

THE HIDDEN TRANSCRIPTS OF SACRED SONG IN A SOUTH AFRICAN COLOURED COMMUNITY¹

by

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One of my earliest memories of coloured farm workers is the sound of their hymn singing at Sunday morning church services. In my mind, these sounds became intimately connected with my visits to the Karoo, the name for the semi-desert landscape that surrounds the farming town of Graaff-Reinet. These childhood associations resurfaced when, early one Sunday morning in August 2004, I travelled into Kroonvale (the residential area for coloured people on the edge of Graaff-Reinet) to attend the morning service of the Uniting Reformed Church. Brown-red dust, typical of the Karoo, hung in the air as I drove. When I stepped over the church threshold, it seemed as if I collided with a powerful wall of sound. While the congregation sang “*Juig Aarde Juig*” (“Rejoice Earth Rejoice”) at full volume, I reflected on the anomaly of the utter silence about this music in the Graaff-Reinet Museum archive where I had spent the last month searching for historical evidence. As the service began, I looked around at the congregation from my position at the back of the church and realized that these distinct sounds, so thoroughly a part of this Karoo coloured community, survived only through their creation and possession by the many people sitting in front of me.

A common stereotype of those classified as “coloured” by the apartheid regime was that, because of their “mixed” racial heritage, they had no authentic racial or cultural identity and history. Nurtured and sustained by a policy of racial purity, the apartheid state held a deeply ambivalent position towards those it categorized as “coloured”, the racial group it defined as “not a white person or a native” (Statutes of the Union of South Africa 1950:277). These negative terms contributed to a construction of this social category as an absent, silent entity. Contemporary written sources typically convey coloured people’s ethnic identity, cultural history and musical heritage as similarly lacking.

In post-apartheid South Africa, this lingering stereotype has been countered by thoughtful studies of coloured history and identity (James, Caliguire and Cullinan 1996; Erasmus 2001). These tend to focus on the Western Cape region, however, where the majority of the coloured population lives. This article also contributes a counter-narrative, based in the Eastern Cape Province, by examining how the musical performance of coloured community members around the town of Graaff-Reinet reveals the history of

¹ This article constitutes one aspect of a larger project on the church music of the predominately Afrikaans-speaking coloured people who live near the town of Graaff-Reinet. I am very grateful to the Kroonvale community members for their generosity and kindness shown to me throughout my research process. I am also indebted to Carol Muller and the three reviewers for their comments and suggestions, Desmond Desai, who made me aware of *liederwysies* and their history in this country and Cameron Harris, who provided the computer notation for the musical examples. For the sake of consistency, I use the name “coloured” throughout this article, but I am fully aware that not all members of the Kroonvale community and the various communities beyond Graaff-Reinet would agree with this designation (see Wicomb 1998).

encounters between various peoples in this region. My fieldwork research on the church hymns and *koortjies* (choruses) reveals that sacred song dates back over two centuries in this community. It is also a combination of disparate musical and cultural sources, including Khoisan and Xhosa indigenous practices, mission Christianity and British and Dutch colonial influences. Using James Scott's theory of "hidden transcripts", I argue that the oral/aural history of church music in this region is embedded and archived in its sound. By doing so, I wish to make this rather ephemeral auditory history part of the written record. In what follows I outline Scott's theory and its application to this case study. I then explore the various origins of this religious music and describe how these origins combine to form the particular sound of congregational singing in this community. My conclusion contains a brief commentary on the significance of listening to the sonic manifestations of history, especially in the music of previously marginalized peoples.

Hiding Histories in Sound

James Scott defines the term, "hidden transcript" as the "discourse that takes place 'offstage', beyond direct observation by powerholders. The hidden transcript is thus derivative in the sense that it consists of those offstage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript". Scott defines the latter term as "a way of describing the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate" (1990:2, 4–5). He applies his theory to various historical and contemporary situations of resistance to political power and dominance. While I have analysed the possibilities of more overt anti-apartheid resistance strategies within this community elsewhere (2006:87–99), I wish to examine here the more subtle transcripts which are embedded in sacred song performance and revealed only through careful listening.

