>   s <sub>1</sub>   f <sub>1</sub> : -		

lo mte to o wa we le - lw'a ma nxu sa e yo ka le la

Figure 12.15: R.T. Caluza, "Silusapho Lwase Afrika" (Lovedale Press: Sol-fa Leaflets)

Particularly in the songs composed after 1915, the year when he finished his studies at Ohlange, Caluza began to experiment with a new style, blending African-American musical influences, ragtime music (*iRagtime*) and neo-traditional song material. "Ixeghwana or Ricksha Song" (Old Man or Ricksha Song), composed in 1917, has a marked rhythmic structure (see Figure 12.16).

Caluza's songs initially seemed to provide a solution to the black elite's dilemma of how to create a new identity – at once modern and 'civilised'. However, when Caluza's ragtime-influenced compositions gained popularity among the urban proletariat and finally contributed to the first urban, working-class syncretic musical style, known as *marabi*, middle class African nationalists like H. Dhlomo and Mark Radebe began to dissociate themselves more and more from African-American influences.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>115</sup> *Ilanga* (June 22, and December 14, 1917) quoted in V. Erlmann, 1991: 125.

<sup>116</sup> A Ragtime dancer, or "expert in movement in African songs" was referred to as *umreki* (C. M. Doke and W. B. Vilakazi, *Zulu-English dictionary*, 1990). *Ukurega* specifically refers to body movements during the performance of a song.

<sup>117</sup> V. Erlmann, 1985: 195-96. See Chapter 4.3.2 for a detailed discussion of the middle class fight against "musical intoxication". See also V. Erlmann, 1991: 126-7.

The image shows a musical score for the song "Ixeghwana of Ricksha Song". It consists of two systems of music, each with four staves. The top staff is the vocal line, the second staff is a piano accompaniment, the third staff is a second vocal line, and the bottom staff is a bass line. The music is in 2/4 time and B-flat major. The lyrics are written below the staves.

System 1:  
 Top staff: Nga-bon' i - xe-gwa - na | li - mbc-t'i - ngutsha - na  
 Second staff: (Piano accompaniment)  
 Third staff: Wo! | Nga-bon' i - xe-gwa - na | li - mbc-t'i - ngutsha - na  
 Bottom staff: (Bass line)  
 Lyrics below: Nga-bon' i - xe-gwa - na | li - mbc-t'i - ngutsha - na

System 2:  
 Top staff: li - mhlophe li - te qwa i-khan - da ka - nye ne - zi - nya - wo  
 Second staff: (Piano accompaniment)  
 Third staff: li - mhlophe li - te qwa i-khan - da ka - nye ne - zi - nya ka - nye ne - zin-ya  
 Bottom staff: (Bass line)  
 Lyrics below: li - mhlophe li - te qwa i-khan - da ka - nye ne - zi - nya - wo

Figure 12.16: "Ixeghwana of Ricksha Song" (transcription of Lovedale Press: *Sol-fa Leaflets No. 2c*)

Some composers deliberately imitated the harmonic and rhythmic structure of Western hymns in order to mock the dominant culture. This is the case in "Hayi Abant' Abamnyama" (Ho, the Black People) by Tyamzashe.<sup>118</sup> The song, composed in the late-1920s, comments on the disenfranchisement of the Cape Africans, and in the third stanza proceeds to complain of exploitation and police harassment:

### "Hayi Abant' Abamnyama"

They say take out your special, take out your pass.  
 You brew 'kill-me-quick', I'll give you cuts.  
 You make yourself the boss of the Amalaitas,  
 I'll give you cuts.  
 You don't work properly, I'll give you the sack.

Blacking has pointed out that the four-square structure of the stanza "is intended to emphasize the bleak consequences of European domination" and African audiences "[understood] perfectly the irony and biting criticism of the contrasts in sound" between this stanza and the "more lively *makwaya* style" in the other stanzas.<sup>119</sup>

"Isitandwa sam" (My Beloved) is Tyamzashe's earliest work, written in 1917 while he was at Tiger Kloof (1913-1924). In this song, Tyamzashe employs a linear style of writing, which is the result of the horizontal approach to composition discussed earlier.<sup>120</sup> Especially in the second section, the composition develops a sort of counterpoint. These "pseudo-polyphonic" passages, which seem to

<sup>118</sup> B. J. P. Tyamzashe, "Hayi Abant' Abamnyama" (Lovedale: Lovedale Press: 1929).

<sup>119</sup> J. Blacking, "The value of Music in Human Experience". *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council*: 48; quoted in V. Erlmann, 1985: 196.

<sup>120</sup> See 12.1. above.

have been inspired by call–response structures prevalent in traditional African music, are created by an imitation of melodic and rhythmic figures previously presented in another part (see Figure 12.17).

Più mosso

Figure 12.17: B. Tyamzashe, “Isitandwa sam” bars 28–32

Towards the middle of the twentieth century, the technique of producing rhythmic structures through polyphonic passages was developed further when some composers started to arrange their works in an A-B-A form: hymn-like, homophonic pillars based mainly on Western musical idioms flanking a middle section marked by rhythmical features with a dance like quality. Mzilikazi Khumalo remembers that this development led to “quite a number of people realising that there was lots of attraction to this insert which is in rhythmic style. They started writing music and some of them are even writing it today, which is African – but typically in rhythm, not anything else”.<sup>121</sup>

Ludumo Magangane explains that the middle section of a song became an important space for development of African ideas because “that’s where the composers were starting to say, but our songs are African in lyrics only, but in terms of other things they are still Western. Then they have the small traditional section. Well [Mzilikazi] Khumalo’s early compositions themselves are like that. Like ‘Ma Ngificwa Ukufa’ [composed in 1959]”.<sup>122</sup>

In the song “Ma Ngificwa Ukufa” (When I Die), one of his earliest compositions, Khumalo reflects on the nature of Grand Apartheid. While the principal text derives from a poem by B. W. Vilakazi, just before the middle part of the song Khumalo inserts his own words, publicly protesting against the compulsory carrying of the passbook (“Akukho’ mlungo, akukho’ pasi” – there is no white person, there is no pass).

### *Ma Ngificwa ukufa*

Ngimbeleni phansi kotshani,  
duze nezihlahla zomnyezane,  
ngozwa nami lapho ngilele,  
utshani ngaphezulu buhleba,

### *When I die*

*Bury me beneath the grass  
next to the willow trees,  
there in my resting place will I hear,  
above me the grass whispering;*

<sup>121</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, February 13, 2001; one has to keep in mind that here Khumalo is contrasting “rhythm” with melody and harmony. As mentioned earlier, “rhythm” refers to a patterned configuration of movement in time.

<sup>122</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Johannesburg, Springs, February 12, 2001.



lala sithandwa, la'uphumule.

Akukho'mlungu, akukho'pasi,  
kulele izinkulungwane zakithi.  
Ziyagiya, ziyagiya ziqethuke,  
ziyagiya zonke.

Lapho amagatsh'ayongembesa,  
ngamaqabunga, agcwel'ubuhlaza,  
utshani ngaphezulu buhleba,  
lala sithandwa, la'uphumule.

*Sleep dear one; sleep and rest in peace.*

*In death there is no discrimination,  
no white man to ask you for your pass,  
there lie thousands of our people resting,  
Everybody dancing and rejoicing.*

*There will the branches of trees cover me,  
With leaves ever green,  
and above me will the grass whisper;  
Sleep dear one; sleep and rest in peace.*

Khumalo says about his composition:

By the time I started writing, the first song I wrote was “Ma Ngificwa Ukufa” I wrote in sort of Western style or the style of non-African music because that was what was popular, that was what the people wanted. That’s what they liked. They liked a style, which is not ours, which is white – to be quite honest. And so I wrote something like that in my first song. But suddenly I felt that there was something wrong if I don’t introduce anything African. And that’s how I introduced that “Ziyagiya” (*sings*) traditional rhythm style.<sup>123</sup>

Although Khumalo emphasises that in this song, “already there was a marriage between the music, Western though it be in structure, and the words, which are in a black language”, the first and the last part mainly use melodic and rhythmic elements borrowed from European musical traditions (see Figure 12.18).<sup>124</sup>

Andantino Tranquillo

1  
p  
Ngi - mbe - le - ni pha - nsi ko - tsha - ni, Du - ze ne - zi - hla - hla zo mnye - za - ne

1  
p  
Ngi - mbe - le - ni pha - nsi ko - tsha - ni, du - ze ne - zi - hla - hla zo mnye - za - ne

1  
p  
Ngi - mbe - le - ni pha - nsi ko - tsha - ni, du - ze ne - zi - hla - hla zo mnye - za - ne

1  
p  
Ngi - mbe - le - ni pha - nsi ko - tsha - ni, Du - ze ne - zi - hla - hla zo mnye - za - ne

5  
ngi - mbe - le - ni pha - nsi ko - tsha - ni, du - ze na - zo e - zo mnye - za - ne.

5  
ngi - mbe - le - ni pha - nsi ko - tsha - ni, du - ze na - zo e - zo mnye - za - ne.

5  
ngi - mbe - le - ni pha - nsi ko - tsha - ni, du - ze na - zo e - zo mnye - za - ne.

5  
ngi - mbe - le - ni pha - nsi ko - tsha - ni, du - ze na - zo e - zo mnye - za - ne.

Figure 12.18: M. Khumalo, “Ma Ngificwa Ukufa” beginning of part A

<sup>123</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, February 13, 2001.

In the middle part, which gave the composition the alternative title “Ziyagiya” (we are dancing), Khumalo introduces what he describes in the score as “a traditional Zulu dance rhythm in *giya* style” (see Figure 12.19).

Figure 12.19: M. Khumalo, “Ma Ngificwa Ukufa” dance rhythm in “*giya*” style.

The effect of this section is strikingly original. It successfully creates a rich rhythmic texture, and employs a number of resources from traditional Nguni music: a cyclic form, short interlocking patterns, and an emphasis on bass sonority.

“Ma Ngificwa Ukufa” was prescribed for a school competition by the African Teachers’ Association of South Africa (ATASA) in the 1960s. As the history of the song has important political connotations, it is worth quoting a longer passage from one of my personal communications with Mzilikazi Khumalo:

You see, it crept in to our music, this political feeling, this feeling of having no power, of having no rights in our own country... You know, it was during very difficult times. This song was written in 1964 and those were very bad times. I initially gave the song the title “khose kubenini” – till when? Because it was actually a political statement. I mean it was a song, which in a sense the cry was: till when oh lord are we going to suffer like we do. And I wrote it just like that... “Ziyagiya”, the section that introduces that traditional insert, is something with amazing little words. Because they don’t come from the poet, they are my own words. And you know what it says? You know this song comes from the words of Dr. B. W. Vilakazi. And it’s a dirge, you know, a funeral song. When I die, bury me next to a river, where the grass above me will say sleep, beloved, sleep and rest. And the trees will be waving... And I will see school children and when I see them, I will be happy. And so on and so on. And I love this poem very much. Because I used to love poetry as a young man. And so I started writing. As I was writing the music, suddenly I knew that I must do something that must be my own contribution in here. I wanted to introduce this dance movement. And then I say “there is no white person, there is no pass” – you know a pass, these ID-documents, it was a terrible thing. And then “thousands and thousands of our people only sleep there”. And then introduce the dance (*singing*). Like in the old Walhalla...

And I wrote this song, and I was really just saying, how long are we going to be suffering in this world? And I presented the song to a committee that was doing songs for national competitions and they liked the song and prescribed the song, When the choir masters received the song and started looking at the words, they were very worried. One guy whom I knew very well he called me and he said to me: hey Jimmy – because most people called me Jimmy then – hey Jimmy, do you know that this is a ticket straight to Robben Island? The teachers' association [ATASA] had a very wise Chairman and he loved me very much, he loved music very much. He called me and said to me: come, let's have a talk. When I got there, he said to me: look, let's change the title. Let's call this song instead of "till when oh Lord?" let's just say, "The cry of the Israelites" – because I mean they were slaves there. So that was the title that was given to the song.<sup>125</sup>

By inserting the dance section, which is "just African rhythm more than anything else", Khumalo emphasises his message in a very impressive way. This middle section has an almost psychological dimension: it becomes the only space that grants freedom from oppression or restriction. In musical terms, it might be understood as an act of liberation from the missionaries' prohibition of movement and an attempt to re-establish the traditional unity of movement, dance and song. This idea is supported by Ludumo Magangane's account of the historical development of this middle-section. He pointed out that, long before Khumalo, composers used the A-B-A form to insert a prayer into their compositions. Those composers were

writing about nature or happenings around you, but at some point you've got to have a slow section which would be a prayer section in the middle. It could be talking about anything, the nature or anything around you and the mid section would be the prayer section. This later not necessarily became a prayer section, but just a slow section.<sup>126</sup>

#### 12.2.4 Fourth Period

##### Traditional Aesthetics and the Renaissance of Ntsikana's Hymns

*That the older music is the one that is not influencing our music now, that to me is the real tragedy. It's the more modern traditional music that's influencing even some of the most important compositions that are coming through.<sup>127</sup>*

In looking back on his career as a composer, Mzilikazi Khumalo remembers that, when he started composing in the late 1950s, "there was very little real African music composed".<sup>128</sup> Born near Non-goma, KwaZulu-Natal in 1932, Khumalo gained his first musical experiences during his youth in the Hlabisa area where he sang at weddings. It was here that he was exposed to the dynamics of group composition. Like many other composers before him, Khumalo is a product of profoundly transcultural experiences. His mother was interested in traditional music and exposed him to folk-songs, which she would sing for him, whilst his father was an officer in the Salvation Army. Using both the traditional songs he learnt during his early years and Western music he played on a euphonium in the Salvation Army band, Khumalo began to search for a distinctively 'African style' of choral composition.

<sup>125</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, February 13, 2001.

<sup>126</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Johannesburg, Springs, February 12, 2001.

<sup>127</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, February 13, 2001.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*: November 20, 2000.

He says:

... you are reciting a poem when you sing. Now those are all the components of what we call African traditional music. The style, the melodic line, the way the melodic line is set out, the way the rhythms are set out. And then of course crucially the scales that we are using, and also crucially the harmonies that we are using. Those are the things that make up aspects of African traditional music.<sup>129</sup>

In the course of his exploration, Khumalo found an important source of inspiration in Ntsikana's songs. Ntsikana's compositions, he argues, have great relevance to the present as they

stand like something from our past – from our real past, which is very beautiful musically. And it is so different from what we were doing that I think all of us, as we listened to it, knew that there was a lot that we'd lost by not doing what that song [referring to Ntsikana's Great Hymn] was doing musically. The structure that it had, the rhythms that it had, the melodic forms that it had – So I think it's been a very great influence in the background of drawing us back to what is so beautiful in our music.<sup>130</sup>

The fact that in Ntsikana's compositions “the music is sensitive to the patterns of the words” was suggestive to Khumalo for his own compositions.<sup>131</sup> Ntsikana, Khumalo explains,

made not only the whole song African in rhythm but African in almost everything. In other words, in melody, where the melody begins to take after the words, you see you get all these grace notes, which come out – not out of music itself, but out of the poetry, out of the words, which are indications what words are looking like... Secondly, also it was the harmonies. The harmonies were now taken purely from pentatonic scales or hexatonic scales. So that you see this – I think the things like “uShaka” – are in that later stage of African musical development.<sup>132</sup>

Khumalo is not the only composer of the *amakwaya* community who has drawn on Ntsikana for inspiration. Two Catholic missionaries, Oswald Hirmer and Fritz Lobinger, later both members of Lumko Missiological Institute, raised question about the importance of Ntsikana with one of the foremost Xhosa composers, Tyamzashe. Tyamzashe acknowledged Ntsikana as an important source of inspiration for his compositions.<sup>133</sup> In “Gloria”, his most successful composition, published in 1965, he has drawn on some thematic material from the chant in Ntsikana's “Great Hymn”.<sup>134</sup> Another composition, with the title “uNtsikana”, was composed by C. B. Qweshu to a Xhosa text for mixed choir. Khumalo himself wrote an arrangement of “Ingoma kaNtsikana” (The Chants of Ntsikana), and several of his later works reveal a strong link to Ntsikana's compositions. This is the case in one of Khumalo's recent works, a short composition with the title “Siyakwemukela”, written in honour of Thabo Mbeki in May 1999. The middle section of this song uses the short “Homna” that Ludumo Magangane inserted into an arrangement he made of the Xhosa folk song, “Jikel' emaweni ndiya hamba”. Referring to his autograph, Khumalo remarked, “I do not know of anything in traditional African music that so aptly portrays moments of great communal joy as the ‘homna’ motif”. Similar in style to his large-scale works like *uShaka*, this composition serves as an excellent example of Khumalo's African style in miniature. In “Siyakwemukela”, like the other works of Khumalo's later period, African elements no longer feature only in a small section of a

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.: July 18, 2000.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.: February 13, 2001.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> See D. Dargie, 1997: 321. Also D. D. Hansen, “Life and Work of B. K. Tyamzashe: A Contemporary Xhosa Composer” (Grahamstown: I.S.E.R., Rhodes University, 1968): 3.

<sup>134</sup> D. Dargie, 1988: 131.

composition but dominate the whole. Magangane says about Khumalo’s “Izibongo ZikaShaka”, a central work of this later period, composed in 1981:

In fact, with “Izibongo” he was already starting to say, no look, just a small section, which is traditional, is not enough. So that taking “Izibongo” for example, “Izibongo” would be largely more traditional, moving away from the Western melody lines and harmonies. Because in fact in “Izibongo” he starts to consciously use the various forms of the pentatonic scales, of writing African music.

**SIYAKWEMUKELA** Lydumo Magangane  
Mzilikazi Khumalo

Key: Doh is G (In honour of Mr. Thabo Mbeki) 8

Sopranos - Moderato

Ẓ.Ẓ.Ẓ.Ẓ	Ẓ: -	- i: - Ẓ	Ẓ: S	m: -	- i: -	m: m. Ẓ	ẒS: -
Qhawe lama qha -	we,	Tha-bo	Mbe -	-	-	Ki, Ngala -	ma -

Basses 16

- i: S	S: S: S: Ẓ	Ẓm: -	- i: m	i	i	i	i
zwi	si-ya-kwe-mu-ke -	la.					
i	i	i	i	Y: Y: Y: Y	Y: -	- i: - Y	Y: d
				Qhawe lama qha -	we,	Tha-bo	

Figure 12.20: Mzilikazi Khumalo, “Siyakwemukela” first section

The first part of “Siyakwemukela” consists of a twelve bar long unison melody for the sopranos, repeated a fifth lower by the basses. This section is followed by a praise poet reciting the clan praises of the Mbekis: “Mbeki, Dlamini, Jama Sijadu, Zizi omhle, wean wamaZizi amnyana neenkomo zawo”. Before the song breaks into a traditional African dance based on Magangane’s “Homna” motif, Khumalo repeats the first section, this time first with sopranos and altos, and later tenors and basses singing in consecutive fourth intervals. The concluding section combines elements of the first melody and the “Homna” motif. A coda in unison, which Khumalo marks “Majestoso [sic] – From the bottom of our hearts”, closes the song.

Qha-we la-ma qha - we, Tha-bo Mbe - - - ki, Nga-la -  
ma zwi si-ya kwe-mu - ke - - - - la

Figure 12.21: Mzilikazi Khumalo, “Siyakwemukela” melody first section

This composition is an excellent example of how composers of eclectic songs have increasingly shifted towards the use of African musical elements at the expense of Western ones that previously dominated their works. Though the four-part structure and the use of a choir consisting of sopranos, altos, tenors and basses still suggest a relation to Western conceptions, Khumalo and Magangane minimise the use of Western elements. The opening of the song presents a descending melody line, which is based on a pentatonic scale (see Figure 12.21). The way the basses imitate the melody of the sopranos gives the work an antiphonal character that is rooted in the important



call-response structure of African music. The fact that Khumalo lets the basses repeat the melody a fifth lower adds to the sonority and is reminiscent of *amabubo* performance practice. The rather free and staggering rubato style of this part, which is contrasted to the later dance rhythm, is typical of Zulu ceremonial songs. Like most traditional song material, “Siyakwemukela” is more or less confined to a single stanza. The words of the praise poetry recited in the second section, recalling reciting the clan praises of the Mbekis, are the only additional ones.<sup>135</sup> An important detail in Khumalo’s choral writing (Figure 12.21, bar 8 and 11 – marked in grey) is his use of grace-notes, as he calls them, which are representations in music of some of the tonal glides found in Nguni speech. In spoken Zulu or Xhosa, syllables beginning with certain voiced consonants tend to commence with a brief rising portamento or on-glide. This feature along with another, similar in effect, but directed downwards when syllables end with such consonants, is very effective in song.<sup>136</sup>

In notating the two types of glides, Khumalo decided to use grace-notes. Whereas previously a ‘slide-beam’ indicated a rise or fall to a particular principal note, Khumalo’s grace notes were introduced as a way of indicating the starting pitch of the glide. As tonic sol-fa did not provide any symbols to indicate these tonal glides, he had to introduce a slur (see Figure 21.22). The bow songs of Princess Magogo show the importance of this linguistic feature in music.

Khumalo refers to

a style of singing that I call the *haya*-style. Now *haya* means ‘to sing’ in Zulu. But you see I use it for when we are singing the old form... following the speech pattern of the language. In other words, your voice follows a tone, (*demonstrating*), just like I speak. And that’s one of the difficult things in our music. [But] that is the very essence of its beauty, at its most beautiful. That’s what African music is.<sup>137</sup>

Among *ihubo* or *indlamu*, *haya*-style is a sub-style of Zulu music, used mainly in singing slower songs with a strong emotional appeal. It is significant that the various Zulu styles are linked to certain age groups. There is music for the youth (e.g. *indlamu*) and for adults (*haya* and *ihubo*). Applied to songs of praise, adoration or admiration, *haya* is hardly ever used in faster songs as “the singing has to be relaxed, lyrical and free-flowing”.<sup>138</sup> The *haya*-style is of the utmost importance in Khumalo’s recent works, as tonal inflections “carry great semantic impact in Zulu”.<sup>139</sup>

The core of Khumalo’s “Siyakwemukela” is the short dance section based on a Xhosa dance rhythm, and it is worth looking at it in more detail. As mentioned already, Khumalo took over four bars from Ludumo Magangane’s arrangement, with only some minor changes in the bass (Figure 12.23). The tenor line presents a distinctively pentatonic melody that is structured in accordance with the falling sentence tone of Nguni language. The first phrase begins on a high pitch and falls towards the end of the phrase. The next phrase begins at a high tonal level again, but not as high as



Figure 12.22: notation of rising and falling glides.

<sup>135</sup> See for instance D. Rycroft, “Zulu and Xhosa Praise-Poetry and Song”. *African Music* Vol. III, 1962.

