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**Analyzing Miriam Makeba's 1950-60s Musical Performances: A Precursor to Steve Biko's
Black Consciousness Movement and a Response to the Epistemological Erasure of
Blackness in Urban South Africa**

1. **Research Interests:** Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies, South African History, South African Music, Black Performance Theory, Postcolonial Theory, Black Feminist Theory
2. **Audience:** Interdisciplinary Africana Scholars
3. **Artistic Medium:** Miriam Makeba's 3 songs including: 1) "Pata Pata" (Recorded 1957, presented live 1967), 2) "Into the Yam" (Sang in film, *Come Back Africa* release by US in 1963, song released in 1967), and 3) "Qongqothwane, The Click Song," 1963).



I. INTRODUCTION

In my paper, I will return to and expand on scholarly works that have previously examined the significance of pop music and resistance in Apartheid South Africa.¹ I will explore

¹ John Shoup. *Pop Music and Resistance in Apartheid South Africa* *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 17 (1997): 73–92. <https://doi.org/10.2307/521608>.

the important role that popular music played in the resistance movement during the anti-Apartheid period (1948-1991) of urban South African history. Zenzile Miriam Makeba (1932-2008), also known as Mama Africa² is one of the most prominent singers and activists in the anti-apartheid struggle. Makeba began her professional singing career around the same time the Afrikaner Nationalist government came into power. She contributed to musical genres including Afropop and jazz. Three songs which have brought her the most international attention in the United States and Europe include: “Pata Pata,” the “Click Song” in English (“Qongqothwane” in Xhosa) and “Into the Yam;” all performed in the “click” sounds of her native Xhosa language. Makeba made 30 original albums, 19 compilation³ albums and in 1966, she became the first African artist to receive a Grammy Award. The influential scale of Makeba’s work is in itself a counter to Black erasure. Additionally, her linguistic performance challenges the epistemological erasure of the Black feminist presence in South Africa. As an affirmation of Blackness, the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM)⁴ began as an ideological symbol of beauty, creativity, competence and diversification. In this paper, I will argue that three of Makeba’s musical performances released in the 50s and 60s create space for the Black feminist perspective prior to the public rise of the BCM in the 70s. The coded movements, sensory aesthetics and the body’s sonics⁵ that Makeba shares with her audience serves as a precursor to the BCM as a whole. It is necessary to examine how Makeba is a pioneer of the BCM as it will further contextualize the importance of its creation as a symbol of equitable socio-political practices in South Africa and beyond. Makeba never sang in Afrikaans and rarely in English—the language of the Apartheid

² Shoup, *Pop Music and Resistance in Apartheid South Africa*.

³ “Miriam Makeba | Biography, Songs, & Facts.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, www.britannica.com/biography/Miriam-Makeba.

⁴ Steve Biko and Millard W Arnold.. *Steve Biko : Black Consciousness in South Africa*. 1st ed. New York: Random House, 1978.

⁵ Thomas DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez. *Black Performance Theory*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014, viii.

government in South Africa— instead, she primarily sang in Xhosa, Sotho and Zulu. As a result, this paper asks: What are Makeba’s songs sung in Xhosa “doing” to linguistically resist the South African Apartheid regime and promote key ideological elements of Black Consciousness?⁶ Other future potential research questions to consider include: How can discursive and visual depictions of Makeba’s image be used as a lens to explore Black and female South African voices in Steve Biko’s notion of the Black Consciousness Movement (as described in his text, *Steve Biko: Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 1978)?, and how is Makeba’s linguistic and musical performance a form of protest that is relevant to contemporary conversations about the Black liberation struggle?

In terms of my methodology— examining the anti-Apartheid period prior to the development of Biko’s notion of the BCM through Makeba’s three visual performances from the lens of African historiography, Black feminist theory and performance studies will allow me as the researcher to use an interdisciplinary approach to analyze embodiment, examine audience reception, and further explore the complex socio-political environment of the anti-Apartheid era in South Africa. Analyzing these aspects of BC and artistic anti-Apartheid resistance strategies can reveal layers that might be missed in a purely linguistic analysis. Some potential limitations of this paper include: 1) although I have a nuanced understanding of Makeba’s relationship to Xhosa, I do not have direct experience reading, writing or speaking these languages, nor an ability to directly translate this content, and 2) as a result of my first point, I will focus on a seemingly “subjective” examination of “linguistic expression;” how language is used to convey meaning, emotion or intention, rather than a seemingly “objective” investigation of “linguistic

⁶ Steve Biko and Millard W Arnold.. *Steve Biko : Black Consciousness in South Africa*, (1st ed. New York: Random House, 1978).

analysis;” rooted in objective investigations and identifying structural patterns of grammar and semantics.

Three visual examples of Makeba “using” linguistic expression as a form of political resistance that can be further explored through the use of Black feminist theory and theatre and performance studies include: 1) “Pata Pata” (Recorded 1957, presented live 1967), 2) “Into the Yam” (Sung in the film, *Come Back Africa* release by US in 1963, song released in 1967), and 3) “Qongqothwane, The Click Song,” 1963). In each song and video segment, I will explore its linguistic significance, highlight Makeba’s reference to the anti-Apartheid movement (typically noted at the start of her performances), and lastly, emphasize how Makeba serves as a precursor to the Black Consciousness Movement.

As a budding Black feminist scholar, I will engage with and expand on two other feminist scholars and their seminal theories on the Black female body— 1) Daphne Brooks, an American writer and Black studies scholar who has contributed several works to the field of Theatre and Performance studies; her contribution to the book, *Black Performance Theory: “Part III, Chapter 13. Afro-sonic Feminist Praxis: Nina Simone and Adrienne Kennedy in High Fidelity”* (2014) which details her theory on the “Afro-sonic feminist,” and 2) Hortense Spillers, an American literary critic and a scholar of the African diaspora who masterfully highlights the contradictory elements of American grammar and uses her findings to uncover how the Black female body is constantly marked with particular semantic alignments.⁷ Spillers' research serves as a launch pad into a broader conversation on the consequences of “epistemological erasure” in a South African socio-political context between the years of 1912-1992.

