THE QUEEN OF AFRICAN POP: REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER, RACE, AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN BRENDA FASSIE'S MUSIC

by

Amanda Lawrence

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Examining Committee:

Hedy Law, Associate Professor of Musicology, School of Music, UBC
Supervisor

David Metzer, Professor of Musicology, School of Music, UBC
Supervisory Committee Member

Abstract

In this thesis, I offer an intersectional study of Brenda Fassie (1964-2004), a leading popular musician in South Africa in the 1980s to early-2000s. Previous studies have focused separately on aspects of race, gender, sexuality and politics in her life and music in apartheid and post-apartheid years. This study looks at multiple aspects of her identity and develops a critical approach that intertwines them.

Fassie was a popular musician who grew up during the racial segregation of apartheid (1948-1990s) and both witnessed and participated in the birth of South African democracy (1994). As a black and queer woman, Fassie's identity deeply impacted the way she produced her music and how it was received by audiences and critics. A discussion of three songs, "Weekend Special" (1983), "Black President" (1990) and "*Nomakanjani*" (1999), demonstrates how each facet of her identity (race, gender, sexuality and cultural) is presented in her music and how this reflection can be used to offer a better understanding of Fassie, her music, and the socio-political culture in South Africa.

The first part of this thesis offers a brief introduction to Fassie's life. It demonstrates how intersectional approaches to identity offer a more well-rounded representation of Fassie. It also explores the literature on black female musicians, South African music and history, and Fassie. The three subsequent chapters each analyze a specific song through close readings of the lyrics and music. By analyzing the three songs and the socio-political conditions they were produced in, this thesis reveals how understandings of Fassie's gender, sexuality, racial and cultural identities were shaped by preexisting gender and societal norms, and how she interacted with these identities. Fassie questioned, and legitimized these aspects of her identity through her music, and in her personal life.

Lay Summary

Brenda Fassie (1964-2004) was black and queer female musician who proved a seminal figure in the South African popular music industry in the late and post-apartheid years. This thesis explores how situating her life and music within multiple identity frameworks, including race, gender, sexuality, and cultural identities, offers a better understanding of how her music was influenced by musical and social culture in South Africa and her subsequent influence on her listeners. I analyze the music, lyrics, reception, and influence of three of her most popular songs from different periods in her career: "Weekend Special" (1983), "Black President" (1990) and "*Nomakanjani*" (1999). The songs reveal how the multiple facets of her identities intersect in her music and how these identities shift at varying stages of her life, and provide a nuanced understanding of her music and of the socio-political and musical culture in South Africa between the 1980s and early-2000s.

Preface

This thesis is the original, unpublished, and independent work of the author, Amanda Lawrence.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1983, a nineteen-year-old black South African singer named Brenda Fassie (1964–2004) released her debut album with her band, Brenda the The Big Dudes, titled *Weekend Special.* The album quickly became popular with young South Africans of colour, understood in the South African context as "non-white". It sold over 200 000 copies in its first year. In the following years, she massed a huge national following as she released hit tracks such as "Black President" (1990) and "*Nomakanjani*" (1999). As South Africa moved towards a democratic future with the dissolution of apartheid in 1994, a political process of reunification began, which had immediate impact on the popular music scene. Fassie's popularity began to increase with white South Africans looking to engage with more local South African music styles, and as the lines between white and non-white music began to blur, so too did the parameters of music-making and genre. Towards the end of apartheid and in the immediate years after, artists like Fassie and her contemporaries such as Arthur Mafokate and Lebo Mathosa famously began to incorporate more traditional African elements with their international popular music styles, such as indigenous languages and traditional instruments. The result was an Afro-European fusion that appealed both to the indigenous African communities and the white settlers who hoped to integrate into Nelson Mandela's vision of a "rainbow nation."

Fassie was a controversial figure in the music industry. She was a known drug user and struggled greatly with her identity as an HIV-positive queer woman while simultaneously situating herself as a sexually liberated woman. In many of her songs and their music videos, she used lyrics and visual imagery to simultaneously construct and challenge her multifaceted gender and sexual identity. Her explicit exploration of her identity garnered international media attention. Fassie had a big reputation to live up to due to media sensationalism. In *TIME*

magazine, a reporter notes that fans nicknamed her "Madonna of the townships" as a compliment to the enormity of her talent.[1] In her 2004 obituary in the *The Guardian*, Liz McGregor referred to her as South Africa's "first black female pop star."[2]

Two decades after her death, Fassie's legacy lives as demonstrated by the still-active comments sections on her post-mortem official YouTube channel.[3] However, despite a wealth of repertoire, numerous awards such as the South African Music Award (SAMA) for Best Female Artist and Song of the Year (1999), Best Song of the Decade (2004) and Lifetime Achievement Award (2005), and a continuing post-mortem legacy, there is surprisingly little published scholarship on Brenda Fassie. Published scholarly work typically frames her within the narrative of the kwaito music genre (i.e., as an example of Afro-Euro fusion of musical styles)/ or within the framework of gender studies.[4] The majority of existing research examines one aspect of Fassie's identity at a time: either her personal life and gender identity, or her musical identity. Yet, in order to offer a fuller understanding of each of these identities, they need to be explored in relation to the others. Herein lies a gap in which the multiple facets of Fassie's identity (queer, HIV-positive, woman, black, African, mother) have not adequately been explored in relation to each other in order to provide a more well-rounded understanding of her social and cultural impact on the post-apartheid South African music industry and society.

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[1] Desa Philadelphia, "The Madonna of the Townships," *TIME Magazine,* Fall 2001. https://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1000782,00.html.
[2] Liz McGregor, "Brenda Fassie Obituary," *The Guardian,* May 11, 2004. https://www.theguardian.com/news/2004/may/11/guardianobituaries.southafrica.
[3] Brenda Fassie Official, YouTube channel, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGKxphO1563QUeYzHZndAjA.
[4] Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies;* Gavin Steingo, *Kwaito's Promise: Music and the Aesthetics of Freedom in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Martina Viljoen, "On the Margins of Kwaito," *The World of Music* 50, no. 2 (2008); 51–73; Stephanie Rudwick, Khathala Nkomo and Magcino Shange, "Ulimi Iwenkululeko: Township 'Women's Language of Empowerment' and Homosexual Linguistic Identities," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, no. 67 (2006): 57–65; Nicol Hammond, "National Mothers: Singing a Queer Family Romance for the New South Africa," *Women and Music* 19 (2015): 77–85.

In my research on Fassie, I have identified three major areas that constitute her public identity: race, gender, and culture identity. First, as a black African born during the legal racial segregation in South African known as "apartheid," Fassie's racial identity was hugely significant to how she was represented in a racially segregated music industry, and how she was perceived by her white audiences versus audiences of colour in South Africa. Furthermore, her use of multiple languages, such as English, Xhosa and Zulu, appealed to a wide array of listeners both in South Africa and surrounding countries such as Mozambique and Lesotho, where shared language families allowed listeners to understand at least some of the music. Second, as a queer woman of colour, her gender, sexuality, and ethnicity were inseparable from her music– – making both through representations of these identities in her lyrics and in the reception of her music, as evidenced in music criticism, album reviews, and tabloid articles. The third process of identity formation is that of nationality. During apartheid (1948–1994) the right to call oneself "South African" was largely reserved for the white descendants of colonizers, while indigenous Africans were stripped of their citizenship. Fassie's identity as a black African withheld her from the legal right to call herself a citizen of the country "South Africa." Her Africanness was in direct opposition of an official nationalism that was explicitly denied from her. Much of her music, such as the album *Black President* (1990), demonstrated political themes, whether they are overtly mentioned in the lyrics or implied.