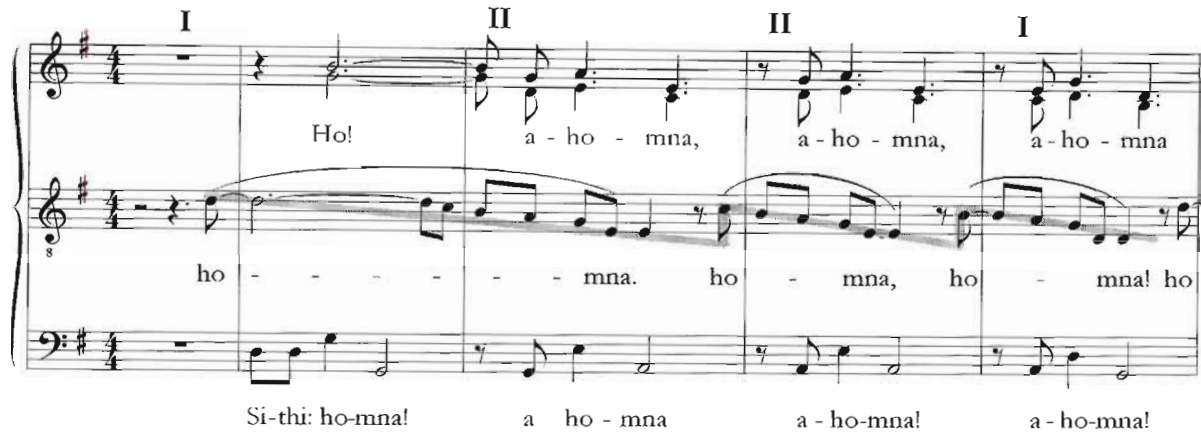
<sup>136</sup> Syllables beginning with voiced consonants (b, h, d, g, z, etc.) normally commence with a rising portamento or ‘scoop’, and this is carried over into song. Similarly, when syllables end with such consonants, they tend to glide downwards in pitch. For more details see D. Rycroft, “African Music in Johannesburg: African and non-African features”. *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, 11, 1959: 28. See also D. Rycroft, “The relation of speech-tone and melody in southern African music”. *South African Music Encyclopaedia*, ed. J. P. Malan, Vol.2 (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1982): 301-14.

<sup>137</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, July 18, 2000.

<sup>138</sup> M. Khumalo, “Commentaries on the Epic uShaka, kaSenzangakhona” in *uShaka, kaSenzangakhona* (Bryanston: Maxym Music, 1999): xli.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

the previous phrase. As in the spoken language, there is a falling pattern in each phrase. The melody, beginning on a high pitch and progressively falling to a low pitch, is “structured like a succession of teeth in a ripsaw”.<sup>140</sup> The bass and the female voices add supporting rhythmic patterns to this melody, resulting in dense interlocking structures. Special mention must be made of the sonority of the bass line, its ostinato shape, its short three-note motif, and the predominance of leaps of fourths, fifth and octaves.

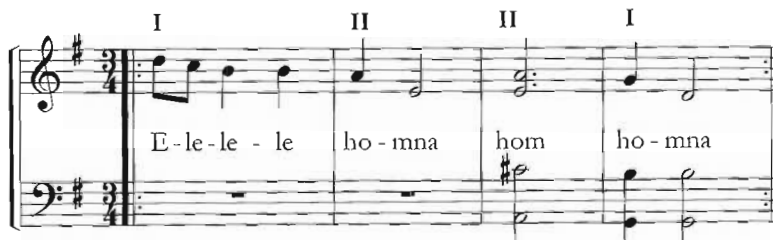


The musical score for Figure 12.23 is in 4/4 time and G major. It consists of four measures with a harmonic pattern of I-II-II-I. The vocal line (soprano) has lyrics: Ho! a - ho - mna, a - ho - mna, a - ho - mna. The piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs) features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The bass line has lyrics: Si-thi: ho-mna! a ho - mna a - ho-mna! a - ho-mna!

Figure 12.23: *Mzilikazi Khumalo, “Siyakwemukela” dance section*

Whereas composers had previously employed harmonic devices like the pervasive I-IV-I<sup>6/4</sup>-V-I formula of neo-traditional music, along with cadences and modulations, Khumalo bases “Siyakwemukela” on the root progression of the musical bow. Magangane, like other African composers, looked to Ntsikana’s songs for inspiration, and uses the same four bar long harmonic pattern (I-II-II-I) as Ntsikana in his “Round Hymn” (see Figure 12.24). The crucial difference is that, unlike Ntsikana, Magangane uses a minor chord on the second degree. In Zulu or Xhosa bow music the scale resulting from this root progression would have a raised fourth. In other words, the chord on the second degree would be a major chord. The fact that Magangane uses a minor chord can be understood only as the result of an adjustment to the Western harmonic system, where on the second degree of a major scale, we find a minor chord.

The exclamation “homna” or “hom” has relevance to the ‘Africanisation’ of *amakwaya* songs. Frequently used in Xhosa and Sotho folk songs, it becomes, in many cases, a praise word or an expression of enchantment or excitement. Such exclamations were used by many black composers throughout the twentieth century. “U ea kae?” (Where are you going?), one of Mohapeloa’s compositions, became very popular, not least because of the exclamations “hel”, “eul”, and “hom!”<sup>141</sup>



The musical score for Figure 12.24 is in 3/4 time and G major. It consists of four measures with a harmonic pattern of I-II-II-I. The vocal line (soprano) has lyrics: E-le-le - le ho - mna hom ho - mna. The piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs) features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The bass line has lyrics: E-le-le - le ho - mna hom ho - mna!

Figure 12.24: “*Elinqukuwa*” lika Ntsikana – *The Round Hymn* (transposed to G)

<sup>140</sup> D. Rycroft, 1971: 236; see also D. Dargie, 1988: 69.

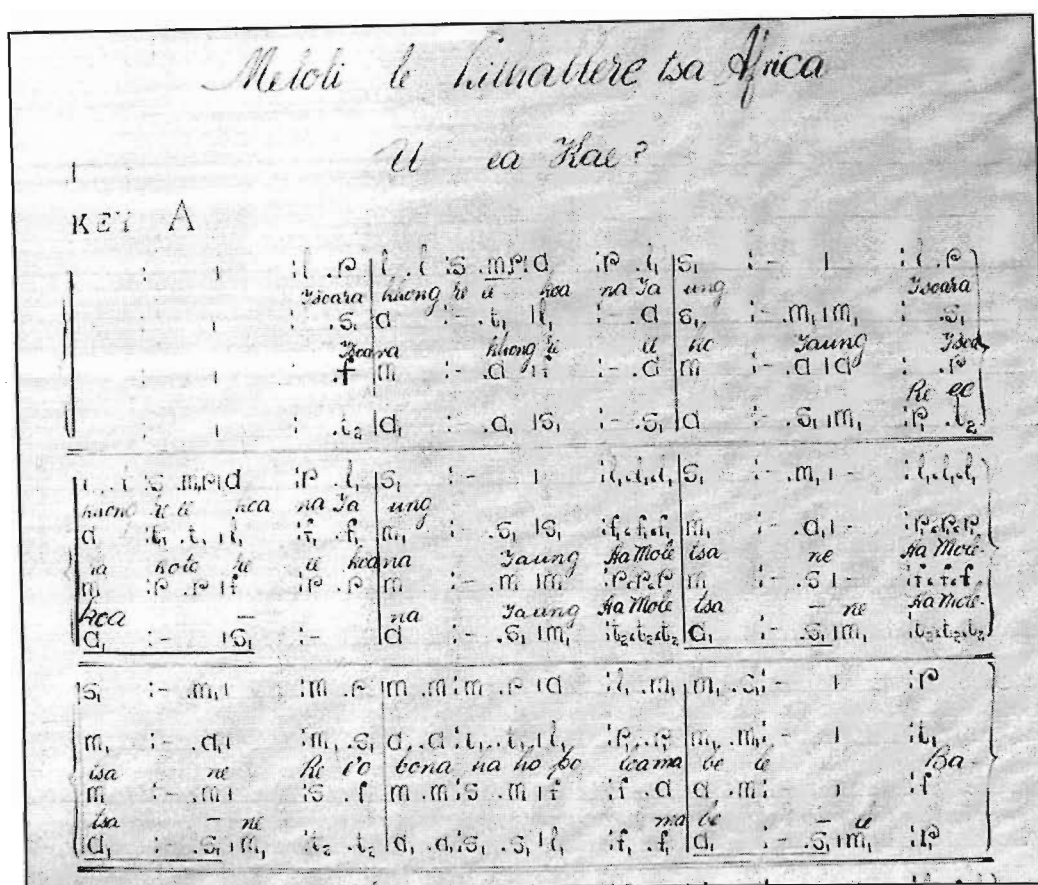


Figure 12.25: Manuscript of Mhahapelo's "U ea kae?"  
(Richard Cock collection)

### 12.2.5 Fifth Period

#### Large Scale Works with Orchestra: UShaka and the Birth of an African Opera

##### 12.2.5.1 An Epic in Music and Praise Poetry: *UShaka*

One last important development, which started in the late 1980s and made headlines through the recent realisation of the first African opera, is the composition of large-scale works by composers of the *amakwaya* tradition. At the beginning of the development towards large-scale works stood one of Mzilikazi Khumalo's compositions, "Izibongo ZikaShaka", which I have already discussed. Khumalo writes about "Izibongo ZikaShaka":

From early youth I had been moved by the character of King Shaka. In some of my earlier songs he features prominently, e.g. in "Ugqozi" and in "KwaDedangendlele". "Izibongo" also marks a crucial transition in my style of composition, that is to say, it was in this song that I started writing each and every section of a song I was composing in Zulu traditional style. In earlier songs, I had usually set only one section in traditional style, and even then, the style was mostly in the rhythm. In "Izibongo", however, the scales, harmonies, and singing styles used are all traditional. This was the first time our traditional praises had been set to music. Most of the sections in the song are in the "Haya" style, especially the opening sections and the section beginning with the entrance of the male choir, "Uyakuhlaselaphi na?"

<sup>141</sup> The song is published in M. J. S. Khumalo, 1998: 29ff.

(bar 105) to the “Oth’esadl’ezinye wadl’ezinye...” (bar 121) which is in the “Bonga” style [stricter in rhythm than the *baya*-style]. One important section is in the “Giya” traditional dance style, which is introduced by the men at “Ilemb’eleq’amany’amalembé ngoku khalipha” (bar 73ff.) followed by the faster *indlamu* dance section at “waqedaqed’izizw’uya kuhlaselaphi na?” (bar 77ff.).<sup>142</sup>

Although Khumalo emphasises that “Izibongo ZikaShaka” was never intended to be extended into a large-scale work, he began to develop the subject of King Shaka into a full-length work with the title *uShaka kaSenzangakhona* (Shaka, son of Senzangakhona), in the late-1980s. “Izibongo ZikaShaka” is placed in the third part of *UShaka*, which describes the triumphal wars of King Shaka and culminates in the singing of Shaka’s praises. This part, the shortest of the four sections, was performed as an excerpt for the first time in Soweto in 1988. “Izibongo ZikaShaka” takes a central position in the epic, not only because it was the first song to be completed, but because it prepared the way for the overall conception of *uShaka* and the production of a large-scale work written with the aim of using the idioms of indigenous African music.

Khumalo was obviously inspired to undertake this work by the European oratorio form which, as we will see in the next chapter, had gained enormous popularity in the *amakwaya* community by the 1980s. The translations of various oratorio choruses and eventually the whole of Handel’s *Messiah* into the vernacular were the first signs of attempts to appropriate Western choral music beyond the limits of mere musical reproduction (see page 364). *UShaka*, in Khumalo’s view,

is very near a oratorio, but not quite one, very near a cantata, but not quite one... therefore together with my librettist Themba Msimang we called it an epic – in poetry and music. We found this term suitable. Because of the length of the poem, it required a solution, where you have sections put into music and sections to be recited as a poem.<sup>143</sup>

It is significant that Khumalo did not simply copy the various elements of the oratorio or cantata, but replaced them with African equivalents. For instance, instead of having recitatives to move the story forward, he introduced a praise singer, who narrates the story, and “echo choruses” that support the narration by commenting on it and expressing their emotions.

The work had its premiere in the Johannesburg City Hall in 1994, and was received with critical acclaim. Riek van Rensburg of *The Pretoria News* commented on the “mysterious melodies that imitate the inflections of authentic Zulu speech, the colourful harmonies, the more introspective, dramatic dynamic, and the general epic scale of the work”,<sup>144</sup> and Paul Boekkooi felt that “this [was] not like Western music that can be appreciated intellectually. *UShaka* went straight for the bone-marrow, gripped you in the guts and made you feel the pulse of the continent. Underneath it all there is the pride of a fervent nationalism that can be found with the Zulu nation up to this day”.<sup>145</sup>

Khumalo did not write the orchestral score himself but asked for help from professional orchestrators. Christopher James prepared a first version and Robert Maxym offered his services for a revised version. Although Khumalo declared that he was happy with the result, my own opinion is that, especially in the later version by Maxym, much of the original appeal of Khumalo’s harmonic and melodic concept is lost or covered by a thick instrumentation, which at times does not give enough space to the beautiful vocal lines. Richard Cock confirms that in the case of “Izibongo zikaShaka, there is

<sup>142</sup> V. Khumalo, 1999: xlvi.

<sup>143</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Durban, Playhouse on the day of the premiere of his opera “Princess Magogo”, May 4, 2002.

<sup>144</sup> *The Pretoria News* (November 29, 1994).

<sup>145</sup> *The Star Tonight* (September 27, 1996).

definitely a difference between an unaccompanied performance and one with orchestra. It's freer without the orchestra... But I'm telling you what it does do, also for that chorus, for example: I mean that's a very colourful chorus, and the orchestra actually drains the colour from the choir – if you know what I'm saying. It's a very characterful chorus and the orchestra dilutes that.<sup>146</sup>

Mokale Koapeng, an aspiring young choral Conductor and composer from Johannesburg, agrees that this is certainly true of the second version and adds: "There is a big difference between the two orchestrations. I think the first orchestration of *UShaka*, done by Christopher James, just with percussion is much better. It gives more room, it's much thinner... [With Maxym's orchestration] even the harmonies, you know they're diluted".<sup>147</sup>

### 12.2.5.2 Towards an African Opera: *Haya, Mntwan' Omkhulu! (Sing Princess!)*



**Figure 12.26:** *Princess Magogo*  
(Programme of the launch of an  
African Opera)

Another important influence in the formation of Mzilikazi Khumalo's "African style" is to be found in the bow songs of Princess Constance Magogo KaDinizulu. Born at the Usuthu royal homestead at Nongoma in 1900, Princess Magogo, who was an authority on Zulu music and an expert performer on the *ugubhu* and the *umakhweyana* bow, is generally recognised as "the greatest woman composer of South Africa".<sup>148</sup> Khumalo asserted that the songs of Princess Magogo were always "something that has been an idea, an aim in my work – trying to preserve the old type of music".<sup>149</sup> Her songs left a strong impression on Khumalo: "[I]f there is anything that has struck me so very powerfully, it's that".<sup>150</sup> What particularly attracted Khumalo's attention was that the songs of Princess Magogo are fully developed in form, thus differing from neo-traditional songs, with their repetitions, in many cases unvaried, that I have discussed in Chapter 11.2.2 (page 289). Every section has its unique character: rhythmically, melodically and harmonically.

Improvisation and variation are central elements in Princess Magogo's original compositions and the rest of her vast repertoire of traditional Zulu bow songs.<sup>151</sup> Khumalo explains:

For the first time I was confronted with African songs which were complete. In other words, in full structure, in full song form. And that is what we don't get in African music. What do we have when we speak of traditional music? We usually have about sometimes four bars, eight bars, if we are lucky, sixteen bars. That's all, that just gets repeated in most traditional songs... There are very, very few songs we get from traditional music which are in full song form. And this is the wonderful thing about the Princess Magogo music, that's why it's so important. Because without it I don't know any other body of

<sup>146</sup> Personal communication with Richard Cock, Johannesburg, February 13, 2001.

<sup>147</sup> Personal communication with Mokale Koapeng, Johannesburg, February 13, 2001.

<sup>148</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Durban, Playhouse on the day of the premiere of his opera "Princess Magogo", May 4, 2002. For details about the life and the music of Princess Magogo see D. Rycroft, "The Zulu Songs of Princess Magogo". *African Music Journal* (1975/76): 41-97.

<sup>149</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, July 18, 2000.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> It seems difficult to distinguish between traditional material, encountered by Princess Magogo as she explained, in her (classificatory) grandmother's houses, traditional music substantially rearranged and the princess's original compositions. At this stage it may be impossible, for example, to distinguish between traditional material and original compositions in a traditional idiom. Since these matters are peripheral to my argument, I have not attempted to do so.



African music that tells us that African music actually had big form, that there were songs that were sung in full song form, not just little snippets – That to me it was a revelation when I started working on the songs of Princess Magogo.<sup>152</sup>

Fascinated by this discovery, Khumalo began to transcribe some of the songs that had been recorded by Hugh Tracey, Henry Weman and David Rycroft. In the late 1990s, he had the idea of developing some of those songs into a song cycle with the title, *Haya, Mntwan' Omkhulu!* (Sing Princess!), which was performed publicly for the first time in August 2000. After a long process of sifting through various songs, Khumalo decided on eight of them for this cycle. The songs are arranged in such a way that they portray different elements of Princess Magogo's life: "her youth, and her adult years in both their darker and their brighter aspects".<sup>153</sup> Khumalo speaks about this song-cycle:

I didn't compose a single thing, not one section. I composed nothing. All I did, I arranged. I sometimes re-arranged the order of the music. Sometimes I felt that this part is so prominent, that it needs to be repeated maybe twice... The one thing that I told myself when I was arranging those songs is that I must, for the sake of the Princess, the composer herself, I must try and be as authentic, her music must be as authentic as possible... And this was my contribution. Particularly, listening to the music, transcribing it into tonic sol-fa from the recordings and then, of course, arranging it, and then my colleague in Cape Town [Peter Klatzow] added the piano part.<sup>154</sup>

The piano part of the song cycle was composed by Peter Klatzow, who wrote in the programme notes of the world première of *Haya, Mntwan' Omkhulu!*:

Reworking the songs of Princess Magogo for alto and piano represents arrangement in its widest sense: there is no pianistic parallel for her accompanying *ugubhu* bow... one has to begin purely from the basis of the vocal line, absorbing its harmonic/modal innuendos to create an altogether new musical work... The art of arrangement seeks to give birth to a new entity, fully acceptable on its own terms, and so it is with these songs. The piano part is generally spare and lightly percussive, and from time to time goes beyond the harmonic implications of the vocal line. For this I make no apology – the piano must be allowed to make its own characteristic contribution, and it is an 88-note chromatic instrument of wide-ranging sonority. The songs also yielded up symmetries in their construction, which I felt needed to be reflected in the texture of the piano part. This will give the listener a clear sense of shape and direction: in the Princess's own recordings, it is the *ugubhu* which acts as a homogenous, integrating feature, while the vocal line creates structural distinctions; but in the

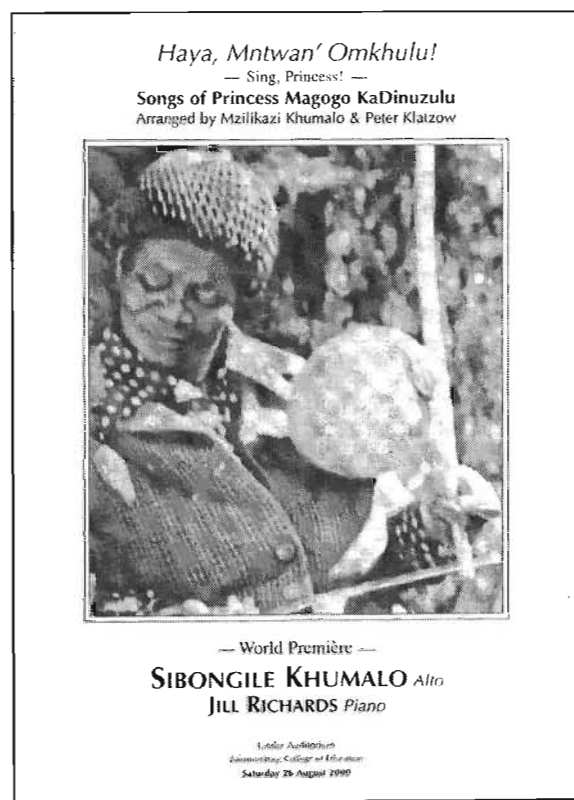


Figure 12.27: Programme of the world première of *Haya, Mntwan' Omkhulu!* August 26, 2000

<sup>152</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, February 13, 2001.

<sup>153</sup> Programme notes of the world première of *Haya, Mntwan' Omkhulu!* Johannesburg, Linder Auditorium, August 26, 2000.

<sup>154</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, February 13, 2001.

present work, the instrumental part delineates the formal musical structure rather than creating an undifferentiated base for the voice.<sup>155</sup>

Khumalo is convinced that “with the music now arranged as it is, it’s much easier for the ear to receive – not only Western, but also even the black ear”. Although he mentioned to me that he was “very happy with the result [of the piano score] personally”, he admits:

there are certain sections in the piano, which to me sound a little off the style... most of it is actually his [Klatzow’s] writing, not very much from the bow music... But then I didn’t complain because I think that finally our music is going to develop by sometimes taking a few things from something of world music. I don’t think you can get any music to develop completely on its own, on the things that come from that music alone. I think there are things that come out from the world, that come in to enrich. Each and every tradition gets enriched by what the world has got, so I have no problems.<sup>156</sup>

When asked about his impression of *Haya, Mntwan’ Omkhulu!*, Princess Magogo’s son, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Minister of Home Affairs, who was present at the work’s première, commented: “I could feel that there are some parts which sound a little modern in the way they are done, but it is her music”.<sup>157</sup> Mokale Koapeng’s impression of the song cycle was that “the piano accompaniment confined the music. The music was put in a box because it was too structured. It gave her [Sibongile Khumalo] little room to express certain nuances”.<sup>158</sup> Koapeng himself is developing an approach to instrumental accompaniment in his compositions that Richard Cock calls “different – South African composers are finding *their* voice”.<sup>159</sup> Up to the present day, Cock argues,

the only black African composer who has done a whole piece including orchestration and instrumentation has been Bongani Ndodana and [Michael] Moerane. But Moerane’s work is very Western... Now Mokale is starting to use a quite a spare instrumentation – sparse – and the emphasis in his works is more on the choir than on the orchestra. The orchestra is just a support system whereas *UShaka* the orchestration swamps.<sup>160</sup>

However, Koapeng points out that, with his approach, he met with some difficulties both on the side of the orchestra and of the choir:

I think [the choirs] were not prepared for that type of a thing – that’s the feeling I got. On the other hand, my experience is that... particularly with a number of orchestral musicians, they find it difficult to move to African music. When you write things, they play them as written. And when you say, guys, can you try this, in a particular style – because of their training it’s difficult to loosen up.<sup>161</sup>

<sup>155</sup> Programme notes of the world première of *Haya, Mntwan’ Omkhulu!* Johannesburg, Linder Auditorium, August 26, 2000.

<sup>156</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, February 13, 2001.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> Personal communication with Mokale Koapeng, Johannesburg, February 13, 2001.

<sup>159</sup> Personal communication with Richard Cock, Johannesburg, February 13, 2001.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> Personal communication with Mokale Koapeng, Johannesburg, February 13, 2001.