My approach necessitates that I expand Scott's theory in three ways. First, I believe that the preservation of oral history can also form part of a hidden transcript of resistance. The Kroonvale religious music I describe below contains powerful statements about the various encounters between historical actors in this region. Far from being a people and music without history, identity and culture (a designation implied and reflected by the official apartheid record), Kroonvale congregation members have ensured the survival of their past by archiving this knowledge within a community musical tradition (Muller 2002:409–412). While not an overtly political statement, nevertheless, I interpret the preservation of aspects of community history in seemingly innocuous church music as an expression of resistance.

My second adjustment to Scott's notion is that the hidden transcript does not necessarily always happen "offstage" and away from the dominant group's watchful gaze. He suggests something similar to this idea when he states that hidden transcripts can appear as a "veiled discourse of dignity and self-assertion within the public transcript" and cites folktales and the carnival ritual among other examples (1990: 137–138). The key element of these examples is that they are performed, both for the immediate community

and also for any powerholder who happens to be present, a characteristic also found in the ritualized performance of weekly church services. Although the latter can be interpreted as private events when seen in relation to state politics,² they are also public in the sense that large numbers of community members attend and any guests (regardless of religious or political affiliations) are welcome. Thus, the “public” transcript here is a formalized religious ritual consisting of pre-decided liturgy, sermon, prayers and sacred song, which is performed for all those present. Within this framework, I believe that community churchgoers regularly recreate the hidden transcripts of their musical history through song performance at these occasions.

Third, while Scott only briefly mentions the ability of song within oral tradition to act as a resistance medium (1990: 160–162), I am particularly interested here in listening very closely to the sonic manifestations of the rich history that belongs to this community. Perhaps due to the painful memories of oppression and apartheid, Kroonvale community members did not often talk about their past (see Field 2001; Denis 2003). Instead, I often heard traces of historical encounters in the music first and then, during the research I conducted, I focused particularly on obtaining substantiation of this aural evidence.

During my work on this article, I became increasingly aware that such hidden transcripts of preservation can be interpreted as a type of political resistance and survival mechanism (especially during apartheid), but now these have the potential to serve as important archives of memory, heritage and cultural identity in the context of post-liberation South Africa. These theoretical ideas necessitate a far larger project that aims at exploring community cultural history and memory through sound, a project that is beyond the scope of the present article. Thus, although these ideas inform my thinking around these issues, I restrict my investigation here to a description of how the sound of sacred music in this community reveals traces of historical encounters between groups and conceive of this work as preliminary research based on the notion of auditory history.

Background

Graaff-Reinet was established by British officials as a frontier outpost in 1786 and it is the fourth-oldest settlement in South Africa. Today, the town is a popular tourist destination for both local and overseas visitors as it boasts many buildings and sites of historic and environmental interest (see www.graaffreinet.co.za). In 2002, the total population was 24,229 (Statistics South Africa 2001). Although coloured people form the majority of Graaff-Reinet’s population, historical information about the coloured community in this town is relatively rare. Indigenous peoples such as the Khoekhoe

² South African history reveals a complex relationship between religion and politics, which complicates the private/public dichotomy even further. The most obvious example is the political role played by the Dutch Reformed Church, the official church of the apartheid state. In addition, after the banning of various anti-apartheid groups by the government, Archbishop Desmond Tutu explains as follows, “[p]rior to February 1990 we often held political rallies under the guise of church services. Such actions were politically necessary and theologically correct” (Tutu in Villa-Vicencio 1996:276).

and San lived in the area before the arrival of *trekboers* (Dutch-speaking farmers). The smallpox epidemic of 1713 and *trekboer* commandos³ mostly decimated these existing populations (Dooling 1989; Newton-King 1999). It is also known that these farmers brought slaves with them on their journey into the interior and they relied upon the remaining Khoekhoe and San people for labor supplies. Colonists in the early 19th century estimated that the region's population comprised 4,000 white farmers, with approximately 1,000 slaves and anything from 9,000-25,000 Khoisan servants (Elbourne 2002:83-84). The slaves and Khoisan people worked mainly for the farmers. The descendants of these servants (designated as "coloured" since 1904) form part of the contemporary Graaff-Reinet community.⁴ In addition to farm work, coloured people are employed as teachers, government officials and professionals in the service and healthcare industries.