II. SOUTH AFRICAN POLICY REMOVALS &

⁷ Hortense J. Spillers, *Black White and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, 71.

BLACK PERFORMANCE STUDIES

Examining the 18th Meeting of the Special Committee against Apartheid, Makeba's address to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly⁸ in 1963, will provide further context to South African policy removals and the process of Black epistemological erasure. In this instance, the UN provides Makeba a platform to share her first-hand experience living under the institutionalization of Apartheid. From a methodological standpoint, Makeba states (in English) that "South Africa has been turned into a huge prison." In a theoretical and conceptual sense, Makeba then uses her "voice" to combat an epistemological erasure of the Black perspective on a global and public platform. Throughout her speech, some South African policies of removal that Makeba is both directly and indirectly referencing stem from the 1913 Native Lands Act which prevented Africans from owning or gaining land outside of "reserves—" which initially included 7% of land throughout national borders. This policy then led to the 1923 Urban Areas Act which constructs legalized areas for Blacks to live in— this population could no longer acquire property or business outside of the "black area." Springing 30 years forward, Makeba and her counterparts are subjected to the 1950 Population Registration Act, which then led to the Group Areas Act and the establishment of "Bantustans." Shortly thereafter, The Suppression of Communism Act was formed and any group or individual who attempts to spark political, economic, industrial or social change is labeled an illegal "communist." Lastly, home ownership (for Black South Africans) is completely eliminated due to the 1952 Native Laws Amendments Act which increasingly limits the residential and labor rights of urban Blacks.

⁸ UN Audiovisual Library. 1963. "18th Meeting of the Special Committee against Apartheid." United Nations UN Audiovisual Library. United Nations . July 16, 1963. <https://www.unmultimedia.org/avlibrary/asset/2553/2553678/>

Keeping these acts that have crafted the foundational nature of the Apartheid system in mind, Makeba goes on to address the UN general assembly as she states—

*“I ask you and all the leaders of the world, would you act differently, would you keep silent and do nothing if you were in our place? Would you not resist if you were allowed no rights in your own country because the color of your skin is different from that of the rulers, and if you were punished for even asking for equality. I appeal to you, and to all the countries of the world to do everything you can to stop the coming tragedy. I appeal to you to save the lives of our leaders, to empty the prisons of all those who should never have been there.”*⁹

Shortly after Makeba addressed the UN, providing critical insight to the state’s policies of Apartheid, the South African government revoked her citizenship. Approximately one year after Makeba's speech to the UN, an article (published in an American data-base and distributed to a primarily English-speaking audience), *The New York Times* (NYT),¹⁰ reflects on Makeba’s contribution to the current climate of international affairs. In this piece, the NYT seems to find Makeba’s politically-charged sentiment and her status as a performer unusual. For example, the text is entitled, “UN Hears Anti-Apartheid Song;”¹¹ It was released on March 10th, 1964. The title’s emphasis on “hearing” and “song” speaks to the fascination of one of the most prominent newspapers in America (at the time) with Makeba’s voice— even when she is not singing. Begging the question, how do Makeba’s three performances show the conflicting relationship shared between sound and erasure? This short text provides another lens to observe the NYT’s tactics of describing Makeba’s relationship to linguistic expression. These Western narratives of erasure are most evident in cultural practices, literature, and the language used to silence social advocates and performers like Makeba. More specifically, the NYT goes on to write, “she spoke

⁹ UN Audiovisual Library. 1963. <https://www.unmultimedia.org/avlibrary/asset/2553/2553678/>

¹⁰ *The New York Times*. ‘U.N. Hears Anti-Apartheid Song’. 10 March 1964, sec. Archives. <https://www.nytimes.com/1964/03/10/archives/un-hears-antiapartheid-song.html>.

¹¹ *The New York Times*. ‘U.N. Hears Anti-Apartheid Song.’

rather than sang, the words in a low and sometimes broken voice.”¹² Western media’s clear interest with Makeba’s coded movements, sensory aesthetics and her body’s sonics, even outside of a traditional performance stage guides Makeba’s embodied tactics of denouncing the South African regime. It is crucial to situate an analysis of Makeba’s mid-twentieth century performances in a broader framework detailing the development of “black performance theory” (BPT). Emphasizing the entangled nature of these political institutions through a performance studies framework will offer an alternative way to examine the historical complexities of conflict and memory with an equally multifaceted approach. Racial inequality is an integral part of South African law and society. Therefore, it cannot be easily reversed through legislation. Through a series of theoretical analysis, we can explore other functions and patterns that Makeba used to challenge systems of oppression with the hope of achieving economic, social, and political progress for all people in South Africa.

Critical scholarship documenting Black performance practices exists as a literary account of expressive forms of the Black transatlantic and its African diasporic roots. Black performance scholars provide analysis and vocabulary to articulate the structural complexity and diversity that was at one point absent from Western practices of knowledge-making and preservation tactics. Black performance’s disciplinary umbrella includes anthropology, musicology, dance, theater, visual arts and literary studies. In the late 20th century, BPT became a public discourse used to complicate and provide aesthetic and literary theory that counters Western perceptions of blackness; a subordinate concept wrongfully tied to fixed social practices that oppose

¹² *The New York Times*. ‘U.N. Hears Anti-Apartheid Song’. 10 March 1964, sec. Archives. <https://www.nytimes.com/1964/03/10/archives/un-hears-antiapartheid-song.html>.

