

# South African Music in Global Perspective

Gavin Steingo

Assistant Professor of Music

University of Pittsburgh

# South African Music

- \* South African music is a music of interaction, encounter, and circulation
- \* South African music is constituted or formed through its relations to other parts of the world
- \* South African music is a global music (although not *evenly* global – it has connected to different parts of the world at different times and in different ways)

# Pre-Colonial South African Music

- \* Mainly vocal
- \* Very little drumming
- \* Antiphonal (call-and-response) with parts overlapping
- \* Few obvious cadential points
- \* Partially improvisatory
- \* “Highly organized unaccompanied dance song” (Coplan)
- \* Instruments: single-string bowed or struck instruments, reed pipes
- \* Usually tied to social function, such as wedding or conflict resolution

# Example 1: Zulu Vocal Music

Listen for:

- \* Call-and-Response texture
- \* Staggered entrance of voices
- \* Ending of phrases (they never seem very “complete”)
- \* Subtle improvisatory variations



# Example 2: Musical Bow (ugubhu)

MUSIC OF AFRICA SERIES 37  
**The Zulu Songs of Princess  
Constance Magogo KaDinuzulu**  
*by Hugh Tracey*



# South African History

- \* 1652 – Dutch settle in Cape Town
- \* 1806 – British annex Cape Colony
- \* 1830s – Great Trek
- \* 1867 – Discovery of diamonds
- \* 1886 – Discovery of gold
- \* 1910 – Union of South Africa
- \* 1913 – Natives' Land Act (“natives” could only own certain parts of the country)
- \* 1948 – Apartheid formed
  - \* Grand apartheid (political)
  - \* Petty apartheid (social)
- \* 1990 – Mandela released
- \* 1994 – Democratic elections

# Early Colonial History: The Cape of Good Hope





# Cape Town

- \* Dutch East India Company establishes refreshment station in 1652 (“colonial backwater”)
- \* “Tavern of the Seas”; “The Mother City”
- \* Dutch encounter the Khoisan





# Creolization in the Cape in the Mid-17<sup>th</sup> Century

- \* Khoisan (hunters and gathers; pastoralists)
- \* Slaves from Indonesia and India
- \* Strong Islamic presence
- \* Dutch, German, and French – become the “Afrikaners” (mainly Dutch)
- \* Creolization and the “coloured” community
- \* (Note: Few “black Africans” in the area at this point)

# Slave Routes to the Cape



# Music in the Cape

- \* Music often performed for colonial administrators by slaves or workers
- \* Little documentation

# Music in the Cape

- \* “Ramkie” performance: Portuguese guitar-like instrument played in traditional Khoisan style



# Music in the Cape

- \* *Ghoemma* drumming: probably based on drumming tradition from Indonesia
- \* Basis for much contemporary Cape Town-based music
- \* Powerful force within the cultural imagination of “coloureds”



# The “Great Trek”

- \* British annex the Cape in 1806 (formally handed over to the British in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna)
- \* The Afrikaans Voortrekkers head north-east (British soon follow)
- \* Three major consequences:
  1. Discovery of diamonds
  2. Development of mission stations
  3. New settlements further to the north-east