Although landmark ethnomusicological studies of South African music concentrate mainly on black music performance in various regions of the country (Erlmann 1991; Coplan 1985; James 1999; Muller 1999), studies that focus on the music of coloured people center primarily in the city of Cape Town, a region where over sixty percent of South Africa's coloured population lives. The New Year's festival in this city, known (and referred to by its participants) as the Coon Carnival, forms the most famous musical representation of coloured people (Martin 1999). Another important subject is the Cape jazz tradition (Jeppie 1990; Layne 1995; Muller 2001, 2004). Although the scholarly literature covers the New Year's Carnival more comprehensively, recent work reveals two lesser-known but equally important traditions among coloured people in the Western Cape, namely the *nagtroepe* (Malay choirs) and the Christmas bands (see Bruinders 2005, 2006 and 2006/7). In addition to the work based in the Western Cape area, there is some research on *langarm* dancing in the Eastern Cape Province (see Coetzer 2005a, 2005b) and literature on coloured people's folk songs (Du Plessis 1935, 1972; Drury 1985; Burden 1991).

South African ethnomusicological literature contains no comprehensive musical studies of the coloured people who live in the Graaff-Reinet region apart from some brief descriptions of music during the colonial era (Kirby 1934 [1953]). What we know about coloured people and their music in Graaff-Reinet has therefore been filtered (and often obliterated) by the voices of colonists, settlers, missionaries and officials. Early printed sources mostly ignore the presence of coloured people in the town except to report every court case in which a coloured person appeared for committing an offence. Today, in many instances, this pattern is mirrored by a lack of knowledge about the lives of coloured people in Graaff-Reinet and at the same time, a constant reiteration of non-coloured stereotypes of coloured people (February 1981:vi-vii).

³ A term used in South African history to describe a group of white farmers, often accompanied by Khoisan servants, which formed specifically to murder San and Khoekhoe people and capture young children in order to force them into farm labour.

⁴ While the Cape population census of 1892 defined "coloured" as all non-European people, the census of 1904 distinguished between three racial groups namely, "white", "black", and "coloured". This date therefore marks the beginning of the particularly South African meaning of the term "coloured" (Goldin 1987:12-13).

The apartheid government added further emphasis to these existing negative stereotypes by treating coloured people as belonging to a race category that is in between black and white and/or neither black nor white (Erasmus 2001:15–16, 18). The complaint of some coloured people that “during apartheid, we were not white enough and now we are not black enough” shows the extent to which this view was internalized (James, Caliguire and Cullinan 1996:12). In the scholarly literature, writers often focus obsessively on miscegenation or on the politics of naming in order to clarify the threateningly indistinct category of coloured-ness. The differing population groups and relations that gave rise to coloured people (Patterson 1953; Marais 1957) and apartheid definitions of coloured according to various legislative acts are common subjects of this discourse. This process of naming coloured people reveals the power of the authorities over these subordinated communities (Bourdieu 1985), but it also exposes the ambivalence of the dominant minority towards a group of mixed racial heritage. In an attempt to dislodge the negative notion of miscegenation, Zimitri Erasmus, herself identified as coloured, states that “[c]oloured identities were formed in the colonial encounter between colonists (Dutch and British), slaves from South and East India and from East Africa and conquered indigenous peoples, the Khoi and San... The result has been a highly specific and instantly recognizable cultural formation – not just ‘a mixture’ but a very particular ‘mixture’ comprising elements of Dutch, British, Malaysian, Khoi and other forms of African culture appropriated, translated and articulated in complex and subtle ways” (2001:21).