Understandings of Fassie's gender, racial, and cultural identities are coloured by preexisting notions of gender and societal norms, both publicly performative and internalized. In this thesis, I seek to investigate how Fassie interacted with, questioned, and legitimized these aspects of her identity. Furthermore, how did she engage identities of her listeners through her music?

In order to answer these questions, I have identified three of her most pivotal songs which represent the two most significant decades of her career: “Weekend Special” (1983), “Black President” (1990) and “*Nomakanjani*” (1999), each of which will be discussed in a chapter of this thesis. “Weekend Special”, which features on her debut album of the same name, has long been regarded as a staple of the queer community in South Africa, despite the fact that Fassie was not yet “out” at this point. It also serves as an anthem of female bodily autonomy—a reclamation of the self in refusing to be considered a weekend-only girlfriend. “Black President” explores Fassie’s relationship with her racial identity in a racially segregated apartheid-state, and her support of black politics as the niece of future South African president, Nelson Mandela. “*Nomakanjani*” points to a pivotal moment in black music-making in South Africa, as artists began to turn away from Euro-centric popular music genres and languages, instead developing new genres that celebrated black South African identities, music, and languages.

This thesis will argue that a well-rounded representation of each facet of Fassie’s identity and by extension her positionality, will provide a better comprehension of her work. Simultaneously, situating her works within multiple identity frameworks better culturally situates her music-making in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. I posit that all aspects of Brenda Fassie’s identity are intrinsically linked to, and represented by, her music which, in turn, has greatly influenced musical and social culture in South Africa between the 1980s and early-2000s.

1.1 Intersectional Approaches to Identity Work

Identity work is an invaluable part of the process of understanding the cultural and historical frameworks in which artists exist and produce their works. Social theorist Patricia Hill Collins suggests that categories of identity such as gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality

"reference important resistant knowledge traditions among subordinated peoples who oppose the social inequalities and social injustices that they experience."[5] Collins notes that "there is not yet one agreed upon way of doing intersectionality."[6] Rather, approaches vary depending on specific contexts. In the context of Brenda Fassie, a black, queer female South African musician, I approach the topic of intersectionality as one that provides a new frame of reference for how race, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity can be understood in the context of one another, in order to provide a more nuanced and complex understanding of the conditions of Fassie's life and music career. The analysis of the three songs presented in this thesis offers a critical approach to the intersections of these identities. Theorizing these aspects of Fassie's identity intersectionally offers new perspectives on how she was shaped by the cultural and socio-political conditions she was situated in as a queer woman of colour during apartheid, and how she helped shape new music traditions in the early post-apartheid years. Furthermore, because the positionality of this research lies within a South African musician and the South African music industry—particularly popular music—it demonstrates how constructions of identity are specific to the different societies they are produced within and the importance of intersectional understandings of those constructs within their unique contexts.

According to Judith Butler, gender identity is one such social construct. Because one exists in society from the moment they are born, gender identity is both inescapable and inherently performative—performative because according to Butler, "gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed… identity is

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[5] Patricia Hill Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 10.
[6] Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*, 9.

performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results."[7] In the case of a performing artist, gender is performed both onstage and offstage—onstage as a sort of character and offstage as a "truer" reflection of the self. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993), provide the basis for gender analysis in the songs discussed in this thesis. Butler's theory of gender performativity, which rejects the gender binary and suggests that gender is the result of a series of acts that are "performed" rather than an internal reality or inherent condition of existence, is particularly significant in the analysis of performed and performing arts (music or otherwise). According to Butler, gender is constructed through "the repeated stylization of the body"[8]—that is to say that gender is not something one is born with but rather a *process*[9]. If a specific characteristic is ascribed to a specific group of people, it is not because the characteristic is intrinsic to their most basic nature but because external forces have demanded it. Hence, it is constructed. Though not explicitly stated yet by Butler, many scholars have suggested that the idea of identity construction that they apply to gender can also be ascribed to constructions of race. This is of particular importance as Fassie navigated the space between constructions of gender and race as a black woman in a place and time where blackness was viewed as "less than" whiteness and black and other women of colour in South Africa were perceived differently to white women.

Returning to gender as an act of "doing", Butler states that "gender proves to be performance—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be."[10] In this respect, gender is

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[7] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990): 34.
[8] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 45.
[9] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 34.
[10] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 34.

not inherent and unchanging, nor is one free to choose whichever gender or aspects of gender they wish to associate with. Instead, the construction of gender is determined by the specific societal context in which it is constructed. Butler posits that if gender is indeed constructed, then it could be constructed differently. Butler's emphasis on language focuses specifically on the controversy surrounding the terms "politics" and "representation". They suggest that, although it is important for feminism to develop a language that represents women, it has proven rather difficult, as the very category of "woman"—what constitutes a "woman—is not entirely clear. Conceptions of gender are not universal, having been constructed differently across history and a variety of cultures.

The construction of gender identities, then, hinges on an agreed upon linguistic understanding. As previously discussed, the divide between women of colour and white women in the racially segregated apartheid state meant that even how they were perceived as women was different. Although situated in the same broad national culture, the discrepancy of ethnic identities (and, by extension, languages) in South Africa and the validity of these identities as ascribed by the government (white supremacy, black subjectivity) influenced the very notion of what constituted a "woman" based on the colour of their skin. While representational democracy can extend a legitimacy to women as political subjects, it is important to note that is can also create a barrier or a qualification that must be met in order for the subject to be fully represented. In this context, I use Butler's theory of gender performativity to consider how Fassie negotiated space in the South African popular music industry as a black woman.

In *Bodies That Matter,* Butler asks what it would mean to consider performativity not just through a heterosexually gendered lens but also through a "complex set of racial injunctions

which operate in part through the taboo on miscegenation."[11] During apartheid, laws were passed to prohibit sharing sexual experiences between white and non-white South Africans and thus the gendered body and the raced body could not be separated. In my thesis I consider Butler's question of "How is race lived in the modality of sexuality? How is gender lived in the modality of race? How do colonial and neo-colonial nation-states rehearse gender relations in the consolidation of state power?"[12] Considerations of racial difference are (or should be) of equal importance to gendered difference and thus the raced body becomes intertwined with the sexed body. Furthermore, if one is to consider the intersections of race and gender, one should also include parameters for queerness. As Butler notes, "if to identify as a woman is not necessarily to desire a man, and if to desire a woman does not necessarily signal the constituting presence of a masculine identification, whatever that is, then the heterosexual matrix proves to be an imaginary logic hat insistently issues forth its own unmanageability."[13]

As a queer black woman living in apartheid segregation, Fassie was constantly exposed to racist legislation that affected her personal life, music career, and industry relationships. In order to effectively analyze her impact (and how she was impacted by) the South African music industry, one must understand the role of race and ethnicity in the construction of her identity in relation to the socio-political landscape that she lived and worked in. Sociologist Ali Meghji views such a perspective as part of critical race theory (a termed coined by Roy L. Brooks in the 1990s), a framework within which racism is not an individual act but rather is a structural power relation.[14] This approach to understanding race demonstrates that it is categorized differently in

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[11] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 122.
[12] Butler, *Bodies That Matter,* 78.
[13] Butler, *Bodies That Matter,* 183.
[14] Ali Meghji, *The Racialized Social System: Critical Race Theory as Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press), 5.