Eurocentric conceptions of whiteness. Exploring cultural responses to an Apartheid system in the southern parts of Africa will allow a deeper analysis of the term, Black internationalism.¹³

III. MAKEBA'S EARLY CAREER EMERGENCE

Based on personal accounts included in Makeba's autobiography, *My Story* (1987), Makeba's early career and reputation began in Sophiatown¹⁴ with a Swazi mother and a Xhosa father. It was a vibrant hub known for its scene of kwela music, marabi and African jazz as well as its political significance rooted in the growing Apartheid system. In Sophiatown, Blacks and coloreds were given permission to settle there during the time of forced land removal. It was also a space in which all races in South Africa could mix. At an early age, Makeba began singing in Protestant school choirs. According to her autobiography, she also frequently sang with her other family members (especially her brother) on a daily basis. Makeba started her professional singing career with her cousin's band, the Cuban Brothers, which then led to Makeba joining the Manhattan brothers in 1954. She toured with the Manhattan Brothers throughout South Africa, Zimbabwe and the Congo until 1957 as well as an all-woman group, the Skylarks.¹⁵ Unlike Makeba's other singing groups, she was the founder and leader of the Skylarks; one of the most successful South African singing groups between 1956 and 1959.¹⁶ Their music was deeply influenced by American jazz and combined these melodies with traditional South African

¹³ Monique Bedasse, Kim D. Butler, Carlos Fernandes, Dennis Laumann, Tejasvi Nagaraja, Benjamin Talton, Kira Thurman, *AHR Conversation: Black Internationalism*, (*The American Historical Review*, Volume 125, Issue 5, December 2020), Pages 1699–1739, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhaa513>.

¹⁴ *Sophiatown* | *South African History Online*. <https://www.sahistory.org.za/place/sophiatown>. Accessed 4 Dec. 2023.

¹⁵ Meintjes, Louise (15 January 2003). *Sound of Africa!: Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio*. Duke University Press. p. 54. ISBN 9780822384632. Retrieved 9 September 2017.

¹⁶ Miriam Makeba & The Skylarks | Gallo Music Publishers. <https://gallomusicpublishers.co.za/composers/miriam-makeba-the-skylarks/>. Accessed 4 Dec. 2023.

rhythms and vocal styles. Makeba's pivotal role in the formation of the Skylarks speaks to the many ways in which she serves as a precursor to the Black Consciousness Movement. In other words, Makeba combatted the epistemological erasure of Blackness in South Africa while nurturing the Black feminist singing voice on an international scale. It is evident that Makeba found innovative ways to rupture the normalcy of the Apartheid system. These three strategic choices show how Makeba contributed to 1) creative spaces in the cultural and professional imaginary for herself and three¹⁷ other Black women (when creating the Skylarks), 2) musical subcultures outside the realm of public discourse that are also perceived as "foreign" to Western audiences, and 3) an articulation of diverse music languages sung in both English and Xhosa. Although this paper primarily focuses on Makeba's individual performance tactics (her sonic gestures, lyrics and aesthetics), it is imperative to highlight the variety of spaces that she created and was deeply involved with during the anti-Apartheid era.

III. ANALYZING MAKEBA'S

VISUAL PERFORMANCE & SONIC EXPRESSION

As in the case of much of her work, Makeba's signature musicality defamiliarizes socio-cultural expectations of "how" Black women should sound in and outside of song. In these three performances, I will analyze Makeba's collective work in Black musical ensembles, her range from speaking to singing in song, the unpredictable tone in which she sings, and the contrasting use of her "chest voice" versus her "nasal voice" as defined by Brooks. Additionally, I will use these findings to explore "how" Makeba breaks *where* Black (and specifically, Black South African women) exists in the Western cultural imaginary. As many Black feminist scholars note,

¹⁷ Miriam Makeba & The Skylarks | Gallo Music Publishers.
<https://gallomusicpublishers.co.za/composers/miriam-makeba-the-skylarks/>. Accessed 4 Dec. 2023.

singers like Nina Simone and Adrienne Kennedy (in *High Fidelity*), and Makeba take us through a reification¹⁸ of Black womanhood. In this examination, it is evident that Makeba embraces sonic expression as the complex articulation of self. Brook's theory of the "Afro-Sonic Feminist" frames my analysis of the embodied voice. "Sonic" is the noise that articulates Makeba's ability to speak in diverse musical languages. Examining Makeba's sonic vocabulary allows for a more holistic exploration of the cultural, social, and embodied dimensions of musical performance. The visual elements I will analyze include: the three live performance's coded movements (rooted in Makeba's individual gestures and choreographed movements), sensory aesthetics (based on audience engagement and the ensemble's collective movements), and Makeba's body's sonic patterns (both seemingly planned and improvised physical behaviors). Examining the discursive aspects of each song rely heavily on an in-depth lyrical analysis and a careful tying together of certain verses sung in Xhosa and translated into English.

What are Makeba's songs sung in Xhosa "doing" to linguistically resist the South African Apartheid regime and promote key ideological elements of Black Consciousness? This question can continue to be explored through an in-depth analysis of Makeba's three performances, with a particular emphasis on the "The Click Song"—since the "click sound" is consistently used in each audio segment. In this particular song, Makeba tells her audience "what" the Xhosa language is and "why" it is significant. Based on a visual analysis of this clip, Makeba unapologetically shares subtle details and knowledge about the value of her home country from a geographical and grammatical¹⁹ approach. By playfully teasing her English-speaking audience for having very little (to no) knowledge of Xhosa, it seems like Makeba's true desire is to

¹⁸ DeFrantz and Gonzalez. *Black Performance Theory*, 210.