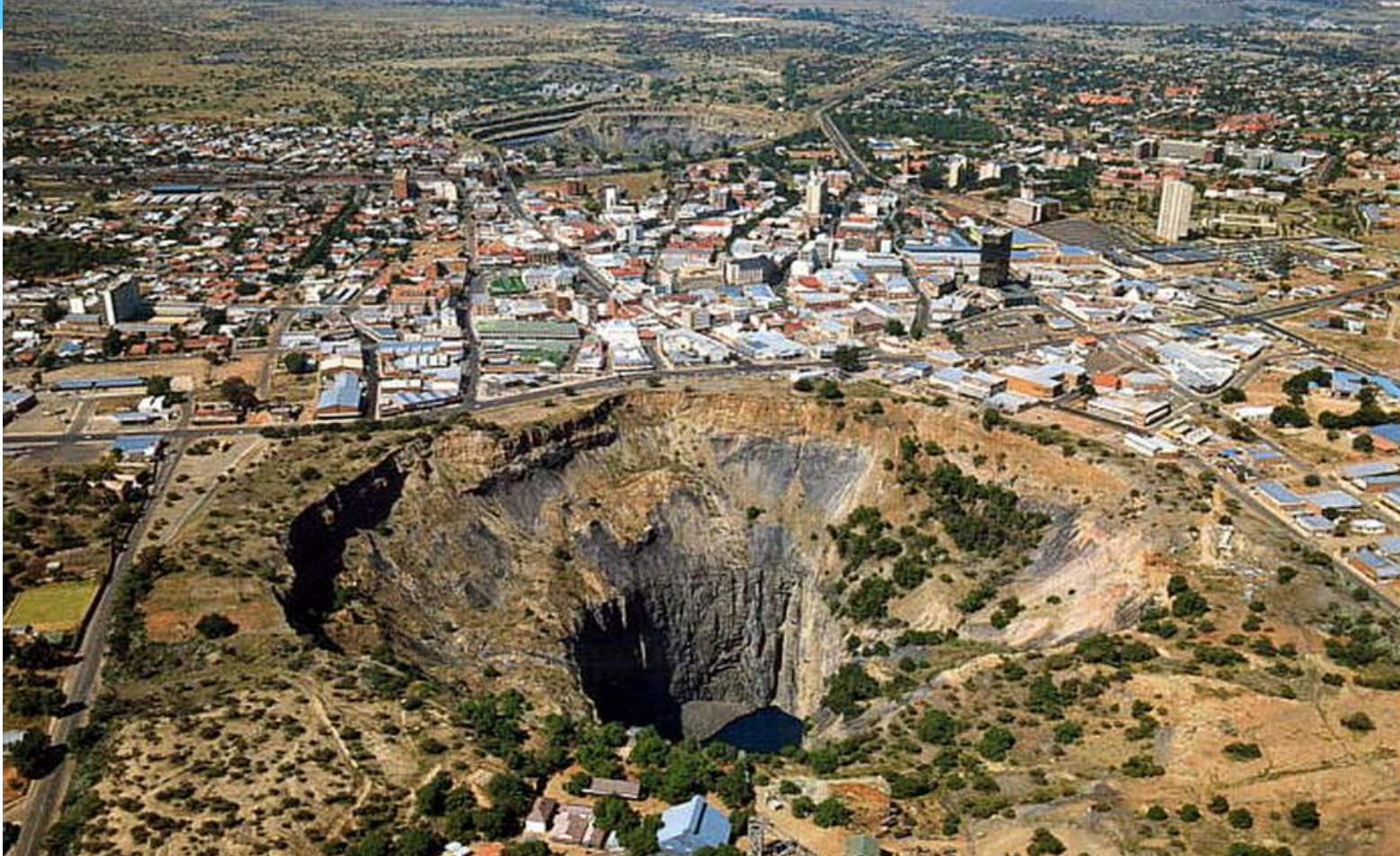




# 1. Urbanization and Migrant Labor: Kimberley

- \* Diamonds discovered in 1867
- \* First cultural contact between “coloureds” and black Africans in Kimberley
- \* Development of migrant labor system: Xhosa-speakers
- \* Migrant labor was male dominated so few black African women at Kimberley
- \* Tours by African-American musicians (encounter with minstrelsy, spirituals)

# Kimberley





The Most Illustrious Musicians

# McADOO'S FISK

THE ORIGINAL

# JUBILEE SINGERS

10 STARS IS 10

Prince Henry of Germany has expressed a desire to hear these singers.

THE FOLK

THE H...  
THE TUN...  
X I Y

"Jubilee"

