Defining the Migrant Experience: An analysis of the poetry and performance of a contemporary Southern African genre.

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Declaration:

Unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, this thesis is entirely my own work.

Abstract

This dissertation focuses on the migrant performance genre *isicathamiya*, a genre which was popular amongst migrant workers in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng in the nineteen thirties and forties. It explores contemporary *isicathamiya* and asks whether there have been paradigmatic shifts in its content in post-apartheid South African society.

By way of introduction, the origins and development as well as some of the themes and features of *isicathamiya* are highlighted. Hereafter scholarly accounts of migrant performance genres are discussed in conjunction with the cultural re-orientation of migrants in urban centers. The introduction is intended to contextualise the genre by alluding to the politics and aesthetics of *isicathamiya* performances.

Leading on from the introduction, the first chapter of this body of research is a reflection upon the characteristics of oral literature; from the point of view of a literary scholar, I also discuss the problems of interpretation I experienced in this study of mediated *isicathamiya* lyrics. I propose that *isicathamiya* performances and texts are elements of oral literature and begin to define them as such.

My intention in chapter two is to explore how local performances have influenced global culture. I ask if oral literature from South Africa has contributed to the global market. I ask what Ladysmith Black Mambazo, the internationally acclaimed *isicathamiya* choir,

has invested in "First World culture" and suggest that there is in existence a transcultural flow of energy between the "so-called centre" and "so-called periphery".

In chapter three I suggest that the local and global are in a state of dialogue. I hope to establish a dialogue between local *isicathamiya* choirs and Ladysmith Black Mambazo. In essence, Ladysmith Black Mambazo has exported a musical form that has its foundations in Kwazulu-Natal and Gauteng. This chapter takes readers back to the source of the genre. I take into consideration Veit Erlmann's scholarly studies of *isicathamiya* in *Nightsong: Performance, Power and Practice in South Africa*. Focus falls upon the paradigm of rural/ urban migration in *isicathamiya* song and the importance of "home" in sustaining migrants in the city. The notion of "homeliness" as a trope in *isicathamiya* performances is discussed.

By extension, in chapter four, I ask whether the notion of "home" emphasized by Veit Erlmann is of significance in contemporary *isicathamiya* performance. Consequently, I adopt a comparative approach and set out to identify the changes and continuities in contemporary *isicathamiya* performances in response to transformations within post-apartheid society. I ask why *isicathamiya* is significant in post-apartheid South African society. What is its importance for personal and collective identity? What is being articulated within contemporary performances? Does *isicathamiya* provide a cultural space, a forum in which public debate (regarding leaders, policies and concerns) can be staged? Most importantly, is the thematic paradigm between the rural and urban world

still visible in contemporary *isicathamiya*? Is contemporary *isicathamiya* still grounded on the notion of "homeliness", or have new thematic paradigms emerged in contemporary *isicathamiya* performances?

I propose that South Africa in the present, is itself the site of multiple cultures and fragmented histories. The country and its people are searching for a new unitary meaning in the post-apartheid era. My argument is that *isicathamiya* texts are elements of post-colonial and post-apartheid literature. I suggest that language, through *isicathamiya* performance, can show a way back into reinterpreting the past and stitching together a different present. *Isicathamiya* texts give hints of journeys and point to identities, shared histories and cultural landscapes. *Isicathamiya* makes possible the sharing of knowledge and knowledge systems, and is an opportunity to hear un-erased histories and un-silenced voices.

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Introduction

a) 'Isicathamiya': the performances of South African migrant communities

In this body of research I reflect upon the members of a migrant community whose life trajectories have been influenced by the broader movements of South African society: labour migration, rural impoverishment and industrialization. In South Africa, the experience of migrant labour and the social and cultural crisis it occasioned led to the development of *isicathamiya*, the nightsong of migrants. Performed by *a-capella* male-voiced choirs, *isicathamiya* is a migrant performance genre of which Ladysmith Black Mambazo became a famous example. As with much popular music in Africa, it is a hybrid form, belonging essentially to the city. *Isicathamiya* responds to social change, is a voice of difference, an expressive voice, a voice of the other and a voice of transgression.

It emerged at the turn of the century out of the experiences and struggles of *isiZulu*-speaking migrant workers in Natal. Fleeing desperate living conditions in the countryside, growing numbers of males were drawn into South Africa's burgeoning industrial economy, where they took up employment in the harbour and railway yards of Durban, or the embryonic manufacturing industry of the Witwatersrand. It was in this situation of rural-urban fertilization that the first fully-fledged *isicathamiya* choirs were formed.

Hence, *isicathamiya* was born of an encounter between two worlds: the world of rural homesteads, warfare, ancestor spirits and wedding ceremonials on the one hand and the realm of factories and urban popular culture on the other hand. Certainly, these worlds rested on two vastly different sets of images of personal identity, sociability and aesthetic value.

Etymologically, *isicathamiya* derives from *cathama*, "to walk softly", and most dancing accompanying *isicathamiya* singing consists of carefully choreographed steps *(istep)* in which the dancers barely seem to touch the ground. Slow shuffling movements, interspersed with high kicking of legs and silent tap dance movements are the hallmark of *isicathamiya*. While most Zulu traditional dance styles display forceful stamping movements expressing virility, *isicathamiya* movements are graceful.

Until nineteen-thirty-seven, films by Fred Astaire highlighting polished tap dancing had become regular attractions for the majority of miners in the compounds around Johannesburg. Some of these American dance steps found their way into early *isicathamiya* dances (Erlmann, *Music, Modernity* 19).

b) The cultural re-orientation of migrant workers in urban settings:

Veit Erlmann, to whose comprehensive work on *isicathamiya* I am indebted, makes use of Homi Bhabha's term "unhomely" to describe the sense of dislocation experienced by

the migrant worker existing between two worlds, that of the city and that of the homestead. *Homeless*, to echo the name of the song on the album, *Ladysmith Black Mambazo Favourites*, seems to encapsulate the migrant experience in the city. *"Unhomely"* describes accurately the conditions out of which *isicathamiya* emerged: a sense of displacement, out of an "unhomely" moment. The concept of the "unhomely" exists at the theoretical core of this body of research, and an understanding of its meaning is crucial in order to fully comprehend the essence of *isicathamiya* performance:

> *To be unhomely...does not simply mean to be homeless...Unhomeliness is a condition in which the border between home and the world becomes confused, in which the private and public become part of each other. The home no longer remains the domain of domestic life, nor does the world simply become its counterpart. The unhomely then, [Bhabha concludes] is the shock recognition of the world-in-the-home, the-home-in-the-world* (Erlmann *Nightsong* 121).

Isicathamiya plays an important role in the cultural reorientation of migrants in urban settings. For new arrivals, incorporation into urban society is a dual process of personal adjustment and group alignment experienced as a series of contrasting situations and identities (Banton 146). Within this process, voluntary associations help build and reinforce values and norms of behaviour suitable to city life and provide networks of support relations. It is noteworthy that despite the sophisticated urban appearance of choirs as "clubs", the network of "home boys" remains an important rural-orientated

foundation for the emergent cultural formations of migrant workers in cities. Furthermore, scholarly studies have indicated that:

> *'Home boy' networks that are based on common regional origin and kinship ties of migrants have been among the earliest and most enduring organizational patterns devised by workers throughout Africa in an attempt to minimize the effects of proletarianism and to provide some measure of stability in an uncertain environment* (Harries-Jones 297).

As part of my first-hand observation of the genre, I attended an actual live *isicathamiya* performance in May this year at the YMCA in Beatrice Road, Durban, where eight choirs were competing. A second performance that I attended, the national *isicathamiya* competition held in November at the Playhouse Theatre in Durban, proved a fruitful source of information; eighteen texts from the performed work were transcribed and translated. At the regional *isicathamiya* competition it became apparent that a complex and resilient social and cultural world exists beneath the surface of the everyday recreations available to the migrant communities within Durban's urban centre. Together, the performers, audience and performance activities seemed to constitute a social microcosm. I became aware that, in this context, *isicathamiya* is the voice of a community and *isicathamiya* singers were eager to have their voices heard and their experiences, perceptions and concerns communicated. Singers wished their complex humanity to be acknowledged and their failings to be understood. The richness of this world invited more thorough study.

It became clear in choir names and certain performance lyrics that much of *isicathamiya's* appeal lies in its being thought of as music from "home". Migrant mobilisation on the basis of a shared "home" had for several decades been a topic virtually ignored by several generations of South African scholars. However, William Beinhart, for example, has pointed to the importance of such networks among South African migrants. [1]

Deborah James' recent publication, *Songs of the Women Migrants*, has been enlightening in terms of its suggestions pertaining to home-based associations in *kiba* music (James *Songs of the Women*). Noticeably, scholarly studies have failed to take up the challenge of understanding how migrants draw on their rural origins to arrange their lives in the cities. As a result, I found myself asking why scholars in South Africa appear to be reluctant to investigate this topic.

As James suggests, it may have been partly because of the refusal to endorse the notions of a rural "home" or common origin, as a basis for migrant association would implicitly have endorsed the state's creation of the so-called homelands for participating ethnic groups (23-24). Reluctance to investigate home-based associations was particularly strong among anthroplogists, due perhaps to their awareness that there has been a disturbing similarity between the definitive cultural features stressed by their earlier scholars writing within a segregationist paradigm.

My study of the voice of difference expressed in *isicathamiya* migrant performance is the study of "popular" culture. "Popular" culture in Africa, as distinct from the study of "traditional" models, inherited from pre-colonial times or the westernized so-called "high-art" of "elite" culture, arose in the nineteen-eighties in South African scholarly circles. Karin Barber and Ulf Hannerz examined forms of Nigerian popular culture; David Coplan studied the culture of *difela*, the songs of Sotho migrant labourers; Veit Erlmann, as mentioned, wrote extensively on *isicathamiya* in the nineteen-nineties. Studying "popular" culture entails studying:

Unofficial [culture that] does not conform with the conventions of established cultural systems…[is produced in times of] drastic social change…is a hybridized form which may combine elements of the modern and traditional to produce a novel form…[and has the ability to] transcend geographical, ethnic and even national boundaries but…retains strong affinities to rural homelands (Barber 11-15).

c) Research paradigm:

In my attempt to explore *isicathamiya* music as "popular" culture, focus has fallen on stylistic features, namely: harmony, dance, composition, audience participation as well as historical background. However, particular attention has been focused on the thematic content of *isicathamiya* lyrics. [2]

Information on past *isicathamiya* performances, consisting of poetry, music and dance, has come largely from Veit Erlmann's work on *isicathamiya*. David Coplan's historical survey of black South African popular performance has also been taken into consideration. Existing interview material includes Veit Erlmann's interview with Joseph Shabalala, leader of Ladysmith Black Mambazo, as well as Erlmann's interviews in *Nightsong: Performance, Power and Practice in South Africa*.

In terms of recordings, some of Ladysmith Black Mambazo's music as well as their collaborations with Paul Simon have been made available. A representative cross-section of the kind of *isicathamiya* music performed at a number of competitions held in Durban, featured on two albums, has been taken into consideration: *Isicathamiya: Zulu Workers' Choirs in South Africa* and *Mbube Roots: Zulu Choral Music from South Africa*. The second album is a compilation of vintage recordings documenting the stylistic development of *isicathamiya*. [3] Two videos have proved to be informative: a video of a competition held under the auspices of COSATU in nineteen ninety-one and an internationally produced film, *Mbube: The Night of the Lion*. [4]

An interview with Dr.Angela Impey from the School of Music at the University of Natal, Durban, proved to be enlightening, as did a discussion with ethnomusicologist, Dr. Patricia Opondo. [5]

By combining my literary training together with visual and auditory skills to synthesise the messages and meanings contained in the performance of *isicathamiya*, I hope to

extend the understanding of the place of oral literature in contemporary South African society and contribute to the understanding of *isicathamiya* performances. Though my samples of *isicathamiya* are perhaps limited, I hope that evidence from these performances, if not conclusive, is indicative of tendencies that might suggest avenues for further research. I have contextualised each chapter with an opening quote so that the reader is given an immediate sense of the essence of each chapter.

Notes to the Introduction

[1] "Home Boy" associations have been given attention by William Beinhart, "Worker Consciousness, Ethnic Particularism and Nationalism: the Experiences of a South African Migrant, 1930-1960." In *Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in 20th Century South Africa* (London: Longman, 1987), 286-310. These associations have also been concentrated on by J.K. McNamara, "Brothers and Work Mates: Home Friend Networks in the Social Life of Black Migrant Workers in a Gold Mine Hostel." In *Black Villagers in an Industrial Society: Anthropological Perspectives on Labour Migration in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1980) 305-40.

[2] The role of migrant labour in South Africa has been reflected upon in the work of a number of scholars, including Jean Comoraff and John Comoraff in *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992) and Belinda Bozzoli in *Labour, Townships and Protest: Studies in the Social History of the Witwatersrand* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1979).

[3] Thank you to Dr Patricia Opondo for assisting with this research and to the staff at the Music Library, University of Natal, Durban.

[4] Thanks to Dr.Liz Gunner for enabling me to view her personal copy of the COSATU *isicathamiya* video and to the staff at the Music Library, University of Natal, Durban where I was able to see the *Mbube* video.

Although the two worlds, that of the unwritten and written world exhibit some striking and important differences, they are not really separate worlds (Albert Lord 1).

Chapter 1: Oral literature

a) The characteristics and potentialities of oral literature:

*Africa possesses both written and unwritten literature. The unwritten forms, however, are far less widely known and appreciated. Such forms do not fit neatly into the familiar categories of literate cultures and are toilsome to record and present (*Finnegan *Oral Literature* Introduction*).*

The concept of an oral literature, to echo Ruth Finnegan, is foreign to most people raised in literate cultures. It is important to note that critics like Lord have used the term "unwritten literature" in reference to oral forms. "Oral literature" is currently the most widely accepted term used to describe performed and transcribed material. However, on a global scale, the terminology remains contested terrain despite the fact that Southern African researchers have reached consensus.

In the so-called "popular" view oral literature is regarded as enigmatic on the one hand, and on the other unskillful and artistically unsophisticated. In fact, neither of these assumptions holds true: the *isicathamiya a-capella* choral musical performances I have seen to date have been skillful and multifaceted representations of migrant re-orientations. I became aware of certain definite characteristics of this art form that have emerged out of its oral nature, and it is important at the outset to point to the implications of these. They need to be considered before one can fully appreciate *isicathamiya* as an element of oral literature. In moving toward an understanding of oral literature, I have decided to discuss the characteristics of performance, namely its transmission, verbal variability and dependency on audience participation. In addition, I address the problems encountered in the interpretation of translated, and therefore mediated, *isicathamiya* texts. [1]

I would like to argue that *isicathamiya* performance lyrics are integral elements of local and global literature and should be taken into account as such. In considering the term literature, it is deduced that a common misconception in this regard is to think automatically of the written or printed word and to exclude performance completely. In essence, the notion of oral literature explores and tests the gap between words and the vast hinterlands of memory, experience, and cultural knowledge to which they gesture.