Contemporary Church Music in Kroonvale

Erasmus’s statement applies not only to coloured identity, but also more specifically, to coloured people’s church music. Before examining the various origins of coloured people’s religious music in this region, I briefly discuss contemporary church music in Kroonvale. My fieldwork research took place at three churches, namely the Uniting Reformed Church (which used to be the Dutch Reformed Mission Church), the Parsonage Street Congregational Church and the East Street Congregational Church (hereafter referred to as the URC or DRMC, PSCC, and ESCC respectively). These churches, established in the early 19th century by local town officials and missionaries from the London Missionary Society, constitute the oldest coloured churches in this area. I attended weekly Sunday services, women’s society meetings and conducted interviews with church members. The music comprised three main types, namely hymns or *gesange*, contemporary worship choruses or *koortjies* and pieces for performance by the church choir. Usually, church members sang *gesange* and *koortjies* in Afrikaans, although the choirs often sang in English. In general the minister presiding over the service announced the hymns or requested that the congregation sang a *koortjie*. After this, the congregation members stood up, found the relevant hymn number in their books and then waited for the lead singer or organist to begin before joining in. Many congregation members of all three churches clapped or (more commonly) tapped their hymnbooks or special leather cushions, held in front of the singer, in time to the music.

These cushions had elastic sewn across the middle on one side so that a person's left hand could be held in position while the church member used his/her right hand to tap the other side of the cushion. The percussive sounds provided a solid rhythmic base for the singing. Some churchgoers stepped from side to side or swayed in time to the music, while others remained completely still.

Khoisan Origins

The question of how much Khoisan culture (including musical practices) survives in the Kroonvale community is a difficult one to answer. Alan Barnard suggests that while there are identifiable Khoekhoe links in the contemporary communities of the Rehoboth "Basters" in Namibia, the Griquas and the coloured people of the northwestern Cape, the remaining aspects of coloured heritage, for example, Dutch, Indonesian and African do not demonstrate such clear links to these indigenous South African ancestors (1992:198). For instance, the sound of the music I heard during my research suggested stronger connections with Xhosa music and the hymnody of missionary Christianity. This does not mean that the Khoisan heritage is entirely absent, however, as historians suggest that certain aspects of Khoisan culture, for example, all-night singing gatherings, were absorbed into the Christian practices of missionary converts (Elbourne and Ross 1997:33). Also, in his study of the San influence on the Bantu-speaking peoples of southern Africa, Gerhard Kubik (1988:42) suggests that the musical practices of the San can also be traced in Xhosa music (see also Olivier and Fūmiss 1997). The connections with Xhosa music that I noticed in Kroonvale religious music could therefore already contain San musical features.

Missionary and Colonial Origins: Religious Music on the Frontier

There is a strong musical legacy of missionary and colonial influence on coloured people's church music in Graaff-Reinet. This comprised psalms, hymns, Afrikaans *liederwysies* and the tradition of the *voorsinger* or lead singer. Although initially, psalms were the only music to be sung on the eastern Cape frontier, these were soon supplemented by revivalist tunes from the United States and the United Kingdom. As some colonists expected their Khoisan servants and farm laborers to attend settler family prayer services, there is no doubt about coloured people's exposure to the psalms and revivalist tunes of the time.⁵

⁵ Through sheer proximity of servants to their masters, the former could not avoid exposure to household religious meetings, Bible readings and the accompanying singing. In 1812, the traveler, Burchell, mentioned a gathering of all the members of a colonial household as well as slaves and Hottentot servants, for a New Testament Bible reading and explanation (1822 [1953] 2:123–124). Willem van Warmelo mentions a certain tune of South African origin that is well-known in the eastern Cape and that coloured people learned from farmers (1958:29). This tune is known as "Mackensie" and appears in several South African hymnbooks, for example *Sing Hosanna!*, *the Nuwe Hallelujah and the Companion Tune Book*. A secular example of this type of musical exchange is the exposure of Zulu farm workers to the music-making of white farmers in KwaZulu-Natal during the 19th and early 20th centuries. This contributed to the formation of the Zulu migrant guitarist genre known as *maskanda* (Muller 2004:132).

