

Popular music in the ZCC

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Abstract

The article dwells, in the main, in rationalizing the popularity of ZCC (Zion Christian Church) worship songs. Lest the point of this paper is misconstrued as a homogenization of the ZCC and the collective of South African black cultural groups only segments of which belong to the ZCC, reasons for qualifying this brand of music as popular are outlined. This discussion isolates features of the music that render it a refracted image of South African black folk music. The purpose is to trace the remoulding of such popular black music in the ZCC in order to pin down its identifiable functions. Aspects by which this kind of music belongs at least to sections of the black nation reflected overwhelmingly in the membership of the AIC (African Initiated Church) are also explored. Apart from probing the uniquely ZCC features of this kind of culturally inflected music, the peculiar way in which the music is put to use in this church is discussed, including how such uses differ from those evident in the greater community sharing its origins.

Key words: ZCC, ZCC worship songs, South African black folk music, popular music.

Introduction

Mafuta (2010:170) observes that according to 1991 census in South Africa, forty-seven percent of all Black South Africans belonged to African Initiated Churches. Of these blacks, one in every eleven was a member of ZCC (Mafuta 2010:170). According to Anderson (1999), the rate at which black South Africans joined AICs is characterized by considerable leaps, with the percentage of the black population comprising members of the AICs having increased from 21% in 1960 to 30% in 1980, and to 46% in 1991.

Anderson rightly remarks that members of AICs in South Africa form 'an extremely significant section of the South African population' (1999). With the ZCC being the largest of the AICs in Southern Africa and the second largest in Africa (Anderson 1999:285; Mafuta 2010:4), the social traits of members of South

African black cultural groups are mirrored overwhelmingly in this more than in any other AIC, including the music of such black cultural groups.

It is not only the statistical might of South African black cultural groups within AICs and even in greater numbers specifically within the ZCC that conjoins black national cultures with the popular culture of the ZCC. Like all AICs, the ZCC's character attracting these throngs is what Anderson (1999) calls its 'ability to adapt ... to the African context.' Such a finding about the ethos of the ZCC makes it not far-fetched to assert that the cultures of black South Africans constituting the populace of the nation-state are also the cultural identity of the ZCC. Indeed, the ZCC's concern with identity is attested to by observations of writers like Rafapa (2010), describing part of the ZCC mission as 'abrogation of western Christianity to imbue it with Afrikan Humanist values that have, through history, proven to be the survival kit of Africans whose identity was being smothered by the alien cultural sensibility of the protagonists of apartheid.' It is thus clear that the cultural identity lived out by the overwhelmingly black membership of the ZCC is virtually identical to the cultural identities of black cultural groups of the South African public.

Musicality is part of black South African cultures. That is why, in his discussion of the Victorian colonizing stratagem of teaching the tonic sol-fa and choral music to blacks, Olwage (2010) significantly observes that 'Xhosa ritual is shot through with music, specifically song.' It is this cultural trait which made colonizers smugly believe that 'tonic sol-fa literacy facilitated the substitution of "civilized" culture, like hymn-tunes, for irrational musicking such as the precolonial dance-song' (Olwage 2010:209).

The ZCC project of harnessing black South African identities into religious singing that positively took advantage of what the ZCC regards as worthy cultures of black South Africans, positively exploits the very cultural trait the vanguard of western Christianity during the Victorian era despised and negated. It should be borne in mind, as Anderson (1999) observes, that the ZCC, like other independent churches sometimes known as Pentecostals, is known for liberating western Christianity such as the Victorian variety 'from the foreignness of European cultural forms.' It is this alienness of Western cultural forms inducing the agents of the colonizing Victorian Christian mission to disdain the musical facet of the cultures of black South Africans. In order to highlight at least such a distinction, churches bearing this kind of alienness are described contrastively in

this article as members of mainstream Christian churches and the ZCC. As Anderson (1999) notes, a 'sympathetic approach to African life and culture, fears and uncertainties, and an engagement with the African world of invisible forces, have been major attractions' of people with black South African cultural identities. Shorn of negative overtones, the musicality of black South African cultural groups now constitutes the texture of ZCC spiritual life. This is why Mafuta (2010) describes the ZCC as a social terrain where 'boots are used in a stamping ritual known as praising with the feet ... where evil is stamped underfoot.' Anderson (1999) highlights the predominance of such black cultural music within the ZCC in his explanation that members of the ZCC 'spend several hours in community fellowship, singing, and dancing.'