A simple dichotomisation of written and oral literature conjures up an undesirable list of correspondingly loaded binary oppositions. As Andre Brink comments: "all texts demonstrate the tension between the spoken and the unspoken, the sayable and the unsayable, these elements of dialogue should not be seen as opposites in a binary equation, but at most as end points on a sliding scale" (Andre Brink 14). It is apparent that oral literature and written literature must be considered as relational. Oral and written literary forms feed into and influence one another continually.

Of particular concern are the existing prejudices regarding notions of oral and written literary texts. Though unfounded, these may nevertheless run deep, especially when they are securely rooted in particular historical and cultural experiences. For example, during the apartheid regime, there were misconceptions regarding the nature of unwritten literature: a Eurocentric bias appeared to privilege written literature at the expense of oral literature. As a result of deep-rooted prejudices:

> ... *familiar and traditional forms of a given culture come to be regarded as the natural and universal ones, expected to hold good for all time and places* (Finnegan 17).

Ideologically, the cultural imperatives and social structures which enable these divergent forms to exist are identified as antithetical, since oral and written literature are not "backed by the same culture and society" (Kashula 140). Despite Leroy Vail and Landeg White's declaration that "there is no essential difference between oral and written literature" (Vail and White 73), it is proposed that they have displayed:

> *... a reluctance to admit the obvious which perhaps has its roots in a too sensitive concern of the potential dangers in over-estimating cultural distance, and it suggests a deep-rooted fear that by admitting profound cultural difference we necessarily create an irredeemably distant, Inferior Other* (Guy 6).

I would like to argue that recognition of the dissimilarities between oral and written literature does not infer that there is not a relationship between them. Orality and literacy can be considered in isolation and in conjunction with each other. The prevailing misconception that written literature is somehow the highest form of the arts has meant that oral literature has tended to be overshadowed, if not overlooked completely. I hope that this thesis encourages the dismissal of prejudices regarding oral and written literature and is a part of the ongoing scholarly interest in oral literature.

It is suggested that there is nothing necessarily unprogressive or unenlightened about an artist who chooses to express his literary ability through the rich aesthetic medium of the oral poetic form rather than the written word. Performance as a form of expression does not necessarily signify that a society is lacking in literary substance or insight. In fact, there exists in verbal art an awareness of the complexities and perplexities of human life: performance speaks of the essence of African society as well as the experiences, hopes and failings of its people. Areas of concern in lyrical content range from social issues, such as the effects of HIV/AIDS, to political disillusionment. Hence, I would like to argue that the poetic form found in *isicathamiya* texts is not something of the past but of the present, and that performance is relevant for the contemporary analysis of South African society.

In this body of work, I do not attempt to suggest a reliance on oral rather than written communication, as does Levi Strauss in *The Savage Mind*. I have decided rather, to speak of the discernible characteristics concerning written and oral forms, as to gloss over these in the interpretation of *isicathamiya* performance is to risk missing much of the subtlety, flexibility, and individual originality of its creators.

The most significant characteristic of *isicathamiya* texts is the fact that they are performed. A literary text, whether presented orally or in written form, has to be

understood with an expectation of being heard (or read) and reciprocally envisioned and embraced by listeners or readers (Barber 28). It is fundamental to acknowledge that without audience, performance cannot fulfil its purpose by being transmitted and actualised. Oral literature is by definition reliant on a performer who is a mediator between himself and the audience. As Richard Bauman comments:

> *Performance as a mode of spoken verbal communication consists in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence* (Bauman 11).

The link between transmission and reception is an integral element of oral literature, and the means of communication in actual poetic expression is of absolute importance. That which is intended for performance cannot be actualised as a literary product or supplemented by a literary text, as performance denotes active expression and transmission. By contrast, Ruth Finnegan points out that:

> *... in the case of written literature a literary work can be said to have an independent and tangible existence in even one copy, so that questions about, say the format, number, and publicizing of other written copies can, though not irrelevant, be treated to some extent as secondary; there is, that is, a distinction*

between the actual creation of a written literary form and its further transmission

(Finnegan 2).

If one pauses for a moment to consider performances with which one is presumably familiar such as a theatrical performance, an address, a poetry reading, or even a greeting, it is evident that in all these instances, their actual delivery is anticipated. The same pertains to African oral literature, for example: "The printed words alone represent only a shadow of the full actualisation of the poem as an aesthetic experience for the poet and audience" (3). Similarly, *isicathamiya* choirs anticipate being heard. Even though it may be true that songs, which are intended to be sung, may also exist in written form, they only attain true fulfillment when actually performed.

In contrast to written communication, which tends to focus on words to the exclusion of other essential facets of performance for its resonance, the actual enactment of *isicathamiya* performances is dependent upon both the context of performance and the charisma of the performer. Dance, articulation, intonation, gesture, facial expression, pace and receptivity to the reactions of an audience influence both performers and their performances.

Stylistically, the potential to manipulate tone, rhythm and musical resources effectively, cannot be disregarded in the study of oral literature. By extension, an appreciation of the messages communicated through the medium of music in African oral literature often rest upon the notion of a knowledgeable community, a community familiar with the sources drawn upon and their connotations. It can be seen that:

> *Oral literature has somewhat different potentialities to written literature and additional resources which the oral artist can develop for his own purposes; and that these elements are of primary significance for its appreciation as a mode of aesthetic expression* (Finnegan 12).

A second characteristic separating oral literature from written literature is its verbal variability. Noticeably, there is no authentic version of an oral text and all texts are subject to alteration and manipulation. In performance, the concepts of innovation or elaboration are often more likely to be at the fore than the concept of memorization. Hence, the split between creation and transmission in oral literature as compared to written literature is significant. A failure to realize this may lead to misconceptions: for example, that a presented version of a text is not an authentic version and may result in only a partial understanding of the performer's contribution to and manipulation of the so-called "authentic" text.

The question of original composition is a difficult one and the extent of this kind of innovation varies with both genre and individual performer. According to Ruth Finnegan, the process is:

> *... by no means the same in all non-literate cultures or all types of oral literature, and between the extremes of totally new creation and memorized reproduction of set pieces there is scope for many different theories and practices of composition"* (8).

When Christopher Ballantine asked Ladysmith Black Mambazo's Joseph Shabalala what the place of improvisation in his compositions is, Shabalala commented that only his role as leader is improvised. He also maintained that neither he nor the group know in advance the details of what he is going to do. The only thing that is certain in performances is that he will improvise, and that the ability to do so will come from an inspirational force he calls "the spirit". The idiomatic embellishments familiar to anyone who has listened to Ladysmith Black Mambazo such as the *grrrrr* and *shi-eshe-eshe* are the only elements Shabalala is willing to permit the group to add more or less to at will (Ballantine 248). Shabalala apparently encourages performers to give a little more (or a little less) during their performances by gesturing in the direction of the bellies of one or more of his singers with a movement of his hand, suggesting he is turning up (or down)

the volume control on an amplifier (249). More leeway is allocated to the alto and tenor when they know the song very well:

> *The alto and tenor must 'talk' with their eyes'... the one telling the other he's going to improvise, so that while the one improvises the other stays firm* (Shabalala 249).

In all these cases, such liberties are grounded on a belief that autonomy and expression should not threaten the identity or the cohesiveness of the group. Shabalala explains by citing a Zulu saying: "If we're dancing together in one line, and you want to jump out in front, then do so, but come back and join us" (249).

The third aspect of oral literature to be discussed in this dissertation refers to the fact that performers seize the opportunity to embroil listeners directly in performance:

> *Oral pieces are not composed in the study and later transmitted through the impersonal and detached medium of print, but tend to be directly involved in the occasions of their actual utterance* (Finnegan 12).

Enmeshing audiences in performance occurs in the context of *isicathamiya* competitions where it is common for choirs to initiate their interaction with the audience through presenting a formula that is familiar to the audience and which seeks to incite the audience. At both the regional and national *isicathamiya* competitions seen this year, choirs followed a distinct performance formula. An introductory snippet of song served as a greeting for the judges; thereafter choirs began what could be called the "corpus" of their performance in which dance and song were combined, after which an epilogue was performed. There seemed to exist a formula of sorts in which momentum ebbed and flowed as performance began with a slow pace, flowed into a quicker pace and ebbed once again into a slower pace. Audiences participated actively in the choruses of songs and seemed familiar with what has been described as the ebb and flow of performance.

It became evident that the presence and reactions of the audience in a specific context can often affect the standard of performance and hence the audience contributions are an essential element of the totality of performance. Noleen Turner argues that context is the single most important determinant of both form and content in performance:

> *The impact that the recitation of [texts], not only rely on the [people] at whom they are directed, but also on the people present, [is] totally reliant on the*

environment in which they are recited and also on who is responsible for reciting

them (Turner 71).

Poems are communal activities engaging others and therefore *isicathamiya* songs tend to achieve a purpose: "regardless of what they say; they are performative utterances, illocutionary acts" (Opland 132). As Opland has remarked:

> *The performances and appreciation of oral poetry are essentially community*
> *affiliation rites, with auditors participating in the performance and interrupting*
> *at appropriate moments with expressions of encouragement"* (Opland 66).

These performance texts function in societies "dominated by the politics of performance"; "the carnivalesque cultural activities in which the body [plays] a central part" are vital to the group's cohesion (Hofmeyr 51). Where written texts centralize the author as source of and authority for meaning, indigenous South African non-narrative forms emphasise the self in the community. Shabalala, commenting on audience reception, stated that:

> *... audiences have admired the richness of Ladysmith Black Mambazo's*
> *meanings, the range of its experience, and the historical depth and allusiveness*

of its musical invention within the isicathamiya tradition ...People say that I've taken an example from the beginning - from Amabutho, and the power of that early album - and woven that sound back into the present" (Shabalala 248).

The connection between audience and performer becomes what Ruth Finnegan, describing the exchange between listener and speaker, has termed "an identity" (Finnegan 11).

b) Oral and written: the fluid boundaries

Some South Africans bring together the traditions of performance and writing. For example, President Mandela has published a secular, Western style autobiography, while his *imbongi*, his professional poet, continues to perform Mandela's *izibongo* (performed poetic praises) at state functions.[2] Hence the boundary between oral and printed literature is dissolved and the fluidity between the two acknowledged.

As Kaschula points out, in some traditions of orality, there are poets and singers who have conceded to the "lure of the publishing houses", and who are either devising their poetry in writing or transcribing poetry previously performed orally (Kaschula 178). A resolution to print performed poetry is ideologically significant:

... there are significant differences in terms of content, the reorganisation of material, and political correctness. Furthermore, the texts lose the flexibility. Poems that are transcribed involve redefinition of the poet as an author, creator, proprietor in capitalist terms... the misconception that literary forms are richer than and superior to oral forms is dismissed (185).

A new form, incorporating elements characteristic of oral literature transcribed into printed, textual form has been identified in the hymns of Isaiah Shembe, the founder of the Church of the Nazarites. These hymns blend Christian hymn with Zulu song and poetry; they reflect congruencies of oral and written literature, traces of mission education as well traditional upbringing and African nationalism combined with universalism. Muller argues that these new ritual forms memorialise the encounter between opposing cultures through a process of bricolage, in which opposing cultural mediums are made to coexist in dialectical tension with each other, or were amalgamated and ascribed new meanings (Muller 220). Guy adds that there is also:

... the ambivalence inherent in literacy which, as a technology, liberates as it confines, and is inextricably linked with conquest, the development of exploitation and the exercise of power and therefore, in the history of Southern

Africa, with racism and oppression as well as with the development of resistance and progress towards liberation (Guy 25).

The juxtaposition of African culture with European culture has implications that extend far beyond the issue of written and oral texts. Modern capitalism requires individuals to act in accordance with the ethos of bourgeois individualism: the self is, in this conception, largely private property. It entails a distinction between private and public domains, so that there are parts of the self that can only be known to the self. Evidently, different kinds of selfhood are required and enabled by a changed social formation.

African societies have been able to make room for literacy without entirely capitulating to it, as the example of Shembe's hymns indicate:

> *All representational practices and constructions of the subject - including Western, hegemonic forms - are under relentless but inconsistent pressure from divergent discursive and material circumstances. Fluctuations in the social formation impact on textual codifications, and vice-versa often in entirely unpredictable ways* (Couille 148-149).

c) The "untranslatability" of oral texts by literary scholars

In writing criticism of performance genres, I immediately confront the problem of imposing literate paradigms on an oral form, a problem allied to the fact that I can only return to many *isicathamiya* texts via the mediated, translated transcript. Ruth Finnegan points out that studies of orality have been carried out almost exclusively by literate academics, particularly those with literary training and that this has led to the development of inappropriate understandings and evaluations of oral forms (Finnegan 6-7). Duncan Brown adds that:

> *The recuperation of oral literature and performance genres for colonial study involves the broader question of 'cultural translation' with its ontological and paradigmatic challenges and problems. As regards the ontological question, the nature and status of many oral texts as they have come to be recorded in print is at best ambiguous. Except at the witnessing of an actual live performance, which is only possible with contemporary, local poets, storytellers or singers, oral texts survive beyond their moment of delivery through a process of mediation* (Brown 8).

In this thesis, the *isicathamiya* text transcribed and translated from the national *isicathamiya* festival at the Playhouse theatre in Durban in November, and the YMCA competition attended in Beatrice Road, Durban, in May, was recorded at actual performances. I was fortunate enough to have had access to live performances at which local performers were present and to two translators (Solomusi Mabuza and Mqondisi Ngcobo). [3] However, I acknowledge that some of the transcription "may lack the cultural understanding or phonetic repertoire necessary to capture the full "meaning of the text", though the aesthetic impact is measurable against a set of specific circumstances and audience expectations (Brown 5).

The role of audience has been largely under-explored in the discussion of culture and production in South Africa despite the fact that it plays an active and dialogic role in it. It is a crucial component in the making of culture "from below" rather than its imposition "from the top down". Audiences are "interpretive communities", knowledgeable communities, often familiar with performance material as mentioned in section one of this chapter.

A further concern regarding the printed textual form in the relaying of texts in this thesis is that it may flavour performance genres with a fixity that obviates their very significance as oral performance. The ontology of the oral texts is further problematised

by the fact that most performances are performed originally in languages other than English and are hence accessible to many, including myself, only in forms of translation. The advice of Susan Basnett-Mcguire seems commendable at this point. In her book *Translation Studies*, she argues that in "attempting to conceptualise translation as a literary activity, it should not be conceived of in narrowly linguistic terms, but in fact belongs properly to the field of semiotics" (Basnett-McGuire 13).