¹⁹ Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book."

linguistically express the complexity of *being* Xhosa. From a linguistic perspective, Xhosa is made up of consonants that are uncommon to English-speakers; the semantic structure of each phrase is densely populated. Additionally, from a constitutional²⁰ standpoint, Xhosa are one of the largest populations in South Africa, and over 7 million South Africans speak Xhosa as their native language. As a result, when Makeba strategically drops the “click noise” (made in Xhosa) in tandem with speaking English throughout the song, the audience is forced to reckon with the dramatically contrasting qualities of sound. Makeba’s usage of vocal nuances in Xhosa include: the variety of “click sounds” used in Xhosa—the dental click, the alveolar click and the lateral click. Unquestionably, the diversity of the language itself speaks to the complexity of the people who speak it. For these reasons, similar to the freedom fighters²¹ who continued their political objective for visibility during the BCM movement— Makeba is staking her position onstage as a prominent Xhosa-speaking singer and activist who refuses to be silenced.

In 1967, Makeba presented “[Pata Pata](#)” (first recorded in 1957 with her girl group, The Skylarks) to an English-speaking audience in America. Makeba’s 1967 version of the song peaked at position 12 on the U.S. Billboard Hot 100. In the clip, Makeba stands in the center of the stage dressed in an animal-print dress in front of two other female singers dressed in the same pink and purple colors. Immediately, the camera cuts to a close-up of Makeba smiling and singing in her mother-tongue, Xhosa. A male drummer sitting to the right of the proscenium seems to be playing a larger version of the bongo drum. The position of his head is angled towards Makeba as he waits patiently for her compositional cues (3:17). As Makeba sways her waist to the left and right, her chin seems to remain slightly pointed to the sky; potentially as a

²⁰ *Xhosa* | *South African History Online*. <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/xhosa>. Accessed 9 Dec. 2023.

²¹ UN Audiovisual Library. 1963. <https://www.unmultimedia.org/avlibrary/asset/2553/2553678/>

symbol of pride. For instance (1:18-1:32), Makeba says to her audience, “Pata Pata is the name of a dance [sat si pata pata] We do down Johannesburg way [sat si pata pata].... And everybody starts to move [sat si pata pata] As soon as Pata Pata starts to play - hoo [sat si pata pata]... Woot!” In a strategic and playful sense, Makeba states the significance of ‘Pata Pata,’ by noting its cultural ties and geographical significance as it is a song that was popular in the shebeens of Johannesburg’s townships in the mid-1950s. Frequently, Makeba uses her songs to challenge the audience's interpretation or potential bias about Black life. She uses her music as an auditory device that highlights the unique political complexities of South African Apartheid which (to name a few) included: the presence of institutionalized racism and segregation, international calls for divestment and boycotting, state repression and judicial killings. As a result of these institutionalized challenges, Makeba uses her performances as a bridge between South Africa's internal struggles and the transnational circulation of information regarding various resistance movements that emerged to challenge the regime. Organizations promoting similar political ideologies to Makeba and that are also embedded into the BCM include: African National Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), and the South African Communist Party (SACP). It is crucial to note the distinct significance of Makeba’s advocacy efforts since her songs (unlike some of the above political organizations’ mission statements) strategically highlight and prioritize the Black female²² experience in South Africa during the anti-Apartheid era. For example, coded movements uncovered in this visual analysis include Makeba’s steady act of smiling, shoulder-touching and consistently moving her hips in a swift hula hooping motion. Her facial and bodily gestures are crucial to note since “Pata Pata” is a song that allows

²² Ruth Feldstein, “Screening Anti Apartheid: Miriam Makeba, ‘Come Back, Africa,’ and the Transnational Circulation of Black Culture and Politics.” *Feminist Studies* 39, no. 1 (2013): 12–39. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23719285>.

Makeba to share intimate aspects of South African culture and ritual practices with a primarily Western audience. The sensory aesthetics used throughout the song are emphasized by the Xhosa meaning of 'Pata Pata' which means "touch, touch" in English. From a choreographic perspective, the term "Pata Pata" itself signifies a call to dance or "to touch," suggesting a joyful moment and a communal experience. The song's upbeat rhythm speaks to the calculated ways in which Makeba is engaging with her audience. She seems to use the gestural nature of "touch" in its figurative form; defined as an expression that describes the emotional influence that "something" has on an individual. In this case, "Pata Pata" is the key factor that is used to spark the audience's potential personal connection to Makeba's cultural experience. The song is also a celebration of South African culture as Makeba simultaneously speaks highly of its creation and invites the audience to "do" the "Pata Pata" as well. In other words, Makeba gently gestures to the audience and encourages them to dance alongside her. More specifically, she "shows" the audience "how to" do the dance in a step-by-step fashion.

Throughout the video, Makeba also uses 'Pata Pata' as a call and response tool needed to engage her back-up singers and the audience as a whole. The call and response tactic is a common rhetorical device used during protests throughout the BCM. Why are connections between Makeba's music and protests during the BCM which each heavily relied on the "call and response" gesture important to consider? Based on the common use of the call and response tactic in South African music, it is evident that simple melodies, freedom songs, and Christian hymns played a large role in the long legislative struggle against Apartheid. As a result, this paper uses archival footage of Makeba's live performances to continue highlighting the intricate role that Black feminist performers like Makeba played in the fight for equality.

