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# Sounding futures: Black operatic voice in postapartheid South Africa

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# SOUNDING FUTURES:

# BLACK OPERATIC VOICE IN POSTAPARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

by

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Mark Smith, a man who loathes opera but loves his daughter unconditionally.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the participation and education of Black South Africans in opera and the processes of some of the opera industry's institutions. The aim of this dissertation is to put Black vocal pedagogies, Black quotidian experiences, and institutional processes in conversation with South Africa's colonial and apartheid pasts. In doing so this dissertation examines the ways in which Black pedagogies reflect self-hood and community in Black townshipsand the ways in which the opera industry unwittingly separates itself from such communities. This dissertation also contends that Black vocal pedagogies are possible sites for decolonization in South African opera. This dissertation delineates and theorizes a Black pedagogy of the operatic voice in South Africa and provides critical frameworks for such pedagogies. Covering South African history from roughly 1860s-present, this dissertation traces the origins of opera and operatic theatre in South Africa and how Black South Africans innovated the genre and developed their own educational methods. It demonstrates how such innovations developed alongside of and challenged the British and Dutch colonial projects. It also demonstrates how, through case studies of three contemporary opera companies, how opera and opera practitioners are participating in South Africa's decolonization process.

Fieldwork was conducted in Cape Town and its surrounding townships between in 2019 and 2022. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, virtual fieldwork was conducted between 2020-2021.

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# INTRODUCTION: NEW FRAMEWORKS FOR THE STUDY OF SOUTH AFRICAN OPERA

This dissertation is about South African opera, its institutions, its educators, and its performers. Through the lenses of pedagogical practices, institutional practices, and the quotidian, I situate contemporary South African opera in dialogue with its colonial (1652-1931) and apartheid (1948-1994) pasts. Because contemporary educational and artistic institutions are inherited from the apartheid government, opera institutions in South Africa reproduce many of the same logics from the apartheid period. Such logics include economic inequality across racial lines, a lack of diversity in creative and board institutions, and a dependence on white wealthy donors for funding. In this dissertation, I examine how Black South African opera singers construct opera careers and vocal pedagogies despite these challenges. Within the gaps that these institutions provide, however, individuals are able to use opera to creatively enact their own pedagogies and epistemologies. Black South African performers, educators, and composers put their own Indigenous languages and vocal pedagogies in conversation with Western epistemologies to encourage productive discourse. This discourse has the potential to decolonize South African opera and enact new futures. With the help of insight from interlocutors, I theorize some of South African opera's new futures that could result from these decolonization initiatives. Opera institutions in South Africa are still in the process of decolonization in regard to programming diverse works, casting diverse artists, and financially investing in the artistry of non-white opera practitioners. Yet, they also provide the sites of possibility for decolonization.

I consider Black vocal pedagogies and practice in this dissertation as productive tools for the preservation and innovation of Black South African cultural practices and for a possible future for South African opera. These pedagogies are primarily reproduced in the opera industry through Black singers, composers, and other opera practitioners. These pedagogies affect how Black opera singers perform opera and, by extension, affect contemporary opera institutions. I will delineate these pedagogies in this dissertation and the ways in which Black practitioners must negotiate the use of these pedagogies in and out of the South African opera industry. These quotidian negotiations illuminate the ways in which these pedagogies interact and can play a role in decolonizing South African opera. I contend that reading opera through the lenses of pedagogical practice, institutional practice, and the quotidian are necessary as each exemplify how colonial and apartheid inequalities are reproduced and challenged in contemporary institutions.

**Setting the Stage: Contextualizing Contemporary South African Opera**

In interrogating the processes of the opera industry in South Africa, I focus on four key opera institutions in this dissertation: the Cape Town Opera, Umculo, Isango Ensemble, and the Opera School at the University of Cape Town's School of Music. These organizations are the most active opera institutions in South Africa and they represent the mainstream, grassroots, and educational sides of the local opera industry. As most of the institutions are based in Cape Town, most of my field research took place in Cape Town. Because of the centrality of these institutions, most opera training and opera production in South Africa occur in Cape Town. Located in the Western Cape province, the

amaXhosa (isiXhosa-speaking people) make up the largest Indigenous ethnic group in the province and, therefore, in Cape Town. As a result, most of my interlocutors were amaXhosa. The repertoire in both grassroots (Isango Ensemble and Umculo) and mainstream opera institutions (the Cape Town Opera) primarily consists of works from the Western canon.[1] There is more variety in the production styles. The Cape Town Opera's productions are both traditional and contemporary. Sometimes they localize productions through the use of Indigenous languages or local settings. The Cape Town Opera also commissions operas from local composers. Primarily, their operas are sung in the original languages. Isango Ensemble primarily stages localized productions of canonic operas. They typically sing them in English or an Indigenous language and set them in South Africa. Umculo commissions works and produces localized settings of canonic operas.

South Africa is one of the few countries in the Global South to house an opera company (the Cape Town Opera) on the international stage. This is especially remarkable considering that South African opera institutions do not get consistent or generous government support. Domestic opera institutions, however, had generous government for most of the twentieth century. The colonial and apartheid governments during this period founded and funded universities, theaters, and other arts institutions that allowed for students to learn opera, for opera singers to build domestic careers, and for opera institutions to economically flourish. These students, singers, and audiences

[1] "Umculo" means "art music" in isiXhosa, one of South Africa's Indigenous languages. "Isango" means "gate" or "portal" in isiXhosa. Umculo and Isango Ensemble are not the only grassroots organizations in South Africa.

were overwhelmingly white, but there were also Black and mixed-race performers during this period. Opera in particular flourished under colonial and apartheid regimes because it rehearsed European cultural elitism for the colonizing British and Dutch populations. For their respective regimes, opera was a legitimating force for white supremacy. Because of the generous funding opera received from the government and wealthy donors, South Africa developed a local cadre of opera singers and institutionalized a local Western music curriculum in universities. The end of the apartheid government in 1994, however, saw an end to opera's generous government funding. In a bid to disinvest from apartheid-sanctioned funding initiatives, the postapartheid government restructured its funding methods and extended funding to Indigenous art forms. Non-Indigenous art institutions still can apply to receive funding but can no longer depend on the government for their primary financial support.

Though opera companies lost much of their government funding after the end of apartheid, the local cadre of opera singers, educators, and curricula remained in place. These singers and educators took on the responsibility of both training the next generation of opera singers and of racially integrating opera. Students of color began to enroll in university music programs and to build careers as opera performers. In regards to funding, the local opera industry now depends on a combination of government-supported grants and private donors. All three opera companies of focus prioritize international touring because much of their funding comes from international donors. These donors are in the United States, Europe, east Asia, and the Middle East. The bulk of the productions of all three companies occur abroad – only the rehearsals for these

productions are in South Africa. All three companies do also produce operas domestically, though these are fewer. The Cape Town Opera is also the only of the three companies to have a home theater. I suggest that the lack of consistent and adequate government funding is much of the impetus behind a lack of domestic infrastructure and of South Africa's ability to emerge on the international stage. Because the local government does not provide sufficient funding, opera companies are often forced to look abroad.

Since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2022, however, there has been an increase in domestic opera productions.[2] Opera companies and other arts institutions around the world are slow to recover their financial losses suffered during the pandemic, leaving little room to fund tours for South African companies. Isango Ensemble has not toured since 2019 and Umculo has been on a hiatus since 2018. The Cape Town Opera visited Germany in April 2023, its first international series of performances since February 2020. Though the pandemic forced companies to produce opera domestically (or to not produce operas at all), it also made the careers of opera singers, Black opera singers in particular, even more precarious. Because Black opera singers received their university music degrees and began their careers in opera *after* the end of generous government funding, they have not been able to accrue substantial capital as opera singers. Universities are no longer free and many students have to apply for grants and scholarships to attend university. Opera institutions are unregulated meaning opera

[2] South Africa's president, Cyril Ramaphosa, ended the country's state of disaster regarding COVID on 4 April 2022.

singers' salaries are unregulated as well. Because there are so few domestic opera institutions, opera singers have little opportunity to negotiate contracts or shop around for high-paying gigs. Opera singers are primarily contracted workers who work intermittently, so they often feel pressure to take jobs as they are available. These wage-related challenges coupled with racial economic inequality inherited from over two centuries of colonial and apartheid governments make a career as a successful opera singer incredibly difficult. COVID-19 has only compounded all of these challenges. Because opera companies were not producing operas or concerts during the height of the pandemic, many opera singers left the field entirely because they needed consistent work. Other opera singers found work in fields unrelated to music to make ends meet such as food delivery. One of my interlocutors, Masakhane, supplemented his opera singing income through opening a dog washing service in his neighborhood. Many families consolidated households during the pandemic for health and financial reasons – elderly and sickly relatives needed care and many lost their jobs and their homes. Opera singers who are still in the field are now financially responsible for multigenerational families but have not seen increases in salary and opera companies are still not offering as much work as they were before the pandemic. I met very few opera singers who only sing opera. Most have either continued the non-music gigs they began in the pandemic while also doing opera, or they get singing gigs in other genres and venues.

The opera industry, as I have demonstrated, was not providing substantial or consistent salaries to opera singers before the pandemic; this has only worsened since the start of the pandemic. I often wondered why singers continued in this field if it has

historically not provided a substantial income and there is little indication that this economic status quo will change in the near future. Many of my interlocutors became opera singers because it gave them the opportunity to travel. Others view opera as a ticket out of South Africa as other Black South African opera singers have done. Others still take a sort of pride in being part of the domestic opera industry's possible future. They recognize the wealth of talent that South Africa possesses and desire to continue to work to enact change in the industry to encourage future generations of opera singers. Many of these same singers want to take up space in South Africa's cities and other places that they were not allowed to be during apartheid. Many also view opera as their cultural inheritance as they have been listening to and singing opera since childhood in township-based choirs.

Cape Town and its surrounding townships are home to a strong choral culture that produces many of South Africa's Black opera singers. The vast majority of Black opera singers learn how to sing and build a familiarity with opera repertoire in these choirs. Townships typically house several choirs – local churches and schools have their own choirs as well as community choirs that are unaffiliated with a particular institution.[3] Beginning in childhood, community members such as school teachers and church volunteers teach children skills such as tonic sol-fa and ear training often without the assistance of piano or other instruments. After learning tonic sol-fa, students often learn

[3] Townships are underdeveloped urban areas on the outskirts of major cities in South Africa. They were built during apartheid as a means to keep the population racially segregated. Many people of color worked in cities but were not allowed to live in the cities due to segregation laws. Therefore, city workers of color constructed and lived in townships, many of which still exist today. The majority of residents in contemporary townships are still people of color. Townships still have high instances of poverty.

harmony by listening to their fellow singers. In addition to tonic sol-fa, students also learn repertoire through listening to recordings. For the most part, students do not learn Western staff notation. Repertoire varies widely, including South African traditional music, anti-apartheid protest songs (also called struggle songs), and opera arias. If any of the songs in the repertoire are in a foreign language, students learn to mimic the language from recordings rather than learning the language itself. In regards to musical style, mimicry from recordings is also the primary mode of learning. Black South Africans from townships who sing in township choirs as children learn via collaboration with their fellow singers and develop a sensitive ear to musical pitch, style, and language. These skills are valuable for any of these singers who choose to pursue opera as adults.

Most aspiring professional opera singers also train at the university level. This mode of education is quite different from the formative education found in townships. One of the most popular programs in South Africa is the School of Music at the University of Cape Town. This program is a popular choice because of its association with the nearby Cape Town Opera, the country's largest and most active opera venue. Via the Cape Town Opera's Young Artists Programme, students at the School of Music at the University of Cape Town can sing in the Cape Town Opera's professional productions, learn standard audition repertoire, and begin to build their résumés. This program, along with other university opera programs in the country, takes a Western conservatory approach to pedagogy. That is, much of the learning takes place in private lessons with an instructor and a piano; students also take courses in Western music history and music theory. Reading Western conducting patterns and staff notation is also

necessary, including stylistic terms and markings, for both private lessons and for coursework. Many Black students who were raised in townships struggle initially in these programs because they do not know how to read Western staff notation. I put this Western approach to opera education in conversation with the township approach in order to demonstrate how individual opera singers negotiate such challenges. Singers negotiate how to incorporate both methods into their personal performance methodology. I contend that these methods are not at odds with one another. Rather, I suggest that these methodologies work together to form a uniquely Black pedagogy of the operatic voice in South Africa.

**Literature Review**

In this dissertation, I put insight gathered from opera practitioners, educators, administrators, and directors in the South African opera industry in conversation with decolonial studies, opera studies, and Black studies. I also interrogate how South Africa's history informs contemporary reception and performance of opera. While opera in contemporary South Africa has become an arena for remembering national trauma, constructing international creative networks, and challenging apartheid-era white supremacist imperatives, its troublesome history rooted in Blackface minstrelsy, racial segregation, and the militaristic grandeur of the white elite affects its current reception. Since the end of apartheid, many South Africans view opera as a white genre that does not deserve the same amount of attention and government funding as Indigenous South African musics such as isicathamiya, umngqokolo, or igwijo; all of which are primarily

vocal genres.[4] What makes Indigenous South African music unique is its emphasis on the voice, particularly on choral music. Other than the mbira (thumb piano) and the umrhubhe (stringed mouth bow), instrumental accompaniment in Indigenous South African music typically consists of whistling, body percussion, or found percussion (such as sea shells, plastic water bottles, and metal dust bin lids). Because South Africa's musical culture is primarily a vocal one, I suggest that opera in South Africa does not need to be understood as an imposed, foreign genre but as a domesticated, Indigenized genre that grew alongside of South Africa's endemic vocal and choral culture.

Similar arguments have been made in musicology by scholars such as Hilde Roos and Mia Pistorius.[5] Both Roos and Pistorius focus on opera from the apartheid period when opera was performed almost exclusively by white people. Coloured (or mixed-race) South Africans, the focus of their areas of research, were the first racial group to integrate opera in South Africa. The South African English term, "coloured" is distinct from the American English term, "colored," which is no longer an acceptable term.[6]

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[4] Isicathamiya originated among Zulu male migrant workers in the 1960s. It is an a cappella choral tradition with a strong emphasis on harmony and choreographed dance. Today, Ladysmith Black Mambazo is the most popular iteration of this genre. See Kofi Agawu, *The African Imagination in Music* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 87; and Veit Erlmann, *Nightsong: Performance, Power, and Practice in South Africa* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Umngqokolo is a type of polyphonous throat singing performed by women in rural villages in the Eastern Cape province. It is often accompanied with the umrhube, a stringed mouth bow. Madosini Mpahleni frequently toured South Africa performing both with voice and umrhubhe before her death in 2022. Ethnomusicologist David Dargie conducted extensive research about umngqokolo, much of which is archived at the University of Fort Hare. Igwijo (plural amagwijo) is a township monophonic choir tradition, popular among school-aged children and teenagers. These songs are also often sung at sports stadiums.

[5] See Hilde Roos, "Opera Production in the Western Cape: Strategies Towards Indigenization," PhD dissertation, Stellenbosch University 2010; Roos, "Indigenisation and History: How Opera in South Africa Became South African Opera," *Acta Academia* (2012): 117-155; and Mia Pistorius, "The Eoan Group and the Politics of Coloured Opera in Apartheid South Africa," PhD Dissertation, Oxford University, 2012.

[6] During apartheid, the government organized people into discrete racial classes: white, Indian, coloured, and Black Africans. The government created such classes in order to assign each racial group to its own area of the country; this further entrenched racial segregation. People who were assigned to the coloured

Both of these scholars' primary methodology is archival research, and both use postcolonial theoretical frameworks, particularly those by Edward Said and Homi Bhabha. Roos argues that South African opera is Indigenized because South Africans are producing it; that is, Indigenization has less to do with genre and more to do with participants.[7] This is in step with Kofi Agawu's argument that African music is simply music performed by Africans.[8] Pistorius's argument is more nuanced – she argues that the crux of the opera-as-colonialist-imposition theory is built on the assumption that resistance must be active rather than seemingly compliant.[9] That is, coloured people performing opera during apartheid was in itself a radical act. She details, for example, the many negative opinions that coloured people published in newspapers that accused coloured opera singers as compliant with the white supremacist government's racial segregation laws. Pistorius responds that, while they did comply with these laws during some performances, coloured people performing opera for white audiences also challenged such segregation laws because these performances placed white and coloured people in the same theater.

Scholarship at the intersections of Black studies, linguistics, history, and musicology informs the ways in which race and language affect audience perception and performance practice. In her study of the performance of isiZulu popular music in South

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class were those who did not fit comfortably into the Black/white binary. Some, but not all, were mixed-race. Today, the term coloured is still in use, but it is highly contested. Some so-called coloured people reject the term, casting it has a creation of the apartheid government. Others embrace the term and seek to reclaim it as their own to redefine the contemporary coloured South African. Today, the term primarily applies to mixed-race people who speak Afrikaans as their first language.

[7] Roos, "Opera Production in the Western Cape."

[8] Kofi Agawu, *The African Imagination in Music* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 3.

[9] Pistorius, "The Eoan Group."

Africa, Thulile Pearl Shandu argues that language purity is often a marker of racial authenticity in South Africa.[10] While code-switching among Nguni languages and between Nguni languages and colonial languages (English and Afrikaans) is common in South Africa, Shandu argues that an emphasis on Nguni language purity in the name of preservation recalls apartheid-era values of segregation and racial superiority.[11] Shandu continues that the use of code-switching is not only a linguistic marker of South Africa's prominent position in global creative networks, it is also a means of preserving the language through creative innovation. Following Shandu, I suggest that Blackness is, in part, constructed by language in South Africa. In this dissertation, I use Shandu as a model to consider how language informs conceptions of Blackness in South Africa by focusing on two aspects of language. First, I ask how linguistic education in formal opera training, including diction and the education of the Romance languages, informs how Blackness is both perceived and experienced. Secondly, I ask how the use of Nguni languages in opera, such as isiXhosa in Isango Ensemble's *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* (2006) commodifies, innovates, and promotes isiXhosa. Finally, Shandu's scholarship also informs what I refer to as linguistically-informed Blackness, which argues that Blackness in South Africa is malleable and is, at times, performed via language. Using language in this way consequently racializes Indigenous South African languages.

[10] Thulile Pearl Shandu, "Pitch Black Language: The Quest for Language Purity in isiZulu Popular Music," *Muziki* 4, no. 2 (2007): 263-277.

[11] The Nguni languages include isiXhosa, isiZulu, and isiNdebele, and siSwati. These languages are native to southern Africa. The use of the term "code-switching" in this dissertation will be distinct from how the term is often used in the United States. In South African English, code-switching refers to mixing together words from different languages but uniting them under one orthography. "Ndizoba late" ("I will be late") or "Zikhona ii-pictures zikaSipho" ("Here are Sipho's pictures") are both examples of code-switching English and isiXhosa.

With Shandu, I put Matthew Morrison and Kira Thurman in conversation in the interest of creating what Morrison, following Shana Almeida, refers to as a "race-based epistemology."[12] For Morrison, a race-based epistemology decenters Western epistemologies through an emphasis on and conversation with Black epistemologies. Such an epistemological framework is valuable because it also reveals the limitations of Western frameworks. In the case of South African opera, a Western-centric framework simplifies the interrelationships among Blackness and opera because it removes such relationships from their local contexts. In this dissertation, I interrogate how Blackness is constructed in South Africa and how Blackness is challenged, reinforced, or changed within the opera industry, during opera performance, and in opera reception. I suggest that such formations of Blackness must be understood through local politics and local experiences. I foreground the experiences of Black opera practitioners and students in order to illuminate how Blackness on the opera stage is constructed and how its construction is informed by the quotidian and by the local. In Thurman's study of white German reception of Black singers in interwar Germany, she exposes the fallacy in classical music's alleged universality. This universality suddenly becomes white-centric at the moment of Black performance. Thurman's exploration of the alleged ability of classical music to transcend issues such as race and politics and the fallacy of an inherent opposition between Blackness and European artistic practices or languages will inform

[12] Shana Almeida, "Race-Based Epistemologies: The Role of Race and Dominance in Knowledge Production," *Wagadu* 13 (Summer 2015), 82. See Matthew D. Morrison, "Race, Blacksound, and the (Re)Making of Musicological Discourse," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72, no. 3 (Fall 2019): 781-823; and Kira Thurman, "Performing Lieder, Hearing Race: Debating Blackness, Whiteness, and German Identity in Interwar Central Europe," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72, no. 3 (Fall 2019): 825-865.

this dissertation's examination of how Blackness between the opera sphere and the quotidian sphere differs and which aspects of Blackness are amplified or minimized.

Black opera singers are often viewed as unrealistic or extraordinary in South Africa and abroad, invoking Thurman's argument that Blackness must be justified in order to match audience expectations of the perceived whiteness of opera. This expectation is maintained in South Africa, in part, due to the nature of the types of operas that are most frequently performed. With some exceptions, operas produced in South Africa are primarily traditional settings of canonic European operas.[13] Thus, professional opera singers must have facility in the Romance languages. While there are Black South African composers currently writing operas in South Africa, the commissions and productions of such works are much less frequent.[14] The mode of opera education, the repertoire, and spectacle-making of Black opera performances in traditionally-performed canonic operas has been racialized in South Africa, rendering criticism that Black South Africans performing opera are trying to sound white coupled with assumptions that Black South Africans are responsible for preserving and innovating Indigenous Black music genres.[15] Such criticism implies that Black performers of genres that were historically

[13] See the Cape Town Opera's (CTO's) production history here: https://capetownopera.co.za/cto-past-production/. Smaller companies such as Umculo, Isango Ensemble, Township Opera Company, and (the now-defunct) Gauteng Opera perform more works by Black composers, smaller-scale works, opera excerpts, and canonic works with updated, localized settings. These companies, however, perform less frequently than the CTO due to financial constraints.

[14] Works such as Mzilikazi Khumalo's *Princess Magogo kaDinuzulu* (2002), Bongani Ndodana-Breen's *Winnie: The Opera* (2011), and Neo Muyanga's *Heart of Redness* (2015).

[15] Such criticisms were voiced by former South African Minister Arts and Culture, Pallo Jordan: "What's wrong with the way Africans sing? Why should you teach them to sing like Italians? To make them into imitation whites – and poor imitations as well?" Quoted in James Davies and Lindiwe Dovey, "Bizet in Khayelitsha: *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* as audio-visual transculturation," *Journal of African Media Studies* 2, no. 1 (2010): 40.

performed by primarily white singers are imitators rather than creators or innovators, thus limiting the creativity of Black opera performers. Further, it hints toward a simplistic, essentialized Blackness that implies a common cultural history heard through Black performers, regardless of genre.

These conceptions of Blackness were theorized by Black and white scholars alike for different purposes. While the aim of such theories of Blackness by white scholars was to confirm a white supremacist hierarchy, Black scholars such as Amiri Baraka and Frantz Fanon had a different aim. In constructing a history and genealogy of Black-centered creativity and innovation, Black scholars such as they were retroactively constructing a place for the Black subject in history and tracing that history outside of the white academy. Baraka's theory of the changing same is one such example of this lineage tracing, in which he argues that there is an Africanist thread aurally identifiable in Black cultural expressions.[16] Fanon, in discussing postcolonial Black liberation, suggests that Black cultural expressions must be wholly new genres that are constructed as advocations of Black subjectivity rather than resentment toward a white colonialist past.[17] Though Fanon does not advocate for an essentialized Blackness, he does seem to imply that race can be read within musical genres themselves. Such arguments have often been misused and led to criticisms that seem to blame the underrepresentation and underfunding of Black performers in South Africa on a perceived lack of Black originality and innovation, such as David Coplan's diagnosis that Black elite theatre in

[16] See Amiri Baraka, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York, NY: W. Morrow, 1963).
[17] See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York, NY: Grove Press, Inc., 1963).

South Africa's cities in the interwar period stagnated because its practitioners looked to the West for inspiration rather than innovating "African" content.[18] Scholars such as V.Y. Mudimbe and Kofi Agawu interrogate how the often-romanticized yet rarely centered invocation of Africa informs scholarly studies about Africa.[19] Mudimbe argues that the idealized version of Africa was invented via translation from African discourse to Western discourse, with alterity as its primary frame.[20] Following Mudimbe, Agawu argues that a presumption of sameness could, to a degree, mitigate such discourse and provide a new discourse on what Africa is rather than what it should be.[21] In regard to opera, as Nina Sun Eidsheim argues, the invocation of difference both introduces otherness as a means to maintain whiteness and depends on difference to revitalize a genre that is often viewed as elitist and stale.[22] Rather than engaging in critiques about which art forms are African, which are borrowed, and which are imposed, I begin from the presumption of similarity rather than alterity to elucidate what makes opera in South Africa distinct. I understand opera in South Africa as a domestic art form rather than one that is borrowed, imposed, or foreign, in order to elucidate its local specificities through observation and analysis. Further, as Agawu argues, the postcolonial creative voice is necessarily complicated and multinational; there is no pure, unmediated African voice

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[18] David Coplan, *In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 151.
[19] See V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994); and Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003); and Agawu, "The Challenge of African Art Music," *Circuit: Musiques contemporaínes* 21, no. 2 (2011): 49-64.
[20] Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*, xiv-xv.
[21] Agawu, *Representing African Music*, 315.
[22] Nina Sun Eidsheim, "Marian Anderson and 'Sonic Blackness' in American Opera," *American Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (September 2011), 664-665.

just as there is no pure, unmediated Africa, or unmediated South African opera.[23] Analyzing African music and musicians in this way also avoids the pitfalls of hybridity theory which prioritizes identifying difference from Western influences.

Assumptions about an imagined purity read as racial authenticity are also superimposed onto the voice of Black opera singers, an extension of Baraka's changing same. Ronald Radano and Naomi André, though neither discuss the theory of the Black voice to a concentrated degree, both mine reviews and secondary sources that reference Black stereotypes mapped onto the voice in order to provide valuable histories on how racialized assumptions of Black vocality became commonsensical through scholarly and archival reiteration that is rearticulated within the social.[24] Grant Olwage provides a similar account of the racialized disciplining of Black South Africans as a part of England's civilization project, ultimately arguing that the Black voice in South Africa was constructed by English voice teachers and by Black voicing subjects.[25] That is, while the English vocal teachers circulated educational documentation seeking to civilize the Black voice, Black voicing subjects ultimately had control over which aspects of this voice they were willing to adopt. I build on this work, particularly Olwage's oeuvre, in its foregrounding of the pedagogical agency of Black opera practitioners. They construct their own pedagogies with the sum knowledge gained from university education, choral education, and their own experiences. Eidsheim's work, in a similar vein to Olwage's,

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[23] Agawu, "The Challenge of African Art Music," 55.
[24] See Ronald Radano, *Lying up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003); and Naomi André, *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2018).
[25] Grant Olwage, "The Class and Colour of Tone: An Essay on the History of Vocal Timbre," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 13, no. 2 (November 2004): 203-226.

also makes an important intervention in revealing the artificiality of the Black voice through focusing on how the training of singers and the social exchange between singers and audience informs its construction.[26] She reveals that opera instructors in tertiary Western institutions often encourage Black students to adopt certain vocal characteristics associated with racial stereotypes in order to embrace their "natural" timbres, or what she refers to as "enculturation."[27] Through a primary framework on the phenomenology of listening, Eidsheim uses this framework to interrogate the intersections among the social, the visual, and the sonic. Following these scholars, I am careful to avoid the assumption of an essentially Black opera voice. Instead, I argue for a Black *pedagogy* of the operatic voice that is informed by the sonic environment of township choirs.

**Scholarly Interventions and Contributions**

With this dissertation I intervene at key points between opera studies, postcolonial studies and Black studies. I put into conversation the study of operatic practice outside of Western university institutions with ethnography and Black critical frameworks that examine how Western institutions function in Black contexts. Scholars such as André, Donato Somma, and Innocentia Mhlambi have produced innovative work that theorizes how opera as a medium can participate in the decolonization process. Somma, in analyzing the novelistic qualities of opera such the stoppage of time for character development, argues that such qualities make opera an ideal genre for reconciling

[26] Eidsheim, "The Micropolitics of Listening to Vocal Timbre," *Postmodern Culture* 24, no. 3 (May 2014); and Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African American Music* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).
[27] Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound*, 48.

contemporary criticism and public memory.[28] Mhlambi argues that the representation of multiple consciousnesses and parallel yet related plot lines in opera encourages a polyphonous reading that challenges the domination of mainstream thought.[29] André similarly argues that the inherent multidisciplinarity of opera allows it to convey the experiences of multiple voices simultaneously, many of which are outside of mainstream thought.[30] Similarly to André, Somma, and Mhlambi, Pamela Karantonis and Dylan Robinson, in their edited volume of Indigenous opera practices in Canada, the Americas, and Australia, theorize that opera is an ideal site to creatively explore tensions between past and present, between Global North and Global South, due to its storytelling abilities.[31] Due to the inherent artificiality and spectacle of opera, Karantonis and Robinson argue, operatic settings of national events can expose such events as artificially constructed and ignite new conversations about national memory and belonging. Precisely because opera is constantly recreated in performance and rearticulated within the social, opera is an ideal medium to explore and critique local social issues. Opera scholars such as Carolyn Abbate and Gary Tomlinson argue that opera is social and cannot be understood outside of its social context. Both also argue that performance keeps opera alive through allowing for multiple meanings, as meanings are primarily

[28] Donato Somma, "'Just Say the Words': An Operatic Rendering of Winnie," *African Studies* 75, no. 1 (2016): 32-47.
[29] Innocentia Jabulisile Mhlambi, "Embodied Discordance: Vernacular Idioms in *Winnie: The Opera*," *African Studies* 75, no. 1 (2016): 48-73.
[30] André, *Black Opera*.
[31] See Pamela Karantonis and Dylan Robinson, eds, *Opera Indigene: Re/presenting First Nations and Indigenous Cultures* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

generated by the sociality of performance.[32] Agawu echoes a similar stance when delineating the limitations of defining African music as text, arguing instead that African music should be understood through the context of performance, with the meaning shifting from moment to moment.[33] Agawu and the above opera scholars seem to agree, then, that opera gains meaning via performance. Following these scholars, I suggest that pedagogy and education must also be considered when studying South African opera because both inform performance. Opera offers a space to innovate and preserve language, particularly in Indigenous-language productions, and language is also a means by which Black opera singers can build community in the opera house.

Developing on these ideas, I show how Black studies could be used as a framework for opera studies that focus on Black subjects. I also show that fieldwork and ethnography in opera studies, particularly considering case studies of performers or students of opera, adds new insight about how everyday experiences inform opera practice. Though the study of opera as a genre and as individual works are important topics when discussing creative intent or pedagogical techniques, opera cannot be performed and works cannot come to fruition without performers. I suggest throughout this dissertation that the sphere of the opera world and the quotidian overlap – therefore, my study incorporates the ephemeral with the quotidian. Performers will bring their informed experiences when they study, rehearse, and sing opera, and their ability to perform is tied directly to quotidian issues such as travel funds and job security. In my

[32] See Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Gary Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song: An Essay on Opera* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).
[33] Agawu, *The African Imagination in Music*, 265-266.

discussion of contemporary works, composers, or performers, I foreground the experiences of the people who enliven opera.

**Positionality-Informed Pedagogy**

The fieldwork and interviews I conducted and my relationships with those I worked with are necessarily complex because of race. I am an outsider to the groups I worked with both as a white woman from the United States. Trust was difficult to build initially because white researchers from the United States Americans writing about South Africans do not have a good track record. Particularly during apartheid, white journalists from the United States made spectacles of township-area poverty and ethnic violence without contextualizing such aspects of South Africa with the violence of the white supremacist government or the ways in which South Africans maintained vibrant communities and self-hoods despite racist turmoil and forced relocation. Because of my positionality, I also never fully gained the trust of the people with whom I worked. I knew that even as they allowed me into their spaces, their attitudes and actions were constructed in such a way to protect knowledge that is uniquely theirs. Erving Goffman argues that people perform certain aspects of their identities in daily encounters in an attempt to control and construct how others perceive them.[34] During my fieldwork, I prioritized the performance of my United States nationality and my ability to speak isiXhosa as these were the two aspects of my identity that garnered the most trust. Though white researchers from the United States have a troublesome past in journalism,

[34] See Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1990).

they also have the benefit of distance from apartheid struggles. Many of my interlocutors mentioned that they felt more comfortable discussing racial and national politics with someone from the United States than with a white South African. Because I did not live in South Africa during apartheid and I was not raised by parents who lived through apartheid, I was more open, in their view, to their opinions about apartheid and how the legacies of apartheid reverberate in the present. My ability to speak conversational isiXhosa also helped with trust because it showed a willingness to engage with their culture on their linguistic terms.

The communities with whom I worked were also very private. Many choir practices and vocal lessons are led by women in their own homes, so allowing me into these spaces required a lot of trust. As a woman in South Africa, I was unable to navigate male-only spaces. Such spaces include township barber shops and gatherings in the households of single men. AmaXhosa men, particularly those who live in townships, also have their own variation of isiXhosa, which often left me out of their conversations even when I was in the company of both men and women. Though I was able to pick up certain words from context, I was never able to become fluent in this masculine dialect of isiXhosa. Though I know from talking to men that informal singing takes place in these male-centric spaces, I am not privy to how it is the same or different from informal singing that takes place in mixed-gender spaces or in female-led spaces.

Despite knowing that I would never observe unfiltered choir rehearsals or receive the same vocal lessons as a Black person from a township, I still felt that I had a unique outlook to bring to this project. I grew up in a type of choir culture in rural Virginia.

Like many of the township residents with whom I worked, church was one of my primary modes of socialization and choir was where I first learned how to perform music. I also learned how to sing without Western staff notation. I did not learn how to read Western staff notation with any ease until I was eleven and I began playing the alto saxophone. Prior to that, I noodled around on a piano inherited from my great-aunt, finding Christmas carols by ear. Because of this portion of my childhood, I had some experience with learning by ear and remembered clearly that feeling of being behind the curve in regards to reading Western staff notation.

Though my whiteness and membership in Western academia complicated my relationship with the township residents with whom I worked, that same positionality allowed me to move more freely within the strictures of opera as an institution in South Africa. From the outset, I was made welcome within the Cape Town Opera and the School of Music at UCT. The directors, educators, and administrators involved in these institutions were keen to provide a portrait of South African opera for an international audience and were eager to provide me the tools to write such a portrait.

**Fieldwork and COVID-19**

Between July and September 2019, I conducted fieldwork in Cape Town, South Africa.[35] I primarily lived in Observatory, a suburb near the University of Cape Town, where I studied isiXhosa under Dr. Mantoa Motinyane. I also lived with a family in Capricorn, a township on the outskirts of Cape Town. During this time, I centered my focus on the

[35] This research was funded by a Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship.

Cape Town Opera and the University of Cape Town School of Music and set the groundwork for professional and artistic networks in Cape Town. I left Cape Town certain that I would return the following year. In the meantime, I kept in touch with the contacts and friends I had made via email and WhatsApp. During my time in South Africa, I had only begun to scratch the surface of the local opera industry. Excited to delve more into the industry, I returned from Cape Town with promising new directions and several friends and interlocutors.

These new directions and research came to a crossroads in June of 2020. Though I was able to keep the funding I had secured for the summer, I was not able to return to South Africa due to the COVID-19 pandemic.[36] Though I was able to use my funding to take isiZulu (a sister language to isiXhosa) lessons for the summer, it was difficult to find the footing between my role as a PhD candidate and my role as a friend. Though the pandemic certainly caused a hitch in my research and my five-year plan, I was lucky to have my home, my health, and a reliable income. In the academic world, the common adage of the time was to switch to virtual fieldwork. There are, however, several issues with virtual fieldwork as a practice. Perhaps most obviously, many of the people suggesting such a switch had never themselves conducted virtual fieldwork, so there were no existing theoretical frameworks to assist in this pedagogical switch. Virtual fieldwork also does not address the presence aspect of fieldwork. There is a certain quality of physical exploration of and involvement in a location and/or culture that is not easily translated via software such as WhatsApp or Zoom.

[36] This funding was provided by a second Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship.

There are also ethical gray areas when conducting virtual fieldwork that differ from the ethical gray areas of in-person fieldwork. I often wondered whether or not it was ethical to expect labor and input from interlocutors during the pandemic. Many were struggling with job insecurity, the deaths of loved ones, and little or no access to dependable and affordable health services. Internet access, particularly for township residents, decreased during the pandemic as fewer people could afford to keep it. Wi-Fi is often inaccessible in townships due to a lack of infrastructure, and use of mobile data is expensive. Because many of my interlocutors are students, for example, they were only afforded a set allowance of mobile data per semester from their universities. It was not ethical to expect them to use valuable mobile data needed for their studies to assist with my research. I was also aware of the ethical implications of paying interlocutors cash for their input. Though the cash would certainly help them in the midst of the pandemic, such an incentive could create new challenges because it would shift the research/interlocutor relationship to an employer/employee relationship. As a graduate student whose own funding was contingent on successful grant applications, I could not promise such monetary futures for my interlocutors. Instead, I approached compensations similarly to how I approached it during my in-person fieldwork. During in-person fieldwork I often bought or cooked a meal for interlocutors, paid their cab fare, or gave them a spare ticket I had to attend a concert. I wanted to make sure that their conversations with me did not cost them valuable money or time. During the pandemic, I decided that the best course of action was to buy mobile data for interlocutors as needed for their conversations with me. Those who were students were able to keep and

supplement the data they received from their universities. Others were able to keep any data leftover after our conversations.

Because of their pressing concerns about employment and health, I assumed that interlocutors would not have much of an interest in speaking to me about my research. Particularly because my research is about opera, I thought discussing my project would rub salt in my interlocutors' wounds. It was depressing for all of us that opera had come to a grinding halt and that its future was uncertain. However, because of shared experiences with isolation and uncertain futures, I also developed deeper personal connections with my interlocutors during virtual fieldwork, becoming what Ruth Behar called a vulnerable observer.[37] Like Behar's work, the subjective became a core part of my ethnography. Through my discussions with interlocutors, it became clear that virtual fieldwork was both necessary for the completion of my research project as much as it was a welcome distraction for the interlocutors. Building off of the momentum of these conversations, I dove ceaselessly into virtual fieldwork via email, WhatsApp, and Zoom. Much of the fieldwork data gathered for and analyzed within this dissertation has been conducted virtually. The nature of such data is inherently different than data gathered from in-person fieldwork. In-person fieldwork allows a certain understanding of cultural atmosphere that does not translate well virtually. The cultural atmosphere, because it is the status quo for the subject, does not get translated for the benefit of the interviewer. Fortunately, the data that I gathered first was the result of in-person fieldwork, allowing

[37] Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996).

me some insider knowledge in translating the cultural atmosphere from the virtual into the real. Admittedly, this methodology is experimental by necessity and I am by no means purporting a new unifying theory of virtual fieldwork.