relation to individual societies and thus must be considered intersectional with other issues such as sex/gender discrimination, sometime also referred to through symbolic interactionism—the idea that people "orient to the world around them according to the meaning it has for them; they consider that meaning arises from interaction, and they view interpretation as a process that is ongoing in interaction."[15]

1.2 Literature Review

In order to discuss the impact of gender, racial, and cultural identities on pop singer Brenda Fassie (1964-2004) and her subsequent influence on South Africans and South African music in the late-– and post-apartheid years, one must first address current literature at these specific intersections. I first offer an understanding of race and racial categories in South Africa during apartheid. I then turn to contemporary scholarship on reception of black musicians in the twentieth- and twenty-first century. In this section, I explain the ways this body of scholarship contextualizes intersectionality of identities and how they interact with music-making. I then offer a broad historical-anthropological overview of settler-colonialism in southern Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This research demonstrates how colonization shaped cultural, social and religious changes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The next section turns to scholarship on interactions between white and non-white identities in South Africa, with an emphasis on cultural fusions of these identities in music. I will identify published work that focuses on the incorporation of European-settler music styles into indigenous African musics,

[15] Dirk vom Lehn, Natalia Ruiz–Junco, Will Gibson, *The Routledge International Handbook on Interactionism* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 7.

and vice versa, in the twentieth century. The last section of this literature review addresses existing scholarship on Fassie, and identifies gaps in research on her life and music.

1.2.1 Understanding Categories of Race and Racial Segregation During Apartheid

Music in South Africa plays a large and important role in shared cultural and social identities. Specific genres are often associated with certain racial groups, and language in music can be used to unify or exclude certain people from certain narratives. In 1948, the National Party—an Afrikaner nationalist group—came to power. During their rule from 1948 to 1993, South Africa was a severely racialized country. The racially divided state is captured in a 1962 court statement titled pointedly "Black Man in a White Court" that documents an exchange between the future president (1994–1999) Nelson Mandela and the magistrate in a trial session:

> Mandela: What sort of justice is this that enables the aggrieved to sit in judgement over those against whom they have laid a charge? A judiciary controlled entirely by whites and enforcing laws enacted by a white parliament in which Africans have no representation – laws which in most cases are passed in the face of unanimous opposition from Africans.
>
> Magistrate: After all is said and done, there is only one court today and that is the White Man's court. There is no other court.[16]

According to the 1996 census, which was the country's first official democratic census, 77% of 40.58 million people living in South Africa at the time self-identified as black/African, 11% white, 9% coloured, and 3% Indian/Asian.[17] 23% of people spoke Zulu as their first language, 18% Xhosa, 14% Afrikaans and 9% English. Roughly 58.5% of the white population and 82% of

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[16] Nelson Mandela, "Black Man in a White Court," (court statement, 28 October 1962), ANC 1912, https://www.anc1912.org.za/trials–black–man–in–a–white–court–nelson–mandelas–first–court–statement/.
[17] Statistics South Africa, *The People of South Africa Population Census, 1996,* https://apps.statssa.gov.za/census01/Census96/HTML/default.htm.

the coloured population spoke Afrikaans (the official language of apartheid) as their first language, while 29.5% and 23% of the black population's first language was Zulu and Xhosa, respectively. Note that only five racial categories exist in this census: Black/African, Coloured, Indian/Asian, White and Other/Unspecified. During apartheid (from 1948 to the early 1990s), non-white South Africans such as black, coloured and Indian people were racially persecuted and segregated from white South Africans. This segregation, which forced non-whites into townships and ghettos, poorly managed educational institutions, stripped them of many of their social rights, came to be known as "apartheid" (literally means "separateness"). [18] It was defined as a "policy of racial segregation and discrimination against South Africa's non-white majority by the country's white minority government."[19]

During apartheid, music was so racially segregated that non-white (black and "coloured") groups had their own radio broadcasts and separate music production labels. It is important to note that in the context of South Africa and South African ethnic groups, the term "coloured" has a vastly different understanding than that in North America. In the context of South Africa and South African racial dynamics, "coloured" refers to a specific group of people whose ancestry is of mixed race. This term was legislated in the *Population Registration Act No. 30 of 1950,* which classified South Africans into distinct racial categories: Native, Coloured, Indian and White.[20] The term "coloured" was also codified in the *Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act No. 72* of 1949 which prohibited marriage between whites and non-whites (note that the cited document is a

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[18] Nigel Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Apartheid, Democracy* (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), 5.
[19] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "apartheid (*n.*)," September 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/9402307403.
[20] Act No. 30 of 1950, *Population Registration*, June 1950: 277. https://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/DC/leg19500707.028.020.030/leg19500707.028.020.030.pdf.

copy produced in 1985, as the original document could not be found).[21] The qualifier "coloured", then, could refer to people who have one black parent and one white parent, but more frequently the term is used to refer to people who come from multiple generations of mixed-race families as an initial result of white owners procreating with their enslaved blacks in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Consequently, their "coloured" children developed their own traditions and culture through multiple generations.[22] Therefore, in this context, the term "coloured" is not used as an offensive catch-all for people of colour as it is in North America but refers to a distinct community of people with a shared cultural and racial heritage specific to South Africa.[23]

1.2.2 Recent International Research on Black Female Musicians

Before looking to South African popular music and black South African musicians, I offer a brief analysis of four recent books on black musicians (mostly women) and their music: *Liner Notes for the Revolution* (2021) by Daphne Brooks, *Tania León's Stride: A Polyrhythmic Life* (2021) by Alejandro Madrid, *Black Diamond Queens* (2020) by Maureen Mahon, and *Flaming? The Peculiar Theopolitics of Fire and Desire in Black Male Gospel Performance* (2020). These four books provide a broad scholarly context within which to understand how identities and labels—specifically black, queer, woman—have conditioned music creation. While these books specifically focus on women active in the US, they will provide relevant

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[21] Act No. 27 of 1949 in *Government Gazette of the Republic of South Africa*, June 1985: 2–4. https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201504/act–72–1985.pdf.
[22] Mohamed Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2005), 2–3, 25.
[23] Evan Liebermann, *Until We Have Won Our Liberty: South Africa After Apartheid* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2022), vii.

insight into how black musicians in popular music industries have historically been undervalued due to their race.

Despite different geopolitical contexts from South Africa, these books address how racial and gender identities intersect and ascribe meaning to music and performance, whether intentional or not. The Butlerian concept of "gender performativity" is based on the idea of sex as two different concepts: sex as a person's anatomically born identity, and sex as a construct, the result of different influencing factors, such as the time period, culture, and social spaces, and can change over time—one learns to "perform" specific roles in accordance with society's perception of specific genders. Gender identity, then, can be understood as inherently performative, yet the strict boundaries in which many societies operate can be used by the mainstream groups against the others to confine the opportunities an individual might create and the boundless possibilities that constructions of gender introduce to societies. The way one dresses, talks, the things they enjoy can all be examples of performative gender.[24] The idea of how value is ascribed to a person and their artistic expression—in this case, music—in accordance with performative labels, and the way in which their intentions can be misconstrued, is a focal point for Daphne Brooks, which leads to the next foundational text for this thesis.