How do Makeba's body's sonic patterns add to the unpredictability of her gestures? "Pata Pata" introduced sounds frequently used in Xhosa to English speakers who are unfamiliar with the "click" sound. Makeba's ability to juxtapose her own social positioning with that of a Western audience creates an alternate way of bringing a political framing to the pop-culture space. Makeba's sonic movements stretch beyond the general theme of accessibility, and instead create dissonant aesthetics and varying compositional structures. Dissonance, in this context, involves the use of harsh, jarring or discordant sounds. The "click" sound is a prime example of this dissonant aesthetic due to its loudness and repetitive use as Makeba also switches between speaking in Xhosa and English throughout the song. The varying compositional structures involved manipulating aspects of the song's melody and rhythm to create a more varied piece that includes changes in tempo, time signatures and thematic material. The "click" sound serves as one key method of interpreting this diversification of the overall compositional structure due to its repetitive, yet seemingly impromptu usage. For example, the "click" sound followed by a touch of laughter and leading to the effortless pronunciation of each English word seems to have left Makeba's audience dumbfounded. Her active rupturing of the passivity of "womenness" and the complexity of "Blackness" then forces listeners to take pleasure in a Black woman's social audibility that is outside the realm of public discourse (at this time) and leads to the uphill battle towards the necessitation of feminine empowerment (20 years later) during the BCM.

Makeba's next song, "Into the Yam," is best examined by first highlighting her role as an actress and a subtle advocate of Lionel Rogosin's film, *Come Back, Africa* (1960). Rogosin traveled to the shebeen²³ and townships of Johannesburg, South Africa to secretly document the cruelty and injustice suffered by Black and colored people under Apartheid. Most of the film was

²³ Nast, Condé. "South Africa's Historic Speakeasies Are Still Thriving." *Vogue*, 18 Apr. 2017, <https://www.vogue.com/article/south-african-speakeasies-shebeens-guide>.

recorded in Sophiatown, a ghetto reserved for Black South Africans. It is often described as a vibrant center of music, art, literature and politics. Makeba makes her popular guest appearance towards the end of the film. Her role serves as a vocalized symbol of hope that dramatically details the hardships of familial life and migrant labor. It is crucial to note that the inclusion of all the musical scenes and Makeba's presence (in the film) counters the concept of Black erasure as it challenges the continuous attempts made by the government to reduce Black South Africans to mere units of necessary labor. Furthermore, Makeba is the key emotive figure in the scene that ties the intricate infrastructure of racial and gendered oppression together— sung from the complex “matrix of black and female subjectivity” (Brooks). Black feminist theorists, like Brooks have found unique ways to explore “how” Black women navigate and negotiate their identities within social structures. Seemingly, Makeba is able to “use” her intersectional identity (from a racial and gendered standpoint) as a point of reflection for herself and the audience. As a result, it is necessary to analyze how her cultural productions intersect with broader social, racial and gender dynamics. More specifically, I am interested in exploring how Makeba uses her gestural movements to confront her own external versus internal modes of expression.

The coded movements that Makeba uses echo some of the gestures she made in my previous analysis. For instance, (0:49) Makeba smiles as she gradually rises from her seat. There is a communal element of resistance that is embodied in Makeba's movement as the camera pans to the group of five other South African men whose deep tenor and joyful facial expressions increase as Makeba takes up more space— both vocally and physically. (1:09), the camera zooms in on Makeba as she spins around, and turns her back to the men. Her act of literally twirling reflects Brooks' decision to figuratively refer to a woman's voice as the “veil.”²⁴ The

²⁴ DeFrantz and Gonzalez. *Black Performance Theory*, 219.

realities of subjugation and legacies of systemic erasure are seemingly veiled by the great tonality of the singer's voice and supported by the complexities of her body parts. Similarly, Brooks argues, low female voices like Lauryn Hill and Amy Winehouse represent the figure of contralto in a peculiar convergence of cultural concepts encompassing scale, mass, sound, vision, race, and gender. In this case, there is a resonance (throughout the audio) that hints at unspoken histories, inviting a mode of expression through song. In another instance, (1:14), Makeba stomps her feet loudly. Seemingly, she happily exaggerates the sudden movement and forces the listener to allow her presence to be known. Immediately, the five men turn to look at Makeba. They continue to follow her lead as Makeba resumes the role of conductor throughout the composition.

Based on a lyrical analysis of "Into the Yam," Makeba maps an alternate way of navigating hardship during apartheid. She uses possessive pronouns such as "my" and personal pronouns including "I" to express a sense of ownership in an oppressive situation that could easily be viewed as bleak. In Xhosa, Maekba sings (0:08-0:38):, "I love my baby even if he drinks too much, I love him, I love him. He left home to go to Cape Town. There he met his ruin.... My baby is my baby and I like him even if he drinks too much." Makeba's repetition of "nom'isilinxila" in the song shows a consistent sense of pride in her culture. The term translates to "with my hardships." In reference to these lyrical fragments, it is necessary to highlight throughlines between Makeba's character's action of prioritizing the female perspective and ideologies embedded into the BCM. For example, throughout "Into the Yam," Makeba is singing about the universal complexities of love, emotion, and problems of being in love with an addict or alcoholic. Similar to the BCM, she is calling for and embodying a more diverse and humanist way of documenting the Black South African experience by showing an alternative way of

“loving” her husband— not because he is without faults, but because he is human, and therefore (in Makeba’s character’s eyes), loveable. Additionally, Makeba is acknowledging the struggles that are a part of the Black South African identity; an identity that is varied based on Makeba’s use of singular pronouns that speak to her own (or her character’s own) individual experience, rather than the overarching Black collective. Makeba is embracing these sensory aesthetics as a complex articulation of self through the use of personal pronouns that seem to semantically support aspects of BC that called for a more diverse and humanist way of exploring the Black experience. (2:00), the song comes to a close and each person in the scene— laughs. This release of verbal and physical tension signifies a newfound lightness and joy that comes to fruition post Makeba’s performance. It is clear that in the last scene of the film, Makeba plays a crucial role in disseminating and shaping ideas related to Black identity against Apartheid. Her “multifaceted”²⁵ approach to performing “Into the Yam ” by primarily using personal pronouns— like “I” and “My”— speaks to Rogosin’s initial goal as the director to acquire a “personal sense”²⁶ of the government’s Apartheid system. Examining the conceptualization of “the personal” in tandem with “the political”²⁷ shows the complex relationship between the Black female body and feelings of outsidersness.²⁸ In other words, highlighting the importance of identifying the personal as the political illuminates Makeba’s strategic choices of self-expression in a broader societal context. As a result, examining Makeba’s performance of “Into the Yam” contributes and generates new scholarship that aims to disrupt the cyclical nature of “racist patriarchal thought.”²⁹ In this case, the intersectional role of the personal and the political is explored in two

²⁵ Feldstein, “Screening Antiapartheid: Miriam Makeba, ‘Come Back, Africa.’