I returned to South Africa in 2022 for two short research trips: one in May and June and one from October through December. Though South Africa's mask mandate ended while I was there in June, activities such as concerts, festivals, and operas were slow to return. My research necessarily began to delve more deeply into local church communities, informal home gatherings, and my own one-on-one vocal lessons because these activities continued largely abated, even during the height of the pandemic. Though I was able to attend three operas and occasional student showcase concerts and master classes at the University of Cape Town's Baxter Theatre, I was unable to attend rehearsals because the singers wanted to protect their voices from the possibility of infection. My fieldwork, therefore, forced me not only to navigate a pandemic, but how to conduct fieldwork about an industry that is not operating at full capacity. I also had to learn how to conduct fieldwork with interlocutors who have not recovered financially or emotionally from the pandemic. My results, therefore, were skewed more toward how opera singers navigated this new post-pandemic landscape and how the opera industry responded to these methods of navigation. Though my project began as an examination of Black pedagogies of the operatic voice in South Africa and the ways in which the local opera industry responded to those pedagogies, it became an examination of the ways in which Black pedagogies reflect self-hood and community in Black townships and the ways in which the opera industry unwittingly separates itself from such communities.

**Chapter Overview**

In the first chapter I provide theoretical and situational contexts for the following chapters. I theorize opera as a potentially decolonizing medium, as argued by Mhlambi, Somma, and André. In this chapter I bring together theories of decolonization and put them in conversation with theories of institutions. Because institutions (such as opera houses and universities) provide the conditions for opera performance, it is also necessary to theorize how institutions can decolonize and the efficacy of their ability to decolonize. I suggest in this chapter that decolonization is produced and limited by institutions. I also suggest that opera practitioners enact individual agency within institutions. To support these suggestions, I theorize racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities in South Africa in order to elucidate how identity intersections of agents inform decolonization methods. These identity intersections are enacted and reproduced in the quotidian, which is also theorized more acutely in this chapter. Finally, I also theorize timbre and vocality and the ways in which individual agency and colonialist impositions have informed and continue to inform timbre construction.

In the second chapter I provide a history of opera in South Africa, from roughly the 1860s-present, which set the stage for the contemporary conditions of opera in South Africa, particularly in regards to challenges that Black opera singers face in cultivating and maintaining a domestic career. I suggest that such contemporary challenges are an inheritance of South Africa's competing Dutch and British colonialisms. I also discuss musical genres and practices that preceded and informed opera productions in the late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. Such genres and practices include: South African

choirs that evolved from nineteenth-century Christian missionaries, American Jubilee choirs, foreign and domestic Blackface minstrelsy, and traveling light or comedic opera companies from Europe. In this chapter I also trace how Black South Africans began to construct their own local ontologies and epistemologies that were both informed by and in contradiction to Black epistemologies in the United States.

In the third chapter I draw heavily from fieldwork to delineate the Black-centered pedagogies of learning and singing opera in South Africa, both formal and informal, both Western and local. I draw from interviews with educators, interviews with students and singers, and participant-observer fieldwork. Drawing from explanations from educators and performers, I also delineate how educators navigate the different linguistic backgrounds of their students and how performers navigate career building. I theorize the role that timbre plays in vocal pedagogy and how timbre is both consciously constructed by students and educators. Finally, I theorize how intersections between Blackness and other social categories (such as gender, class, and language) inform individual construction of timbre and how those same categories influence audience perception of timbre.

The fourth and final chapter contains comparative case studies of the Cape Town Opera's *Orphée et Eurydice* (2019) and *Così fan tutte* (2016), the Isango Ensemble's *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* (2006), and Umculo's *Romeo's Passion* (2018). With these case studies, I examine the ways in which opera institutions and individual operas participate in and impede the decolonization process in South Africa. In this chapter I also theorize

the efficacy of using opera to engender discourse and represent social issues. I incorporate insights about Black opera pedagogies from earlier chapters.

In the conclusion I provide practical calls to action, namely encouraging and championing the hard work of Black and South African educators, singers, and scholars. I will summarize the possible futures that opera practitioners, opera educators, and opera institutions have produced. I also summarize the current status of the opera industry in South Africa and discuss the limitations that institutions impose on South Africa's future as they also provide the conditions of possibility for that future. I will also summarize further possibilities for research, such as opera in rural South Africa and in other cities.

# CHAPTER 1: SOUNDING CONTRADICTIONS: THE LIMITATIONS AND POTENTIALITIES OF DECOLONIZING OPERA IN SOUTH AFRICA

In March of 2015, the #RhodesMustFall movement, a series of protests and actions demanding the decolonization of South African universities, started at the University of Cape Town (UCT). The movement centered around removing a statue of Cecil Rhodes, a ruthless British colonizer and former prime minister of the Cape Colony. Rhodes believed in the supremacy of the British people and the inherent barbarity of Indigenous South Africans.[38] The university removed the statue in April 2015 after a month of student protests. Students attending other universities across South Africa launched similar protests. Building on the momentum of #RhodesMustFall, the #FeesMustFall protests started at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg in October 2015. These protesters requested universities to stall increases on student fees and called on the government for more funding assistance for university students. Much like #RhodesMustFall, the #FeesMustFall protests also extended to other South African universities across the country.

My tenure at UCT in the summer of 2019 coincided with a resurgence of the #FeesMustFall protests, and a host of other protests that extended into the city of Cape Town and beyond. In addition to university students, the drivers for UCT's student

[38] The Cape Colony (or the Cape of Good Hope) was a British colony in present-day South Africa, primarily along its coast. It existed from 1795-1802 after the British gained control of South Africa from the Dutch. England briefly lost control of the colony between 1803-1806 to the Napoleonic Batavian Republic. The British regained control of the colony in 1806 and retained that control until 1910 when the colony dissolved in order to become the Union of South Africa. The Union of South Africa joined other British territories that are now part of present-day South Africa. Rhodes was Prime Minister of the Cape Colony from 1890-1896.

shuttle bus, the Jammie, also protested during this period, citing low pay. For myself and many other students, the Jammie was the primary mode of transport from Cape Town's suburbs to the UCT campus. This disruption of transportation services added to the chaos and confusion of competing protests across the university. In August 2019, the rape and murder of UCT student, Uyinene Mrwetyana, ignited even more protests across campus and outside of the Houses of Parliament in Cape Town. Students and Cape Town residents alike demanded that the government take seriously the epidemic of femicide and intimate partner violence in South Africa.[39] The protests became so intense that UCT shut its campuses down for two days in September 2019.

Decolonization was a common thread among the protests. The issues at hand – high university fees, unlivable wages, gender- and racial-based violence – each was attributed as a product of the legacy of colonialism in South Africa. In listening to student protestors and intellectuals, universities and government institutions did not acknowledge or criticize how such economic and educational inequalities impact racial communities differently because colonization prioritizes the experiences and epistemologies of the West. Many students called for an acknowledgment of the ways in which race plays a role in such inequalities and a dialogic interconnection between African and Western epistemologies. For other students, decolonization seemed to be defined in negation – they called for a replacement of white experiences and

[39] The South African government declared femicide a national crisis shortly after the protests in response to Uyinene's death in August 2019. Based on crime statistics at the time, the government estimated that a woman is murdered in South Africa every three hours. Most of those women were victims of assault before death, according to the same statistics. See Thuso Khumalo, "South Africa Declares 'Femicide' a National Crisis," *VOA News*, 20 September 2019, https://www.voanews.com/a/africa_south-africa-declares-femicide-national-crisis/6176187.html.

epistemologies with Black experiences and epistemologies. Student protestors demanded the decolonization of universities. Protestors for the protection of women called for a decolonization of the law. When students returned to campus after the shutdown, UCT hosted a variety of events themed around decolonization in an attempt to mollify the student protestors. The presence of decolonization protests, roundtables, and discourse on the UCT campus suggests that UCT is site of both decolonization and the reproduction of colonization.

During protests, contemporary activists sing many of the same songs that apartheid activists sung – these songs are referred to as struggle songs. Contemporary activists will also often use South Africa's national anthem, "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika" ("God Bless Africa") during protests. Intended to unite races into what Nelson Mandela termed a "rainbow nation," the anthem includes five of South Africa's eleven national languages: isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sesotho, Afrikaans, and English. Though each language has its own verse, I primarily heard the isiXhosa and isiZulu verses only during protests, and occasionally the Sesotho verse. I never heard the verses with the colonial languages (Afrikaans and English). The isiXhosa and isiZulu verses are as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika<br>Maluphakanyisw' uphondo lwayo | God bless Africa<br>May her glory be lifted high |
| Yizwa imithandazo yethu<br>Nkosi sikelela, thina lusapho lwayo | Hear our prayers,<br>God bless us, we are your children |

The other song I heard most frequently was "Senzeni na" ("What have we done?").

| | |
|---|---|
| Senzeni na? | What have we done? |
| Sono sethu, ubumnyama | Our sin is that we are Black |
| Sono sethu yinyaniso | Our sin is the truth |
| Sibulawayo | They are killing us |
| Mayibuye iAfrika | Let Africa return |

Most frequently in protests, only the first line, "Senzeni na?" was sung in call-and-response format. The juxtaposition of the national anthem and "Senzeni na?" sounds the hollow promise of Mandela's rainbow nation. While the national anthem promotes multiracial unity under linguistic diversity, "Senzeni na?" exposes the limitations of such an anthem. Though the demands for decolonization were clear, the music sung during these protests suggested the limitations of the institution and the institution's ability to decolonize. Yet, it is through the music of the colonizer that one can mobilize decolonial practices. Through song, protestors sounded this contradiction in the spaces of institutions such as the national government and the university.

**Institutions, Decoloniality, and their Limits**

Institutions play a central role in this dissertation because they are the sites of conflict between colonization and decolonization. While they reproduce inherited colonialist imperatives, they also provide the conditions of possibility for decolonization. The institutions central to this dissertation are the School of Music at UCT and the Cape Town Opera. In this dissertation, I situate institutions within their historical contexts in

order to elucidate how biases inherited from apartheid-era South Africa influence the contemporary opera economy and how individual agency challenges such biases. Sociologists have theorized the concept of an institution most thoroughly. Sociologists such as Emile Durkheim and Pierre Bourdieu primarily theorized social institutions (e.g. marriage, punishment, law).[40] Others such as Michel Foucault and Erving Goffman theorized physical institutions (e.g. an opera house or a university) and how they reinscribe social institutions.[41] For the purposes of this dissertation, my use of the word "institution" refers to physical institutions – namely, opera companies, universities, and other sites of training for opera singers. Both Foucault and Goffman argue that institutions are lynchpins of consolidated power designed to discipline and regulate behavior. Foucault acknowledges that institutions are both oppressive and enabling to the citizen-subject – the citizen-subject does have limited agency within institutions. In order to understand how institutions regulate behavior and how individuals enact agency that differs from that of the institution, it is necessary to know their history. Durkheim argues that, because institutions are inherited, a historical analysis is crucial in order to understand an institution.[42] Tracing the history of an institution forms one branch of focus in sociological research from the twentieth century. James S. Coleman and W. Richard Scott in particular focus on the process behind the regulatory forces of

[40] See Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, ed. Steven Lukes, trans. W.D. Halls (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1982); Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
[41] See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1991); Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1961).
[42] Ibid., 37, 157.

institutions and how that process both limits and creates agency within institutions. Seth Abrutyn theorizes how social institutions are organized into institutional structures. He constructs a hierarchical organization of institutions. Durkheim's social institutions and social units (groups, organizations, communities) are on the macro-level. The micro-level consists of encounters between individuals and the various identities of individuals.[43] Both the micro- and macro-levels of an institution are further mediated by global and local hierarchical systems. Abrutyn's theory is instructive in analyzing the ways in which the interlocutors in this dissertation work within institutions as a group member and as an individual. Such a system also provides a way to analyze how aspects such as linguistic, gender, and racial identity limit individual and collective agency within institutions. In regards to music institutions, Georgina Born's ethnography about IRCAM, a French compositional and research institute dedicated to avant-garde and electroacoustic music, details the ways in which composers and students navigated their own subjectivities within the constraints of IRCAM. Born argues that while IRCAM imposed limitations on these composers and students, their seeming compliance with such constraints yielded professional and cultural legitimation.[44] I suggest that Black South African opera singers navigate a similar terrain within South Africa's opera institutions as they seek to legitimate themselves both as Black and as opera singers.

[43] Seth Abrutyn, "Institutional Spheres: The Macro-Structure and Culture of Social Life," in *Handbook of Contemporary Sociological Theory*, ed. John DeLamater (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2016), 225.
[44] Georgina Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995).

Decolonization initiatives within institutions are similarly limited because such institutions are the inheritance of colonialism and they reproduce the colonial imperatives they are attempting to deconstruct. This is particularly true of opera institutions such as the Cape Town Opera and the UCT Music School because both institutions are inherited from apartheid. These institutions embody the contradictions at the core of South Africa's decolonization process: the institutions that maintained and reproduced racial segregation and Afrikaner nationalism are the same institutions that are desegregating and diversifying arts and education in South Africa.[45] Though desegregation and diversification are important aspects of decolonization, these institutions still reproduce the colonial hierarchy that maintains the status quo of racial and economic inequality in South Africa.[46] Such contradictions exemplify sociologist Aníbal Quijano's theory of the "coloniality of power."[47] He argues that the hierarchical systems created by Euro-American colonizers and the rules that governed and entrenched those hierarchies still exist in the postcolonial nation state.[48] A colony's independence from its colonizing power(s) merely shifts institutional hierarchies to a different form – independence does not deconstruct or dissolve such hierarchies.

[45] Following Ngugi wa Thiong'o's theorization of decoloniality, I will refer to decolonization as a process rather than an event. See Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: J. Currey, 1986).
[46] Diversifying school music programs is one of the steps musicologist George Lewis suggests in his essay on how to decolonize music. See George Lewis, "New Music Decolonization in Eight Difficult Steps," *Outernational,* https://www.van-outernational.com/lewis-en/.
[47] Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, "Americanity as a concept, or the Americas in the modern-world system," *International Journal of Social Science* 134 (1992): 549-559.
[48] Ibid., 550.

Interventions in postcolonial studies demonstrate that Nelson Mandela's "rainbow nation" brand of postcolonial nationalism is the form that coloniality has taken in postapartheid South Africa. Though South Africa has been officially independent from colonial control since 1931, it was under apartheid control between 1948 and 1994 – the year that Nelson Mandela was democratically elected as president by the whole country. Though the democratic election officially ushered in South Africa's postapartheid period, the conditions for the democratic election resulted from negotiations between Mandela and his political party, the African National Congress (ANC), and the party of the apartheid government, the National Party. In order to secure a safe democratic election for the country, Mandela agreed in negotiations that South Africa's first constitution, written by the ANC, would set up South Africa as a capitalist country. This concession on Mandela's part is contra to the Marxist history and origins of the ANC.[49] The legal institution of a capitalist government and society further entrenched apartheid-era economic inequality across racial lines. Achille Mbembe argues that capitalism and race in South Africa are inextricably linked. In regards to Black labor and capital in South Africa, the "valorization" of the laboring Black body and its dispensability have always been dialectical.[50] The Black body has been and continues to be necessary to provide the

[49] For more in-depth histories on South Africa's early democratization processes see: Matthew Chakalson and Richard Spitz, *Politics of Transition: The Hidden History of South Africa's Negotiated Settlement* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 1999); Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Boston, MA: Back Bay Books, 1995); Robert Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Allister Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country: The Inside Story of South Africa's Road to Change* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Frank Welsh, *A History of South Africa* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishing, 2000).

[50] Jesse Weaver Shipley, Jean Comaroff, and Achille Mbembe, "Africa in Theory: A Conversation Between Jean Comaroff and Achille Mbembe," *Anthropological Quarterly* 83, no. 3 (Summer 2010), 660.

colonial, apartheid-era, and postcolonial state with capital although the state does not acknowledge the personhood of laboring Black bodies. The continuance of capital requires the erasure of Black subjectivity at the institutional level. In an allegedly postracial "rainbow nation," recognizing such economic inequality and its racial origins at the institutional level both threatens and reproduces Mandela's brand of postcolonial nationalism. This nationalism is threatened because such economic inequalities demonstrate the necessity of reconciling historical racist practices in order to engender present multiracial equality. This nationalism is simultaneously reproduced because such economic inequalities provide the necessary capital to help the inheritors of Mandela's political theories, the ANC, maintain a financial and political majority. Through the denial of recognition of racial categories in favor of a South Africanism vaguely defined by South Africanism, or what ethnomusicologist Gavin Steingo calls a "tautological nationalism," racial identities in South Africa have become entrenched.[51] Thomas Blom Hansen argues that the denial creates an urge among South Africans to visibly mark racial and ethnic identities.[52] While Mandela's "rainbow nationalism" marks an urge to shift away from the apartheid government's overdetermination of race through the denial of race, South Africans are negotiating how to mark race differently in postapartheid South Africa. Both political theorist Partha Chatterjee and philosopher Daniel Herwitz acknowledge that while postcolonial nationalism accepts standards set by colonizers, the postcolonial nation needs colonial heritage to reimagine itself on contemporary local and

[51] Gavin Steingo, "The Inaudible Nation: Music and Sensory Perception in Postapartheid South Africa," *Cultural Critique* 95 (Winter 2017): 72.
[52] Thomas Blom Hansen, "Sounds of Freedom: Music, Taxis, and Racial Imagination in Urban South Africa," *Public Culture* 18, no. 1 (2006), 199.

global stages.[53] Said differently, colonial heritage can be productive in constructing postcolonial epistemologies. While defining oneself according to race is an inheritance of colonialism, the means by which to mark one's race can be newly defined in postapartheid South Africa.

Though colonial epistemologies are (re)produced in postcolonial institutions, such institutions can also be productive sites for constructing new epistemologies. Literary theorist and opera scholar Innocentia Jabulisile Mhlambi argues that capitalist cultural institutions are ideal sites for decolonization precisely *because* they are inherently contradictory.[54] Because the knowledge systems in such institutions are based on what theorist Sara Ahmed refers to as the "reproduction of likeness", or the reproduction of white-centric Western knowledge systems, such gaps in knowledge of local epistemologies allow for individuals to engage in the decolonization process within the confines of the institution.[55] These gaps in knowledge allow for lived experiences that are, to borrow Kofi Agawu's terminology, "incongruent" to Euro-American epistemologies inherited from colonialism.[56] This incongruency is necessary because, as Mbembe argues, a multiplicity of epistemes is at the core of decolonization. More acutely, it is the *dialogue* between epistemes that catalyzes and continues the process of

[53] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (London: Zed Books 1986); Daniel Herwitz, *Heritage, Culture, and Politics in the Postcolony* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012).
[54] Innocentia Jabulisile Mhlambi, "Embodied Discordance: Vernacular Idioms in *Winnie: The Opera*," *African Studies* 75, no. 1 (2016), 68.
[55] Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 38-39.
[56] Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 25-27.

decolonization.[57] Within the gaps afforded by the contradictions of institutions, South African opera practitioners put epistemes into dialogue via opera to assist in South Africa's decolonizing process.

*Winnie: The Opera*, an opera written by South African composer, Bongani Ndodana-Breen, is one example of the ways in which opera can utilize the gaps between the mimesis of opera and its Indigenous reproduction to serve as a decolonizing force. Mhlambi, together with fellow opera scholars, Naomi André, and Donato Somma use this opera as a case study to make key interventions in the gap between Black studies and opera studies. Firstly, they theorize how opera as a genre can decolonize; secondly, they theorize how opera decolonizes in South Africa. *Winnie: The Opera* is, in part, a biography of Nelson Mandela's second wife and anti-apartheid activist, Winnie Mandela, as it is also a summary and critique of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC was a restorative justice body formed in 1996 whose purpose was to provide a space for participants on both sides of the apartheid struggle to give testimony and/or request amnesty for their crimes committed during apartheid.[58] Winnie Mandela was a key witness in the TRC hearings because she was one of the founders of Umkhonto weSizwe (Spear of the Nation), the military arm of the ANC during apartheid. Mhlambi, André, and Somma argue that Ndodana-Breen depends on opera rather than language to

[57] Mbembe, "Decolonizing the University: New Directions," *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* 15, no. 1 (2016): 29-45.
[58] For a more in-depth history of the TRC, its successes, and its shortcomings, see: Janet Cherry, *Spear of the Nation (Umkhonto WeSizwe): South Africa's Liberation Army 1960s-1990s* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2011); Catherine M. Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission: Stages of Transition* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010); Annie Coombes, "Witnessing History/Embodying Testimony: Gender and Memory in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17 (May 2011): S92-S112.

portray Winnie because much of his libretto is taken from the TRC reports and other sources of public record; Ndodana-Breen did not fictionalize Winnie.[59] Ndodana-Breen's use of public record material was dialogical – he used sources that were both critical and supportive of the TRC and its outcomes. Winnie is also equally honored and critiqued, providing a nuanced depiction that encourages multiple simultaneous viewpoints.[60] *Winnie: The Opera* is an example of Agawu's incongruity of lived experience and Mbembe's dialogical epistemes and offers a model for the ways in which opera can be used to decolonize Western epistemes within opera institutions. *Winnie* is also demonstrative of Brett Pyper's argument that music more so than music festivals or institutions provides the possibilities for a "liberatory praxis" because music plays a role in activating and encouraging social and political imaginations.[61]

Building off Mbembe, I theorize vocal pedagogy as another practice that participates in South African opera's decolonizing process. While opera composition is a form of decolonization that is performed within institutions, vocal pedagogy is particularly efficacious because performers can use it as a decolonizing agent within and outside of the institution. This pedagogy is developed within township homes, churches, and schools, and honed in quotidian experiences. Township bars, taxi rides, funerals, sports games, and several other quotidian spaces and events are sites where singers develop pedagogy. When opera singers who live in and/or grew up in townships engage

[59] Naomi André, Donato Somma, and Innocentia Jabulisile Mhlambi, "*Winnie: The Opera* and Embodying South African Opera," *African Studies* 75, no. 1 (2016), 4.
[60] Ibid., 6.
[61] Brett Pyper, "Jazz Festivals and the Post-Apartheid Public Sphere: Historical Precedents and the Contemporary Limits of Freedom," *the world of music* 5, no. 2 (2016), 119.

with vocal pedagogy dialogically with Western pedagogical and performance methods, they disrupt Ahmed's "reproduction of likeness" within institutions. In this dissertation I focus on the ways that the quotidian is a site for decolonization and how the quotidian informs vocal pedagogy for Black South Africans.

**The Quotidian and/as Pedagogy: The Politics of the Ordinary**

As observed during my fieldwork in South African townships, much of the formation of Black vocal pedagogies occurs in the township, itself a construct of apartheid. The quotidian, ordinary events of the township are the sites in which such pedagogies are innovated. South African theorist, Njabulo Ndebele, theorizes an interpenetration between what he terms the "spectacular" and the "ordinary."[62] The spectacular contains events such as political protests, acts of violence, and other spectacular means to gain political goals. The ordinary contains the quotidian: taxi rides, church services, use of Indigenous languages in English-only spaces, and multitudes of other actions that, although not always intended as political action, can be interpreted as such. Ndebele argues that limiting the decolonizing project to the spectacular robs the subject of agency – the proverbial struggling subject is then only a product of tyranny. Rather, Ndebele argues that the decolonization project lies in a "politics of the ordinary."[63] Such a politics is lived in townships. Though townships certainly are a creation and inheritance of apartheid, they also contain sites that make decolonial processes possible. This emphasis

[62] Njabulo Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2006), 41-59.
[63] Ibid.

on the possible is indicative of Sarah Nuttal's "politics of the emergent" in which she encourages a "turn towards the negotiation of the possible."[64] This "politics of the emergent" addresses both the potential and limitations of a democratic society in postapartheid South Africa through a focus on the marginalized and of the everyday.[65]

The quotidian in postapartheid South Africa exemplifies a politics of the emergent because it is simultaneously a site for obfuscation of violence and for decolonization. South African musicologist Mia Pistorius argues, via Ndebele, that decolonization in apartheid South Africa exemplified a politics of the ordinary. She argues that apartheid's quotidian of violence and racial segregation *was* a spectacle.[66] In such an environment, even the most ordinary of acts had the power to enact decolonizing processes. U.S. theorist Saidiya Hartman theorizes the interpenetration between the quotidian and the spectacular in a similar way. Rather than focusing on how decolonization is possible via the quotidian, Hartman theorizes how an emphasis on the spectacle of violence and the obfuscation of the violence of the quotidian maintains inherited racist institutions.[67] Though the legacy of chattel slavery in the United States is the system that Hartman is theorizing, similar parallels can be made when thinking through the legacy of apartheid in South Africa. The everyday of postapartheid South Africa contains the legacy of apartheid's racial segregation. Townships are still racially homogenous places with high

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[64] Sarah Nuttal, "A Politics of the Emergent: Cultural Studies in South Africa," *Theory, Culture, & Society* 23, no. 7-8 (December 2006), 264.
[65] Ibid., 264-265.
[66] Mia Pistorius, "The Eoan Group and the Politics of Coloured Opera in Apartheid South Africa," PhD dissertation, Oxford University, 2017, 193.
[67] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 42.

instances of homelessness, poverty, and job insecurity. The paucity of public transport and the high cost of long taxi rides to the city contribute to this status quo. These are only two of the ways in which postapartheid South Africa's everyday maintains the spectacle of apartheid. As illustrated in this chapter's opening vignette, the spectacle of violence that garners public attention and catalyzes institutional action. Yet, following Hartman it is "by defamiliarizing the familiar" that one can "illuminate the terror of the mundane and quotidian rather than exploit the shocking spectacle."[68]

Because the quotidian is at the core of this contradiction, ethnography was a necessary practical and analytical tool when conducting research for this dissertation. I lived in both the Cape Town suburbs and in townships during my fieldwork trips in order to get a sense of the places in which my interlocutors lived and worked.[69] Anthropologist Lila Ellen Gray, in her ethnography of Portuguese fado, theorized the role of the city in understanding the motives of her interlocutors. She argued that the material physicality of the city is connected to the ways in which interlocutors shape memory and sociality.[70] Living, studying, and traveling between and within Cape Town and its townships, then, was necessary to understand the ways in which these postapartheid spaces still harbor the memory of apartheid and how those memories affect how interlocutors relate to their coworkers and communities. Via his twin concepts of "ethnographically informed

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[68] Ibid., 4.

[69] A summary of my three fieldwork trips is as follows. Between July and September 2019, I lived in Observatory, a Cape Town suburb, and a township, Capricorn. Between May and July of 2022, I lived in Claremont, a suburb of Cape Town. Between October and December 2022, I lived in Khayelitsha, a township.

[70] Lila Ellen Gray, *Fado Resounding: Affective Politics and Urban Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 107.

history" and "historically informed ethnography," ethnomusicologist Michael Birenbaum-Quintero encourages a consideration of the everyday when examining history, and an understanding of history as one of the many factors that affect people's actions in the present.[71] Steingo, in his ethnography of kwaito music in Soweto, a township outside of Johannesburg, provides a model for how to engage with apartheid history as it resonates in the everyday.[72] He argues that postapartheid South Africa is an "experiment" in nonracial democracy that affects how South Africans understand and experience values such as freedom, equality, and democracy.[73] Similarly to Steingo, I make connections between interlocutor insights from fieldwork and how such insights resound in vocal practice and opera productions. Anthropologist David Coplan, in his ethnography of music by Basotho migrant workers during apartheid, emphasizes both the role of the everyday in ethnography and the importance of the relationships among interlocutors and the relationship between interlocutor and researcher.[74] Coplan argues that an ethical ethnography requires an emphasis on listener and performer positionality. This requires an intimate knowledge of how the everyday affects their positionalities in order to write a contextualized and defensible ethnography.[75]

The everyday for both myself and many interlocutors was often punctuated by travel between the township and the city. For a portion of my fieldwork, I lived in a

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[71] Michael Birenbaum-Quintero, *Rites, Rights and Rhythms: A Genealogy of Musical Meaning in Colombia's Black Pacific* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 3.
[72] See Gavin Steingo, *Kwaito's Promise: Music and the Aesthetics of Freedom in South Africa* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016).
[73] Ibid., 10-14.
[74] See David Coplan, *In the Time of Cannibals: The Word Music of South Africa's Bosotho Immigrants* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
[75] Ibid., 8-9, 242-261.

township called Khayelitsha on the outskirts of Cape Town. Roughly twenty miles from Cape Town's city center, taxis (iiteksi in isiXhosa) were the most common mode of transport for those who worked in the city.[76] Taxis themselves are inherited from apartheid. During apartheid, workers of color were permitted to work in the city but only white people were permitted to live in cities. The apartheid government constructed townships on the outskirts of cities to house these workers of color. The government, however, supplied few, if any, transport options for these workers. Township residents created their own networks of taxi systems in order to provide transport. These taxis are vans that can seat between eight and ten passengers. Because Khayelitsha is a large township, a one-way trip to Cape Town often involves two taxis: one to get from home to the taxi depot, or "rank," and another to get to Cape Town.[77] As was the case for myself and several of my interlocutors who lived in Khayelitsha, a round trip to Cape Town took at least four taxis and cost roughly sixty rand (or roughly $3). Because most taxis from townships go to Cape Town's city center, it was common to have to take another taxi once in Cape Town to the next location. Rehearsals and performances were often in Rondebosch, a suburb of Cape Town and location of the Baxter Theatre and the UCT Opera School. This taxi cost another ten to fifteen rand. Several of my interlocutors commented that they spent most, if not all, of their paychecks on taxis alone. There have

[76] Khayelitsha is one of the few townships to have access to the city of Cape Town's public bus system, MyCiti. Though a one-way trip from Khayelitsha to Cape Town is roughly the same cost as a taxi, the bus requires the purchase of a fare card that adds extra cost. There are taxi options other than iiteksi in South Africa. Rideshare services such as Uber, Bolt, and InDriver are available, but charge much more than iiteksi.

[77] Like buses, taxis have predetermined routes. At each rank there are several taxis with their respective routes displayed in the front windshield.

also been many occasions where interlocutors did not attend a gig because they either did not have transport money or because the gig did not pay enough to justify paying for transport. The cost of transport that is disproportional to the pay that opera singers receive in South Africa is example of how apartheid history and South Africa's decolonizing present are intertwined. Even in an allegedly postapartheid country, many Black South Africans are not able to gain enough capital to live in the cities in which they work. In turn, they are still beholden to a taxi system that was designed out of desperation.

Because many Black South Africans either cannot afford to attend university-level opera school and/or perform regular opera singing gigs in the city, much of their formative training and gigging occurs in township churches and other venues. Several solo and choir gigs are available in townships, though the pay is typically lower than those in the city. Such gigs are held at large community centers, at churches, or at restaurants. Though several of these gigs are choir competitions, others are artist showcases intended to shine a light on the wealth of talent in South Africa's townships. Township choir repertoire varies widely but does include pieces from canonic Western operas as well as traditional South African songs, pop covers, and Christian hymns. Choirs will also hire soloists to sing opera arias on their programs. Other singing gigs include gospel gigs at churches, jazz gigs at bars and restaurants, and traditional singing for weddings and funerals. Some singers will also perform traditional music for documentaries or backing vocals for television commercials. Much like forced localization forced apartheid-era township residents to create their own transport system,

so do contemporary Black South Africans create their own pedagogy and vocal timbre in response to the forced localization inherited from apartheid.

**The Sociality of the South African Voice**

Black South Africans have a long history of constructing their own systems and practices within and against the confines of strict governments. In the nineteenth century, the British colonial government provided the framework for a construction of a Black South African voice by providing music lessons and repertoire. As musicologist Grant Olwage explains, British Christian missionaries introduced hymnody to colonial South Africa in the nineteenth century as a means to spread the gospel.[78] British missionaries also sought to instill values of Victorian respectability onto the voices of colonized Black South Africans through hymnody. Missionaries especially emphasized elocution in their teaching and in circulated educational materials in order to discipline Black South Africans through speech. Ethnomusicologist Ana María Ochoa Gautier, in her historical ethnography of the strategies of colonization in nineteenth-century Colombia, argues that disciplining via the voice is powerful yet limited.[79] It is powerful in that disciplining the voice simultaneously disciplines the voicing body, yet the voice is also a site of self-actualization. Similarly, Olwage posits that Black South Africans had some control in the creation of their own voice, arguing that the Black South African voice is a "hybrid"

[78] Grant Olwage, "The Class and Colour of Tone: An Essay on the Social History of Vocal Timbre," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 13, no. 2 (November 2004): 203-226.
[79] Ana María Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 210.

voice that resulted from colonial culture and an "existing timbral habitus."[80] Because many choral teachers and conductors were Black, even in the colonial missionary system, Black singers and teachers decided which aspects of British culture they wanted to adopt and which they did not.[81]

The dialogic relationship between the voice and body that Black South Africans had prior to colonization could explain why disciplining colonized South Africans via the voice was especially limited. Louise Meintjes, in her ethnography of ngoma dancing, a traditional dance performed by amaZulu men, theorizes such a relationship via her concept of the "body-voice."[82] She describes the body-voice as "an intense sociality … with a view toward the apparent futures neoliberalism presupposes … a refusal of the charge of victimhood and of relegation to the past."[83] The neoliberal futures to which Meintjes gestures toward in the above description are futures in which the removal of regulatory government forces from the everyday allow for self-actualization independent of Western forces. The apartheid government maintained its power through intense regulation of the social. It regulated racial categories, cross-racial interactions, ethnic identities, among several other identities and actions. With neoliberalism came the promise of the removal of local government deregulation of the citizen-subject and presupposed a future that would allow the citizen-subject to define their own ontologies on both the local and global stages. In South Africa, the journey from apartheid-era over-

[80] Olwage, "The Class and Colour of Tone," 210.
[81] Ibid. John Knox Bokwe was one such teacher, who will be discussed more closely in the second chapter.
[82] Louise Meintjes, *Dust of the Zulu: Ngoma Aesthetics After Apartheid* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 21-22.
[83] Ibid.

regulation to postapartheid deregulation was rife with violence. Because ngoma is a dance that performs violence, Meintjes argues that ngoma dancing is the means by which amaZulu men redefine their relationships to and performance of violence that is not overdetermined by the regulatory violence of the apartheid government.[84] Performing violence in this way connects amaZulu men to pre-colonial performances of violence that were deregulatory. These performances were rooted in community-building and forged connections among amaZulu men as those men learned about themselves through performing. Neoliberalism via ngoma dancing is a sort of re-return to the pre-colonial as it rehearses a deregulated past to enact a deregulated future. As Mbembe argued, the overregulation of the laboring Black body was defined by its simultaneous ability to perform labor and to remain illegible. Making the body legible through ngoma dance enacts a liberatory politics that delinks the Black body from its overdetermined history with the apartheid struggle. For Meintjes, the voice is a co-producer of this potential for liberatory politics as it also organizes the sociality between the self and history. Via the body-voice, Meintjes demonstrates that Black South Africans had a strong sense of sociality with the self and others before colonization.[85] This dialogic sociality assists in constructing a timbre that enacts a deregulated future as it also in response to an overdetermined apartheid past.

The sociality between the sounding body-voice informs the dialogical relationship between the body-voice and the listener. Musicologist Nina Sun Eidsheim has

[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., 12-13.

extensively theorized the voice, how race informs conceptions of and pedagogies for the voice, and the sociality of the voice.[86] She defines the voice as a "complex event" that consists of: action, material, and social dynamics.[87] Though Eidsheim also focuses on the sociality of the voice, unlike Meintjes, Eidsheim focuses on the sociality between the singer(s) and the listener(s) rather than the sociality among performers. For her part, Lila Ellen Gray theorizes the voice as not only interpersonal but also intrapersonal. She defines the voice as an intrapersonal "mediator" between the exterior and interior self that is also interpreted differently in interpersonal relations between performers and listeners.[88] That is, the singer's intention or expression of their own selfhood may not be legible to the listener. Eidsheim theorizes the racial implications of such a relationship. She argues that the racialization of timbre takes place via the listener's assumptions and biases superimposed onto the voice.

Historian Kira Thurman and sound theorist Mendi Obadike make similar arguments.[89] Thurman argues that a Black body sounding "white" music, such as opera, creates a contradiction for white listeners that needs to be solved. Obadike focuses on sound rather than the body, arguing that listeners impugn a "mythic blackness" onto sound, even if a Black body is not present.[90] Mythic blackness is defined in relation to

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[86] See Nina Sun Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African American Music* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019); Eidsheim, "The Micropolitics of Listening to Vocal Timbre," *Postmodern Culture* 24, no. 3 (May 2014); Eidsheim, "Marian Anderson and 'Sonic Blackness' in American Opera," *American Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (September 2011): 641-671.
[87] Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound*, 4.
[88] Gray, *Fado Resounding*, 196.
[89] See Kira Thurman, "Performing Lieder, Hearing Race: Debating Blackness, Whiteness, and German Identity in Interwar Central Europe," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72, no. 3 (Fall 2019): 825-865; Mendi Obadike, "Low Fidelity: Stereotyped Blackness in the Field of Sound," PhD dissertation (Duke University, 2005).
[90] I used a lowercase 'b' in "mythic blackness" to match Obadike's original capitalization.

whiteness – it is what whiteness is not.[91] Thurman's and Obadike's theorizing ties back to Eidsheim's theory of the "figure of sound."[92] This figure "assumes a fixed, indisputable referent" and the listener's "primary goal is to identify difference from that referent."[93] Those assumed referents, in this dissertation, are a white opera singer and a Black subject.

Meintjes, Eidsheim, Obadike, Gray, and Thurman all demonstrate how intimately sociality and voice are intertwined. Eidsheim, Meintjes, and Gray demonstrate that the voice is an event that sounds embodied history, actualizes self-hood, and negotiates relationships. Eidsheim, Obadike, and Thurman demonstrate that the listener's biases and experiences influence the legibility of the singer's selfhood. In the Black township, the sociality between listener and singer is mediated by common racial and economic pasts and presents. The Black sounding body does not need to be made white to be legible. As I will show in subsequent chapters, the sociality between listener and singer is mediated by assumptions that the listener has both about opera and about the role of the Black voice.