In *Liner Notes for the Revolution* (2021), Daphne Brooks explores how black women in the United States of America have historically been underappreciated and undervalued in the popular music industry in the U.S. and under-estimated by critics and scholars.[25] Brooks approaches this research first by outlining the significance of black women music critics/scholars

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[24] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990): 11.
[25] Daphne Brooks, *Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound* (Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021), 2, 16-17.

and performers (such as Rosetta Reitz, Ellen Willis, Beyonce and Esther Mae Scott) in their contributions to popular music. She claims that popular music culture would be drastically changed (if not cease to exist) without these contributions. Brooks notes how a lack of documentation of black women's efforts has resulted in a lack of historical recognition, thus creating a false understanding of their place in the history of popular music in the U.S. She points to writers such as Toni Morrison and Pauline Hopkins as insurgents, that is, as examples of how to read black women's histories as a means of intellectual revolution.[26]

Furthering this point, Brooks looks at the history of popular music criticism and its marginalization and even exclusion of black women's music, pointing to white critics such as Leonard Feather and Ralph J. Gleason as examples of those tasked with ascribing more or less value to music, and offers an alternative, more nuanced criticism of black women's music while taking note of their "radical triumphs and lifelong labours."[27] The idea of the body as an archive is central to this book. Brooks suggests that "Black women artists have played crucial roles as archives, as the innovators of performances and recordings that stood in for and as the memory of a people."[28] Simply put, because traditional music archives, including objects preserved in physical archives (e.g., letters, scores, recordings), music criticism and scholarly publications, have historically failed to sufficiently documents black women's contributions to music, the black women artists have had to be taken by scholars as "archives" of their own creative practices. In this regard, the body itself becomes a site of knowledge, and therefore an "archive" or a physical representation of black female histories of sound.

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[26] Brooks*, Liner Notes for the Revolution*, 9.
[27] Brooks, *Liner Notes for the Revolution,* 6-7.
[28] Brooks, *Liner Notes for the Revolution,* 4.

Brooks reads a wide variety of sources for her book—including black scholars' work, feminist studies, ethnographic surveys of songs and different musics, interviews and music criticism—to offer an analytical perspective of black women's music history by exploring the "intellectual labour" of black women and traditions of black feminist scholarship.[29] These key cultural factors that Brooks identifies demonstrate how women, particularly black women, have been excluded from music history. Her reframing of the narratives surrounding them and their embodied histories allows a better understanding of artists, particularly women of colour, must grapple with. Her argument shows how their identities intersecting race and gender interact with and influence their art. However, in the process of constructing and portraying identities through specific categorizations (whether of race or gender), one must ask not only how these categorizations can positively create space for shared experiences, but how they could also possibly detract from them.

Alejandro Madrid asks these questions in *Tania Léon's Stride: A Polyrhythmic Life* (2021), which focuses on composer and conductor Tania Léon's desire to not be labelled as a "black" composer or a "female" composer, but to simply be listened to without ascribing anything "extra" to her or her music.[30] "I am not a feminist, am not a black conductor, and am not a woman conductor. I am nothing that people want to call me. They do not know me," says Léon.[31] According to Madrid, Léon rejects identity labels that allow audiences to form preconceived notions of her and her music, and that Léon is in the process of "becoming": a continuous evolving of her personhood and womanhood that is a direct result of every

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[29] Brooks, *Liner Notes for the Revolution,* 59-61.
[30] Alejandro Madrid, *Tania León's Stride: A Polyrhythmic Life* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2021), 3.
[31] Madrid, *Tania León's Stride,* 169.

experience, memory, and interaction she has had throughout her life.[32] By this logic, then, León balks at the labelling of "woman" or "black" as a reductive approach to identity, as she considers herself and her life experiences to be beyond a one-word labelling of identity that only serves to make her the other of a stable, essentialized identity.[33] Madrid scrupulously recounts León's childhood, musical achievements, and personal relations on the grounds that all of these elements, combined, are essential to her journey of becoming. No one label, no one experience defines a person's entire identity; rather, these millions of individual experiences make up a greater whole.

This sentiment is shared by gender theorist Judith Butler who, in their book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), claims that because gender comes from expressions, shaped by physical representations designated by external objects (such as that Barbies are for girls and trucks are for boys; or ballet is for women and football is for men) and repetitive acts (such as girls wear skirts and wear make-up). Gender is thereby considered a performance. And that performance, inherently, is a collective experience shared by billions of people who are lumped into these binaries, despite not always wanting to or being able to fit into them. It is understandable that León would prefer to have her music relate to individual experience instead of representing any one group identity such as "woman" or "African-American" (when she is, in fact, also Cuban). However, one can also acknowledge the importance, relevance, and significance of identity (particularly marginalized ones) and this

[32] Madrid, *Tania León's Stride,* 169.
[33] Madrid, *Tania León's Stride,* 174.

identity is expressed performatively through such collaborative and community-building mediums as music.

Ritual is another prominent theme in Tania León's life. Growing up in Cuba, León was exposed to and complicit in the culture and music of her people. Her exposure to Santeria drumming and its particular rhythms and compositional structure would have a lasting impact on her later career.[34] However, she was also received training in Western art music. These seemingly conflicting aspects of her identity were both significant to her musical process, as they create the foundation for a multifaceted angles of identity that has made Tania León who she is. She was not born "Tania León;" instead, she *became* her performatively through constructing a self through a series of life events, family and cultural influences, and the ways in which she was perceived understood by her peers, critics, family and collaborators both her personal and professional lives.

Tania León's desire to not be known by and referred to as the mere label of "woman" or "African-American", neatly categorized but ultimately lacking, was also evident in post-apartheid South Africa after 1994 (post-apartheid) and early 2000s, when group identity regarding racial and gender was heavily promoted as fostering new relations between groups in a new nation.[35] In my thesis, I investigate how decades of governmental oppression of non-whites based on racial identity categories as designated by laws such as the *Population Registration Act of 1950* created a desire to move away from ready-made categorizations, yet also provided a sociopolitical context for the performativity of identity for South Africans to decide whom or

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[34] Madrid, *Tania León's Stride,* 25.
[35] Carol Anne Muller, *South African Music: A Century of Traditions in Transformation* (California: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004), 239, 243.

what to look up to. Certainly, in the case of Fassie, who was hailed as South Africa's "first black female pop star,"[36] identity politics were a hugely important aspect of fostering a new musical tradition in the 1990s in the aftermath of the segregation of apartheid rule.[37]

The sentiment that labels can be both harmful or uplifting to the people they are ascribed to is shared by *Black Diamond Queens* (2020) author, Maureen Mahon, who demonstrates how labels can negatively affect women (particularly women of colour) when unwarranted. Mahon points to Santi White, who was often incorrectly classified by the media as an R&B singer. According to the singer, this misrepresentation was in large part due to her racial stereotyping as she was actually a rock and roll artist, which indicated a white, male-dominated genre.[38] The racial and gendered profiling of genres is an interesting one to consider. What makes a musical genre "black" or "male"? If an artist who exists outside these stable classifications engages with that music, in what ways can that outsider change it and influence the way the listener engages with this genre?

The period from the 1990s through the early 2000s in South Africa was largely about collaborating across racial lines, but it was also about black youths forging their own, free identities performatively in the aftermath of apartheid. How did that political climate affect the way music was perceived and the labels ascribed to it and its artists? One aspect of identity that often seems to be neglected in the historical recounting of music and musicians, particularly in popular music, is religion, as popular music has long been characterized as secular. Yet, religion in South Africa is as multifaceted as its demographic. It is a predominantly Christian nation with

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[36] Liz McGregor, "Brenda Fassie Obituary," *The Guardian,* May 11, 2004.
[37] See the chronology of major South African political events.
[38] Maureen Mahon, *Black Diamond Queens: African American Women and Rock and Roll* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 1-2.

a large culture of African spirituality that co-existed within the Christian church. Alisha Jones explores gender identities within the black church (in the U.S.) in *Flaming? The Peculiar Theopolitics of Fire and Desire in Black Male Gospel Performance* (2020). Jones suggests that the performative masculinity in church music is carefully constructed by practitioners such as pastors and choir directors so as not to appear too feminine.[39] Jones's argument helps to provide an analytical framework for this thesis. The conservatively gendered music roles and gendered presentation in American churches can serve as pertinent references to explaining the black music culture in South Africa. How did gender identity in religion factor into the music of black women like Brenda Fassie who, even if not outwardly religious, were affected by the mainstream societal and religious beliefs held by the large majority of the population? How did younger audiences and artists question or even subvert the masculine/feminine dichotomy?