Bassnett-Mcguire argues that the text must be seen in relation to the signifying systems of the society, both in the source and the target language. Drawing on developments in literary theory, particularly on Roland Barthes' emphasis on the role of the reader in "creating" the text, Bassnett-Mcguire emphasises the fact that every translation is a "reading", which involves the processes of decoding and recoding (16). Yet, she points to the difficulties experienced in translating from one language to another when there is no equivalent of the literary form within the signifying systems of the target language. The difficulty of translating performance genres is exacerbated by the fact that the structure of rhyme often differs greatly from one language or language group to another.

Ruth Finnegan points out that:

... whereas written poetry is primarily typographically marked, critics who are involved in oral studies identify the poetic status of oral texts not through one absolute criterion but [through] a range of stylistic and formal attributes... features like heightened language; metaphorical expression; musical form or accompaniment or structural repetitiveness (Finnegan 25-26)..

Hence, the question of how to represent oral genres in translated, printed forms remains a vexed one, and we are reminded, by Duncan Brown, that in any search for correspondences, translation often involves "disjunctures between the cosmologic and ethical assumptions of the source language and the target language (Brown 6). In such a situation, the translator appears to face the problem of "untranslatability" in a task similar to that of the literary historian, as defined by Frederic Jameson:

How to make a text from another historical period/ society available or accessible without reducing its "otherness" or "strangeness"; how to maintain a necessary dialectic between the difference of a text which is outside of our immediate cultural experience and its identity as an artefact which can address us across social or historical distances (Jameson 35).

Hence, equivalence in translation, without which meaning is impossible, need not imply "sameness". Accordingly, many alterations to the text are seen as departures from the inspired words of the original genius. As Basnett-Mcguire has indicated, the insights of structuralism and semiotics suggest that rather than concerning ourselves with the loss of an inspired original, we might perceive the value of transfer from one signifying system to another to serve a purpose in a given context. Along the same lines, I have endeavoured to receive the translated *isicathamiya* texts that I concentrate on in this thesis as serving a purpose in this context, in terms of how valuable they are in revealing the shifts in contemporary *isicathamiya* performances.

A further consequence of traditional literary training is the lack of emphasis on performance in studies of oral literature. I have attempted in this body of research to focus attention on performers and performance itself. Breath, voice and performance in themselves have proven to be enriching notions of study and suggest that perhaps even the study of the Romantic poets would be immeasureably enriched by our understanding of these elements of oral literature by those with literary training. Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and *isicathamiya* choirs it seems, all speak beyond the confines of the printed page with inspiration, the word itself suggesting the breathing of performance (Brown 11).

Unscripted, performed words have a long and honourable place in the making of southern African culture. Now, the new or relatively well-known but fresh voices of the migrants singing *isicathamiya*, have complicated any simple sense of cultural history of national identity. Of significance is what these voices are saying about South African society and what resources they are relying on to express their innermost thoughts. The voices speak of, to echo Vail and White, elements of the past in the present, yet they reinterpret the past through the oral form of *isicathamiya* in the present.

Notes to Chapter 1

[1] The term "unwritten literature" has been chosen as it seems to have a clear connection with the term "written literature". It is my intention to move away from the binary between oral and printed texts and to concentrate on the interconnectedness between them.

[2] Judith Couille refers to the coming together of written and unwritten textual forms in her article entitled "(Dis)locating Selves: *Izibongo* and Narrative Autobiography in South Africa". In *Oral Literature and Performance in Southern Africa* (London: James Currey, 1999) 61-90.

[3] I take this opportunity to extend my thanks to my translators: Solomuzi Mabuza and Mqondisi Ngcobo. Without them I would not have been able to complete my field research or gather primary texts.

The transnational flow of music is often envisioned as a vertical flow from more powerful

nations to less powerful ones, or as a centre-periphery model with music moving from

dominant cultures to marginal cultures, from developed countries, particularly the

United States, to the rest of the world, with accompanying images of overpowering,

displacing, and destroying local cultures (Reebee Garofalo 17).

Chapter 2: Global Interconnectedness: 'Isicathamiya' and its enmeshment in the Modern World System

a) Isicathamiya: local voices, global resonance

In the first chapter of this dissertation I have discussed *isicathamiya* as an element of oral literature

and focused on its performative dimension. I endeavour in this chapter to explore power relations in

the production of culture between the so-called "centre" and so-called "periphery". I ask myself

how local oral literature might be thought to be in engagement with, or might challenge or even

contribute to global politics.

Appended at the end of Michael Jackson's *Moonwalker* video, as the credits begin to roll, is a

segment of the song "The Moon is Walking", a segment that features Ladysmith Black Mambazo.

The members of Ladysmith Black Mambazo are dressed in suits and hats that match those of the

club scene in Jackson's segment "Smooth Criminal". "Smooth Criminal" takes place in a club

called "Club thirties" in a nineteen -thirties scene in which Jackson baffles a motley crowd of mobsters, pimps and prostitutes by a spectacular display of dancing. Appearing in a brick-walled room similar to another of Jackson's video segments, the South African group, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, is seen performing a classical *isicathamiya* routine in "The Moon is Walking" which is interspersed with brief quotations from "Smooth Criminal", shown earlier in the film. [1]

Both Jackson's dance troupe and Ladysmith Black Mambazo seem to use the *istep* characteristic of *isicathamiya*: both groups have their arms firmly pressed against their bodies, and both kick their legs high in the air, wobble their knees, and lift up their trouser legs. Musically too, strong resemblances are observed in the way both songs ("Smooth Criminal" and "The Moon is Walking") are constructed around a repetitive pattern. Even if these correspondences cannot be proven to have resulted from concrete historical contacts between African-American and South African dancers, it is clear that black performers at the end of the twentieth century are no less fascinated by the continuities and parallels between their respective expressive traditions than their predecessors in the eighteen- nineties were (Erlmann *Music, Modernity* 270-271).

The above example illustrates that there are elaborate socio-cultural and political dynamics involved in the interpretation of the relationship between local literature -whether written or unwritten- and global, cultural politics. At the core of this chapter, exists the peripheral, rurally - derived genre upon which Paul Simon and Ladysmith Black Mambazo's success is based: that of *isicathamiya*. Paul Simon's album *Graceland* reached the top notches of international charts at the

so-called "centre" as a result of the peripheral-based male *a capella* voiced *isicathamiya* choir, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, a choir familiar to local and global audiences well before Paul Simon joined them.

Their international hit, *Homeless*, has two central thematic elements: the one is the notion of "homeliness", a trope to be explored in detail in chapter three, and the other reflects upon the choir's global success:

> *Yithi omanqubo*
>
> *Esanqobo phakathi e-Ngilandi*
>
> *Esayibam 'ba phakati e-Ngilandi*
>
> *Esayibamba kwakhal' amadoda*
>
> *Esayibamba phakathi e-Landani*
>
> *Esayibamba kwakhal'abantu*
>
> *Chorus: Yithi omanqoba*

> *[We are the victors/ conquerers*
>
> *who conquered the whole world*
>
> *who came victorious in England*
>
> *who performed in England*
>
> *who performed to the men's wonder*
>
> *who performed in London*

who performed to the peoples' wonder]

Chorus...

Khulumani. Khulumani sizwe.

Singenze njani?

Bayajabul' abasithandayo... wo.

[Speak. Speak so we can hear

What else can we do?

Happy are those who love... us!]

(Ladysmith Black Mambazo *Homeless, Ladysmith Black Mambazo Favourites: translated by Mqondisi Ngcobo).*

With every step they dance and with every note they sing, the search for what *isicathamiya* performers call "home", the quest for redemption and wholeness, draws them ever more inexorably into the West and the modern world system (Erlmann *Music, Modernity* 207). All this implies, of course, a paradox: the fact, namely, that the emergence of *isicathamiya* as a genre of the Zulu core was in reality the product of a prolonged entanglement with the forces of modernity and the media (Erlmann *Music, Modernity* 208).

b) A backward glance: the history of 'isicathamiya'

If we are to grasp this dialectic of "absence and presence" and more specifically, to comprehend the role of *isicathamiya* in the making of *Graceland*, the first thing we have to consider is its history. [2] The earliest prototype of *isicathamiya*, "*isikhunzi*", evolved out of the fusion of middle-class, urban vaudeville and "coon" songs with "cleaned-up" choir arrangements of traditional songs. A great amount of such music had been commercially available on records from as early as 1908 and remained popular among migrant workers until the mid-nineteen thirties. Informants described *isikhunzi* as a: polyphonic kind of music that employed low vocal registers (Erlmann *A Conversation* 35). By the mid nineteen thirties, *isikhunzi* came to be replaced by "*imbube*", a genre that was much more indebted to rural wedding *ingoma* light dance songs and Western church hymns. Pioneered by groups such as Solomon Linda's *Evening Birds* and Enoch Mzobe's *Crocodiles*, *imbube* used "strong, cyclic bass patterns and a stereotyped chord structure". At the same time *imbube* choirs introduced uniforms and light touch choreography called "*istep*" (Erlmann *Music, Modernity*).

Solomon Linda's choir was the first choir to make a point that his singers appear on stage in uniform dress and in line with the latest trends in urban fashion. The *Evening Birds* sported pin-striped three piece suits, Florsheim shoes and hats, and fostered a fast-paced, energetic choreography called the *istep* that made performers look like resolute men defiantly walking the streets of the white man's city (Erlmann *Music, Modernity* 204).

Research indicates that in nineteen-fourteen in Botha's Hill (near Durban), the first *isicathamiya*

group was founded. *The Crocodiles,* was founded by Lutheran preacher and land-owning farmer

Mzombe and his family (Erlmann *Ethnomusicology* 207). They initially confined their activities to

rural wedding ceremonies on the outskirts of Durban. However, The *Crocodils* found themselves

competing against the second most important *isichatamiya* groups of the time: the *Evening Birds*

whose leader was Solomon Linda. Linda was responsible for a series of innovations in migrant

workers' music whose influences are still felt today. T. Pewa recalls that Linda "was the first

soprano…he always wore white shoes or black and white shoes; black suit, that man. That's the

Evening Birds, man (*Zulu Worker Choirs* 14). That was their uniform, the only uniform-black suits

> *… soon after Solomon Linda [leader of the Evening Birds] had moved to Johannesburg to*
>
> *work as a record packer for Gallo, he recorded a song that was to become one of Gallo's*
>
> *best selling hits, imbube. On this album a version of imbube is heard performed by the*
>
> *SABC Easy Walkers (track fourteen). The success of imbube was partly based on a new*
>
> *marketing strategy specificallly developed by Gallo for the black market at the time. It was*
>
> *about nineteen-thirty-seven or so when those large automobiles with loud speakers came*
>
> *along here during those times, broadcasting the imbube song* (Pewa 15).

I found the *song* Imbube *features on the ninteen-eighty-six album* Zulu Worker Choirs in South

Africa: Isicathamiya 1982-1985 *and echoes the word* "Imbube, hha"/ "lion, ha.

Towards the late nineteen-thirties, other choirs began experimenting with sounds that more clearly reflected the Zulu migrants' search for a modern, Western expression of urban identity. The result was *"isikhwela Jo"* or *"ikambula"*, an idiom that used choral fortissimo yells and represented an endeavour to appropriate the sound of Western church hymns by substituting the female parts with male falsetto singing. Thembinkosi Pewa identified *isikhwela Jo* as a "high-pitched choral style in which every member of the group would sing at the top of their [sic] voice. There was in fact no harmony [he commented]... The *isikhwela Jo* people used to wear coats with huge pockets, long coats that went just below their knees, with pads on the shoulders. They walked in a certain way and they tied their pants on their stomachs" (Pewa *Zulu Worker Choirs* 38).

During World War One, *isikhwela Jo* became known as *"ibombing"* and is currently one of the most prevalent styles of Zulu choral music. By the late nineteen- sixties, when Joseph Shabalala entered the *isicathamiya* scene, choirs such as the King Star Brothers began to reduce the volume of *ibombing*, at the same time retaining the structure and content of the songs within that genre.[76] The new style came to be called *"cothoza mfana"* or *"isicathamiya"*, and has since become perfected not only by Ladysmith Black Mambazo but also by numerous choirs in the KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng regions (Erlmann, *Migration and Performance* 38).

The majority of *isicathamiya* lyrics, including the introduction of Paul Simon's *Diamonds on the Soles of her Shoes*, celebrate a sense of local identity, by applauding appropriate relationships between "men and women in self-reproducing homesteads that are rooted in ancestral lineages"

(Erlmann *Nightsong* 179). It is in *isicathamiya* that an entanglement of local performance is enmeshed in a modern world system. This chapter explores what it is that local singers of the "margins" contribute to the world system, why it is that individuals participate in the practice of *isicathamiya* in the first place and what it is that these voices are singing about.

Our initial focus falls upon Paul Simon's *Graceland* which has been one of the most celebrated and commercially successful "world music" endeavours in recent years. Louise Meintjies, in an analysis of *Graceland* as a text, has pointed out that "the plural authorship in many of the tracks is a celebration and dialogue between centre and periphery" (Erlmann *Africa Civilised* 175).

Meintjies observes that "highly power-laden images are involved in this conjunction between global economic and political systems on the one hand and local lived experience of specific creators and interpreters on the other, in the production of this transcultural musical style" (Erlmann *Africa Civilised* 175). It seems that what has been disregarded in the debate on Graceland, world music and post-modern cultural production is the fact that unlike any other project involving musicians from disparate cultural realities, Paul Simon's "multi-million dollar enterprise represents one of the most powerful expressions to date of the modern world-system and has had far-reaching implications for the aesthetics of popular music" (Erlmann *Africa Civilised* 176).

The songs on *Graceland* represent on a holistic scale, a similar theme: that of acceptance, followed by a move towards a state of peace and then ultimately towards a quest for some state of redemption

or grace. Noteworthy, is the fact that in the nineteen-eighties, the quest for redemption did not lead Paul Simon back to the centre:

> *Where choirs such as the South African choir sought to assimilate the periphery to the idiom of the centre by subjugating its truth to a narrative of redemption through the progressive march of history, Graceland, at least as seen through the artist's own discourse, is about the fashioning of an authentic identity from the margins, from the position of the subaltern. It is at the margins, Simon confesses, 'outside the mainstream'... where [he] always enjoyed being* (Warner Brothers 5).