²⁶ Feldstein, “Screening Anti Apartheid: Miriam Makeba, ‘Come Back, Africa.’

²⁷ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider : Essays and Speeches*. (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984)

²⁸ Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, 113.

²⁹ Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, 113.

key ways: 1) through Rogosin's directorial choice to shine light on an intimate and (at the time) alternative aspect of Sophiatown— while structuring the film's narrative from the perspective of Black South African characters, and 2) through Makeba's creative decision to sing a song— like "Into the Yam"— that details the complex relationship shared between a husband and wife (during the Apartheid era), but from the perspective of the wife.

The celebratory aspects of each individual's actions speaks to the ways in which Rogosin designs a narrative that complicates monolithic ideas of "struggle," often depicted in films published prior to this one. In other words, the sense of joy shown in the film allows the viewer to process the intricate (and artistic) forms of resilience that Black South Africans seem to participate in including: dancing, singing, marching, and playing as they perform. It is significant to identify the role of "play" and improvisation during these street-performance practices. The concept of play can offer the observer a clearer understanding of life under oppression. More specifically, the relationship between the spectator and the performer provides another lens to investigate the role of performance practices in relation to a conversation on human rights and racial equity. Rogosin makes a creative choice to position the usual "performer" (Makeba) as both a spectator and an active participant in a broader South African historical and political context. In doing so, Rogosin encourages the viewer to more carefully examine the political mobilization tactics that both Black South African men and women have taken to maintain one's sense of individual and cultural identity.

To conclude this second analysis, it is important to emphasize Makeba's body's sonic patterns. (1:51), Makeba makes laborious motions by singing loudly with her eyes closed, proving to the listener how much control and ownership she has over her expressions and the bodily response of the other five men. From 1:50 to 1:58, Makeba sings with her eyes closed,

mirroring a sense of safety and calmness. In what ways does this gesture of closing her eyes represent an unpredictable motion that breaks where Black women exist in the cultural imaginary? The idiom “with my eyes closed” often details effortless and highly skilled movements. Makeba’s performance practice continues to generate a sonic interpretive paradigm that allows the “historically frozen or erased black female body [to] become open, public and exposed.”³⁰

In 1963, Makeba performed “[Qongqothwane, The Click Song](#),” live at Ce soir à Cannes. She starts her performance by looking directly at the audience and subtly poking fun at the limited linguistic capabilities of her English-speaking listeners. (00:18-0:28) Masterfully, Makeba bounces between English and Xhosa as she explains the title of the song—Qongqothwane (in Xhosa); her native language. Based on an in-depth lyrical analysis of “The Click Song,” it is evident that Makeba’s musical interpretation of the cultural saying became known world-wide as she continued to share Xhosa traditions and stories to Western audiences. The title of the song is translated from Xhosa to “knock-knock beetle.” The phrase is a popular name for the species of beetles that make a specific knocking sound with their abdomens on the ground. The “knock-knock beetle”³¹ is a traditional folk song believed by the Xhosa people to symbolize a direction towards a better future in times of struggle. For example, Maekba sings, “The doctor of the road is the beetle / He climbed past this way / They say it is the beetle / Oh! It is the beetle.” In this textual analysis, it is evident that Makeba uses black feminist sound³² as a rebellious act; promoting Black joy, pleasure and happiness as a form of counterabjection.

³⁰ DeFrantz and Gonzalez. *Black Performance Theory*, 211.

³¹ Makeba, Miriam, and Jonas Gwangwa. *The World of African Song*. Quadrangle Books, Chicago, 1971.

³² Daphne A. Brooks. *Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound*. Harvard University Press, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1dhp54>.

Smiling at her audience, Makeba shifts her gaze from the left to the right as she gently notes that “The Click Song” is a wedding song in South Africa. Makeba’s speech continues— “[it] is called by the English-speaking people, the ‘Click Song’ because they cannot say— Qongqothwane.” As part of the song, Makeba ranges from speech to singing in ways that show mastery of both Xhosa and English as well as the contrasting qualities of melody. The coded gestures that Makeba makes include: (0:21) her left eyebrow raises almost immediately as she says “the English-speaking people.” Seemingly as a subconscious symbol of surprise and mild disapproval of the English-speakers’ lack of *trying* to even pronounce the true title of the song. This individual movement leads swiftly into Makeba’s poignant and humorous act of stating the song quickly and effortlessly in Xhosa while laughing gently to herself. As usual, her smile ties the complexities of these gestures together. It becomes evident that her playful approach to introducing each song is rooted in what Brooks refers to as the “matrix of black female subjectivity;” the interconnected factors that shape a distinct set of experiences and challenges for Black women (as a result of their race, gender and nationality). Specifically in “The Click Song,” it is evident that Makeba approaches performance and songwriting as not only responsive to traditions of social thought, but also as an alternative way to express collective habits of body and mind rooted in resistance practices reflective of the BCM. Makeba’s heavy emphasis on sharing the process of making the “click sound” in Xhosa shows “how” she enacts new social forms onstage. For instance, from a sensorial perspective— visually and sonically, Makeba uses dramatically contrasting qualities of noise and aesthetic to slightly rupture the relationship between the audience and herself.³³ Throughout the 2:02 mins clip— the song’s form (including its intro, verse, pre-chorus lift, and chorus)— varies in tempo and vocal nuances, specific to

³³ Brooks. *Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound*.