Wilson's Almanac

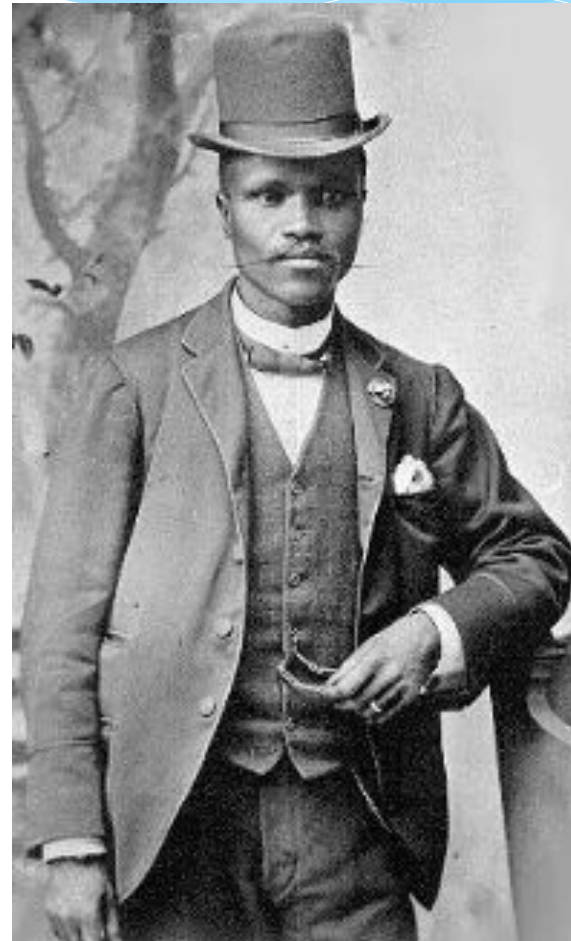


## 2. Mission Education and Christian Hymnody

- \* Xhosa chiefdoms (close to Cape Town) partially defeated in the early 1800s by the British
- \* “Civilizing process”
- \* Introduction of Christian hymnody, 4-part harmony, music notation, musical “disciplining” through *solfege*, clear cadences and alignment of parts
- \* Had lasting effect on South African music

# Enoch Sontonga (ca. 1873-1905)

- \* Xhosa composer educated at Lovedale mission station





# Sontonga (cont.)

- \* Composed “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika” in 1897
- \* Song performed by South African Native National Congress (later the ANC) in 1905 and recorded by Sol Plaatje (founding member of ANC) in 1923 in London
- \* Today “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika” is the first part of the South African national anthem
- \* Also national anthem of Zambia and Tanzania



### 3. New Settlements Further to the North-East

- \* Trekkers encounter the AmaZulu
- \* The British soon follow and create the Colony of Natal
- \* Thousands of indentured servants from India in the 1860s (second wave of Indian diaspora)
- \* Over a million people of Indian descent in South Africa today



# Johannesburg: “Instant City”

- \* Discovery of gold in 1886
- \* Second Boer War (1899-1902)
- \* Union of South Africa (1910)
- \* Massive urbanization
- \* Struggle for right to the city

# Black Urban Music:

- \* Slum yards mushroom on the Reef
- \* Emergence of “shebeens”
  1. Marabi (1910s and 1920s):
    - Working-class music performed at shebeens
    - Cyclical (performed for hours at a time)
    - Guitar-based
    - Appropriation of ragtime
    - Thomas Mabiletsa, “Zulu Piano Melody”
  2. Kwela (1940s)
    - Main instrument was “pennywhistle”
    - Performed by young boys on street corners
    - Solven Whistlers, “Something New in Africa”



# Sophiatown

- \* Multi-racial suburb of Johannesburg that flourished in the 1940s and early 1950s
- \* Home to many musicians, writers, artists (often compared to Harlem during the Harlem Renaissance)
- \* Home to many jazz clubs with performances by musicians such as Hugh Masekela and Miriam Makeba
- \* Heavily influenced by African-American musicians and intellectuals
- \* Also major site of gang activity – development of the *tsotsi* (slick urban hustler and dandy)
- \* Dorothy Masuka, “Ufikizolo”



# Sophiatown cont.

- \* Sophiatown destroyed in 1954
- \* Black residents forcibly removed to black-designated area
- \* Renamed “Triomf” (“Triumph” in Afrikaans)
- \* Marks the beginning of most repressive era in South African history



# Apartheid

- \* Nationalists come to power in 1948
- \* Three main forms of apartheid:
  - Petty
  - Grand
  - Urban