1.2.3 A Historical Overview of Politics and Race in South Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

The books discussed above present classic and recent research on gender and black music studies. I now to turn another four books by anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff, which provide a historical-anthropological context for the societal foundations on which South African popular music was built. Their research, which focuses on European colonialism and the development of African Zionism in southern Africa, charts important cultural, social and religious changes from the early 1800s to mid 1900s.

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[39] Alisha Jones, *Flaming? The Peculiar Theopolitics of Fire and Desire in Black Male Gospel Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 5, 11.

Of Revelation and Revolution, Vol. 1: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa (1991), by Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, provides an in-depth historical-anthropological analysis of the role of organized religion in colonialism and the colonization of indigenous southern Africans. Professors of Anthropology and African-American studies at Harvard University, the Comaroffs aimed to write a "historical anthropology of colonialism in southern Africa that take account of all the players in the game."[40] What this expression means is that they have investigated South African history from both the perspectives of the colonizer and the colonized, or the European missionary and the "savage" native, in order to create a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships between races and subsequent racial, economic and social inequalities.

Of Revelation and Revolution makes no claim to provide a comprehensive history of every colonial encounter in southern Africa; nor does it attempt to follow any chronological history. Instead, they offer an understanding of *how* and *why* the British sought to civilize the "savage" Africans and "make history" for the people whom, they thought, lacked it.[41]

In this first volume, Jean and John Comaroff approach the anthropological history of Western religion and European consciousness imposed on Africans in a profound and extremely sensitive manner that provides a detailed understanding of colonialism and evangelical enterprise. The dual approach to narratives of both the colonizers and the colonized particularly compelling, as it allows the reader to understand the savior complex of what the Comaroffs call "humane" imperialism, while also providing insight into how Africans absorbed and

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[40] Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Vol. 1: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), 9.
[41] Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution Vol. 1,* 11.

appropriated elements of European culture and subsequently produced their own ideas of what it means to be civilized.[42]

In their second volume on this topic, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Vol. 2: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (1997), the Comaroffs build on their work in first volume by considering how colonial ideologies and indigenous African traditions fused to form new cultural practices. Addressing multiple aspects of identity – race, gender, religion – they demonstrate how different peoples reacted to and resisted colonialism from their specific positions. Some Africans accepted and willingly joined the church, while others outright rejected it or appropriated only some elements of it.[43] The ideas proffered by the Comaroffs on how colonial ideologies and indigenous ideologies became intertwined offer an interesting entryway into a consideration of how Fassie's cultural and racial identity as a black South African intersected with the popularity of American music genres in South Africa.

From my standpoint, I find that the narrative the Comaroffs paint in this book extremely relevant to the understanding of the events of late and post-apartheid South Africa. Though the events of these two volumes take place in what is now known as Botswana (which borders South Africa), with the shared history of colonization and likely geographical overlap with South Africa, the history of European colonialism and the fusion of European and indigenous African cultural practices are shared across the continent. These volumes, offer a critical understanding of a socio-political landscape that ultimately would lead to the formation of the South African apartheid state in 1948. Simultaneously, the Comaroffs attention to the "give and take" of shared

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[42] Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution Vol. 1,* 309-311.
[43] Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution Vol. 2,* 57.

cultural practices between Europeans and Africans can also speak to the post-apartheid amalgamation of black and white music, fashion, local slang and dance.

When the apartheid regime started gaining power and segregationist ideologies became more prominent in the early-to-mid twentieth century, social practices in fact became even more Africanized, as the separation of black and white citizens fostered a deeper desire amongst indigenous peoples for an African nationalism.[44] Published six years before *Of Revelation and* Revolution, Jean Comaroff's 1985 book, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People* by uses the Tshidi people as a case study demonstrating how precolonial sociocultural structures of the early 1800s were appropriated by indigenous Africans who their own socio-cultural beliefs and value-systems with that of the West.[45] She demonstrates that modern religion in southern Africa is the result of a "process of simultaneous reproduction and transformation…set in motion by the engagement of a particular indigenous system and a specific extension of European colonialism" and suggests that African Zionism created a middle ground between tradition and modernity, which provides a successful sociocultural structure that still exists in South Africa today.[46]

Similar to her later collaboration with John Comaroff in *On Revelation and Revolution* (1991 & 1997), Jean Comaroff draws on a relationship between history and anthropology to provide a comprehensive, well-rounded understanding of the socio-political landscape of the Tshidi people and the establishment of a long-lasting culture of Zionism in South Africa. In my view, Comaroff demonstrates how European hegemony forced new affordances for the

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[44] Comaroff, *Body of Power,* 40.
[45] Comaroff, *Body of Power,* 22-25.
[46] Comaroff, *Body of Power,* 252.

expression of African consciousness. This claim specifically relates to my thesis as I consider the impact of the apartheid regime and continued imposed whiteness on black people and, in particular, black women musicians like Brenda Fassie, even in post-apartheid South Africa.

The most recent of the four included Comaroff books, *Ethnicity Inc.* (2009), tackles what the authors call "ethno-talk," which means ethnic and cultural identity, and the societal value ascribed to ethnicity.[47] The Comaroffs pose the idea of identity as a commodity to be marketed and sold, questioning the role of neoliberalism in the incorporation of identity.[48] Notably, Chapter 4, "Commodifying Descent, American-style", poses a particularly relevant question of how ethnic groups become brands. I highlight this chapter as it most apropos of my thesis. The authors develop their argument initially in the context of indigenous Americans whose identity became a legal matter in the incorporation of laws such as the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act before discussing the South African context.[49] Of course, their point resonates well with South Africa's laws such as the Coloured Persons Communal Reserves Act of 1961. Yet the Comaroffs are quick to note that the identity economy in South Africa is not purely oppressive, it can also be a liberating force, as it allows minority groups to create ethnic value by marketing themselves. To my mind, *Ethnicity Inc.* demonstrates that while minority identities have historically been used to label and further disenfranchise groups, in the modern era the commodification of the identities can serve as an economic foundation for reclaiming a group's autonomy. Much of my thesis focuses on the commercialization and commodification of black South African identities in popular music. In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, however, this

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[47] Jean and John Comaroff, *Ethnicity Inc.* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), 1.
[48] Comaroff, *Ethnicity Inc.,* 141.
[49] Comaroff, *Ethnicity Inc.,* 61.

ethnopreneurialism helped foster relations across the racial divide, as black musicians marketed themselves to white audiences and white audiences became involved and supportive of black music.