Many of these tunes also appeared in the hymnbooks used by the coloured mission congregations. These groups had their own book, published in the mid-19th century by the Rhenish Missionary Society as *Geestelijke Gezangen ten Gebruike van Evangelische Gemeenten uit de Heidenen in Zuid-Afrika* (“Spiritual Songs for Use by the Evangelical Congregations Formed from the Heathen in South Africa”), but it is unclear whether the early coloured Graaff-Reinet congregations used this book. We do know, however, that the DRMC, the PSCC, and the ESCC used the Afrikaans edition of a book containing older psalm melodies, German and Dutch tunes, entitled *Evangeliese Gesange*. The Dutch Reformed Mission Church records only mention this book in 1934 although it is likely that the congregation used the earlier Dutch edition (known as *Evangelische Gezangboek*) before this time (DRMC records, 12 September 1934).⁶

Afrikaans *liederwysies* constitute another important source of early hymn melodies in both settler and most likely, in mission congregations of the region. *Liederwysies* are substitute melodies for official hymn melodies. These could be printed melodies of other psalm or hymn tunes used instead of the official printed melody for that specific text, or melodies from oral sources. In Kroonvale, the heritage of *liederwysies* has contributed to the use of “unofficial” hymn melodies for church hymns. For example, during my fieldwork, I recorded four different versions of “*Juig Aarde Juig*” of which only one was sung to the official melody (see Examples 1–4).

Example 1. Parsonage Street Congregational Church, 13 February 2005⁷

The image shows two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time, with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The melody is written on a treble clef staff. The lyrics are written below the notes. The first staff contains the first line of the hymn, and the second staff contains the second line. The lyrics are in Afrikaans and English.

Juig al wat leef, juig voor die Heer, dien God met blyd-skap, gee Hom eer, kom
 nad - der voor sy aan - ge - sig en prys Hom met 'n lof - ge - dig.

⁶ The Dutch Reformed Church introduced the *Evangeliese Gezangboek* in 1814 (at a service in Cape Town) to be used in conjunction with the older psalm book. This hymnbook contains 192 hymn texts set to 31 older psalm melodies, 44 melodies of German origin and 15 contemporary Dutch melodies (Cillie 1964:65).

⁷ Authors of the Afrikaans texts include J.D. du Toit (Totius) (Examples 1, 2 and 4) and E. Hartwig (Example 3). The English translation of the text for Examples 1, 2 and 4 reads: “Rejoice all who live, rejoice before the Lord, serve Him with joy, give Him honour, approach His countenance and praise Him with a hymn of thanksgiving.” The translation for Example 3 differs slightly from the Congregational Church examples as it is a DRMC/URC text: “Rejoice earth rejoice before God the Lord, serve Him with joy, give Him honour, come with a joyful hymn of thanksgiving and be jubilant in His presence.” Translations throughout the article are mine unless otherwise noted.

Example 2. East Street Congregational Church, 17 July 2005

Juig al wat leef, juig voor - die Heer,
 dien God met blyd - skap, gee Hom - eer,
 kom na - der voor sy - aan - ge - sig
 en prys Hom met 'n - lof - ge - dig.

Example 3. Uniting Reformed Church, 15 August 2004

Juig, aar - de, juig - voor God die Heer! Dien Hom met blyd - skap, gee Hom eer! Kom
 met 'n vro - lik lof - ge - dig en ju - bel voor sy aan - ge - sig en ju - bel voor sy
 aan - ge - sig!