**Figure 12.28:** *Performance of Haya, Mntwan' Omkhulu!*  
Durban, Playhouse, April 18, 2001

### 12.2.5.3 The First African Opera: *Princess Magogo kaDinizulu*

*I did not know whether black music can carry opera – now I know that it is indeed possible.*<sup>162</sup>

Back to Princess Magogo. The composition of the song cycle, *Haya, Mntwan' Omkhulu!*, coincided with Durban-based Opera Africa's commissioning of an opera on the subject of Princess Magogo's life. Before taking the step of putting on the country's first opera by a black composer, Opera Africa had already been experimenting with 'Africanising' opera for five years, setting the *Magic Flute*, *Carmen*, *Fidelio* and *Faust* in local contexts, and performing them in local languages. The result of the commission, *Princess Magogo kaDinizulu*, which is commonly regarded as "the first African opera",<sup>163</sup> was performed with great success at Durban's Playhouse Opera on May 4 2002.

Although the song cycle was not directly related to the composition of the first African opera, it has some relevance. First, *Princess Magogo kaDinizulu* is based on the life of Princess Magogo. The opera is concerned with the epochal defeat of the Zulus in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the aftermath of this in the early part of the twentieth century. This story line unfolds in a series of flashbacks of important historical and personal events just prior to and during Princess Magogo's lifetime. Secondly, Khumalo has woven four of Magogo's original compositions into the score of the opera.

<sup>162</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo on the day of the premiere of *Princess Magogo kaDinizulu*, Durban, Playhouse, May 4, 2002.

<sup>163</sup> See, for instance, *The Daily Dispatch* (March 18, 2002) and *The Mail and Guardian* (May 03, 2002). When speaking of the first African opera, one has to distinguish between opera and South Africa's long tradition of "black" musicals, by composers such as Todd Matshikiza, Gibson Kente and Mbongemi Ngema.

When I put Khumalo's opera *Princess Magogo kaDinizulu* at the end of my periodisation of black African eclectic choral compositions, I do not want to suggest that the composition of an opera is the culmination of more than a hundred and fifty years of black choral composition. In fact, it has to be emphasised that this is not the only direction that composers in South Africa have taken. *Princess Magogo kaDinizulu* obviously represents only one aspect in Khumalo's creative work. The fact that Khumalo, one of the most prolific *amakwaya* composers, has put



Figure 12.29: Sibongile Khumalo in the role of Princess Magogo kaDinizulu, Durban Playhouse, May 4, 2002

considerable effort into composing large-scale works over the past years, has a certain significance. A discussion of large-scale compositions is made more imperative as there seems to be a marked interest among the choral community in performing oratorio and, recently, opera.

The production received enthusiastic reviews and acclaim from national and international reviewers. In a long article published in *Opera*, Christopher Ballantine claims that, compared with the 'Africanised' operas previously produced by Opera Africa, *Princess Magogo kaDinizulu* "makes a quantum leap, marking a signal moment in the history of opera in South Africa".<sup>164</sup> Michael Church, in the *BBC Music Magazine*, expressed the view that this opera "spells the start of new opportunities for South African musicians".<sup>165</sup> The comments *Princess Magogo kaDinizulu* received in the local press were not less enthusiastic. Anthea Johnston, writing for *The Sunday Tribune*, described the opera as presenting "spectacular costumes, a superb score and outstanding acting – all elements to make the performance of Africa's first opera, *Princess Magogo kaDinizulu*, a memorable one".<sup>166</sup> Barbara Trofimczyk's headline in *The Mercury* read, "Local opera's terrific".<sup>167</sup> Given the passion many South Africans have for Italian and German opera, she argued that, "it was only a matter of time before the emergence of a truly indigenous African opera".<sup>168</sup> Heralded as the "first African opera", *Princess Magogo kaDinizulu* raised considerable controversy, even in the run-up to the première, as to what an 'African' opera might be. In an attempt to place Khumalo's work in the context of the post-Apartheid era, Ballantine argues that this question is part of a much larger set of questions that need to be answered:

about how to 'think' about opera – and classical music in general – in a context where these traditions are no longer guaranteed by their old hegemony; about how to fund such activities, given limited

<sup>164</sup> C. Ballantine, "Opera for Africa". *Opera* Vol. 53, No. 8 (August 2002): 950.

<sup>165</sup> M. Church, "Sing out, Sister". *BBC Music Magazine* (September 2002): 46.

<sup>166</sup> A. Johnston, "Memorable Opening for Africa's First Opera". *The Sunday Tribune* (May 12, 2002): 6.

<sup>167</sup> B. Trofimczyk, "Local Opera's Terrific" *The Mercury* (May 07, 2002): 7.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.



resources and enormous demands for social and economic reconstruction and redress; and – in sharpest irony – about the sheer abundance of singing talent among the country’s population, and the rising clamour, from growing numbers of outstanding young black singers, for more resources for career-orientated training in opera.<sup>169</sup>

It is not my intention to intervene in this complicated and politically charged discussion. Yet it seems necessary to point out the relevance *Princess Magogo kaDinizulu* has to my present work. This thesis has argued in detail that *amakwaya* is a product of a long process of negotiation between indigenous South African idioms and Western traditions. Thus the attempt to amalgamate indigenous tradition with what has been perceived for centuries as being essentially European is not a complete novelty. In other words, the adaptation of a traditional



**Figure 12.30:** The production team on the day of the premiere of *Princess Magogo kaDinizulu*, Durban Playhouse, May 4, 2002

European art form to tell an essentially African story is not surprising, given the hybrid character of *amakwaya* tradition in which it was created. This hybrid character may be seen in almost every aspect of the opera. As in the case of the epic *uShaka* and the song cycle *Haya, Mntwan’ Omkhulu!*, Khumalo had to rely on professional orchestration, this time by British-born Michael Hankinson. The only material that Hankinson received from Khumalo was an unaccompanied vocal score written in staff notation. After transcribing Khumalo’s sketches in staff notation, Hankinson devised all the orchestral music – not only the accompaniment of the vocal lines, but also the freestanding orchestral passages, like the overture and the interludes between the scenes.<sup>170</sup> The fact that an African opera should be the product of collaboration between two composers from different cultural backgrounds is no contradiction at all. In fact, the co-operation between Khumalo and Hankinson may be regarded as being perfectly in line with endeavour of the black middle class to negotiate choral practice. Mangosuthu Buthelezi expressed this idea in his address on the opening night of the opera when he welcomed it as the product of a valuable collaboration between many South Africans. He praised those associated with the opera for taking a “monumental step in the promotion of our dream of an African Renaissance”.<sup>171</sup> Putting the opera into the context of the negotiation of past tradition and new influences, he added, “I have always believed that the essence of an African Renaissance is that of merging our most ancient traditions with the highest standards of world experience”.<sup>172</sup>

<sup>169</sup> C. Ballantine, 2002: 950.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.: 951.

<sup>171</sup> Remarks during the reception following the first performance of Opera Africa’s *Princess Magogo Ka Dinuzhulu*, May 4, 2002.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.



There is a small but interesting point that is relevant to this discussion. Hankinson has created a substantial amount of musical material for the opera, which certainly has an important bearing on the overall result. It is therefore surprising that Khumalo is named as the (sole) composer of the opera, with Hankinson not being credited for an effort that certainly exceeds the normal scope of an arrangement or orchestration. Is this the result of African nationalism or a ploy to obtain funds and wide acknowledgement? One can only speculate as to why Opera Africa decided to market this work as the first (black) *African* opera: a 'truly indigenous' opera based on an African topic and created by black Africans.

What about Mzilikazi Khumalo himself? On the day of the performance, Michael Church, a freelance journalist working for the British Broadcasting Company (BBC), asked Khumalo how he felt about the fact that his work has been orchestrated by Michael Hankinson. His answer was that, though he was happy with the result, he saw it as a work in progress. He felt sorry that he could not write his own orchestration, never having had the opportunity of learning how to compose for an orchestra, and that there was presently no black composer living in South Africa who was capable of doing so: "When I was growing up, there were no opportunities for us to learn how to orchestrate. Even now that we are running the country, I don't see any of our boys and girls acquiring the necessary knowledge. The next person to write an African opera will have to struggle as I have struggled. It makes me very sad".<sup>173</sup>

Though there are some black South African composers composing for orchestras – like Bongani Ndodana, who is presently living in Toronto, Canada – Khumalo adds, "[Ndodana] is not writing our music, it has somehow gotten out of his system". His greatest wish for the future is to "get some of our own people to write our own orchestration".<sup>174</sup>

Be this as it may, this opera can be regarded, without doubt, as a valuable contribution to South African musical life. Even though it remains to be seen whether the opera, which has been described by Opera Africa as "one of the most important turning points in modern South African culture",<sup>175</sup> will really have the impact some critics have anticipated, the production certainly deserves the widespread attention it has received nationally and internationally. Khumalo's comment suggests that there are still a number of difficulties in the way of future achievement to be overcome, lack of resources for *amakwaya* composers and choirs being only one. The greatest danger seems that the creative process of *amakwaya* composers may be compromised by decisions made for political rather than musical reasons.

The composition of *Princess Magogo kaDinizulu* coincides with a growing orientation of *amakwaya* tradition towards the operatic repertoire. Since the mid-1990s *amakwaya* groups have been performing opera choruses, and even whole opera scenes, to an increasing degree. The latest development is that, from 2001, the National Choir Festival has been exclusively prescribing operatic choruses for their annual competitions. One wonders whether the appearance of *Princess Magogo kaDinizulu* is yet another marker of a current trend. My concern is that opera is only one part of a rich vocal repertoire, African and Western. An exclusive concentration on opera, I want to argue, would have a limiting effect on the future development of the *amakwaya* tradition. The following third section will develop this argument in more detail by scrutinising the shift in interest from oratorio to opera.

<sup>173</sup> Michael Church in conversation with M. Khumalo on the day of the première, Durban, Royal Hotel, May 4, 2002; see also Church, 2002: 48.

<sup>174</sup> Michael Church in conversation with M. Khumalo on the day of the première, Durban, Royal Hotel, May, 4, 2002.

<sup>175</sup> Patrick Leeman in *The Mercury* (March 28, 2001).



**Figure 12.31:** *The final scene, Durban Playhouse, May 4, 2002*

### 12.3 Summary

This chapter has traced the historical development of the eclectic compositions of *amakwaya* composers since the early eighteenth century. The main aim was to look into the process of composition of the most influential composers and work out a periodisation that reflects the various stages of their stylistic development. Five periods were distinguished, with Ntiskana Gaba as the influential precursor of this choral tradition. In his compositions, which were notated decades later by Bokwe, Ntsikana attempted to make Christian doctrine more accessible to the people. His work is rooted in African tradition in respect of both musical substance and structure. His hymns have remained important to the present day and continue to exert significant influence on contemporary composers.

The first group of mission-educated composers deviated from Ntsikana's approach. Their works merely imitate the melodic and harmonic structures of hymns taught to them by the missionaries. In most cases, vernacular words constitute the only African aspect of these compositions. Towards the beginning of the twentieth century, however, composers started to recollect their roots and began to include elements of African traditional music in their compositions, thus contributing to emerging nationalism. The African elements included initially involved only rhythm. Gradually the composers started to replace Western hymnic square rhythms, introducing polyrhythm, multiple downbeats, syncopated rhythms, interlocking and interrhythm into their compositions. At that stage, the harmonic and melodic structures were still largely

Western. It was only towards the middle of the twentieth century that composers started to search for a peculiarly “African style” of choral composition. Composers found inspiration in the hymns of Ntsikana and in the recordings of traditional song material like the Zulu bow songs of Princess Magogo. Mzilikazi Khumalo, who was at the forefront of this development, started to experiment with traditional linguistic elements like the tonal glides in form of “grace-notes”. In his latest composition, Khumalo attempted to realise an “African style” in several large-scale works.

The five periods reveal a clear development in the use of African musical elements at the expense of Western ones. From the early twentieth century, composers consciously attempted to re-discover and continue African folk tradition by incorporating and imitating elements of traditional song material in their compositions. These compositions are also marked by a constant process of negotiation of the traditional and the modern. As argued in the first part of this thesis, this process of negotiation has been a central aspect of black middle class communities throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. Though initially assimilation and imitation were the main strategies in the struggle to win the recognition of the dominant European culture, this changed decisively towards the turn of the century when the black middle class began to question their rejection of their African cultural heritage in favour of an exclusive imitation of Western culture. This re-thinking came at a time when the black middle class found themselves caught between their own culture which they had left and the Western culture to which they aspired, and belonging to neither of them. They started to redefine their identity and began to form ideas of a national culture, emphasising the process of negotiation between traditional and Western values. Their growing awareness of their African roots, which culminated in the black consciousness movement and later in the African Renaissance, had a decisive influence on the stylistic development of *amakwaya* composers and their compositions. That the process of negotiation has remained a central concern of *amakwaya* compositions to the present day is illustrated not least in the project of creating an African opera, in which a Western art form is used to express African content. *Princess Magogo kaDinizulu* may be regarded as the latest example of a process of negotiation that started early in the twentieth century with the rise of African nationalism.

What is the vision of *amakwaya* composers for the future?

Mokale Koapeng is convinced that the question of whether “we are taking African music towards [Western] classical music, or... [Western] classical music towards African music” is going to become less relevant. Koapeng’s answer reminds us of a similar statement of Mzilikazi Khumalo, which, though quoted earlier, I want to repeat at this point because of its significance: “I think that finally our music is going to develop by sometimes taking a few things from something of world music. I don’t think you can get any music to develop completely on its own, on the things that come from that music alone... Each and every tradition gets enriched by what the world has got”.<sup>176</sup>

To *amakwaya* composers this report of Khumalo’s views should be of interest:

[C]horal music of the future should dig to our roots and unearth the wealth of songs that formed the basis of our traditional communities. In his view, these must be sung and arranged to modern instruments to establish a continuity with the past while at the same time allowing us to fully realise the ideals of an African Renaissance humanism or whatever appellation one may wish to add.<sup>177</sup>

Koapeng considers that one of the central questions that will have to be discussed in future is: “can we allow ourselves [as composers] to be different and interest choirs to stretch themselves

<sup>176</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, February 13, 2001.

<sup>177</sup> Mzilikazi Khumalo quoted from a research paper written by Thembe Vokwana for Radio Ulwazi, 2001.

towards new ideas?” Here Koapeng touches on the conservative approach of many composers and choirs. In his experience, being ‘African’ puts a lot of pressure on composers, because they are

always expected to produce something that is entirely African. Then I said, I used to live with that: trying to be as African as possible. But you know my recent development is that – can’t I be a composer first and an African second? Which means I should be able to write anything I like. The fact that I’m African should not be prescribing.<sup>178</sup>

Here Koapeng feels himself to be a product of many different influences, that is, a transcultural individual. For him, distinctions between Western and African music may not always be significant. In the process of composition, he thinks, all musical and extra-musical influences play an important role. It should be left to the individuals, with their own specific background, to use their artistic skills to create characteristic sets of impressions from their experience of life. We see Koapeng putting his ideas into practice in a number of compositions performed at the annual Nation Building Festival. Another interesting project of his is the collaboration with the British group I Fagiolini. “Khutso” (Grant us peace), one of Koapeng’s contributions to this project, attempts to arrive at “deeper understandings of the possibilities and pitfalls involved in merging different musical traditions”.<sup>179</sup>

Koapeng’s voice might not be representative of the whole choral community, but it counterbalances other more nationalistic tendencies. His transcultural attitude towards composition and choral practice in general is without doubt highly stimulating and valuable.

<sup>178</sup> Personal communication with Mokale Koapeng, Johannesburg, February 13, 2001.

<sup>179</sup> B. Pyper, “Global Harmonies”. *Vuka* (Vol.2, No. 3, 1997): 9.



## Western Repertoire

This final chapter will deal with some aspects of the development of the Western repertoire, the third part of the sectionalised repertoire of *amakwaya* groups. Compositions by Western composers have always had a special importance for members of the choral community, and performing such works is partly an expression of their sophistication and desire to be progressive. Choristers and conductors are aware that “when you sing a Western piece, you concentrate [because of] these semi-tone intervals and the chromatics, which are very difficult to execute”.<sup>1</sup> According to Edward Mngadi, the Western repertoire is regarded as the serious part of *amakwaya* repertoire as it needs much more attention than the neo-traditional African songs, which are “like a second nature” to the choirs: “We spend a lot of time in Western songs because they are difficult. It takes time to learn them”.<sup>2</sup> The difference between Western and neo-traditional African pieces is manifest not only in the musical structure but also in the different performance practice. Whereas in the African cultural context movement, dance, gestures and singing form a unity, Western art music, except for opera, has separated the elements of this unity, and is presented on a stage that separates performers and audience.<sup>3</sup>

When looking into the development of the Western repertoire, we have to recall the earlier discussion of music at the mission stations. Hymn singing was at the centre of early singing practice and was used as a means of promoting Christianity and disciplining converts. Besides hymns, the repertoire of early *amakwaya* groups comprised short a cappella compositions such as madrigals and part-songs, mainly from European Renaissance composers. Though extracts taken from large-scale works (for example, Handel’s and Mendelssohn’s oratorios) were added in the second part of the nineteenth century, it was only in the mid-twentieth century that choruses taken from oratorios, cantatas or masses gained singular popularity. From about the 1960s onwards, these compositions dominated the repertoire of *amakwaya* groups. An important impulse for this shift towards accompanied music came from theoretical considerations regarding pitch and intonation expressed by one of the foremost choral conductors and music educators of the time, Khabi Mngoma. This chapter will discuss the effects of Mngoma’s theories and clarify the main terms used in the debate. There were obviously also other factors that favoured the almost exclusive concentration by *amakwaya* groups on oratorio, such as the close relation of this genre to the social and political experience of the black community. Handel’s and Mendelssohn’s oratorios brought messages of hope to them and the subjects of many oratorios expressed their religious beliefs. The captivity of the Israelites in Egypt, for instance, was perceived as similar to the position of the black middle class in their subordination to the dominant European settler culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Personal communication with Zakhele Fakazi, Marianhill, November 05, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Personal communication with Edward Mngadi, Durban, November 16, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> See also Chapter 9.3.1.3 (physical and psychological consequences of a stage).



### 13.1 Reconsidering Repertoire: Khabi Mngoma and his Deliberations concerning Intonation

*Our greatest weakness [is the] lack of training in singing.<sup>4</sup>*

An important change in *amakwaya* repertoire occurred in the early 1970s, since when an increasing number of oratorio choruses with extensive solo passages has been prescribed. Mzilikazi Khumalo argued that the main reason for this development was the growing understanding that “our greatest weakness [is the] lack of training in singing”.<sup>5</sup> Whereas for a long time the choral community concentrated mainly on a cappella compositions, in the late 1960s and early 1970s competition schedules started to include solo sections and choral compositions with instrumental accompaniment.<sup>6</sup> This resulted in an almost exclusive preoccupation in *amakwaya* groups, first, with oratorios and, in the most recent development, with operas. A key figure in this development was without doubt the music educator and choral Conductor, Khabi Mngoma, who, as we have seen before, guided the early beginnings of the National Choir Festival and pioneered the performances of oratorios in the 1960s. He was very influential in shaping *amakwaya* performance practice and repertoire in the second half of the twentieth century. Langa Nkosi summarises:

When he started at the University of Zululand [August 1975], he really made a great change in the whole of South Africa when it comes to choral music. Because at the moment when we look at most of the musicians, especially the conductors and the singers, most of those that we get in South Africa are influenced by his legacy. It's either students from his students or his students directly. He is really a key person. I mean the people that he has produced out of the University of Zululand... you can't count how many there are... So you can imagine that the man made a great change in South Africa. He also influenced the choral training of the choirs.<sup>7</sup>

In order to explain the rationale behind Mngoma's vision, which in the last quarter of the twentieth century led among *amakwaya* groups to an almost exclusive focus on oratorio repertoire, I have to go back to a pronouncement Mngoma made in the late 1950s during his involvement with various *amakwaya* groups. Mngoma had observed that “one of the biggest problems facing African

<sup>4</sup> *TUATA* (December 1982): 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> During my fieldwork I became aware that there was certain confusion concerning the use of the term a cappella. I was told that the prescribed music of the National Choir Festival from the initial year of 1978 up to 1982 was always a cappella and that Brahms's “How lovely are thy dwellings fair”, prescribed in 1983, was the first piece with accompaniment set in the Western Section. Choirs did, however, indeed perform compositions that were meant to be accompanied prior to 1983, but because of lack of facilities they were in most cases performed a cappella. Prof. Mzilikazi Khumalo explained how the misunderstanding originated: “You see the point is, when we say a cappella, we sometimes just mean that the song is been sung without the instrumental accompaniment whereas it could be composed with accompaniment.” (Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, July 18, 2000.)

<sup>7</sup> Personal communication with Langa Nkosi, Johannesburg, July 20, 2000.

Further details about Khabi Mngoma can be gleaned from Inge Mari Burger's Thesis, a chronological account of his life. The Thesis, which is unfortunately rather uncritical and superficial, nevertheless constitutes a rich collection of material relevant to Mngoma's involvement in South African choral music. Other sources include a vita written by Mngoma himself: K. Mngoma “Khabi Mngoma 75” in (*Musicus*, 1998), J. P. Malan, ed. *South African Music Encyclopaedia*, 1979-1986, (Volume I: 107-9 and Vol. III: 246-7), and Y. Huskisson, *The Bantu Composers of South Africa*, 1969.

choirs is that of intonation".<sup>8</sup> As he wrote later, "singing a cappella in all languages (English, Afrikaans, Sotho, Xhosa, Tsonga and Zulu) was good but singing with orchestra or piano or organ created serious intonation problems".<sup>9</sup> He considered that "choirs had reached a ceiling, because of problems of intonation".<sup>10</sup>

The discussion of problems relating to pitch and intonation obviously had been part of the history of *amakwaya* from the early days. Commenting on renditions of the African Native Choir that toured London in 1891, a critic of *The Musical Times* remarked on the unfamiliar and frequent use of parallel fifths, neutral thirds, and the augmented fourth. He concluded from this observation that "the notes to their minds have no relation to each other as with us. Hence they avoid our *mi, fa*, and sing the *fa* sharp".<sup>11</sup> In the early 1960s Henry Weman, in his comprehensive study of African music and the church, offered a more specific view of the problem when he concluded that the African seems generally able to sing semitone intervals "though this depends to a great extent on the context in which they occur, and the leading note, for instance, will sometimes disappear completely in the tonic".<sup>12</sup> *Amakwaya* conductors today are very concerned about intonation. Joshua Radebe insists: "I'm very concentrated on the pitch. Anything else doesn't do".<sup>13</sup> Intonation and the correct singing of intervals also featured as topics in the Action Research Group that I started in Pietermaritzburg early in 2000 (see Introduction, page XXIII). At one of the meetings Radebe explained: "I discovered through practice that the semitones are not observed. It's the semitones especially where there are chromatic notes".<sup>14</sup> Another participant, Themba Ntuli, a high school teacher, had decided to work towards improving the intonation: "The problem that I want to focus on in my choir is the chromatic notes together with the intervals in-between the notes. Because my kids are not quite good when they are singing the semitones".<sup>15</sup> Thulasizwe Nkabinde was very worried that "in South Africa we still have a problem in that area, in as much as the standard of choral music has improved by leaps and bounds but we still have the problem of intonation".<sup>16</sup>

That intonation has become such a central concern for the conductors and choirs is to a large extent due to the adjudicators of the various *amakwaya* competitions. Ludumo Magangane, for example, emphasised that his main criteria of evaluating a choir are "rhythm and intonation, and the choir has got to have a nice tonal quality. But most important it's got to be very good intonation".<sup>17</sup> There are, however, others in the choral community who warn against such obsession. Mokale Koapeng, who works at the University of Pretoria as a choral educator, questioned whether intonation should be

<sup>8</sup> Khabi Mngoma, *Choral Technique – a Guide for the Chorister, Conductor and Adjudicator, with Historical Aspects of a Choral Tradition among Black South Africans*, Ford Choirs in Contest organised by Future Marketing, (Ford South Africa, 1980): 11.