**The Race of Language**

My interest in engaging with Blackness in this dissertation is, in part, to theorize how interlocutors negotiate Blackness to achieve professional and personal ends and how they understand their own lived experiences and performances of Blackness in relation to

[91] Obadike, "Low Fidelity," 14.
[92] Eidsheim, "The Micropolitics of Listening to Vocal Timbre."
[93] Ibid.

those of other Black people. In my work with opera singers and students in townships and within the opera and university systems, I observed the ways in which Black opera singers modify different aspects of their identities according to environments and situations. Shifts in language and linguistic dialect were common between the township and the opera house, or between monoracial and multiracial environments. The vocal pedagogy of Black South African opera singers is informed by the environments of the opera house and township and coproduced by other factors such as place, language, and race. The township is monoracial and primarily monolingual.[94]

Race and language are closely tied together in South Africa – language seems to have the ability to both affirm and challenge racial identities. IsiXhosa was the dominant language in the townships in which I conducted research because the amaXhosa are the largest Indigenous ethnic group in the Western Cape province.[95] Language was the primary method I used in fieldwork to gain trust with my interlocutors and to enter spaces that intentionally only use isiXhosa. Such spaces are churches, homes, and choir rehearsals – these are intended to be closed spaces because they are spaces that are preservative and innovative in regards to vocal pedagogy. Though my network of interlocutors certainly played a huge role in granting me access to these closed spaces,

[94] There is some use of English in townships – restaurants, bars, and other businesses often advertise and produce menus in both isiXhosa and English. This is likely due to the large number of Anglophone African immigrants, particularly from neighboring Zimbabwe and Botswana, who live in isiXhosa-speaking townships but do not speak isiXhosa. There is also a large Somalian population – many Somalians operate stores similar to bodegas called "Somali shops." Other Indigenous languages are also spoken in these townships as members of other South African ethnic groups also live in Cape Town-area townships.
[95] These townships included: Khayelitsha, Langa, Gugulethu, Nyanga, and Capricorn.

my ability to speak conversational isiXhosa disrupted race expectations. That disruption also granted me access to these spaces and helped me build my network.

South African ethnomusicologists Gavin Steingo and Carol Muller discussed how they negotiated their whiteness in their fieldwork. Both discuss how their fieldwork was fraught with tension between being inside (South African, particularly South Africans who witnessed South Africa's shift to democracy) and outside (white).[96] This tension, Muller notes, is demonstrative of the ways in which apartheid kept people emotionally, culturally, and physically separate.[97] While this relational history provided these white South African ethnographers with a common experience with their Black South African interlocutors, I entered the field as a linguistic, racial, and national outsider with no existing network. This position afforded me a different kind of whiteness than the whiteness inhabited by Steingo and Muller. My effort to learn isiXhosa also allowed me to negotiate the putative bounds of my whiteness – interlocutors and others I met spoke more freely once they heard me speak the language. Because linguistic identity is one of the only audible forms of diversity in South Africa's putatively postracial democracy, language has become closely linked to race. Though my isiXhosa did not grant me any degree of Blackness, its close association *with* Blackness afforded me a proximity to amaXhosa practices that English did not.

While race, ethnicity, and language are often viewed as separate elements, race is closely linked to ethnicity in South Africa, largely because Indigenous ethnic groups are

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[96] Steingo, *Kwaito's Promise*, 22; Carol Muller, *Rituals of Fertility and the Sacrifice of Desire: Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 13.
[97] Muller, *Rituals of Fertility*, 13.

classed according to their respective languages of origin. Historian Patrick Harries, in his analysis of how Tsonga people became ethnically conscious, argues that ethnicity is itself a product of internalized colonialism.[98] Before colonialism, African identity was more closely rooted in clan lineage (patrilineal) and in chiefdoms rather than in ethnic identity.[99] During apartheid, the apartheid government intentionally pitted ethnic groups against each other to stoke racial division because a united racial front was an obvious threat to the apartheid government. Ethnic groups were often competing for the same limited resources and were able to mobilize their own ethnic groups for their own needs. Such division entrenched identifying strongly with one's ethnicity – this is still the case in contemporary South Africa. Though racial unity in the form of political parties such as the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) eventually assisted in bringing an end to apartheid, ethnic separations still persisted.[100] Though inter-ethnic relationships and populations are much more common in postapartheid South Africa, ethnicity is still a strong marker of identity.

The South African government's emphasis on linguistic and ethnic identity over racial identity has, paradoxically, entrenched racial identity in contemporary South Africa. During apartheid races were separated and discrete racial categories were created

[98] Patrick Harries, "Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism: The Emergence of Ethnicity among the Tsonga-Speakers of South Africa," in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, ed. Leroy Vail (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 110. Tsonga is one of South Africa's eleven national languages and is indigenous to southern Africa. The Tsongas primarily live in the northeastern provinces of Mpumalanga and Limpopo near the Mozambique border.
[99] Ibid., 90.
[100] The ANC was and still is understood as a group that is biased toward Nguni peoples (an umbrella term that includes Xhosa-, Zulu-, Ndebele-, and Swati-speaking peoples). The IFP is said to have a bias toward amaZulu.

– segregation thus entrenched racial identities because it was the primary means of state categorization. The apartheid government divided the entire country into four racial groups: white, Indian, Black African, and coloured.[101] During apartheid, coloured people were officially classed as people with a Black parent and a white parent, but, as sociologist Mohamed Adhikari argues, race is part determined by social relations as well.[102] How people of other races interacted with coloured people during apartheid also helped codify "coloured" as a racial category. Although South Africa is ostensibly postracial, the continuance of cross-racial social relations has ensured the continuance of racial identity.

Language is one of the ways in which race is marked. For Black South Africans, speaking a Nguni or other Indigenous African language is a marker of race.[103] Language also marks ethnicity due to the continued social salience of linguistically-organized ethnic groups from apartheid-era South Africa discussed above. Language is also implicated in questions of racial authenticity. There is a racial authenticity associated with the township dialect of isiXhosa that is not afforded by the urban dialect spoken in Cape Town. Because the Cape Town dialect tends to code-mix with English more frequently than the township dialect, speakers of the Cape Town dialect are viewed as

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[101] I will maintain this spelling of the term "coloured" throughout this dissertation to avoid confusion with the American English term "colored."

[102] For more research on coloured identity, see: Mohamed Adhikari, "Hope, Fear, Shame, Frustration: Continuity and Change in the Expression of Coloured Identity in White Supremacist South Africa: 1910-1994," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 32, no. 3 (September 2006): 467-487; Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006); Adhikari, *Burdened by Race: Coloured Identities in Southern Africa* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2009).

[103] For the purposes of this dissertation, however, I focus on Nguni-speaking, particularly isiXhosa-speaking South Africans, as most of my interlocutors were amaXhosa.

less authentically amaXhosa *and* less authentically Black. Linguist Thulile Pearl Shandu notes that much of the racial and ethnic politics tied to language are a result of a concern of an erosion of Indigenous cultures in South Africa.[104] However, rather than understanding code-mixing with English as a dilution of isiZulu (the language of focus in her article), Shandu instead sees code-mixing as a result of a pervasive multilingual ontology and a translocal mindset. Code-mixing, she continues, is a result of linguistic innovation and evolution.[105] In my own experience in Cape Town-area townships, however, was that English was a language for work and for other racially-mixed places. The township is a place for isiXhosa in order to claim the township as an area with free, undiluted expressions of Blackness.

This murkiness involving the interpenetration of race, ethnicity, nation, and language is part of the complexity of the postcolonial subjects as they work to redefine racial identity in the postapartheid period. Sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant, in theorizing how race became formulated in the United States, argue that race must be considered with ethnicity and nationalism.[106] For South Africa, I contend that language must also be considered in theorizations about race formulation. Though Omi and Winant theorize how race formed in the United States, their core definition of race can be applied to the South African context:

> Race is not only a matter of politics, economics, or culture, but operates simultaneously on all these levels of lived experience. It is a pre-eminently social

[104] Thulile Pearl Shandu, "Pitch Black Language: The Quest for Language Purity in isiZulu Popular Music," *Muziki* 4, no. 2 (2007): 263-277.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, eds. *Racial Formation in the United States,* 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 67-69.

> phenomenon that suffuses each individual identity, each family and each community, and that also penetrates state institutions and market relationships.[107]

Omi and Winant essentially argue that race is not *determined* by culture, economics, or politics but is *co-articulated* with and experienced through these elements. They also acknowledge that racial rule transforms rather than dissolves under hegemony. In the case of South Africa, racial hegemony is still present under democracy but is based on consent rather than coercion.[108] Philosopher Antoni Gramsci's theory of subordination and hegemony demonstrates that marginalized groups can challenge the dominant ideologies of hegemony if they internalize such ideologies.[109] Following Gramsci, both Adhikari and film theorist, Adam Haupt, have argued that marginalized groups in South Africa have internalized racist values which has, in turn, allowed for dominant representations of Blackness to further marginalize other forms of Blackness.[110]

One of the dominant forms of Blackness is one informed by the language purity to which Shandu refers. This mode of Blackness, dominant in Black townships, manifests itself, as described above, through a fluency in native languages, in township slang, and infrequent code-mixing between English and the native language. Though this type of Blackness is the norm in Black townships, I suggest that the presentation of it outside of the township is intentional. I call this type of Blackness a linguistically-informed Blackness because it is primarily performed via language. Linguistically-informed

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[107] Ibid., 151.
[108] Ibid., 132.
[109] Walter L. Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution: A Study of Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Theory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 142-143.
[110] Adhikari, "Hope, Fear, Shame, Frustration," 487; Adam Haupt, *Static: Race and Representation in Post-apartheid Music, Media, and Film* (Cape Town: HRSC Press, 2012), 5-6.

Blackness outside of the township is a way for opera singers to from community in racially heterogenous spaces. Because vocal pedagogy is also closely linked to language, it is also a way to carry that pedagogy from the township into the opera house.

**Between the Township and the Opera House: Opera and Pedagogy**

Township choirs are the nexus of linguistic and pedagogical innovation and preservation. Olwage, in his recounting of early choral history in South Africa, notes that language was one of the primary means of colonization and of enacting agency. As England's missionary project in South Africa progressed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Black South Africans also became ordained and began to transcribe, translate, and circulate English hymns in Indigenous languages.[111] They also circulated others work songs in Indigenous languages sung by migrant workers as well as struggle songs. South African composer Neo Muyanga notes how these songs provided the foundation to form churches and choral communities independent of the colonizing missions. Reflecting on his boyhood choral education in the 1980s, he remembers that the vast repertoire of native-tongue hymns, Bibles, and religious documents was normalized.[112] Muyanga also recalls the consistency of operatic singing and opera repertoire in township choirs. He notes that some of this likely stemmed from choral conductors from townships attending teachers colleges in the 1950s and 1960s. The curriculum at those colleges included learning tonic solfege and classical repertoire. He reasons that these

[111] See Grant Olwage, "John Knox Bokwe, Colonial Composer: Tales about Race and Music," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 131, no. 1 (January 2006): 1-37.
[112] Donato Somma and Neo Muyanga, "'The Musical Thread': Neo Muyanga on Opera and South Africa," *African Studies* 75, no.1 (2016), 75-77.

teachers brought this material with them to township choirs and, over time, the presence of operatic singing in these communities and operatic material in European languages in the repertoire in these communities became commonsensical as more teachers learned these repertoires and practices and passed them on.[113] Though learned and inherited from colonizing Christian missions, vocal traditions and operatic repertoire in townships depended on the use of Indigenous languages for the oral or material circulation of repertoires and practices.

Though there are overlaps between Western opera pedagogical technique and choral-based pedagogical technique learned in townships, it is useful to delineate their core characteristics. Western opera pedagogical technique requires fluency in Western staff notation, conducting patterns, and stylistic terminology. Students primarily learn in private, one-on-one lessons with a piano. Students of this technique are also required to learn how to pronounce and sing in English, German, French, and Italian. Choral-based pedagogical techniques learned in townships require fluency in tonic sol fa. Students primarily learn in two ways. In group settings without the use of piano or sheet music. They learn in private via the use of voice notes or some other recording that the singer can mimic. Singers who learn this pedagogy also learn by ear in regards to pitch and harmony. Rather than using a piano, they listen to their fellow students when singing in group settings.

Opera singers learn how to use both pedagogies in constructing their own performance practices. Durban-born but Berlin-based opera singer July Zuma notes that

[113] Ibid.

there is inherent value in learning primarily by ear and believes it is worth having both methods work in tandem. In terms of how long it takes to learn a piece of music, Zuma noted that the imitation and tonic sol-fa-based approach was much slower than learning via staff notation:

> [With tonic sol-fa and learning by ear] You must first learn your meter, so everything is written in that kind of form. And then you have to learn that until you know the melodies, until you know all the notes. And then after that you put on the words on top of it. So you see, it's like double the work, whereas with staff notation, [when] you learn you're sightread[ing] with the words already. So, I think that was sort of a disadvantage in a way.[114]

Zuma also argued, however, that his choral background taught him valuable skills such as working as a team when putting together productions, listening closely to other performers, and finding tonics and key changes if necessary. He concluded that having his choral background followed by a more Western approach makes him a more-well rounded singer: "I can drive on the right and left side of the road."[115]

Another way in which the community-centric and individualist approaches work in tandem is the influence of Black mentors within township communities. Of the dozens of singers with whom I have worked with over the years, nearly all of them mentioned having a member of the church, a teacher, or a choir director who took a special interest in them and gave them private lessons. The content of these lessons varies widely. Some learned staff notation and basic music theory and keyboard skills. Others learned conducting, while still others learned none of these skills but had extra attention in crafting the artistry of their voices and expanding their repertoire. In some cases, mentors

[114] July Zuma, interview with the author, 17 September 2020.
[115] Ibid.

even launched school choir programs or implemented curricula for a Sunday school-style setting in which kids would attend basic staff notation and music theory lessons after the church service. These programs are only growing in number in South Africa now, and the presence of these programs is due to the hard work of Black mentors who took interest in a select group of students. Such programs and mentors also demonstrate that choral education and formal opera education in South Africa need not be diametrically opposed. These practices confirm, as Agawu argues, that knowledge systems are translatable.[116]

Knowledge systems travel and are rearticulated with language. In an interview, South African soprano Hlengiwe Mkhwanazi recalled a time when tapping into her native language, isiZulu, helped her find her creative voice. She was studying in the United States at the time and, although her teacher complimented her on her vocal technique, Hlengiwe was having trouble finding her own sound. "Once I sang it in my own language," Hlengiwe recalls, "she looked at me and said, 'that's it.'"[117] Hlengiwe recalled the feeling of that energy of singing an operatic text in isiZulu and continues to draw from that well when she sings, regardless of language. Hlengiwe's identity as an umZulu person is articulated in her performances, in her body-voice, regardless of location or genre.

Language has the power to recall the self for Black South Africans. It also has the power to rearticulate township communities in other spaces such as the opera house.

[116] Agawu, *Representing African Music*, 400.
[117] Hlengiwe Mkhwanazi, interview with the author, 14 December 2022.

During breaks at English-speaking opera rehearsals, I often witnessed interlocutors switch back to speaking isiXhosa. I suggest that doing so enacts a politics of the ordinary in the opera house – the opera house shifts from a space that reproduces Euro-American likeness to one that reproduces South Africa's multilingual ontology. At the same time, it also shows how contemporary South Africa reflects and rejects apartheid-era politics. The use of isiXhosa in the opera house rejects historical racial segregation as it also shows the lasting cultural separation to which Muller referred. It also challenges what opera institutions used to represent during apartheid – an assertion of (real or imagined) Dutch and British ancestry that was articulated with a performance of white elitism. Articulated next to that history is the cultural history and biography that sounds in the isiXhosa-speaking body-voices. A deconstruction of this era and these parallel histories is the focus of the next chapter.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated the ways that South Africa's complicated colonial and apartheid past informs the political terrain of postapartheid South Africa. Many of South Africa's contemporary political issues – economic inequality, racial violence, gender violence, among others – are an inheritance of these competing past regimes. As the reproducers and hosts of such inequalities, South Africans call on institutions to decolonize in an attempt to redress these inequalities. I have also demonstrated the limitations of private and state institutions in reconciling these issues as the very institutions tasked with doing so are themselves an inheritance of apartheid. At the same time, Black South Africans are making use of musical repertoires and pedagogies passed down from colonial and apartheid-era South Africa to enact musical

communities, innovate and preserve their own vocal pedagogies, and to negotiate how music can be used as a conduit to reframe their racial, linguistic, and ethnic identities in a putatively postracial postcolonial nation state. Black South Africans enact these musical and linguistic practices both in the quotidian and in opera institutions to provide the conditions of possibility to construct new musical futures for opera in South Africa.

# CHAPTER 2: BLACK EPISTEMOLOGIES AND WHITE IMAGINARIES: A HISTORY OF OPERA IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1860s-PRESENT

Opera's history in South Africa has typically been overdetermined by its relationship to Western imperialism and colonialization. Although British colonial missionaries and European traveling opera companies were the first to bring opera performances and repertoire to South Africa, I demonstrate in this chapter that Black singers and educators used opera as a tool to construct local epistemologies and pedagogies. At the same time, both British colonial and Afrikaans apartheid governments utilized opera as a tool to legitimize and undergird white supremacy. These performances of white elitism and white military supremacy attempted to construct opera as a site that reproduced the white imaginary. In this chapter, I intervene in this history through centering Black agents and Black epistemologies that developed parallel to competing colonialisms in order to challenge the perceived white heritage of opera in South Africa. I demonstrate the ways in which Black singers and educators, building from the choral knowledge cultivated during British colonialism, forged pathways for the normalization of Black performers in segregated South Africa.

In this chapter I expand on the relationship between choirs and opera and its crucial roles in the evolution of opera and in the formation and development of the Black voice in South Africa. I center two other important institutions in this chapter: the Christian missionary system and Blackface minstrelsy. While these minstrelsy performances were indeed steeped in racism and were used as a legitimating force of the militarized Christian civilizing mission, I suggest that such performances paved the way

for Black South Africans to perform in opera and in other genres that are perceived to be outside of their race. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, opera likely sustained a place in South African Blackface minstrelsy repertoire for nearly sixty years and, despite its racist origins, paved the way for Black South Africans' participation in the domestic opera world. Both institutions also played instrumental roles in the development of opera in South Africa and they relate closely to the choral-culture-to-opera pipeline.

In this chapter, I also show how Black colonized subjects were able to construct their own creative voice using Western ideologies. South African music historian, Grant Olwage, has conducted extensive research on the role of Black agency in the colonial history of South African choirs in the English Christian missionary system. I relate Olwage's work to the colonial and apartheid histories of both American and South African minstrelsy troupes in South Africa. In regards to opera, U.S. musicologist Naomi André's research gestures toward the apartheid-era connections between Blackface minstrelsy and early South African opera. Building on these scholars' work, I formulate two observations. Firstly, that colonized Black South Africans contributed to opera's domestic heritage via choral singing and transatlantic interactions with Blackface minstrelsy. Secondly, I suggest that contemporary Black South Africans continue to use choral singing to build opera's local heritage. I situate these observations within the contexts of the colonial and apartheid governments to illustrate how these governments' policies and inconsistencies both challenged and produced creative agency by Black and coloured subjects. At the end of this chapter, I use insights from ethnographic fieldwork that demonstrates the interpenetration between the quotidian and South African opera

institutions in order to show that the imagined white heritage of opera in South Africa continues to undermine the status of Black participation in contemporary South African opera. At the same time, the valuable contemporary contributions of Black pedagogues, artists, and composers confirm that the white heritage of opera only exists in the white imaginary.

Moving chronologically, I begin with the overlap of the Christian missionary system and Blackface minstrelsy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I contextualize these systems in the mandated racial segregation of the colonial and apartheid governments and examine how Black and coloured performers were able to subvert such mandates through performance. Moving to the 1930s, I discuss a few select opera groups and the public response to them. Finally, I trace opera from roughly 1994 to present and comment on how opera in South Africa has developed, particularly in regards to the status of the domestic opera industry and the conditions of labor for opera musicians. I show that opera is as dynamic as South Africans, and tracing its entanglements in its colonial past and its decolonizing present expose, challenge, and trouble these boundaries as it also reveals the pasts and presents of the people involved with it.

**Choralism and Subversion: Early Opera in South Africa**

The ways in which the Christian missionary constructed the Black South African singing voice and the ways in which choral music was racialized continues as an undercurrent in regards to how Black opera singers are perceived and how Black vocal education is

perceived. English Christian missions introduced Western styles of choral singing in South Africa in the nineteenth century as a means to spread the gospel.[118] In order to more easily teach colonized peoples how to sing in a Western style without having to teach them staff notation, missionaries taught colonized South Africans to sing using tonic sol-fa. Much of the discourse and defense of tonic sol-fa was racially coded; apologists argued that tonic sol-fa is related to nature because of its dependence on only the human voice for melody and harmony (as opposed to artificial musical instruments) and because it necessitated the Western mode of tonality.[119] Ronald Radano, in his overview of Enlightenment thought in both Europe and the United States contemporary to colonizing Christian missions, traces how "nature" was often coded as uncivilized while it also had the potential to function as a corrective to irrationality, particularly through music: "without civilization there could be no art; without the natural capacities of an originary, primal sound, there could be no civilization."[120] Olwage's interlocutors, missionaries Christopher Birkett and John Henry Ashley, echo this sentiment in that they understood choral hymn singing among colonized South Africans as a solution to "irrational musicking."[121] This affirms Olwage's argument that tonic sol-fa and Western-musicality-as-civilization was framed by the missionaries to the colonized South Africans

[118] Grant Olwage, "Singing in the Victorian World: Tonic Sol-fa and Discourses of Religion, Science and Empire in the Cape Colony," *Muziki* 7, no. 2 (2010): 207.
[119] Ibid., 196-203.
[120] Ronald Radano, *Lying up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 91.
[121] Olwage, "Singing in the Victorian World," 209.

as an opportunity to save oneself from Blackness and consequently, such musicality constructed race.[122]

Though the intention of tonic sol-fa was to "civilize" and colonize, Black singers who learned it were able to use it as a tool to construct their own musical practices and their own singing voices. Olwage argues that colonized Black South Africans were able to construct their own voice (a voice that continues to be constructed) due to their embodied musicality and use of their native Nguni languages.[123] In regards to embodiment, Olwage suggests that the Christian civilizing mission tried to erase the voicing body through attempting to construct a singular, idealized singing voice. Olwage uses isiXhosa, the native language of the singers of focus in Olwage's essay, as an example to outline how such a language both challenged and complemented the Church's idealized singing voice. IsiXhosa is a vowel-heavy language and it has a fixed set of vowel sounds – that is the five vowels are always pronounced "ah", "ay", "ee", "oh", "ooh," respectively. Because of this, amaXhosa do not have to modify their vowel sounds in the same way that native English speakers do in order to achieve the ideal vocal diction. While this worked in favor of the mission's idealized voice, the clicks endemic to isiXhosa and the other Nguni languages disrupted it.[124] Some Black South African composers took control of translating English hymns to isiXhosa and composing new hymns and choral works in isiXhosa. The most prominent of such composers was the

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[122] Ibid., 210.
[123] Olwage, "The Class and Colour of Tone: An Essay on the Social History of Vocal Timbre," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 13, no. 2 (Nov 2004), 213.
[124] Olwage, "The Class and Colour of Tone," 214. Though Olwage here is referring to isiXhosa specifically, his and my analysis generally applies to the Nguni languages, all of which have the same primary 'x,' 'c,' and 'q' clicks.

umXhosa (Xhosa person; singular of amaXhosa) minister John Knox Bokwe (1855-1922). Bokwe was most well-known for his collection of songs written in tonic sol-fa, *Amaculo ase Lovedale* (*Songs of Lovedale*).[125]

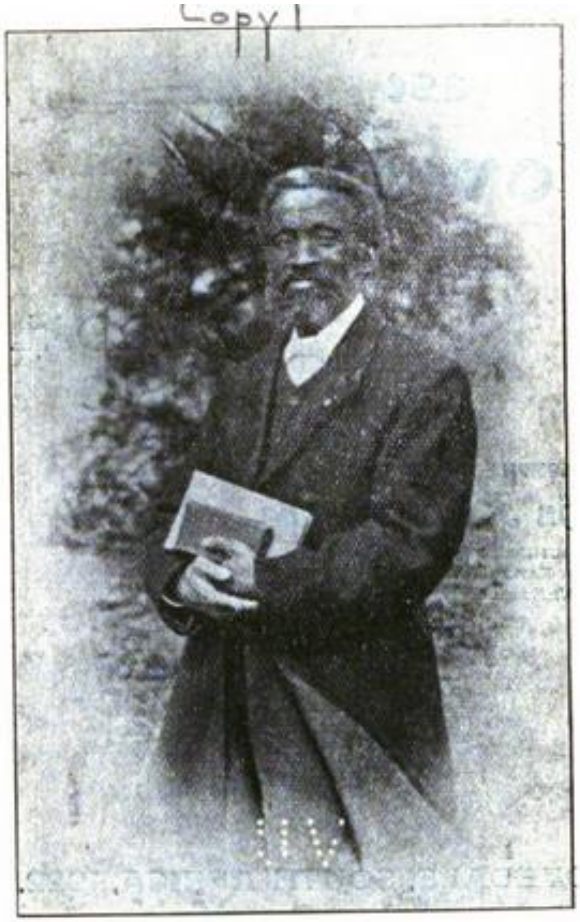



Figure 2.1: South African composer and minister, John Knox Bokwe.[126] Bokwe also played a crucial role in leading the civilizing initiative in the Cape Colony.

Part of an emerging Black educated class, Bokwe appealed to both his fellow South Africans and to the colonizers. To Black South Africans, he extolled the virtues of education, particularly learning how to read. He argued that through education South

[125] Lovedale was a Christian mission and educational institution in what is now the Eastern Cape for which Bokwe worked.
[126] John Knox Bokwe, *Amaculo ase Lovedale*, 5th ed. (Lovedale, South Africa: Lovedale Press, 1922), ii.

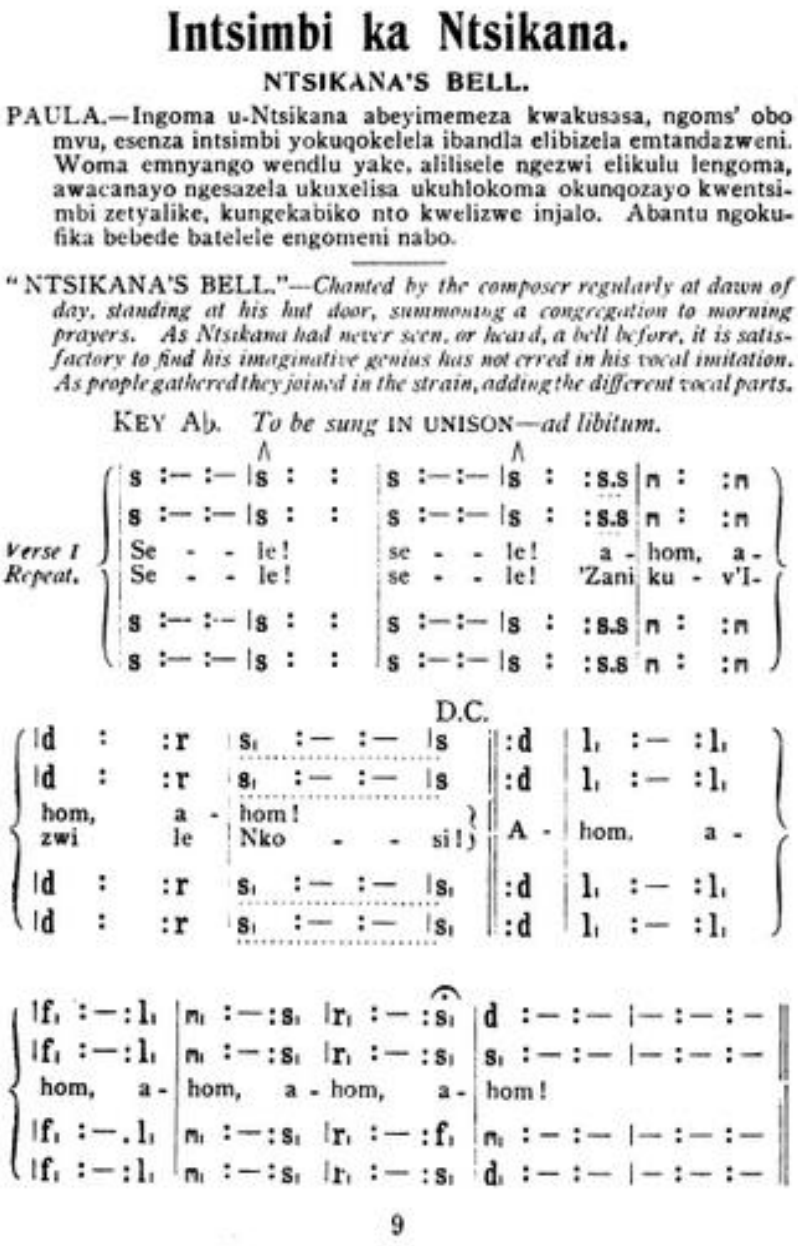
Africans could escape their subordinate position and have more control over their futures. Most importantly, Black South Africans could lead intellectual movements, similar to the role that Bokwe played in what would become Black South African choral culture. To the colonizers, he pointed out the gaps of civility in their behavior, suggesting that they may need civilizing of their own.[127] His equal criticism of both colonized South Africans and European colonizers indicates that he was both colonized himself and had some control in the circulated materials and operation of the Christian colonizing mission. Colonized Black South Africans also had some control in regard to the construction of the Black singing voice, of genre, and of the uses of tonic sol-fa. Though missionaries instructed Black South Africans in how to sing, how to use their voice for the colonizing mission, and circulated materials that reinforced that education, Black South Africans decided which elements of this education to adopt for their own voices. They also wrote and circulated their own musical materials using solfege, as evidenced by Bokwe's *Amaculo ase Lovedale.* Such materials both racialized and transformed choral singing and Black musical literacy. Olwage argues that the Black singing voice is and was unique in South Africa because the singers themselves had the ability to decide which parts of idealized Western methodologies they adopted and which they did not. This innovation on the part of Black musicians racialized choral music itself in the Cape Colony as missionaries became concerned that Black musicality diminished their civilizing and evangelizing project. Though tonic sol-fa originated as a tool of the

[127] Olwage, "John Knox Bokwe, Colonial Composer: Tales about Race and Music," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 131, no. 1 (2006), 25-27. Bokwe is referring to perceived character flaws in the colonizers that are contra to Victorian Christian values, or what he describes as "wicked things." See John Knox Bokwe, "Reflections on the Lovedale Jubilee," *The Christian Express*, 1 September 1891, 150.

oppressor, Black South Africans were able to customize it to serve their own needs. They used tonic sol-fa to write and circulate Indigenous songs and hymns. Given the facility that Black singers gained in ear training and repertoire knowledge via the Christian missionaries, Black communities independent of the Church were able to construct their own choir cultures. Such cultures formed in township churches and community choirs as well as in the woman-led domestic sphere.

This brief history of early choral music in South Africa demonstrates that both English missionaries and colonized Black South Africans constructed the Black South African voice during the colonial period. Olwage argues that this voice was both "unconsciously structured and self-reflexively made."[128] Missionaries provided the Victorian hymnody framework for what would become the Black South African choral tradition, yet Black singers and Black educators and ministers formed their own repertories, linguistic materials, and pedagogies. Though the Black South African choral tradition is rooted in colonialism and England's sweeping civilizing project, choral culture has provided several tools for Black South Africans that they continue to develop in the contemporary period. During apartheid, choirs offered a place for community building, community engagement, and creative innovation and enjoyment. Contemporary choirs often offer formative education and performance opportunities, particularly for opera singers.

[128] Olwage, "The Class and Colour of Tone," 217.



# Intsimbi ka Ntsikana.

## NTSIKANA'S BELL.

PAULA.—Ingoma u-Ntsikana abeyimemeza kwakusasa, ngoms' obo mvu, esenza intsimbi yokuqokelela ibandla elibizela emtandazweni. Woma emnyango wendlu yake, alilisele ngezwi elikulu lengoma, awacanayo ngesazela ukuxelisa ukuhlokoma okunqozayo kwentsimbi zetyalike, kungekabiko nto kwelizwe injalo. Abantu ngokufika bebede batelele engomeni nabo.

"NTSIKANA'S BELL."—*Chanted by the composer regularly at dawn of day, standing at his hut door, summoning a congregation to morning prayers. As Ntsikana had never seen, or heard, a bell before, it is satisfactory to find his imaginative genius has not erred in his vocal imitation. As people gathered they joined in the strain, adding the different vocal parts.*

KEY A♭. *To be sung* IN UNISON—*ad libitum.*

*Verse 1*
*Repeat.*

Se - - le! se - - le! a - hom, a -
Se - - le! se - - le! 'Zani ku - v'I-

D.C.

hom, a - hom! A - hom. a -
zwi le Nko - - si!

hom, a - hom, a - hom, a - hom!

9

Figure 2.2: The first page of the song, "Instimbi ka Ntsikana" from *Amaculo ase Lovedale* written in tonic sol-fa.[129]

[129] Bokwe, *Amaculo ase Lovedale*, 5th ed. (Lovedale, South Africa: Lovedale Press, 1922), 9.

**Minstrelsy, Blackface, and Opera: Transatlantic Perspectives on Musicality and Nationality**

As the nineteenth century progressed, the repertoire provided by Christian missionaries to the colonized South Africans diversified to include African-American spirituals and American hymns. African-American spirituals entered the repertoire for two reasons. Firstly, they are often sacred in nature, so they still contribute to the missions' initiative to spread the gospel. Secondly, they teach many of the Victorian Christian values that missions sought to instill in the colonized and colonizers alike. As an extension of the colonizing mission, troupes such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers and Orpheus McAdoo's Virginia Singers started to tour South Africa in the 1870s. These all-Black singing groups performed spirituals and the McAdoo Singers also performed minstrelsy segments (among other genres). The interactions between Black Americans and Black South Africans in this context continued to shape the emerging Black South African middle class, the racialization of choir music in South Africa, and the concept of Black subjectivity via Black musicality. Laura Chrisman characterizes this encounter as occurring "between two mission-educated black communities" that "moves us beyond the hierarchies of New World black leaders and Old World African imitators."[130] Both Black communities involved were agents of their postcolonial soundscape; the South Africans in this encounter were not passive vessels waiting for the wisdom and creativity of Black Americans, as the Western missionaries certainly hoped.

[130] Laura Chrisman, "American Jubilee Choirs, Industrial Capitalism, and Black South Africa," *Journal of American Studies* 52 (2018), 276.

Nineteenth-century South African newspapers reveal some of the overlapping ideologies held by white colonizers in regard to newly free Black Americans and colonized South Africans. One such newspaper, *Isigidimi samaXhosa* (*The Xhosa Message*) often published comments from readers both in South Africa and the United States regarding strategies to manage the threat of the social mobilization of Black people.[131] Reflecting in 1875 on his observations of recently freed slaves in Richmond, Virginia, W. Hepworth Dixon writes:

> The utter failure of compulsory labour or slavery to evoke an industrial spirit in the negro is pretty manifest. A new set of appliances is necessary, of a moral and christian kind, and the work of moral and social elevation will be a slow one. The sheer impotence of wailing over the laziness of the negro, or of the Kaffir, having become apparent, it is high time to take some steps of a practical kind.[132]

Dixon makes plain in this passage that white colonizers in South Africa must learn from the white colonizers in the United States; that is, if Black people, regardless of nationality, are not forced into institutionalized labor of some kind, then they will not work at all. Dixon's association between work and Christian morality also reveals the capitalist undercurrent to the civilizing missions of the nineteenth century. Both E.P. Thompson and Syed Hussein Alatas trace these connections among Christian morality, laziness, and capitalism as understood in the British Empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[133] The Empire did not consider any labor that did not directly benefit

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[131] This newspaper was also published in English as *The Kaffir Express*. It is necessary to note here that "kaffir" or "kafir" is an Afrikaans racial slur against Black people. As such it is only used in this dissertation when referencing historical documents.
[132] W. Hepworth Dixon, "Latest Aspects of the United States," *The Kaffir Express*, 1 January 1875, 5.
[133] See E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present* 38 (December 1967): 56-97; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966); Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (London: Frank & Cass Company, Ltd., 1977).

(via monetary profit) its colonialist enterprise as work.[134] The Christian missionaries in British colonies, therefore, were responsible for preaching against laziness as a moral issue to encourage the servitude of the colonized and ensure an increase in capital.[135] This is likely why the missionaries added African-American spirituals to the missions' repertoire in the Cape Colony – these songs often reference physical labor. Without the context of daily lives of African-American slaves, colonized South Africans may not have understood that such references to labor were a dark commentary on the difficulty and longevity of their suffering, not an indictment against laziness. Dixon continues that "laziness" also led to the lack of formal education among Black children. Regarding the segregated public schools in Virginia:

> Though the schools are free, the books and slates cost money. Improvident fathers find the cost a burden, and indolent mothers find the work and worry an addition to their daily task. They sicken at the efforts to be made, and let the lazy imps loiter about the lanes and play among the pigstyes, when they ought to be at school.[136]

Plain here is Dixon's warning to white colonizers in South Africa – Black people must be segregated, educated, and institutionalized to benefit and undergird the global Christian civilizing mission.