Graceland attempts to construct an authentic identity for the inhabitants of the margins. In trying to bring to the fore the voices of difference while at the same time recognising the universal in the local, *Graceland* partakes of what Arjun Appadurai has called:

> *... a certain kind of cannibalism, a politics of the mutual effort of sameness and difference to cannibalise one another and thus proclaim their successful highjacking of the twin Enlightenment ideas of the triumphantly universal and the resiliently particular* (Appadurai 308).

This symbolic traffic becomes perhaps nowhere clearer than in *"The Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes"*. What is striking about the juncture between locations (Simon's Manhattan and Black

Mambazo's Zululand) in *"Diamonds"*, is the degree to which this "cannibalism" is encoded at the level of sound texture, itself to a large extent the product of far-reaching developments in sound-recording technology and on-stage presentation (Erlmann *Africa Civilised* 177). The almost seamless cross-referencing that is achieved in vocal elements: between call-and-response, English and Zulu, is accentuated by the on-stage positioning of Black Mambazo in relation to Paul Simon (most vividly perhaps in live performances). Here, the group (like all *isicathamiya* choirs seen to date) stands in a straight line with the lead singer Joseph Shabalalala moving freely in front of the choir. Simon stands on the side of the choir, almost extending the line formed by the choir (Simon, *The African Concert*). Performance suggests as Louise Mentjies points out:

> ... *that the collaboration celebrated in Graceland is metaphorically configured in structurally integrated rather than merely juxtaposed musical styles* (Meintjies 43).

Erlmann adds that *Graceland* might be used "as an exemplary text to interrogate the ability of the post-modern, global aesthetic to capture an identity, to offer redemption in the first place" (Erlmann, *Africa Civilised* 177). A brief look at the lyrics of *"Diamonds"* may demonstrate this. The track is really two linked songs in one: a brief introduction in Zulu, followed by Simon's eerie story about the rich girl and the poor boy floating- disembodied and physically forgotten- through somewhat unearthly space that could be New York City. At the end of the track, elements of the first section ("Ta na na") resurface:

Awa Awa

Awa Awa

akucwayelekile

[it is usually not like that]

O kodwa ezinsukwini uzongenelisa namhlange

[Oh, but in the days ahead, she is going to satisfy me, today]

Zanamuhla sibona kwezeka amantombazane ayazondla

[Today we are witnessing that the girls are self-reliant].

Awa, awa, sibona

[awa, awa, we see]

Kwenzeka kanjani?

[How does it happen?]

Awa, awa amantombazane ayeza

[Awa awa, the girls are self-reliant]

[She's a rich girl

She don't try to hide it

Diamonds on the soles of her shoes

He's a poor boy

Empty as a pocket

Empty as a pocket with nothing to lose

Sing Ta na na

Ta na na

She's got diamonds on the soles of her shoes

People say she's crazy

She got diamonds on the soles of her shoes

Well that's one way to lose these

Walking shoes

Diamonds on the soles of her shoes

She was physically forgotten

Then she slipped into my pocket

With my car keys

She said you've taken me for granted

Because I please you

Wearing these diamonds

And I could say oo oo oo

As if everybody knows

What I'm talking about

As if everybody here would know

Exactly what I was talking about

Talking about diamonds on the soles of her shoes

She makes the sign of a teaspoon

He makes the sign of a wave

The poor boy changes clothes

And puts on after-shave

To compensate for his ordinary shoes

And she said honey take me dancing

But they ended up by sleep in

In a doorway

By the bodegas and the lights on

Upper Broadway

Wearing diamonds on the soles of her shoes

And I could say oo oo oo

As if everybody knows

What I'm talking about

As if everybody here would know

Exactly what I was talking about

Talking about diamonds

People say I'm crazy

I got diamonds on the soles of my shoes

Well that's one way to lose

These walking blues

Diamonds on the soles of my shoes

Ta na na.]

(Simon *Graceland: The African Concert*)

The introduction by Ladysmith Black Mambazo is based on a wedding song and forms part of the tradition of *isicathamiya* choral music. Popular among migrant workers since the nineteen-thirties, songs within this genre symbolically reconstruct a vanished world of regional identity, domestic cohesion and specific gender hierarchies (Erlmann *The Past is Far* 45-6).

In the opening lines we hear a voice commenting on the growing independence of young women: "Awa, awa" expresses amazement at the unusual Manhattan story. The introduction in reality- it is suggested -echoes patriarchal concerns of migrant workers regarding the growing independence of women in South African society. Labour migration, in other words, the growing encroachment of the forces of the global commodity exchange upon black South Africans' lives, is the pivotal context in which these opening lines have to be read.

> *The contrast between this intensely laden personal response to a particular historical disjuncture between the world of custom and habits, "it is usually not like that", and the present moment of growing female autonomy might suggest a whole range of alternative readings. We are dealing with a bricolage of sorts-between the two different types of gender relations in two radically different times and locations (Erlmann, Africa Civilised 179).*

Stylistic bricolage cannot re-capture the experience of a local world, firmly framed by the clear-cut binary relation between signifier and signified. Nor does bricolage such as that in *"Diamonds"* necessarily disrupt the hegemony of the First World (Comoraff *Body of Power*). *Graceland* has dissolved any concrete referential frame. The album and the Black Mambazo tracks, in particular, represent a global soundscape in which the boundaries between the symbols, perspectives and interpretations of culturally distinct spheres have become almost seamlessly enmeshed with each other to produce a post-modern space littered with semiotic debris without referent to authenticity.

Graceland offers scenery without actors, a world filled with ever- present role models. *Graceland,* despite all its musicianships, resembles what Jean Baudillard, the master thinker of simulation, has called *"a melodrama of difference"* (Baudillard, *The Transparency of Evil* 125).

c) Socio-political and stylistic collaboration on the 'Graceland' album:

Collaboration operates in the *Graceland* album in two ways: First, it is established in the music (in the way styles are intertwined) and in composition, production, and promotional processes:

> *The presence of style indicates strong community, an intense sociability that has been given shape through time, an assertion of control over collective feelings so powerful that any expressive innovator will necessarily put his or her content into that shaping continuum and no other* (Keil 122).

Secondly, this idea of collaboration presented by the music is to be absorbed independently by various listeners. Each listener receives the songs on the *Graceland* album with a unique set of accumulated sociopolitical and cultural experiences. Each set of experiences includes the listener's own ideas about what creates collaboration (Meintjies 37).

Graceland is exceptionally powerful as a sign vehicle for three principal and interrelated reasons. Firstly, the idea of collaboration is embedded in many levels of the music and music-making process.

Secondly, the ambiguity of its political orientation allows multiple interpretations of that collaboration. Thirdly, interpretations of that collaboration are tied, through symbols, to listeners' perceptions of themselves. The album's success on the basis of sales is dependent on its appeal to a wide range of listeners who are able to make sense of what they hear in relation to their own lives (39).

There is a deliberate effort to convey a sense of mutual cooperation and musical collaboration in the composition of *Graceland* (Erlmann, *Music, Modernity* 40). The integration of a number of musicians representing a wide stylistic, geographical, ethnic, and sociopolitical range on the album promoted a collaborative image. In terms of song, *"Homeless"* is the most collaboratively conceived of the album's songs. In the album notes, Simon described the collaborative process involved in its composition: apparently the lyrics and melody were pieced together bit by bit, some by Ladysmith Black Mambazo, some by Simon, some together. They composed some new lyrics and melodies, and inserted these into existing material from various sources. Musical and linguistic changes were made to each other's contributions. They integrated Zulu with English, and Simon's vocals with those of Ladysmith Black Mambazo (Erlmann *Music, Modernity* 42).

I turn now to examine how *Graceland's* musical collaboration has operated as a pathfinder for sociopolitical collaboration in the South African context. Listeners have related their ideas about the value, identity and coherence of *Graceland* in order to imbue *Graceland* with meaning. On hearing the album, listeners have been faced with a number of tasks. These include: recognising the style types that have been drawn upon and sorting out how they have been combined, experiencing

the sound as a new entity and locating the sound in a field of sounds familiar to the listener (Erlmann *Music, Modernity* 47-8). Erlmann's research has shown that South Africans have responded to the project in three ways: it has been embraced by those who value the social collaboration it signifies; conversely, it has been rejected by those who oppose the social collaboration the album signifies. Furthermore, the signification of social collaboration has been regarded as irrevelant compared to the inherent value of the artwork for a handful of South Africans, and evaluated only in terms of the success of its musical collaboration (Erlmann, *Music, Modernity* 60).

It can be deduced that Black South African commentary that supported the project, did so largely because of the international exposure it offered. To reach the world stage for black South Africans was both a politically and professionally motivated goal. Politically, the opportunity an international project like *Graceland* afforded them meant speaking out about apartheid through song, talk, interviews and other promotional activities. Professionally, *Graceland* positioned the musicians in a space that facilitated future contacts in the industry for themselves and for fellow musicians at home. Through Simon, Ladysmith Black Mambazo was able to reach the international market while bypassing the South African state with its repressive censorship, limited access to capital and media channels and its restraints on black business. Hence, a measure of independence was gained for performers through the *Graceland* project.

The post- *Graceland* revival and promotion of indigenous sound within the South African music industry has indicated that there is a new value assigned to black music (Erlmann *Music, Modernity* 62). Recent domestic support for indigenous sound (Zulu *masakanda* and *imbube* for instance) in South Africa is directly related to the demands of the international market for "ethnic" (other) popular music and not for the imitations of Western popular music. On the one hand, the members of the subordinate group, black South Africans, are assisting in the maintenance of the status quo by providing appropriate "ethnic" cultural material for international consumption. On the other hand, however, they are challenging the status quo by hailing the value of their own expression:

> *Prioritizing and promoting native values and rejecting the internalization of the values of the dominant group is a significant step toward counteracting the hegemonic* (Keil 125-6).

The dialectic between the value of musical "indigenization", of localizing sounds and their meaning, and of musical "internationalization", places collaborative projects like *Graceland* in a pivotal position politically, professionally and stylistically:

> *The drive for "internationalization" has two trajectories in the black South African post apartheid context: the first refers to the recognition and remuneration that results from international exposure; that is, it refers to economic rewards for artistic success within the global market system. The second trajectory is politically and ideologically based. It refers to the drive of pan-African links that can be expressed, drawn upon, invigorated and recreated through music* (Erlmann *Music, Modernity* 63-4).

Noteworthy is the possibility that the presentation of identity through sound is subject to commodification, as it risks losing or diffusing the meanings associated with those sounds for that collectivity (Erlmann *Music, Modernity* 65). The danger of "selling-out" so to speak, to an international audience; that is, of incorporating oneself into the dominant class and discarding the support system and community that facilitated artistic and economic success, is expressed in political terms by the then-imprisoned ANC leader Walter Sisulu:

> *You cannot remain aloof from the political struggles of [your] community. You may become famous internationally, but your writing will die because it is not rooted in the people... We are allowing our political development to outstrip our cultural development, a mistake we should not make...* (Badela 3).

Graceland alerted South Africans to the richness and contemporary relevance of black South African expression. Interest in other local music mediated by Simon seems to have followed interest in *Graceland*. The political discourse surrounding and embedded in the album, *Graceland*, is as complicated as the musical construction. The discourse of cultural politics is not separated from the musical- the one is embedded in the other. The politics of culture is articulated within the musical in the international market to create a transcultural flow of meaning.

> *It is the timing and placing of Graceland in South Africa in the nineteeneighties as well as the prominence and problematics of South Africa's positioning within the global system that has made Graceland controversial. Along with the artistic and technical skills of its*

maker, it was the winner of the nineteen eighty-six Record of the Year Grammy Award.

Graceland illustrated that the meanings of transcultural musical styles are located at the

conjunction between the multilevel global economic and political system and the local

lived experience of specific creators and interpreters (Meintjies 69).

Isicathamiya cannot be said to represent the extreme periphery: it seems to be rather, to echo Ulf

Hannerz in "The Local and the Global : A View from Afar" somewhere midway, where cross-

currents are strongest, and where the interactive processes of creolization bring the most strikingly

new results. Cultural forms emerging from midway are neither of the so-called "centre" or so-called

"periphery" and hence are accessible from both ends. [3] *Isicathamiya* singers are claiming their

place in the useful past of the South African future and belong not only to South Africa but to the

world.

Notes to Chapter 2

[1] It is in Veit Erlmann's "Dances with Power: Michael Jackson, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, and the Ambiguities of Race". In *Music, Modernity and the Global Imagination: South Africa and the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 270 that Erlmann examines the collaboration of Ladysmith Black Mambazo and Michael Jackson. Jackson's "Smooth Criminal" and "The Moon is Walking" is courtesy of Epic records.

[2] The phrase "absence and presence" is an echo of Frederic Jameson's words in *Postmodernism Or, The Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991) 411.

[3] It is Ulf Hannerz in "The Local and the Global: A View from Afar" (ed) Karin Barber: *Readings in African Popular Culture* (London: Currey, 1997) whose scholarly work I refer to here to make the point that the flow of music is not unidirectional, it does not flow merely from the "centre" to "periphery" but between the two. Hannerz's work on Sophiatown has been enlightening in this regard. Hannerz also speaks of transcultural flow in "The World of Creolization", *Africa* 57(4): 546-59.

By appropriating the objectified symbols of the dominant order - its roads, townships, buildings and so forth, migrant workers [have] sign[ed] their existence as authors on these structures (de Certeau 31).

Chapter 3: Local *Isicathamiya* Performance:

a) Bridging the gap between home and the world

In chapter two I discussed what local performances have contributed to global culture. I now consider the dialectic between the local and global and confirm that they exist in a constant state of communication. It is as if local choirs in Kwazulu-Natal constantly "speak" to and engage with the global market. In this chapter I give voice to local *isicathamiya* performers and move back to the source of *isicathamiya*, on which Ladysmith Black Mambazo's local and global success is grounded.

At one level, Veit Erlmann suggests that *isicathamiya* local performances, in the nineteen thirties and forties, symbolically connected migrants in urban centres with their rural homesteads in an endeavour to bridge the gap [to borrow from Homi Bhabha] between the "home" and the "world". That which transpired from the remarkable dialectic between the private and public, the near and the far, the local and the global, the so-called "centre" and so-called "periphery" was, to use Frederic Jameson's phrase, a "new play of absence and presence" (Jameson 411).

In this chapter, it is suggested that *isicathamiya* performances in the nineteen- thirties and forties embodied Bhabha's notion of *"unhomeliness"* in that, within certain song texts and performances of *isicathamiya*, choirs constructed a notion of "home" on which to ground themselves in the city. Even in Ladysmith Black Mambazo's nineteen- eighty- six album, there is a preoccupation with the notion of "homeliness" as is reflected in their song *Homeless:*

> *Emaweni webaba, Silal'emaweni*
>
> *Webaba, Silal'emaweni*
>
> *Silal'emaweni*
>
> *Webaba silal' emaweni*

> *[On cliff tops. We sleep on cliff tops!*
>
> *On cliff tops! We sleep on cliff tops...*
>
> *Our Lord, we sleep on cliff tops*
>
> *We sleep on cliff tops.*
>
> *Our Lord, we sleep on cliff tops*

> *Sing: Homeless, Homeless*
>
> *Moonlight sleeping on the midnight lake*
>
> *Homeless, homeless, homeless*
>
> *And we are homeless, homeless*
>
> *We are homeless*

Moonlight sleeping on the midnight lake.]