<sup>9</sup> K. Mngoma, 1998: 44. See also K. Mngoma, *Study of the Musicology of African Music in South Africa*, unpublished MS quoted in Burger, 1990: 100.

<sup>10</sup> K. Mngoma, "Music Teaching at the University of Zululand". *Papers Presented at the 1<sup>st</sup> Symposium on Ethnomusicology* (Grahamstown: International Library of African Music, 1981): 18.

<sup>11</sup> *The Musical Times* (August 1, 1891).

<sup>12</sup> H. Weman, 1960: 120; the observations I made during my fieldwork revealed a similar impression and confirmed Weman's conclusion. Apart from the leading note, the choirs generally seemed to have had problems whenever semitone intervals occurred. The choirs are aware of the problem as Nkabinde indicated: "...and the problem of the leading note to the tonic: that short intervals, ti-do and mi-fa is still a problem. Whether it is an African or Western song that is still our problem." (Personal communication with Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Johannesburg, July 17, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> Personal communication with Joshua Radebe, Pietermaritzburg, October 05, 1999.

<sup>14</sup> Joshua Radebe, Pietermaritzburg Participatory Action Research Group, 10<sup>th</sup> meeting, April 13, 2000.

<sup>15</sup> Themba Ntuli, Pietermaritzburg Participatory Action Research Group, 11<sup>th</sup> meeting, April 20, 2000.

<sup>16</sup> Personal communication with Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Johannesburg, July 17, 2000.

<sup>17</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Sandton, Johannesburg, ESCOM Building, July 19, 2000.

the only yardstick in judging choirs' ability. It is important, not necessarily central. What I've learned is at times we lose the spirit of a performance, we lose the warmth, we lose so much because we are so concerned with one aspect. I'm not trying to downplay, I'm not trying to make up for one choir's inability to maintain pitch, no. But what I'm trying to say is that there are other aspects to a performance.<sup>18</sup>

Khabi Mngoma's statement about the problem of intonation was based on his hypothesis that

tempered pitch in which Western music is conceived, is different in its sounds from acoustical pitch which obtains in all African singing. Tempered tuning of instruments in Western music started a little after 1700. Attuning to it is an acquired skill which comes through constant practice... African choirs usually sing to an accompaniment of an instrument tuned to tempered pitch, resulting in unsatisfactory sharpening of pitch.<sup>19</sup>

Mngoma was convinced that "intonation is a matter of education – it isn't an inbred thing":<sup>20</sup>

African choirs sing in acoustical pitch and the conductor must teach his choir to sing in tempered pitch as well. Regular scale exercises with the choristers imitating a well tuned piano or organ are indispensable if a choir hopes to sing Western music with any success... However, the conductor must cultivate a sensitivity for both types of tuning in his choristers, rather than destroy their inherent sense of acoustical pitch which is a part of their cultural heritage and which they hear around them all the time in form of folk music.<sup>21</sup>

The measures recommended by Mngoma to improve the shortcomings of intonation eventually led to an extreme concentration on oratorio repertoire at the expense of a cappella literature. Considering the impact of Mngoma's hypothesis on the *amakwaya* tradition – its aesthetic concept, performance practice and repertoire – it appears necessary to investigate his ideas more closely, particularly since there seems to be some confusion among the different members of the choral community. Although it is not my intention to embark on a detailed discussion of the theoretical background and the implications of different tuning systems, a brief clarification of the terms used by Mngoma will help in the understanding of his hypothesis and its relevance for the *amakwaya* tradition.

### 13.1.1 Equal Temperament and Acoustical Pitch

The system of tuning which Mngoma calls tempered pitch should more accurately be referred to as (twelve-tone) equal temperament. During the second half of the eighteenth century, European keyboard tuning drifted closer and closer towards equal temperament at the expense of many different tuning systems that were used at that time. In fact equal tempered pitch is a compromise, reached in order to enable the transposition of music to any key on fixed tone instruments like the piano, guitar or organ. In order to achieve this tuning, many characteristics of previous tuning systems were lost. Hence, the establishment of an equal temperament must be seen in part as a limitation. Kenneth van Barthold, for instance, has warned against the consequences of the fact that

the keyboard has become to be the arbiter of intonation... [The] piano intonation equivocates; the sounds are impure, many of the overtones lost or damped on purpose, and every interval except the

<sup>18</sup> Personal communication with Mokale Koapeng, Johannesburg, February 13, 2001.

<sup>19</sup> K. Mngoma, 1980: 11-12.

<sup>20</sup> K. Mngoma, 1981: 18.

<sup>21</sup> K. Mngoma, 1980: 21; 12.

octave out of tune (and many octaves are now 'stretched' for added brilliance). This is the arbiter we use... The dangers to the sensitivity of the ear are obvious.<sup>22</sup>

The main characteristic of equal temperament is that it divides the octave into twelve equal intervals in contrast to the differently-spaced ones of just intonation, mean tone, or other tuning systems. The introduction of equal tempered tuning was an inevitable result of compositional work applying chord changes and modulations to distant keys. Equal temperament enabled these innovations at the expense of the harmonic integrity. In the second part of his *Istitutioni Harmoniche* (1558), Gioseffo Zarlino has provided what constitutes one of the first precise descriptions of a musical temperament.<sup>23</sup> At the end of this analysis, he devotes a chapter to vocal intonation, declaring that a cappella singers tend not to use a particular temperament but rather intervals in their "true form".<sup>24</sup> In other words, Zarlino argues that singers develop a certain flexibility: when accompanied by instruments with fixed pitches, they match the particular tuning of the instrument, whereas when unaccompanied, they adhere to the pure intervals of the diatonic syntonic tetrachord they had selected. These views made Zarlino the pioneer of what later theoreticians called just or pure intonation, which is probably what Mngoma describes as acoustical pitch. When a single string is set in motion, it vibrates at a rate directly proportional to its length. However, this is not the only mode of vibration of the string. In addition to vibrating over its entire length, a string simultaneously vibrates over fractional divisions of its length (1/2, 1/3, 1/4, 1/5, 1/6, etc.) producing ever-higher frequencies (overtones). For example, the relation of 1:2 represents an octave, which means that one periodic vibration fluctuates twice as fast as the other, and in the relation of 3:2, resulting in a perfect fifth, one periodic vibration is three times as fast as the other. Just intonation refers to the consistent use of harmonic intervals tuned so exactly that they do not beat,<sup>25</sup> and of melodic intervals derived from this process.<sup>26</sup> Thus the intervals of a scale are precisely tuned to the pure harmonics of the natural overtone series.<sup>27</sup>

Let us look briefly into the differences between equal temperament and just intonation. The small logarithmic measurement universally used today to compare interval sizes is the Cent, invented by Alexander Ellis and used for the first time in the Appendix to his translation of Helmholtz's *On the Sensations of Tone* (1875).<sup>28</sup> A Cent is an irrational number, used to delineate 1200 logarithmic divisions of the octave. Ellis divided the octave into 1200 steps, one Cent is 1/100 of a semitone. Although the theory is grounded on the idea of equal temperament with twelve tones comprising in the octave, the concept is valuable in that it transforms frequency distance into pitch distance. I do not want to go into detail about how to calculate the Cent-value of various interval sizes: for our understanding it is important only to be aware that an equally tempered semitone

<sup>22</sup> K van Barthold in the Foreword to L. S. Lloyd and H. Boyle *Intervals, Scales and Temperaments* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1978): ix-x.

<sup>23</sup> G. Zarlino, *Le Istitutioni Harmoniche* (Venice, 1558; reprint, New York: Broude Brothers, 1965).

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.medieval.org/emfaq/zarlino/article1.html>

<sup>25</sup> Tuned to the analogous interval in the harmonic series, such intervals are considered acoustically pure.

<sup>26</sup> M. Lindley, "Just Intonation", in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Stanley Sadie, ed., (London: Macmillan, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> Harmonics are exact, whole-number multiples of a fundamental frequency, and are a natural phenomenon of vibrating bodies. A string vibrating at a fundamental frequency of 100 cycles-per-second, also vibrates simultaneously at harmonic frequencies of 200, 300, 400, 500, etc. cycles-per-second.

<sup>28</sup> H. Helmholtz, *On the Sensations of Tone*, (Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1954; reprint of an edition first published in 1885); for a short summary of pitch measurement and instructions how to calculate intervallic distances in Cents see K. Vaughn, "Pitch Measurement", in H. Myers, *Ethnomusicology, an Introduction*, *The New Grove Handbooks in Music* (London: Macmillan, 1992): 462-8.



interval is the equivalent of 100 Cent. Looking at the table reveals that the interval of a fifth in equal temperament is two Cents lower than the perfect fifth (3:2). The equal tempered third however, is quite sharp and lies fourteen Cents above the natural third (5:4).

<b>Pitch:</b>	doh	ray	me	fah	soh	Lah	ti	doh'
<b>Ratio:</b>	1 :1	9 :8	5 :4	4 :3	3 :2	5 :3	15 :8	2 :1
<b>Just intonation</b> (in Cents)	0	204	386	498	702	884	1088	1200
<b>Equal temperament</b> (in Cents)	0	200	400	500	700	900	1100	1200
<b>Difference</b> (in Cents)	0	+4	-14	-2	+2	-16	-12	0

With this framework we can now try to judge the accuracy of Mngoma's claim that intonation problems of *amakwaya* groups were the result of different tuning systems. A point already made in Chapter 5.3.1 (page 135) can help us here. I pointed out that, as in many other cultures, Zulu musical grammar is based on these pure harmonics. The determining factor, in the case of Nguni tradition, was the overtone structure of the musical bow, a one-stringed instrument that can produce only two fundamental notes and a series of corresponding natural harmonics (see Figure 13.1). In order to produce a melodic line, the player emphasises specific overtones by opening or muting the resonator (a calabash or the oral cavity). Bow songs, like the ones performed by Princess Magogo, are at the heart of traditional Nguni music and can be treated as the formative influence. Presumably when Mngoma speaks of the "inherent sense of acoustical pitch which is a part of [the African] cultural heritage",<sup>29</sup> he has in mind the harmonic and melodic structures produced by the bow, which represent the above-mentioned system of just intonation.



Figure 13.1: Overtone structure of the ughubo

If Nikolaus Harnoncourt is right in his assertion that "by nature, the human ear is like a blank sheet of paper, ready for the intonation marks of the piano tuner, the radio, the music teacher",<sup>30</sup> a sense of intonation is 'programmed', either actively or passively. This allows two conclusions as to the validity of Mngoma's statement. First, it seems questionable whether African choristers who have grown up in an urban environment – in the nineteenth century carefully shielded from traditional African influences by the missionaries, and in the twentieth century increasingly exposed to Western music through radio and the recording industry – could possibly have inherited a tuning system that prevents them from accommodating equal tempered pitch. Second, I want to argue that the ear is not necessarily restricted to a single tuning system, rigid once programmed. It is quite possible to achieve an awareness of the need for flexibility within different systems. Regarding my discussion of equal temperament and just intonation, I would claim that every good string or wind instrument group and, in a similar way, every choir uses just intonation when it comes to performing music without a fixed tone instrument. Only when a keyboard instrument, for instance, accompanies the singing of the choir, will the performers begin to adjust to the equal temperament of the keyboard instrument. A performance by a choir and an orchestra therefore is not necessarily based on equal tempered pitch.

<sup>29</sup> See footnote 21, page 352.

<sup>30</sup> N. Harnoncourt, *Baroque Music Today: Music as Speech. Ways to a New Understanding of Music*, (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1982): 80.



### 13.1.2 Intonation: a Matter of Training?

*Everything goes with training. It is like learning a language. It is a matter of repetition, but it takes time to speak a language without a foreign accent.<sup>31</sup>*

Many choirs perform neo-traditional repertoire very successfully but struggle with the other parts of the repertoire, as Zakhele Fakazi observed: “We have choirs that are very bad on intonation on a Western song. Give them a traditional song, bah! A different choir all together”.<sup>32</sup> Choristers and conductors, Edward Mngadi argued, are aware that they have to

spend a lot of time in Western songs. Because they are difficult and it takes time to learn them. But with the traditional songs, we just go. When you prepare it, you just go and in minutes you know the song. Because even you can compose a traditional song, come up with a tune, but the rest of the things will come from the people.<sup>33</sup>

Fakazi’s observation that the choirs perform neo-traditional pieces more satisfactorily than European compositions, can be accounted for by the fact that neo-traditional songs are in most cases based on a cyclical repetition of the formula I-IV-I<sup>6/4</sup>-V-I (see Chapter 11.2.2, page 289). The concept of modulation is foreign to the traditional music making of sub-Saharan Africa. Henry Weman made an important observation in the early 1960s that contributes to this discussion:

The African has a strong aversion to leaving a key when it has once been established. Too many modulations in the same song carry with them the risk of losing accurate pitch, and as a result there are not many songs which the African can sing without a liberal scattering of wrong notes; songs ideally must be without modulations, or with only the very simplest.<sup>34</sup>

The “aversion to leaving a key” might be explained in terms of the philosophical importance of repetition in African music, as argued elsewhere. It is important to understand that neo-traditional African songs make different demands on the performers than those made by European compositions. This is, of course, true of repertoire of all kinds. Only when a performer has gained sufficient understanding of the historical, political, sociological, cultural and musical context of a composition and mastered the relevant techniques, will he be able to render a valuable performance of it.

Given the fact that *amakwaya* groups grew out of the mission context and have been exposed to repertoire from various cultural backgrounds for more than a hundred and fifty years, it is worth investigating why there should be a discrepancy in the quality of their performance of different parts of the repertoire. In a seminar held at the University of Natal in September 2002, visiting scholar Kofi Agawu made an interesting observation on this subject. Referring to hymns and other European vocal forms, he asked the question: “How long are we going to say that these things are foreign to us?” His point was that *Amakwaya* groups have been rehearsing and performing European music for more than a century and that one should not try to account for shortcomings in their performance of it, on the grounds that it is ‘foreign’.

<sup>31</sup> Personal communication with Lindumuzi Mngoma, Johannesburg, SABC, February 16, 2001.

<sup>32</sup> Personal communication with Zakhele Fakazi, Marianhill, November 5, 1999.

<sup>33</sup> Personal communication with Edward Mngadi, Durban, November 16, 1999.

<sup>34</sup> H. Weman, 1960: 120.

Judging from my own experience and the insights that I gained through comments of various members of the community, I should say that the problems in performance are rather the result of insufficient training than genetically determined. A similar answer has already been made to Khabi Mngoma's claim that African choral groups are accustomed only to acoustical pitch, and also to those conductors and adjudicators who complain about "the problem [is moving from] the leading note to the tonic... [problematic] are the short intervals, ti-do and mi-fa".<sup>35</sup>

It is unfortunate that most of the choirs do not have access to a piano or an organ, and therefore cannot check their intonation. Even in cases where choirs have such an instrument, only a few conductors have the necessary skills to use it. Choirs, Nkabinde explains,

usually don't rehearse with instrumental accompaniments... Because of lack of facilities, they would rehearse the song without accompaniment and only see the piano on the day of the competition or two days before if that choir is lucky enough to get a piano somewhere and an accompanist. But the problem was not solved, because this piano is becoming a monster to the choristers: they are not used to it.<sup>36</sup>

Thus the lack of suitable instruments affects not only the rehearsals but also the performances of the choirs. P. J. Simelane, one of the important composers of the choral tradition, wrote in a review of a concert that he attended during a conference on African church music in 1967: "Some of the music prescribed for High Schools and Teachers' choirs is unsuitable due to the fact that it should be accompanied by an instrument or instruments. When sung unaccompanied, much of the beauty is lost and the music becomes unnecessarily difficult".<sup>37</sup> One can witness the results of this deficiency at many *amakwaya* competitions and concerts. It is always a very disconcerting experience to see a conductor in silence beating the bars of an interlude for an imaginary orchestra or piano until the choir comes in again. In a post-Apartheid South Africa resources for black choral groups are still limited and opportunities for further training rare. The only instrument that is available to many choirs and conductors is a melodica, which conductors use to set the key of a piece or to demonstrate the line of one single part. Singing in a choral ensemble, however, requires an understanding of the harmonic coherence of the music and an awareness of other parts. It is here where the melodica fails as a teaching aid, as it promotes the undesirable process of 'note-bashing' and an exclusive concentration to the singer's own part. I am in agreement with Richard Cock, one of the leading conductors and choral trainers in South Africa, who maintains that "the problem with intonation is just that they don't rehearse with pianos, that's all. They haven't got anything to relate to. And when they do transitions, it just goes hopelessly out... But black choirs can sing just as well in tune as any other choirs if they are made to sing in tune".<sup>38</sup>

Mngoma, too, considered singing in tune to be "a matter of proper training [that has] nothing to do with skin colour or race".<sup>39</sup> His goal was to achieve flexibility in the use of various tuning systems. According to his own account, he attempted to reach this goal by teaching the difference between acoustical pitch and equal temperament through constant correlation with a properly tuned piano and attentive listening to records of Western classical music. When teaching instrumental students, he made clear that

<sup>35</sup> Personal communication with Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Johannesburg, July 17, 2000.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> P. J. Simelane, *Report on the Conference on African Church Music*, Roodekrans, December 5-7, 1967: 35-6.

<sup>38</sup> Personal communication with Richard Cock, Johannesburg, July 21, 2000.

<sup>39</sup> Khabi Mngoma, interview with Inge M. Burger, August and September, 1985; quoted in I. M. Burger, 1990: 134.

the piano was actually 'wrong', but that in order to appreciate Western music, as heard on the radio or records, for instance, and in order to be able to perform it themselves, they needed to be 'wrong' with the piano. That is, they had to produce 'piano intonation' on their instruments.<sup>40</sup>

Inge Burger remarks that Mngoma's training of his students in "both pitch traditions" was highly successful. One might have doubts about this statement, especially as she goes on to assert that "the acquisition of pitch sensitivity was [so] remarkable" that his students "could perform in both systems, and were always prompt to report any newly out-of-tune pianos to Khabi Mngoma".<sup>41</sup> Be this as it may, Mngoma's effort certainly did not have the desired long-term effect, and problems of pitch are still worrying conductors and adjudicators today.

### 13.2 The Significance of Oratorio: Mngoma's Ionian Choir and Handel's *Messiah*

*So now the feeling was we need to graduate from that and move a little forward because pitch was even worse at that time... Then it was enforced that the choirs must be accompanied. You have got to sing with accompaniment.*<sup>42</sup>

In mid-1959, as a result of his intense theoretical and practical involvement in the choral scene, Mngoma was approached by Cecil Skotnes, then Chairman of the Johannesburg Bantu Music Festival, to join the Johannesburg Recreation and Community Services Department and act as Cultural Officer as well as Secretary of the Bantu Music Festival. Mngoma's responsibilities entailed<sup>43</sup>

- the stimulation of interest in Western classical instrumental music in the townships of the Johannesburg area, and the establishment of an orchestra;
- the stimulation of interest in the academic study of Western classical music (vocal and instrumental) among the people of the townships;
- the improvement of the general quality of choral singing as regards the performance of Western choral repertoire by African choirs, with specific reference to intonation, which meant providing skilled guidance in the vocal techniques employed in Western tempered singing;
- the development of a choral tradition of equal-temperament singing among African choirs in the townships, so that performances of Western classical repertoire could be rendered successfully;
- the establishment of music educational programmes in the townships that would synthesize the study of African and Western musical cultures in one curriculum, with the purpose to reconcile the two;
- to instil a love of good music and to promote the joint appreciation of Western as well as African music among the people of the townships.

The central idea was to establish a 'model choir' that would promote the singing of the Western choral repertoire, especially in the townships, and help other choirs to deal with the problems of tempered pitch intonation. Consequently Mngoma formed the Ionian Choir, choosing choristers from choirs in the Johannesburg area. The name was supposed to reflect the group's aim of developing a choral tradition of equal-temperament singing among African choirs and "to emphasise the

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.: 111.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Personal communication with Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Johannesburg, July 17, 2000.

<sup>43</sup> I. M. Burger, 1990: 105.

group's commitment to the mastery of staff notation and Western classical music".<sup>44</sup> In order to accustom his choristers to tempered pitch intonation, Mngoma started every rehearsal with scales and exercises using a keyboard to train listening skills.<sup>45</sup> The Ionian Choir had socio-political underpinnings that derived from Mark Radebe's conception of a National African Culture. This becomes especially clear in Mngoma's ambition to exert "an influence on African choral singing in general, not only in terms of performing Western music so that it sounds Western, but also in terms of performing African music in such a way so that it sounds recognisably 'African'".<sup>46</sup>

With the establishment and training of this choir, he intended to make a statement that counteracted the prevailing idea that "although African choirs are able to sing African songs, Blacks cannot sing Western music".<sup>47</sup>

In the early 1960s, when it became illegal for blacks and whites to collaborate in cultural activities, Mngoma could no longer draw on white musicians to support his training and performance projects. He had to rely on his own ingenuity to create forums for development, and in 1959 founded the Jubilee Orchestra as part of the Ionian Music Society. Khabi Mngoma's ultimate aim was to start an orchestra, with a full string section comprising violins, violas and cellos, that would be proficient in the performance of symphonic music. In addition, this orchestra would perform with other African choirs who wished to gain experience in performing large-scale choral works. Violin classes, consisting at first of six students, had already started in 1957 in Soweto, where Mngoma had initiated the Soweto Music Education Programme at the Jubilee Social Centre. The Jubilee String Players or Jubilee Chamber Orchestra was the first black instrumental ensemble ever to be established in South Africa. In the early 1960s, the Ionian Music Society comprised the Ionian Ladies' Choir, the Ionian Male Choir, the Ionian Mixed Choir, and the Ionian Junior and Senior orchestras.<sup>48</sup>

From 1964 Mngoma's choir and orchestra started to perform extensively in the Johannesburg area and became well known in the following years for the impressive range of repertoire – mainly oratorios and cantatas – that it presented, including:<sup>49</sup>

- 1961: Bach *Four Seasons* (Cantata No. 206);
- 1962: Mendelssohn *Hymn of Praise*;
- 1963: Mendelssohn *Hear My Prayer*;
- 1963: Brahms *Alto Rhapsody*, with Grace Mngoma as soloist;
- 1964: Spohr *The Last Judgement*;
- 1964: Handel *Judas Maccabaeus*, Festival Choir, Johannesburg City Hall;
- 1964: Handel *Samson*, St Mary's Anglican Cathedral Johannesburg;
- 1965: Bach *Christmas Oratorio I&2*, Uncle Tom's Hall Orlando West;
- 1966: Handel *Israel in Egypt*, St Mary's Cathedral, Johannesburg;

<sup>44</sup> Khabi Mngoma quoted in I. M. Burger, 1990: 134. Mngoma regarded the diatonic major scale as the central intonation basis of tempered pitch. He chose the term "Ionian" for his Choir, "since the Ionian model is in fact the diatonic major scale". (K. Mngoma, 1998): 44.