Such emphases on education, labor, and Christian morality are likely what made the Fisk Jubilee Singers and its offshoots so popular to the white colonists in South Africa and to the emerging Black middle class. Jubilee choirs were inherently affiliated with higher education, due to their founding at Fisk University, and the core curriculum

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[134] Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," 83-87.
[135] Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, 26-27.
[136] Dixon, "Latest Aspects of the United States," 5.

of the Fisk Jubilee Singers in particular was, among other subjects, the classics and theology. Further, their repertoire not only included hymns and African-American spirituals which often had a Christian message, the singers were trained to have clear diction in accordance with the standards of Western universities and of Victorian hymnody. McAdoo's Singers, however, who arrived in South Africa seventeen years after the first appearance by the Fisk Jubilee Singers, favored a different educational and aesthetic approach to the Fisk Jubilee Singers. McAdoo added minstrelsy tunes to the repertoire of his Singers, and their iterations of both spirituals and minstrelsy tunes often implemented dialect to lend their performances an "authenticity" that was absent in Fisk Jubilee Singers performances.[137] McAdoo also added what ethnomusicologist Sandra Jean Graham calls "commercial spirituals" or newly composed (by both white and Black composers) songs in a similar style to African-American spirituals that were written for the intention of profit. Commercial spirituals fit in well in McAdoo's shows because they often incorporated minstrel humor in the lyrics, dances, or themes, adding to the perceived authenticity that the Fisk Jubilee Singers lacked.[138] The authenticity that McAdoo was searching for in his inclusion of dialect and minstrelsy humor, I suggest, was a means to increase the profit made by the group's performances.

[137] Chrisman, "American Jubilee Choirs," 282-283.
[138] Sandra Jean Graham, *Spirituals and the Birth of a Black Entertainment Industry* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2020), 126.


Figure 2.3: "Orpheus M. McAdoo, Sole Proprietor and Director of the Original Jubilee Singers"[139]

These intersections of strategies in regards to performance practices, gospel spreading, and money making were reflected in class politics and Black musicking in South Africa. Much like Black South Africans used tonic sol-fa in building their own choral repertoire in their native languages and choral communities, so did Black South Africans make their opinions known about these visitors from across the Atlantic in native-language newspapers. One such newspaper, *Imvo Zabantsundu* (*The Opinions of Black People*), was published in isiXhosa. In one edition from September of 1890, an

[139] Photo taken by Talma Studio in Melbourne and Sydney, Australia, in 1892. Photo courtesy of Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

author by the name Dorotil' Ongwevu Ngezihlati published a list of things that Black Africans can learn from Black Americans like the Jubilee Singers.[140] Seemingly in support of an assimilation-as-social-advancement narrative, Dorotil charges Black Africans to learn "like the English (njengama Ngesi)" in order to shed their status as "barbarians."[141] Dorotil, finding a model of respectability politics in Black Americans' musical practices, wants his fellow Black South Africans to follow suit:

> These people [Black Americans, specifically the Jubilee Singers] are just visiting places not wanting money for their wallets; they want money to build educational institutions to educate their fellow Black Americans, which is accessible to us, too, if we arrive in their country.[142]

This passage follows Dorotil's reference to the Jubilee Singers as "children of slaves (ababantu ungabantwana bama Koboka)." This can be understood to imply that because Black Americans are only recently out of slavery but are also educated "like the English," then there is no reason that Black Africans cannot do the same. South Africa had recently become a self-governing colony, so many of the Black emerging middle class saw no reason that Black South Africans could not have a similar trajectory to Black Americans who had been recently freed from slavery.[143] Dorotil continues that the

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[140] Dorotil' Ongwevu Ngezihlati translates to, "Dorotil with grey cheeks." This is often a reference to amaXhosa men who have grey beards but either no hair or black hair. This is most likely not his real name, so I will refer to him simply as Dorotil.

[141] Dorotil'Ongwevu Ngezihlati, "Izifundo ngama Afrika ase Amerika," *Imvo Zabantsundu,* 18 September 1890, 3. The title of this article translates to "The Studies of African-Americans" in English.

[142] Ibid.; some punctuation added to make the English translation clearer. Original isiXhosa: "Ababantu bephumile nje behamba kwezindawo abafuni mali yenxhowa zabo, bafuna imali yokwaka izindlu zemfundo zokufundisela abantu abantsundu bakowabo base Amerika kwanabeli lizwe abanokufikelela kwelo." Translation by the author.

[143] The Cape Colony became self-governing in 1872 with the appointment of its first Prime Minister, John Moltena. It was still subject to the British monarchy in constitutional matters.

readers of *Imvo Zabantsundu* who do smear Black Americans such as the Jubilee Singers are doing so out of jealousy.[144]

Dorotil continues to impress self-responsibility onto the readers of *Imvo Zabantsundu,* encouraging Black Americans to educate themselves and to not wait on white people to do so: "They [Black Americans] are managing education by themselves: that is they are teaching themselves – in simple terms they are teaching one another – they are not being fed by the dead as we accept being fed by the dead by the white people of this country."[145] This last bit is idiomatic; the saying essentially urges people to not seek sustenance or help from those who are unable to help. Recalling Bokwe's own encouragement of self-responsibility in regards to education, Dorotil seems to be suggesting that Black Africans have already gotten all of the help they can get from white people in South Africa and, therefore, they need to educate and fund themselves to achieve a social status similar to Black Americans. Though, as Dixon indicated fifteen years earlier, Black Americans did not enjoy a social or economic status much higher than that of Black Africans. This view, however, was typical among the emerging Black middle class in late nineteenth-century South Africa.

As implied in Dorotil's accusation of jealousy among readers of *Imvo Zabantsundu*, many Black South Africans held a different view of Black Americans and of Black South Africans. John Tengu Jabavu, a political activist and editor of *Imvo*

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[144] Ibid; Original isiXhosa "…sizama ukulityapasa ngenxa yomona." Translation by the author.
[145] Ibid; Original isiXhosa "…Kukuba bazipatele imfundo: oko kukuti bayazifundisa – ngenteto elula bayafundisana – abanyiswa mntu kofileyo umbele njengekuba tina sivuma ukwanyiswa kofileyo ngabelungu belilizwe." Translation by the author.

*Zabantsundu,* refuted Dorotil with an emphasis on keeping the fight for Black equality at home:

> I might be in error but perhaps I may suggest to us Africans that here we shall find no help in sending our people to America if they will return as experts that will have forgotten to uplift their own people. Another thing is that we will have forsaken the will of the All Mighty if Africans of these parts of south Africa should seek education from afar to return to be of assistance to us … what African Americans have done we too can do here.[146]


Figure 2.4. A photo of John Tengu Jabavu, editor of *Imvo Zabantsundu*[147]

[146] John Tengu Jabavu, "Ama Afrika ase Amerika," *Imvo Zabantsundu,* 18 September 1890, 2. Quoted in and translated by Khwezi Mkhize, "Empire Unbound: Imperial Liberalism, Race and Diaspora in the Making of South Africa" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2015), 67. The title of Jabavu's article translates to "African-Americans" in English.

[147] Photo taken from D. D. T. Jabavu, *The Life of John Tengo Jabavu: A Great Bantu Patriot* (Lovedale, South Africa: The Lovedale Institution Press, 1922).

Jabavu closes with a warning: "We will be the weakest link in the confidence and growth of the American economy."[148] What Jabavu seems to suggest here is that Americans, no matter their race, will always value their own over foreigners. If Black South Africans seek a similar right to education and independence from white control that Black Americans seems to have, then Black South Africans need to construct their own economies and educational institutions independent of Western imperialism.[149]

As the nineteenth century progressed, Black South Africans began to understand self-responsibility differently and form their own local Black politics distinct from the Black American politics to which they were introduced. Sociologist Saida Grundy argues that the Black respectability politics that groups like the Fisk Jubilee Singers reproduced purport to offer a standard of Black excellence as they also create intra-Black hierarchies that pit Black men against one another.[150] The introduction of this Black American masculinist iteration of Black respectability politics in South Africa indeed pitted Dorotil and Jabavu against each other. Though Dorotil and Jabavu disagreed, both men encouraged self-responsibility in different ways. Dorotil encouraged a self-responsibility that would, ideally, afford them a social status similar to the white Christian middle class. Jabavu urged a self-responsibility that would actualize a uniquely Black South African politics that would result in their economic and educational growth.

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[148] Jabavu, "Ama Afrika ase Amerika," 2; Original isiXhosa "Sosuke sibe yiminxeba engenamandla sakutembela ekwayameni nasekukuleni ngemikoba yase Amerika." Translation by author.
[149] Such a warning could have also been in response to the 1890 death of South African Titus Mbongwe en route from Cape Town to the United States. He was heading to the United States on a scholarship McAdoo awarded him to study with the Hampton Singers in Hampton, Virginia.
[150] See Saida Grundy, *Respectability: Politics and Paradox in Making the Morehouse Man* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2022).

This tension between what seemed like a sweeping acceptance of transatlantic Black respectability and a burgeoning South African Black nationalism was a productive creative force at the turn of the twentieth century. This tension was reflected in the introduction of Blackface minstrelsy and the proliferation of Black musical performers across racial barriers in South Africa.

**South African Opera's Origins with Blackface Minstrelsy**

Minstrelsy troupes began touring South Africa in roughly the 1850s and minstrelsy reached its peak popularity in the 1880s. At its peak there were several active South African minstrelsy troupes, the most famous of which was the Kafir Christy Minstrels.[151] As late as the 1940s, new Black minstrelsy groups were forming in South Africa. Although minstrelsy is clearly a white supremacist genre by contemporary standards, the genre was more complicated for Black American performers and differently complicated for Black South African performers. Minstrelsy shows made fun of slavery plantation-era African-American slaves – they were typically portrayed as lazy, childlike, and unintelligent. The humor was presented with United States-centric stereotypes via dialect, dance, dress, and song outside of the South African cultural milieu. It is possible, then, that such stereotypes would not have come across as offensive to Black South Africans. Because of the rise in respectability politics and the rejection of the "lazy native" archetype in the burgeoning Black South African educated class, it is also likely

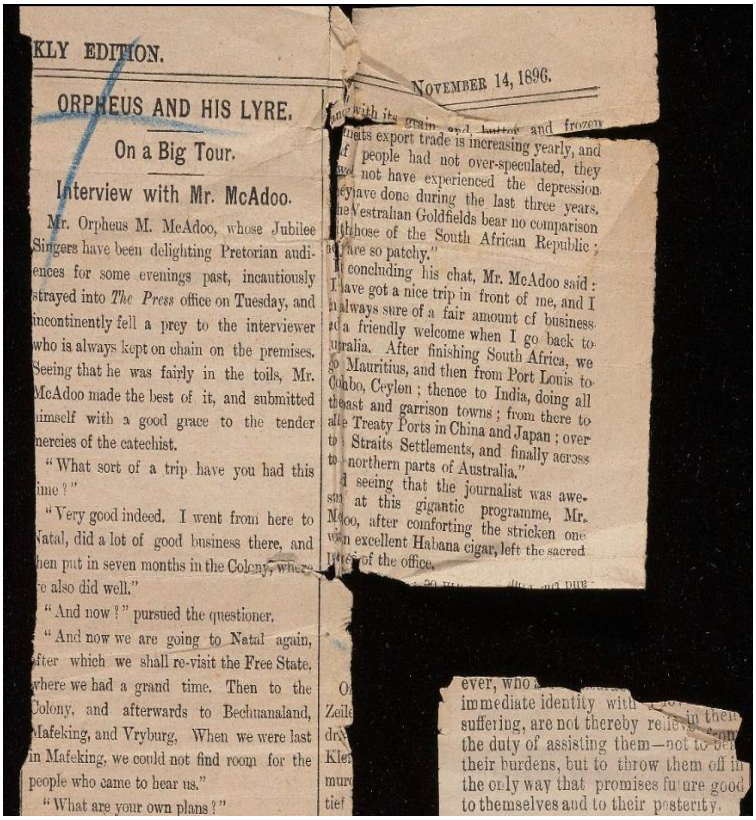
[151] Dale Cockrell, "Of Gospel Hymns, Minstrel Shows, and Jubilee Singers: Toward Some Black South African Musics, *American Music* 5, no. 4 (Winter 1987), 420.

that they would have found humor in the castigation of lazy impish characters even if the United States-centric aspects of the performances were not fully understood. As evidenced by reception to the minstrelsy songs in the McAdoo's Jubilee Singers' performances, such stereotypes seemed to be read as authentic rather than offensive.

With the creation and presence of Black South African minstrelsy groups, South Africans continued to cultivate Black creativity, encourage cross-racial interactions, and influence public opinion of Black musicality and of opera. While performance venues were segregated at this time in South Africa, there is also evidence, as Dale Cockrell shows, that Black, coloured, and white audiences alike attended minstrel shows.[152] South African minstrelsy troupes, like troupes from the U.S., still wore Blackface. This placed Black South African minstrel performers in a unique position of dual subversion. Firstly, they were able to adapt a white supremacist genre that spoke to South African audiences in such a manner to which white audiences were not privy. Secondly, unlike Black Americans who wore Blackface to imitate Black Americans, Black South Africans were translating stereotypes of Black Americans through a South African lens. Louis Chude-Sokei makes a similar argument in his book on Bert Williams (1874-1922), a popular Black American minstrel, and his impact on the Harlem Renaissance in the early twentieth century. Like Black South Africans, Williams also performed as a caricature of an African-American even though he was not African-American but a Bahamian-born Black American.[153] Because of such multiplicities inherent in Williams's performances,

[152] Ibid., 419-421.
[153] See Louis Chude-Sokei, *The Last 'Darky': Bert Williams, Black-on-Black Minstrelsy, and the African Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

Chude-Sokei argues that Williams mastered the art of mimicry and blending that was crucial to Black immigrant communities during the Harlem Renaissance. Black South African minstrel performances were similarly multitudinous and multinational. The genre arrived in South Africa as a genre created by white supremacists translating plantation-era Black Americans translated by freed Black Americans in a troupe led by a Black American, Orpheus McAdoo.



KLY EDITION.

ORPHEUS AND HIS LYRE.

On a Big Tour.

Interview with Mr. McAdoo.

Mr. Orpheus M. McAdoo, whose Jubilee Singers have been delighting Pretorian audiences for some evenings past, incautiously strayed into *The Press* office on Tuesday, and incontinently fell a prey to the interviewer who is always kept on chain on the premises. Seeing that he was fairly in the toils, Mr. McAdoo made the best of it, and submitted himself with a good grace to the tender mercies of the catechist.

"What sort of a trip have you had this time?"

"Very good indeed. I went from here to Natal, did a lot of good business there, and then put in seven months in the Colony, where we also did well."

"And now?" pursued the questioner.

"And now we are going to Natal again, after which we shall re-visit the Free State, where we had a grand time. Then to the Colony, and afterwards to Bechuanaland, Mafeking, and Vryburg. When we were last in Mafeking, we could not find room for the people who came to hear us."

"What are your own plans?"

NOVEMBER 14, 1896.

with its grain and butter and frozen meats export trade is increasing yearly, and if people had not over-speculated, they would not have experienced the depression they have done during the last three years. The Westralian Goldfields bear no comparison with those of the South African Republic; they are so patchy."

In concluding his chat, Mr. McAdoo said: "I have got a nice trip in front of me, and I am always sure of a fair amount of business and a friendly welcome when I go back to Australia. After finishing South Africa, we go to Mauritius, and then from Port Louis to Colombo, Ceylon; thence to India, doing all the east and garrison towns; from there to all the Treaty Ports in China and Japan; over to the Straits Settlements, and finally across to the northern parts of Australia."

I seeing that the journalist was awe-struck at this gigantic programme, Mr. McAdoo, after comforting the stricken one with an excellent Habana cigar, left the sacred precincts of the office.

ever, who ... immediate identity with ... suffering, are not thereby relieved from the duty of assisting them—not to bear their burdens, but to throw them off in the only way that promises future good to themselves and to their posterity.

Figure 2.5: A portion of McAdoo's interview in an unidentified South African newspaper.[154]

[154] "Orpheus and his Lyre on a Big Tour: Interview with Mr. McAdoo," 14 November 1896. Found in Orpheus M. McAdoo and Mattie Allen McAdoo Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Laura Carr was a contralto with the Jubilee Singers.

In an 1896 interview with McAdoo in an unidentified South African newspaper, the reader gets a glimpse of how minstrelsy was understood in the South African context. When the interviewer remarks that he would like to see McAdoo add some "fine old negro songs in character" to the Singers' repertoire, McAdoo responds:

> That's just what I'm after now […] Take that young lady, Miss [Laura] Carr, if she came out in a calico jean dress, and a bandana on her head, just as they used to wear, and I appeared and sang "Gwine back to Dixie" in character, it would bring the house down. I should like to have a sketch for the last part of the programme, in which we could have dancing and plantation songs.[155]

McAdoo also states in the interview that he plans to do so by returning to the United States to add "four of the finest minstrel men obtainable" to his Singers before bringing such new repertoire on tour.[156] In the above excerpt, it can be assumed that South African audiences favored the perceived authenticity of not only plantation songs themselves but of the costuming and dialect that accompanied those songs. The excerpt also suggests that McAdoo was intentional and instrumental in constructing what that authenticity looked and sounded like for international Black audiences. It is from McAdoo's model that Black South African minstrel troupes were able to form their own version of antebellum American Black authenticity. Following Chude-Sokei, I suggest that the formation and longevity of Black South African minstrelsy troupes was indicative of an emerging South African awareness of global Black nationalisms and how such a nationalism could be expressed at home by Black South Africans. Black South Africans intervened in South African politics in their minstrelsy shows, using a

[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.

historically white supremacist, genre from the United States to their advantage. Black South African participation and innovation of minstrelsy provided an important stepping stone in desegregating performance venues and opera.

Though the content of the South African minstrelsy programs has not been ascertained, secondary sources provide some clues. As Naomi André notes, the content of these minstrelsy performances in South Africa, whether by traveling American troupes or by local South African troupes, is hard to discern, though there is some evidence that opera arias were performed in these shows along with spirituals and comedic segments.[157] The African Minstrels, formed in 1941, listed "operatic minstrel choruses" as one of the mainstays of their repertoire.[158] Though it is difficult to ascertain what the word 'operatic' means here, I suggest that such choruses were choruses from canonic European operas infused with minstrelsy humor. Sheet music of popular choruses and arias from operas were widely circulated for the purpose of parlor entertainment in the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Due to their popularity, American minstrelsy troupes often incorporated them into their acts along with dances, acts, or other parodic material.[159] Because South African minstrelsy troupes modeled themselves after American ones, I suggest that the 'operatic minstrel choruses' by South African troupes were similar. In McAdoo's previously mentioned interview, he said he wanted to split his shows into two acts – the first act including plantation songs and the

[157] Naomi André, *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 37.
[158] Christopher Ballantine, "Music and Emancipation," in *The World of South African Music: A Reader*, ed. Christine Lucia (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2005), 190.
[159] Graham, *Spirituals and the Birth of a Black Entertainment Industry*, 31-33, 109-123.

second including "nice concerted singing," which could confirm André's observation that McAdoo's shows included operatic material, though such 'nice concerted singing' could also refer to spirituals.[160] This also suggests that South African minstrel troupes adopted McAdoo's two act model for their programs.

According to *The Journal*, a newspaper published in Grahamstown (now Makhanda) in the Eastern Cape (the location of the former Cape Colony), it seems that Black minstrel troupes were popular in Grahamstown in the 1860s and 1870s. Advertisements for performances suggest that they performed to desegregated audiences, and that they maintained a close relationship with the Christian civilizing mission and with the white (at this time, British) military.[161] It is safe to assume that the audience for *The Journal* would have primarily been white British colonists for two reasons. Firstly, it was only published in English. Secondly, the minstrel performances mentioned in the journal took place in Albany Hall in the Albany district of Makhanda – this was the cultural center for the English-speaking elite in the Cape Colony. This indicates that, at least for some minstrelsy performances, white audiences were allowed to attend performances with Black performers.

In the 21 January 1867 edition of *The Journal*, an advertisement appears for a performance of the Christy Minstrels, an all-Black South African minstrelsy troupe, at Albany Hall sponsored by The Total Abstinence Society Amateurs. The performance

[160] "Orpheus and his Lyre"

[161] In 2018, Grahamstown was renamed Makhanda, after the umXhosa prophet and military leader who was imprisoned on Robben Island following the 1819 Battle of Grahamstown between the amaXhosa and the British. Grahamstown was originally named after one of the invading British Lieutenants, John Graham.

promises minstrelsy dances such as the Juba.[162] Such a sponsorship suggests a close relationship with the Church of England's nineteenth-century temperance and abstinence movement. In the 9 December 1868 edition of *The Journal*, the Christy Minstrels enjoyed a new sponsor, British Lieutenant General Robert Percy Douglas and the officers of the 211th regiment of the British military.[163] The program was promised to include interlude performances by musicians from the regiment. The Minstrels were promised to be accompanied by orchestral instruments such as the violin, cello, and bass, among other instruments. Such an advertisement encourages two suggestions: first, that this program may have included operatic music due to the nature of instrumentation and, second, that desegregated minstrelsy performances not only continued but were supported and produced by the military-led government.

While an overview of these select newspaper articles suggest that the Christy Minstrels and, by extension, other Black South African minstrelsy troupes, benefitted from the Christian and military arms of the colonizing mission, I suggest that their status as beneficiaries should not mark them as wholly compliant with the colonizing mission. Though they were performing within the framework of English Christian civility, these troupes were also acting as agents in constructing the foundations for the Black South African voice and performance practices (chapter three). White audiences and the colonizing government were so taken with Blackface minstrelsy that they were willing to bend segregation laws to accommodate Black performers of the genre. Black performers

[162] "Christy Minstrels," *The Journal,* 21 January 1867, 1.
[163] "Christy's Minstrels," *The Journal,* 9 December 1868, 1.

were allowed in the same spaces as the white military elite for the first time, normalizing not only the presence of Black creatives on the theatre stage, but also normalizing the monetary compensation of Black creatives on the theatre stage. This intervention added to the cadre of musically literate Black musicians, of which there were already many from the choirs that came from the colonizing missions in the early nineteenth century.[164] Musically literate Black musicians would only grow through the twentieth century as more genres began to develop.

The arrival of British light opera companies in South Africa overlapped with minstrelsy troupes in the nineteenth century and through the first half of the twentieth century, which also led to the formation of local white South African groups that performed operettas and light operas.[165] It is likely that minstrelsy troupes and light opera companies had some repertoire that overlapped considering both genres used parody, comedy, hymns, and popular songs. Due to an overlap in programmatic content, it is also possible that minstrelsy and light opera audience members overlapped which may have encouraged an aesthetic interconnectivity between light opera and minstrelsy. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Jacques Malan notes that, due to the popularity of "light theatre entertainment," the major city centers in South Africa began to set aside

[164] Musically literate in this context means that these musicians' ears were tuned to Western tonality. They could learn and perform songs written in Western tonality. These musicians were not necessarily fluent in Western staff notation.

[165] These groups included the Carl Rosa Opera Company and the D'Oyle Carte Opera Company, both based in England. See Hilde Roos, "Opera Production in the Western Cape: Strategies in Search of Indigenization," PhD dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2010, 32-42. Light opera differs from full-scale opera in length, orchestra size and subject matter. Light operas feature small orchestras, typically last no more than two hours, and the subjects are often comedic. It also features bits of spoken dialogue, popular song, and dance. Full-scale operas typically feature large orchestras, last between three to five hours, and are often based on works of literature or Greek and Roman mythology. They also feature almost entirely newly-composed music and are typically sung through.

funds for larger theaters for such entertainment.[166] Because of their locations in major city centers, these venues likely catered to white audiences, unlike some of the venues in which minstrelsy was performed. Cape Town's New Theatre was built in 1893 but only staged one full-scale opera – the Arthur Rousby Opera Company performed Richard Wagner's *Tannhäuser* in the 1890s. Otherwise, it primarily screened films and produced light operas; Gilbert & Sullivan light operas were especially popular.[167] Johannesburg's Standard Theatre also screened films and specialized in light operas. It also produced multiple full-scale operas – local opera company The Lyric Opera Company and the England-based Quinlan's Opera Company performed operas by Wagner, Giuseppe Verdi, Pietro Mascagni, Charles Gounod, Giacomo Puccini, and Ruggero Leoncavallo.[168]

Shortly after England's win against the Dutch in the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), the Opera House was constructed in Pretoria, South Africa's administrative capital. Intended to host elaborate productions suitable for South Africa's new military elite, the Opera House hosted 'command performances' which were intended to show loyalty to the administrative elite who attended these performances. Like Johannesburg and Cape Town, most of the works that the Opera House produced between 1904 and 1920 were light entertainment such as operettas, light operas, and musicals, with opera comprising less than a quarter of its output. The talent was typically imported from England, though the local Amateur Dramatic Society (later the Amateur Dramatic and

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[166] Jacques Malan, "Opera Houses in South Africa," in *The World of South African Music: A Reader*, ed. Christine Lucia (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2005), 126.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid., 127-128. These operas included *Pagliacci, Faust, Cavalleria Rusticana, Il Trovatore, La Traviata, Madame Butterfly,* portions of the *Ring* cycle, *and Die Walküre*.

Operatic Society) performed there as well. The advent of film lessened theatrical productions over time, and by World War II, it showed exclusively films.[169]

Four observations arise from this brief history of opera houses and/in city centers in the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. First, it suggests that opera was not understood as South African by many of the white audience members, as these theaters produced no works by South African composers and hired few South African performers and performance groups. Secondly, it suggests that lighter, comedic entertainment was preferred over operas due to four possible reasons. The influence of popular comedic minstrelsy shows, the repeated tours of British opera companies, the low cost of production in comparison to full-scale operas, or due to the lack of formalized classical musical education, as operettas and light comedic works are vocally less demanding.[170] Thirdly, the full-scale operas performed for white audiences in South Africa during this time period were concentrated in Pretoria, the home of the military and administrative elite. This may explain how opera came to be associated with elite white society in South Africa, as opera productions at Pretoria's Opera House were typically part of the 'command performances.' Finally, it suggests that the popularity of the film industry eclipsed the popularity of the theatric performance industry for white audiences in South Africa; each theater was sold, demolished, or burned down with no intent to resurrect it. Opera productions during this period waned due to the lack of the theaters and due to the

[169] Ibid., 128-129.

[170] Formalized classical musical education was developing at this time, but was not widespread enough to expect local proficiency in opera performance. This period saw music departments formed at institutions such as the University of Cape Town, the University of Potchefstroom (now North-West University) and the University of Pretoria. The curriculum, however, was not yet centralized.

Second World War. As detailed in the following section, however, opera was resurrected within South Africa's burgeoning university system.

**The 1930s-1990s: Opera and Apartheid**

As demonstrated above opera was one of the means by which the white colonizing elite used the arts to assert cultural dominance and underscore political dominance. South Africa underwent key political shifts in the period from roughly 1870 to 1948 as its competing colonizers, England and the Netherlands, vied for ultimate control. In addition to racial segregation laws, the Union of South Africa's white-led government passed several laws that prevented non-white, colonized South Africans from voting and holding political office in the early twentieth century.[171] This period also saw a rise in Afrikaner nationalism. This particular brand of white nationalism asserts that, though Afrikaners are descendants of Dutch colonizers, South Africa is their fatherland and it is their destiny to rule South Africa. As such, Afrikaners felt that the British rule of South Africa was unjust. In the 1940s, Afrikaner nationalists feared that the South African government would begin to reverse some of its segregation policies due to the outcome of the Fagan Commission. This commission concluded that controlled integration could improve the flow of labor and benefit businesses in cities. The National Party, the party of Afrikaner nationalism, formed its own Sauer Commission in response. This commission concluded that integration would be a cultural detriment to *all* races in South

[171] The Union of South Africa, formed in 1910, was still under control of the British monarchy. It was a self-governing colony that joined the Cape Colony with England's other southern African colonies.

Africa. Running on a pro-segregation platform, the National Party won the 1948 election and ushered in the apartheid era.

This same period, from roughly 1910 through the 1940s was also when opera in South Africa became more localized due to the formation of domestic opera groups and musical institutions. The University of Cape Town (UCT) was at the core of this development of local opera. The South African College of Music opened its doors in 1910 and was incorporated into the University of Cape Town in 1923. Though touring European opera companies had been visiting South Africa since the nineteenth century and domestic opera companies had already begun to form, South African musicologist Hilde Roos argues that domestic South African opera did not really find its footing until the 1930s.[172] The 1930s and 1940s were the decades in which student opera productions at UCT became more frequent until World War II eclipsed such activities. Shortly after the end of World War II, Scottish composer Erik Chisholm became the director of the College of Music and reinvigorated the program. Chisholm, with Italian opera singer Gregorio Fiasconaro, founded the University Opera Company and the Opera School in the 1950s – the same Opera School currently at the University of Cape Town. Fiasconaro took on the role of full-time director for the Opera School and both Fiasconaro and Chisholm directed and produced roughly six hundred operas in the 1950s.[173] They also were responsible for providing these students with formal opera training which was crucial in developing a domestic cadre of opera singers. It is likely that only white

[172] Hilde Roos, "Opera production in the Western Cape," 37.
[173] Ibid., 37-38. For more on Fiasconaro's tenure as the director of UCT's Opera School, see Gregorio Fiasconaro, *I'd do it again* (Cape Town: Books of Africa, 1982).

students benefited from Chisholm's and Fiasconaro's initiatives, however. Though non-white students were allowed to enroll at UCT as early as the 1920s, enrollment by students of color remained low until the 1980s and 1990s. This is likely due to the lack of formative education available for students of color, largely due to the Bantu Education Act of 1953. This Act enforced Afrikaans-only education (very few students of color spoke Afrikaans at the time), defunded schools in non-white areas, and provided a curriculum geared toward labor jobs. The Extension of University Education Act of 1959 stopped any enrollment of students of color at UCT. This Act opened underfunded, segregated universities and UCT became a white-only institution until 1988 with the enactment of the Tertiary Education Act. Chisholm's and Fiasconaro's initiatives also demonstrate, as evidenced in this chapter, that opera in South Africa largely depended on foreign companies, talent, and directors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This trend began to shift with the enactment of the apartheid government. Domestic talent and public support for opera flourished under apartheid as a means to emulate high European society. At the same time, opera performances by performers of color also flourished during apartheid. These activities reveal the internal inconsistencies of the apartheid government's segregation policies – though the government initially argued that racial mixing would be culturally detrimental, coloured performers became a fixture in elite white society in the mid-twentieth century.

Members of the all-coloured opera company, the Eoan Group, were popular opera performers in the mid-twentieth century. British immigrant Helen Southern-Holt founded the Eoan Group in Cape Town in 1933 as a cultural institution intended to

educate the local coloured community in the "civilizing qualities" of European culture.[174] The members of the Group did not receive the same access to university education as UCT students, but they were able to enroll in elocution, physical education, ballet, literature and drama classes taught by Southern-Holt or one of her other contemporaries. Similar to the trajectory of UCT's School of Music, the Eoan Group's activities started to gain traction in the 1930s and 1940s and peaked in the 1950s with the appointment of a full-time European director. Two singers from the Group, Dan and John Ulster, formed a small amateur choir within the Group in the late 1930s or early 1940s. That choir expanded in the years following 1943 when the Group hired Italian conductor Joseph Manca as its director. Manca had previous experience conducting choirs and producing light operas – when he started with the Eoan Group, Manca was also the current director of the Camps Bay and District Musical Society, which later became the Cape Town Light Opera Company.[175] The Group's choral productions directed by Manca slowly grew larger and more complex with the added involvement of the ballet school in their performances and the use of costumes, drama, and soloists.[176] The Group produced large-scale choral works, children's operettas, and choruses from full-scale operas before becoming a fully-fledged opera company in 1956 with its premier performance of Verdi's *La Traviata.*[177]

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[174] Roos, *The* La Traviata *Affair: Opera in the Age of Apartheid* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), qtd. 18.
[175] Ibid., 19-25.
[176] These works included May Sarson's *The Wonderful Inn*, Stanley Guise's *A Slave in Araby,* and Martin Shaw's *The Redeemer*. See Roos, *The* La Traviata *Affair*, 27-38.
[177] Ibid., 24-44.

From its beginnings in the 1930s through the early 1960s, the Group played to packed houses and almost exclusively to white audiences. This combined with the acceptance of the apartheid government's funds and the seeming lack of political awareness and sensitivity within the Group contributed to its reputation as an apartheid apologist group complicit with white supremacy. The funding from the apartheid government, paradoxically, both underscored and challenged the Afrikaans nationalism on which the apartheid government was founded. On the one hand, the success of the Eoan Group was intended to demonstrate the success of what the apartheid government called "separate development," or the idea that races intellectually, culturally, and economically developed most effectively when segregated from other races. On the other hand, such funding made possible the slow desegregation of opera in South Africa and demonstrated the internal inconsistencies of the apartheid government. The apartheid government had to break its own segregation rules in order to demonstrate the perceived successes of segregation. This limited, apartheid government-controlled desegregation did work in favor of the apartheid government in that it stoked conflict within the coloured community. Many members from the coloured community boycotted the Group's performances and lambasted the Eoan Group's complicity in newspapers geared toward the coloured community. Though there was a brief period in the 1960s in which the Group did not receive government funding and, in its later years, performed to

integrated or coloured-only audiences, it was never quite able to shake this reputation. Though it is still functioning, it has not been an opera company since 1975.[178]

Hopes that participation in perceived high culture would lead to a color-blind class mobility permeated opera performance during apartheid. Performers for the Eoan Group hoped that, because they were capable of performing a genre associated with European high society, that they would experience upward class mobility. Echoing the apartheid government, Southern-Holt believed that opera performances by the coloured members of the Group were intended to show the success of the civilizing project. Although these performances were attended by many white audience members and positively reviewed by many white journalists, the apartheid-era logic that conflated race and culture still permeated high white society. Reviews typically expressed surprise and foregrounded how unusual skilled performance of opera by coloured people was, rather than focusing on the performance regardless of race:[179]

> Allow us to congratulate you on your magnificent performance of 'La Traviata'. You have shown that, given the opportunities, Coloured people can excel in the realms of culture on par with all other people.[180]

The performances seemed to have been consumed by white people as exotic spectacles rather than as displays of talent and hard work.

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[178] Ibid. Though the Eoan Group is still functioning in South Africa, it is now operating under the name The Eoan Group School of Performing Arts. It also has an Academic Centre and a Theatre Company.
[179] See Hilde Roos, *The La Traviata Affair: Opera in the Age of Apartheid* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2018); Roos, "Remembering to Forget the Eoan Group – the Legacy of an Opera Company from the Apartheid Era," *South African Theatre Journal* 27, no. 1 (March 2014): 1-18; and Juliana Pistorius, "Coloured opera as subversive forgetting," *Social Dynamics* 43, no. 2 (May 2017): 230-242.
[180] Letter from South African Coloured People's Organisation, signed by Chairman Alex La Guma and Secretary R. September, undated (Eoan Group Archive 29:200).

Similar to the ways in which Black South Africans both internalized elements of the Christian civilizing mission and actualized local Black epistemologies and creative practices with tools provided by that mission, the Eoan Group used the inconsistencies within the apartheid government to push the putative racial bounds of opera. Just like their Black counterparts, so did the coloured community experience intraracial conflict due to activities that seemingly complied with the apartheid government's politics. The political fracturing within the coloured community itself was due to differing opinions on how to cultivate a colouredness of one's own design rather than one designed for them by the apartheid government. Crafting an ontology different than the one constructed for them by the apartheid government was especially difficult for coloured people because their status as a classified group was a creation of apartheid. This tension within the coloured community and between the coloured community and other South Africans of color persists today as each vie for racial recognition and equality.

**Opera in South Africa, c. 1994-present**

Although apartheid legally ended in 1994, South Africans are still in a messy state of political and social transition, particularly due to the country's continued racial segregation following the end of apartheid. The present-day period is sometimes referred to as the long apartheid because many of the challenges of the apartheid period have either remained stagnant or worsened post-1994. Living amidst this transition has a direct effect on how opera singers build their careers and construct their pedagogies. Many Black, Indian, and coloured South Africans still live in townships. South Africa's

inheritance of the apartheid era's wealth inequality across racial lines is reflected in the country's continued racial segregation and the vast difference in household incomes and quality of life between cities and townships. The depth and longevity of wealth inequality inherited from apartheid, as anthropologist James Ferguson argues, still controls labor practices in South Africa and how the government responds to wage inequality.[181] Although government assistance toward livelihood issues such as unemployment has risen in South Africa, freelance work as opposed to jobs with a formal job title and predictable paycheck has risen as well. Freelance workers can earn higher wages than unemployment checks or minimum wage work, which can lead to quicker and less regulated acquisition of capital; most opera singers in South Africa are freelance workers.[182] Constant or near-constant movement is often a condition of such work, as one must go where there are available job opportunities. Such conditions can necessitate emigration of opera singers as July Zuma, argues. He believes that the South African opera industry must adopt the European model of unionized workers and salaries subsidized by the government because a lack of such centralized salary organization creates a hostile job market for singers:

> Everybody is just, like, abusing singers in a way because they know they need this. They have nowhere else to go […] And if you say no to something, then there is somebody behind you who is even more highly hungry than you. So, the circle just keeps going and it's easy for people to say, "yeah, the people who are accepting those low, low fees should stop accepting them." Yeah, of course they can do that. And then what if I turn away a job that gives me, like, what, 2,000 [rand]? It's a very low salary. […] What am I going to do? I need this 2,000 [rand]. So, this is where the problem is. So, if we have more opera companies, I

[181] James Ferguson, "Formalities of Poverty: Thinking about Social Assistance in Neoliberal South Africa," *African Studies Review* 50, no. 2 (2007): 71.
[182] Ibid.

> think they will create more works, more jobs. Then there will be a competition with the salaries as well.[183]

Neither economic precarity nor movement as conditions of labor are new in South Africa.[184] The displacement caused by racial segregation under apartheid forced such conditions, as Black South Africans were allowed to work but not live in cities. Instead, they lived in townships on the outskirts of cities, necessitating constant migration. Constant movement is also a condition of labor for opera singers who live in townships, as travel to major cities is necessary for opera performance and education. Although fewer restrictions on movement in post-apartheid South Africa has made possible more occupational and educational opportunities, movement as a freelance opera singer in South Africa is often a condition of labor rather than a pleasurable expenditure. To borrow from Gilles Deleuze, South African society has moved from state control to market control.[185]

Careers for South African opera singers necessitate international tours because the South African opera industry heavily relies on international touring and tourism for the majority of its profit. Both the Cape Town Opera (CTO) and Isango Ensemble primarily tour abroad. Though the high cost of travel is an opportunity not afforded due to the high cost, this travel-heavy status quo of the domestic industry has detrimental effects on

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[183] The author conducted an interview via Zoom with Zuma on 17 September 2020. Two thousand rand is roughly $130.