Example 4. Combined Congregational Church *Broederband* service, 17 February 2005

Juig al-wat leef, juig voor die Heer, dien Hom met blyd-skap, gee Hom eer kom

na-der voor sy aan-ge-sig en prys Hom met 'n lof-ge-dig.

Example 1 uses the official melody, entitled “*Old Hundredth*”, which is notated in both the keyboard editions of the URC and Congregational Church hymnbooks.⁸ The English editor, Ravenscroft, named this melody as such in 1621 because it was inseparable from the text of the 100th Psalm (Routley 1983:58). Example 4 is the melody of “*Senzeni Na*”, a well-known anti-apartheid resistance song. Examples 2 and 3 are not from the official hymnbooks and I have been unable to trace their exact origins. However, Willem van Warmelo states that the use of the tonic triad in second inversion is a common melodic shape used to begin a *liederwysie*, and thus this provides a possible origin for the melody in Example 3 (1958:24).⁹

Another colonial settler tradition is that of the *voorsinger* (lead singer), who usually began the hymns and led the congregation through strong, confident singing. Gawie Cillié explains that the role of the *voorsinger* in the Afrikaans religious tradition was originally linked to the role of the teacher, but later on, referred to someone with a strong voice who knew his hymnbook very well (1983:4). This definition aptly describes the *voorsingers* I heard during my fieldwork. Willem Kayster, a retired teacher and one of the *voorsingers* in the URC, mentioned to me in an interview that he knew over 300 hymn melodies from memory (2004).

Xhosa Origins

While hymn-singing has a very long history in this religious community with the combination of missionary and colonial influences I’ve discussed, the singing of *koortjies* (according to community members) is a far more recent phenomenon that began in the later decades of the 20th century. The singing style of *koortjies* in Kroonvale, however, is

⁸ Both official hymnbooks for the Congregational Churches and the URC have a chorale book edition which is a larger book containing all the hymn melodies in staff notation. While church organists usually played from these editions, congregation members sang from books containing the hymn texts only.

⁹ This tendency is referred to as a *liederwysformule*, by which many old *liederwysies* can be recognized. Two other possible origins for the melody in Example 3 include sources from beyond Graaff-Reinet. I.D. du Plessis notated a Cape Malay *Ghomma-liedjie* that has similar contours (1935:129) and Frikkie Strydom recorded a version of the hymn among the mixed-race self-named “Baster” community of Rehoboth, Namibia, which has some similar rhythmic and intervallic aspects (1983: Notation example 30).

very similar to this description by David Dargie of the songs of Xhosa people’s mission congregations:

Many songs are not hymns arranged in verses but choruses of frequently repeated single-line texts or simple verses more closely related to the cyclic songs of African music than to the stylized structures of Western hymns. Such songs, called “*amakorasi*” or choruses, are sung with beating of hymnbooks (and also, the beating of cushions held in the hand), with clapping and some body movement. (1997:325)

Koortjies in Kroonvale demonstrate these characteristics mentioned by Dargie, namely repeated lyrics in the texts, percussive elements and African call-and-response and cyclic forms (see Example 5).

Example 5. “*Jesus is so Lief vir My*”, East Street Congregational Church, 26 June 2005¹⁰

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with a vocal line and a clapping line. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are in Afrikaans, with English translations provided below.

System 1: The vocal line begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The lyrics are "Je-sus is so lief vir my" followed by a repeat sign and "Hy kan all-es doen". The clapping line shows a 4/4 measure followed by a series of rhythmic patterns: two eighth notes, a quarter note, and two eighth notes.

System 2: The vocal line features a first ending marked "1." and a second ending marked "2." with a "Fine" symbol. The lyrics are "Je-sus is so lief vir my" and "Hy kan all-es doen". The clapping line continues with similar rhythmic patterns, including a double bar line.

System 3: The vocal line includes a "D.C. al Fine" instruction. The lyrics are "Hy kan all-es doen" and "Je-sus is so lief vir my". The clapping line continues with rhythmic patterns, ending with a double bar line.