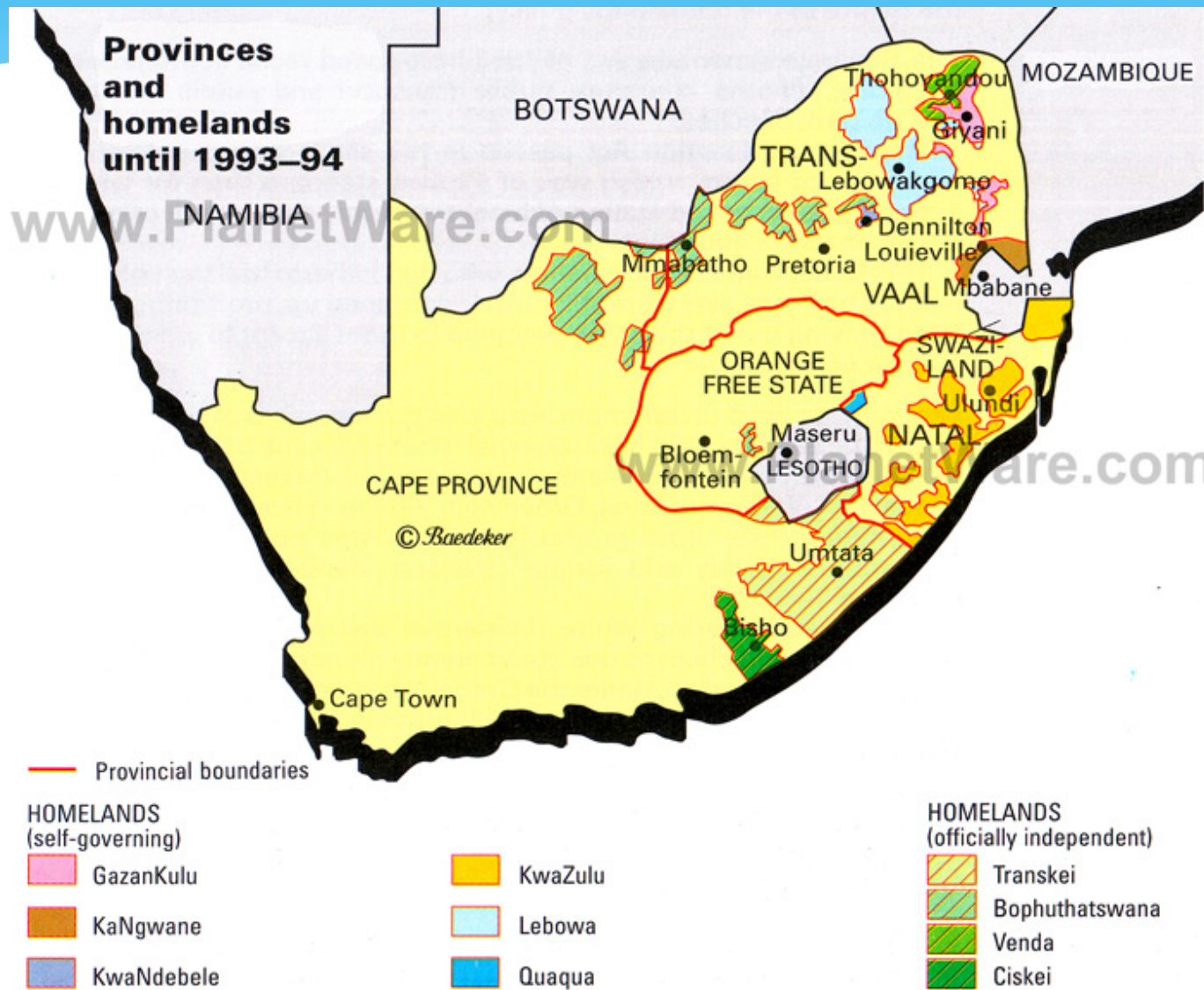
# “Petty” apartheid



# “Grand” apartheid: “National Units” and Separate Development

- \* Shangaan
- \* Swazi
- \* Ndebele
- \* Zulu
- \* Pedi
- \* Sotho
- \* Xhosa
- \* Tswana
- \* Venda

# “Grand” apartheid



# “Urban” apartheid

Stallard doctrine:

“The Native should be allowed to enter the urban areas when he is willing to minister to the needs of the White man, and should depart therefrom when he ceases so to minister.”

Leads to the development of “townships”



# Soweto





# Bantu Radio and the Valorization of Traditional Music

- \* Mbaqanga: neo-traditional music promoted on Bantu radio
- \* Use of “pure” language
- \* Apolitical
- \* Romanticization of village life
- \* Two consequences of Bantu Radio:
  1. Jazz musicians in exile
  2. Clandestine radio stations (Radio Freedom)

# Mahlatini, “Ilele Insizwa”



# Late Apartheid Music: Bubblegum in the 1980s

- \* In the context of apartheid and separate development, black South Africans became increasingly invested in African-American music
- \* Bubblegum as cosmopolitan, international, urban, modern
- \* Famous musicians: Brenda Fassie, Yvonne Chaka Chaka, Chicco Twala

# Post-Apartheid Music: The Emergence of Kwaito

In the post-apartheid period, South Africa faces many problems:

- HIV/Aids
- Unemployment
- Inequality
- Crime
- **Kwaito is a response to the opening of South Africa's border in the post-apartheid period and the contradictions of political freedom (and democracy) and continued social inequality**



# Main references:

- \* Coplan, David. *In Township Tonight! South African Black City Music & Theatre*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- \* Muller, Carol Ann. *Focus: Music of South Africa*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. New York: Routledge, 2008.

# PROMPT

- \* How does the history of music in South Africa help us understand South Africa's relationship to the world? How has South Africa's relationship with the rest of the world changed in the last two centuries and how have these changes been registered in or expressed through music?