[184] See Veit Erlmann, *African Stars: Studies in Black South African Performance* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Erlmann, *Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination: South Africa and the West* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999); Erlmann, *Nightsong: Performance, Power, and Practice in South Africa* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1996); David Coplan, *In the Time of Cannibals: The Word Music of South Africa's Basotho Immigrants* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Coplan, *In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[185] Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (Winter 1992): 3-7.

opera singers. Consistent domestic audiences and industry stagnate, causing many South African singers to be out of work or to permanently move abroad for more consistent work. South African opera singers are also paid in South African currency according to South African standards rather than the currency and standards in the countries in which they perform. While airfare, lodgings, and meal stipends are provided for them, the singers are not paid enough to secure much of a profit once they return to South Africa. At home, there is no labor union for opera singers and their wages are not regulated by the government. Like travel, wage inequality is also a condition of opera performance, as payment inequalities in opera occur across racial and national lines, with little opportunity for redress.[186] As someone who also worked behind the scenes at the CTO, Zuma notes that it is common for such institutions to import European opera singers to sing lead roles in their productions – these singers are often paid more than domestic singers as they are paid according to the standards of their home country, not of South Africa. This is the opposite treatment that South African opera singers receive. Zuma also notes that their payment includes their travel and lodgings while in South Africa. In productions with only local singers, Black singers are typically paid less than white singers, regardless of role. "The big problem that we are facing is that in the country itself, as a South African singer, you get paid less in your country. Your value is less in your own country because of your background […] and I think it's the country itself that doesn't value its own people and especially if you are a person of color."[187]

[186] Zuma, interview with the author.
[187] Ibid.

The South African government has implemented affirmative action methods such as Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) in an attempt to redress economic inequality along racial lines, though such methods seem to treat the symptom rather than the problem.[188] While BBBEE requires artistic institutions such as the CTO to employ a certain percentage of people of color in its company in order to receive government stipends, it does not specify in which positions they must be employed. Black singers employed by the CTO are primarily on-stage performers; few of them are employed in production or leadership positions, causing little Black representation in repertoire choices, creative positions such as directing and producing, and board positions.

The government has also changed the methods by which the arts are funded in South Africa in an attempt to encourage diversity and equity. Under apartheid, opera performances were segregated both on and off the stage; there was little racial mixing permitted within opera casts or within audiences. Though there were exceptions to this due to organizations like the Eoan Group, the vast majority of opera performances were performed by white singers for white audiences. At this time, opera was primarily funded by private donations from the white elite and stipends from the government-funded Provincial Arts Councils (PACs). As its name suggests, each province had a dedicated Arts Council which undemocratically controlled how arts-related funding was

[188] Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment was adopted in South Africa in 2004, with 'black' referring to Black Africans, Indians, and coloured people. If an organization applies for public funding, BBBEE requires that a certain percentage of staff is black in an attempt to redress economic inequality across racial lines. The program has increased black participation in the market and in the job force, but is also highly criticized as benefitting primarily the black elite as poverty has increased since its implementation.

dispersed.[189] Such councils were yet another method by the apartheid government to deepen racial segregation and to impoverish, both artistically and economically, non-white populations. The apartheid era, however, also saw enthusiastic public funding of the arts and artists. This trend seems to have diminished in the postapartheid period, particularly in regard to funding perceived European genres such as opera.

Between 1994 and 1998, the first four years of the postapartheid era, PACs were dissolved and replaced with the National Arts Council (NAC).[190] The NAC, an initiative launched by the government's Department of Arts Culture, was intended to fund more diverse expressions of South African culture. The government does not consider opera to be an expression of South African culture, but an imitative genre that does not deserve the same funding as Indigenous arts.[191] Zuma confirms the public disinvestment in opera, noting that the NAC has actually funneled *less* money into the arts than the PACs did under apartheid.[192] While the dissolution of the PACs was a necessary move away from racist funding initiatives, the NAC's disinvestment from the public support for the arts has not resolved the issue of South African art's dependence on white, wealthy donors to keep art afloat. Institutions are now overwhelmingly dependent on private donations for profit rather than government subsidies or internal revenue.

Now that there are more Black singers on stage than there were during apartheid, the institutional rhetoric about opera and opera singers has changed. Because the

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[189] Hilde Roos, "Viva Verdi: Ringing the Changes at the Cape Town Opera," *Acta Musicologica* 86, no. 2 (2014), 249.
[190] Ibid.
[191] In 2005, former Minister of Arts and Culture, Pallo Jordan, argued that opera did not deserve equal funding to other arts in South Africa. He regarded Black South African as imitators of white Europeans.
[192] Zuma, interview with the author.

contemporary opera industry inherited institutions that thrived on the imagined superiority of European culture, opera companies must find a way to amend institutional rhetoric to embrace racially diverse singers. One of the rhetorical changes that the Cape Town Opera has employed is an emphasis on the new racial demographic of the casts in the CTO's productions and an emphasis on an idealized voice of these singers. Roos argues that, while these institutions have allowed for opera production to continue in South Africa since the financial disinvestment of the South African government, this foregrounding of Black opera singers and a Black operatic voice has done little to advantage Black South African opera singers. Because arts organizations such as the Cape Town Opera receive funding from government programs such as BBBEE when certain demographic standards are met, the foregrounding of a Black voice has impugned Blackness with a "use-value" that helps keep opera in South Africa financially afloat.[193]

Because the Cape Town Opera is an institution inherited from the apartheid era it will continue to reproduce apartheid-era logics even as it works to diversify its casts. Sara Ahmed argued that the ways in which historically white institutions such as the Cape Town Opera reproduce whiteness often become less visible over time.[194] Though the use of opera to perform white cultural superiority was a conscious effort in the apartheid period, the required effort to interrelate whiteness and opera decreased over time. Even when the apartheid government agreed to amend its segregation practices to accommodate the Eoan Group and its audiences, the Eoan Group was only permitted

[193] Hilde Roos, "Viva Verdi," 253, 266.
[194] Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 38-39.

entry into the world of opera performance insofar as they continued to model the possibilities of assimilation into the respectability of white European culture. Though the Eoan Group certainly challenged the efficacy of the apartheid government's ability to keep people culturally and racially separate, its performances also reproduced the government's discourse that positioned whiteness as the end-goal and benefactor of opera performance. While the Cape Town Opera does supply meaningful work for Black opera singers, I suggest that their institutional rhetoric reproduces a discourse that others Black singers in an effort to legitimize the financial support of a historically white genre.

Some of the qualities that former or current participants in South Africa's opera industry assign to the Black voice are borne from environment. In 2009, Roos conducted an interview with Angelo Gobbato, an Italian immigrant and former singer who was instrumental in bringing Black South Africans onto the opera stage. He identified different social behaviors between white and Black singers that could have some impact on the voice: "In Europe, everyone is polite, in social circles you're not allowed to speak out loud or shout. It's all very *democratic*, everybody sings well, but they all sound the same. African singers still have that wild primal force which makes you the king on the stage."[195] In Roos's interview of the same year with Christine Crouse, former artistic director of the Cape Town Opera, Crouse also associated certain timbral qualities with the "African experience.": "they are rhythmical and love to sing and dance and have this

[195] Quoted in Roos, "Viva Verdi," 257, emphasis mine.

wonderful passion and spirit … the sound is very unique; you don't find this color of sound amongst the white [singers] of Europe."[196]

Others identified different educational backgrounds as possible timbral influences, as I discovered in some of my own interviews. Jeremy Silver, the current director of the University of Cape Town Opera School, seems to suggest that educational focus of Black singers in South Africa has an effect on their timbre:

> They're [European and American singers] sort of, probably, interesting musicians and maybe they've sung in a choir and they've got a bit of voice and, you know, then you have to teach them how to sing. In this country, they turn up singing … the most impressive thing about most of these singers is simply the raw power of their singing.[197]

Silver notes that Black South African do not receive a strong education in acting and languages – their education, particularly in townships, prioritizes singing instead: "They're winning all the [singing] competitions and so they should. [Without more training] you can't cast them [in operas], though because their languages and their acting isn't good enough."[198] Elise Brunelle, the former financial director of the CTO, confirms this.[199] She notes that the Cape Town Opera provides educational opportunities in partnership with students from the University of Cape Town Opera School. These programs are necessary, she continues, because many Black South African singers often "can't read music, have no clue about Italian, German, or French."[200]

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[196] Ibid., Magdalene Minnaar is the current artistic director of the CTO at the time of writing.
[197] The interview with Jeremy Silver was conducted in person on 7 August 2019.
[198] Ibid.
[199] The interview with Elise Brunelle was conducted in person on 25 July 2019. This position has since been filled by Shammy Desai.
[200] Elise Brunelle, interview with the author.

Brunelle's comments, especially in relation to Gobbato's, Crouse's, and Silver's comments, need some unpacking. None of these interlocutors seem to theorize an essential quality of the Black voice but posit environmental and educational reasons that the Black South African voice sounds distinct from a white voice. Because such reasons are posed in comparison to a white European voice as the norm for operatic singing, such theorizations other the Black operatic voice. These comments recall Nina Sun Eidsheim's theory of the "figure of sound" or the assumption of a "fixed, indisputable referent."[201] In regard to the figure of sound, the listener's "primary goal is to identify difference from that referent."[202] These theorizations of the Black operatic voice suggest that whiteness is a fixed referent for opera performance in South Africa and frame Blackness as a difference to that referent. This difference seems to bring a sort of energy to contemporary opera productions and, as Roos argued, a use-value because this foregrounding of difference can result in some government funding. Such institutional rhetoric, though it foregrounds diversity, still centers and reproduces whiteness as the default.

As I have illustrated in this chapter, the shift from apartheid to democracy was messy and ill-planned – arts and educational institutions had no framework for how to desegregate institutions originally designed for the performance and maintenance of white supremacy. Some of these interlocutors were working within opera institutions during the postapartheid shift and set the groundwork for desegregation of the arts and

[201] Nina Sun Eidsheim, "The Micropolitics of Listening to Vocal Timbre," *Postmodern Culture* 24, no. 3 (May 2014).
[202] Ibid.

universities. Gobbato himself was an opera singer, producer, educator, and administrator during apartheid, so he witnessed first-hand the shift between segregated and desegregated opera in South Africa.[203] Due to the influence he carried as South Africa shifted to a democracy, Gobbato was invaluable in teaching and casting Black South Africans in the first few years following the end of apartheid. He continues to be an encouraging force for new generations of Black South African opera singers. At a 2022 awards banquet at the Cape Town Opera, Gobbato expressed disappointment at the Cape Town Opera's recent casting decisions – he began listing the names of singers with whom he has worked and openly wondered why they were no longer being cast in productions.[204] His comments suggest that there is still more to be done in desegregating opera in the postapartheid period.

Opera companies in postapartheid South Africa are not only struggling financially, but are also attempting to create and execute wholly new funding, decolonization, and diversity strategies. Because public funding initiatives require certain demographic standards, opera companies must meet these expectations as they no longer enjoy the generous funding from the apartheid era. Though some of these challenges may be mitigated by hiring a more diverse artistic and board team, other challenges are more complex. In working to actualize South Africa as a node of operatic excellence on the world stage, Cape Town Opera and other local opera institutions must work to meet a pre-existing European standard of operatic performance. Simultaneously,

[203] See Gobbato's memoir, *A Passion for the Opera* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2019).
[204] These casting decisions will be discussed more in the third chapter. Put simply, there has been an increase in white South Africans and Europeans in lead roles since January 2022.

such institutions in South Africa are attempting to decolonize and shift *away* from pre-existing European standards. Opera in South Africa is in a constant state of flux between becoming South African and being South African as South Africans themselves are negotiating what it means to be South African in the postapartheid state. Though ethnomusicologist Kofi Agawu argues that music performed and/or created by Africans is African music, he also acknowledges that the postcolonial African voice is necessarily complicated and multinational.[205] Exemplified in the postapartheid South African opera industry is this global/local tension that is at the root of decolonization projects. An assertion of local epistemologies in order to decenter Western epistemologies is essential in the decolonization process.[206] Incorporating local South African vocal pedagogies into inherited European opera practices and institutional models is a messy process and, as I have demonstrated in this chapter, is still in progress.

**Conclusion: Opera, Segregation, and Subversion**

Reading these brief, non-exhaustive histories of the overlaps among Blackface minstrelsy, light operatic works, and full-scale opera in this period between the mid-nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth century reveals the musical diversity of South Africa in this period. It also revealed the ways in which racial politics became closely tied to artistic expression and how that expression expanded the putative racial boundaries of opera. As the Black South African and coloured middle classes began to

[205] Kofi Agawu, *The African Imagination in Music* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 3; Agawu, "The Challenge of African Art Music," *Circuit: Musiques contemporaínes* 21, no. 2 (2011), 55.
[206] Achille Mbembe, "Decolonizing the University: New Directions," *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* 15, no. 1 (2016): 29-45.

emerge around the 1870s, so did these groups begin to measure musical performance to white European aesthetics in order to separate themselves from South Africans who lived in city slums or in rural areas.[207] At the same time, Black and coloured South Africans worked with and against one another to construct epistemologies and ontologies for themselves through artistic performance.

In this chapter I demonstrated that opera in South Africa does not fall into easy binaries: European or South African, foreign or domestic, colonialist or agential in the decolonization process, Black or white. Rather, sorting through these entanglements is vital in that doing so allows the consumers, producers, and creators of opera to come to terms with its ambivalent history and present, ideally allowing opera to operate in South Africa as a cultural expression unlinked from an overdetermined colonial history. Examining such entanglements shows opera to be what it is – a dynamic, creative force that tells and re-tells stories as they are performed by different people, in different languages, with many points of view behind its production and composition. The insights from historical and contemporary interlocutors in this chapter set the stage for a decolonial lens through which to analyze opera. In the next chapter I build on this idea and what stakes opera performers have in South Africa's decolonization process.

[207] Coplan, *In Township Tonight!* 137-141.

# CHAPTER 3: OPERATIC PEDAGOGIES IN SOUTH AFRICA: INTERSECTIONS WITH RACE, LANGUAGE, AND GENDER

In this chapter, I draw on virtual and in-person fieldwork in order to trace how opera's complicated history in South Africa lives on in township choral groups, opera companies, and opera schools. I also dive deeply into linguistically-informed Blackness as it also shows how the quotidian continues to intersect with opera in South Africa. Foregrounding the lives and personal viewpoints of the interlocutors involved, I discuss the overlapping roles of gender, class, race, and language in relation to opera in South Africa. In doing so, I will attempt to delineate a Black pedagogy of the operatic voice in South Africa and discuss how that pedagogy interacts with the Westernized opera pedagogy taught in tertiary education. The methods of music education in townships and cities reflect both the consequences of apartheid-era racial segregation and the methods by which Black South Africans constructed their own repertoire, vocal pedagogy, and professional and educational futures in spite of the restrictions imposed on them. Townships and cities largely remain segregated according to the sectioning enacted with the apartheid government's 1950 Group Areas Act. The Act forced South Africans out of their homelands, organized South Africa into racially homogenous spaces, and legalized the forced removal of Black, Indian, and coloured South Africans to their designated areas – what became known as townships. Black South Africans constructed many of the methodologies discussed in this dissertation to preserve and innovate Black South African creative cultures from their homelands in townships. Consequently, Black South Africans are necessarily protective of this knowledge. These methods only exist via oral

transmission and within the spaces of the domestic and the Black church. I recognize that as a white U.S. scholar, my inclusion in these spaces was limited and my observations incomplete. I am also cognizant of the violence to these traditions that my research could cause. Therefore, the only materials I have written down in Western notation are examples of music I learned during my own private lessons – music heard and/or performed during more public gatherings will be discussed but not written down in Western musical notation out of respect for the oral, community-centric traditions of those with whom I worked.

In this chapter I have two objectives. First, I delineate a Black pedagogy of South African opera singing. Based on my own fieldwork and interviews, I have identified two primary methods of vocal music education in South Africa: community-centered choral education primarily based in townships and individualistic opera education primarily based in universities. The two methods have overlap, particularly because many opera educators and opera students have backgrounds in both methods. In this chapter, I delve more deeply into these two modes of education from the perspectives of educators, opera singers, and opera students. Secondly, I examine more closely the intersections among race, class, and gender and how those intersections affect such pedagogies. These intersections are but three of the many sociopolitical factors that impact both access to and methodology of opera education and the sustainability of a domestic opera career. In this chapter I continue the first chapter's discussion on the connection between race and language in South Africa and how this connection is present in the construction of vocal timbre and in community building. Because race in South Africa is, in large part,

linguistically-informed, certain languages carry racist or antiracist connotations. The always already multilingual worlds of the opera house and university system are the sites at which these connotations come into contact.

To assist in this analysis, I trace the ways in which listeners project race onto the voice and genre and how that projection influences vocal construction. I discuss my participatory fieldwork in private singing lessons with a Cape Town-area choir teacher and the ways that my race influenced my vocal construction and education. I then examine vocal education more broadly from both student and educator perspectives. Through my singing lessons and observing others' lessons I was able to experience, to a small degree, how two differing pedagogies interact and counteract with one another in practice. I then examine how singers construct their professional careers within or outside of the university system. Language plays an important role here in regards to the efficacy of pronouncing Romance languages, navigating the opera industry, and building community within the opera industry. These analyses will demonstrate the ways in which race, language, gender, and education influence performance practice and how such influences are reflected in contemporary career trajectories in South Africa.

**The Power of Entrainment**

Race affects audience perception and causes professional roadblocks for Black South African opera singers. In particular, Mendi Obadike's work on "acousmatic Blackness", Nina Sun Eidsheim's work on "sonic Blackness", and Kira Thurman's work on the unmarking/marking paradigm that effects white and Black performing bodies,

respectively, illustrate how visual and sonic racism are concomitant.[208] In regard to vocal education, Eidsheim theorizes that vocal "entrainment" contributes to the performance of racial stereotypes.[209] Entrainment is the combination of both pressure from outside sources, such as educators, and conscious vocal construction on the part of the singing subject. Eidsheim also argues that entrainment focuses on disciplining the body in order to achieve an idealized vocal timbre – both Ana María Ochoa Gautier and Grant Olwage similarly theorized in chapters one and two that vocal discipline primarily focuses on disciplining the sounding body.[210] Like Olwage and Ochoa Gautier, Eidsheim also argues that disciplining the body is always already incomplete – sounding subjects have the ability to reject and accept different elements of entrainment. Entrainment is also a racialized practice. Drawing from her own experience as a Korean-Norwegian woman studying voice in a conservatory setting in Norway where she was racially marked, Eidsheim argues that vocal teachers conflate timbre with identity (racial or otherwise). A reflection of that identity in the voice renders that voice authentic, according to the voice educators in Eidsheim's study. In order to achieve that authenticity, vocal instructors also often encourage a "healthy" or "natural" timbre because that timbre will automatically express racial or ethnic difference.[211] Voice-based racial stereotypes then

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[208] See Mendi Obadike, "Low Fidelity: Stereotyped Blackness in the Field of Sound," PhD dissertation (Duke University, 2005); Nina Sun Eidsheim, "Marian Anderson and 'Sonic Blackness' in American Opera," *American Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (September 2011): 641-671; Kira Thurman, "Performing Lieder, Hearing Race: Debating Blackness, Whiteness, and German Identity in Interwar Central Europe," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72, no. 3 (Fall 2019): 825-865.
[209] Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African American Music* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 32-34.
[210] Ibid. Ana María Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 210; Grant Olwage, "The Class and Colour of Tone: An Essay on the Social History of Vocal Timbre," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 13, no. 2 (November 2004), 214.
[211] Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound*, 44-45.

become a self-fulfilling prophecy because teachers will encourage timbral qualities that reflect racial stereotypes and discourage qualities that stray from those stereotypes. Eidsheim argues that listeners often mistake this entrainment for a natural "vocal essence" and attribute that essence to the race of the voicing body.[212] Anthropologist Roshanak Kheshti argues that audiences also take pleasure in the sonic encounter of the racial other.[213] The repetition of racial stereotypes in the conservatory classroom and in the listening ear ensures the continuation of the pleasure of the encounter of the racial other.

Interviews given by white opera educators and professionals in South Africa suggest that the Black performing body is indeed always already marked and that visual and aural racism are closely aligned. Some comments by current and former Cape Town Opera administrators and University of Cape Town educators were discussed in chapter two. In these comments, interlocutors such as Christine Crouse and Angelo Gobbato created dichotomies between white singers and Black singers: polite/wild, sophisticated/passionate, sameness/color. While they assign these qualities to the voice and not to the singers themselves, implied in such statements is that Black South Africans have a passionate quality about them that makes them natural musicians. White singers, on the other hand, have a learned restraint about them that renders them unoriginal musicians. I suggest that these dichotomies exemplify Thurman's marking/unmarking paradigm as they also show the effects of Eidsheim's entrainment. In the following

[212] Ibid., 32-34.
[213] Roshanak Kheshti, *Modernity's Ear: Listening to Race and Gender in World Music* (New York, NY: New York University Press), 91.

sections, I outline how this marked/unmarked paradigm and entrainment plays out in vocal education and opera performance in South Africa through three lenses: language, gender, and race.

**Environment and Entrainment: Construction and Perception of Vocal Timbre**

Much of the choral side (as opposed to the university side) of singing education in South Africa takes place within the church – this is clearly a continuation from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in which choral music was introduced through colonial missionaries. For many involved in church choirs, they are both a hobby and a central part of township socializing. While choral singing had a different framework for myself growing up, I do relate to having a church choir at the center of my social life. Growing up in rural Virginia, church was one of the few social outlets I had as a child, and most of my friends were in my church. One of the activities in which I partook was my church choir. I did not learn how to read music in church or in choir; I learned by ear both by listening to the others sing around me and through noodling around with the family piano at home. I did not learn how to read music until I was eleven or twelve when I started learning the alto saxophone, now my primary instrument. This did present a challenge to me, as most of the other students in my school band class had been reading notation since they were very young and most could play piano whereas I had only learned by ear. I was fortunate enough to have a teacher in that class who helped me catch up to the other students, but I also remember that feeling of being left behind.

While in Cape Town, I took weekly private voice lessons from Sena, a church choir director in Bellville, a suburb outside of Cape Town. The lessons were conducted without any written music and primarily without accompaniment. Instead, I learned by watching YouTube videos and listening to voice notes that my teacher sent me via WhatsApp. During only one lesson did my teacher's partner accompany me on an electronic keyboard to test the ear training skills that I had built. Most of the time spent during my lessons consisted of learning repertoire and entrainment of my body to achieve a "natural" sound. My teacher often assured me that my speaking voice was not reflective of my singing voice. During my years in church choir, the choir director typically placed me in the alto section. Throughout ear training and aural skills classes at university, I always placed myself in the alto section because I believed that was where my ideal voice range lied. When I organized lessons with my voice teacher in Cape Town, I told her that I was an alto so that she could plan her lessons accordingly. During our first lesson, she asked me to perform a vocal warm-up on the word, "yonga" in order for her to get an idea of my range. This exercise repeats the same sequence and increases by one whole step at the beginning of each new sequence (Figure 3.1).

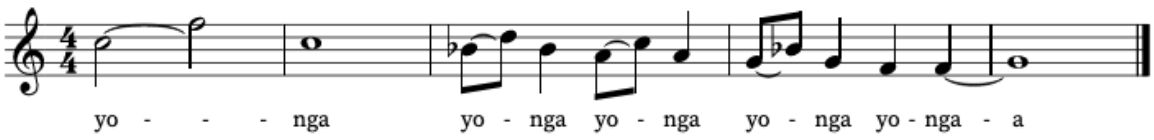


Figure 3.1. "Yonga" exercise. The next sequence would begin on D.

I was surprised that she continued the exercise beyond what I perceived to be the top of my vocal range, E♭5. At her direction, I continued the exercise and hit a pitch a perfect

fourth higher than my perceived range, A♭5. At the end of the exercise she told me I was a soprano and asked me why I thought I was an alto. When I explained that my choir director placed me there, she told me that was because I have a lower speaking voice that makes people assume I am an alto. She continued that my singing voice was light and feminine and she will train me to hone those qualities of my voice. One of the ways in which she did so was through entrainment, through a disciplining of my body as well as my voice. In training my body to match the light, feminine quality of my singing voice, she encouraged me to stand tall and consciously elongate my neck. When practicing the upper portions of my range, she encouraged me to concentrate on opening my throat rather than opening my mouth very wide. While her bodily directions did succeed in making me look lither and more "feminine" they also had timbral repercussions. Keeping my mouth smaller and focusing my opening vowels on my throat resulted in a thinner upper range rather than a more rounded, diaphragm-based upper range. While my teacher presented my entrainment in such qualities as the development of my natural, healthy singing voice, adopting them was a continuous conscious effort on my part as I unlearned all of my formative years as a more masculine-coded, diaphragm-based alto.

Though I did not meet any of my teacher's other students, and therefore had no certainty in how similar or different her approach was toward me, I wondered if I was her only white student. Whiteness has historical associations with femininity and litheness, especially in comparison to Black women. Literary theorist Michelle Smith and historian Jane Nicholas examine how the white feminine body was disciplined in nineteenth-century Western Europe and North America through beauty standards that encouraged

youthfulness and physical fragility.[214] A thin, youthful woman reflected the success of their hard-working husbands and the emerging petty bourgeoise in the dawn of the Industrial Revolution.[215] Such an appearance showed that these women did not have to perform physical labor because their husbands provided for them. Sociologist Sabrina Strings draws similar conclusions in tracing the ways that white feminine beauty was also constructed against Blackness.[216] Strings, via primary sources from the nineteenth-century United States, argues that litheness among white women was the "correct embodiment."[217] Such an embodiment demonstrated a strong work ethic and a Christian morality against overindulging on food – these are the same ideals that Christian missionaries in South Africa instilled on colonized South Africans.[218] Whiteness was often described in negation to Blackness – it was what Blackness was not. Blackness was always in excess – in body, in immorality, and in laziness. This quality of being in excess also played a role in the construction of the timbre of Black women. Comparisons between Black American soprano Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield or "The Black Swan" and soprano Jenny Lind or "The Swedish Nightingale," demonstrate the ways in which white femininity was constructed via Blackness and how Blackness disciplined white femininity. Jennifer Lynne Stoever compares reviews of these two women who were at the peak of their performing careers in the Victorian period. Reviewers typically

[214] Michelle J. Smith and Jane Nicholas, "Soft Rejuvenation: Cosmetics, Idealized Femininity, and Young Women's Bodies, 1880-1930," *Journal of Social History* 53, no. 4 (Summer 2020): 906-921.
[215] Ibid., 908.
[216] Sabrina Strings, *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia* (New York: New York University Press, 2019).
[217] Ibid., 12.
[218] Ibid.

described Lind's voice as "pure" and "light."[219] Lind herself said that her voice was "simple and natural" and that her proper elocution contributed to the beauty of her timbre.[220] Elocution was also a common means of bodily discipline in colonial and apartheid South Africa, as reflected in the pedagogical techniques of colonial missionaries and instructors for the Eoan Group (chapter 2). In reviews about Greenfield's performances, she was always compared to Lind and reviewers assumed that she was less disciplined and less talented than Lind. While Lind's femininity was highlighted in reviews and affirmed by descriptions of her timbre, reviewers often described Greenfield's timbre as somewhere between masculine and feminine. Reviewers often described her timbre has having a lot of "power," a word that had more masculine associations, particularly when compared to the "lightness" of Lind's timbre.[221] Similar dichotomies seem to be made in contemporary South Africa between white and Black singers. Gobbato and others described Black singers as having a certain passion and power that the restrained white singers did not possess. In my own entrainment, I felt the need to restrain what I felt to be my natural timbre to achieve a restrained, thin timbre that my teacher believed to be my natural timbre.

On my days off from voice lessons, I practiced for roughly twenty minutes a day. The repertoire included various vocal warm-ups, breathing exercises, and two songs: "Shosholoza" (Fig. 3.2) and "Igama leNkosi" (Fig. 3.3). "Shosholoza" or "Push Forward" is a traditional South African song that is often sung in stadiums and by choirs.

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[219] Jennifer Lynne Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 111.
[220] Ibid., 102.
[221] Ibid., 118-119.

"Igama leNkosi" or "The Name of God" is a hymn that is often sung by church choirs. I also learned how to lead a choir using "Shosholoza," a practice that will receive a fuller explanation below. As part of my bodily discipline, my teacher gave me a diet to follow: this list included foods that I should eat frequently, foods that I should eat directly before singing, and foods that I should eat no more than once a month. Foods to eat frequently include grilled white meats, vegetables, fruits, water, and decaffeinated hot tea. Before singing, she instructed me to eat nuts and fruit only, but to make sure that I do not get too full. Foods to eat only monthly were: dairy products, greasy food, spicy food, fried food, soft drinks, and caffeinated drinks. I followed this diet closely, with the exception of daily coffee intake.

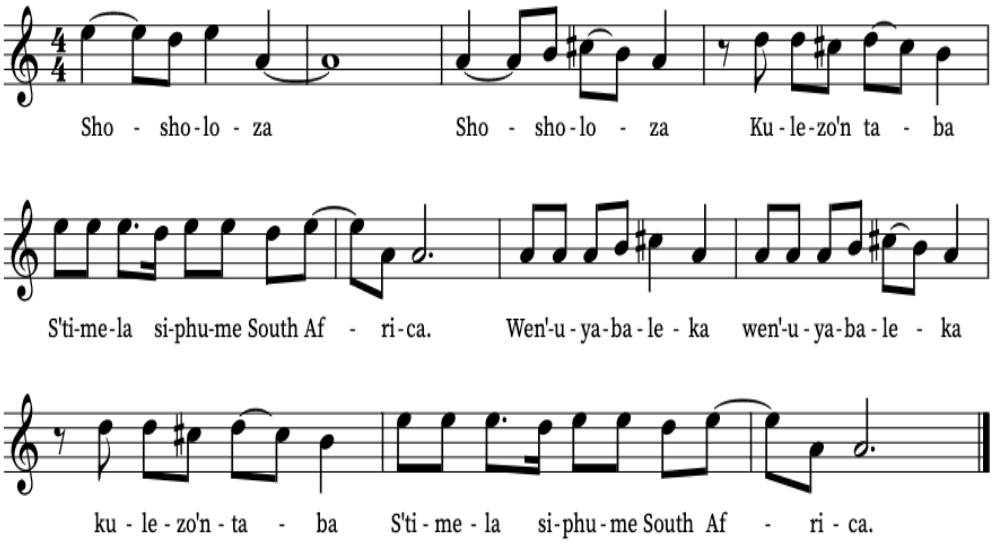


Figure 3.2: "Shosholoza" as the author sung in her lessons.[222]

[222] Author's translation of lyrics: "Push forward, push forward, to those mountains, we leave South Africa. You are running away, you are running away to those mountains, we leave South Africa."

The vocal warm-ups included singing a C major scale on "la" and a warm-up intended to be a sort of tongue-twister: "mimi mama wu mimi ma mimi mama mimi mama wu." The breathing warms-ups included what my teacher referred to as "dog breaths"; after my inhale, I held my breath and exhaled in exaggerated pants to clear mucus from my throat. The final activity of my warm-ups was exaggerated chewing motions to loosen up the muscles around my mouth.

"Igama leNkosi," like many Christian chants in South Africa, has several versions. I asked one of my isiXhosa instructors (who is a former choir teacher) to sing the chant for me. She sent me two versions via WhatsApp voice notes and three more versions sung by her friends and acquaintances. From these voice notes, I tested which versions felt comfortable in my range and, from there, made an aesthetic preference. Because I knew that my teacher wanted me to expand the soprano portion of my range, I also chose the version shown in figure 3.3 to assist in that goal.

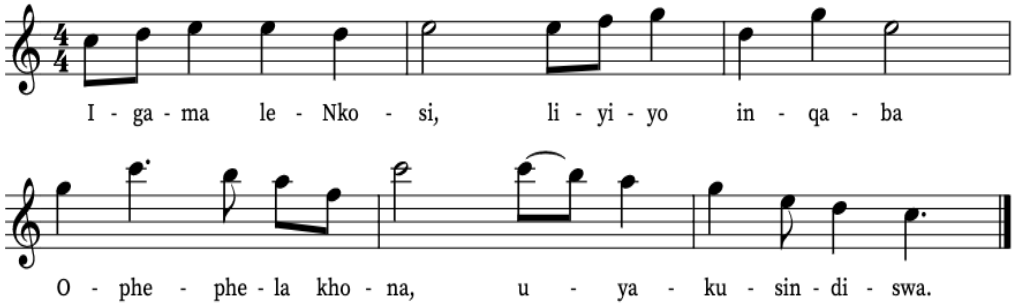


Figure 3.3: "Igama leNkosi" as the author sung in her lessons.[223]

The example of "Shosholoza" shown in figure 3.2 is the part sung by a mass choir. The choir leader part is unwritten and improvised in the moment, though there is a

[223] Author's translation of lyrics: "The name of God is a refuge, whoever hides in Him will be safe."

bare-bones structure that allows spontaneity on the part of both the leader and the choir. Essentially, the choir leader introduces each phrase. In this case, those phrases begin on "shosholoza", "kulezo", "s'timela", and "wen'uyabaleka." The choir leader also sets the key and version for the choir, as there are many different versions of "Shosholoza." Due to the simultaneous fixity and flexibility of the choir leader plus mass choir format, choirs can change choir leaders often and can sing repertoire using this format with little to no rehearsal. Due to South Africa's strong choral culture with frequent choral competitions, performances, and tours, such a format is necessary. I also learned how to lead a choir as a part of my lessons, and I learned this skill with "Shosholoza" due to its popularity.

Though I learned via "Shosholoza," the skill can easily be transferred to other songs with a mass choir. I also learned this skill aurally first by mimicking my voice teacher in our lessons, and then by mimicking the YouTube video that she sent me via WhatsApp. By listening to recordings that I had made in my lessons and the YouTube video, I learned the choir leader part by rote. However, I was able to improvise at my teacher's urging after learning by rote due to the inherent flexibility of the format. Learning how to sing with this method highlighted the ways in which I had forgotten my formative, ear-based training and decentered my dependency on Western notation to learn and practice music. When practicing at home, I had to resist providing myself with a starting pitch on a keyboard. I had to retrain myself to stay on pitch without the assistance of a keyboard, returning to sounding middle C if I heard myself straying from the pitch. Though I had to retrain my ear to stay on pitch without a constant referent, my ear is trained to Western tonality and all of the choral songs that I heard, learned, and

sang were also within Western tonality. This made learning easier because my ear was already accustomed to the tonal framework of my repertoire.

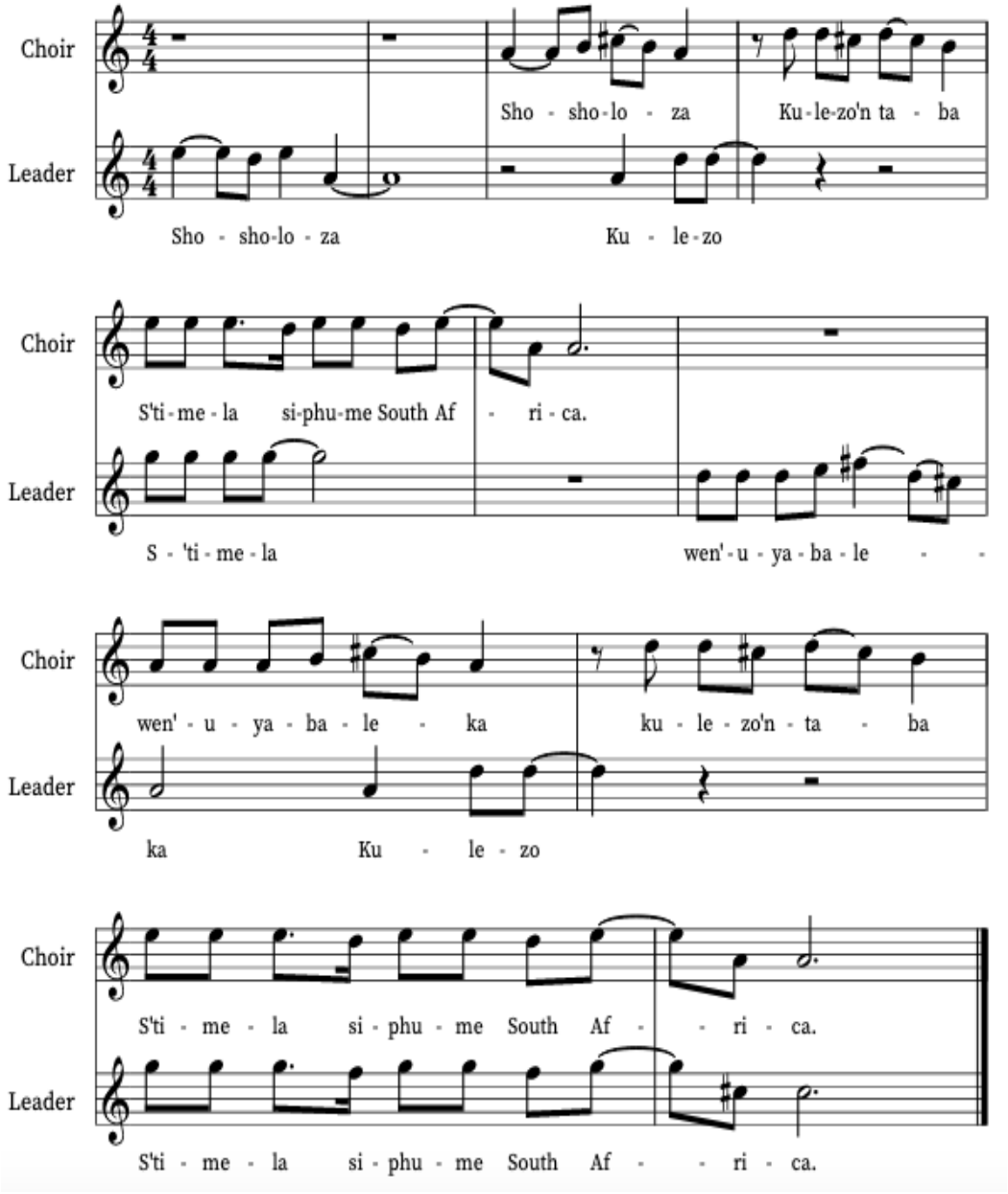


Figure 3.4: "Shosholoza" with choir lead as sung by the author in her lessons.