<sup>45</sup> K. Mngoma, 1998: 44.

<sup>46</sup> Khabi Mngoma, interview with Inge M. Burger, May 9, 1985; quoted in I. M. Burger, 1990: 134; see also K. Mngoma "The Teaching of Music with Special Reference to Instruments". *Pedagogue* (No.3, 1980): 5.

<sup>47</sup> Khabi Mngoma, interview with Inge M. Burger, August and September 1985; quoted in I. M. Burger, 1990: 134.

<sup>48</sup> I. M. Burger, *The Life and Work of Khabi Mngoma*, Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy. University of Cape Town, 1990: 107, 109, 131-2; see also Y. Huskisson, "Bantu Musical Corporations of Johannesburg 1949-1976", in *South African Music Encyclopaedia*, Vol. I, 1979: 108.

<sup>49</sup> The information about the various ensembles Khabi Mngoma established at Johannesburg and the select list of performances was given to me by his son, Linda Mngoma; see also *The Rand Daily Mail* (October 10, 1962) and (August 7, 1964), and *The Star* (October 04, 1968).

- 1967: Verdi           *Requiem*;
- 1968: Handel       *Messiah*;
- 1969: Bach           *St. Matthew Passion*;
- 1970: Haydn         *Seven Last Words*;

The concert activities of the Ionian Music Society were not confined to Johannesburg. Langa Nkosi, adjudicator of the National Choir Festival, remembers being impressed by Mngoma's performances:

I was very young... [when Khabi Mngoma] came to present his music in the different provinces... So that choir influenced a lot of choirs because it would go around the country singing. During Easter, every Easter, it would go down to Durban to the YMCA and sing. It had a lot of influence on us as well. So that's one choir that sung mostly away from competitions. And again it's the choir among the black choirs that started singing choral music with accompaniment. Then they started singing the works, the *Messiah*, the *Judas Maccabaeus*, you know, in South Africa, and that is the choir that had the first group of violinists, I mean an orchestra. So that had a lot of influence as well.<sup>50</sup>

George Mxadana has similar memories of performances that "were elements of joy for most of us". The Ionian Choir inspired the creation of many "excellent choirs" in Johannesburg, as Mxadana goes on to explain:

We used to have something like a concert a week or maybe once a month or once in two months. We had the Capedium [Choir conducted by Jabulani Mazibuko] maybe going there and performing *The Creation*.<sup>51</sup> Then we would have the Ionian [Choir] performing *Judas Maccabaeus*... And then we would have the Pretoria Adult Choir doing some other things, and there were many other choirs... I mean these choirs that I just have mentioned, these choirs really belong to the early, early ages of choral music in the country. But they did a lot of contribution... I mean those were really what you may call role models in the African singing. They really were absolutely excellent. The Ionian had also a lot of people who were excellent soloists as well... And remember that the first African group to have an orchestra trained by Khabi Mngoma was the Ionian [Music Society]. They were the first group to have African instrumentalists.<sup>52</sup>

Khabi Mngoma's concerts, tours, and workshops triggered a process of restructuring repertoire. In the 1970s a cappella music was still part of *amakwaya* performance repertoire, but the trend was clearly towards Western art music composed with accompaniment. In a 1961 review in *The Rand Daily Mail* the critic asserted that "both [*The Creation*] and the earlier, highly successful performance of [*The Messiah*] have shown how much Africans enter into the spirit of oratorio".<sup>53</sup> Mngoma's promotion of the view that "the introduction of instrumental accompaniment is gradually helping the problem of intonation", resulted in many competitions starting to prescribe repertoire taken exclusively from oratorios and masses.<sup>54</sup> Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Conductor of the SABC Choir in Johannesburg, explains that the rationale behind this move was Mngoma's conception of improving intonation amongst *amakwaya* groups: "If you keep on singing a cappella stuff, we will never solve

<sup>50</sup> Personal communication with Langa Nkosi, Johannesburg, July 20, 2000.

<sup>51</sup> The performances caused quite a stir and received wide coverage. For reviews of the concerts with piano accompaniment given in the Selborne Hall, Orlando, see *The Star* (August 26, 1961) and (September 8, 1961), and *The Rand Daily Mail* (September 26, 1961). The follow-up concerts done with a small orchestra are covered by *The Star* (November 25, 1961), and *The Rand Daily Mail* (November 7, 1961) and (November 25, 1961).

<sup>52</sup> Personal communication with George Mxadana, Johannesburg, February 08, 2001.

<sup>53</sup> *The Rand Daily Mail* (November 7, 1961).

<sup>54</sup> Personal communication with Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Johannesburg, July 17, 2000.



this problem of pitch... So there is no way we can go back to a cappella because that means going back to the original problem”.<sup>55</sup>



**Figure 13.2:** *The Ionian Mixed Choir and orchestra performing excerpts from Handel's Judas Maccabaeus (TUATA Diamond Jubilee, December, 1966)*

### 13.2.1 Handel's *Messiah*: Chronicle of Appreciation

*I knew Handel from long, while I was still very young.*<sup>56</sup>

An interest in oratorio did not suddenly spring into being in the second half of the twentieth century, artificially introduced as an attempt to improve certain technical and musical weaknesses of *amakwaya* groups. Works by Mendelssohn and Brahms, as well as Handel's *Messiah*, had long been significant presences. The famous "Hallelujah" chorus, in particular, had become a standard item in the repertoires of numerous choirs, and had been prescribed for the first Transvaal Bantu Eisteddfod in December 1931.<sup>57</sup> One of the earliest references to a black choir presenting excerpts from Handel's oratorios, including the "Hallelujah" chorus, dates back to the 1891 performance of The Zulu Choir at Westminster Abbey.<sup>58</sup> Oratorios, and particularly those of Handel, were popularised in South Africa through the tonic sol-fa movement.<sup>59</sup> In England, the production of cheap vocal

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Personal communication with Leslie Nkuna, Grahamstown, July 03, 2000.

<sup>57</sup> Programme to the first Transvaal Bantu Eisteddfod, held in Johannesburg at the Bantu Men's Social Centre, December 2-5, 1931. (Africana Collection of the William Cullen Library at University of the Witwatersrand/Johannesburg); see also Chapter 8.1 for more details about this Eisteddfod.

<sup>58</sup> See foreword to Sam Shabalala, *I-Mesaya – Umculo kaHandel ngesiZulu* (Pietermaritzburg: Reach Out Publishers, 1993).

<sup>59</sup> A sign of the enormous popularity that tonic sol-fa had gained by the end of the nineteenth century, was the annual Festival of the Tonic Sol-fa Society held, since its inception, at Crystal Palace in London. Founded in 1857, by 1891 twelve thousand singers participated and, for the grand finale that year, a mass choir of twenty thousand singers was brought together (*London Times*, July 17, 1891). The movement promoted a musical tool designed to teach the rudiments of music as rapidly as possible, and popularised certain trends in repertoire and performance practice. See also Chapter 6.2.3.

scores printed in tonic sol-fa prepared the ground for the formation of large amateur choral societies. Promoted particularly by the London based Sacred Harmonic Society, oratorios became an important part of the repertoire of amateur groups from 1836 onwards. Another step taken by the Sacred Harmonic Society was to give up programmes of miscellaneous selections in favour of entire oratorios, including Handel's *Messiah*. The regular performance of this work by the Society as well as other amateur groups contributed crucially to its popularisation, until the choristers involved could be numbered in thousands and audiences in tens of thousands. Handel became a national figure, and his music an important part of English identity.

Through the tonic sol-fa movement black choirs in South Africa gradually gained firsthand experience of and insight into the musical life of the West. During their tour to England, the African Native Choir was invited to take part in the 1891 Tonic Sol-fa Jubilee. A journalist of *The London Times*, reporting on this occasion, was amazed:

It would indeed have seemed incredible, 50 years ago, not only that so large a body of singers could be directed by a single conductor, but that a method invented, or rather adapted from a very old system, by a lady who wished to simplify the beginnings of music for her young pupils, should become the mighty force it is at present, when it has almost attained the position of a religious doctrine.<sup>60</sup>

The annual Festival comprised a series of concerts and musical performances culminating in a choir competition.<sup>61</sup> An impressive display of the sol-fa method was given: "The concert of 5,000 children in the Handel orchestra was chiefly remarkable for the complete success with which an exercise in two parts, dictated by the conductor from 'Handsigns', was sung".<sup>62</sup> There was also sight singing test involving a "hymn-tune of fairly simple structure, written in the morning by Sir John Stainer", and given out on the organ. After it had been written down by everyone in the huge choir, it was sung "of course in harmony, with remarkable correctness".<sup>63</sup> These experiences left a deep impression on the choristers of the African Native Choir. After returning home, Paul Xiniwe initiated a similar movement in the Ciskei in 1894, which he called the Native Harmonic Society.<sup>64</sup> This movement encouraged the use in South Africa of the choral repertoire that had been published through tonic sol-fa. By the middle of the twentieth century, the popularity of oratorios, and especially Handel's *Messiah*, had spread throughout South Africa and almost every concert or competition featured set pieces from this rich source. *Iso Lomuzi* reports on numerous concerts structured like the one presented by Adams College in 1933 to celebrate the progress of the institution. The students performed "a few selections very well indeed under the baton of Mr. A. J. Lutuli. These were 'School Song', 'Vuka Deborah', 'Hallelujah Chorus', 'The Bells of St. Michael's Tower'".<sup>65</sup> Apart from the "Hallelujah" chorus, various other pieces from the *Messiah* were included in the programme. In the course of the twentieth century, Handel's "Hallelujah" chorus became very important to the students of Adams College: "We read in our English newspapers that, in some parts of Yorkshire, the people sing the Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's 'Messiah' as a community

<sup>60</sup> *The London Times* (July 17, 1891).

<sup>61</sup> One of the main attractions of the Festival was the participation of the African Native Choir. In the intriguing mixture of biography and autobiography relating to Katie Makanya, Charlotte Manye's sister, Margaret McCord reports on the performance of the Choir during the Festival. See M. McCord, 1995: 33.

<sup>62</sup> *The London Times* (July 17, 1891).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> C. G. Henning, "The Introduction of the Tonic Solfa System into the Eastern Cape". *Journal of the Department of Music Examinations* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, Vol. 4.1&2 1976): 46.

<sup>65</sup> *Iso Lomuzi* (May 1933: 20).

of Yorkshire, the people sing the Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's 'Messiah' as a community song. Could we not equal that at Adams? An ideal to live up to at any rate".<sup>66</sup>

Mzilikazi Khumalo claims that "black singers of all ages have always found Handel most 'singable'", and tells a story from his childhood about how, when he and his classmates were walking home after choir rehearsal, they started to create their own version of the "Hallelujah" chorus by using vernacular words.<sup>67</sup> Reverend Myaka from Clermont has equally fond memories of his youth, when he sang "Every Valley" from the *Messiah*:

When I also was studying, I sang for the Philharmonic Society [in Pietermaritzburg]. During the auditions the requirement was that I sing a song, a solo of one of these big composers: Mozart, Handel. And I just picked this song because I knew it from the youth. And then I was asked to sing it with the pianist – I sang it so correct, without reading, that the pianist asked, "How do you do it?" He was reading from the book and I was just standing next to him. [I sang] this song of "Every Valley". I almost sang 100% the timing, because that's important.<sup>68</sup>

In view of the popularity of the *Messiah*, it is not surprising that in the early 1950s Mngoma should have decided to establish the "Townships' Handel's Messiah Tradition", with the objective of performing Handel's *Messiah* annually. In the inaugural year, 1953, the Jabavu Choristers under Jabulani Mazibuko performed five choruses and seven recitatives and arias. Khabi Mngoma remembers:

I managed to establish the "Townships' Handel's Messiah Tradition" by persuading the Jabavu Choristers under Jabulani Mazibuko, to do Handel's Messiah annually, starting with five choruses and seven recitatives/arias in 1953. The first performance lasted 45 minutes, and this time was doubled by soliciting the audience to ask for encores. Urbaniah Mothopeng (soprano), my wife Grace Mngoma (alto), Ben Xathase (tenor) and Lucas Schott (bass) were soloists. The first keyboard accompanists were Ada Lovell (organ) and Peggy Haddon (piano).<sup>69</sup>



Figure 13.3: Three of the principal singers of the Messiah Choir with Anne Feldmann and Joseph Friedland, (*Star*, April 19, 1961)

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.: (October 1933: 24).

<sup>67</sup> M. Khumalo in the foreword to Sam Shabalala, *I~Mesaya*, 1993.

<sup>68</sup> Personal communication with Rev. Nxele and Rev. Myaka, Clermont, May 08, 2000.

<sup>69</sup> K. Mngoma, 1998: 44.

Another result of the enthusiasm for Handel's *Messiah* was the establishment of The Messiah Choir in 1958 under the leadership of Ben Mzwandile Xatasi.<sup>70</sup> The remarkable feature of this project, actually called the Johannesburg African Music Society, is that it was a real joint effort. Though Mngoma's "Townships' Handel's Messiah Tradition" certainly influenced the establishment of The Messiah Choir, which developed out of the Jabavu Singers, the initiative was promoted by Les Dishy of the Desert Lily Shellhole, who recruited an African choir for a performance of the *Messiah* in a collaboration with the Johannesburg Symphony Orchestra.<sup>71</sup>



Figure 13.4: *The Messiah Choir on the steps of the Durban City Hall, (The Star, May 02, 1963)*

For the first concert, scheduled for Easter 1959 in the Johannesburg City Hall under the direction of Joseph Friedland, the Jabavu Singers teamed up with the St. Augustine and the St. Cyprian's choirs from Sophiatown, forming a hundred-and-fifty-strong choir.<sup>72</sup> Within a short time, the Johannesburg African Music Society proved to be "one of the most advanced non-European choirs in existence in South Africa".<sup>73</sup> In the years that followed, with the help of Joseph Friedland and a number of white soloists, including John Thorpe, Anne Feldmann (a soprano trained in Vienna) and Sarie Lambrecht, The Messiah Choir gave annual performances of Handel's *Messiah* for both "European and non-European" audiences, and toured South Africa, giving concerts in Durban and Cape Town. The *Messiah* became for the choir not only "the world's greatest oratorio but a way of life".<sup>74</sup> Later the Johannesburg African Music Society gave performances of other oratorios, like Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, and mounted a show that featured traditional and eclectic African compositions, which they called "Intsholo". Their concerts were received with overwhelming enthusiasm. *The Star* reported that at the first concert given in the City Hall in 1959, "Johannesburg music lovers went mad with delight. Two performances only were scheduled. Seven performances were finally given".<sup>75</sup> A review, published in *The Rand Daily Mail*, of a later concert in the Johannesburg City Hall in April 1961 reads as follows:

<sup>70</sup> *The Star* (April 09, 1964).

<sup>71</sup> *Drum* (No. 3, October 1964): 37.

<sup>72</sup> *The Star* (May 02, 1963).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*: (April 09, 1964).

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*: (July 24, 1967).

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* (May 02, 1963).



Those who imagine that the townships produce only jazz and kwela should have heard the Johannesburg African Music Society's performance of Handel's *Messiah* in the City Hall last night... Mr. Friedland conducted a White orchestra and knowing where the strength of the society lay, gave most attention to the choral passages... The "Hallelujah", with Stuart Pope at the organ, very properly brought the audiences to their feet and (less properly) a burst of applause.<sup>76</sup>

Over the years this Choir achieved tremendous popularity with their audiences in the *amakwaya* community, with the result that, in many performances, "the 'Hallelujah' chorus had to be repeated".<sup>77</sup> After a concert at the Dorkay House – at that time centre of Johannesburg's black urban musical culture – *Drum* magazine even proclaimed: "now jazz fans want the 'Messiah' choir".<sup>78</sup>

To make the *Messiah* even more accessible to black audiences, various translations of the text into indigenous languages were attempted, Mathaela-Michael Masote's *Black Messiah* being the earliest example. In February 1983 Masote, a gifted Conductor and string player,<sup>79</sup> began his translation of the work into the nine Bantu languages spoken in South Africa. Masote recalls that a performance of the *Messiah* by the Johannesburg Music Society at the Johannesburg City Hall in 1960 left a lasting impression on him. Years later he listened to a radio broadcast of the work sung in Afrikaans and thought that it would be wonderful if the work could one day be sung in the other languages of South Africa.<sup>80</sup> The *Black Messiah* was performed for the first time on April 8, 1984, under the baton of Masote at the Holy Cross Anglican Church in Soweto. Masote saw a link between his version of the *Messiah* and the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa. His aim was to bring "the beauty of Handel's most famous score to the many nationalities in our country".<sup>81</sup> Sam Shabalala's Zulu translation of the work, *I~Mesaya – Umculo kaHandel ngesiZulu*, had its world premiere on 20 March 1993 in the Pietermaritzburg City Hall, with the Radio Zulu Mass Choir and the Natal Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Richard Cock.<sup>82</sup> The latest endeavour in this direction has been Ludumo Magangane's production of his *Rainbow Messiah*, a title inspired by Thabo Mbeki's reference to South Africa as the Rainbow Nation. Magangane's version draws heavily on the *Black Messiah*, making only minor changes to Masote's translation.

To see the success of and the overriding interest in the *Messiah* in black communities only as the result of a successful cultural imperialism, an imposition of foreign culture, would be to oversimplify. By repeatedly translating the work, the choral community has gone beyond a mere reproduction. The act of translation must be seen as an important endeavour to appropriate a work that has had great significance in the history of *amakwaya*. It was, as Christopher Cockburn puts it, an attempt to 'own' the work, "to assert that it is not the exclusive property of the colonisers, of the dominant culture, while at the same time acknowledging the fact that they did bring it".<sup>83</sup>

<sup>76</sup> *The Rand Daily Mail* (April 24, 1961).

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* (April 13, 1964).

<sup>78</sup> *Drum* (No. 3, October 1964): 37.

<sup>79</sup> See *The Star* (February 1, 1973) for more details about Mike Masothe's contribution to the development of a music culture in Soweto.

<sup>80</sup> The 1930s Afrikaans version of the *Messiah* was performed by the Dutch Reformed Church Choir, Bloemfontein North under D. J. Roode. See C. Cockburn "Music in Twentieth Century South Africa: the Example of Handel's *Messiah*". Paper presented at the 26th Annual Congress of the Musicological Society of Southern Africa, Bloemfontein, 26-27 August 1999; also: Phillis Scarnell-Lean "Since Singing is so Good a Thing: the Story of the Johannesburg Philharmonic Society 1909-1959" (Pietermaritzburg, 1959): 10-1.

<sup>81</sup> [http://www.classicalmusic.co.za/Pages/in\\_the\\_wings.htm](http://www.classicalmusic.co.za/Pages/in_the_wings.htm)

<sup>82</sup> *The Natal Mercury* (March 22, 1993). Sam Shabalala, *I~Mesaya*, 1993; for the recording of the world premiere: *IMesaya – Iculwa NgesiZulu*, Tusk Music, 1994 (MWCD 1001).

<sup>83</sup> C. Cockburn, 1999.



This ambiguity once more illuminates the main theme of this thesis: that a constant process of negotiation has played a major role in the formation of middle class identity. A performance of, say, the Zulu version of the *Messiah* cannot simply be seen as an attempt to emulate British social values. In the eighteenth century, this work was closely associated with English nationalism. But here, in Shabalala's translation (dedicated to King Goodwill Zwelithini), it expresses pride in Zulu language and culture, and thus witnesses to a people engaged in the process of negotiating the present with the past, of reconciling traditional values with modern ones.



**Figure 13.5:** *The Princess Square Singers, National Choir Festival, Cape Town, December 2000*

Khabi Mngoma and Michael Masote's endeavours to create their own black orchestras and similar initiatives were driven by the fact that black communities suffered from limited resources and that the collaboration of musicians of different ethnic origin was in most cases prevented by Apartheid laws. One could, however, interpret the step of establishing a black orchestra on Western models as an important sign of black middle class aspirations and as an act of emancipation intended to offer proof that black musicians could achieve what their white counterparts had done. This has a bearing on the occasion when, during the 2000 NCF held in Cape Town, an orchestra of exclusively black South African musicians for the first time provided the accompaniment for the prescribed pieces. Despite all the problems, such as shortages among the various instrumental parts,<sup>84</sup> this move was perceived as a very important step in the direction of cultural emancipation.<sup>85</sup> It was interesting to observe, however, that the performance practice and the stage behaviour of the participants aimed at maintaining the usual conventions, such as the conductors shaking hands with the concert master and letting the orchestra stand before the performance. It was striking that all

<sup>84</sup> See for instance the *City Press* (December 17, 2000) and E. Mlangeni, "Choir Festival was Badly Run". *The Sowetan* (December 27, 2000).

<sup>85</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Johannesburg, Springs, February 12, 2001. The desire to have an exclusively 'black orchestra' might seem surprising after 1994. This shows, however, that the issues surrounding identity continue to remain important.

conductors were dressed formally when performing the prescribed Western pieces – the conductor of the Princess Square Singers even wore a frock-coat to dignify the occasion (see Figure 13.5) – whereas in the African pieces the choirs and conductors wore traditional attire or colourful costumes with African designs. Dress had been used by the African Native Choir to convey the message of “Africa civilised, Africa uncivilised” (Chapter 1.2.2, see also Figure 1.9 and 1.10).

### 13.2.2 Meaning Transformed: Songs and Symbols

*... music is a form of communication and during the Apartheid era certain things could be sung but certainly not said.<sup>86</sup>*

It needs to be explained why George Frederic Handel, though born in Halle, Saxony, in 1685, should have become one of the most popular composers in Britain, where he was celebrated as a national figure. There are two principal views on this question of how it was possible for a foreigner to advance to this status. William Weber emphasises the rise of musical classicism in the eighteenth-century England,<sup>87</sup> whereas Linda Colley<sup>88</sup> claims that an increasing awareness of British national identity in the eighteenth century prepared the ground for this development. Britons could identify with the subject matter of most of Handel’s oratorios,<sup>89</sup> which was taken mainly from the Old Testament.<sup>90</sup>

[Englishmen] liked the Old Testament for its exaltation of righteousness, the constant emphasis on morals, the primacy of law, its Puritanism, its unequivocal endorsement of private property and “free enterprise”. And they loved the elaborate ritual, administered by a priesthood of high estate, the role of the King, and above all the staunch defence of the nation’s ideals, laws, and institutions by great commoners who rose to heroic leadership. No one in their entire history has realized for the English these ideals, these thrilling ceremonies, these dramatic figures, with more conviction, more majesty and grandeur, and more exhilarating immediacy than Handel in his anthems and oratorios.<sup>91</sup>

The adoption of British performance culture by *amakwaya* groups can be seen as a process of emulating Britishness and consequently as an important aspect in the middle class’s struggle for identity and recognition. The adherence of *amakwaya* groups to Handel and his oratorios suggests a determination to appropriate Western culture and “to sing like a Westerner”. This becomes obvious in a letter to the Editor of *The Natal Mercury* sent in 1947 by a reader who used the pseudonym “Progressive Native”. After attending a performance of Handel’s *Messiah* organised by the Durban City Entertainment Department, he requested that “a choir of Africans should be organised for Durban”. It would be for the benefit of all, he argues, to bring “to the African the priceless gifts of the old composers... Let us arise and drink deep of all that Western civilisation has for us. Here, may be, is the door to better conditions”.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Personal communication with George Mxadana, Johannesburg, February 08, 2001.