Makeba's act of making the "click sound" (beginning at 0:09), clapping her hands together (beginning at 0:49) and relying on her chest voice.³⁴ Makeba's throat tightens as her voice becomes slightly nasally, and she suddenly disrupts the flow of her breath. The temporal break in the song becomes most apparent as Makeba's vocal chords shift to a deeper tone, ascending to an open and exposed body onstage. Begging a similar theoretical question that Brooks also ponders, how does the Black female singing voice transmit transatlantic Black female histories in particular? What kind of politically generative space does it offer its listener?

In my final analysis of Makeba's third performance, her body's use of sonic patterns is clearest when she interacts directly with the audience; relying heavily on short, deep and powerful sounds that resemble a grunt noise. Following Brooks and American studies scholar Farah Griffin's groundbreaking work on Black women's vocalities, it is crucial to examine these forms of dissonant aesthetics. Controlled instances of grunting (0:48 and 1:30) sprinkled throughout a lightly rhythmic melody are examples of Makeba engaging in asymmetrical gestures. Associating Makeba's distinct audible skills to a radical expression of self—acquired in spite of the Apartheid regime—provides alternate ways of interpreting conventional definitions of musical structures, speech and protest.

Positioning the "Click Song" as a tool used in Makeba's pursuit of political mobilization offers her listeners a space to traverse the limits of their cultural imaginary; deeply interwoven into the fabric of South African policies of removal (i.e., The 1950s Population Registration Act, The Group Areas Act, The Suppression of Communism Act, ect..). The significance of Makeba's music can be most effectively explored by emphasizing its collaborative nature; the "call and response" pattern, her constant eye contact that shifts to each corner of the room, and her

³⁴ DeFrantz and Gonzalez. *Black Performance Theory*, 211.

informal interactions with the audience (at the beginning of each song) that detail the political conflict unfolding in her home country. As a result, Makeba's three songs sung in Xhosa (to predominantly Western and English-speaking audiences) are generating new interpretive paradigms. This breaking of *where* the Black female body exists in the (inter)national political imagination is most evident when observing gestures that speak to the BCM's process of advocating for the diversification of Blackness;³⁵ rejecting its conceptualization as a monolithic identity. In other words, Makeba carefully uses the extremities of vocality to disrupt any comfort (or discomfort) shared between herself and the audience through the unpredictability of her voice. Similarly, the "foreignness" of Makeba's mother tongue ruptures the audience's social familiarity. To rephrase, Makeba challenges her social positioning (as a Black woman)³⁶ by consistently using her voice as an expressive linguistic device and performance tactic that offers her a space to "make" the female body: 1) visible (to a Western and non-Western audience), and 2) authoritative (as she is the composer and conductor of each song). Lastly, Makeba designs a literal and figurative space to consider Black epistemological possibilities through her sonic patterns and visual gestures. These epistemological potentialities can be more closely explored in an in-depth analysis of "how" Makeba promotes key ideological elements of Black Consciousness that linguistically resists the South African Apartheid regime.

V. HOW DOES THIS EQUAL A PRECURSOR TO BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS

It is pivotal to critically examine the potential limitations of literature that currently exists in South Africa and attempts to omit certain historical aspects of the Black Consciousness

³⁵ Biko and Arnold, *Steve Biko: Black Consciousness in South Africa*.

³⁶ Brooks. *Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound*.

Movement (BCM). For instance, Public Policy scholars like Siphso Buthelezi note the problematic ways in which the development of the BCM is described in literary outlets as characterized by distortions, stereotypes and omissions of periodisation.³⁷ I have contributed to this discussion by emphasizing Makeba's role as the precursor to BCM. Proving it evident that the deliberate nature of BCM stood on the foundation of historical roots and performance platforms including: "Pata Pata," the "Click Song" in English ("Qongqothwane" in Xhosa) and "Into the Yam." With an intersectional lens, we can identify the immediate needs of the BCM's particular strategy which was led by a diverse array of South African social movements led by: the intellectuals,³⁸ rural labor force and urban working class groups.

As a response to the ANC (African National Congress, founded 1912) and PAC (Pan Africanist Congress of Azania, founded 1959) being outlawed by the State (predominantly under white leadership) in 1960— some Black South African youth of the late 60s founded SASO (the South African Student's Organization), founded 1969 by Steve Biko) at the same time as Makeba's rise to global fame. The basic political premise that SASO upheld seemed to echo many of the viewpoints that Makeba embodied in her performance practices; expressed through her coded gestures, sensory aesthetics and her body's sonic patterns. The unique combination of pride and frustration, first publicly expressed in Makeba's performance tactics (late 50s)— and then a few years later throughout SASO literature³⁹ (early 70s)— led to the construction of various ideologies of empowerment embedded into the BCM. Following in the footsteps of Buthelezi, it is necessary to continue contextualizing the evolution of BC and other players in

³⁷ Siphso Buthelezi, "The Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa in the Late 1960s," December 1, 1987. <https://jstor.org/stable/al.sff.document.joa19871200.032.009.762>.

³⁸ Buthelezi, "The Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa in the Late 1960s."

³⁹ Ssleem Badat, *Black Student Politics, Higher Education and Apartheid: From SASO to SANSCO, 1968-1990*, (Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 1999).

this movement of resistance. Continuing to stretch the South African historical archive to include the political significance of digital media (like live clips of Makeba's performance) may reveal blindspots in critical approaches exploring anti-Apartheid practices. These gaps in the literature may at first include the feminists' perspective (led by groups like the Sharpeville Six⁴⁰) and their calculated role in the anti-Apartheid movement. However, it is also necessary to consider the creative strategies used by female South African female performers like Makeba. Each group fought to assure that marginalized voices had a role in policy-making and that platforms were neither male or white-dominated.