¹⁰ Composer and author unknown. The English translation for this text is as follows: “Jesus loves me very much; He can do everything.”

Another influence on this music (which most likely reached the Kroonvale churches through interactions with Xhosa people) is the tradition of the African Independent religions. Although aspects of these rituals such as healing, summoning the spirit (Comaroff 1985), drumming and sacred dancing (Muller 1999), and use of hymn-singing to cut sermons short (Kiernan 1990) are absent, the presence of percussive aspects such as handclapping and hymnbook tapping together with dance steps and the African aesthetics of call and response and cyclic repetition do suggest musical borrowings from these churches. As I observed during my fieldwork, the influence of percussion and dancing seems to have originated in the male and female groups of the *broederband* (band of brothers, the name used for a church men's society) and *vrouevereniging* (church women's society) respectively and then gradually moved into the formal Sunday services (see also Dargie 1997:324).

Sacred Sounds

The singing style used by the congregations for both hymns and *koortjies* is very similar. Marius Barnard, who grew up in the Karoo town of Beaufort West, describes the sound of his father's Dutch Reformed Mission Church congregation as follows:

The congregation sang as a whole but also as individuals. The better known, the more melodious the hymn, the stronger the congregation; the less well known the hymn, the more prominent the individuals. (Barnard and Johnson 1975:28)

This account, written in the 1970s, but referring to the early to mid-20th century, is (thus far) the only description I could find on the sound of coloured congregational singing in the Karoo and it certainly applies to what I heard at church services in Graaff-Reinet. In all three churches, members never sang in unison, but rather they harmonized freely in a highly individual way, which was roughly based on the SATB voice parts.¹¹ They sang melodies in parallel intervals and changed range as they wished, according to their individual singing voices. This harmonious sound constituted a very dense texture and timbre and it was often very difficult to isolate the original soprano line of the hymn melody. In addition, this singing style meant that no two verses of a *koortjie* or hymn were alike. Singers constantly changed voice parts and harmonies and/or clapping patterns and this contributed to a sense of gradual build-up to a "groove" of full volume, harmony and percussion, only ending in a *decrescendo* on the final phrase of the piece. This technique demonstrates a characteristic of African music, in which each repetition of a pattern is slightly different to the previous one (Levine 2005:21–22; Turino 1992:165).

As the form of each hymn or *koortjie* became cyclical through either repetition of the melody for subsequent verses or repetition of both melody and text, this style also resulted in the increased prominence of the *voorsinger* as an independent voice within the piece.

¹¹ Frikkie Strydom narrates a similar occurrence of free harmonization within the Rehoboth "Baster" community of Namibia. One of the choir leaders in this community, a teacher by the name of Paulus de Vries, always had to admonish his choir members to sing according to the original solfa notation instead of harmonizing freely (1983:104).

Instead of initiating the song and then singing together with the congregation for the rest of the hymn or *koortjie*, the *voorsinger's* role became more like the “call” of the call and response format typical of much African music-making. For example, in this rendition of a popular hymn “*Worstel Mens*” (“Wrestle, Sinner”), the *voorsinger*, a man singing in a falsetto voice, not only began the hymn, but continued with embellishments and a call towards the end of every line to which the congregation responded with the next line of the hymn. The *voorsinger* thus provided a powerful momentum throughout the piece. This is a complex example of how the Afrikaans *voorsinger* tradition and the African call and response aesthetic combined and became virtually indistinguishable. The difference in rendition of the first and second verses (as mentioned earlier) is also clear in this example.

Example 6. “*Worstel Mens*” (“Wrestle Sinner”), Combined Congregational Church Broederband service, 17 February 2005¹²

Verse 1.