Inhliziyo yami, inhliziyo yami, inhliziyo yami

Inhliziyo yami, inhliziyo yami, inhliziyo yami

Angibulel' amakhaza; angibulele mina

Inhliziyo yami, inhliziyo yami, inhliziyo yami

Somandla angibulele mina amakhaza, We Ma

Thululu ... thululu ... thululu ... lu ... (humming)

[My heart, my heart, my heart

My heart, my heart, my heart

Wintry conditions have corroded me; they have really corroded me

My heart, my heart

Almighty God, coldness destroyed me. It destroyed me, oh, Ma

Thulu ... thululu ... thululu..lulu (humming)]

Strong winds, strong winds

Destroy our homes

Many dead tonight, it could be you

And we are homeless, homeless

Moonlight sleeping on the midnight lake

Homeless, homeless, homeless

And we are homeless, homeless

We are homeless

Moonlight sleeping on the midnight lake...

Somebody sing, Hii..ii..Yi..ii..J..hhi..ki

Somebody sing, hallo, hallo, hallo

Somebody cry why, why, why?

(Ladysmith Black Mambazo, extract from: *Ladysmith Black Mambazo Favourites,* translated by Mqondisi Ngcobo)

It is suggested that *isicathamiya* performances not only aptly capture Jameson's phrase but also that they are inconceivable without this figurative *"play"*. Hence, I argue that in the nineteen-thirties and forties, *isicathamiya* was sung to connect singers with the bounded community that the homestead represented, as the migrant experience resulted in a desire to establish a foundation on which to fix identity:

The very essence of the migratory experience [included] the blurring and dislocation of boundaries, an interim state, existence in a liminal position. [It was] labour migrants who [were] identified as 'the wanderers of the world in which the dichotomies of the past and future; here and there; dwelling and travel; centre and periphery, become enmeshed with each other' (Erlmann *Nightsong* 110).

Whether one thinks of men of life worlds as migrant labourers, peasant proletarians or members of displaced communities is only of secondary importance here. The point is that, more than anything else, it is the uncertainty and instability experienced at the interstices of the world of wage labour and the world of subsistence production that characterised the predicament of South Africa's labouring masses, not any specific class designation as such.

Millions of black South Africans were compelled to exist in the insecure interstices between wage labour employment and other forms of production. The following two songs, located on the album *Zulu Worker Choirs in South Africa* reflect on the realities of the world of wage labour: the first entitled *Ngifuna imali* speaks of the neccessity to leave the homestead and family and the second extract from a song entitled *Sawubona Baba* speaks of a family left behind by the head of their household, detailing the conditions they are enduring:

> *Ngifuna imali baba nomama*
> *Baba good bye.*
> *Mina ngifuna imali.*
> *Bonke abantu baba nonama thula du.*

> *[I want money, father and mother.*
> *Father, goodbye.*

I want money.

Everybody, father and mother, keep quiet.]

(track 6: Zulu Worker Choirs in South Africa: Isicathamiya: translated by Mqondisi Ngcobo*)*

... Yena washiya umakoti nabantwana

bayahlupkeka ekhaya.

Wayehamba eyosebenza manje

Sekuphele iminyaka eyishumi singazi

Ukuti washonaphi.

Sifuna ukubuya nawe mfowethu

Siyabona abantwana.

Vela, vela, vela mfowethu woza

Musa ukucasha ngabanye.

[He left his wife and children; they are

Suffering back home.

He went in search of work, but now

Ten years have passed without us

Knowing his whereabouts.

We want to take him back to see the children.

Avail yourself, brother, do not hide behind others!]

(track 15: Zulu Worker Choirs in South Africa: Isicathamiya: translated by Mqondisi Ngcobo)

In the language of anthropology the migrant existence could perhaps be better described as an:

*... all-pervasive state of off-centeredness, of fractured identities and of perceptual displacement. It [was] a whole social microcosm in itself, a complete way of life with its own set of rules, symbols and meanings (*Erlmann *Nightsong* 109).

Through song, migrant workers invoked images with which they were familiar to transcend the realties of their lives in the city. Given their strangely oscillating experience, migrant performers' *isicathamiya* songs, lyrics and choreography were potent resources for action, that aimed at the definition of a social space and at a secure location within their multiple, contradicting worlds. Participating in *isicathamiya* enabled individuals who were "de-centred", so to speak, to reconstruct their universe in their own controllable terms.

Migrant experience communicated through performance featured outside of the boundaries of social control. It was in the practice of *isicathamiya* that performers carved out a space in which their bodies were seen to be a site of resistance; hence, they

functioned as agents of change and posed an alternative conceptualisation of self to that which the hegemonic order offered migrants. *Isicathamiya* became a vehicle of expression, a voice of difference that emerged out of a sense of displacement, a loneliness, a longing and a remembering of that which home represented. The "world-in-the-home" and the "home-in-the world" constituted a total reality for migrants and *isicathamiya* performers as it enabled migrants to occupy a space in society, a half-way house between the homestead and city, between South Africa and the world (Erlmann *Nightsong* 121).

Isicathamiya was (and is still) a community-based genre, and created a "home" out of the migrant worker community and township audience. "Competitions were then and are now the life artery of *isicathamiya* music and rooted in rural forms of group conflict as well as in urban middle-class performance practices at the turn of the century" (Erlmann, *A Conversation with Shabalala* 43).

b) The tropes of "unhomeliness" in isicathamiya:

It is in key tropes of *"unhomeliness"* (the *crowd and machine*) in song texts that the *unhomely* was mediated and configured and to which *isicathamiya* performers constantly reverted to in order to structure, reflect upon and ultimately render their practice meaningful. The first trope, that of the crowd, echoes Walter Benjamin's phrase, "the secret presence of the crowd" (Benjamin 122). Moving about town was regarded by South African migrants as a metaphor for dislocation, as the urban landscape was seen as

a more or less chaotic "assemblage of people without a shared moral foundation, a space people of every conceivable variety inhabit[ed] side by side" (Erlmann *Nightsong* 127):

> *The migrant experience[d] the urban built-up space and the soulless masses as diametrically opposed to his or her centredness within the circular enclosure the umuzi [the homestead] ... [represented. In comparison] to the anchorage [which was to be] found in the network of pathways and spatial divisions that link[ed] semi-autonomous yet interdependent homesteads and districts [in the countryside, the migrant found the city a place of dislocation]* (Erlmann 127).

South African migrants' experience of the city had them liken people in the city with the machine as "the pedestrians in the street act[ed] as if they have adapted themselves to the machines and could express themselves only automatically" (Benjamin 133).

The second trope, of which Benjamin spoke, the machine, was presented in two forms: the train and the gambling machine. On the one hand, the train was portrayed by migrants as a "predator that abduct[ed] the girlfriend but sometimes it was invoked to convey messages to the relatives at home" (Erlmann *Nightsong* 128). Noteworthy, is the fact that this representation of the train differs from the depictions found in other genres of migrant performance, such as in Basotho *lifela* where the train is personalised and demonised as a madman. An example of the train's appearance in *isicathamiya* is to be found in a song by *The Crocodiles*. A sense of the content in *isicathamiya* songs is visible in the following song by *The Crocodiles*:

Leader: *Isitimela saseMampondweni sihamba njalo sibange enyakatho*

[Here is a train bound for Pondoland, also heading for the North]

Nas 'is 'timela s 'qudl 'uMtata

[Here is the train going past Umtata]

Chorus: *Isitimela saseMampondweni sihamba njalo sibange enyakatho*

[Here is a train bound for Pondoland, also heading for the North]

Nas 'is 'timela s 'qudl 'uMtata

[Here is the train going past Umtata]

Leader: *Si...*

[It...]

Chorus: *Sisuk 'e Thekwini, kwashis 'a phantsi*

[It is from Durban, you can see from the rails.]

Hamba njalo ukhonze kubazali.

[Go, train, and send greetings to our parents.]

Nas'is'timela sawa maBhunu.

[Here is the train of the Boers]

Sisho sithi "khu-khu-khu".

[It is going "khu-khu-khu".]

(SABC LT 10,158, B1: translated Mqondisi Ngcobo)

A rather basic metaphoric operation was set in motion: the train was turned into an ally on the part of the migrant labourers and asked, symbolically, to bridge the gap between the very space that separated the young migrants from their kin. There existed a strangely ambivalent relationship with the train: it was a means that enabled migrants to transcend the spatial divisions between the homestead and the city; metaphorically the songs were filled with the onomatopoeic "khu-khu-khu" of automation. The rhythmic representation of the train came closer than rich poetic imagery would to the essence of the experience of the worker at the machine. The "khu-khu-khu" produced by the train was representative of the drill of a factory worker, "the unceasing motion of automation" (Benjamin 132).

c) "Homed" through song:

The "*unhomely*" entered into *isicathamiya* performers' daily practice at every moment as they struggled to maintain a connectedness with that which "home" represented while existing in the city streets day after day. At the same time, as we have seen, it resonated through stark imagery, both verbal and embodied: the *unhomely* spoke of disorientation, uncertainty and ambiguity (Erlmann 133). The "home" (khaya), on the contrary, echoed the distant past, idealising the past of the family, order, affection and security.

Far from submitting to the shock of the "home-in-the-world" and "world-in-the-home", the performers of the night-song:

...[sang] of a past and future in which a truthful existence and an ordered social universe [were] anchored in, [a world] mutually enabled by a firmly framed world of local rootedness, tradition [as well as] sexual and collective identity. To harness, then, the instability of social action and meanings in capitalist society- to bring to a standstill the restless 'disembedding mechanism' of industrial society and its constant relocation and redefinition of people, things and meanings- the performers posed isicathamiya... [as an alternative to the "unhomeliness" of which Bhabha speaks] (Erlmann *Nightsong* 133).

This genre of performance did not present itself as an arrived form but continually struggling to pose an alternative to this state of *"unhomeliness" in* which South African migrants found themselves. The most fundamental destination of their journey was to take the performers of the night songs to a realm of wholeness, tradition, custom, closer to a sense of domestic cohesion and political allegiance.

Isicathamiya performance [was] tantamount to a mode of homing, its practitioners were both figuratively and in reality, homebound. To sing isicathamiya [was] to be at home: ekhaya. There exist[ed] in this art form, the unmaking of the unhomely and the remaking of the home through a complex edifice of symbols and bodily practice in performance (Erlmann *Nightsong* 133).

In "The Argument of Images and the Experiences of Returning to the Whole", James Femandez writes that "to construct an imaginatively integrated context, a stage for

satisfying performance, is the ultimate and recurrent strategy of the human experience",

suggesting that performance is the base of an exercise in restoration, a redemptive

activity in a profoundly afflicted and unsettled world (Fernandez 184).

The reassertion of alternative social practice hinged on the creation of temporal frames in

isicathamiya. By conflating the idea of play with night-time, *isicathamiya* practitioners

took into consideration and challenged the hegemonic temporal order and thus created an

alternative space for themselves, beyond that in which this order enabled them to exist.

Reconstruction of an integrated universe, of a totality of practice and world-view entailed

narrative, historiography, was in fact, a restructuring of time. As recent work on the

production of historical consciousness in modernising African societies amply

demonstrates, the *reinterpretation* of tradition, of selected metaphors, is the fundamental

strategy for the displaced, marginalised and powerless of Africa's neo-colonial societies

and aids in the creation of a positive self-identity (Erlmann, *Nightsong* 137). Hence, the

notion of tradition as essentially dialogic practice must inform all our attempts to

understand Black South African cultural practice, including *isicathamiya* performances.

As a space that is predominantly anchored in an imagined past, the *"home"* represented

an inverted utopia of sorts, a counter image of the *"unhomely."* Consequently, the

"home" as a symbol did not stand for the possession of a home. Rather, it denoted a

condition in which the blurred boundaries of the "world-in-the-home" and "home-in-the-

world" were redrawn as to keep distinct from each other the world and the home, and to

protect the latter from the destructive impact of the former (Erlmann *Nightsong* 139). An indication of the attempt to protect the notion of the home from being enveloped by the world is apparent in the names of the following *isicathamiya* songs: *"Ikhaya Lam'"* (*My Home*) by the GMC choir and *"Likude Ikhaya Lam'"* (*My Home Far Away*) by the Durban City Choir. [1]

> *Isicathamiya performance bound performers within a presumed harmonious and intact world, constructed a tightly sealed realm of habitus and local moorings. The root image of this vastly idealized, fictitious world being that of the home, khaya. An immensely multilayered term in the Zulu lexicon, khaya denotes the dwelling, an inhabited place, the homestead, a place to which one belongs. This term translates not so much as a location but as a set of relationships in space and time; it conveys a sense of what it means to live in a society in which everything flows from within and is mediated by the lineage* (Erlmann, *Music, Modernity* 211).

Isicathamiya performance reflected and at the same time enacted migrants' nostalgia for the home in a variety of ways. For instance, apart from the fact that most choirs consisted of a combination of men from the same kin group or area, *isicathamiya* choreography, through the association with wedding songs, evoked potent images of domestic unity and social control. A song text like the following stands for the acute sense of dislocation and yearning for the family at home that was voiced in many songs:

Nisibona silapha siphuma kude.

Siphuma le ebunzimeni.

Silapha nje sizula

Senziwa yindaba zokuhlupheka.

Sashiya abazali nezihlobo zethu.

Thina sihamba sifuna imali.

Ngihlupheka, ngihluphrka, ngihluphrka.

[As you see us here, we come from afar.

We come from afar.

As we are gear, we are roaming around

Because of suffering.

We left our parents and family.

We travel in search of money.

I suffer, I suffer, I suffer.]

*(unknown:*translated Mqondisi Ngcobo*)*

The disconnection from the centre of gravity of social life was perceived by migrants as the most troubling symptom of a derelict social order. The migrant experience was a state that brought intense discomfort as it included the forced separation from the family and *umuzi,* from a space in which "a complete life [could] be led" (Schlemmer and Moller 138).