<sup>87</sup> W. Weber, “Intellectual Basis of the Handelian Tradition, 1759-1800”. *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* (London: Royal Musical Association, 1981): 102-8.

<sup>88</sup> L. Colley, “Britishness and Otherness: An Argument”. *Journal of British Studies*, (No. 31, 1992): 309-29.

<sup>89</sup> See W. Weber, *The Rise of Musical Classics in Eighteenth-century England: A Study in Canon, Ritual, and Ideology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

<sup>90</sup> See, for instance, R. Smith, *Handel’s Oratorio Librettos and Eighteenth-century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>91</sup> P. H. Lang, *George Frederic Handel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966): 389.

<sup>92</sup> *The Natal Mercury* (December 23, 1947).

Though I do not want to suggest that *amakwaya* groups and their audiences may necessarily have thought of Handel's oratorios as the equivalent of protest songs, there is some evidence that such were their perceptions, at least to a certain degree. The fact that not much appears in written form does not mean that these understandings were not at times present. Douglas Reid, a musicologist who before his retirement was associated with UNISA, had the impression that "the songs that they were singing became part of the struggle, emphasising dignity and freedom of the people".<sup>93</sup> Throughout the history of *amakwaya*, the stories of the Old Testament that Handel set to music in his oratorios contained much meaning for black choirs. In an interview conducted by Christopher Cockburn, Khabi Mngoma, remarking on a performance of Handel's *Judas Maccabaeus* by the Ionian Choir in the early 1960s, expressed similar ideas:

It was especially the spirit that comes through in *Judas Maccabaeus* that attracted me when I read through the protests and the fights of the Israelites against the Roman empire, when they were such a small, powerless nation, that with the means at their disposal they were able to resist or to show the indomitability of the human spirit. And it's amazing how the choirs that I worked with responded to that.<sup>94</sup>

The black middle class was well aware of the Israelites and could identify with both their history as well as their fate. N. J. Molohe, for instance, told his audience at a district conference of *TUATA* in April 1965: "The Israelites were a unique nation from many point of view, unique in their election, unique in their worship of one living God, unique in their faith... there is much in Christian teaching which we have inherited from the Hebrews".<sup>95</sup> The story of the Israelites, of Moses (whom Yahwe chose as a leader though he was a man who was weak, not an eloquent politician, but a stutterer), and of the exodus from Egypt into the land of freedom, had a deep significance for the *amakwaya* community. In Chapter 12, I mentioned Mzilikazi Khumalo's composition, "Ma Ngificwa Ukufa" (When I Die), and the politically motivated change of the original title, "Koze Kube Nini?" (Till When?), into "The Cry of the Israelites" (see 12.2.3, page 329). The changed title was obviously chosen to highlight the fact that like black people in South Africa, the Israelites "were slaves [in Egypt]".<sup>96</sup> Another composition that has some relevance to the topic of transformed meanings is "Influenza" composed by R. T. Caluza. In *Bantu World* this song is said to relate the ravages of the 1918 influenza epidemic to the sufferings of the Israelites: "Caluza likens the 'Flu' with the tribulation of the Israelites on their sojourn to Canaan".<sup>97</sup>

Though the *Messiah* is not a work that lends itself to nationalism as readily as the oratorios based exclusively on the Old Testament do, texts like "Comfort ye" and "Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their yokes from us", both taken from the Old Testament, spoke to black choirs of their own desires for political liberation. Even a New Testament text like "...we shall be changed", which refers to Christ's promise of resurrection for believers on the day of Judgement, may have had political meaning for them. The fact that Adams College students wanted to use the "Hallelujah" chorus as a community song (see 13.2) suggests that the transcendental vision it projects of the eternal, righteous rule of God supplanting the rule of corrupt, unjust men, may have had the more immediate effect of promoting political solidarity among them.

<sup>93</sup> Personal communication with Douglas Reid, Pretoria, February 14, 2001.

<sup>94</sup> Khabi Mngoma, interview with Christopher Cockburn, KwaDlangezwa, June 12, 1997.

<sup>95</sup> *TUATA* (May 1965): 15.

<sup>96</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, February 13, 2001.

<sup>97</sup> *Bantu World* (September 21, 1935); Caluza also produced a new arrangement of the great Negro spiritual, "Let My People Go", the same anger and distress about the political circumstances is apparent in his song "iLand Act" (T. Couzens, 1985: 56); for more thoughts about political songs see also Chapter 5.5.1

George Mxadana, Conductor of Imilonji KaNtu, a choir which since its inception in 1983 has been very active politically, comments on the nature of transformed meanings:

The point that I'm making is that whenever we used to sing those songs, we used to have a political understanding: [Mendelssohn's] "Be not afraid!" – all right – for us it was not just a song that's been written somewhere. It was a song that we were using to express the political situation in South Africa... We used to take the songs and have a very, very strong political attachment to the songs. Again our strategy was... [that] nobody could come to us and say to us, you know, you are being political, because we did not write the songs, they've been written by somebody in Europe, in Germany or somewhere, but we are using that song to express our aspirations and our situation in this country... Well you know one of the things what we used to say to ourselves was: the South African government at that time of the Apartheid regime [was] telling everybody that they were a very religious government – and if they were a religious government it made it very difficult for them to arrest anybody who was singing those songs, because if there is anything else, the biggest political document you have is the Bible... And they say they are a Christian government then they better understand that if we are reading the Bible, they themselves must understand the Bible and understand how radical the Bible is. Look, I think there was a lot of naivety as far as our government is concerned, because you could be saying other things, but if somewhere in the lyrics you had God, you had Jesus Christ, you could be saying the most radical things but if they can pick up certain points that make them comfortable, they actually would accept it.<sup>98</sup>

Although Mxadana admits that few black choirs used music in this way, his own choir tried to communicate those ideas at their concerts:

But you see what we would do when we sing a song like "Be not afraid", we would have somebody in the choir saying "we are going through this political trauma but we as black people have to stand together, and this song is a tribute to the efforts and the wishes of the black people". We would do that. So that you already change the mind of the people when they listen to it then they look at it differently.<sup>99</sup>

### 13.3 The Latest Development: Opera

*And if you look at our repertoire the music that we have prescribed from the beginning up until now. I mean this year we now have a prescription from an opera. It actually gives an idea as to how far have we moved from where we started to where we are today.<sup>100</sup>*

In the early 1990s, the interest of *amakwaya* groups in choruses taken mainly from oratorios gradually changed to an enthusiasm for opera. At the competitions of the National Choir Festival, for instance, where aspiring choirs like the Durban Serenade Choral Society and the Cape Town-based Heavenly Voices with Kamal Khan (renamed in 1996 the Simon Estes Choral Group) began to present whole operatic scenes. Ludumo Magangane, who was adjudicating the competition then, remembers:

In fact it started on a small scale in Durban with Simon Estes [Choral Group]. You know, they did that *Carmen* [the "Habanera" from Bizet's *Carmen*]. Those choirs chose very rousing choruses from operas

<sup>98</sup> Personal communication with George Mxadana, Johannesburg, SABC, February 08, 2001.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

and the audience loved it... It certainly was attractive to other choirs. So this may have been a trend-setter.<sup>101</sup>

Whereas the presentation of opera was initially restricted to the own-choice category, organisers of choral competitions and festivals quickly picked upon the trend and started to promote the idea of prescribing compulsory opera arias, recitatives and choruses for the participating choirs. Isaac Tlou, one of adjudicators on the NCF panel, noted that a decision was taken to follow the new trend: "You have realised that this year we have prescribed mostly opera because of all the choirs doing the operatic thing. All these years it was oratorio".<sup>102</sup> In 2001 the prescribed pieces were taken exclusively from Handel's opera *Semele*.<sup>103</sup> Every choir taking part in the competition had to present a recitative, an aria and a chorus taken from this opera. Another signifier of this trend is a constantly growing number of young black singers registering at the various opera schools around the country and seeking a career in opera. The production of the first African opera, discussed in the previous Chapter, is another indication that in the meantime a process of appropriation of this genre has set in (see 12.2.5, page 342).

The enthusiasm for opera in South Africa is not a recent development but goes back more than hundred years. During his tour to South Africa, McAdoo presented selected opera items, and in a concert at Kingwilliamstown on 17 October 1890 the Virginia Jubilee Singers performed an aria from Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. This choice of repertoire seems to have been influenced by a visit of Giuseppe Verdi, who toured the Cape with an opera ensemble in 1890. Obviously this visit was well received and left a strong impression on McAdoo, who decided to include "30 Minutes of Grand Opera", featuring "Selections from 'Bohemian Girl' and 'Il Trovatore'",<sup>104</sup> in his concert programmes.

Recent developments raise the question of where the present enormous interest in opera originated. The social motivation seems to derive from a desire for achievement, which as I have argued in this thesis, has been a major concern of the black middle class since the mid-nineteenth century. As far as the musical motivation is concerned, Peter Louis van Dijk suggests that "the African temperament is very drawn to the operatic and oratorio type of thing. It's very close to the Italians and the Spaniards... The Pavarotti type of thing, you know".<sup>105</sup> What makes opera particularly attractive to the choirs is the expressive force of acting and singing combined.

The most attractive part of opera, according to Edward Mngadi, is that acting, moving and singing on the stage are all part of the total effect. "Opera is free expression-wise, the soloists move up and down. And do all those things".<sup>106</sup> Coplan argues that the black performing arts in South Africa, "cannot be divided realistically into Western categories of music, dance, or drama".<sup>107</sup> As opera strives to integrate many different forms of art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*), the attempt to re-unite in an African opera the various forms of artistic expressions separated by missionary intervention, among other things, seems to be a logical development. The fact that African music aims at the integration of song, lyric, tone, rhythm, movement, rhetoric, and drama, Khumalo argues, lends itself to the

<sup>101</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Sandton, Johannesburg, July 19, 2000.

<sup>102</sup> Personal communication with Isaac Tlou, Johannesburg, February 11, 2001.

<sup>103</sup> According to the Harvard Dictionary of Music, *Semele* is described as a dramatic oratorio based on a play with a classical theme. On these grounds, the NCF's choice of *Semele* should perhaps be regarded as transitional.

<sup>104</sup> V. Erlmann, 1991: 35; for a short discussion of the influence of Coon and Minstrel groups on South African see Chapters 1.1 and 4.1.3.

<sup>105</sup> Personal communication with Peter Louis van Dijke, Durban, December 06, 2000.

<sup>106</sup> Personal communication with Edward Mngadi, Durban, November 16, 1999.

<sup>107</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 4.



creation of opera: “In our folk-tales, for instance, our characters do say their lines in song”.<sup>108</sup> Here Khumalo touches on the fact that the tradition of story telling (*izinganekwane*) and praise poetry (*izibongo*), both of which include acting and singing, have certainly facilitated the move towards operatic performance. Numerous sources report on attempts by Africans to unite different modes of artistic expression in a single composition. A dramatic work with music about the life of a sangoma (diviner) was presented by R. T. Caluza as part of a tour by his choir in 1920-21,<sup>109</sup> and Coplan mentions that Esau Mtetwa, a teacher at Amanzimtoti Institute in the 1920s, presented various musical shows with his student company, the Lucky Stars: “Entirely in Zulu, their colourful and carefully rehearsed displays of folk culture proved as popular with white audiences as with black. Rather than imitate European drama or narrative themes, they emphasised traditional social values and cultural patterns. Scripts were generally discarded in favour of a series of standard scenes always renewed and enlivened by spontaneous improvisation in theatrics, dance, dialogue, poetry, and song... Musical instruments included traditional strung bows in addition to the guitar and concertina”.<sup>110</sup>

H. I. E. Dhlomo’s plays are also of interest. In *Chaka* and in his musical drama, *Moshoeshoe*, produced in 1939 in collaboration with R. T. Caluza and the choreographer, A. P. Khutlang, Dhlomo intended to preserve traditional African themes and performance techniques by incorporating them in European dramatic forms.

According to Ludumo Magangane, it is the style of opera, “the Italian style, which is very emotional”, that attracts black choirs. He sees a similarity in Italian and African vocal expression, where “you put all your feeling into the whole thing.”<sup>111</sup> Therefore it gives you this scoop... and the full range of the voice. Unlike especially English singing where you have to be very controlled”.<sup>112</sup> Edward Mngadi, an official at the South African Choral Music Association (SACMA), argues that opera is indeed closely related to African forms of expression: “You see, it’s easy for us to do the expressions with these opera songs, because it’s nearly African way of singing where you have to move and show motions and understanding”.<sup>113</sup>

The social motivation for the growing popularity of opera was pointed out to me by Thokozani Ndlovu, a Durban-based singer who works at the SABC:

Opera was always a white thing, something we were not able to do. We had no opera stages, no opera festivals. The only place where you could go to see opera was the Playhouse [in Durban]. It was always a very elitist white thing. Today, many choirs have started choosing opera as choice pieces – that tells you something.<sup>114</sup>

Ndlovu’s remark suggests that the cultivation of opera is yet another sign of the black middle class’s aspiring to European culture, of their striving for economic emancipation and for equal political status as citizens of South Africa. A similar view was expressed to me by Edward Mngadi:

...we realised that our choirs, especially African choirs, are not good in opera because [previously] opera has been something for white choirs and the orchestra. So our choirs in the past were not exposed to orchestras, were not exposed to singing in the concert halls, things like that. So now it’s still something new

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Mzilikazi Khumalo on the day of the premiere, Durban, Playhouse, May, 4, 2002.

<sup>109</sup> For Caluza’s tour, see *Ilanga Lase Natal* (December 31, 1920).

<sup>110</sup> D. Coplan, 1985: 125.

<sup>111</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Johannesburg, SAMRO, July 18, 2000.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Personal communication with Edward Mngadi, Durban, November 16, 1999.

<sup>114</sup> Personal communication with Thokozani Ndlovu, Durban, ICC, June 21, 2002.

for them. [That is why] we ran a workshop specifically for opera in 1999, because our competition songs [SACMA] for 1999 were opera songs.<sup>115</sup>

During the Apartheid era, opera was regarded as a prestigious form of musical entertainment by the dominant culture. The Performing Arts Councils made it an important feature in the musical life of the white communities of South Africa and an enormous proportion of the state resources was spent on developing and supporting it. The Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal (PACT), the Cape Town Performing Arts Board (CAPAB) and the Natal Performing Arts Council (NAPAC) put on huge opera productions. Those were, however, usually restricted to white audiences only.<sup>116</sup> Gabriel, a chorister of the SA Singers alludes to this as part of the common daily experience in a system where “everything that was reserved for whites was not allowed for blacks – Western music was somehow in that category”.<sup>117</sup> In the mid-1990s, when state support for Western classical music was cut down drastically and as a result most orchestras around the country ceased to exist, *amakwaya* groups started on a dedicated exploration of opera repertoire. It is surprising that, having experienced the elitist attitude to opera productions of white people, members of the black communities do not regard classical music and in particular opera as needing to be replaced by other, more African cultural forms.

High hopes of making a career in opera are obviously nourished in the choral community by the financial success of international opera stars and by the prospect of exposure on the stage and the national and international media. This is substantiated by Mngadi, who points out that “the great international soloists sing opera mainly. Take the three tenors, most of their repertoire is opera”.<sup>118</sup> Ludumo Magangane remembers that when Luciano Pavarotti “came out here in 1995 and then later with the three tenors, then the up-and-coming black soloists have taken on to all those arias that they sing today”.<sup>119</sup> Thabane Sello, a chorister from the Lesotho-based Maseru Vocal Waves, believes that “in music, you know, if you want to be a good singer, you have to do exactly what you copied from someone you like, for example Pavarotti. Most of us want to sing like Pavarotti... You know, when he sings, he changes the whole thing, you know. You can see, now he is on stage and well he can sing!”<sup>120</sup>

The desire to render proof of achievement appears to be a key motivating factor here. The following statement by Isaac Tlou is representative of the mindset of the various members of the *amakwaya* community: “We feel that people realise that they are beginning to learn something [and] we want to showcase that”.<sup>121</sup> It seems quite understandable that, having been excluded from the body politic for such a long time, they should be eager to prove that they are also capable of performing and producing what was during the Apartheid years sometimes portrayed as “the best in civilised music”.<sup>122</sup> Since in their understanding “opera is much more prestigious than oratorio”,<sup>123</sup> choristers perceive opera as another step towards the perfection of their choral singing. On the occasion of the launch of an African opera project at the Durban Playhouse, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Minister of Home Affairs, claimed that “the making of Zulu music and harmony into an opera proves that our traditions can reach into the highest expression of mankind’s spirit and art

<sup>115</sup> Personal communication with Edward Mngadi, Durban, November 16, 1999.

<sup>116</sup> See for instance *The Rand Daily Mail* (September 25, 1965).

<sup>117</sup> Personal communication with Gabriel, SA Singers, Durban, May 20, 2000.

<sup>118</sup> Personal communication with Edward Mngadi, Durban, November 16, 1999.

<sup>119</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Johannesburg, SAMRO, July 18, 2000.

<sup>120</sup> Thabane Sello, Maseru Vocal Waves (Lesotho), questionnaire Cape Town NCF, December 03, 2000.

<sup>121</sup> Personal communication with Issac Tlou, Johannesburg, February 11, 2001.

<sup>122</sup> P. Kirby, 1949: 627.

<sup>123</sup> Personal communication with Thanduxolo Zulu, Clermont, May 23, 2000.

form. Opera is the summation of art, for it merges and sublimates theatre, poetry and music in unparalleled beauty".<sup>124</sup> Expressing the high hopes he had for a first African opera, he added, "[Few] great operas have been written since the end of World War II and I would not be surprised if tonight were to mark the beginning of a new season of opera which springs out of Africa".<sup>125</sup> Later, at the reception on the occasion of the world première of *Princess Magogo kaDinizulu*, Buthelezi continued:

we have proven our capacity to leap-frog ahead without relinquishing any part of our heritage. These are the foundations of a genuine renaissance which expands to reach out of its shell and embrace the world has to offer. Tonight a resonant message rises out of South Africa that this country is merging its many cultures and traditions to begin its journey into the forging of its own new civilisation.<sup>126</sup>

Buthelezi's enthusiasm for operatic development adds another dimension to Thabo Mbeki's conception of the African Renaissance:

Today, we have seen the birth of a genuinely African opera. This is a monumental step in the promotion of our dream of an African renaissance. I have always believed that the essence of an African renaissance is that of merging our most ancient traditions with the highest standards of world experience. In my mind, opera is the highest artistic form of human expression as it merges in one magical creative moment the beauty and artistry of music, theatre and poetry. This evening's opera was a genuine African expression with roots which run deep into our history. Yet it was an opera which reflects the evolution of European music and complies with its form and structure at their best. For this reason, this opera shows how the musical evolution of Africa is coming of age, and with it our awareness of and pride in a continent which claims its recognition in the consortium of mankind because of the strength and dignity of our endeavours.<sup>127</sup>

In accounting for the present currency of oratorios and (lately) opera, Ludumo Magangane pointed out that in choral concerts and competitions it is necessary to "give the audience something interesting". Pure choral music would be too monotonous and unexciting to listen to. Pieces with extensive solo parts or ensembles are favoured in order

to have a variety to listen to even within one song. At times maybe it's not a solo but maybe it's a quartet. Like in the "Dixit" [from Mozart's *Vespers*, prescribed for the NCF 1999]. But it's a very short [solo] section. So I'm among those people who say: if it's possible let's spice it up either with one solo or a quartet or a duet or whatever... If maybe the Western chorus won't have a solo like with the Brahms ["How lovely are thy dwellings fair", prescribed for the NCF 2000] then maybe in the African one we could have one with a solo. There has been a year where both the African and the Western didn't have a solo, but to a large extent you do have one or two.<sup>128</sup>

The decision to prescribe mainly compositions with extensive solo sections raises the question of whether a choir is typically in a position to produce good soloists. Those choirs wanting to take part in South African choral competitions have since the early 1980s been bound to work towards the presentation of works that contained a substantial amount of solo passages, no matter what their resources were when it came to the soloists. The training of soloists, Edward Mngadi explains,

<sup>124</sup> Remarks by Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Minister of Home Affairs, during the preview of "Birth of an African Opera", Durban, The Playhouse, April 18, 2001.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.: May 04, 2002.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Sandton, ESCOM building, July 19, 2000.

is normally done by “the conductor if he is good, or any other person that is good in training”.<sup>129</sup> Whereas this is certainly true for most choirs, competitions since the early 1990s have rendered proof that only those choirs with access to further training facilities like universities or opera houses can excel at the competitions. The choirs that started promoting the idea of performing opera, Magangane asserts,

were actually in some ways involved in opera productions, like the Durban Serenade who were trained at the Playhouse with the orchestra. Those choirs are now exposed to a diversified way of singing other than just masses and oratorios. So the others [choirs] even if they may want to emulate, they would actually have difficulties, because have got to know how to look for these opera choruses and then how to train to get the effects that those choirs were managed to get. So it's exposure in terms of those choirs.<sup>130</sup>

Mokale Koapeng agrees that

there is a strong element of exposure... But now you find a choir in a remote area where the conductors still struggle with reading staff notation. Obviously this guy won't be able to compete with somebody who has been exposed to some form of education. I think that's an element of exposure, not just the conductor, even the choir itself.<sup>131</sup>

As a result, the choice of prescribed repertoire automatically favours those choirs that can impress the adjudicators with their soloists. When asked how adjudicators go about dealing with this problem, Tlou, as a member of the adjudication panel of the National Choir Festival, replied: “We are looking at both: a solo must be good and a choir must be good. We are saying the solo will not affect the choir. The choir will not affect the solo. And we'll look at the general condition, the general choral sound, the general performance. Was it understood as an opera?”<sup>132</sup> But he also admits that the quality of soloists can indeed affect their decision. At the end, he added, “Well, competition is competition”.<sup>133</sup>

I would argue, however, that choirs are not necessarily made up of solo voices. In fact quite the opposite is true, for in most instances the blending of voices, which is an important part of choral sound, would be disturbed by solo voices that are not flexible enough and therefore ‘stick out’.

Competitions and particularly the National Choir Festival are trend-setters. The decision of the adjudicators' panel definitely influences and, in some instances, even dictates the direction of repertoire, aesthetics and performance practice. Since all the winning choirs in the Finals of the National Choir Festival since 1999 have presented choruses or whole scenes from operas as their choice piece, other participating choirs have gained the impression that the choice of repertoire at least partially facilitated their triumph. This has put a lot of pressure on the less proficient choirs of the *amakwaya* community. The situation came to a head when the organisers and adjudicators of choral events decided to make opera compulsory in the “Western” section of the annual prescriptions in 2001 and 2002.