For the purposes of this paper, I have highlighted Makeba's vital trek to negotiate South Africa's transition to democracy as she hopes to reform societal aspects of the South African Apartheid regime. Points of reform⁴¹ that Makeba called for included: land ownership, the "security" sector, the release from imprisonment of anti-Apartheid "resistors," and an international intervention to end racial segregation. After conducting in-depth research, it is clear that issues of reformation can be further explored through a methodical audio-visual analysis of Makeba's live public address to the United Nations⁴² and her three songs, each performed live between the years 1957-1964. How do Makeba's musical contributions to the international stage of the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa equal a precursor to the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM)? This portion of the paper reveals "how" exactly Makeba is a symbol of beauty, creativity, competence and diversification as defined by the BCM, and other theorists interested in exploring the complexities of the anti-Apartheid movement. Significant elements of

⁴⁰ *Women and Their Involvement with the Anti Apartheid Movement*. <https://www.aamarchives.org/who-was-involved/women-s-groups.html#:~:text=Women%20also%20worked%20to%20give,Hall%20on%209%20August%201984.>

⁴¹ UN Audiovisual Library. 1963. <https://www.unmultimedia.org/avlibrary/asset/2553/2553678/>

⁴² UN Audiovisual Library. 1963. <https://www.unmultimedia.org/avlibrary/asset/2553/2553678/>

the BCM that Makeba is a precursor to include: 1) her songs' use of the "call and response" tactic, 2) her deliberate (and seemingly politically-charged) use of the "click sound" in each song sung in Xhosa, 3) her heavy use of "personal pronouns" in songs like, "Into the Yam," 4) her creation of the all-female singing group, the Skylarks, and lastly, 5) her public address to the UN that aims to prioritize the Black South African perspective.

To situate this analysis in a broader socio-cultural context, we must use an interdisciplinary framework to examine "how" Makeba relates the significance of each song to a different aspect of South African culture. For instance (1:17) of "Pata Pata," Makeba makes the conscious decision to note the significance of the dance being somewhat of a cultural phenomenon exercised in Johannesburg. She clearly states "that " and "how" the dance is choreographed— therefore implying that— one must be skilled, innovative, and interested in preserving cultural traditions passed down through generations. From a Black performance theory (BPT) perspective, one "successful" aspect of imperialist trade and capital accumulation is the active public rejection of Blackness. However, BPT (and Makeba's act of detailing the choreographed elements of the song) confront the purpose of black abjection⁴³ (systemic racism, discrimination and dehumanization) by highlighting its continuous contradictions. In other words, "old claims of blackness"⁴⁴ are rooted in a conceptual stagnancy; Makeba's performances are a prime example of how this dormancy is filled with linguistic⁴⁵ and gestural⁴⁶ contingencies that are unable to be maintained. In sum, as Makeba emphasizes the importance and desirability of knowing the "Pata Pata" song and dance, there is a shifting taking place between herself and the audience. Arguably, this shift in perception is uniquely accessed through the compositional

⁴³ DeFrantz and Gonzalez. *Black Performance Theory*, Foreword.

⁴⁴ DeFrantz and Gonzalez. *Black Performance Theory*, Foreword.

⁴⁵ Spillers, *Black White and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*.

⁴⁶ Brooks. *Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound*.

structure of song. In simpler terms, Makeba's music created a space that allowed a distinct reception to Black epistemologies in Urban South Africa to form.

In conclusion, Makeba's three songs sung in Xhosa offer an alternative space to examine a specific "production of" and "reception to" Black epistemologies in urban South Africa to unfold. From a BPT and Black feminist perspective, Makeba's work is itself a counter to Black erasure and a precursor to the BCM. The political messages encoded in her work echo the advocacy efforts of Biko.⁴⁷ For instance, her 1963 public address to the UN serves as a key example of the various avenues used by Makeba to contribute to anti-Apartheid discourse that serves as the foundation for movements like BC. Throughout the speech, Makeba references the shootings in Sharpeville⁴⁸ which also led to the birth of feminist ideologies embedded into the contemporary political framework of the BCM. Makeba's speech included the full spectrum of "South African freedom fighters," with a particular emphasis on South African women and children. Ultimately, Makeba appeals to the court to intervene by stating that the UN ("and the entire world") should urge the Verwoerd Government to open the doors of prisons and concentration camps in South Africa. Makeba then goes on to note that 5,000 people have recently been sentenced to jail by the government as the situation is increasingly becoming dire to further expose on an international scale. In sum, Makeba's three performances are driven by the act of exposing the realities of South African Apartheid. She is using varied forms of linguistic⁴⁹ expression and selective tactics of BPT to rupture⁵⁰ any sense of normalcy in regards to the Apartheid system. As a result, further research is needed to fully explore the complexities

⁴⁷ Biko and Arnold, *Steve Biko: Black Consciousness in South Africa*.

⁴⁸ "South Africa: Death Sentence Commuted." *Off Our Backs* 19, no. 1 (1989): 5–5.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25775757>.

⁴⁹ Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book."

⁵⁰ DeFrantz and Gonzalez. *Black Performance Theory*, 219.

of the anti-Apartheid movement through the lens of Black feminist performers; those who use their racialized and gendered “voices” as a tool to defamiliarize socio-cultural expectations of “how” Black women should sound in and outside of song. Examining late 1960s and early 70s digital archives in tandem with discursive mediums detailing the anti-Apartheid struggle will highlight the significant role of Black women in this fight for freedom and provide proper context to the interdisciplinary tactics used to challenge and construct political doctrines in the country throughout this time period.

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