Hence, this "return to the whole", as James Fernandez's work on metaphor and performance shows, is more than the goal of all symbolic practice. In a society that inflicted upon its black majority a ruthlessly oppressive minority rule, this retrieval of an imagined past takes on specific meaning. It can be seen as part of the semantics of a social order: one that extends migrants' retrospective quest beyond the realm of the personal and the family into the political and the public sphere. Through skilled manipulation of language, the juxtaposition of textual elements from seemingly disparate and disconnected semantic realms, *isicathamiya* migrant performers as Johnny Clegg has pointed out:

> ... *are interested in the tensions that result from the profuse overlapping of multiple and blurred semantic fields. There is a concern with the stylistic process of "building up significance", not with their significance as a value in itself. What isicathamiya choirs communicate, then, is not meaning as such, words or images referring to some content, but rather the ability to give meaning. To weave together praise poetry, proverbs, snippets of TV beer commercials and fragments of Zionist hymns is to move into style, to create symbolon* sic*, binding together elements that bring into relationship with one another experiential domains of masculinity in the modern world* (Erlmann 'Music, Modernity' 205).

Isicathamiya is a picture of a long and venerable tradition and although it is no longer part of the past, it still speaks to the past. And by the same token it is a representation of a

creative practice that, although it cannot be placed within the Western mainstream, does not stand outside the West. Rather, *isicathamiya* has all the discrepancies, failures, and figures of both tradition and modernity available to it.

Erlmann argues in this piece that "although the songs within the genre voice a quest for identity and security in a dramatically changed social universe similar to Paul Simon's songs, *isicathamiya* performance is driven by the same dilemmas of the modern world that also trouble Western sensibilities" (Erlmann, *Music, Modernity* 200). The dialogic relationship between the local and global is thus evident. It is with this in mind that we move toward a discussion of contemporary *isicathamiya* in its current form and how it relates to the scholarly work discussed thus far.

Notes to Chapter 3

[1] Most *isicathamiya* choirs seen at the YMCA regional competition and national competition called their choir a name that originated from their place of origin or region or school. Cohesive group identity is important.

It is Saturday night, the most important time of the week for many Zulu men living in

South Africa's bigger cities. This is when they get together for the weekly [isicathamiya]

choir competitions. This cultural tradition which has always blended the old with the new

has survived apartheid and is still going strong today (Sycholt *Mbube:The Night of the*

Lion).

Chapter 4: Contemporary *Isicathamiya* Performances: a local context

In this chapter I have adopted a comparative approach and set out to establish whether there are

thematic continuities and changes in contemporary *isicathamiya*. I ask if the thematic paradigms

seen in Erlmann's work on *isicathamiya* are still visible in current performances. The stylistic

characteristics of *isicathamiya* discussed include dance and dress. In discovering what is

articulated in current *isicathamiya* performances, two categories are suggested: the first category

encompasses songs of a residual nature and the second those of an emergent nature. In the final

section of this chapter the impact the media has had on *isicathamiya* is discussed. Finally,

attention has been paid to the far-reaching implications of current *isicathamiya*.

During the year 2000, I was fortunate enough to attend two separate Saturday-night *isicathamiya*

competitions. The first of my experiences occurred at the YMCA in Beatrice Road, Durban (a

ramshackle building which has a hostel section for migrant workers and a few rooms which are

used for migrant night-school). It so happened that this was the regional *isicathamiya* finals.

Eight choir performances were seen at the regional finals. My second experience of *isicathamiya*

was at the national *isicathamiya* competition between eighteen top choirs at the Playhouse Theatre in Durban. I endeavoured to find out, in the year 2000, if Veit Erlmann's observations still held true. Choir names, dance and dress are the first technicalities that come to mind. [1]

a)Technicalities of name, dance and dress and audience:

i) Naming: relevance hereof for 'isicathamiya' choirs:

In contemporary performances of *isicathamiya*, it held true that places of origin featured in the names of choirs: as Veit Erlmann had commented, "the names [are] the means by which the rift between this world of cities and segregation and the home is figuratively transcended". Names "organise the spatial experience of migrant performers by repositioning them in spaces that are less ambiguous than the amorphous 'here' of the factories and cities" (Erlmann *Nightsong* 153). At both the regional and national *isicathamiya* competitions attended, it was immediately deduced that choirs drew their members from the same town, region, workplace or school.

The *Pietermaritzburg Home Boys* were, as their name implies, from Pietermaritzburg and the *Royal Happy Singers* were from the same factory. [2] Names are turned into compact maps of spatial experience, complex topographic tropes, employed in the conception and transformation of South Africa's political, economic and cultural landscape. Through choir names, migrant performers redraw the cartography of a profoundly upset moral universe. The city to the *isicathamiya* is still an "other" and this notion is captured in the process of naming.

The name Ladysmith Black Mambazo is a characteristic of the modern *isicathamiya* group. The importance of regional origin and "homeboy" ties for the identity of this choir is reflected in the word Ladysmith. Ladysmith is the choir leader's (Joseph Shabalala's) home- town and is emphasised in the concluding formula, *Kumnandi kwelakithi eMnambithi (Ladysmith is a sweet place)* that Shabalala attaches at the end of most of his compositions (Erlmann, *Music, Modernity* 41).

ii) Dance as a means of communication

> ... *through dance and dress, isicathamiya performers seek to reform the offending system by rehabilitating the body...Isicathamiya choreography and dancers' uniforms reinsert the body's potential for symbolic representation* (Erlmann *Nightsong* 182).

Dance, Erlmann comments, is a special form of human communication that has implications beyond its immediate social uses and functions. Dance can be seen in *isicathamiya* principally as a means of constituting the self and redefining a self. Furthermore, in the context of *isicathamiya*, dance is considered the highest form of worship and spiritual communication with the ancestors. It constitutes (for example) the most sacred ritual activity in a wedding: a wedding is considered incomplete, spiritually empty and profane unless a bride has danced. As a result of the powerful communicative purpose available in dance, *isicathamiya* performers have appropriated key dance elements from the realm of weddings.

Another prominent feature of *isicathamiya* with regard to choreography, is the circular floor pattern. Before a choir moves onto the stage, the members form a ring, and with the leader in their midst, start the opening song in hushed voices. The circular pattern is associated with the cattle enclosure of the traditional homestead. Not all choirs appropriate all these dance and floor patterns in a like manner however. The fact is that *isicathamiya* dancers construct "spheres of corporeal interaction that metaphorically speak to the contrary location of the house in the city and its alienating set of social relationships" (Erlmann *Nightsong* 190).

iii) Dress in contemporary isicathamiya:

Contrary to the prevailing and apparently indelible image of migrants as politically conservative and culturally introspective, [they] eagerly sought to assimilate the old with the new, the indigenous with the foreign, the home with the diaspora [in performances]. They sang of the wisdom of Shaka but to the tune borrowed from the Christian missions; they modeled their choirs on the image of pre-colonial war regiments, but the dances bore the elegant mark of the urban flaneur (Erlmann 203).

The choirs seen at both the regional and national *isicathamiya* competitions were dressed in uniforms that consisted of suits (often double-breasted jackets or blazers), coloured shirts, ties, white gloves and two-tone shoes. The leaders often wore a different shade of suit or shirt in order to distinguish themselves from the rest of the group. The sports' jacket or suit are icons of respectability and achievement and emerged at a time when "dressed natives were still

considered somewhat ambiguously, as evidence of civilisation and a threat to that order. Choirs have developed idiosyncratic uniforms that suggest different, potentially counter hegemonic and more polysemic schemes of self-fashioning" (Erlmann, *Nightsong* 200).

Uniforms also appropriate select symbols of dominance and Western social structure. Sashes for example, index military power. Many components of stage dress such as the white gloves seemed to be, I suggest, reminiscent of jigs and reels becoming a form of local resistance, accepting the United States was a way of rejecting Pretoria and all that it represented in terms of segregationist politics (Ulf Hannerz *Sophiatown* 168).

According to Nixon, symbolic import of cultural appropriation, adaptions by *isicathamiya* performers of foreign styles rendered by urban culture is all the more immutable and thereby indisputably indigenous. The white gloves also suggest social advancement and refinement. These gloves, used extensively in choreography, express freedom from menial forms of manual labour and underscore the playful nature of *isicathamiya* nightsong.

A COSATU competition held in Pinetown, filmed by a team at the University of Natal in 1991 showed established *isicathamiya* groups in suits, while the younger choirs were of a more informal style displaying African print shirts popularised by Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Ladysmith Black Mambazo, shown at the Albert Hall in a clip on *People of the South* hosted by Dali Thambo on SABC 3, paraded what could be called African-style shirts. Typically local, were Ladysmith Black Mambazo's oufits featured on their *Graceland* tour: the group wore

bright orange-coloured shirts with colourful triangular patterns reminiscent of so-called Ndebele wall paintings: "Although these paintings were essentially invented by the tourist industry, they have come to signify the resilience of African tradition in South Africa" (Schneider, 1989).

It appears that in the most prevalent of the current styles, a more conscious effort is being made at setting *isicathamiya* performers apart from the constrained codes of the once dominant culture by foregrounding designs and fabrics emblematic of African cultures. I would like to reinforce this idea with the following quote:

> *The aesthetic splendour of shirts reaffirms fundamental indigenous principles of artistic production, for the creation of dense textures and multilayered, crowded surfaces in a great many African traditions of casual arts and performance, engender a surplus, an excess of meaning which invites multiple, intersecting readings and hence ensures the permanent re-construction of a multi-stranded yet unified web of social relations* (Erlmann *Nightsong* 203).

Uniforms, it is ascertained, are reflective of African culture (a dignified culture in which presentation and neatness are prominent features) and are hence worn to establish high standards of dress for performers and audiences alike. Dress competitions called "swanking competitions" apparently became popular in the nineteen-sixties and are an integral part of contemporary *isicathamiya* competitions. Swanking events provide the *oswenka*, as this is what the swankers are called, with a forum in which to act out the inherently competitive nature of capitalist

consumption and the fashion system (Erlmann *Nightsong* 199). Swanks seem to offer comment, I would argue, on the notion of a commodity-based culture in which the image is on sale.

iv) *The role of audience: active participants rather than passive recipients:*

The true value of *isicathamiya* lies in its social context, and audiences feature prominently in *isicathamiya* performances. I think that Erlmann's *Nightsong: Performance, Power and Practice in South Africa*, written in 1996, fails to reflect, in enough detail, on the presence and importance of the audience at *isicathamiya* competitions.

An interview with Isaac Nhlebela, leader of the *Nongoma Morning Stars,* spoke of three insightful rituals regarding the audience at the YMCA regional *isicathamiya* competition: supporters consist mainly, he explained, of urban girlfriends and supporters of particular choirs and performers. On occasion, women supporters may press money into the hands of performers whose voices they admire, showing their appreciation for the musical talent. Audiences are also able to request songs that they would like to hear: when a member of the audience wishes to hear a particular song by the choir that is rehearsing, he/she pays one rand to the chairman for a request. The choir is then compelled to sing that song. According to David Coplan, this practice of "concert-bidding" can be traced back to the nineteen-twenties when the audiences at minstrel performances initiated this ritual (Coplan 86-7).

Secondly, it was discovered that each gesture from women supporters is meaningful: sometimes women may point demonstratively at a performer, indicating a relationship exists between him and her. And lastly, if a woman supporter touches her breast, it refers to the fact that she has had the man's child. Performers of *isicathamiya* are not offended if members of the audience doze-off and one sees many members of the audience sleeping. After a short sleep, audiences are seen doing a steady trot to and from what is called the "kitchen" where eat and drink are sold to raise money for the *isicathamiya* venue at which the respective competition is held.

b) Performance style:

In performance participants followed, what seems to be, a characteristic *isicathamiya* display formation: when beginning, the leaders stood in front of the choirs while the other members formed a line behind them. The march-like linear arrangement seemed to connote an aspect of pre-colonial social practice: that of warfare. The most telling symbolic cross-referencing performers made in this respect, was to the formation of regiments in single lines or to the breaking-up of a unit into strands by the war leader. This image of a marching regiment going to war, as *Jama Stars'* leader Wellington Dlamini told Caesar Ndlovu, is in the minds of performers proceeding to the stage. "When we go to the stage", Dlamini said, "we go there with the enthusiasm of the regiments" (Erlmann *Nightsong* 190).

A transformation occurred between what could be called the two main phases of an *isicathamiya* night, *prakthisa* and *kompithi* (Erlmann *Nightsong* 199). As the night progresses, choirs gear

themselves for the final contest and a strangely inverted movement in style takes place; this transition symbolises in situation the passage from the contradictory world of industrial rationality to the pure realm of aesthetic beauty. Street clothes, coats, and other wear connected with the workplace give way to stylish attire. In a similar way, uniforms replace the unsystematic assortment of individual garments worn during *prakthisa,* and cleanliness and tidiness supersede drabness and grime. These journeys across the fashion landscape and between different states of being affected, even contaminated by the environment, represent a move toward social advancement and construct a narrative about performers' social histories, real and imagined.

c) "Residual" and "emergent" cultural elements:

In any culture, there exist available elements of the past but their place in the contemporary cultural process is profoundly variable. The most enlightening comparison between the scholarly work of Veit Erlmann and the *isicathamiya* performances I have witnessed emerges out of thematic content. Tropes and themes identified by Erlmann do re-emerge in contemporary songs however, and new themes can be identified. Hence, there exist not only what Raymond Williams would describe as "residual" elements of culture but also what he would describe as "emergent" elements of culture (Williams 123). The "residual", according to Raymond Williams, " has been effectively formed in the past, but is still active in the cultural process [of the present], is not only and often at all an element of the past, but an effective element of the present" (Williams 122-3). In contemporary *isicathamiya,* traces of the "residual" were found but performances depended

largely on the "emergent": new tropes or adaptations of themes, new meanings and values, practices, relationships and kinds of relationships.

i) *"Residual" cultural elements:*

The opening lines of the song by the *Pietermaritzburg Home Fighters*, "*Sanibonani Afrika*", merges into prayer and then a version of *Tshotsholoza*, the song telling of a train coming around a mountain. The train is a reminder of the trope of which Erlmann and David Coplan have spoken, that of the locomotive carrying migrant workers from their homes to work in the urban centres. Hence, this song is inherently "residual" in its content as it reiterates a trope that has effectively been formulated in the past but is still active in the present. In an ebullient performance by the *Pietermaritzburg Home Fighters*, the onomatopoeic title, *Tshotsholoza*, hooting and mimetic shuffling is seen to evoke its subject and encourage audience participation.