In order to better understand this concept of an "identity economy" introduced in Comaroff and Comaroff's *Ethnicity Inc.,* I now turn to another leading expert on identity construction in South Africa. In the book chapter "South Africa and South Africans: Nationality, Belonging, Citizenship" (2011), South African historian and University of Cambridge professor Saul Dubow notes an increasing scholarly interest in intersectional considerations of nationalism, race and identity in regard to nation-building and belonging in modern South Africa. Dubow aims to understand how South Africa, as an idea and as a physical space, was conceived and developed both within and outside the nation. What makes a South African "South African"? According to Dubow, despite the existence of South Africa as a geographical marker (what would be referred to as *southern* Africa today), the region was so unfamiliar in Britain that journals and newspapers would simply refer to it as the "Cape colonies" instead.[50] It was not until the 1870s when intellectuals, such as Anthony Trollope, visited South Africa and wrote about it in scholarly articles and books. Notably, Trollope was quick to express concern over the black majority population, as he realized that indigenous populations would not succumb to colonization as easily as in Canada or New Zealand.[51] Thus, it became increasingly important to integrate indigenous peoples into white colonial structures and they became a collective, racialized "other" under imperial rule.

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[50] Saul Dubow, "South Africa and South Africans: Nationality, Belonging, Citizenship," in *The Cambridge History of South Africa*, edited by Robert Ross, Anne Kelk Mager, and Bill Nasson, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2: 18.
[51] Dubow, "South Africa," 2: 20.

Dubow poses an important question regarding African identity in opposition to white supremacy: namely, when did they [Africans] begin to see themselves first and foremost as South Africans?[52] In 1882 a black political organization seeking to fight for Africans' rights, the *Imbumba Yama Nyama,* was formed. According to Dubow, this marked a shift in African nationalism as they negotiated space against the oppressing Afrikaner nationalism of the Boers and English imperialism.[53] As tensions heightened, prime minister Cecil Rhodes initiated in the 1894 Glen Grey Act, which essentially segregated indigenous Africans and restricted them to specific geographical areas. This "Native Bill for Africa" was, as Dubow notes, a way of unifying the white nation while addressing the concerns of the "native problem".[54] The South African War (or the Anglo-Boer War, as it is most typically referred to by current-day South Africans) of 1899 ultimately added to a clearer definition of "South Africans" as a collective identity made up of Anglo-Boers settlers who viewed themselves as separate from Europe. By 1910, this sentiment coupled with the previously discussed segregation of indigenous Africans, codified a white South African nationalist framework into the Union of South Africa.[55] However, at the same time, the missive of Pan-Africanism (that all black people are connected, regardless of where they live or come from) was spreading between African communities.

In the years leading up to apartheid in the 1940s, African nationalists began to draw attention to the fact that a racial minority held majority political power and called instead for a majority (i.e., African) rule.[56] When power did eventually transfer to majority rule in the 1990s,

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[52] Dubow, "South Africa," 2: 47.
[53] Dubow, "South Africa," 2: 29-30.
[54] Dubow, "South Africa," 2: 32-33.
[55] Dubow, "South Africa," 2: 34.
[56] Dubow, "South Africa," 2: 48, 56.

ideology surrounding nationalism in South Africa needed to be reframed to recognize people of all ethnicities as South African citizens. As Dubow notes, the Black Consciousness Movement that emerged in the 1960s created a sort of "transnational" black nationalism that extended to all black people, not just those within South Africa's geopolitical borders. At the same time, it refocused activism on black activists instead of their white allies.[57] This argument poses an interesting consideration as narratives surrounding the legitimacy of black Africans as South African citizens were previously considered from white allied perspectives, rather than the black intellectuals at the forefront of their movement. Ultimately, Dubow provides a compelling insight into the construction of South African identity and the role of conflicting racial ideas of nationalism in the process of building a South African collective nationalist identity.

In "Resistance and Reform" (2011), Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies Tom Lodge looks at the power of protest and anti-apartheid rebellion in South Africa between 1973 and 1994. Specifically, Lodge considers how organized resistance led to the passing of a set of harsher government policies which, in turn, sparked even greater revolution.[58] In 1973, Zulu king Goodwill Zwelethini initiated a wave of brick-and-tile factory strikes across Durban that would span over two months. As news spread, African workers in other fields such as engineering, textiles and clothing joined the strike in hopes that their working conditions and wages would improve. According to Lodge, the strikes led to the formation of official African trade unions. However, instead of protecting workers, these unions would largely protect the employers, which led to the formation of unofficial/underground trade unions.

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[57] Dubow, "South Africa," 2: 62.
[58] Tom Lodge, "Resistance and Reform, 1973–1994," In *The Cambridge History of South Africa*, edited by Robert Ross, Anne Kelk Mager, and Bill Nasson, vol.2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 409.

Public attention shifted however from the union issue in 1976, when black students in Soweto marched against the use of Afrikaans (the language of the oppressor) as the primary medium of instruction in their schools. On June 16th, nearly fifteen thousand student protestors were met in the streets by armed policemen. They opened fire on the children (some of whom were as young as ten), killing over one hundred students with some estimates suggest as many as six hundred.[59] While the maximum force displayed by police was intended to curtail further insurrection, Lodge notes that it ultimately did the opposite. Waves of revolt spread across the country in the weeks following the Soweto Uprising, with many black South Africans expressing increasing frustration with their lack of freedom and a large number of white South Africans calling for the removal of governmental restrictions on black citizens. Returning to the issue of trade unions, Lodge refocuses on the implementation of illegal black trade unions in 1979. According to Lodge, the formation of illegal black trade unions came at a time when Africans were attempting to establish collective identity in way that would help organize mass mobilization against oppressive forces. The United Democratic Front (UDF), a group of over four hundred unions, was formed to express grievances regarding anything from affordable housing, education, poor working conditions, and feminist issues. As Lodge notes, the UDF provided much support for the African National Congress and advocated for a socialist future.[60] In 1984, the African National Congress (ANC) began attempts to increase guerrilla operations but as these attacks became more frequent, so too did civilian casualties (particularly white

[59] Lodge, "Resistance and Reform," 420.
[60] Lodge, "Resistance and Reform," 445.

civilians). Larger police presence in black homelands caused tensions to heighten and over 160 guerrillas were captured or killed in 1986-1987.[61]

Concluding his reflection on apartheid resistance and government and cultural reform, Lodge turns to the last four years of apartheid rule. Building on Dubow's critique of conflicting and reconciliatory notions of nationhood, Lodge notes that by 1990 there was at least a somewhat unified understanding of South African nationhood.[62] That is not to say that all conflict was immediately resolved. Lodge is quick to note that bloodshed continued well after the 1994 election, with an estimated sixteen thousand casualties. Most violence was a result of differing opinions on retribution and reconciliation between the Inkatha Freedom Party and the ANC and subsided as new policies were implemented in the new, democratic South Africa. In his concluding statements, Lodge suggests that "ending violence in South Africa was easier because neither the 'national liberation struggle' nor white society was heavily militarised."[63] Lodge's use of a direct comparison between anti-apartheid protest/guerrilla activism and social/government reform demonstrates the constantly shifting nature of law, governance and belonging in the politically unstable and oppressive era of apartheid. It is important to consider how forms of protest were directly able to influence government structures (even if not always for the better), which in turn further mobilized anti-apartheid groups and ultimately led to the dissolution of apartheid in South Africa.

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[61] Lodge, "Resistance and Reform," 462.
[62] Lodge, "Resistance and Reform," 482.
[63] Lodge, "Resistance and Reform," 486.

1.2.4 Afro-Euro Fusion and Identity in South African Popular Music

As demonstrated in the previous section white European settlers in Africa brought their European culture and traditions with them. Over time, the combination of white settler's promoting their European heritage in Africa (in this thesis, specifically South Africa) and the global reach of American culture in the twentieth century had an influence on the development of popular music in South Africa. In this section, I offer an analysis of existing scholarship on cross-racial musical collaborations and the subsequent development of Afropop and other Afro-Euro music fusions.