Now that the description of music within the ZCC as popular in the sense of the general South African black populace sharing in it has been rationalized, it is apt to turn to features of this kind of music – both the generic and specific.

The popular music within the black nation

Music, as writers such as Olwage (2010) have shown, is an integral part of black South African cultures. Consistently with the more communalist tendencies of cultural groups broadly described as African (Gudykunst 2003), musical compositions sung by groups and individuals among black South African cultural groups have a folkloric bent. This is why a number of writers have argued for a socially pervasive presence of the folk music of the Venda in forms like *tshikona* and *domba* (Musehane 2005), the Balobedu in forms like *Khekhapa* (Makgopa 2005; Shai 2006), of the Bapedi in forms like *mathumaša*, *mogobo*, *makgakgasa* and *dinaka* (Nkadimeng 1973; Makgopa 2005). Choir members in folk musical groups mentioned above consist variously of female virgins, women of all ages, an indiscriminate mix of men and women, stag chanting groups and of boys. Reasons for the existence of such groups may be entertainment; ritual performances for rainmaking, purity or overall good health of individuals and villagers collectively; reverence towards ancestral memory; pious reverence to a traditional ruler; and many more (Nkadimeng 1973; Musehane 2005; Makgopa 2005; Rafapa 2009).

The mode of singing stresses *a capella* (Olwage 2010), although elaborate or simple traditional instrumental accompaniment is also normal (Musehane

2005). In both their traditional and modernized forms, these black traditional music groups are identifiable by their distinct costumes (Makgopa 2005).

Scholars of traditional black music like Mapaya (2013) point out that individual artists do emerge in the black traditional musical space, alongside group performances. Although there is bound to be idiosyncratic touches to such individual musical compositions, such musical pieces accompanied by folk instruments like *dipela*, *setontolo* and *lelope* are invariably grounded in folk music (Mapaya 2013).

It will be interesting to examine ways in which these aspects of black South African folk music manifest themselves in the music tradition of the ZCC.

Mutations of the popular music within the ZCC

Anderson (1999) and Mafuta (2010) complement each other both on the existence of female, male and mixed choirs in the ZCC and these choirs' identification by means of green-and-yellow, khaki, and blue costumes. The colourful costume aspect of ZCC choirs reminds one of observations by writers such as Makgopa (2005), that black traditional music groups outside the ZCC are identifiable by their distinct costumes in both their traditional and modernized forms (Makgopa 2005).

It is thus not far-fetched to interpret ZCC music groups as transformed versions of the black traditional music choirs described by Nkadimeng (1973), Makgopa (2005), Musehane (2005), Shai (2006), Olwage (2010) and Mapaya (2012). Such a description of the presence of black South African folk music within ZCC lifestyles actually confirms an observation made by Lukhaimane (1980) in his Masters dissertation on the empirical study of the ZCC, that the ZCC is a 'supra-tribal' religious organization modeling its lifestyle and modes of worship on traditional black cultures of South Africa. It is important to record that black South African cultural forms of music are not just replicated in the ZCC. The phenomenon has occurred with modifications that embrace a distinctly ZCC character based on the teachings of the church's founder Engenas Lekganyane and his successors (Lukhaimane 1980).

A music audiocassette entitled *ZCC Church Choir Volumes 1 & 2* contains 24 tracks. Of these, songs like '*Ha Le Mpotsa Tshupo Ya Ka*' and '*E Joale Ke Tla Goroga*' are sung by the ZCC mixed choirs; '*I Have Decided*' and '*Emmanuel Mong*

Wa Rona' by male choirs; while '*Pele Re Kena*' and '*Relapile*' are sung by mostly youthful female choirs. The *a capella* nature of the songs is strengthened by inclusion in this collection of two grandly constructed and eminently articulated praise poems praising the head of the church during the premier rendition of the praise poem, Bishop Edward Lekganyane. Collectively, the songs forming the collection chiefly praise the current ZCC head Bishop Barnabas Lekganyane for his powerful Christian leadership fashioned boldly into the ethos ZCC members are currently known for.