Another "residual" element of culture, the familiar theme of township versus the rural home, is addressed in many contemporary songs. Throughout performances, it seems that the physical and psychological well-being of performers is ensured by reverting back to the theme of the "home". In essence, group identity is reinforced by drawing on common memories and a collective sense of the rural hinterlands that singers call "home". Joseph Shabalala reinforces the significance of the rural "home":

All the time when you compose a song you must make the group happy first of all. Talk to them, and tell funny stories. Remind them of back home. Birds: throwing a stick to the birds. And maybe talk about weddings. Beautiful girls... in our days as we grew up, take that from back home. And now we are in church. Now we are here in big towns- but we are still in the same place, it's all earth. Now we are here. We supposed to give something, the idea we have, where we come from. And then you let them talk. Talk easy stories. Make them enjoy...(Ballantine 251).

"Home" and belonging are still seen to be pertinent in many *isicathamiya* performances. "Home" is identified as synonymous with the natural landscape. The tie to the organic world whilst living away from it is given breath and voice in *isicathamiya* song. Indigenous tradition is invoked as a source of strength and western ideals are rejected as a substitute for the familiar, western ideals appear to be foreign and unfamiliar:

Bansundu Bantu Bakithi Makesiyeke

Ukugxambukela ezintweni zabase Ntshonalanga

Sesibanqobile

Abangenahlazo lokuhushulwa kwezisu

kepha thina bengabadi siyayihlonipha imvelo

yomphefumulo ngob'ivela kuSomandla

Phela thina bendabuko isiko lethu: uma owesefazane

Ephuphunyelwe yisisu uyafake inzilo

Ahloniphe amadholzi alinde sigeze

Ngoba naye lomtwana uyidlozi

.

[Blacks, People of our Land, Let's stop

Interfering with Western Ideals

We have conquered them,

They, who, do not view abortion as a taboo/scandal

But we, as Africans, respect the nature of the soul

Because soul / spirit is nature to the Almighty.

According to our customs, when a woman has had a miscarriage,

She wears traditional mourning garments respecting the ancestors,

Not mentioning the fact that the miscarried baby is in itself an ancestor.]

(Group 6: National *isicathamiya* Festival: November 2000, trans Mqondisi Ngocobo) [2]

Cognisance should be taken of the poet's insistence on tradition, custom and the spiritual. Since it is largely the "traditional" aspects of culture that give Africa its identity in the world scene, much more interest is now being shown in African traditions than ever before. In the midst of all the social changes taking place and the clamour for social and economic development, one finds considerable emphasis on the political scene, on traditionalism as a force for transforming and

invigorating contemporary cultural life, a force giving it an African quality. It is in the context, this wave of traditionalism, this assertion of cultural identity that questions of and interest in the preservation and presentation of traditional music is being stimulated. Culture is seen as a resource but used in different ways by different *isicathamiya* groups. Here, a conservative cultural nationalism is evident. In contrast, some *isicathamiya* groups speak of the progressiveness with which the present government has operated on this exact issue (abortion).

Recognisably, *isicathamiya* performances continually create a cultural space for not only Zulu speakers of KwaZulu-Natal but also for black South Africans as a whole. The prevalence of custom as compared to Western education is extended in the following song that comments on the innate wisdom which elders in the rural hinterland possess:

> *Kulezi yantaba ezimabedlan*
>
> *Zingikhumbuz ekhaya lapha ngahamba khona*
>
> *Ngofika ngithini ekhaya*
>
> *Ngahamba ngingavalelisanga nghisho nomphako*
>
> *Ubaba wathi kimi "Mntanami. Ayikho impunga yehlathi.*
>
> *Hamba juba bayokuchuta phambili".* [3]

> *[To those breast-shaped mountains*
>
> *They remind me of my household*
>
> *Where I left my umbilical chord,*

What am I going to say to my household

Since I left without bidding, Good bye!

Coming back without remittance

My father once said to me

"My son, there is no ultimate 'clever' in this world

You can leave, but you will find those more clever than you".]

(Group 16: National *isicathamiya* Festival: translated by Mqondisi Ngcobo)[4]

ii) "Emergent" cultural elements:

Contemporary performers, I would like to suggest, employ the framework of *isicathamiya* to raise "emergent" issues and communicate contemporary concerns. Shabalala, discussing the contemporary purpose of *isicathamiya* songs in an interview with Christopher Ballantine maintains that "music is for peace. When you sing [he says], you feel like you want people to come together and love each other and you share ideas" (Ballantine 245). He adds:

Today, in the 'new' South Africa, the urgency I feel to reach out through music has not diminished. Partly because of the new context I have recently found song writing very difficult. For instance, I recently struggled to put together my recent album Thuthukani Ngoxolo: Let's Develop in Peace. My album Ukuzala ukuzeluza (To bear children is to

extend one's bones) is a case in point: the recording is an unprecedented amalgam ^{sic} of

isicathamiya, amahubo (pre-colonial religious songs) and isigekle (wedding songs), in

which Ladysmith Black Mambazo combines with new male and female vocal forces. This

convergence of genders is surely the most striking feature of the amalgam ^{sic}, for in its

history, social structure, musical configuration, symbolism and significance, isicathamiya

is profoundly and exclusively marked as a male domain (252).

"This convergence of gender" about which Shabalala speaks here is a significant dynamic that emerged in my own experiences of contemporary *isicathamiya*. In the following song a female choir member made her appearance:

Sashile isibonelo enasikhombisa

Amanye amazwe ngalolukheto lika 1999

Ngendlela enaziphatha kahle ngayo kukhombisi

Ukukhula komqondo

Ukuthukhutela nakushiya emaphepheni okuvota

Manje-ke thina sesilindele abahloi bethu

bakhombise ukukhula njengoba thina

sesikhombisile izwe lonke ubuqotho bethu

Masiqhubekeni njalo ngokuziphata kwethu okuhle.

[You set a good example

During the 1999 elections

The way you behaved showed some mental maturity.

You left your emotions in the ballot papers

Now the ball is in our leaders' courts

To show this maturity as we did.

Keep up the good behaviour.]

(Group 10: National *isicathamiya* Festival: translated by Mqondisi Ngcobo) [5]

As Shabalala has pointed out, this is out of the ordinary in terms of the male-dominated performance genre *isicathamiya.* The "emergence" of women in *isicathamiya* performances is comparable with the "emergence" of women in Basotho migrant song *(difela).* [6] For migrant women, *difela* (though not referred to by that specific name) provides a medium of collective self-expression and emotional reflection on the quality of their lives, their hopes and their inalienable human dignity. Song is a medium whereby Basotho women enjoy poetic licence and gain through performative eloquence a degree of personal authority otherwise denied to them.

Isicathamiya can perhaps expect the "emergence" of female-dominated choirs who bring forth their views in a public context and signify an independence of spirit. South African *isicathamiya* could come to represent a space in which black women could exercise relative choice and embrace opportunities for independence. Women's songs could proclaim a resolute, individualistic and adventurous spirit, contrary to the binding domestic commitment expected of

them in the rural homestead. Women's *isicathamiya* is a resource which, if mobilised, could illuminate migrant workers' consciousness and make known the cognitive sources of the African struggle for self-determination in South Africa.

Another element that features prominently in the "emergent" practice of contemporary *isicathamiya* is a certain didactic essence, namely, the potential one has if one is educated. An uneducated individual is regarded as "left behind" and the young are encouraged to seize the opportunities they have to become educated:

> *Ngiswele imilomo ibe*
>
> *Yinkulungwane ngitshele bonke*
>
>
> *Abantu ngokubaluleka kwemfundo*
>
> *Babusiswe abantwana abancune*
>
> *ngoba bona banethuba lokuqhubeka nemfundo.*
>
> *Kusasa yibo abazohola izwe*
>
> *Bazali siyanincenga thumelani*
>
> *Abantwana esikoleni*
>
> *Izizwe zonke ziyasihleka*
>
> *Zithi "awubheke abamnyama*
>
> *base Afrika".*

[I run out of words

To tell everyone about the importance of education.

Young people are blessed because they have the chance to learn.

They are the future leaders of this country

Parents: we beg you,

Send your children to school.

Other nations are mocking us:

They say: "Look at these Blacks in Africa. (They are still left behind)".]

(Group 9: National *isicathamiya* Festival: translated by Mqondisi Ngcobo) [7]

iii) The ordinary as extraordinary:

The Xolo *Home Boys* at the regional and national *isicathamiya* competitions sang of violence, death and AIDS, and like many of the *isicathamiya* groups were seen to display AIDS' ribbons on their uniforms, presumably to raise an awareness of the disease. [8] Listening to these songs, I was reminded of words first spoken by Njabulo Ndebele in an article entitled *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa*: "the water will continue to flow, only it is destined to become sweeter, if only because more life-sustaining minerals, the minute essences, will have been added to it" (Ndebele 50).

Listening to the content of the *Xolo Home Boys* song, one could argue that the "water ha[s] not become sweeter" (ibid). I agree with T.T..Moyana's observation that "the difficulty for the creative artist in South Africa, especially the black writer, is that life itself is too fantastic to be outstripped by the creative imagination" (Moyana 95-96). The ordinary itself, "the place where cultural and political encounter each other as realities rather than through the meshes of pre-constructed concepts or slogans or symbols" seems rather extraordinary (Tony Morphet 129).

The extraordinary nature of that which occurs in the ordinary daily lives of South Africans is represented in the following texts from the national *isicathamiya* festival:

Kuyadabukisa okwenzeka kulomhlaba

Wake wasilaya owadala isibhamu

Nyaka nonyaka kuhlala kukhalwa ngenxa yesibhamu

Baphelile abantu emhlabeni-yasha yaphele imizi yisi bhamu

[What happens in this world saddens

The person who invented the gun is an agent of this destruction

Each and every year, we cry because of the gun

People are killed every year, we cry because of the gun

People are killed in this world-households burning because of the gun.]

(Group 2:National *isicathamiya* Festival: translated by Mqondisi Ngcobo) [9]

In the second text, South Africans are awakened to the sobering reality of the violence within South African society namely, the rape statistics in this country:

South Africa: Vuk'ukhanye singabantwanyana

thina base Africa

Siyacela Hhulumeni wethu uqinise ingalo yomtheto

Sisho ngoba thina wonk' umhlaba wonke

Sekubulawa abantu sekugobhoza igazi

Ngicel' ukubuza nobaba wahonaphi unembeza

Ngoba imihla yonke sekudulwengulwa izingane

Khona into eyodwa engixakayo kunina

Sekukhona labo sisi abathengisa ngemizimba yabo

Yini ningayi kubo nina?

[South Africa, rise and shine: we are the children of Africa

We request our government to make the law take its course

We say this because, worldwide, there is killing and bloodshed

May we ask you, fathers: where have your consciences gone?

Because, almost everyday children are raped

There is one thing that confuses me about you

Now that there are prostitutes:

Why can't you go buy it from them?]

(Group 4: National *isicathamiya* Festival: translated by Mqondisi Ngcobo) [10]

iv) The impact of the media on isicathamiya:

When Nelson Mandela, just released from twenty-seven years' imprisonment, visited

Detroit on a historic first tour of the United States, he surprised audiences there with a

striking familiarity with soul music and Motown. The music of Marvin Gaye, Mandela

told a jubilant crowd, had provided solace during the long and lonely days of his

incarceration....It is in this sense that Mandela in his Robben Island cell, like millions of

black listeners in South Africa had accepted soul" (Erlmann *'Music, Modernity'* 246).

The rapid expansion of radio broadcasting in South Africa impacted upon the evolution of

isicathamiya performance. The development of broadcasting services for the major

African languages had been one of the apartheid regime's top priorities after it came to

power in 1948 and when the SABC's black stations, dubbed Radio Bantu, went on the air in

1962, it was by far the most powerful broadcasting service on the entire continent, reaching up to

97% of the country's black population (Erlmann *Music, Modernity* 207).

The goal of radio Bantu was to propogate the apartheid mythology of "separate development", and to obtain black South African's assent to the idea of the homelands as a blueprint for development. To accentuate these broader political objectives, in the early nineteen- sixties, a vast amount of traditional music, sustaining as it allegedly did the apartheid engineer's hygienic vision of separate "tribal" identities, was recorded in the field and broadcast regularly on all vernacular services. [11]

The audience for *isicathamiya*, especially the songs that were recorded and played on the radio, rapidly spreading among black communities, urban and rural. Ladysmith Black Mambazo were wealthy men before their discovery by Paul Simon. However, through their participation in the *Graceland* album, they became part of the globalization process. Hundreds of *isicathamiya* choirs who are not professional or commercial and unrecorded participate in choir competitions.

Isicathamiya remained the favourite of both broadcasters and listeners. With its nostalgia for the countryside and dislike for the city, *isicathamiya* seemed ideally suited to serve the interests of state and capital. Noticeably, the perception the people have of the media has changed with the transformation of society, as will be revealed in the following lyric:

> *Thina siyakubonga MTN ngokusizhumanisa nomhlaba wonke.*
>
> *Sibonga nakuwe Khozi olumaphiko ngokusixhumanisa no-MTN*
>
> *Noma kukhon'izinkinga wena ufika nesixazululo ngokushesha*
>
> *Sibona abantu behleka bodwa bemamatheka ngawe MTN*

Wena mavula kuvaliwe MTN

[We thank you MTN for connecting us to the whole world

We thank you Khozi FM for clinching a deal between us and MTN

Even in times of problems; you always come up with quick solutions.

We see people laughing; smiling about you, MTN.

You, who does the unexpected, MTN.]

(Group 1: National *isicathamiya* Festival: translated by Mqondisi Ngcobo) [12]

v) Beyond South African borders:

Culture-making in South Africa is currently fluid as it is able to make use of a bricolage of the local and global, work beyond categorizations, boundaries, margins and centres and function in reciprocal worlds. Shabalala for example, I argue, is simultaneously what could be called "world-focused" and "locally-focused". Furthermore, in present-day *isicathamiya* performances, there is a sense of local and global interconnectedness, of transnational dialogue: this is seen in the following song in which the value of education is foregrounded. Singers reflect upon our citizens in relation to the rest of the world, hence there is a sense of the global and local:

Hambanini nonke niye esikoleni

Niyothola imfundo nenqubeko

Zintombi Zakithi hambani niyofunfa njengezinye izizwe niyothola

Inquebekela phambili

Bafundi...lapha e-South Africa siyabadinga ochwepheshe kuyoyonke imikhakha

yemfundo.

[All of you, go to school

To achieve education and prosperity

Our girls; go to school and learn like other nations are doing-learn so as to prosper.

Boys...Here in South Africa we need specialists in all fields of education.]

(Group 3: National *isicathamiya* Festival: translated by Mqondisi Ngcobo) [12b]

In the time between seeing the performers at the YMCA in April and the performers at the Playhouse in November, I find myself with more questions than conclusions. I trust my anxieties regarding the mediation of texts through translation and carving out of meaning of texts with literary tools have not affected my findings. Observations have suggested that Erlmann's detailed and comprehensive account of *isicathamiya* presents in many aspects a past view of an oppressed culture rather than a present view of an emergent culture. In a postcolonial South Africa with an enfranchised, unionized and increasingly urbanized population as well as an increased entrepreneurship and a large informal trading sector, there is necessarily greater urban

consciousness than Erlmann allows. *Isicathamiya* is a polysemic vehicle of post-apartheid South Africa.