In my opinion, the practice of representing the Western choral tradition by choruses taken from opera limits the repertoire of *amakwaya* groups to a genre that constitutes not only a very small but also a rather marginal part of the rich choral repertoire. The desire to take part in the prestigious competitions is so strong that aspiring choirs enter though their training and their resources are not

<sup>129</sup> Personal communication with Edward Mngadi, Durban, November 16, 1999.

<sup>130</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Sandton, ESCOM building, July 19, 2000.

<sup>131</sup> Personal communication with Mokale Koapeng, Johannesburg, February 13, 2001.

<sup>132</sup> Personal communication with Isaac Tlou, Johannesburg, February 11, 2001.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

really sufficient to cope with the prescribed repertoire. Furthermore, they spend most of the year preparing those few items required for the competition at the expense of all other repertoire.

### 13.4 Summary

This Chapter describes the important changes in the Western part of *amakwaya* repertoire that have occurred from the early 1970s onwards. In the 1970s the choral community began to shift its attention from unaccompanied choral pieces towards compositions with instrumental accompaniment and extensive solo passages taken mainly from oratorios, masses or cantatas. A central figure in this development was the music educator and choral Conductor, Khabi Mngoma, who argued that “choirs had reached a ceiling, because of problems of intonation”.<sup>134</sup> This statement stood at the beginning of two revolutionary decades that impacted on *amakwaya* performance practice, aesthetics and repertoire. Mngoma’s main argument was that choristers of the *amakwaya* tradition had an “inherent sense of acoustical pitch which [was] a part of their cultural heritage”.<sup>135</sup> This fact, Mngoma suggested, lay behind the various problems related to pitch that were prevalent in most *amakwaya* groups. A closer investigation led to the question of whether African choristers who have grown up in an urban environment inherit a tuning system that prevents them from accommodating to equal tempered pitch. In fact, current musicological discussion confirms one of Mngoma’s positions, that is, that the ear is not necessarily restricted to a single tuning system, but is able to be flexible in terms of accommodating different systems. A well trained choir, like an experienced string group, seems to use just intonation when it comes to music performed a cappella, whereas it adjusts its intonation when it performs compositions involving a fixed tone instrument like a piano or organ. These considerations led to the conclusion that the *amakwaya* choral community’s problems with intonation are based on a lack of resources and training. Various members from the choral community confirm that shortcomings in the area of intonation can indeed be attributed to the lack of proper training and to the limited resources available to the choirs even at the present day. The lack of training is largely accounted for by the fact that most choirs do not have access to a piano or an organ. Even where choirs have access to an instrument, few conductors have the necessary skills to use it. One has to keep in mind, however, that problems of intonation are also caused by various other shortcomings, such as lack of proper vocal technique (wrong placing of the voice, lack of support) or insufficient oral training.

When Mngoma considered how to put his theories into action, he decided to establish a ‘model choir’ that would deal with the problems of tempered pitch intonation, and also promote Western choral music in the cities and the townships. With the Ionian Choir, formed from choristers of different choirs in the Johannesburg area, he wanted to show that it was possible to gain flexibility in the use of various tuning systems. In the following years, the Ionian Choir presented an impressive amount of accompanied repertoire – mainly oratorios and cantatas – in the greater Johannesburg area. The concerts were well received and soon the choir started to embark on various tours of the country. Mngoma conducted workshops to improve the standard of *amakwaya* groups. His influence triggered a process of restructuring *amakwaya* repertoire with the result that from the 1980s onwards most choral competitions prescribed repertoire taken exclusively from oratorios, masses or cantatas.

Whereas Mngoma’s influence certainly played a major role in this development, choruses taken from oratorios had already been being performed in the nineteenth century at the mission stations.

<sup>134</sup> K. Mngoma, 1981: 18.

<sup>135</sup> See footnote 21, page 352.



Works by Mendelssohn and Brahms, and, above all, Handel's *Messiah*, had long been significant presences. The performance of oratorios may be understood originally as an endeavour simply to emulate Britishness, whereas the translations of the texts undertaken much later represent a more thoroughgoing process of appropriation, involving the adaptation of Western culture to African needs. In other words, the popularity of oratorios and in particular those of Handel, reveals an important aspect of the middle class's struggle for recognition and identity.

In recent years, the trend of concentrating mainly on choruses taken from oratorios, to the exclusion of other Western choral music, has gradually developed towards an enthusiasm for opera. Whereas by the mid-1990s only a few of the leading choirs had started to present choruses and solos from operas as their 'own-choice' competition piece, organisers of choral competitions and festivals have since picked up on this trend. Without doubt, there is a strong and growing interest in opera in black communities, but the consequent narrowing of the repertoire to one part of the vocal tradition seems to me educationally questionable. The repertoire of *amakwaya* groups, I argue, still draws too heavily on the oratorios of Handel and Mendelssohn and others. Should choirs not be encouraged to enrich their choral experience by exploring new repertoire rather than to limit it in another way? It remains to be seen if the trend towards opera will continue in the years to come or if alternatives will be investigated which will encourage further exploration of the great choral tradition from the Renaissance to the present day.

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# Epilogue



The final question to be asked is what relevance this thesis has for the future of the *amakwaya* community. As Bongani Mthethwa, an ethnomusicologist who was a lecturer at the Music School of the University of Natal remarked, research “should, through the study of the past and the present, be able to project future possibilities and thus guide us in the right direction”.<sup>1</sup>

As a trained choral conductor I have a practical interest in this question. During the fieldwork for this project I was able to observe the work of many different choirs throughout the country, often taking part in rehearsals and competitions as a coach and pianist. This practical involvement with choral groups provided valuable insight into the present state of choral music in South Africa. But it was the combination of theory and practice that turned out to be most beneficial. I found that I was able to check observations and hypotheses that I made during archival work against my practical dealing with the choirs and vice versa. The following observations on the future directions of *amakwaya* are informed by both theoretical study and practical involvement.

## A) The Need for Critical Development

*South Africa needs proper training for the conductors as they lack the knowledge and the skills to build up, conduct and organise a choir.*<sup>2</sup>

The various aspects of *amakwaya* history that I have discussed have made it clear that *amakwaya* tradition has throughout its history played an important role in creating a bond of interest among the black middle class people in their social aspirations, shaping and communicating their identity. Under Apartheid, which in practice denied black social groups dignity and social development, choirs became among the few spaces in which the middle class could express the attitudes and aspirations not allowed to them on a social or political level. However, now that things have opened up, performers realise that the clinging on to this ‘holding operation’ is no longer necessary and that instead new directions have to be explored instead.

How is one to judge the present state of this choral tradition? A number of points, some positive and some negative, have been made in Parts Two and Three of this thesis, having to do with the identity of choirs and the aesthetic criteria relating to choral music as a South African art form. Negative criticism is bound to be controversial. But George Mxadana, Chairman of the National Choir Festival committee, remains positive. Choral contests, he is convinced, have contributed to *amakwaya* reaching “a stage right now where we can say we are meeting the global standards in terms of our musical excellency”.<sup>3</sup> “[T]he beautiful art of choral singing has risen to world-class levels”.<sup>4</sup> Though there is certainly some truth in Mxadana’s assessment there seems not to be consensus in the choral community. A number of experienced conductors and choristers who have

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<sup>1</sup> B. Mthethwa, “The Songs of Alfred A. Kumalo: A Study in Nguni and Western Musical Syncretism”. *Papers Presented at the Sixth Symposium on Ethnomusicology*, 1988: 28.

<sup>2</sup> Personal communication with Michael Dingaan, Drakensberg Boys Choir, July 12, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Personal communication with George Mxadana, Johannesburg, February 08, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Newsletter of the Old Mutual/Telkom National Choir Festival (Nr 2, 2000): 1.

tested the proficiency of their choirs in the international arena have come back with a new perception of the substantial amount of work that still needs to be done.<sup>5</sup> In most cases the critical voices begin to question the value of competitions in advancing the standards of *amakwaya*. Linda Mngoma, son of Khabi Mngoma, is convinced that “the competitions only promote a facial makeup not a thorough development of the choral community”.<sup>6</sup> He emphasises the need for thorough training in order to ensure the continued development of *amakwaya*. The creation of sustainable resources seems to be a matter of concern for many members of the community. “While one wishes to applaud the improvements in our choral music”, says Mzilikazi Khumalo, “it is important to admit that much more still has to be done”.<sup>7</sup> We need to begin with the problem of the lack of properly trained conductors before turning to the negative implications of *amakwaya* groups’ intense involvement in competitions and their exclusive reliance on tonic sol-fa notation.

### Expertise of the Conductors

The problem of poorly trained conductors is widely recognised. Khumalo argues that the training of conductors should be one of the foremost concerns for the choral community today, for “this is where the weakness still is. We are trying to get good voices properly trained [but] we don’t have sufficient conductors that have the skill of producing proper voices from their choirs”.<sup>8</sup> Ludumo Magangane claims that “many of our conductors today don’t have any background”.<sup>9</sup> This situation is mainly caused by the way conductors are selected. Sometimes, he explains, a person becomes “a conductor because the guy who led the choir either passed away or what the case may be. So they say ‘You seem to be the better one amongst the lot of us, so step in and take the choir over’”.<sup>10</sup> In a letter to the Editor of the *The Sowetan*, Ephraim Mlangeni, Director of the Fuba School of Music at Soweto, criticised the poor training of conductors. Apart from complaining that the orchestra chosen for the 2000 National Choir Festival Finals “was not up to standard as their instruments were largely out of tune”, he called attention to the fact that “it takes serious training for someone to stand in front of an orchestra and conduct. The Festival is giving the impression that there is no need to study music, or conducting in particular. Some of the people out in front could not conduct at all”.<sup>11</sup> Joshua Radebe made a similar comment on a competition organised by the South African Democratic Teachers’ Union (SADTU), where conductors of high school choirs had to conduct an orchestra, “something they had never seen” before: “There was a big audience – beach front. Some of these people, they did not know where to start. They had to conduct, but were messing things – it was really so hurting. I [felt]... they just had no idea what an orchestra is”.<sup>12</sup>

Though these examples refer to the advanced technique required for conducting an orchestra – a technique which needs to be developed, given the current move in the direction of repertoire taken from oratorios and operas – one has to be aware that the deficiencies of conductors are also recognisable in matters of intonation, vocal technique, and so on.

<sup>5</sup> Personal communication with Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Johannesburg, SABC, November 17, 2000. See also C. van Wyk, “Choral Singing in South Africa”, in *South African Music Teacher Magazine* no. 132 (July 1998); available online: <http://www.puk.ac.za/music/ssamt/132/choral.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication with Linda Mngoma, Johannesburg, SABC, February 16, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> M. Khumalo, *Guide to South African Arts, Culture and Heritage*; available online: <http://www.artsdiary.org.za/index.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Personal communication with Mzilikazi Khumalo, Johannesburg, SAMRO, July 18, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Johannesburg, SAMRO, July 18, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> E. Mlangeni, “Choir Festival was Badly Run”. *The Sowetan* (December 27, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Personal communication with Joshua Radebe, Pietermaritzburg, March 14, 2001.

But it is not only the development of techniques that are needed for the performance of Western music that members of the *amakwaya* tradition are concerned with. Mzilikazi Khumalo emphasises that, in view of the latest developments in African eclectic compositions, it is also important to

make a careful study of both the traditional singing and the traditional music that our forebears left us as our heritage. Most of our singers do not understand the technique employed in singing traditional music. They are not sure where the different types of glides occur; they are not aware that musical glides are used to highlight the tonal glides of the text or, in some sections, as stylistic ornaments in the music.<sup>13</sup>

### Competitions Revisited

The restrictive commitment of choirs to competitions is a further problem that needs addressing. In Chapter 9 (page 237) I undertook a detailed evaluation of the competition culture. For the purpose of plotting future directions, we need to take note of the educative aspect of competitions. Many choirs and conductors consider participation in choral competitions as an important informal learning process, since choirs that prove to be successful over a number of years become role models for other choirs and sources of inspiration for them in their attempt to achieve similar success. In the history of *amakwaya* one can find numerous examples of how aesthetics and performance practice have been shaped by the choirs that the adjudicators have chosen as champions. Ludumo Magangane remembers that “there were times when it was fashionable to produce a certain tonal quality, like it used to be a very dark tonal quality. Then at some point again with some coastal choirs it was very fashionable to vibrate. Once a choir that vibrates wins, and then other choirs are going to copy that”.<sup>14</sup>

Learning from other choirs may be a valuable experience. I want to argue, however, that when choirs focus exclusively on pleasing the adjudicators and imitating the winning choir (see Chapter 9.3.2.2, page 258), there is a danger of their developing only the ability to fulfil the requirements set up by competitions. This approach may have a rather limiting effect on the development of *amakwaya* groups, if little or no attention is given to understanding the music and expressing individual ideas on interpretation.

Another trend that gives rise to concern is that competitions encourage the almost exclusive concentration of choirs on the prescribed pieces, and limit the Western repertoire to extracts from oratorio and more recently from opera, a genre which arguably is of small importance in the great choral tradition. There is also a tendency to prescribe pieces that are too difficult. Though it may be stimulating to challenge choirs with demanding repertoire, this may also have a negative effect when choirs are overtaxed. This problem becomes apparent in the annual Finals of the National Choir Festival. While some choirs cope with the prescribed pieces in a commendable way, others reveal shortcomings that are the result of a vain attempt to meet competition requirements. In the process the basics of choral singing are ignored and the continuous and reliable development of skills becomes difficult to achieve. This is especially true for choirs that have little or no access to resources like pianists or vocal coaches to help them with their preparations. The organisers and adjudicators, Radebe argues, should be much more aware of their responsibility towards education:

Now they [organisers and adjudicators] say if a conductor is going to conduct an orchestra it takes his own initiative to learn that music. That is stupid, that is very hard. How do we know where to go and

<sup>13</sup> M. Khumalo, *Guide to South African Arts, Culture and Heritage* available online: <http://www.artsdiary.org.za/index.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Personal communication with Ludumo Magangane, Johannesburg, SAMRO, July 18, 2000.

where to start? [But] the stupid organisers should know that they are putting people on a platform where they just don't belong yet... So I am really worried.<sup>15</sup>

There is in fact an educational side to almost every choral competition organised in the *amakwaya* community, but the clinics and workshops set up are not sufficiently geared towards the real needs of the choral community.

### Workshops for Choirs and Conductors

Usually the workshops are run by members of the adjudication panel, and the aim is to raise the standard at the competitions by furthering the skills of the conductors. Before the workshop, reports Chris Mhlongo, Chairman of Imvunge Choral Association,

the adjudicators come together and discuss the most important aspects of the music that is prescribed, so that they all have a common approach. When they go out to adjudicate, everybody is looking for the same things in a song. Everybody [meaning all the adjudicators] understands, this is classical period, this is romantic period, and everybody understands what that means.<sup>16</sup>

The adjudicators' panel of the National Choir Festival, for instance, meets once a year for what they call *bosberaad*,<sup>17</sup> to agree on aspects of interpretation of the songs prescribed for the current year. The substance of these meetings becomes the content of the workshops held in major centres of every province. Mxadana, who is also Conductor of Imilonji KaNtu, explains the functions of these workshops, which usually last one day:

What we do, we have got a panel of adjudicators they go out and run workshops... [they] will use the music that has been prescribed for the year and tell the choirs about the pitfalls of the music. Who wrote the music etc. And also talk about the general musicianship, how to sing, how to project, what phrasing is all about, and intonation, what is intonation problem... You know all those general musicianship things. They workshop all those things.<sup>18</sup>

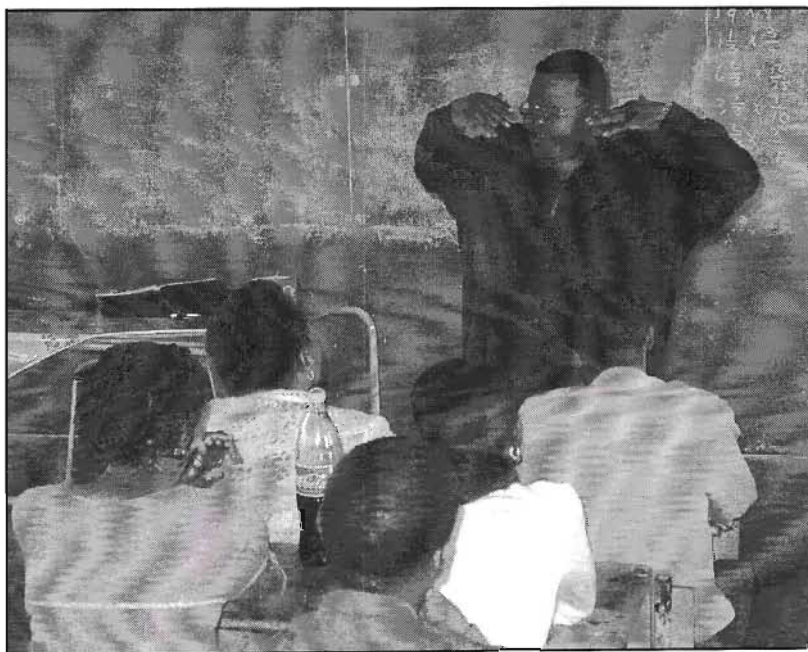


Figure 14.1: Workshop with Griffiths Khanyile, Bothas Hill, June 2001

<sup>15</sup> Personal communication with Joshua Radebe, Pietermaritzburg, March 14, 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Personal communication with Chris Mhlongo, Durban-Westville, November 11, 1999.

<sup>17</sup> Isaac Tlou explained to me that this is "a South African term: *Bos* is a bush, and *beraad* is a consultation, where you go into the secure area and sit down and say where did you go wrong and what do you want to do and what is the planning? Away from the people". Personal communication with Isaac Tlou, Johannesburg, February 11, 2001.

<sup>18</sup> Personal communication with George Mxadana, Johannesburg, February 08, 2001.

This practice was already promoted in the 1940s by the Johannesburg Bantu Music Festival. In order to introduce a



Although the adjudicators do not claim that the workshop is the only means of achieving well-informed interpretations, the choirs have come to think that the advice given by the adjudicators during the workshops must strictly be followed if they want to be winners at the competitions. Linda Mngoma confirms that “some people see the workshops as an institution only where they want to learn a few fast tricks to be successful in the competitions. They are not interested in thorough skills”.<sup>19</sup> This is not surprising, given the fact, according to Nkabinde, that the workshops are designed to “tell the conductors exactly what is expected of them”.<sup>20</sup> Both Mngoma and Nkabinde touch on an alarming development, which essentially results in the standardisation of interpretation and repertoire. Though the clinics and workshops are designed mainly to help the choirs with what the adjudicators perceive as ‘correct’ interpretations of the formally prescribed pieces, they do not provide hands-on experience for the conductors and choristers but are often no more than lectures on the background and the interpretation of the prescribed compositions.<sup>21</sup> As a result, they too rigidly determine the way in which the choirs prepare for the next competition.

It is one of the biggest problems in *amakwaya* competitions that adjudicators grant very little freedom when it comes to the interpretation of the prescribed songs, and, as Anri Herbst from the South African College of Music at the University of Cape Town points out, “that there is no continuity in those workshops”.<sup>22</sup> Choirs gain the impression that ‘aesthetic quality’ is imposed from the outside. Conductors and choristers are convinced that they have to follow the specifications of the ‘experts’ in order to be successful in the contest, and because they rely on a standard issued from on high, they fail to develop their own musical standards. In fact, it almost seems as if the choirs need competitions and workshops to tell them what quality is. As long as choral competitions and workshops perpetuate this idea, further development will be difficult to achieve. Therefore it seems imperative that choirs should gain confidence in developing an informed self-sufficient aesthetic and musical judgement. Various suggestions as to how this might be achieved will be made later.

### Tonic Sol-Fa

A further obstacle to the future development of *amakwaya* is the holding on to the tonic sol-fa system. I have already dealt with aspects of this problem at some length earlier (see Chapters 6.2.3, page 167, 12.1.1, page 301 and 13.2.1, page 360). Here I want briefly to sum up the main problems:

- the repertoire readily available in tonic sol-fa is limited
- tonic sol-fa notation does not give a graphic idea of the outline of the music
- the choristers have to deal with a ‘double text’
- impedes the understanding of the more complex musical structures
- the linear conception of tonic sol-fa impedes the development of a vertical understanding of music
- instrumental instruction is virtually impossible

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development aspect into the Festival, the committee members decided to put in charge “three travelling native choir masters [to] train choirs in the vernacular and in English.” (*Rand Daily Mail*, December 8, 1947).

<sup>19</sup> Personal communication with Linda Mngoma, Johannesburg, SABC, February 16, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Personal communication with Thulasizwe Nkabinde, Johannesburg, July 17, 2000.

<sup>21</sup> *Drum* (February 1992): 34.

<sup>22</sup> Personal communication with Anri Herbst during the Tirisano competition, Durban 2001.

The unfortunate effects of the exclusive use of tonic sol-fa became evident to me during my involvement as a lecturer in choral studies at the University of Natal. The majority of students registered for choral studies had only a tonic sol-fa background. They struggled to find repertoire appropriate for their class work written in tonic sol-fa and had to realise that the amount of music published in this system is restricted, especially when it comes to pieces that are not part of the 'mainstream' concert repertoire.

Since tonic sol-fa is a one-dimensional tablature consisting of a mere string of letters which do not communicate any idea of the shape of musical phrases, it is almost impossible to grasp musical ideas in this notation. The misreading of musical lines is furthermore aggravated by the fact that it is the usual practice of black students to start off teaching new songs by singing the tonic sol-fa syllables. The changeover to the actual lyrics of the song happens only in a second phase, when the choristers are fairly acquainted with the melodic lines. Thus it is very difficult to co-ordinate text and melody right at the outset of teaching.

The shortcomings of tonic sol-fa become a real obstacle when in the course of their studies students are required to deal with compositions that contain many chromatic lines, modulations to distant keys or complex rhythmic structures. Apart from the fact that tonic sol-fa does not easily convey a sense of tonal coherence, the students cannot develop the skills of reading a number of voices simultaneously. It became clear that the linear conception of tonic sol-fa impedes the development of a vertical understanding of music. When the parts are written in a score, even simple homophone structures become unclear and almost unintelligible. When using tonic sol-fa in more complex musical contexts, the students struggle to pick up rhythmic and melodic patterns visually, or to grasp quickly the harmonic context of a number of vocal parts at a glance. Holding on to this system also prevents students from making progress on the piano.

Despite concentrated efforts during the lectures and the choral ensemble practicals, and despite the introduction of an additional module that aimed at helping students to become fluent in both notation systems, even third-year students continued to write tonic sol-fa into their staff notation scores. It is obvious that the wide-ranging deficiencies of tonic sol-fa make progress for conductors very slow and in many instances impossible.

Members of the choral community seem to be already alarmed about this problem. Musa Nkuna speaks of his experiences as a Conductor and composer when he suggests that the adherence to tonic sol-fa "is one thing what is causing a problem with African choral music... It is unable to move forward because of problems of notation".<sup>23</sup> The plight of many choirs is exemplified in the statement of Thembelihle Dladla of the Pietermaritzburg Choral Society, who told me: "We have got problems with the staff notations. All the years we have been wasting our time with tonic sol-fa. But all the music comes in the staff notations... at school they didn't teach us [staff notation]".<sup>24</sup>

### Summary of Problems Identified

It seems helpful to list the problematic points which I have identified in this Epilogue:

- The training and expertise of the conductors are in many cases insufficient
- The learning process at competitions remains limited
- Choirs concentrate their effort on the few pieces prescribed for competitions

<sup>23</sup> Personal communication with Musa Nkuna, Grahamstown, Rhodes University, July 02, 2000.