The lyrics of '*Pele Re Kena*' are:

Pele re kena,
Ko motseng wa Sione,
Re tla fihlela keiti gona,
Keiti yena e šomilwe ke Bophirima,
Ba e bitsa Royal;
Fa Moefangedi a kenang teng,
Le dikoloi tsa Papa;
Manobonobo a keiti yena,
A feta daemone lefaseng.

Ga e se gope e tshwang le yone,
Khutlong tse nne tsa lefase;
E batla bonnete,
Bukana ya mošomo,
Ke Sione ga e rore.

Keiti yena ke ya segosi,
E na le naledi gare,
Naledi yena e arogana ka bogare,
Ga keiti e bulega.

Keiti yena e a makatsa,
E jele dirantaranta,
Hlwahlwa ya yone ke *one thousand nine ninety-nine*,
Sione wee, Sione wee.

In this musical piece, Christian allusions of paradisaical radiance are attributed to ZCC headquarters, referred to colloquially as Sione (city of Zion). The head of the church is eulogized in lofty terms combining images of his kingly stature with the stature of a messiah (in words like *Moefangedi* and *Papa* – lines 6 and 7). In this way, tribute to a ruler evident in the black South African folk songs is repeated. While folk songs praising traditional rulers like Kgoši Modjadji (Shai 2006) and Kgoši Sekwati Mampuru (Nkadimeng 1973) may freely approve of frivolous conviviality, their tempering within the ZCC is such that they entrench chaste conduct. ZCC members are known for their strict moral code and pure lifestyles symbolised in their abstention from tobacco, alcohol, meat regarded as defiled and related drugs and foodstuffs (Lukhaimane 1980; Mafuta 2010).

In these lyrics, the overriding image of a scintillating celestial gate (*Keiti yena* – line 4) is complemented by spiritual qualifications for passing through it and entering the Kingdom of Heaven – *E batla bonnete,/ Bukana ya mošomo* (lines 12 and 13). The two lines state that entering through the gate requires one to have been truthful and served the Lord. Lines 8 and 9 signify the linking of this worldly gate found in ZCC headquarters with the celestial gateway to heaven – in the sense that the value of the gate exceeds that of diamond or any form of material wealth.

The lyrics of the track '*Hela bomme*' bear the refrain *Ikokobeletseng mmuso wa Bishopo* (Humble yourselves to the Bishop's reign)/*Le tla humana mahlohonolo* (And you will prosper). This, the ZCC folk song exhorts, should be the mantra of all in all corners of the earth, expressed in yet another refrain *Kwa bochabela, /Kwa Bophirima*, (From the East, /To west,). Anderson (1999) remarks that in tough economic times under apartheid rule members of the ZCC were lucky to be given preference when employers recruited the workforce, because they are known for their humbleness and honesty. The lyrics of this song patently inculcate these values.

The religious context in which these ZCC musical pieces are performed is clearly Christian. That is why the collection has well-known hymns forming the multilingual repertoire of other Christian churches including the mainstream within South Africa, like '*Jesu o tla Busa*' and '*Ha Le Mpotsa Tshepo Ya Ka*' (tracks 2 and 9). What is clear is that the variety of Christian gospel preached and lived in the ZCC sets itself apart from the gospel of other Christian churches that do not necessarily stress the same kind of devout lifestyles.

Conclusion

Data collected qualitatively in the course of conducting this study attests to important facts about popular music practiced within the ZCC.

There are features of ZCC music that characterize it as popular music practiced among members of black South African cultural groups. Such popular music also bears traits that pay allegiance to a common history between the mainstream churches and an AIC like the ZCC. The popular nature of ZCC music has been moulded in line with the values and dogmas of the church. While popular music in the greater black South African community generally aligns itself with the reinforcement of free, pleasure loving lifestyles cherished variously by the different social groups, popular music in the ZCC is a vehicle for Christian and African cultural values distinctively associated with the church.

There is a need for future research into manifestations of individual music within the ZCC, epitomized by renowned recording artists such as Matlakala, Solly Moholo and Oleseng Shuping.

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