I conclude that in the year two-thousand, *isicathamiya* has displayed thematic evolution: the performance pattern characteristic of *isicathamiya* still flourishes; however, new issues are being voiced. Poets are embracing topical issues: violence, AIDS, education, abortion and global interconnectedness. Poets' comments reflect changing times and hence, *isicathamiya* is no longer the voice of the subaltern but continues to be a popular voice of difference.

Notes to Chapter 4

[1] I was fortunate enough to attend both a regional *isicathamiya* competition in 2000 as well as the national *isicathamiya* festival. Thanks to Liz Gunner for making these visits possible, to my translators Mqondisi and Solomuzi for your assitance and to those who joined us at *isicathamiya* Nightsong.

[2] The information regarding the performers'origins was obtained at performances. Audiences were communicative and I am grateful to those individuals who assisted me in my endeavours.

[3] This is a primary, contemporary text (original text) heard at the national *isicathamiya* festival at the Playhouse Theatre in November 2000. Thanks to Solomuzi Mabuza for the transcript and Mqondisi Ngcobo for translating the text.

[4] The reference to a Zulu proverb in this song text reminds one of commentary on Zulu proverbs by Cyril Lincoln Sibusiso Nyembezi.

[5] This is primary, contemporary text (original text) heard at the national *isicathamiya* festival at the Playhouse Theatre in November 2000. Thanks to Solomuzi Mabuza for the transcript and Mqondisi Ngcobo for translating the text.

[6] This is primary, contemporary text (original text) heard at the national *isicathamiya* festival at the Playhouse Theatre in November 2000. Thanks to Solomuzi Mabuza for the transcript and Mqondisi Ngcobo for translating the text.

[7] For extensive reading on Basotho migrants, consult David Coplan's *In The Time of Cannibals: The Word of South Africa's Basotho Migrants* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994) OR R.E. Well's *An Introduction to the Music of the Basotho* (Lesotho: Morija Musuem and Archives, 1994).

[8] This is primary, contemporary text heard at the national *isicathamiya* festival at the Playhouse Theatre in November 2000. Thanks to Solomuzi Mabuza for the transcript and Mqondisi Ngcobo for translating the text.

[9] Attendance of performances enabled me to make these first hand observations.

[10+11] These tracks are original contemporary texts from the national *isicathamiya* festival at the Playhouse Theatre in November 2000. Thanks to Solomuzi Mabuza for the transcript and Mqondisi Ngcobo for translating the texts.

[12] Liz Gunner writes extensively on Zulu radio drama and has made invaluable contributions in this regard. Her most recent article appears in Nutall, Sarah and Michael, Cheryl-Ann. *Senses of*

Culture: South African Culture Studies. Cape Town: Oxford University Press of Southern Africa, 2000.

[12b] This is primary, contemporary text heard at the national *isicathamiya* festival at the Playhouse Theatre in November 2000. Thanks to Solomuzi Mabuza for the transcript and Mqondisi Ngcobo for translating the text.

Conclusion:

a) The dynamism of culture:

> *Studies of African music can no longer be directed solely towards a set of musical*
>
> *styles defined as "traditional" to the exclusion of more recent developments if*
>
> *they are to portray adequately the musical culture of a society or nation. The term*
>
> *"tradition" itself does not acknowledge the dynamism of culture. It implies a*
>
> *fixed, static, inorganic set of values or practices that, though rooted in history,*
>
> *are paradoxically immune to history* (Coplan 22).

It is here postulated that modes of expression such as auriture and literature change in conjunction with the dynamic transformation of society as a whole, and are thus constantly evolving areas of human experience. Musical styles are the product of social identities set within specific socio-historical parameters, and as such they are commentaries on these particular identities. The notion of music as having been passed down from generation to generation unchanged, as the "immutable expressions of specific culture immune to foreign influence, is a fallacy" (Wells Introduction). Musical styles, as with the cultures that create them, are subject to constant transformations. I would like to argue that the *isicathamiya* performances seen at the turn of the millennium have changed in conjunction with the dynamic transformation of society as a whole.

Performances can now be seen, I suggest, as elements of both "post-apartheid" and "post-colonial" literature.

In the last section of this thesis, I have gone beyond the theoretical concepts in which Veit Erlmann and other scholars have embedded *isicathamiya*. In crossing the terrain of the political and the literary, I have suggested that contemporary *isicathamiya* are elements of both the "post-apartheid and post-colonial" worlds of literature.

b) Isicathamiya as "post-apartheid" texts:

In conjunction with the emergence of a "post-apartheid" South African society (a society that not only seeks to transcend apartheid, but also carries with it the legacy of apartheid), what I consider to be, a "post-apartheid" *isicathamiya* performance style has emerged. The "post-apartheid" style carries within it the legacy of apartheid but strives to move beyond this legacy. This performance style endeavours to free the social imagination of the oppressed (from the laws of perception that have characterised apartheid society) by embracing the cultural imaginations of an 'imagined community': the community which performers create out of an urban audience (Anderson Introduction).

Isicathamiya texts, I suggest, locate themselves in the "post-apartheid" condition in terms of the reading of the past they offer, and in terms of how they interpret the past and the present, the urban and the rural.[1] Texts deliver a many-voiced discourse in a polyglossic language, carrying at once the voices and aspirations of many different groups (Bakhtin

167). More than that, *isicathamiya* texts reflect on the exchange of ideas between local and global communities, displaying the transcultural character of "post-apartheid" literature.

c) *Isicathamiya as postcolonial texts"*:

The intersection of the literary and the political has to do with the basic question of how the thematization of the political in literature helps or forecloses the possibility of imagining a passageway beyond the 'nervous conditions' engendered by the incoherences of the African post-colony (Quayson 93). One finds oneself asking how literature is able to reflect social reality, while at the same time rendering such social reality unsatisfactory and encouraging us to find ways of transcending it? The problem of how to link literature to politics without lapsing into a binaristic code is the dominant mode of thinking in this segment of work.

It is Biodun Jeyifo who suggests that post-colonial literature is essentially a writing back to the former metropolitan centre. Jeyifo takes a two-tiered approach to post-colonial writing, categorizing it in terms of what he calls the postcoloniality of "normativity and proleptic designation" and that of "interstitial or liminal postcoloniality" (Jeyifo 51-70).

The first category embraces that in which the writer or critic speaks to, or for, or in the name of the post-independence regional or continental community, the pan-ethnic,

racial or cultural agglomeration of homelands and diasporas. In Jeyifo's account, the "normativity" in this conception of postcoloniality often entails a return to the cultural sources, the projection of a futurist agenda, and the celebration of authenticity. This dimension of postcoloniality is often saturated with what could be described as an ethical will-to-identity - as an object lesson to his readers to prove that indigenous Africa had a viable culture before the white man came. It is impossible to deny that this "normativity" ultimately depends on a perception of literature as part of the contest against colonial hegemony, and that the implication of "writing back" to the centre is much in evidence.

Jeyifo's second category, that of "interstitial of liminal" postcoloniality, embraces what is normally perceived in the West as a metropolitan or hybrid sensibility (51-70). Jeyifo notes that:

> ...*the interstice or liminality here defines an ambivalent mode of self-fashioning of the writer or critic which is neither First World nor Third World, neither securely and smugly metropolitan, nor assertively and combatively Third-Worldist. The very terms which it expresses the orientation of this school of postcolonial self-representation are revealing: diasporic, exilic, hybrid, in-between, cosmopolitan* (Jeyifo 53).

The two forms of postcoloniality- "normativity and proleptic designation and intersital/ liminal"- are often expressed within the same text, so that sometimes it is

preferable to speak of the two poles as a dialectical continuum rather than as polarised and mutually exclusive entities (53).

I would like to suggest that *isicathamiya* texts express at once what Jeyifo categorizes as the 'normativity and proleptic designation and interstitial and liminal'. As such, it follows that I consider *isicathamiya* texts to be elements of post-colonial literature. Firstly, in performance, performers speak for a migrant community, a racial and cultural agglomeration of individuals. The "normativity" in this conception "entails a return to the cultural sources" of performers, a return to the resources that the home and homestead represent. Furthermore, the artful practice of present-day *isicathamiya* rests upon the authentic style of the early forms of *isicathamiya*. It is evident that performers rely upon an indigenous art form to produce "popular" music. An authentic form is adapted in order to adjust to the conditions faced in urban centres. Performances are saturated with what could be described as an ethical will-to-identity: it is upon this art form that migrants construct a sense of themselves, a foundation on which to depend in the city. *Isicathamiya* in the nineteen-forties spoke back to the engineers of apartheid, back to the local centre. In the nineteen-eighties, however, it spoke back to the global centre.

Secondly, *isicathamiya* performances express what Jeyifo categorizes as "intersital or liminal" in his discussion of the post-colonial (53). I would like to argue that isicathamiya performers exist in what could be called a liminal position, because they exist between the worlds of the rural and urban, the Third and First World. Performers

constantly borrow from both worlds, thus creating a migrant performance genre that is of a hybrid nature.

d) Re-imaginings in "post-apartheid" South African performance: the move away from the closed imagination

The notion of South Africa as a closed space has, for a long time, been seen to dominate cultural theorizing (Nutall and Michael Introduction). Studies of migrant workers and migrant worker's lives in South Africa have relied on South Africa's distinctiveness and difference. Although long-term lines of connection have existed between workers from South Africa and elsewhere on the continent, few studies have focused on the cultural dimensions of the continental mixing that has shaped and influenced worker identity in this country. David Coplan's study of the Basotho migrant's song (*difela*); Veit Erlmann's study of migrant performance in Gauteng and Kwazulu-Natal (*isicathamiya*) and Deborah James'study of women migrants, *kiba,* have, in differing degrees, begun to open new territories. However, these new areas are still within circumscribed geographical limits. [2]

> *It is possible that South Africa is one big game lodge where all its... citizens are struggling to make sense of their lives, like people who awake in an enormous vacation house which is now supposed to be theirs but which they do not recognise?* (Ndebele 16).

In the above quotation, Ndebele suggests that South African imaginings remain closed; he therefore signals the need for an opening of the South African imagination. As a result of Ndebele's suggestion, I am left wondering whether the imaginative closure associated with apartheid (the inability to think of South Africa as more than a closed space) has transformed in the new period of openings, in the "post-apartheid" era.

In writing this thesis, much has been gained from studying *isicathamiya* migrant performance in a re-imagined space, namely, the city of Durban. In studying *isicathamiya* migrant performances in Durban in conjunction with the dancing body in space, it is concluded that even in the most controlled space, such as in the centre of the city, *isicathamiya* performances have been connected with fantasy, meaning, memory and imagination. It seems that the city fuses and transforms, conjures up new imaginings based upon the old (that which has passed). Furthermore, the imagined has come to be seen, not as distinct from the "ordinary"; the boundaries between performance, artists and onlookers have come to be seen as integral elements of one another.

I conclude that migrant *isicathamiya* singers, in joining together to create new "home" bases or imagined homes, have moved beyond the imaginative closure of the apartheid era. In so doing, they have embraced the openness that the "post-apartheid" era offers and now have much to offer towards the making of culture in a contemporary world. New aesthetic forms of *isicathamiya* are not only pointing backwards to old identities but also to new, incorporative ones. Hence, new social and cultural spaces are being created. The opportunity to sing in new places results in the staking of one's claim, and the

"importation" of culture into new spaces. *Isicathamiya* communities are re-claiming their rightful spaces in the dispensation of "post-apartheid" South Africa.

Isicathamiya songs constitute an African discourse not only about Africa, but also these songs represent an attempt to both reject and embrace modernity as part of the same gesture. In their re-imaginings, *isicathamiya* migrant performers are able to author complex and multiple determined identities; identities that were not given from time immemorial, but historically produced in the uneasy confrontation with the West, the world system and the forces of modernity. Conversely, Erlmann shows how the disembedding logic of modernity promoted a reverse process, that of finding, amid the rampant ambiguities and insecurities of modern South African society, certainty and deliverance in a feeling of belonging at home (Erlmann *Music, Modernity* 211). *Isicathamiya* is what the Drum writer Es'kia Mphalelele, referring to township culture, would have called a fugitive culture: "borrowing here, incorporating there, retaining this, rejecting that" (Hannerz *Sophiatown*167).

A phase of *isicathamiya* that began with the release of *Graceland* and coincided with the end of apartheid rule may well continue into the present moment of the reconstruction of "post-apartheid" South African society. *Isicathamiya* singers, through the *Graceland* project, have demonstrated that they no longer think in terms of the local, closed imaginings of apartheid but are able to think in terms of the global, opened imaginings of the post-apartheid dispensation. In *isicathamiya*, migrants sing not only of the condition of migrancy; they also sing of the growing loss of agency and sense of continuity.

Something more is at stake than placelessness, something more existential and so utterly disquietening that it must inevitably belie any Western fantasies about an Africa at one with itself and the inner sources of human existence. The future story of *isicathamiya* will ever more be conjoined with other stories and other musics elsewhere on our planet.

For decades, South Africa has been thought about and written about as separate from the rest of the world. Its policies during the apartheid period, of legalized segregation on the basis of race, isolated it as the grotesque in the colonial historical narrative (Nutall and Michael Introduction). Yet, South Africa is also a place striking for its imbrication of multiple identities, identities that mythologies of apartheid, and of resistance to it, tended to silence. We must move away from imagining South Africa as a closed space, a place entrapped by boundaries and endeavour to re-imagine South Africa as an open space. New spaces for understanding cultural practice are necessary; new readings of sound and word are required. It now seems that new forms of imagining need to emerge and indeed are emerging.

Notes to the Conclusion

[1] By extension, the concept of a "post-apartheid" narrative is explored in Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1995). *Ways of Dying* tells the story of the eccentric professional mourner, Toloki. His odyssey takes him from a rural village community to the shabby, vibrant outskirts of a contemporary South African city where is confronted with Noria. The dynamic between Toloki and Noria enables them to heal the past. This post-apartheid novel speaks of the residual elements of apartheid and the emergent elements of post-apartheid South African society.

[2] David Coplan's study of Basotho migrants is to be found in: *In The Time of Cannibals: The Word of South Africa's Basotho Migrants* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994). Veit Erlmann's detailed account of *isicathamiya* migrant performers and performances is given attention in *Nightsong: Power and Practice in South Africa* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996). Deborah James's study of *kiba* music appears in her new book: *Songs of the Women Migrants: Performance and Identity in South Africa* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

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