<sup>24</sup> Thembelihle Dladla, Pietermaritzburg Choral Society (Kwazulu Natal), interview questionnaire, January 30, 2001.

- The current trend is towards opera at the expense of all other repertoire
- The prescribed pieces tend to be far too difficult for the majority of choirs taking part in the competitions
- Clinics and workshops are designed to help the choristers with an orthodox interpretation of the prescribed pieces
- Workshops provide little in terms of hands-on experience for the conductors and choristers
- Competitions and workshops give the impression to the choirs that musical standards are being issued from on high – as a consequence the choirs do not develop self-sufficient aesthetic and musical judgement
- Clinging to tonic sol-fa impedes progress

These findings together with the comments of conductors and choristers point to the steps that should be taken to secure a way forward. Many of the problems are caused by lack of resources. One of the greatest challenges for *amakwaya* will be to identify and implement models for the creation of resources that can ensure sustainable development in the specific situation of this choral practice in post-Apartheid South Africa. A number of initiatives have been taken in the direction of creating festivals and training facilities. I want now briefly to refer to these new ventures.

## B) Some Perspectives on Future Development

*There is more to music making than a competition.*<sup>25</sup>

It is not as if the problems I have referred to have not been recognised. In fact officials seem to be well aware of a number of difficulties, relating to current competition practice. Since the educative side of competitions puts a great deal of responsibility into the hands of the organisers and, in particular, the adjudicators, it is to them that many of these suggestions are directed.

### Competition versus Festival

Competition in its present form has, as I have argued, limited and in some instances even prevented the proper development of choral singing (see 9.4). In calling for a re-evaluation of current competition practice, then, I should like to see the exploration of alternatives that might supplement rather than replace competitions. My intention is to let the critical voices from within the choral community be heard, when they say that, even though competitions surely serve a certain purpose, the exclusive concentration on this medium necessarily leads to limitations. As Mokale Koapeng argues, choirs are sacrificing

the spirit of free music making. Just enjoying performance and enjoying the luxury of knowing that if you make a mistake in a performance, it's part of a performance. Nobody is going to shoot you down for that mistake. You don't have that kind of spirit in a competition. There, everything has to be tight. One can feel the tension in there.<sup>26</sup>

He strongly believes that rather than concentrating on competitive events, the choral community should start encouraging individualism and creativity. Choirs, Koapeng argues, “don't have to prove

<sup>25</sup> Personal communication with Mokale Koapeng, Johannesburg, Parkhurst, February 13, 2001.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

that they are the best choir in the country through competitions".<sup>27</sup> A more relaxed atmosphere would be created at choral festivals where choirs could gain experience without having to compete against one.<sup>28</sup> Richard Cock's is another strong voice arguing for the reassessment of the current competition culture. He too favours the idea of creating choral festivals:

because I like people to go away all feeling good about what they have done. I don't want people go away being losers. Music for me is a positive thing in life, about joy and fun and all that. And I think competitions are just the opposite. People are too narrowly focused on what they are doing. They don't expand their repertoire – they spend the whole year learning four or five pieces. And I think there is much more to music than that. And they either win or lose. You are either number one or you are not number one. So you have one winner and fifty losers. And that's no good for me.<sup>29</sup>

These two positions are perhaps too extreme in rejecting competitions. What I want to show are the ways in which the current practice is problematic.

Currently there are very few examples of established choral festivals in South Africa.<sup>30</sup> The Nation Building Festival organised jointly by Mzilikazi Khumalo and Richard Cock is one of the most important and promising attempts to give South African choral music new impulses. Cock remembers what led to the establishment of this Festival, which has been running successfully for more than thirteen years:

It was in 1989, at the height of the bad troubles here. And the Editor of the newspaper [*The Sowetan*, which sponsors the event] actually was badly criticised, people saying, how could you start a choir festival, you know, when the country is burning? And he said that's when we should be doing it. And he was right, because it really brought people together. It was an amazing thing in the beginning. Really difficult, but it's paid off. And it's a wonderful festival. The audience loves it, full house. And they all join in and cheer and shout – it's really nice.<sup>31</sup>

Another important initiative is the series Songs of Praise established by Cock. These festivals, Cock explains, have not had the publicity that competitions like the National Choir Festival receive, but they make an important contribution to education and community building.

This festival is not necessarily high powered. For example, we did one in Nelspruit where we never have done it before. And I had twelve church choirs joining together and community choirs. For the first time they did it. Then we had a full hall, a thousand people came to listen and it was wonderful... they found that it was a very good way to bring the community together. It was the first time that black people had ever sung in this church – even the first time ever they had black people in that church. And also the first time they had sung Latin in the church. It's wonderful what it does in the community... It's various repertoires. Sometimes the local people like to do their own repertoire... And it's also a sort of developing thing for their conductor.<sup>32</sup>

The National Choir Festival itself has taken a step towards relaxing the rigour of competition by introducing an own-choice category. Isaac Tlou explains that at competitions

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> See also A. Kohn, *No Contest: The Case against Competition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986).

<sup>29</sup> Personal communication with Richard Cock, Johannesburg, February 06, 2001.

<sup>30</sup> When I refer to festivals, I am referring to events that do not have a competitive element like the National Choir Festival, often confusingly referred to as a competition-festival.

<sup>31</sup> Personal communication with Richard Cock, Johannesburg, February 06, 2001.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

people perform in a very tense mood... but in the festivals they are relaxed. This is why we created this 'own choice' section, where they perform the way they want to perform [without being adjudicated]. And then they switch on back to competition, and sing the competition song. We are hoping to have a pure festival in future. But how it is going to be sponsored is still a question now.<sup>33</sup>

This, in my opinion, is a step in the right direction. Organisers and adjudicators should encourage choirs to enrich themselves by exploring new repertoire. As long as choirs keep on going over the limited and often taxing repertoire prescribed for competitions, many of them will not have the energy to develop their musical knowledge and skills. Making festivals attractive would encourage choirs to widen their attention to repertoire outside the competitions, and give them the opportunity of choosing repertoire according to their own performance level. In the long run this would result in the refinement of their technical resources and in their exploration of the great choral tradition from the Renaissance to the present day.

From this might evolve more opportunities for choirs to develop without being subject to the pressures of competition. A promising model towards the creation of a healthier atmosphere for *amakwaya* competition could be to establish music festivals offering workshops, concerts and discussions alongside competitions.

According to Cock, the biggest problem with choral festivals is that of securing sufficient funding. His experience is that it is not easy to persuade the corporate sector to invest in the establishment of educational festivals as they do not yield enough in terms of exposure. At the moment, Koapeng adds, "the bulk of the money is directed to competitions",<sup>34</sup> from which only a very few choirs benefit. He is very concerned about this "serious imbalance in terms of development" and suggests pursuing the question of why the money currently spent on competitions does so little for the choral community as a whole.

### Opportunities for Further Training

The comments made by choristers and conductors during my interviews indicate that there is a real demand for further training and the creation of attractive alternatives to competition. Workshops should go far beyond merely giving instructions on how to perform the prescribed songs and should be run on a regular basis over a few months; perhaps concentrating on one aspect of choral technique at a time. The need for the introduction of adequate training resources has also been highlighted by Anri Herbst: "Choral music needs to be developed but not through competitions with difficult repertoire and with workshops that are just accidentally touching some problems here and there".<sup>35</sup> I thoroughly agree with Thembela Vokwana, an ethnomusicologist from Pretoria, who wants "to see choral music in South Africa among black people transcending the limited platform of competitions".<sup>36</sup> Again, he wants

to see rigorous training given to our conductors and composers as well as scholarships for the host of singers and would-be instrumentalists to learn aspects of music as wide ranging as history, education, aesthetics, compositional techniques in both the Western and African styles, documentation and arts management (in addition to their instrument and general choir/ensemble direction) so that as a people

<sup>33</sup> Personal communication with Issac Tlou, Johannesburg, February 11, 2001.

<sup>34</sup> Personal communication with Mokale Koapeng, Johannesburg, Parkhurst, February 13, 2001.

<sup>35</sup> Personal communication with Anri Herbst during the Tirisano competition, Durban 2001.

<sup>36</sup> Unpublished research paper written by Thembela Vokwana for Radio Ulwazi, 2001.



we can also reach a stage where we have transcended the limits of what we know and we can diversify or choose to do the same thing over again empowered enough to deal with any choice we may make.<sup>37</sup>

In order to secure further development, however, the most urgent need is to help conductors to effect a change from tonic sol-fa to staff notation. Whereas the use of tonic sol-fa as an ancillary device is valuable in the early stages of learning to read music, choirs and conductors have at some point to free themselves from this system in order to gain a deeper understanding of musical structure.<sup>38</sup> It should therefore be the foremost responsibility of choral associations, organisers of competitions and training institutions to work on facilitating the transition from the exclusive use of tonic sol-fa, to its use, in a balanced way, with staff notation.

A keyword in envisioning future directions is empowerment. Koapeng has pointed out the need for conductors who are “quite informed, enlightened and [have the capacity of] taking the choir from a particular level to another level”. The development of conductors, Koapeng suggests, should be taken up by the National Choir Festival by means of the “introduction of a course or a training module for conductors”.<sup>39</sup> If the organisers, the project management and the sponsors of the Festival really want to make an impact on *amakwaya* they need to re-assess the structure of workshops and come up with models of assistance that are capable of creating sustainable improvement. Some promising projects have been started by tertiary institutions, with the Universities of Pretoria and Port Elizabeth leading the way. The problem with most degrees currently offered in choral studies is that they require fulltime registration. The University of Port Elizabeth seems to be the only institution that offers conductors from the *amakwaya* opportunities to further their skills on a part time basis.

Growth can come only with sustainable development. While it is understandable that organisers of competitions should be striving to achieve a world class standard, I want to argue that, instead of concentrating their efforts on impressing overseas audiences with some few representatives of the local choral culture, it would be better to establish a strong and sustainable choral community in South Africa on a broad basis. The promotion of a few hopeful ambassadors to the West in order to exhibit South African excellence amounts to little more than window-dressing. In the present situation it is much more important to work towards making reliable resources available to the choirs enabling them to improve their technique and thus raise their standard. The starting point of this endeavour should be music education in the schools. Only if sufficiently trained and experienced music teachers were to be made available could we build a strong foundation for further development that might eventually reach a world-class standard.

### Music Education and Choral Practice at Schools

It is not only the conductors and the choirs that take part in prestigious choral festivals that need to be properly trained. In fact, for strong and sustainable growth to occur it is important to start building skills and resources at all levels. The improvement of music education at schools and the further empowerment of teachers are crucial for the further development of *amakwaya*. Unfortunately music education at school cannot be taken for granted in South Africa. Especially in townships and rural areas few schools have a music period on their timetable, and then it is usually for only a few weeks in the year when schools are putting together a choir to compete at

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Some efforts have been undertaken to develop and promote a revised form of tonic sol-fa since the last quarter of the twentieth century. These efforts suggest a way of integrating tonic sol-fa and staff notation. See for example W. H. Swinburne *The New Curwen Method* (London, 1980–84).

<sup>39</sup> Personal communication with Mokale Koapeng, Johannesburg, Parkhurst, February 13, 2001.

competitions. Since this often remains the only musical experience of the students, it is not very surprising that conductors and choristers express dissatisfaction and frustration at not being able to realise their ideas owing to the lack of basic knowledge. I thoroughly agree with Sam Shabalala that the current deficiencies of *amakwaya* could be gradually changed by “introducing systematic and regular music education in general and choral education in particular” at the schools.<sup>40</sup> With proper guidance, the vocal talent that exists in abundance in South Africa could be developed much more efficiently than it is at present. As school choirs are the foundation of community choirs, it is to be expected that the improvement of education and skill training at school level would have beneficial results for the whole choral practice.<sup>41</sup> To achieve this aim, it is necessary to have a pool of trained and experienced teachers and choral trainers. Given the current plight of music education and the low level of expertise of the teachers, it is not enough to reform teacher training at tertiary level. The existing teachers need to be empowered with the necessary skills and understanding. Alternative ways of training have to be found that take account of the current state of education in South Africa. One way may be the establishment of action research groups.

### Action Research

As described in some detail earlier, action research is an ongoing, cyclic problem-solving process that alternates between action and critical reflection (see Introduction, page XXIII). The guiding principle of this methodology is to identify and consequently develop strong points by involving all participants as partners. The idea is to find a way to self-empowerment by learning from the shared knowledge of every single member of the group. This pooling of knowledge is done under the guidance of a facilitator. Fundamental to the conception of action research is that questions and problems are discussed in order to find possible solutions collectively. This sharing of ideas and skills can be an enormous source of motivation. Action research would thus be a step away from the tendency of organisers of competitions and adjudicators to impose preconceived ideas on conductors and choirs from on high. Given particularly those problems relating to lack of adequate resources, action research as a method of self-empowerment has much to offer for the future development of South African choral music. The establishment of action research networks, perhaps at tertiary institutions, could be a promising move in the direction of empowering of choristers and conductors on a broader level, and a way towards the sustained training of *amakwaya*.

The Pietermaritzburg Action Research Group that I had initiated in 2000 has already shown results in the development of effective rehearsing methods, conducting skills and adequate vocal techniques (see Introduction). Another promising project for self-empowerment is the training centre set up by the Durban Serenade Choral Society in November 2002. The guiding idea is to offer skilled training to choristers and conductors, and to work towards establishing the choir as a business enterprise that would create job opportunities.

No one who has followed the struggles of *amakwaya* to define their identity by attempting, from their hymn-singing days in the mission choirs of the nineteenth century to the competition culture of the present, to negotiate the often conflicting claims of tradition and modernity, will fail to realise how deeply interwoven *amakwaya* practice is with the emergence of the new South Africa. Today *amakwaya* practice remains one of the most important artistic expressions of black South Africans, rooting each new generation in a disciplined and affirming community. Not only because

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<sup>40</sup> Personal communication with Sam Shabalala, Durban, SABC, March 30, 2000.

<sup>41</sup> See also J. R. Austin, “Competition: is Music Education the Loser?” *Music Educator’s Journal* 76 (February 1990): 21-23 and G. C. Fox, “Making Music Festivals Work”. *Music Educator’s Journal* 76 (February 1990): 59-64.

of its important history and social relevance, but also in view of the immense talent found in this choral tradition, *amakwaya* must not be marginalised in the present South Africa.

My hope is that the research I have written up in this thesis will be used to promote what is best in the tradition, and to keep alive this expression of an indomitable African spirit.

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## 5. THESES

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## 6. INTERVIEWS AND PERSONAL COMMUNICATION WITH INFORMANTS

- Gerald **Bhembe** Johannesburg (Sportainment International), 20 July 2000.  
Johannesburg (Sportainment International), 17 November 2000.
- Michael **Blake** Durban (NSA Gallery), 4 September 2000.
- Catherine **Burns** Durban (University of Natal, History Department), 3 April 2000.  
Durban (University of Natal, History Department), 14 November 2000.
- Babo **Buthlezi** Eastern Cape (Umzimkhulu), 2 June 2000.
- Richard **Cock** Johannesburg (Parkhurst), 21 July 2000.
- Dr. Rosalie **Conrad** Durban (Manor Gardens), 31 May 2000.
- Péter Louis **van Dijk** Cape Town, 6 December 2000.
- Leon **van Dyke** Durban (University of Natal), 13 May 2000.
- Michael **Dinga** Drakensberg Boys Choir School, 12 July 2000.
- Wilson Oscar **Dubazana** Durban (SABC), 30 November 2001.
- Zakhele **Fakhazi** Marianhill, 5 November 1999.
- Sallyann **Goodall** Durban-Westville, 23 November 1999.  
Durban, 20 March 2000.  
Durban-Westville, 04 April 2000.  
Durban (University of Natal), 26 June 2000.  
Durban (University of Natal), 29 August 2000.
- Robert **Harris** Durban (Umlazi), 26 March 2000.
- Ray **Kantuli** Johannesburg (SABC), 15 February 2001.
- Shasha **Kefabile** Durban (University of Natal), 10 April 2000.
- Griffiths **Khanyile** Durban (Bothas Hill), 23 April 2001.
- Mzilikazi **Khumalo** Johannesburg (SAMRO), 17 July 2000.  
Johannesburg SAMRO), 18 July 2000.  
Johannesburg (SAMRO), 20 November 2000.  
Johannesburg (SAMRO), 13 February 2001.  
Durban (Playhouse), 4 May 2002.
- Mokale **Koapeng** Johannesburg (Parkhurst), 13 February 2001.
- Vera M. Thembeni **Kubeka** Durban, 11 January 2001.
- Michael **Levy** Johannesburg (SAMRO), 18 July 2000.
- Ludumo **Magangane** Johannesburg (SAMRO), 17 July 2000.  
Johannesburg (ESCOM Building, Sandton), 19 July 2000.  
Johannesburg (Springs), 19 November 2000.  
Johannesburg (Springs), 12 February 2001.
- Vic **Majiza** Durban, Tirisano Eisteddfod, 15 July 2001.
- Kate **Mateta** Johannesburg (SABC), 20 July 2000.  
Johannesburg (SABC), 15 February 2001.
- Bongani **Mbangi** Bizana/Eastern Cape (Ministry of Arts and Culture), 17 May 2000.
- Chris **Mhlongo** Durban (Essex Terraces, Imvunge Choral Society), 18 November 1999.
- Falithenjwa **Mkhize** Eastern Cape (Umzimkhulu) 24 August 2000.  
Durban (Playhouse), 31 August 2000.  
Durban (Playhouse), 9 March 2001.  
Johannesburg, 8 December 2001.
- Edward **Mngadi** Durban (NSA Gallery), 16 November 1999.
- Bandile **Mngoma** Johannesburg (Sportainment International), 16 February 2001.
- Linda **Mngoma** Johannesburg (SABC), 17 February 2001.

- Phelelani **Mnomiya** Port Alfred, 18 May 2000.  
Durban (Playhouse), 22 June 2000.  
Umlazi, 24 October 2000.
- Peter **Morake** Johannesburg (SAMRO), 09 February 2001.
- George **Mxadana** Johannesburg (IBM Building-Sandton), 08 February 2001.  
Johannesburg (SABC), 17 February 2001.
- Reverent **Myaka** Durban (Clermont), 8 May 2000.
- Mongoni **Mzobe** Durban (Umlazi-KaShaka High School), 17 November 1999.
- Sandile **Ndlanya** Johannesburg, 7 December 2001.
- Thokozani **Ndlovu** Durban (ICC), 21 June 2002.
- Sakha **Ndwandwe** Cape Town, 4 December 2000.
- Siybonga (Pi) **Ngcobo** Johannesburg, 8 December 2001.
- Thulasizwe **Nkabinge** Johannesburg (SABC), 17 July 2000.  
Johannesburg SABC, 20 July 2000.  
Johannesburg (SABC), 15 February 2001.
- Langa **Nkosi** Johannesburg, 20 July 2000.
- Leslie **Nkuna** Grahamstown (Rhodes University), 2 July 2000.  
Grahamstown (Rhodes University), 3 July 2000.
- Musa **Nkuna** Grahamstown (Rhodes University), 2 July 2000.
- Elizabeth **Oehrle** Durban (University of Natal), 14 December 1999.
- Eliot **Pewa** Durban (SABC), 30 November 2001.
- Joshua **Radebe** Pietermaritzburg, 3 November 1999.  
Pietermaritzburg, 14 March 2001.  
Durban (SABC), 30 November 2001.
- Douglas **Reid** Durban (Durban Institute of Technology), 25 March 2000.  
Durban (Umlazi), 26 March 2000.  
Pretoria (Waterkloof Heights), 14 February 2001.
- Sam **Shabalala** Durban (SABC), 7 March 2000.  
Durban (SABC), 30 March 2000.  
Durban (SABC), 16 April 2000.
- Barry **Smith** Capetown (St. George Cathedral), 6 December 2000.
- Clive **Staegemann** Drakensberg Boys Choir School, 12 July 2000.
- Brian **Thusi** Durban (University of Natal), 22 May 2000.
- Isaac **Tlou** Johannesburg (National Arts Council), 11 February 2001.
- Reverent **Xele** Durban (Clermont), 8 May 2000.
- Thanduxolo **Zulu** Durban (Clermont), 23 May 2000.
- Dexter **Zuma** Durban (Morningside), 11 July 2001.

## 7. INTERVIEWS WITH CHORISTERS (QUESTIONNAIRE)

**Pietermaritzburg, 07 September 2000.**

**Choir:** Pietermaritzburg Choral Society  
Maureen Ncubane  
Themba

**Pietermaritzburg, 30 January 2001.**

**Choir:** Pietermaritzburg Choral Society  
Thembelihle Dladla  
Siyabonga Maluleka  
Maureen Ncubane



Sibusiso Sotsaka  
Ballingile Zondi

**Johannesburg, 18 November 2000.**

**Choir:** Gauteng Choristers  
Ntombifuthi Langa  
Muntu Lukhozi  
Thabani Khanyile  
Sfiso Shezi

**Johannesburg, 12. February 2001.**

**Choir:** Bonisudumo Choristers, Springs  
Bennet  
Lunga  
Mathilda  
Musa

**Cape Town, 2 December 2000.**

**Event:** National Choir Festival – National Finals 2000

Kagisho Diphame	Molopo Choral Artists
Israel Dzangare	Chitungwiza Harmony Singers (Zimbabwe)
Leon	Mhluzi Choral
Thulani Maqungo	Tsakane Adult Choir
Obakeng Modisa	
Tshepo Moreothata	Kimberly Spoonnet Choir
Puleng Mothomme	St Mary's Senior Choir (Northern Cape)
Jane Motlhabane	Bloemfontein Serenade Choir
Thabo Tabane	Sarankuwa West-URC
Ignatius Telebimo	St Mary's Senior Choir (Northern Cape)

**Cape Town, 3 December 2000.**

**Event:** National Choir Festival – National Finals 2000

Xolani Cele	Imizwili Choir
Ephraim Leotwane	Gauteng Choristers
Steve Luknele	Wesselton Choristers
Ursula Motlhaba	St. Mary's Church Choir
Thulani Mzobe	Durban Serenade Choral Society
T'seffo Pefole	Port Elizabeth Technikon Choral
Thabane Sello	Maseru Vocal Waves
Thulisile Simelane	Welkom Choral Society
Mercia Teledimo	St. Mary's Church Choir
Fasion Zondi	SA Singers

**Johannesburg, 7 – 9 December 2000.****Event: National Choir Festival – National Finals 2001**

Thabo Gumede	Durban Serenade Choral Society
Nomothemba	SA Singers
Hlatshwayo	
Sibusiso Khumalo	Durban Serenade Choral Society
Sandile Ndlanya	Durban Serenade Choral Society

**8. MEMBERS OF THE ACTION RESEARCH GROUP****PIETERMARITZBURG**

Thembelihle Dladla  
Patience Khuzinayo  
Ntombizodwa Millicent Majola  
Jabulani Nene  
Thokozani Ndolomba  
Themba Ntuli  
Andile Radebe  
Joshua Radebe