Until the late twentieth century, the arts in South Africa were largely segregated by race, and that it was black creative arts that suffered most under this division. In "Modernity, Culture and Nation" (2011), South African scholar Tlhalo Raditlhalo suggests that black literature was a by-product of Christian mission work and the translation of the bible into African languages.[64] Conversely, African writers also began to translate African texts into English and as schooling and the Church became more central to their lives, the previously oral traditions of African tribes transitioned into a text-based one.

As Africans became literate, they began to publish their own journals and newspapers which, in turn, allowed them a space to express themselves and share cultural and political ideas and opinions on colonialism. In South Africa, even some white authors began to veer away from Euro-centric writing in an attempt to create more South Africa-centric works.[65] White Afrikaans authors such as Pauline Smith and William Plomer focused on South African society, while

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[64] Tlhalo Raditlhalo, "Modernity, Culture, and Nation," In *The Cambridge History of South Africa*, edited by Robert Ross, Anne Kelk Mager, and Bill Nasson, vol.2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2: 573-74.
[65] Raditlhalo, "Modernity, Culture, and Nation," 577.

poets like Eugene Marais cemented the use of Afrikaans in poetry and literature. As Raditlhalo recounts, the renowned poet Uys Krige even translated Shakespeare into Afrikaans. Fusions of European and African music and dance styles also began to take root. According to Raditlhalo, *isicathamiya* (call-and-response) choirs and gumboot dancing became increasingly popular in black communities. Traditional songs would be blended with European and American styles as they sought to define a new art style.

In 1955, the Union of Southern Artists formed to protect black artists rights in South Africa, but as free expression for black people became more perilous, more artists began to choose exile in other countries and left the country.[66] The loss of prolific musicians such as Abdullah Ibrahim and Hugh Masekela hugely impacted South African music culture, not just as a loss of black musicians in South Africa, but also in a gaining of new styles and understandings of music outside of South Africa. As musicians in exile continued to play and perform, they became more familiar with African American jazz styles which were ultimately brought back to South Africa.

However, the *Publications and Entertainment Act* of 1963 allowed government regulation of theatrical and musical performances under the guise of promoting the arts but ultimately allowing for a total control over which works could be performed. As Raditlhalo notes, in the first decade of this Act alone, over a dozen Afrikaans plays were produced in attempts to promote Afrikaans identity and Afrikaner nationalism, while black theatre that addressed injustice were often banned.[67] Towards the dissolution of apartheid in the 1990s,

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[66] Raditlhalo, "Modernity, Culture, and Nation," 586-87.
[67] Raditlhalo, "Modernity, Culture, and Nation,"589.

however, black literature began to shift away from exposing inequalities to themes of reconciliation, healing the painful past, and other issues such as women's rights. As Raditlhalo highlights, South African arts began to move towards a "hybrid" approach to indigenous African and settler art styles, while still remaining politically and culturally relevant.[68] Raditlhalo's final question (which he echoes from the writings of Njabulo Ndebele) of what South Africans might write about in the aftermath of apartheid is certainly intriguing, as one considers the confluence of group identities and the reflection of new South African ideals regarding nationalism and reconciliation in the arts.

As far back as the 1920s, when American jazz began receiving international attention, the fusion of black American jazz sounds with African indigenous traditions has led to the creation of new styles such as *marabi* and *mbaqanga.* David Coplan's "Popular Styles and Cultural Fusion" (2001) argues that South Africa's popular music is influenced by European/American musical styles that have been synthesized with African music and instruments.[69] *Marabi* was a genre that stemmed from the Johannesburg slums. It was a violent, dangerous and working-class genre that was mostly found in illegal shebeens.[70] *Mbaqanga* (also referred to as African Jive), on the other hand, became the dominant popular music style in South Africa in the 1960s and 1970s.[71] It made use of African drumming rhythms and call-and-

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[68] Raditlhalo, "Modernity, Culture, and Nation," 596.
[69] David Coplan, "South Africa, Republic of," *Grove Music Online,* 2001, https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/display/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000043028?rskey=ge7WJn&result=2
[70] Christopher Ballantine, "Marabi," *Grove Music Online,* 2001, https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/display/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000051496?rskey=BXSuy2&result=1
[71] Lara Allen, "Mbaqanga," *Grove Music Online,* 2001, https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/display/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000051740?rskey=oGk2d6&result=1.

response type vocals in the vernacular, coupled with electric guitar, bass and other electric instruments. *Mbaqanga* is widely accepted as the first South African music developed for mass audiences via recording, instead of live audiences.

The evolution of *mbaqanga* and mass-produced popular music led to the creation of what was called urban township music, which often used lyrics to comment on the political-social climate of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa.[72] From this township music rose the bubblegum genre, also referred to as township pop, which was performed by and for black youth who used indigenous languages – predominantly Zulu and Xhosa (though some songs were in English) – and indigenous music characteristics.[73] As recording technology evolved so too did township pop, ultimately resulting in *kwaito*: a mid-90s blend of house/pop/hip hop that became extremely popular with youths of all racial backgrounds, though it was predominantly performed by black musicians.[74]

The bridging of the racial divide through cross-collaborative music-making formed a fundamental part of protest against the apartheid regime. Artists of different races fused genres, developed new slang, and shared musical performance spaces. By subverting essentialized racial expectations (i.e., certain genres such as rap or hip hop were inherently black music, or that pop was white) in music performance through cross-cultural collaboration and the fusion of indigenous music with popular music styles, listeners and performers alike engaged in the act of

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[72] David Coplan, "South Africa, Republic of," *Grove Music Online,* 2001, https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/display/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000043028?rskey=bavcg3&result=2#omo-9781561592630-e-0000043028-div1-0000043028.1.
[73] Lara Allen. "Bubblegum," *Grove Music Online,* 2001, https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/display/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000051494?rskey=bavcg3&result=1.
[74] Lara Allen. "Bubblegum," *Grove Music Online,* 2001, https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/display/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000051494?rskey=bavcg3&result=1.

protest through playing, singing, dancing to, and listening to music. The same argument can be made for subverting gendered expectations in South Africa and within the music industry, as women in the 80s and 90s began to thrive in a previously male-dominated industry, subverting the patriarchal power relation that had dominated the popular music industry.

Marginalized groups, such as black people (and specifically black women) in South Africa had to look for new ways to express themselves against dominating white cultural scene of apartheid, but as previously mentioned, some white artists also sought to situate themselves in a more local musical space. In *Sounding the Cape: Music, Identity and Politics in South Africa* (2013), French/South African socio-musicologist, Dennis-Constant Martin, offers a compelling insight into how music in Cape Town has historically interacted with, influenced, and been influenced by white non-white identities. Martin points to the use of Western popular music genres by black South African musicians, and their fusion with traditional African instruments, tunes, and even language or local slang. According to Martin's account, Cape Town was one of the most significant sites of popular music development in South Africa in the twentieth century and thus Martin focuses his research on this area, straying only so often as necessary as to demonstrate the reach of Cape Town's popular music scene on the rest of the country, such as in the cities of Durban and Johannesburg, and the Soweto township.[75] Martin separates his book into two parts: "The Emergence of Creolised Identities" and "The Dialects of Separation and Interweaving". He explores concepts of group and individual identity and how the relationship between the self and other in marginalized groups has historically been commodified, packaged

[75] Dennis-Constant Martin, *Sounding the Cape: Music, Identity and Politics in South Africa* (Somerset West: African Minds, 2013), viii.

and marketed in order to drive specific political, religious or social goals. That is to say, how minority persons see themselves as individuals versus their perceived identity as a group minority by the group majority.