The musical score is presented in four systems. The first system shows the *Voorsinger* (falsetto) and Congregation parts, with lyrics: "Wor-stel mens as - Gods ge-na-de" and "werp die las -". The second system continues the Congregation part with lyrics: "Gods ge-na-de" and "jou be-sock en - wil be-keer -". The third system shows the *Vsgr.* (falsetto) and Congregation parts, with lyrics: "las - van" and "Voor - dat jy -". The fourth system continues the Congregation part with lyrics: "werp die las van jou mis-da-de aan die Heer - se voet - e neer -". Hand Claps and Claps are indicated by rhythmic symbols below the vocal lines.

¹² Composer unknown; Afrikaans text by G.B.A. Gerdener. The first and second phrases of “*Worstel Mens*” outline the opening of the United Kingdom’s national anthem, “*God Save the King Queen*”, which also indicates the enduring presence of the British colonial legacy in this area. The English text of this hymn reads: “Wrestle sinner, when God calls you, to come to his mercy seat, cast the burden of your misdeeds at the loving Saviour’s feet.” Verse 2 reads: “Ere you enter God’s great city, you must struggle, toil and strive, up the pathway, steep and narrow, if you want to be alive” (UCCSA 1988: Hymn 304).

9 Verse 2.

Vsgr. Voor-dat jy in -, is — jy wor-stel stry stry

Cong. Voor-dat jy in God se stad is moet jy wor-stel swoeg en stry -

Claps

13

Vsgr. poort - is pad is wat - na -, wor-stel mens

Cong. want die poort - is nou, die pad is smal wat na - die le - we - ly - .

Claps

In addition to the *voorsinger*'s role and the difference in rendition between the verses, one can also observe here some slight changes in voice parts and the slow beginning and then regular occurrence of the handclapping. However, the notation is ill-equipped to indicate the particular timbre of this performance. Sung at full volume, the effect was of a solid block of sound that completely enveloped the listener. Depending on where one sat in the congregation, the surrounding singers emphasized certain melodic lines, which contributed to the treatment of the hymn's "main" melody as one of various and constantly changing harmonic strands. In this case especially, the open fourths and fifths between the voice parts contributed to a ringing sound that often dominated the overall effect. Two additional aspects of this music made it unique. First, the effect of scooping between pitches (notated above in bar 6 of each verse) also occurred between smaller intervals throughout the piece and because each singer chose to slide between different pitches in comparison to his/her fellow congregation members, this added to the existing rich texture. Second, the particular Afrikaans pronunciation and accent typical of coloured

South Africans lent a specific sonority and timbre to each syllable. I believe that these aspects very clearly identify this singing as forming part of a distinctive religious musical culture. Congregational song in this community thus incorporates recognizable elements of music from other groups and yet moulds these to form a particular musical aesthetic.

Conclusion

Traces of encounters between Khoisan, Xhosa, colonist and settler in this music not only ensure the preservation of an auditory history of this community, but also indicate a statement of resistance to the dominant power structures inherent in colonialism and apartheid. The “hidden transcripts” of congregational singing in this community suggest a refusal to comply with the existing negative perceptions that coloured people had no cultural history or identity. Instead this community archived its history and thus preserved its musical identity within the sound of its sacred song. What resulted is a sense of the complex history of this group within South African society, one which has been sadly neglected in the written record and that would otherwise be very difficult to retrieve.

The descriptions of coloured congregational singing in this article suggest two final ideas for contemplation. First, the community’s sonic archive not only provides a sense of its musical history, but also potentially reveals new insights in the areas of oral history, community memory and cultural identity. I believe that there is a depth of knowledge embedded in these hidden musical transcripts, which demands additional investigation of this community’s auditory history. Second, there is an ongoing need for careful listening and attention to the narrative subtleties hidden in sound. As John Blacking observed about the religious music of Venda Zionists, “[t]he key to understanding this lies not so much in *what* people sang, but *how* they sang, and in particular how they sang hymns of European origin” (1995:213). As scholars continue to investigate the historiography of South African music research (Olwage 2002; Lucia 2005), it is clear that previously ignored or marginalized genres not only offer rich insights and deeper understandings of the incredibly diverse musical offerings in this country, but also present opportunities for broadening our current perception of South African music history.

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