**Volume and Vibrato: Constructing Timbre**

Learning how to sing in this way sounds the history of the construction of the Black South African singing voice and of the choral history of Black South African choirs. While the roots are firmly in Western tonality, the repertoire and pedagogy of South African choirs demonstrate the ways in which Black South African musicians have used those roots to create musical communities. British missionaries and colonizers constructed what musicologist Matthew Morrison would call a "counterfeit" Blackness through careful vocal instruction and repertoire.[224] As discussed in chapter two, missionaries accomplished this primarily through elocution, education in Western tonality, and gospel-centered repertoire. This creation of Blackness undergirded Europe's civilizing mission because it helped spread the gospel and showed the perceived successes of Western civilization. I contend that, though inherited from colonizing European frameworks, the work that Black South African educators and community members have done in restructuring and developing historically white practices into a body of localized repertoire, languages, and communities has created a uniquely Black South African pedagogy of the voice. Borrowing from Thulile Pearl Shandu's theorization of the inherent translocality of the contemporary South African subject, I suggest that a Black South African pedagogy is necessarily translocal.[225] She argues that contemporary South Africans use English to situate themselves as part of the global

[224] Matthew Morrison, "Race, Blacksound, and the (Re)Making of Musicological Discourse," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72, no. 3 (Fall 2019), 790. Though Morrison refers to the ways in which the white working class in the antebellum period in the United States constructed Blackness, his theorizations are instructive in a South African context.
[225] Thulile Pearl Shandu, "Pitch Black Language: The Quest for Language Purity in isiZulu Popular Music," *Muziki* 4, no. 2 (2007), 268.

space, and use Indigenous languages to underscore their local authenticity as South Africans. Construction of native-tongue songs, circulation of knowledge, anti-apartheid struggle songs, newly built township communities – these are but few of the core experiences of the Black South African that have been made possible by the construction and development of a Black South African pedagogy originally informed by Victorian hymnody. Just as the postcolonial Black South African subject is necessarily multinational, so Black South African vocal pedagogy must sound that multinational, postcolonial history.

Contemporary timbre in the voices of the those who have learned to sing via township-based choirs is informed by the timbre constructed during South Africa's colonial period. Timbre was also constructed via Black South African agency and through entrainment. All of my Black interlocutors had their formative education in community or church choirs. When discussions about vocal timbre came up, all of them mentioned that they can aurally identify whether or not someone sang in choirs as a child. When I asked them to describe the qualities of a choir-trained voice, I heard several of the same adjectives that interlocutors such as Crouse, Gobbato, and Jeremy Silver mentioned: power, emotion, and color. One of my interlocutors, Masakhane, also mentioned that regular attendance at church sounds in vocal timbre. When I pointed out that I also grew up in the church, Masakhane laughed: "yes, but you didn't grow up in *my* church." Repertoire and service content in the township church plays a large role in constructing the powerful timbre that Masakhane and others describe. Having attended several of these services throughout my fieldwork, even those who do not sing in the

church choir sing frequently during the service. Though services are still broadly organized and sectioned by hymns, Bible readings, and sermons, the singing of the hymns themselves is loosely structured. Of the township churches that I attended in the Capricorn and Khayelitsha townships, none had hymnals. The choir always started hymns in the choir leader-choir response format that I outlined in my above description of my vocal lessons. Because the congregation is not using notated music on a page, the length and veracity of the hymn were always subject to change. Congregants or choir members who felt especially energized by a sermon or Bible passage would often begin singing a song of their own (whether or not that song was a hymn) or extend the scheduled hymn by riffing on the last verse. Even if one is not in the church choir, regular attendance at a township church exposes congregants to frequent singing and encourages creativity and improvisation on the part of the congregant, both children and adults alike. Because I grew up in a church setting in which we adhered only to the pre-determined hymns as they were written on the page, I did not develop the same timbre that Masakhane and others who grew up in similar churches developed. Masakhane clarified that he did not understand this powerful quality he often heard in Black singing voices as racial. He noted that frequent choir-based singing as a child develops that quality and white people can possess it if they spend their formative years in that environment. This observation affirms the arguments that Eidsheim, Obadike, and Thurman make in regards to racialized assumptions of Black singing voices. Masakhane's diagnosis here implies that the Black South African operatic voice is environmental more than it is an essential ability due to their race.

Volume and vibrato were the two timbral qualities I noticed most acutely in these church settings. Because Black South Africans in church services oscillate frequently between soloist and choir member, I noticed that these singers tended to sing loudly because they needed to be heard over many other people. There was also little if any decrescendos or crescendos, or even minor volume changes. Singers often came in on at least a *forte* and remained at that volume for the duration of the phrase or song. I also noticed that many singers' voices featured vibrato even within choirs. The vibrato was typically fast and slowed down the longer that the singer held the same pitch. The vibrato was also forced – singers often nodded their heads to cause the vibrato. Masakhane noted that this style of vibrato is often the mark of a singer who has not taken formal vocal lessons and that it is typically the first quality to be trained out of the voice in such lessons. I witnessed this during a master class taught by South African soprano Pumeza Matshikiza for University of Cape Town Opera School students.[226] Each of the students who attended the master class prepared an aria and Pumeza provided immediate feedback to the students. Though all three of the students received a variety of comments from Pumeza, all three students also were critiqued on how volume and vibrato affected their phrasing. Though the students were no longer using the quick vibrato typical of township church singing, the students had little to no volume difference between the start and end of their arias nor much of a volume difference within phrases. Pumeza pointed out that musical phrasing in opera encourages forward momentum – each phrase should

[226] After graduating with a degree in voice from the UCT, Pumeza studied voice at the Royal College of Music in London. She now lives in Germany. This master class took place at the Baxter Theatre in Rondebosch, Cape Town on 23 May 2022.

have its own beginning, climax, and end as should the aria itself also have these checkpoints. By forward momentum she meant there should be a gradual increase and volume toward an apex and then the volume should decrease incrementally after that apex. While these students were all in opera training programs, certain qualities, such as volume and phrasing, were still being negotiated in their lessons.

The comments made by white opera educators and administrators and Black singers paired with observations about Pumeza's master class illustrate the ways in which timbre is entangled in entrainment, racial stereotyping, and individual agency. Though white administrators and educators used some of the same timbral adjectives as Black singers did, the context of those comments needs some unpacking. For Black singers, the use of those adjectives seems to be environmental. The energetic quality of their timbre is cultivated within church settings – these environments encourage creativity and improvisation. These environments also encourage emotional connection with song – congregants and choir members alike are free to extend hymns or sing songs of their own to express the emotions spurred by a Bible passage or a sermon. Masakhane's use of the terms coupled with his observation that white people could develop a similar timbre if they grew up in a township church culture suggests that Black singers do not understand adjectives such as "powerful" and "energetic" to be racially unique qualities but qualities that are cultivated through a lifetime of church services and choir participation. Adjectives such as "powerful" and "energetic" however, become racialized in the opera classroom and on the opera stage because they are borne from assumptions based on race. This recalls the trends that both Thurman and Morrison have acknowledged in their

scholarship. Thurman argues that Black singers (in interwar Germany) could never be accepted as authentic producers of classical music or of opera – their talent was minimized or justified in racialized terms: "racially unmarked for so long, classical music became an audible signifier of a white, European culture (against a supposedly primitive, non-European one) only when listeners were forced to think about classical music's racial alternatives."[227] Similarly in South Africa, Black singers are often not understood as authentic producers of opera but vessels of energy that enliven a genre that is haunted by its complicity with South Africa's white supremacist regimes.

**University Pedagogies: Educators' Perspectives**

Some of the opera and voice instructors at the University of Cape Town had similar educational backgrounds as their students. They have first-hand knowledge of the challenges of only coming to learn about Western notation, Romance languages, Western music history, stylistic technique, and other such topics in university training. I spoke with Paulina Malefane, co-founder and co-director of grassroots South African opera company, Isango Ensemble. Malefane also has a teaching post at the University of Cape Town. We spoke about how her experiences as a student, as a professional opera singer, and as a tertiary educator have impacted her career and outlooks.

Malefane first spoke about her conflicted feelings toward choral-centric formative education that those who grow up in townships learn:

[227] Thurman, *Singing Like Germans: Black Musicians in the Lands of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021), 92.

> We learn by ear. And it's a blessing, but also it comes as our demise because most kids listen to YouTube. They listen to YouTube and they try and mimic exactly what they hear on YouTube. And that's not how you learn technique. You know, so they come to — they come to your city having this preconceived and manufactured technique that they have and that they make. And when they come here, it's a shock. […] I have to say that some students come and they have wonderful voices, so they go from there and then you just develop them, help them develop. But some of them, unfortunately, you have to undo. You know, all the bad habits that they learned from YouTube or from people that maybe are not qualified to teach.[228]

Malefane continued that she would like to see Western music education implemented into all school curricula, particularly for students between ages fourteen and eighteen. That way, she reasons, the students who choose to go into singing professionally will not lose "a sense of dignity" by being at the bottom of one's class.[229] She also identifies a lack of diversity in tertiary voice and opera instructors as another reason that township-raised students fall behind in the university classroom. The lecturer will often move quickly due to an assumption of a basic fundamental Western-style voice education, and the students who are behind often feel too embarrassed or uncomfortable to speak up and ask for help or clarity. Music theory courses, for example, assume a literacy in Western notation and basic piano skills. Malefane remembered that harmony-based theory was especially difficult for her. Because she had learned harmony only by ear, having to write out harmony in Western notation and harmonizing on the spot with only a piano was quite challenging.[230] However, one of the ways in which choral-based training, Malefane reasoned, is a "blessing" is the facility to move among different tonics with

[228] Paulina Malefane, interview with author via Zoom, 15 October 2020.
[229] Ibid.
[230] Ibid.

ease. Malefane said that if a particular passage is providing difficulty, choral training allows one to move it to a different tonic for the moment for easier learning and move it back to the original tonic later.[231]

Because Malefane has had her own experiences with lagging behind her peers in music theory, language, and piano, she has constructed her own approaches to make the transition for students of similar backgrounds easier. In regard to language, Malefane insists that it is crucial to start with English in her voice lessons with students whose first language is not English. I found this surprising as most South Africans speak fluent English because most public schools are conducted in English, although some are in Afrikaans. Malefane confirmed this, but pointed out that those who grow up in townships and attend English-language schools do not know English that is flowery or poetic; they only use English to write their school essays and to take lecture notes. They often do not speak English outside of the classroom. Therefore, Malefane finds it necessary to encourage her students to study English literature and to become conversationally fluent in English before moving on to Romance languages. She encourages them to express their needs and wants in English and to speak English in their private lessons. In order to transition from English to a Romance language, Malefane has her students translate the Romance language into English and express that English translation in their own words. This not only hones her students' English skills; she also wants her students to understand and closely connect with the opera text to positively affect characterization. In township church settings, emotion is catalyzed through

[231] Ibid.

personal resonance with a text. This explains why Malefane is insistent that her students understand what they are singing. Tapping into emotions can recall the energetic church performances on the opera stage.

I also spoke with Jeremy Silver, the director of the University of Cape Town's Opera School. Silver is English-born and received a traditional Western music education in England; his studies focused on conducting and languages. He also teaches private voice lessons and has to navigate how to approach language in those lessons. He also noted that teaching students with such different fundamental backgrounds is challenging. In step with Malefane, he impressed on his students the importance of knowing the meaning of the texts they sing. Perhaps because his own native language is English, Silver seems to take for granted the English fluency of his students who speak an Indigenous South African language as their first language. Silver said he found that many of his students who speak an Indigenous South African language as their first language did not have deep grammatical or syntactical knowledge of that language. They primarily spoke this language conversationally and studied it very little in an academic or literary context. Again, this is likely due to the fact that most public schools are conducted in English and, while there has been an influx of Indigenous-language literature in recent years, there is a dearth of it in comparison to available English-language literature. Differently from Malefane, he encouraged the use of Indigenous languages to better learn English and Romance languages. To break down the Romance languages, Silver encouraged them to first learn the grammatical nuts and bolts of their

native language and apply that knowledge to the opera text.[232] For example, how does subject and verb agreement work in isiZulu? What are the object and subject pronouns in isiXhosa? Though these are relatively rudimentary grammar lessons, South African students are often not taught about the structure of their native languages in public schools.

When reading Malefane's linguistic methodology with Silver's, differences and similarities appear. It is clear from both of their methodologies that the wide usage of English as the primary language in public schooling provides unique linguistic challenges for students who speak an Indigenous language as their mother tongue in adulthood. They often have incomplete fluency in both their native language and in English – they have primarily conversational fluency in their native language and primarily academic fluency in English. This then creates a pedagogical challenge for instructors, who have to form a methodology that encourages fluency in languages distant to their native tongues and only marginally related to English. Malefane's methodology seems to be somewhat reactive; her approach to linguistic education is based on her own experiences of falling behind in university music courses as a student. Her solution seems to be to make her students' English as robust as possible and, by implication, to keep their native tongues primarily conversational. She reasoned that her voice lessons should be conducted in English to avoid a linguistic separation between vocal lessons and students' courses in music theory, piano skills, and music history.[233] Malefane seems to want to build the

[232] Jeremy Silver, in-person interview with author, 7 August 2019.
[233] Malefane, interview with author.

foundation of her students' opera and Western music education on English with an intent to expand on that foundation with native South African languages later on in their careers. I will return to this point and to Malefane in the case studies chapter (chapter four). Like Malefane, Silver designs his methodology to fill in the linguistic gaps between Romance languages and South African languages. Unlike Malefane, he brings native South African languages into the classroom. When students seem to struggle with an excerpt of text in English, Silver encouraged them to translate it into their native language. He would then ask them to explain why they would express that excerpt in their own native language in that way, while also asking them to identify the discrete grammatical parts of their translation. The students would then apply those insights to English, and then to the target Romance language.[234] Silver's method recalls soprano Hlengiwe Mkhwanazi's use of her native language, isiZulu, to find her creative voice (chapter 1). Though the methodology itself is different, Silver's goal seems to be similar to Malefane's – to fill in the linguistic gaps left by the South African educational system. Malefane seeks to personalize and deepen her students' engagement with English while Silver seeks to personalize opera lessons through use of the students' native languages.

**Alternatives to the Choir to University Pipeline: The Gigging Approach**

Though it is most common for opera singers to attend a university program before starting an opera career, it is necessary to note that the choir to university education pipeline is not the only option for beginning an opera career in South Africa. Because so

[234] Silver, interview with author.

much of early vocal education depends on learning by rote and mimicry and because university tuitions are only partially subsidized by the government, some singers choose not to attend university and build their opera careers through networking and gigging. South Africa's grassroots opera companies such as Isango Ensemble, Umculo, and Township Opera cast their operas based on voice type and ability. There is no minimal education requirement in order to audition. Though the Cape Town Opera does not explicitly require a university education, their connection with the University of Cape Town Opera School via their Young Artist's Programme and partnered productions suggests that they prefer singers with such an education.

Two interlocutors who did not receive a university opera education are tenor Masakhane and soprano Pumza, both based in Khayelitsha, a township outside of Cape Town. When asked why he did not even consider getting a tertiary education, Masakhane had a few reasons. Firstly, he was fortunate enough to attend a high school and a church with robust music programs. His mother's former employers paid for Masakhane and his siblings to attend a private school of their choosing, and Masakhane was able to attend a school known for its music program, the Simon Estes Music High School, founded by African-American bass-baritone, Simon Estes. Attending this school, Masakhane noted, also helped him to become conversationally and academically fluent in English, a skill that has helped him engage directly with white English-speaking opera directors and creators. Masakhane's local church also had a robust music education program – a program which he has continued to help develop in adulthood. Growing up in his church, Masakhane learned how to read Western notation, how to conduct a choir,

and basic music theory. Because of the deep connections between the opera and choir industries, Masakhane was able to use his education and his artistic network to build an opera career without first getting a university degree. He works frequently with Isango Ensemble. Pumza's case is similar – she had a robust community-based education in school and church choirs during her childhood in the Eastern Cape. When she decided to pursue an opera career as an adult, she moved to Cape Town and joined Isango Ensemble (then called the Portabello Ensemble) before securing a permanent position in the Cape Town Opera Choir without any university training. Outside of the Choir, she has found work as an opera singer with other projects and companies.

This method of building an opera career does have its limitations. In Masakhane's case, long-term, permanent work is incredibly hard to achieve. This type of work typically consists of short-term contracts and one-off gigs which typically do not see enough income to last between gigs or to cover costs to attend auditions for other work. Though Pumza does have the security of a permanent contract with the Cape Town Opera's Choir, this contract also leaves little time between obligations and money between performances to attend other auditions. Further, because it is a contract for a Choir, she does not have the benefit of adding professional title roles to her resume. Though skipping the high fees incurred by a university education is beneficial, the gig approach to an opera career in South Africa is still precarious. As illustrated in the previous chapter, South Africa's wage inequality issues, high taxi fees, and stagnation of a domestic opera industry affect all singers regardless of the method of their career path.

**Language and Race**

Crafting one's own career path outside of the university system also presents linguistic challenges. Those who study at a university receive diction training in Romance languages – this skill is difficult to acquire via mimicry, the primary vehicle for learning Romance-language opera songs outside of the university context. While some of my interlocutors had the opportunity to attend secondary schools outside of the townships with European language programs, others learned diction in township churches via mimicry from audio recordings. Because opera arias and choir songs are common repertoire in South African choirs, many church choir directors have some knowledge of Romance language diction. These directors construct their own curricula to teach such diction to their choir members. Much like singers from townships construct their own vocal pedagogies, they also construct their own linguistic curricula to supplement such pedagogies.

This practice of crafting one's own curricula and professional trajectory is not new in South Africa, particularly in Black townships. Since the apartheid era, South Africans have had to craft their own curricula due to the near eradication of mother-tongue classrooms and "separate development" curricula for students of color that focused on physical labor skills.[235] Currently, there are arguments both in support of

[235] Mother-tongue instruction is often used in Black schools for children aged from roughly 5-10, with English-only instruction following. See Pule Phindane, "Learning in Mother Tongue: Language Preferences in South Africa," *International Journal of Educational Sciences* 11, no. 1 (2015), 107. In April of 2022, Angie Motshekga, the Minister of Basic Education in South Africa, announced an initiative toward the use of mother-tongue education in all classrooms. See Ntando Makhubu, "Minister Angie Motshekga promises mother tongue lessons in schools," *Independent Online,* 21 April 2022, https://www.iol.co.za/pretoria-news/news/minister-angie-motshekga-promises-mother-tongue-lessons-in-schools-1dcc4f77-5db5-4bca-9666-46dd9eb24862.

English-language classrooms (the current practice) and in support of native-language classrooms, both sides citing constitutional support.[236] South Africa's first democratic Constitution was instated in 1994. In regard to language and education, the Constitution allows for schools to use any of South Africa's eleven national languages (which includes both English and Afrikaans) as the primary language of instruction.[237] Supporters of mother tongue classrooms cite this aspect of the Constitution to support their argument. The Constitution also specifies that every student who goes through public schooling in South Africa needs to be fluent in two languages and have studied a third. Because of this stipulation, those in support of colonial language classrooms argue that English- or Afrikaans-language schools are necessary because it forces the speakers of Indigenous languages to become fluent in another of South Africa's most commonly spoken languages.

The switch to English as the primary colonial language instead of Afrikaans was also politically motivated. Though the Dutch were the first to colonize South Africa, the English gained control of the colony in the nineteenth century after the Anglo-Boer War.[238] English then became the primary colonizing language of the colony and the Afrikaners resented being pushed aside. The apartheid government, a government founded on Afrikaner nationalism nearly a century later, enacted the Bantu Education Act

[236] Chrizell Stoop, "Children's rights to mother-tongue education in a multilingual world: a comparative analysis between South Africa and Germany," *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal (PELJ)* 20, no.1 (2017).
[237] The other nine national languages are isiXhosa, Venda, isiZulu, isiNdlebe, siSwati, Sepedi, Sesotho, Tswana, and Tsonga.
[238] 'Boer,' the Dutch and Afrikaans word for 'farmer,' was often used as a name for Afrikaners as many of the Afrikaner colonizers were farmers. It is still sometimes used to describe them today, whether or not they are farmers. The isiXhosa word for Afrikaans, "isiBhuru," is derived from this word.

of 1953. This enactment forced all South African students to learn in Afrikaans and all instructors to teach in Afrikaans; the government also replaced all textbooks with Afrikaans-language textbooks. Many of the Black instructors and students did not know any Afrikaans and those that did know the language did not know it well enough to engage with it in an academic setting; the colonial language they knew was primarily English because of the long rule that the English held between the two Afrikaner rules. Because of this, the Black populations fell behind white, Afrikaans-speaking populations in their educations. Due to the apartheid government's failure to educate all pupils equally, Black children started their own informal schools that not only filled in the gaps in standard subjects such as history and mathematics, but provided supplemental education in Marxism, communism, and alternative political ideologies that could aid in the dissolution of the apartheid government. One such group was the Coalition of South African Students (COSAS), who aligned themselves with the African National Congress (ANC), the primary anti-apartheid faction that included notable members such as Nelson Mandela. Historian Emily Bridger's ethnography of Soweto-area women who were child comrades provides insight to the risks that children took to construct these alternative curricula.[239] Townships were heavily monitored by the apartheid military and police forces at the time, and the families of these children became targets. Many children were kicked out of their homes for joining groups like COSAS and female children in particular faced the constant threat of sexual violence when forced to live outside of the

[239] See Emily Bridger, *Young Women against Apartheid: Gender, Youth & South Africa's Liberation Struggle* (Boydell & Brewer: Woodbridge, UK, 2021).

family home.[240] Such risks illustrate the value that South Africans place on education and that language has a deep political significance.

The ANC-led postapartheid government did enact some changes to encourage linguistic equality. The government acknowledged the historical erasure and diminishing of Indigenous languages and the Department of Arts and Culture enacted bodies to address these inequalities. One such group was the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB), established in 1995. This group was intended to "develop" and "promote" the equal use and enjoyment of all eleven of South Africa's national languages. Despite these changes, Shandu notes, there is still a gap in Indigenous-language academic texts and curricula. She continues that this gap exemplifies that PanSALB and other similar public bodies have not developed or promoted Indigenous languages to the status of colonial languages, particularly English.[241] The after-effects of the forced implementation of Afrikaans as South Africa's primary language still reverberate in the present. In my own informal conversations with my friends and interlocutors during fieldwork, many refer to Afrikaans as a "racist" language; English does not seem to have earned the same reputation though it has now regained status as the lingua franca of South Africa's academic system. In these conversations, I would probe a bit further, trying to figure out why Afrikaans and English were not equally castigated as "racist" languages. Much of the response had to do with the apartheid government – Afrikaans is still closely associated with apartheid and its racist violence in a way that English is not.

[240] Ibid., 22.
[241] Shandu, "Pitch Black Language," 264.

In some ways, English was one of the languages of the anti-apartheid activists, or freedom fighters. Many southern African ethnic groups that had never interacted before in the years before and during apartheid found themselves in interaction with one another due to several reasons. Because of the large number of mines that had been steadily opening in South Africa since the late nineteenth century, southern Africans looking for jobs often relocated to South Africa to work in these mines. South Africa's university system also grew in the twentieth century, bringing in more immigrants. In the mid-twentieth century, many South Africans were exiled by the apartheid government to neighboring countries because of their involvement in anti-apartheid protests. Because of this cross-ethnic, cross-national mixing, many spoke English to one another because it was the only language they had in common. As such, many of the freedom fighter demonstrations and rallies were conducted in English for ease of communication between different races and ethnic groups. Conducting large events in English had the added benefit of being understood by international audiences, a benefit that Afrikaans would not provide. Therefore, although English is a colonial language and is understood as such, it is preferable to Afrikaans because of its association with the freedom fighters and because it does provide access to the domestic university system and the ability to consume international media.

Because of the ways in which Afrikaans pervaded Black South African homes, many of my friends and interlocutors make a point of only speaking their native languages with little code-mixing at home and in the townships to reclaim that space as independent from the increasingly Anglicized postcolonial space of the cities and

universities. In step with linguistically-informed Blackness, the use of isiXhosa in the city creates community in the postcolonial city. The friends that I made while I was studying at the University of Cape Town said that their parents raised them to speak only their native tongue at home – English was for school and professional situations only. This suggests that Black South Africans are doing their best to reclaim their homes as places of "ulwimi lwasekhaya" or "mother tongue". In some cases, language also seems to transcend visual cues when determining one's race in South Africa. Though many so-called coloured South Africans are of mixed race, typically the native language of a mixed-race person determines their status as coloured or Black. If a mixed-race person speaks Afrikaans as their first language, then they are considered coloured; if a mixed-race person speaks an Indigenous South African language as their first language, then they are considered Black.[242]

Linguistic partitioning in contemporary South Africa is both an inheritance of apartheid and a strategy to construct postcolonial, postapartheid selves. Shandu, in her analysis of the use of isiZulu in popular music, in everyday speech, and in academic settings, demonstrates that the ways in which one speaks and uses a native South African language can provide their Blackness with a certain authenticity. Shandu notes that some linguists argue that such code-mixing is harmful to the preservation of native languages.[243] In other words, isiZulu should not be mixed with any other language or it is not an authentic or pure language. In response, Shandu argues that such calls to purity

[242] South African-American comedian and host of *The Daily Show*, Trevor Noah, is a well-known example of this phenomenon. Though he is mixed-race, his native language is isiXhosa, marking him as Black (specifically as umXhosa) rather than coloured in South Africa.
[243] Shandu, "Pitch Black Language," 266.

are reminiscent of apartheid-era linguistic partitioning. She continues that a desire to keep native South African languages "pure" does not consider the global positionalities of South African music and musicians.[244] Code-mixing and innovative use of Indigenous languages offers a "condition of possibility" for language development and prevents stagnation.[245] Code-mixing is, however, not only a concern among linguists but also among Black South Africans themselves. Hierarchical interpretations of language are tightly connected to ethnic and racial identity.[246] The more one code-mixes with colonial languages, the less authentic their Blackness. In chapter one I illustrated the ways in which language has become a marker of self in postapartheid South Africa, largely due to Nelson Mandela's encouragement of multilingual unity as the successor to racial division. Removed from their ancestral homelands, mixed with other ethnic groups, and forced to learn Afrikaans during apartheid, contemporary Black South Africans identify strongly with their ethnic and linguistic identities as a means to rebuild them. Though opera houses are now racially heterogeneous spaces, linguistic partitioning across racial lines is still common.

Language is one of the ways in which Blackness is constructed and utilized in the opera house. Part of the reason that opera is largely understood in South Africa as a "white" genre, other than its European origins, is that it is primarily contained in the English-speaking parts of South Africa and because most of the operas produced in South Africa are canonical operas sung in Romance languages. This association is also due to

[244] Ibid.
[245] Ibid., 265.
[246] Ibid.

South African opera's history with Blackface minstrelsy and as a vessel for the British colonial government and apartheid government to assert their cultural supremacy. While grassroots opera companies in South Africa typically center township locations, reduced fee concerts, and linguistically accessible productions, opera in South Africa is still primarily centered in the culture districts of Cape Town and Johannesburg, two of South Africa's largest cities.[247] These cultural centers are far from townships and require expensive round trips on public transport and expensive tickets to attend. Such a divide is indicative of how opera in South Africa represents a microcosm of present-day apartheid. While English has been standardized and spread to the masses, the South African iterations of European high culture are available only to those who can afford it. As mentioned previously, many Black opera singers speak isiXhosa (or another Indigenous language) to one another during rehearsal and performance breaks. Of the interlocutors I observed doing this, I asked them if switching languages was intentional or automatic. One interlocutor said that it was intentional – he wanted to encourage an isiXhosa-speaking social group that was separate from the other singers.[248] He said that he will always be friendly with all of his coworkers and attend social events for the whole cast but clarified that the English- and Afrikaans-speaking coworkers were not his friends.[249] "They will just never understand the challenges that we face so it's hard to

[247] Groups such as The Township Opera Collective, the now-defunct Gauteng Collective, Umculo, and Isango Ensemble.
[248] This interlocutor asked to be kept anonymous in regard to this anecdote.
[249] With the exception of Isango Ensemble and Umculo productions, all of the opera productions I saw in South Africa had white, coloured, and Black cast members. All of the cast members were fluent in English and some of the white and coloured cast members spoke Afrikaans in their spare time.

connect with them. And I'm definitely not seeing them ekasi on the weekends."[250] The implication here is that the non-Nguni speakers do not seem to have an interest in spending their spare time in Black majority spaces, so this interlocutor does not desire to put forth a concerted effort to fit in with his white cohorts. Though most Black people in Cape Town speak isiXhosa because the amaXhosa are the largest ethnic group in the Western Cape province, not all Black opera singers in Cape Town speak Nguni languages. I met several Sesotho speakers who exclusively spoke English at rehearsals because it was the only language they had in common with other cast members. I did not find that Sesotho-speaking or otherwise non-Nguni speaking Black singers were wholly excluded from Nguni-speaking groups – those groups would use English to accommodate non-Nguni speakers through the use of code-mixing. Linguists Mela Sarkar, Lise Winer, and Kobir Sarkar argue that, in this case, code-switching can "enact a particular speech community's collective and linguistic cultural identity."[251] Residents of Cape Town, even those who do not speak a Nguni language, often understand basic isiXhosa or isiZulu and know some slang because of how often it is used. I suggest that switching from isiXhosa to an English and isiXhosa code-switching way of speaking enacts Black South African urban community in the opera house.

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[250] Ibid. "Ekasi" is isiXhosa slang for "in the township." Many people who do not live in townships visit township bars on the weekends. Bars are often cheaper in townships. Because there is more space in townships than in the city, there are also several open-air bars in townships that are very popular in the summer months.

[251] Mela Sarkar, Lise Winer, Kobir Sarkar, "Multilingual Code-Switching in Montreal Hip-hop: Mayhem Meets Method or, 'Tout moune qui talk trash kiss mon black ass du nord," in *Proceedings of the 4th International Symposium on Bilingualism*, ed. James Cohen, Kara T. McAlister, Kellie Rolstad, and Jeff MacSwan (Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press, 2005), 2059.

**When Patriarchies Collide: Gender, Race, and Language**

Like language, gender is also often racialized and Black singers have to reckon with their Black identity along with gender – this is particularly true for Black women opera singers. Women artists are in a constant process of negotiation in regard to their performance of gender both on and off the stage because the patriarchy in South Africa is informed by precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial expectations simultaneously. Pre-colonial, postcolonial, and postapartheid models of patriarchy in South Africa all assign similar roles to women, particularly girls and young women – their place is in the home, their primary purpose is to marry and bear children, and their primary role is as caretaker to her own family and to her husband's family. With postcolonial patriarchy came the near-eradication of precolonial and colonial polygamy and an introduction of modesty on the part of women in both clothing and behavior. Women are expected to dress modestly and to limit their one-on-one interactions with men before marriage.[252] Anthropologist Margaret Mead argues that gender and sex relations are driven by cultural practices and expressions.[253] Following Mead, I suggest that competing patriarchies inform how women perform their femininity in cultural expressions such as opera.

In my observations of others in voice lessons and in interviews with interlocutors about theirs or others' performances in opera, it is plain how such behavioral expectations affected gender presentation in opera in a number of ways. I observed voice lessons with two University of Cape Town Opera School graduate students, Fanele and Setsoane

[252] Bridger, *Young Women against Apartheid*, 41-47.
[253] See Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilisation* (New York, NY: Morrow Quill, 1961).

taught by Sipho Fubesi. Both Fanele and Setsoane struggled with how to perform Black South African femininity while also performing opera. Both sopranos, Fanele and Setsoane were working on the upper parts of their ranges. Sipho told both students that they must stop being polite and open their mouths as wide as possible. This made both Fanele and Setsoane visibly uncomfortable, as a woman opening her mouth very widely in public, especially in front of a man, is considered suggestive and inappropriate. The discomfort that Fanele and Setsoane felt about opening their mouths wide in the presence of their male teacher recalled the feminine disciplining that I was receiving in my own vocal lessons. Both Setsoane and Fanele were performing the restrained, white-coded femininity I was currently working to make natural in my timbre. Such a presentation of femininity suggests that opera performance is implicitly white performance given that both Setsoane and Fanele were performing in this manner. Sipho's encouragement of opening the mouth wider as Setsoane and Fanele tried to reach higher pitches seemed to be in service of two goals. Firstly, he wanted Setsoane and Fanele to present more confidently with their voices. Secondly, by widening their mouths and increasing their volume, he was trying to find the limits of their higher ranges. In particular, he was testing how high they could sing while still projecting. Both Setsoane and Fanele, as postcolonial subjects, had internalized aspects of both restrained white-coded femininity and South African femininity. To advance as opera singers, it seems, both women have to negotiate how to perform such a postcolonial femininity. In regard to vocal timbre, white-coded femininity can be too restrictive.

A conflict between traditional South African femininity and the performance of opera also arose during the Cape Town Opera's June 2022 production of Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* (1786). Directed by Magdalene Minnaar, this production featured several simulated sex scenes between Figaro (William Berger) and Susanna (Brittany Smith). Speaking with Setsoane and Fanele as audience members and Pumza as a member of the chorus in the production, I asked what they thought of such scenes. Both Setsoane and Fanele felt uncomfortable during the performance and stated that they would never be able to perform as Smith did on stage. Pumza was less reserved, saying that she would have no issue with performing Susanna as Smith did, but did note that such direction is not the norm for the Cape Town Opera. Both their repertoire and production style tend to be traditional settings of canonic operas. The opinions and comments by Pumza, Sipho, Setsoane, and Fanele illustrate a spectrum of views on gender and sexuality and its intersections with opera performance. I suggest that such gender expectations are racially coded as a white sensibility of femininity that is at odds with Black South African gender expectations in the Cape Town Opera's production of *Figaro.*

Such implicitly white performance expectations seemed to have affected casting habits and restricts professional futures for Black South African opera singers. I asked two performers what they thought about the Cape Town Opera's 2021 appointment of Magdalene Minaar as artistic director (*Figaro* was her directorial debut at the CTO).[254] The performers, Mbali and Luthando, expressed disappointment but not surprise at the

[254] I am keeping these two interlocutors anonymous at their request.

lack of racial diversity in the cast. Though Minnaar promised to keep the casting for *Figaro* "in house," the main cast was still mostly white (with the exception of Siphamandla Moyake as the Contessa) and the choral members were mostly Black. Keeping the production "in house" meant that non-South African singers were not going to be cast, as was common during the tenure of the Cape Town Opera's last artistic director, Matthew Wild. While casting only South Africans in their productions is a step in the right direction for building a sustainable opera industry for South Africans in South Africa, the racial divides continue to deepen.[255] All of the Cape Town Opera's permanent choral members were allowed to audition for *Figaro,* along with other community members. Although this is a step in the right direction for the Cape Town Opera, Mbali and Luthando expressed that they knew before the final cast was announced that the cast would be primarily white. When pressed for an explanation, Mbali clarified that Minnaar wanted to maintain the Afrikaans-biased environment at the Cape Town Opera. Minnaar, a young woman who created her own production company, Mbali suggested, was an intentional choice to make the Cape Town Opera seem like it was moving in a more progressive direction, but was actually maintaining the status quo. Mbali said there was usually a brief glimmer of hope when the Cape Town Opera was in the process of hiring a new artistic director. Many of the singers hoped that Minnaar would be a positive change from her predecessor, Matthew Wild. As long as the Cape Town Opera keeps hiring from a small pool of Afrikaans directors, Mbali explained, she does not believe

[255] At the time of writing, Minnaar has broken her "in-house" initiative and cast Puerto Rican tenor, Juan Hernández, as Nemorino in their October 2022 production of Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* (1832).

that there will be long-term meaningful change at the Cape Town Opera. She also lamented that the few Black South African artists who could serve as directors for the Cape Town Opera end up leaving the country for professional opportunities in Europe due to the dearth of opportunities in South Africa.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have demonstrated that race, language, and gender are three among the many sociopolitical factors that impact construction of timbre, methodology of opera education, and the sustainability of a domestic opera career. I have also demonstrated that the timbre constructed in township and church choirs has been racialized in the contemporary opera industry. Contemporary hiring trends in the South African opera industry are another facet of the restrictions that Black South African singers face in constructing their own professional futures. While their timbres that they construct in their church and choir-based formative years are trusted to enliven contemporary opera productions, Black opera singers are often pushed out of creative and casting decisions. Echoing Thurman, I have demonstrated that opera does not function as an unmarked universal art that rejects politics and difference. Rather, it is a place in which conflicts between historical divides and intersectional identities come into contact. As the opera industry is reckoning with its segregationist and white supremacist past, it is also the site at which artists are constructing opera's new futures. These artists have to negotiate how linguistic, gender, and racial politics affects their own performances of these identities on and off the opera stage. These identities also affect how they construct their own timbres

and how teachers entrain their perceived natural or healthy timbres in the university system and through private lessons. Although tertiary education is not necessary to perform as an opera singer in South Africa, I have suggested in this chapter that both educational paths yield nearly identical professional results. Though the government has expanded educational access to non-white South Africans since the end of apartheid, informal peer educational systems among Black South Africans are still necessary because of the linguistic barriers still present in both general and music education.

In this chapter I have also demonstrated that different participants in South Africa's opera industry hold different stakes in opera's future. Educators like Malefane and Silver want to provide the industry with opera singers that have linguistic proficiency in English and Romance languages in order to produce well-rounded performers. Their efforts indicate the fluidity and uncertainty of finding the middle ground between preparing students for a career in opera without disregarding their culture. I suggest that this fluid process of negotiation is part of the decolonization process in South Africa. Their teaching methodologies are also directly informed by their own personal experiences in the opera industry. Malefane is reacting to the shortcomings that her formative education caused during her tertiary education while Silver is reacting to the limitations he has seen in South African students. Performers, regardless of educational or linguistic background, also hold stakes in reconciling their participation in a world which, at times, is opposed to their cultural experiences. Fanele and Setsoane must negotiate their femininity within their opera pedagogy while Mbali and Luthando must negotiate their participation in an institution that has indicators of anti-Black casting.

Their participation in the opera industry, however, is part of the process in constructing new futures for South African opera. While linguistically-informed Blackness does authenticate a localized, South African Blackness among other Black people, so does linguistically-informed Blackness trouble the perceived European fixity of the opera space. IsiXhosa pervades the opera house via pre-show announcements, the rehearsal rooms, and backstage discussions. However, once the opera begins, English retains its status as the lingua franca of the opera house. While affirmative action programs such as BBBEE were intended to deconstruct the colonized spaces of large art institutions, the continued tradition of Afrikaans-led opera productions and institutions allows for apartheid-era inequalities to resonate in the present. In the following chapter, I will examine the ways in which such inequalities resonate in the present via analyses of opera productions.

# CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDIES: MAINSTREAM AND GRASSROOTS OPERA INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

In this chapter, I study three opera organizations in South Africa: The Cape Town Opera, Umculo, and Isango Ensemble. These institutions represent different facets of the South African opera industry. The Cape Town Opera is a mainstream company and both Umculo and Isango are grassroots companies. Each company provides possible futures for decolonizing opera in South Africa as they also reveal the limitations of that process. From these three institutions, four primary works will be discussed: The Cape Town Opera's *Così fan tutte* (2016) and *Orphée et Eurydice* (2019), Umculo's *Romeo's Passion* (2018), and Isango Ensemble's *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* (2006). I provide brief histories and operational procedures of these institutions. This overview demonstrates how these institutions are informed by South Africa's past of competing colonialisms and white supremacist governments. South African opera enjoyed the peak of its funding during the apartheid regime, allowing for white opera practitioners to build careers and receive university educations before the end of public monetary support. Yet, each production also demonstrates how composers, directors, and performers can use opera as an artistic medium to decolonize from within opera institutions and how opera institutions themselves limit and assist that process. This chapter contains a score analysis of a portion of the film version of *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*. In the analysis of *Romeo's Passion* I primarily draw from field interviews and from YouTube excerpts. Through analysis and comparison of these four operas, I intend to show a birds-eye view

of the opera industry in South Africa and demonstrate the ways in which institutions both limit and provide the conditions for possibility for decolonization in South African opera.

**From the Cape Town Performing Arts Board to the Cape Town Opera: Inheritance and Decoloniality**

Though it is South Africa's largest opera company, The Cape Town Opera is still relatively young in comparison to major Euro-American companies, only existing in its current iteration since 1999. Much of the staff that founded the Cape Town Opera, a privately funded organization, were transplanted from the now-defunct Cape Performing Arts Board (CAPAB). Founded in 1962, CAPAB was created to promote the arts in the Cape Province.[256] It received generous funding from the apartheid government. The headquarters for CAPAB occupied the same building as its successor, the Cape Town Opera, now occupies. Now called the Artscape Theatre, this building was previously named after Nico Malan, an administrator for the National Party. The dissolution of CAPAB in the 1990s and the encouragement of diverse casting initiatives was intended to signal a positive shift in the role of opera in postapartheid South Africa. By the time of Cape Town Opera's launch, Black singers had already been cast in some of CAPAB's operas at the urging of Angelo Gobbato, who was the former music director of CAPAB, and the first music director of the Cape Town Opera.[257] However, with the loss of

[256] The Cape Province is now the Western Cape province.
[257] Hilde Roos, "Viva Verdi: Ringing the Changes at Cape Town Opera," *Acta Musicologica* 86 (2014), 250-251.

apartheid government support came the loss of consistent government funding (as reviewed in chapter two).

Due to the loss of government funding and the fact that most opera singers in South Africa are, as they are in the United States, contracted workers and do not receive government- or union-based fees and job security, consistent work and livable wages are rare for contemporary South African opera singers. The lack of government oversight also means that a large opera company such as the Cape Town Opera manages itself and has little to no direct supervision by a third party. This also means that the Cape Town Opera has difficulty turning a profit as singers also have difficulty making a living wage from opera singing alone. This status quo often causes Black South African opera singers to make a difficult decision – to move to Europe for the chance at a lucrative, government-funded opera career, or to continue to work in South Africa with little to no job security. While there are, of course, exceptions to such a binary decision, I suggest the ways in which the opera industry has been forced to function in the wake of public disinvestment both fractures the domestic core of South African opera and maintains the legacy of wage inequality in South Africa.

The methods by which the Cape Town Opera has attempted to redress historical racist exclusionism are incomplete and contribute to maintaining the status quo of the South African opera industry. Though disinvesting from the apartheid government and encouraging diverse casting was a step in the right direction, there was a lack of planning on how to monetarily invest in diversity in the opera industry. Though the apartheid government also provided funding to a coloured opera company, the Eoan Group, and

CAPAB produced some operas with multiracial casts, the vast majority of opera singers of color have not received the benefit of sufficient funding for their opera careers. Because university education is now costly and opera companies do not have the same funding to support up-and-coming singers of color, apartheid-era wage inequality and unequal access to career advancement continue despite the appearances of antiracist shifts in the postapartheid opera industry. I suggest that the continuance of career and wage inequality across racial lines in the opera industry is due to the ways in which the Cape Town Opera inherited CAPAB and the ways in which institutions carry history. Because the Cape Town Opera inherited many of the same employees from the apartheid-funded CAPAB, it also inherited CAPAB's operational practices. Such employees were already primed to run an opera company that had the benefit of generous government funding and to produce and cast white-majority operas for white majority audiences. Sara Ahmed argues that institutional logic is something like a "kinship logic" in which institutions reproduce a network of social relations that always circle back to a starting point of "institutional whiteness."[258] When institutional whiteness becomes a norm, that whiteness stops being noticeable and is unconsciously reproduced.[259] Without a shift in employees and employee practices, renaming the company and its theater and disinvesting from the apartheid government will reproduce the apartheid-era likeness of racial exclusivity. Borrowing from J.L. Austin's theory of the performative utterance, Ahmed theorizes the concept of the non-performative.[260] Austin's theory argues that

[258] Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 38-39.
[259] Ibid.
[260] See J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).

certain utterings or speech acts can produce a named effect. Speech acts such as questioning or apologizing produce questions and apologies. Ahmed's non-performative theorizes a discourse that intentionally *does not* produce the effect it names.[261] Rather, Ahmed argues, naming the discourse intended to produce the effect of diversity or antiracism does not necessarily produce diversity or antiracism. It is a strategy that institutions use to appear as a benefactor of diversity or antiracism without enacting methods and policies to do so. On the other hand, Kira Thurman argues that an institution can be "capable of performing racism and antiracism" simultaneously.[262] Renaming the Nico Malan Theatre, disinvesting from the apartheid government, and employing Black singers are all examples of antiracism as they are also examples of the non-performative in that such actions have not produced a wholly antiracist or decolonized opera industry.

These actions are also the methods by which the Cape Town Opera is attempting to come to terms with its colonial and segregationist past. Thurman, in writing about the treatment of Black opera singers in West German opera houses after the Second World War, discusses the ways in which the process of denazification affected casting and perception of Black opera singers. Thurman argues that Black singers such as Leontyne Price and Grace Bumbry were a way for West German opera houses to rebrand themselves and cultivate new audiences in the post-Nazi era.[263] Though there were more

[261] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 117.
[262] Kira Thurman, *Singing Like Germans: Black Musicians in the Land of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021), 257.
[263] Thurman, *Singing Like Germans*, 224.

Black opera singers in West Germany during this period, Black singers were still typecast into "exotic" roles and/or had their complexions lightened with makeup to make the white audiences more comfortable.[264] Blackness for West German opera houses post-WWII seemed to operate as both a way to rescue opera from associations with Nazi-era Germany as it also maintained whiteness as the norm for such opera houses. By casting Black singers into exotic roles and lightening their complexions, Black singers had to be both white enough to be palatable for audiences and Black enough to encourage spectatorship. Similar to the role that Blackness played on West German opera stages in the years following World War II, I suggest that Blackness on the postapartheid South African opera stage is tasked with similar goals. I also suggest that those in charge of opera houses are in a process akin to denazification as the country attempts to cleanse its palate of nearly half a century of Afrikaans supremacist rule. This is complicated by the centuries of British and Dutch colonial rule in the years before the apartheid government. While more diverse casting is a step toward decolonizing opera in postapartheid South Africa, Black singers are implicitly tasked with legitimizing the opera industry's decolonization process. Their participation in opera obfuscates the realities of labor disputes and wage inequality behind the scenes. In the case studies below, I demonstrate how three key opera institutions respond to and reproduce these challenges and navigate the decolonization process in postapartheid South Africa.

[264] Ibid., 224-230.

**Cape Town Opera, Isango Ensemble, and Umculo: Different Approaches**

The Cape Town Opera, Isango Ensemble, and Umculo represent both the mainstream and grassroots facets of the South African opera industry. They also represent the international focus of South Africa's opera industry. Each company either puts primary focus on international touring or hires international talent to compose or star in their operas. Each company also approaches decolonization methods in different ways. Isango does so via the use of Indigenous languages and settings. Cape Town Opera and Umculo do so via staging contemporary representations and discourses of sexuality in South Africa. Because of the international focus, the long-term impact that these companies have on localized decolonization efforts is limited.

Though the Cape Town Opera does primarily tour abroad, the fact that the majority of their repertoire includes full settings of canonic operas (meaning that the productions are in the original language and the music and libretti are not abridged or amended), allows the singers who work for the Cape Town Opera to build an audition repertoire. With these skills, singers can audition for other opera companies, both foreign and domestic. Though the cost of visas and international travel is still highly prohibitive for South African opera singers, if they can find sponsorship to audition, they do have the requisite knowledge for such an audition. Further, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, more and more opera companies around the world, in particular young artist programs, are accepting video auditions. This has also allowed South African opera singers (presuming they have access to WiFi and/or sufficient mobile data) to audition virtually.

Though grassroots opera companies such as Umculo and Isango Ensemble provide more domestic opportunities than the Cape Town Opera, their repertoire can prevent the singers from moving on to bigger opera companies, both domestic and international. In the case of Isango Ensemble, their works are mostly canonic, but are often translated into English (often interspersed with isiXhosa and/or isiZulu) and are abridged versions of the original work. Because of that, the singers are not adding to their audition repertoire, which often means that Isango Ensemble is the only opera company for which they are qualified. While Umuclo does important work in building a more domestic opera infrastructure in South Africa, many of their works are commissions or Indigenous-language translations of canonic works. Therefore, like Isango Ensemble, the singers who work for Umculo are not building standard audition repertoire. Umculo is unique in the ways in which it uses international connections to support and create a domestic infrastructure, contra to the Cape Town Opera and to Isango Ensemble. Though its founder is based in Germany, its collaborative and foundational work always starts in South Africa with local artists. The Cape Town Opera does keep their chorus in permanent employ, while Isango Ensemble only employs performers when they start a new project. In other words, those who work for Isango only have work for roughly two to three months at a time. Because Isango primarily tours abroad (with occasional performances in South Africa) most of the funding they receive goes toward paying for expenses such as visas, plane tickets, and accommodations. Local rehearsals that take place before international tours are in Rosebank, a Cape Town suburb, which requires long and expensive iteksi rides for those who live in townships. For auxiliary cast

members, most if not all of their paychecks go to these taxi rides. Even for main cast members who get a higher monthly salary, the money they keep after travel expenses is still very little. Similarly, when Isango travels abroad, the auxiliary cast members only get free travel and accommodations along with a daily food allowance. Main cast members get a salary in addition to these other benefits. However, because of inherited wage inequality, those cast members who bring home a salary often use it immediately to pay for expenses they have not yet been able to afford, such as household items and medical care. Many homes in South Africa are also multi-generational, so paychecks must support several people rather than only a nuclear family. While Isango does provide travel opportunities for people that otherwise would not be able to afford it, the group also reinforces the status quo that prevents the development of a domestic opera industry and hinders the ability to generate wealth.

This brief overview of general artistic and creative practices in these three key institutions demonstrates some of the ways in which institutions repeat colonialist history as they also work to decolonize. Though opera companies are now providing travel and performance opportunities to opera singers across races, these companies are also reproducing the conditions that maintain the apartheid-era practice of underpaying Black workers. Because institutions such as the Cape Town Opera inherited an industry that flourished under racist exclusionism, its processes will reproduce the same hierarchies. Aníbal Quijano argues that colonial hierarchies remain even after the dissolution of that

colony.[265] One of the ways in which such hierarchies remain is through reproduced history via institutions.[266] Because South Africa is decolonizing from competing British and Dutch colonialisms, the decolonization process is more complex. While British and Afrikaner nationalisms were in competition for nearly two centuries in South Africa, both nationalisms had anti-Blackness in common. The British colonial government and Afrikaans apartheid government used race to solidify an economic hierarchy that kept Black South Africans at the bottom – this hierarchy is continuously reproduced in postapartheid South Africa albeit in different ways. I suggest that a meritocracy system is one of the methods by which contemporary South African opera institutions enforce this racial hierarchy. Quijano argues that meritocracy is one of the ways in which the postcolony entrenches racism.[267] I suggest that much of the value that the South African opera industry places on Black performers is the "powerful" timbre that they bring to opera productions and the ways in which their Blackness revitalizes opera and confirms the non-performativity of the decolonization project. The unique qualities attributed to the Black voice by those affiliated with the Cape Town Opera suggest that the objectification of the Black voice is used as a justification for an imposed Africanness that is intended to enliven opera for primarily white audiences. Black performers are rewarded for their performances in opera but within the limits of the inherited economic inequality that maintains white superiority. This is demonstrated in the low wages that

[265] Aníbal Quijano and Immuanel Wallerstein, "Americanity as a concept, or the Americas in the modern-world system," *International Journal of Social Science* 134 (1992), 550.
[266] Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, ed. Steven Lukes, trans. W.D. Halls (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1982), 37.
[267] Ibid., 551.

opera singers receive despite the international recognition that the opera companies for which they perform receive.

There are also aesthetic differences between grassroots organizations and the Cape Town Opera that directly affect audience reception of these organizations. Shirley Apthorp, who founded Umculo in 2010, desires to avoid what she argues is the Cape Town Opera's primary aim, which is "pandering to a European understanding of 'Africanness' with a model based on export."[268] It is worth quoting her at length as she diagnoses what she believes to be an artistic and systemic failure that lies at the core of opera in South Africa:

> [The Cape Town Opera has] a board who can see no further than their own very narrow view of a white-centric profit-based model, a board with no artistic grasp of what opera is or can be in an international or social context. Obviously, my definition of opera is one informed by a European background … This in turn presupposes the existence of subsidy, and eschews the idea of sponsorship and/or artistic dependence upon donors. Not being totally naïve, I can see the catches in this style of thinking in a South African context, or indeed an American one, but I will not back down from the position that the independence and integrity inherent to this model is what art should be. Every step away from that is a journey towards corruption … Very few leading opera companies pay young singers a living wage. This is not desirable, but it is not exceptional. It is not the thing that bothers me about Cape Town Opera. What bothers me is the absolute absence of artistic courage in a unique national context.[269]

Apthorp's diagnosis of a white-centric, sterilized conception of Africanness injected into the CTO's productions suggest that, although the efforts of government programs such as BBBEE and the NAC (Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment and National Arts Council, discussed in chapter 2) may have brought more diversity to

[268] Email interview with the author, 6 February 2020.
[269] Ibid.

South African opera companies, the representations of Blackness are constructed to legitimate Black performers to white majority audiences. Such efforts have made opera almost entirely dependent on private donors which itself is a necessity due to the government's disinvestment from opera and other art forms that do not habitually emphasize Indigenous languages, cultures, or musics. Apthorp's comments also undergird Zuma's observation (chapter 2) that little government money funneled toward singers caused the emigration of many of them. Because issues of access to transportation have a major impact on the possibility of opera attendance in South Africa, those who can attend the Cape Town Opera's productions and afford safe and reliable transport to and from the opera house in the center of Cape Town are typically white audiences.[270] Many people who live in townships spend a lot of money on and spare time in taxis for their work commutes, especially if they work in or near the city centers; this makes it impossible or incredibly difficult to attend opera in one's spare time. Prices for taxis and opera tickets require expendable income that many living in townships do not have. Because taxis run at inconsistent hours, it is possible to get a taxi to a destination but not be able to get one for the return journey. Finally, as Apthorp touched on in our conversation, personal safety on public transport, including taxis, is also an enormous issue, especially when travelling after dark, when operas tend to take place.[271]

One possible solution to the lack of safe and available transport from townships is to bring opera to the township. In my own interview with Paulina Malefane, co-founder

[270] Ibid.
[271] Ibid.

of Isango Ensemble, she reports that centering the Black South African township is one of the goals of the group. On her decision to replace the Western orchestra with wooden marimbas and hand drums and other percussion in the group's production of *Impempe Yomlingo* (*The Magic Flute*), Malefane said:

> …[We] use instruments, you know, that one can get in a township. That's the idea behind Isango. So, the instrumentation comes from something that you might find in the township. So, marimbas are made of wood and wood you get in the township.[272]

Here, Malefane indirectly supports Apthorp's assertion about the surface-level Africanization of opera productions that is endemic to large institutions like the CTO. Translate a canonic opera into an Indigenous language is not enough to localize it; the content and structure of the opera must also be localized. Yet, Malefane's sonic packaging of the South African township is emblematic of the status-quo of movement as a requirement for job stability for South African opera singers and grassroots opera companies. Like the Cape Town Opera, Isango Ensemble primarily tours abroad. As opera institutions inherit practices that standardized racial and class segregation and a lack of government funding entrenches these realities, Isango hints at a future of nomadic opera companies as the status quo in South Africa. Meritocracy-based systems value Black singers insofar as their voices invigorate opera productions and their low-waged labor help make productions financially possible in the wake of public disinvestment. These institutional practices are a continuance of inherited racist economic hierarchies and demonstrate the coloniality present in South Africa's opera industry. At the same

[272] Interview with the author, 15 October 2020

time, opera is also an effective medium through which to critique such practices and realities. The four productions analyzed below demonstrate the ways that opera institutions reproduce inherited colonial hierarchies as they also provide the site for constructing new futures.

**The Cape Town Opera's *Così fan tutte* (2016) and the Pleasure of Terror**

The Cape Town Opera's and Aix-en-Provence festival's 2016 production of Mozart's *Così fan tutte* (1790) reveals how institutions can simultaneously critique and reproduce colonization, particularly in regard to the exploitation of Black workers. Set in eighteenth-century Naples, Mozart's original features two officers, Ferrando and Guglielmo, who express uncertainty about the fidelity of their fiancées, Dorabella and Fiordiligi, respectively. The men hatch a plan to disguise themselves as Albanians and seduce Dorabella and Fiordiligi in order to trick their fiancées into "infidelity", thus proving that all women are fickle. I detail the layers of colonization and racism added to this production in order to demonstrate the possibilities and limitations of decolonization in an institution such as the Cape Town Opera. While the production critiques the exploitation of colonized Africans, the Cape Town Opera chorus members also claimed wage exploitation. This production, I suggest, simultaneously reproduces and critiques exploitation of Black labor for the benefit of unequal monetary profit and power.

The Cape Town Opera received negative press in 2016 when twelve Black South African chorus members were fired due to wage and contract disputes that occurred

during a tour of *Così fan tutte* in Aix-en-Provence and Edinburgh.[273] The CTO had contracted each of the twelve singers at roughly 6,000 to 11,000 rand (roughly $400-$750) for rehearsal time and touring performances. Upon arrival in Aix-en-Provence, the singers found out that they had already been contracted by the Aix festival at nearly ten times that amount (at 3,640 euros or $4,288). Per French law, the singers were required to sign the Aix festival contracts in order to be allowed to work in France. The singers complained to the Cape Town Opera and threatened to strike if they did not receive equal wages. In response, both the Aix and Edinburgh festivals removed the Cape Town Opera contract and give each singer an individual contract. Accusing the singers of accepting both South African and French contracts, the Cape Town Opera not only fired the singers from its company but brought disciplinary charges against them in South Africa for theft.[274] In speaking with *The Guardian*, Mike Williams, then-managing director of the Cape Town Opera, commented that, "they [the singers] are having the time of their lives. They have got this fantastic opportunity. If it wasn't for me they would not be at Aix."[275] In a heated discussion between the singers and Williams upon their return to South Africa, Williams allegedly asked, "who do you think you are to think that you deserve this money?"[276] Such comments, representations, and pay disparities sound concerns that

[273] See Severin Carrell and Mark Brown, "South African opera house accused of exploiting black singers," *The Guardian*, 1 September 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/01/south-african-opera-house-accused-of-exploiting-black-singers; Henry Bodkin and Patrick Sawer, "Another fight at the opera in *Così fan Tutte* row over wages," *The Telegraph*, 28 August 2016, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/08/28/another-fight-at-the-opera-in-cosi-fan-tutte-row-over-wages/; David Doochin, "Cape Town Opera in legal battle," *GroundUp*, 29 September 2016, https://www.groundup.org.za/article/singers-vs-cape-town-opera-labour-court/.
[274] Carrell and Brown, "South African opera house accused of exploiting black singers."
[275] Ibid.
[276] Ibid.

contemporary opera productions in South Africa foreground Black South African opera while obfuscating their labor conditions.

Director Christopher Honoré's production of *Così fan tutte* is set in 1930s Italian Eritrea. Playing off the theme of manipulation of power present in Mozart's and da Ponte's original, Honoré centers racial and sexual power in this intended critique of Italian fascist colonization. What is framed in some reviews as an in-depth portrayal of the taboo of cross-racial sexual desire and the quotidian of racist abuse can also be read as a spectacle of the suffering by and abuse of Black subjects that centers white guilt.[277] As the curtain rises, two Black women are dancing to a calypso tune in lieu of Mozart's overture. A Black man is hanging from his feet, motionless. As the calypso tune fades out and Mozart's overture begins, one of the dancing women is raped on stage by an Italian soldier. The opera's protagonists, Guglielmo and Ferrando, are Italian fascist soldiers while Italian sisters Dorabella and Fiordiligi oscillate between the privileged boredom concomitant with imperialist femininity and both terror and awe at the colonized Eritreans. Rather than disguising themselves as Albanians, as they did in Mozart's original, Guglielmo and Ferrando wear Blackface to disguise themselves as Dubats, or mercenaries from Italian Somaliland employed by the Italian military, to test Dorabella's and Fiordiligi's fidelity.

[277] See Kate Molleson, "*Così fan Tutte* review — Mozart's frothy opera turns nasty," *The Guardian*, 26 August 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/aug/26/cosi-fan-tutte-review-edinburgh-festival-theatre-mozart-cape-town-opera and Zachary Woolfe, "Review: Mozart Reimagined in a Violent, Racist World," *The New York Times*, 1 July 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/02/arts/music/review-cos-fan-tutte-mozart-aix-en-provence-festival-chrisophe-honore.html.

Kate Molleson, writing for *The Guardian* when this production toured Edinburgh, and Zachary Woolfe, writing for *The New York Times*, argue that Honoré's use of Blackface is subversive rather than reproductive of racial terror. Molleson seemingly chides nay-sayers of Honoré's production: "what makes Honoré's interpretation valid is that the nastiness is true to the piece if you care to look and listen."[278] Many audience members and audiences-members-to-be found the production offensive as evidenced by the Edinburgh festival's decision to send letters to ticket holders before the production's premiere warning them of explicit content and offering refunds if necessary.[279] Woolfe identifies the violence that the opera depicts as "volatile" and "racist," and frames the opera as something intended to prioritize the white gaze: "Honoré's staging is, for whites … often a brutal, shaming experience, as the black Africans onstage are shoved, dragged, ground against and used as avatars, fantasies and objects, encountered as spurs for white imaginations rather than as people."[280] Yet, he concurs with Molleson in that Honoré did not take the violence and terror on stage far enough. Because the opera opens with a rape, Woolfe reasons, Honoré's gradual decrease in violent depictions was a disappointment and took away from the production's efficacy.[281]

In their reviews, both Molleson and Woolfe gesture toward the intimate relationship between pleasure and pain, particularly when diluted into the spectacle of

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[278] Molleson, "*Così fan Tutte* review."
[279] Ibid.; Chris Johnston, "Edinburgh festival offers refunds for controversial opera before opening," *The Guardian*, 27 July 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2016/jul/27/edinburgh-festival-offers-refunds-for-controversial-opera-before-opening.
[280] Woolfe, "Review."
[281] Regarding Honoré's use of Blackface, Woolfe described it as a "potent theatrical device" that foregrounds tensions between racial passing and cross-racial desire, with pleasure and with pain.

opera. In her groundbreaking book that illuminates the forms of resistance and terror that have shaped Black identity and Black subjectivity in the United States, Saidiya Hartman illustrates the ways in which spectacularizing racial violence and terror, particularly of the past, obfuscates both the quotidian violence that Black subjects still experience and the actions that white subjects take to maintain white supremacy.[282] When the white imagination and white guilt are centered instead of Black subjectivity, whiteness then becomes the suffering subject at the expense of the erasure of the Black body. As Hartman succinctly argues:

> the effort to counteract the commonplace callousness to black suffering requires that the white body be positioned in place of the black body in order to make this suffering visible and intelligible … that empathy is double-edged, for in the making of the other's suffering one's own, this suffering is occluded by the other's obliteration.[283]

Perhaps such an obliteration is, in part, what led Woolfe to both describe the violence depicted in the opera as "volatile" and "racist" while also wanting for more. The use of Blackface depicts what Hartman calls the terror of pleasure, as the violence of minstrelsy flows as an undercurrent to the dark humor of disguise and deceit so prevalent in opera.[284] Hartman argues that the racist violence inherent in minstrelsy is, to a degree, occluded by the comedic presentation of minstrelsy. Pleasure on the part of the white audience is also maintained because minstrelsy underscores the security of the order that white supremacy imposes on a society — that is because white people can never be

[282] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997): 42.
[283] Ibid., 19.
[284] Ibid., 32.

Black, they can take pleasure in their distance from racist terror.[285] Both Matthew Morrison and Eric Lott, in step with Hartman, argue that minstrelsy, or any white creation of Blackness, maintains white supremacy by engaging with racism at a distance that is safe for white audiences and white performers.[286] Though Honoré's production encouraged critique of colonialist violence through representations of that violence, Woolfe's and Molleson's reviews suggest it obfuscated such violence against Black subjects in favor of white voyeurism.

Honoré's production also plays on the terror/pleasure dynamic of white femininity and Black masculinity that undergirds both minstrelsy and present-day race and gender norms. While this production can be understood as an effective critique of the control that white women yield over Black men under white patriarchal supremacy, such a critique loses its efficacy when juxtaposed against the real-time labor disputes between the white opera administrators and Black performers. When Dorabella and Fiordiligi, two white women, are deciding who will promise to marry which Dubat, they flirt with a male African servant who is cleaning their feet. They use him as a sexual instrument, a prop, to test out cross-racial desire. When the servant begins to reciprocate, that is, shows some degree of sexual agency, the sisters rebuff him and send him away. Building off of Frantz Fanon's argument that Black phenomenology is always, in part, understood in relation to the whiteness, Katerina Deliovsky examines the relationship of Black

[285] Ibid., 31-32.
[286] Matthew D. Morrison, "Race, Blacksound, and the (Re)Making of Musicological Discourse," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72, no. 3 (Fall 2019): 799; Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993): 4-7.

masculinity and white femininity under the rubric of the white patriarchy.[287] Via Fanon, Deliovsky argues that white women understand sexual contact with Black men as a means to achieve sexual liberation under the auspices of white patriarchal supremacy. White women can use Black men as sexual scapegoats in this way because Black men, not being white, cannot pass judgment on white women for sexual exploration because Black men are also subject to white patriarchal supremacy.[288] Gender and sexuality theorist, Anne McClintock, theorizes the complicated ways in which European male colonizers hierarchized colonized women, colonial women, colonized men, and colonial men. She argues that colonial women were in positions of "borrowed" power over colonized men.[289] The use of Blackface in Honoré's production could be said to be representative of this muddled power hierarchy characteristic of colonial Africa. Colonial women are exercising their borrowed power over colonized men who are really colonial men. This whole farce is also a way for the colonial men to exercise power over colonial women. It was through the labor of colonized Africans, however, that colonial men were able to maintain ultimate power in the white patriarchal system they created and the use of Blackface could be said to critique the ways in which white colonial men used Black bodies to maintain that power. However, given that opera seems to be the last medium in which Blackface is accepted by the white elite who produce, cast, and attend

[287] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1967): 109-140; Katerina Deliovsky, "White Femininity, Black Masculinity, Sex/Romance Tourism, and the Politics of Feminist Theory," in *Appealing Because He Is Appalling: Black Masculinities, Colonialism, and Erotic Racism*, ed. Tamari Kitossa (Alberta, Canada: University of Alberta Press, 2021): 105-139.
[288] Deliovsky, "White Femininity," 132-133.
[289] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995), 6.

such operas, Honoré's use of Blackface – even critically – reproduces past and present racist terror because it obfuscates the suffering of real Black subjects.[290]

The institution that threatened to sue singers over wage disputes is the same institution that used opera to critique the violence that colonialism has wrought. This production demonstrated the consequences that singers can face when confronting the meritocracy system that encourages the continuance of South Africa's racist economic hierarchy. While the Cape Town Opera offered these singers the opportunity to travel to and perform in France, the unequal pay and threat of legal action demonstrates that such opportunities are conditional. Their role as African chorus members in an opera set in colonial Africa lent an authenticity to the production. Their voices also lent timbral power to the production. Molleson described the chorus as "vibrant."[291] The opportunities for travel and performance that Cape Town Opera provides seem to be conditional on the merits that Black singers bring to opera productions and their seeming complicity with such conditions. Demonstrating Ahmed's non-performative, the Cape Town Opera's production of *Così fan tutte* demonstrates the ways that opera institutions in South African have inherited and reproduce racist economic hierarchies.

[290] As recently as 2018, the Metropolitan Opera cast Russian soprano, Anna Netrebko, as Aida. Though the Met stated that they were not putting Netrebko in Blackface, Netrebko herself got a fake tan in order to darken her skin for the role. La Scala's 2016 production of *Die Zauberflöte* featured Monostatos and Sarastro's slaves in Blackface.
[291] Molleson, "*Così fan Tutte* review."

**Staging Gay and Lesbian Relationships: The Cape Town Opera's *Orphée et Eurydice* (2019) and Umculo's *Romeo's Passion* (2018)**

The Cape Town Opera's 2019 production of Gluck's *Orphée et Eurydice* (1762) and Umculo's 2018 production of *Romeo's Passion* each engage with South African gay and lesbian discourses differently. *Orphée* made gay South African women visible in a way that did not make a spectacle of them, but presented lesbian relationships as unremarkable. Though this production provided a staging of a possible future for normalized public queer relationships in South Africa, it did not engage meaningfully with the real violence that queer women, particularly township-based Black queer women and girls face at the hands of men. Umculo's 2018 production of *Romeo's Passion* engages with the ways in which contemporary South Africans reconcile Blackness, queerness, masculinity, and family identity. It also confronts the complicated history of sexuality in South Africa. The apartheid government provided the conditions of possibility for gay relationships among Black South African men as it also platformed anti-Blackness in favor of white gay rights. In the postapartheid period, queerness among Black South African men has been simultaneously decriminalized and vilified. Rather than staging a possible future, *Romeo's Passion* shows the processes, struggles, and successes of confronting and engaging with the entangled histories of colonialism, racism, and queerness. These productions complicate the project of decolonization because, while staging gay and lesbian relationships gestures toward progressive politics, gay culture in South Africa has, at times, been used as a means to secure a white political majority. With these productions, both the Cape Town Opera and Umculo create a site

for meaningful public discourse about queerness that both acknowledges its past and theorizes possible futures.

The Cape Town Opera's production of *Orphée et Eurydice* was directed by then-artistic director of the Cape Town Opera, Matthew Wild. This production was sung in French with English and isiXhosa surtitles with set design by South African Chris Pienaar. The cast featured Singaporean-British mezzo soprano, Fleur Barron, as Orphée, South African soprano, Hlengiwe Mkhwanazi, as Eurydice, and South African soprano, Brittany Smith, as Amour. The music remained unchanged and Wild made only small changes to the libretto. He changed masculine pronouns and references to feminine ones in order to portray Orphée and Eurydice as a lesbian couple.[292] I was able to attend several rehearsals in August before attending its premiere in September of 2019. The rehearsals were held at a small church in Zonnebloem, a suburb of Cape Town. The plot of *Orphée* is based on the ancient Greek myth of Orpheus. Orphée, a gifted musician and lyrist, must travel to the underworld to rescue his wife, Eurydice, from Hades, the god of the Underworld.[293] Hades agrees to release Eurydice on the condition that Orphée does not look back as he is leading Eurydice out of the Underworld. Orphée does look back at Eurydice and she dies. In a departure from the myth, Amour stops Orphée from killing himself due to his grief and restores Eurydice's life as a reward for his undying love.

[292] These changes were reflected in the English surtitles. No changes were necessary for the isiXhosa surtitles because "yena" means both "he" and "she" in the language.
[293] Gluck wrote the role of Orphée (or Orfeo in Italian) for a castrato. Castrati were castrated male singers common in European opera in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This surgery occurred before the singers began puberty which allowed them to maintain a soprano range into adulthood. Because this practice is now outdated, this role is usually played by a male countertenor or a female mezzo soprano in contemporary productions. Therefore, contemporary productions of this opera invite gender bending and/or depictions of queer love.

This production was groundbreaking in its unapologetic depiction of a lesbian relationship. Though same-sex marriage has been legal in South Africa since 2006, queer South Africans still face public violence and discrimination. When this production premiered in September 2019, instances of 'corrective' rape were on the rise, in particular among Black queer women and girls who lived in townships.[294] Because of the violence directed toward Black queer women in South Africa, I asked Mkhwanazi if she was scared to portray a queer woman. She said that she had no qualms with it personally or performatively because she does not judge her characters. She also noted that she wished that this production had repeat performances or more publicity because it provided a crucial normalization of queer relationships.[295] I suggest that this production represented and gave voice to what anthropologist Robert Thornton calls "unimagined communities."[296] These networks are invisible to the participants in them because they are not provided the safety to publicly live or express their queer identities. Because intimacy between queer South Africans is often in private, Thornton continues, queerness is resistant to discourse in South Africa.[297] The inherent voyeuristic qualities of opera allows for a blurring of the public and the private. This blurring of spheres, in turn, allow

[294] "Corrective" rape is a term used to refer to the act of men who rape queer women in an attempt to 'cure' their gender or sexual orientation in favor of heteronormativity. See Ariana Puzzo, "In South Africa, LGBTQ bigotry raises concern of 'corrective' rape," *Social Justice News Nexus*, 15 May 2019, https://sjnnchicago.medill.northWestern.edu/blog/2019/05/15/in-south-africa-lgbtq-bigotry-raises-concern-of-corrective-rape/.
[295] Interview with the author, 14 December 2022. This production premiered at the Baxter Theatre in Rondebosch, Cape Town between 3 and 7 September 2019. It has had no repeat performances.
[296] Robert Thornton, *Unimagined Community: Sex, Networks, and AIDS in Uganda and South Africa* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 29.
[297] Ibid., 30.

for the representation of gay intimacy in a way that provides the condition of possibility of a normalization of queer public intimacy.

Umculo's *Romeo's Passion* premiered in Hillbrow, a suburb of Johannesburg, in September 2018. With music by Australian-German composer Catherine Milliken and libretto by German director and librettist, Robert Lehmeier, the production provided surtitles in both English and isiZulu and is mostly sung in English. Similar to Wild's *Orphée*, the story centers around a gay couple and stars South African soprano, Hlengiwe Mkhwanazi. Though Milliken and Lehmeier are credited as the work's primary creators, the work is based on material from collaborative workshops with the cast. Like Umculo's other works, the composer works closely with the singers to write the music for the production – given broad plot points, singers will improvise lines or lyrics which the composer will write down by ear. Mkhwanazi noted that she wrote one of her arias in its entirety via improvisation at the keyboard with the composer.[298] In lieu of a large cast and a full orchestra, *Romeo's Passion* only requires a cast of five and a small ensemble of oboe, violin, and piano – this is in step with their other productions. The five cast members include Romeo (The Son, sung by Thabiso Masemene), Romeo's boyfriend (Young Boy, sung by July Zuma), Romeo's girlfriend (Young Girl, sung by Sarah Suping), and Romeo's parents, Mother (sung by Hlengiwe Mkhwanazi) and Father (sung by Mlamli Malapantsi).

The story centers around Romeo's struggles with disappointing his family and his girlfriend due to his sexual orientation. In Wild's production, a lesbian relationship is at

[298] Hlengiwe, interview with author.

the center but not the focus of the plot – the relationship is assumed to be normalized within the confines of the production. In *Romeo's Passion*, Apthorp and her team construct a new work to place queer relationships and their concomitant taboos as the plot's focus. The opera centers not only around Romeo's coming out to his family, it also investigates the tension of living as a Black gay man in South Africa. South Africa's Black patriarchy is closely linked with a pre-colonial patrilineality which placed a high premium on procreation. This, combined with the strict British Protestant missionary influence of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, has made many view gay relationships as both anti-African and anti-Black.

Same-sex relations among Black men in South Africa have long been clandestine. Same-sex relationships were relatively common among Black migrant workers during apartheid. Male migrant mine laborers engaged in male-male "mine marriages."[299] Away from their wives and home for months at a time in order to work in the mines, mine laborers lived with and maintained intimate relationships with men while temporarily living near the mines. There were also several male hostels near these temporary dwellings that were frequented by male laborers. Anthropologist Donald L. Donham argues that such relationships would not have necessarily been understood as same-sex during apartheid. Effeminate gay men were considered a third gender and were treated more similarly to women in their daily life.[300] After apartheid, these relationships broke down as migrant laborers returned to living with their wives full-time and male

[299] David Coplan, *In the Time of Cannibals: The Word Music of South Africa's Basotho Immigrants* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 137-141.
[300] Donald L. Donham, "Freeing South Africa: The 'Modernization' of Male-Male Sexuality in Soweto," *Cultural Anthropology* 13, no. 1 (1998), 7-10.

hostels closed. Donham argues that the dissolution of male-male relationships in Black townships was a cost of freedom: "with the birth of a 'free' South Africa, the notion of sexuality was created for some black men, or more precisely, an identity based on sexuality was created."[301] Black male identity became tied up in the identity of the Black family – masculinity, in large part, often rests on procreation. For amaXhosa men, initiation ceremonies are intended to teach adolescent boys how to become men – a type of man assumed to be heterosexual. The boys are taught how to be providers and leaders for their families. Fatherhood, as Keketso Matlebyane argues, is fundamental to social status and masculinity.[302] Black fatherhood in South Africa seems to be closely associated to Chrys Ingraham's "heterosexual imaginary" and precludes an assumption of queer parenting.[303] Because amaXhosa value the continuation of a precolonial cultural practice, identities that are seen as an opposition to such a practice are viewed as antithetical to Black masculinity. Because of the premium that male initiation places on the nuclear family, queerness can be seen as an opposition to South African culture because it challenges precolonial concepts of masculinity.[304] Romeo's family struggles with this tension throughout the opera as Romeo similarly struggles with his own masculinity. At the end of the opera, the lyrics imply acceptance when Father sings, "you are Black and you are gay."

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[301] Ibid., 11.
[302] Keketso Matlebyane, "Negotiating masculinity: Experiences of black gay men" (PhD dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2017), 18.
[303] See Chrys Ingraham, "The heterosexual imaginary: feminist sociology and theories of gender," *Sociological Theory* 12, no. 2 (July 1994): 203-219.
[304] Matlebyane, "Negotiating masculinity," 19.

The different ways in which Apthorp and Wild centered gay and lesbian relationships may have something to do with their respective performances spaces and the audiences present in those spaces. *Orphée* premiered at The Baxter Theatre which is part of the University of Cape Town's campus. Productions there draw in many students from the School of Music because they often get free or discounted tickets. However, most of the audience members tend to be white, middle-class residents from Cape Town's suburbs because, as mentioned previously, many locations in Cape Town preclude township residents from attending due to lack of safe and reliable transport. Because *Orphée* was performed on a university campus, when I attended both the final dress rehearsal and the opening performance, I was not surprised that the audience did not protest the representation of a lesbian couple in the production. Mkhwanazi confirmed that she also was not aware of the audience having any issue with such themes and noted that Cape Town tends to be more politically liberal in regard to sexual orientation. Hillbrow Theatre, the location of *Romeo's Passion*, is in a much different space than Rondebosch, the Cape Town suburb in which the Baxter Theatre is located. Located in Johannesburg, Hillbrow was once home of the wealthy white elite in the 1970s and 1980s. Hillbrow also has a history as a beacon of burgeoning gay rights in South Africa. In the 1980s, Leon de Beer, an openly gay man, was elected as a Member of Parliament for the National Party. His platform was both pro-gay and anti-Black, promising to reinstate Hillbrow as a whites-only district. Though de Beer never delivered on that promise, his platform and support of his platform was enough to alienate Black residents from the white gay community and from queerness. Hillbrow is now a majority

Black, working class neighborhood. Most of the gay community was part of the white wealthy elite who did not want to mix with people of color, and they left Hillbrow in the 1990s. This history of Hillbrow coupled with cultural expectations of Black South African men creates a complicated environment in which to perform *Romeo's Passion.* For many Black Hillbrow residents, queerness is likely associated with racism and anti-Blackness. The response to *Romeo's Passion* by Black Hillbrow students could be a result of this history. Because Umculo had already invited secondary school students to the workshopping of the opera and because of the theater's central location for those students, most of the audience was comprised of young Black South Africans. Umculo invited these students to stay after the show to ask the cast members and creative team any questions. Mkhwanazi noted that most of the questions were about the performance of queerness. Students asked Zuma or Masemene directly if they were gay; some expressed outright anti-gay sentiments. Other students expressed that they saw nothing wrong with the opera. Others still said that they were gay themselves and several other students were shocked as they had never knowingly met a gay person before. While Mkhwanazi noted that she was a bit frustrated by these interactions because she wanted to answer more questions about the work, she did note that *Romeo's Passion* was the first exposure that many of these students had to queerness. Further, the work forced these students to have difficult conversations surrounding sexual orientation that they likely would not have had otherwise.

Both *Orphée* and *Romeo's Passion* center gay and lesbian relationships, but in different ways. *Orphée* represents a normalized lesbian sexuality that is removed from

quotidian threats that queer women face in South Africa. Through bringing the intimate onto the opera stage, however, *Orphée* allows the possibility for discourse to develop about queerness. *Romeo's Passion* engages with the difficulties that gay Black men currently face in South Africa as it also interrogates the assumption that Black masculinity and queerness must be mutually exclusive. It also directly confronts the complicated history between apartheid-era segregation and queerness and provided a space for young South Africans to sort through their thoughts and opinions on this history. These works demonstrate the conditions of possibility for decolonization that institutions can provide. Innocentia Jabulisile Mhlambi argues that South Africans have effectively utilized opera to complicate postapartheid nationalism and cultural heritage.[305] In the case of *Romeo's Passion*, the connections among Blackness, queerness, masculinity, and the concept of the family are presented through multiple viewpoints, discouraging a "narrow nationalism" that prioritizes one viewpoint over another.[306] The opera itself is also in dialogue with the lived history of Black gay men in South Africa and the ways in which their Blackness and sexuality challenge, redefine, and affirm their ethnic and familial identities. This history expressed via opera also complicates what is decolonial, anti-colonial, or postcolonial. By presenting these contradictions through opera and through opening up conversations with contemporary artists and schoolchildren, *Romeo's Passion* is an example of the ways in which opera in

[305] Innocentia Jabulisile Mhlambi, "The Question of Nationalism in Mzilikazi Khumalo's *Princess Magogo kaDinuzulu* (2002)," *African Cultural Studies* 27, no. 3 (2015), 295.
[306] Ibid.

postapartheid South Africa is a conduit for voicing new nationalisms as it is also sounds the contradictions, history, and possible futures of contemporary society.

**Staging the South African Township: Isango Ensemble's *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* (2006)**

Isango Ensemble's 2006 film, *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*, is based off Bizet's *Carmen* (1875).[307] Bizet's *Carmen* is set in Seville, Spain in roughly 1820. The opera centers around Don José, a solider, and Carmen, a factory worker. Though Don José is engaged to Micaëla, he becomes enamored with Carmen after he arrests her for attacking another woman. Carmen and Don José have a love affair which Carmen eventually ends. When she refuses to restart the love affair, Don José kills her. *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* is set in contemporary Khayelitsha, a township outside of Cape Town. This production engages with the challenges that Black South African women face in contemporary South Africa, particularly those who live in townships. There are high instances of gender-based violence and femicide in contemporary South Africa. Recent statistics estimate that one in three South African women will be raped in their lifetimes. Black women experiencing poverty are even more likely to face violence at the hands of men because of unequal access to resources.[308] *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* critiques the normalization of sexual harassment and violence against women in townships through centering U-

[307] *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* translates to *Carmen in Khayelitsha*. When referring to Isango's *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*, I will refer to the title character as u-Carmen to follow isiXhosa language construction. "U" precedes a name when referring to someone in the third person.
[308] See, "South African poor, black women are the face of health inequity," African Health Organization, 15 December 2020, https://aho.org/news/south-african-poor-black-women-are-the-face-of-health-inequity/.

Carmen's experiences with it. This production also uses language, among other strategies, to center South African publics. The centering of a Black South African woman's perspective and of a South African township is a step toward decolonization because it prioritizes South African ontologies as it also puts the township in dialogue with Western audiences.

This production was also radical in that it brought opera to the township, thus mitigating unequal access to affordable transport and spare money for opera tickets. *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* premiered in Khayelitsha to over 700 people in the Oliver Tambo Community Hall, selling tickets for ten rand (roughly $0.50). The producers and performers in the film also hired local township agents to help advertise *U-Carmen*, with cast members singing from buses that drove through Khayelitsha as a form of advertisement. *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* did engender a local township audience when it premiered in Khayelitsha's O.R. Tambo Center. By the end of its run in Khayelitsha, *U-Carmen* was playing to roughly 1,500 people per day.[309] Unlike Bizet's original, *U-Carmen* is sung in isiXhosa with intermittent English and, while it primarily uses the original orchestral score and libretto, it makes some cuts and additions. References to Carmen's otherworldliness or her connections to the supernatural are omitted, as are scenes in which she is hypersexualized.[310] Unlike Bizet's Carmen, Isango's U-Carmen (performed by Paulina Malefane) is a single mom with a past of domestic violence – the film adds a few scenes to solidify this artistic change. *U-Carmen* also changes the

[309] James Davies and Lindiwe Dovey, "Bizet in Khayelitsha: *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* as audio-visual transculturation," *Journal of African Media Studies* 2, no. 1 (2010): 49-50.
[310] Martina Viljoen and Marita Wenzel, "The Same, Yet Different: Re-encoding Identity in *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*," *Journal of the Musical Arts in Africa* 13, no. 1-2 (2016), 63-65.

perspective of Bizet's original, allowing the audience to experience the township through and with U-Carmen. Though entitled *Carmen*, Bizet's original centers around Don José's obsession with Carmen – she is the object rather than the subject. The opposite is true in *U-Carmen.* Martina Viljoen and Marita Wenzel argue that rather than a "figure" u-Carmen is an African woman who is desperate to find freedom of choice in postapartheid South Africa.[311] Isango's *U-Carmen* centers u-Carmen's perspective and portrays uJongikhaya's (*U-Carmen*'s Don José, performed by Andile Tshoni) obsession with and treatment of u-Carmen as a symptom of South Africa's epidemic of femicide and intimate partner violence. The understated sexuality of u-Carmen underscores the "unrestrained chauvinistic behavior" of uJongikhaya and other men in the opera.[312] While uJongikhaya and u-Carmen's unnamed romantic partner are the only men who are physically abusive toward u-Carmen, there are prison guards and other male township residents who catcall and harass u-Carmen and other women in the film. Naomi André argues that both u-Carmen and African publics are centered in this production via creative camera use in the township setting.[313] Viljoen and Wenzel argue that the camerawork and the township location also help to build u-Carmen's identity and allow the audience a glimpse into her interiority.[314] I suggest that the interaction between diegetic and non-diegetic sound also contributes to the centering of African publics. The use of diegetic sound, James Davies and Lindiwe Dovey argue, troubles the artificial

[311] Ibid., 69.
[312] Ibid., 68.
[313] Naomi André, *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 166.
[314] Viljoen and Wenzel, "The Same, Yet Different," 61.

divide between real and illusory space in standard Western opera productions. Operas, both live and recorded, typically start with the sound of the tuning orchestra, signaling the shift from the real world to the fantasy world of opera. *U-Carmen*, however, opens with the quotidian sound of the township. This artistic decision, Davies and Dovey argue, shifts *U-Carmen* from "operatic presentation to social realist representation" of the contemporary township.[315] The township setting and sounds, the use of isiXhosa, and creative camera use that prioritizes u-Carmen's point of view with no contextualization or explanation for the benefit of Western publics centers Black South African ontologies.

The film itself is bookended by the local specificity of Khayelitsha. As *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* opens, u-Carmen's voice is mixed with the diegetic sounds of the township – honking cars, the squealing of train tracks, trading in the market, the sizzle of meat on the grill – as she makes her way to choir practice. The camera follows u-Carmen throughout the film as she moves in and out of Khayelitsha – to her job at the local cigarette factory, to singing and drinking in the local shebeens, or township bars, and finally as she runs from her murderous ex-lover, uJongikhaya at a local choir competition. Following her death, the camera slowly pans out as fellow competition attendants accost uJongikhaya and u-Carmen's friends mourn her passing. The camera's gaze slowly shifts from one focused on u-Carmen to a birds-eye view of Khayelitsha; u-Carmen's body becomes a distant object covered in a white sheet. The last sounds of the film feature the hum of traffic, the whir of helicopter blades, the blowing of wind, slowly

[315] Davies and Dovey, "Bizet in Khayelitsha," 45.

rising in pitch as the camera continues to pan out; the township has already moved on as it relegates u-Carmen's death to memory.

Score key:

| | |
|---|---|
| ---------- | Hum of road traffic |
| -----<---------- | Presence of a car on road; the direction of the arrow represents the direction in which the sound moves. Multiple arrows in the same direction indicate size of the car. |
| -----<><><><>------ | Indicates heavy traffic, in which cars are passing in both directions. |
|  | The curve on the left indicates Carmen being pushed into a barbed wire fence; the mordent represents the reverberations of the fence. |
|  | Car horn |
| X note head | Screams |
| X, no stem | Guttural scream |
|  | Applause |
| ° | Clang of metal ring on ground |

Figure 4.1: Score key for a partial transcription from "Ndisakuthanda mna," from *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*

In this section, I will analyze a portion of this final scene, "Ndisakuthanda mna," in *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*.[316] I wrote the transcription by ear, including the isiXhosa lyrics. In addition to the Western notation, I have added in diegetic sounds in the score,

[316] "Ndisakuthanda mna" translates to "I still love you" in English.

explained by the key in Figure 4.1. In this final scene, u-Carmen and her fellow choir members are contestants in a choir competition at the O.R. Tambo Center in Khayelitsha. U-Carmen has already ended her romantic relationship with uJongikhaya, so when she hears that he is at the Center, she attempts to hide from him. UJongikhaya has a proven violent side as evidenced in an earlier scene in which he physically assaults u-Carmen in a shebeen. UJongikhaya finds u-Carmen and begs for her to resume their relationship. When u-Carmen refuses, he kills her. With my score, I intended to highlight the interaction between diegetic and non-diegetic sound, and how that interaction contributes to the centering of South African publics in *U-Carmen*. Thinking through the township as diegetic sound and the orchestra (represented in the piano reduction) as non-diegetic sound, I chose to position them to frame the score, with the township as the top part and the orchestra as the bottom part. The symbols I chose for the township part highlight both the visual and sonic – some of the shapes are intended to mimic the directionality and shape of sound, while others are meant to mimic their object. The hum of traffic resembles a road with a slotted lane divider, while cars are represented by the direction of the sound. The cone shape of the car horn also indicates the direction and crescendo of sound. The use of 'x' note heads as screams is borrowed from Arnold Schönberg's Sprechstimme, as both U-Carmen's and uJongikhaya's screams are pitched within the score.

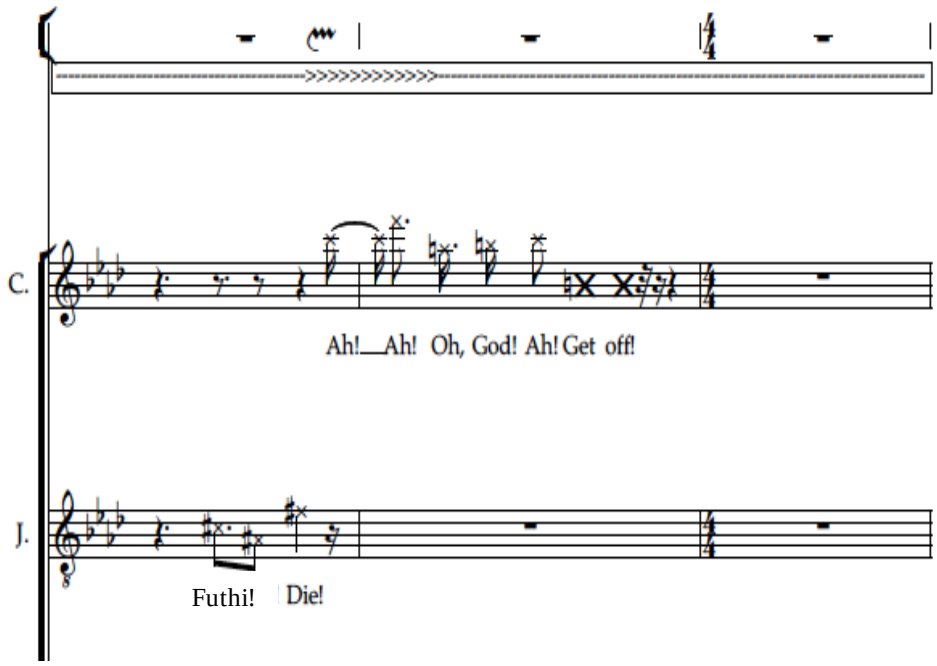


Figure 4.2: Sprechstimme in both uCarmen's and uJongikhaya's parts as he kills her. The x's without noteheads represent unpitched screams. In the township part (above uCarmen's part) the reverbation of the barbed wire fence that uJongikhaya pushes Carmen into and the township traffic are represented.[317]

The x's representing guttural screams in the township part (and briefly in u-Carmen's part to mark her death), indicate multitudes of screams upon finding u-Carmen's body. The shape of the applause symbol represents its sound wave – peaks and valleys suggest volume changes due to differing vocalizations and celebratory chanting. Finally, the small circle represents the ring that uJongikhaya gave u-Carmen.

[317] "Futhi" translates to something like "and" or "continue" in isiXhosa and in isiZulu. It is often used as a space-filler. Transcription by the author.

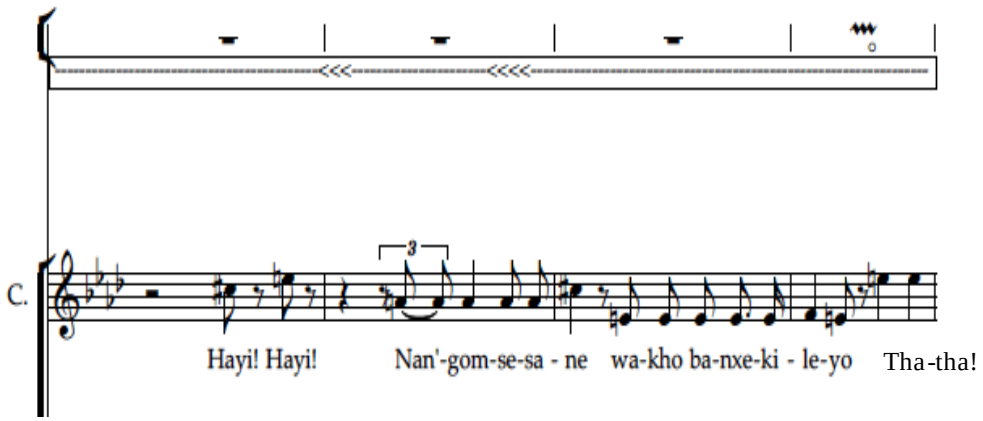


Figure 4.3: UCarmen throws the ring uJongikhaya gave to her and it falls to the ground as he pushes her into the barbed wire fence, represented in the top part of the fourth measure of this excerpt.[318]

The interactions between diegetic and non-diegetic sound in the score accomplishes two tasks. Firstly, this analysis centers the township rather than treating it as a backdrop. Secondly, the juxtaposition of diegetic and non-diegetic sounds demonstrates how normalized femicide and intimate partner violence has become in contemporary South Africa. During uJongikhaya and u-Carmen's fight that results in her murder, the hum of traffic and the sound of the choir competition mere feet from uJongikhaya and u-Carmen both continue unabated. Shortly after her murder, the choir, previously a diegetic sonic backdrop, begins to sing Bizet's celebratory "Toreador" chorus. This chorus accompanies the screams of U-Carmen's friends as they find her dead, showing that everyday life in the township continues amidst such a tragedy.

[318] UCarmen's line reads: "No! No! Here is your ring, it's a joke. Take it!"

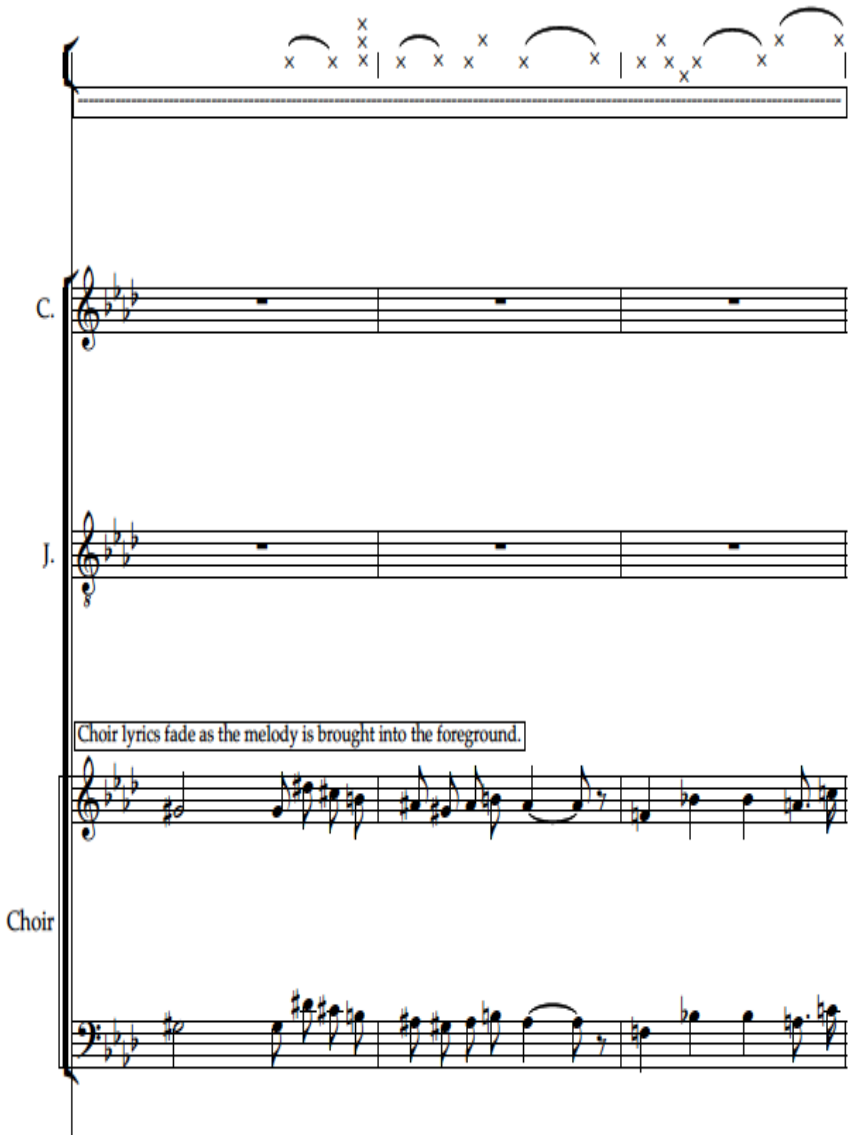


Figure 4.4: The x's in the top part represent the unpitched and overlapping screams of uCarmen's friends when they find her dead. The "Toreador" melody is still present in the choir part, but the lyrics are no longer discernable.

The screams continue to permeate uJongikhaya's hasty justification of the murder he has committed, as the chorus fades away. Rather abruptly, the orchestra and singing cease completely, as only the hum of traffic continues. The horror of her murder quickly forgotten, the score returns to only the diegetic.

Language and diegetic sound are the primary methods used to aurally signify the township in *U-Carmen.* The use of language and diegetic sound work in tandem to critique multiple viewpoints and create multiple publics. André argues that the use of isiXhosa provides audiences with an experience somewhere between Western opera and South African singing. While isiXhosa is a vowel-heavy language that, at moments, sounds similar to Italian, the clicks create a linguistic environment that is "syncretic" of both Western and South African traditions.[319] The use of language, as Mhlambi argues, is also an effective tool to challenge dominant understandings in multiple publics.[320] The use of vernacular language creates two publics: linguistic insider and linguistic outsider. For linguistic insiders, the use of the vernacular roots meaning-making processes locally. For linguistic outsiders, Mhlambi continues, the moments of linguistic nuances lost on outsider publics become crucial moments of critique.[321] In the case of *U-Carmen*, the use of diegetic sound and of language centers meaning-making processes within the South African township as it also places those processes in conversation with decentered Western publics.

*U-Carmen* demonstrates of the ways in which South African opera can participate in the decolonization process. Firstly, it centers a Black woman protagonist in a Black township – there is no racial or foreign other as the entire opera takes place in a South African township. Any othering attributed to *U-Carmen* is inorganic to the work itself, but is done by its international audience who find the South African township setting

[319] André, "*Winnie*, Opera, and South African Artistic Nationhood," *African Studies* 75, no. 1 (2016), 14.
[320] Mhlambi, "Embodied Discordance: Vernacular Idioms in *Winnie: The Opera*," *African Studies* 75, no.1 (2016), 49.
[321] Ibid., 49-51.

foreign. *U-Carmen*, in its foregrounding of Black female vocality in a Black context is reflective of Daphne Brooks's call to decolonize Black female voices by shifting the focus toward how Black women hear other Black women, rather than through a white filter.[322] Because *U-Carmen* centers the voice of a Black woman, u-Carmen, in a work that centers South African publics, *U-Carmen* can be said to be a work of Matthew Morrison's Blacksound – Blackness is the framework and focus rather than a simple translation and re-casting of Bizet's work.[323] Crucial to the way in which Achille Mbembe frames decolonization, *U-Carmen* prioritizes multiple simultaneous viewpoints and points them in dialogue with one another.[324] *U-Carmen* also legitimizes the multiplicity of the postcolonial South African and troubles the putative global/local divide.

**Conclusion: Colonialist Inheritances and Postcolonial Futures**

These case studies of the Cape Town Opera, Umculo, and Isango Ensemble have demonstrated that each has different stakes in opera's future in South Africa and each has different, yet overlapping institutional practices. The goal of the Cape Town Opera seems to be to create an African opera institution that competes with internationally renowned European and American opera institutions. The bulk of their performances are abroad (though, there have been more domestic opera performances in the years since the

[322] Daphne Brooks, "'Sister, Can You Line It Out?': Zora Neale Hurston and the Sound of Angular Black Womanhood," *American Studies* 55, no. 4 (2010), 622-624.
[323] Matthew Morrison, "Race, Blacksound, and the (Re)Making of Musicological Discourse," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72, no. 3 (Fall 2019): 781-823.
[324] Achille Mbembe, "Decolonizing the University: New Directions," *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* 15, no. 1 (2016): 29-45.

start of the COVID-19 pandemic), and their repertoire focus is on canonic European works. The practices of the Cape Town Opera recall those of the Eoan Group (discussed in chapter two). Priority is placed on the presentation of the (mostly) South African cast of the Cape Town Opera's productions as on-par with Euro-American productions rather than on building a domestic industry that can financially support its workers. Such practices often other Black cast members of their productions, marking them as performers who exist on the margins of opera performance rather than encouraging Black cast members to imagine opera for themselves. As sociologist W. Richard Scott argues, institutions such as the Cape Town Opera are both empowering and constraining for the individual agency of Black opera performers.[325] The reproduction of likeness within the Cape Town Opera and agency on the part of opera performers are dialectical – agency on the part of Black opera performers in South African opera's future depends on the continuation of the Cape Town Opera and similar institutions.

Grassroots opera institutions in South Africa have more racial diversity in casting and programming, but still reproduce limitations on singers' opera careers domestically. Isango Ensemble is similar to the CTO in that its interests are primarily international and it has done little to build consistent domestic opera work and infrastructure. Rather than focusing on the Cape Town Opera's goal of placing South Africa on the cultural map of elite opera institutions, Isango Ensemble seems to focus on packaging township culture for international consumption. While the Cape Town Opera's productions seem to focus

[325] W. Richard Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014).

on a more broadly defined Africanist interpretation of their works, Isango's works are explicitly South African, due to the choices of languages, settings, and instrumentation. However, their international packaging of the South African township does not provide a return investment to the performers for Isango who live in townships. They are only hired on a case-by-case basis and do not often build a strong audition repertoire with the Ensemble, while the Cape Town Opera offers the opportunity to both build strong audition repertoire and secure more consistent work. However, it is notable that the Isango Ensemble only hires local talent, unlike the Cape Town Opera who often employs international singers for their lead roles. Productions such as *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* also provide important work in decolonizing South African opera as it encourages centering Black South African publics and putting the South African township in dialogue with Western opera houses.

Finally, Umculo seems to desire to build a local infrastructure, though founder Shirley Apthorp is based in Berlin. Similar to the Cape Town Opera, it also has an education outreach branch that draws in local schoolchildren from the townships to participate in workshops and attend free performances. Like Isango Ensemble, Umculo also uses local performers for their productions, though their commissions are often filled by European composers, librettists, and directors. This gap in local employment, in part, both contributes to and is a symptom of the lack of local opera infrastructure. Though there are composition programs at multiple universities in South Africa, few of these composers focus on writing opera – many focus on writing traditional music and/or jazz and gospel music. Like Isango Ensemble, Umculo's performers are not singing or

learning typical audition repertoire, though it is worth mentioning that many of the singers in their productions are already career opera singers. Umculo's primary focus seems to be geared toward educational initiatives and community uplift rather than becoming a brick-and-mortar opera institution. Umculo does seem to understand that local issues must be addressed to build a local opera economy. Much of Umculo's funding goes toward transportation for students to attend collaborative workshops and performances because access to safe and reliable transportation is one of the major local challenges of building a strong domestic opera audience.[326] Umculo's method of using collaborative workshops to create musical works under the supervision of a trained composition and librettist team is consistent with the collaborative methods by which Black South Africans in townships learn how to perform music. Umculo's model of collaborative composition could be an exciting next chapter for the future of the opera industry in South Africa. Their model of local itinerancy also allows them to bring in more of a diverse audience because they produce works at performance halls and theaters away from the elite city centers in both Cape Town and Johannesburg. Because of the government's disinvestment from opera, however, these initiatives use up most of Umculo's funding – Apthorp has expressed the desire to put on full-scale opera productions but cannot secure the money for them in addition to the outreach and transport initiatives.[327]

[326] There are public buses in South Africa, but all taxis are privately run with little to no government oversight. The bus systems are also much slower than the taxis, so people do not use them as often as they use taxis.

[327] Interview with author, 6 February 2020. Apthorp acknowledges that she could get more funding if she made use of a board or allowed for wealthy private investors. Both Isango and the CTO get a large portion

These case studies have demonstrated that the focal points of key opera institutions in South Africa, in some ways, hinder the ability for a strong domestic opera economy to flourish. Though part of this is certainly due to the postapartheid government's financial disinvestment from opera institutions much is also due to a focus on international reputation than on domestic support of artists. These case studies have also demonstrated the conditions of possibility that institutions can provide. The Cape Town Opera and Umculo both provided the means to stage, critique, and historicize sexuality in South Africa, particularly among Black gay men. Isango Ensemble similarly showed the ways in which the Western canon can be repurposed to critique contemporary South African gender politics. With *Così fan tutte,* the Cape Town Opera demonstrated that institutions are often reflective of contemporary society – inequalities that exist in the quotidian are reproduced on the opera stage. The scope of productions, receptions, and practices of these institutions demonstrate that the future of opera in South Africa is a process that cannot be contained or complete.

of their funding from wealthy investors. Apthorp's issue with this model, however, is that it would require Umculo to cater to the preferences of the investors.

# CONCLUSION: SOUTH AFRICAN OPERA AND ITS POSSIBLE FUTURES

South Africa's past continues to inform both current opera pedagogical techniques and the present opera industry. Though South Africa is in its alleged postapartheid period, the legacy of competing Dutch and British colonialisms and British and Afrikaner nationalisms is reproduced in South Africa's opera institutions and universities. For example, economic and social practices in opera institutions in South Africa maintain a status quo of job insecurity and generational poverty for Black performers. This dissertation also showed that public and state monetary disinvestment from opera and the primarily international focus of South African opera companies also contribute to the paucity of domestic opera institutions and consistent work. On the other hand, institutions provide the possibility for decolonizing opera in South Africa. Opera as a medium contributes to the decolonization process through centering South African ontologies and providing social discourse from multiple viewpoints. Institutions are also the sites through which Black South African performers can build their careers and construct new futures. As institutions reproduce themselves, they reproduce internal inconsistencies. These inconsistencies are productive sites of tension that allow for individual agents to push the putative boundaries of opera and opera institutions. The creative agency of Black South African performers and the reproduction of apartheid- and colonial-era practices in opera institutions are in a constant tug-and-pull in contemporary South Africa.

In this dissertation I have shown that the quotidian must be considered when negotiating the decolonization process in the South African opera industry – how singers

learn, the difficulties they encounter in order to attend rehearsals and performances, and the pay they earn all affect the future of South African opera. Black South Africans worked within the framework of colonial and apartheid governments to desegregate theaters and normalize performers outside of townships and designated Black areas. In particular I have examined the ways in which Black South Africans constructed their own timbres, repertoires, and vocal pedagogies. Though choral music and opera were both introduced to South Africa via colonialism and forced removals of Black South Africans from their ancestral homelands threatened the continuance of Indigenous musical and cultural practices, Black South Africans found methods by which to utilize Western genres and methodologies for their own purposes. Township churches and community choirs became sites for musical and linguistic preservation and innovation. In the second chapter I invoked Black-led institutions and groups to enact a Black-centered history of the origins of opera in South Africa, how Black South Africans responded to domestic and international pressures to assimilate into white culture, and how South Africans were able to find their own agency under the auspices of the colonial and apartheid governments. Such methods included the use of Indigenous languages, publications, methodologies and performances. I have suggested that the negotiations made by South African opera practitioners are part of South Africa's decolonizing project and that opera is, therefore, qualified to participate in such a process.

**Opera and Pedagogy**

In the third chapter I illustrated the ways in which Black South Africans in townships learn music during their childhoods. Though the Black South Africans who choose to attend university programs in opera studies find their own ways in which to combine their township- and university-based pedagogical methods, individual opera institutions and university programs are still in the process of incorporating racially and linguistically diverse singers and students. Students who grew up in townships are being instructed almost exclusively in English at universities. They are also expected to take music theory and music history lessons that assume a literacy in Western notation that many who had their formative education in townships do not have. As Paulina Malefane noted, this experience is alienating and makes it difficult to ask for help or to relate to the other students in one's cohort. There have been strides in making the transition into university programs easier for students who grew up in townships. Firstly, the older generation of Black South Africans who studied opera at the university level has wanted to ease the transition for the younger generation of Black South Africans entering similar programs. Such initiatives were demonstrated in township church programs and the ways in which teachers like Sipho Fubesi and Paulina Malefane instruct their students in private lessons. Malefane encourages a stronger grasp on English in her lessons and Fubesi encourages his students to temporarily suspend their own traditions of presenting femininity when performing opera. In addition to the Cape Town Opera's Young Artist Programme, they also hire opera singers (one of whom is soprano Hlengiwe Mkhwanazi) to teach a small group of secondary students from Cape Town and its surrounding townships basic music

theory, keyboard skills, and operatic repertoire. These students have expressed interest in attending the Opera School at the University of Cape Town and the goal of this initiative is to ease the students' transition into such a program. Such initiatives can decrease the feeling of alienation for students from townships in university and professional opera settings and speaks to an awareness of the needs of the students and singers. This process of integrating choir-based methodologies with Western methodologies is reflective of the ways in which Black South Africans have, historically, been agential in local performance practices of Western genres. It indicates that opera in South Africa is in the process of decolonizing as educators and administrators negotiate how to incorporate Indigenous and Western vocal epistemologies.

Separations between opera institutions in Cape Town and townships contribute to the pedagogical disconnect. Pedagogical foundations in South African townships are almost entirely based in the church and in the domestic sphere. While churches are typically public spaces, township churches house communities that seek to stay private from outsiders, primarily those who do not live in townships. Though South Africans were forced into townships during apartheid, I have discussed how postapartheid townships have become sites of creative flourish and traditional preservation of linguistic and musical practices. Informal voice lessons or choir rehearsals outside of churches are primarily in the domestic sphere and are led by women. These spaces are sites of cultural enjoyment and community engagement, sites disinvested from the project of decolonizing opera because of its history of racial segregation and elevation of white supremacy. As long as opera in South Africa is primarily focused on South Africa's

major cities and international locations, township churches, choirs, educators are unlikely to seek to play a central role in opera's future or its decolonizing process. I suggest that the institutions at the center of the decolonizing process in South African opera will have to continue to address the challenges that township residents face in accessing opera and building opera careers.

**Opera and (De)colonization**

As illustrated in the case studies of the Cape Town Opera's *Così fan tutte* (2016) and *Orphée et Eurydice* (2019), Isango Ensemble's *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* (2006), and Umculo's *Romeo's Passion* (2018), operas as works contribute to or undergird the decolonization process. With these case studies I also demonstrated the ways in which people involved with an opera's creation, production and performance do the same. In the case of *Così fan tutte*, Christopher Honoré's use of a canonic work to critique contemporary race and gender mores inherited from European colonialism in Africa unfolded alongside the Cape Town Opera's treatment of its underpaid Black chorus members. Umculo and the Cape Town Opera staged, respectively, lesbian and gay relationships in *Orphée* and *Romeo's Passion.* Matthew Wild framed the lesbian relationship in *Orphée* as normalized and provided a possibility to create more public discourse around queerness in South Africa. Umculo created the conditions to confront and critique South Africa's troubled past and present in the connections among Blackness, masculinity, and queerness. *Romeo's Passion* also made great strides in modeling what collaborative creation can look like in South Africa. Isango Ensemble's

*U-Carmen* accurately portrayed life in a township for a contemporary Black South African woman and provided access to township residents to perform in and watch an opera.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Due to the constrained time period of this research, I was unable to extend my vocal training from choral training to opera training. Extending my research in this way and seeing for myself how my technique would develop over time is a possible avenue for future research, though such an undertaking would take years to finish. I also did not consider pedagogical techniques in rural areas of South Africa or areas outside of Cape Town in this dissertation. Though Cape Town is an active opera hub, there are still theaters in Johannesburg and Pretoria that produce operas and, Johannesburg especially, has a thriving artistic scene. Because I did not spend any time in rural areas of the Western Cape and spent little time in South Africa's other provinces, future research could illustrate how vocal pedagogies differ in rural areas, in areas with different linguistic majorities, and in other urban areas outside of Cape Town and its townships.

The future of opera in South Africa is uncertain, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Social media has become a crucial avenue for building creative and professional networks since the start of the pandemic; it continues to be crucial post-pandemic. Though I used WhatsApp and Instagram as a means for communication during fieldwork, and though I examined the role that YouTube has played in circulating opera repertoire within township spaces, possible future avenues for research could

include the role that other social media platforms play in the circulation of vocal repertoire and pedagogy. WhatsApp statuses, TikToks, and Instagram stories by South Africans frequently feature themselves or others performing both traditional music and opera. Such research could examine the efficacy of social media in constructing creative networks and whether the usages of these social media platforms are primarily for community seeking, job seeking, or education.

Opera institutions in South Africa have inherited colonialist and apartheid-era racist practices and reproduce those practices. Yet, these institutions also provide the possibility for individual agency within institutions to construct new futures for opera. Initiatives that seek to extend opera beyond the auspices of the opera house and the racial boundaries of its colonial past are often short-lived and have little to no government support which further complicates the efficacy of the decolonizing process. Further research could provide possible frameworks and more diverse public support could engender a dynamic future for the blossoming opera industry in South Africa.

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