The relationship between identity and music is demonstrated through an understanding of how musical tastes and the creation of musical traditions can be viewed as a marker of social identity either within or as a way of subverting one's racial, gender, or social categorization. Throughout his book, Martin argues the significance of music in the narrative of reconciliation in South Africa: "the potential of musical traces for recognizing can be actualized as part of a project of identity reconfiguration aiming at creating the conditions of a new living-together."[76] A cornerstone of Martin's research, the narrative of reconciliation proves important as a lens through which to understand cross-collaborative efforts between white and non-white South African's in the aftermath of apartheid in the 1990s. It demonstrates reconciliatory efforts through collaboration, blending of genres and the influence of black music on white youths and vice versa.

The idea that identity (group and individual) is the driving force behind artist creation is one that appears across much scholarship on music. Certainly, music can be used to create, or even segregate, certain groups within different contexts. In *Composing Apartheid: Music for and Against Apartheid* (2008) editor Grant Olwage and contributors look at the music that was produced in South Africa both as a product of, and as an act against, apartheid. Consequently, this collection of essays asks how music had a direct influence on the creation of the apartheid regime. The book, which contains chapters by authors such as South African musicologist Grant

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[76] Martin, *Sounding the Cape,* 49.

Olwage and former University of Witwatersrand fellow Lara Allen , explores different narratives (white South Africans, people of colour, women, pro and anti-apartheid supporters etc.) regarding racial segregation, gender, interracial music-sharing, appropriation of music genres by and for different identity groups and even critically reflects on music scholarship that was produced in South Africa during apartheid. Lara Allen's Chapter 4, "Kwela's White Audiences", is particularly relevant to this thesis, as it looks at the production of black music in formats such as the LP, which was almost exclusively available to white audiences, thus demonstrating one example of how music was used as a unifying force.[77] Allen's critical examination of kwela's commercial success with white audiences demonstrates the importance of a "shared identification and common aesthetic appreciation" in crossing barriers between racial groups in a way that largely undermined the apartheid ethos of racial segregation. [78]

Chapter 5, "Popular Music and Negotiating Whiteness in Apartheid South Africa," by Garry Baines in the volume edited by Olwage follows a similar narrative to Allen in that it situates whiteness in pre-1994 South Africa as a "positionality of power and privilege, and not some fixed, immutable essence."[79] Through the lens of music performance, Baines questions the changing nature of white identities in South Africa between 1960-1990, and how individual listening habits cumulated in an "awareness of shared experience" with other white-identifying groups outside of South Africa in a sort of transnational national identity (i.e., a white identity).[80]

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[77] Lara Allen, "Kwela's White Audiences: The Politics of Pleasure and Identification in the Early Apartheid Period," in *Composing Apartheid: Music for and Against Apartheid,* ed. Grant Olwage (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008): 79.
[78] Allen, "Kwela's White Audiences," 95.
[79] Gary Baines, "Popular Music and Negotiating Whiteness in Apartheid South Africa," in *Composing Apartheid: Music for and Against Apartheid,* ed. Grant Olwage (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008): 99.
[80] Baines, "Popular Music," 110.

Baines's exploration of white nationalism and the difference between the white Afrikaner and white English person in South Africa leaves open the question of how much racial identity interferes or conflates with national identity within the musics of such diverse and conflicting nations such as South Africa. In a majority minority country, where white people make up a minority of the population yet hold the majority of power and people of colour make up the majority of the population but hold little power, the further divide between white identities becomes significantly more important. As white Afrikaners viewed themselves as true South Africans, the apartheid national identity was built around Afrikaner identity and, while white English speakers still benefited from white privilege, their cultural and language differences were largely excluded from the narrative.

In the same volume, the chapter, "Decomposing Apartheid", by Ingrid Byerly pertains to the relationship between musical markers and social histories. Byerly suggests that musical markers can have such a significant impact on individuals and communities that they can "define and transform social histories."[81] The importance of language and religious ceremony in music is highlighted by Byerly, who suggests that music is an important way of sharing tradition and beliefs between generations and those within a shared cultural community. Yet, it is precisely in the overcoming of these boundaries that Byerly places her theory that fusion music helped to forge a path for a new South Africa that transcended these boundaries. If the goal of apartheid was to separate, then the goal of anti-apartheid protestors was to unify South Africans of all races. Through music, anti-apartheid protestors were able to collaborate in the creation of a new

[81] Ingrid Byerly, "Decomposing Apartheid: Things Come Together. The Anatomy of a Musical Revolution," in *Composing Apartheid: Music for and Against Apartheid,* ed. Grant Olwage (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008): 256.

sound that resonated across the racial divide and thus "decompose" apartheid.[82] The idea of "decomposing" apartheid is an interesting one in that it denotes power in the act of music-making. If music is a political act, which means in this context by performing in genres and languages that subverts the political goal of apartheid, then it can, in a sense, de-compose the structures put in place by this oppressive regime. Particularly in the years following the end of apartheid rule, music became a focal point in the creation of a multiracial nation, a point of great significance to this thesis as it explores black South African music in the 1990s to 2000s and the reception of this music in an evolving political climate.

Similar sentiments of cross-collaboration in efforts to subvert apartheid and Afrikaner nationalism are echoed in the collection of essays, *Composing the Music of Africa* (2018). In the chapter called "Keeping Our Ears to the Ground," Hans Roosenschoon examines the significance of the role played by South African composers (both white and of colour) in rejecting apartheid structures during and after the apartheid period and working to change the biases of a nation through music.[83] Roosenschoon questions where and within which traditions South African composers rooted their music in. A Western definition of nationalism and national music cannot be so easily ascribed to South Africa, where so many cultures and traditions were conflated and blended with varying ideas of patriotism and anti-apartheid narratives. Roosenschoon's attempts to rationalize the collaboration between Western art music and indigenous African musics (or the appropriation of these musics) offers an interesting reading of the legitimacy of blended traditions.

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[82] Byerly, "Decomposing Apartheid," 259.
[83] Hans Roosenschoon, "Keeping our Ears to the Ground: Cross-Culturalism and the Composer in South Africa, 'Old' and 'New'," in *Composing the Music of Africa: Composition, Interpretation and Realisation,* ed. Malcolm Floyd (New York: Routledge, 2018), 265.

It is worth noting that, to date, while there are often accusations of appropriation with regard to the use indigenous African musics with Western art models, this argument is inapplicable to popular music fusion. Indeed, the adjective "collaborative" appears more than anything else, and the use of African languages, instruments and cultural references in black South Africa music that also engaged with white audiences was hailed as a medium through which reconciliation could occur. In his monograph *Kwaito Bodies*, Xavier Livermon argues that kwaito, both as a music genre and cultural movement, gave young South Africans in post-apartheid years the opportunity to explore shifting political and cultural boundaries. He acknowledges the importance of intersectional black feminism and black queer theory in legitimizing kwaito as a fundamental musical and cultural contribution to South African resistance politics.

A similar argument is made in Gavin Steingo's monograph *Kwaito's Promise* (2016), which focuses on how political change is reflected in music and how music can be used as a form of protest that can ultimately lead to political change. Steingo draws attention to the extreme inequality between white and non-white South Africans as a continued repercussion of apartheid.[84] Looking specifically at Soweto as a case study for the origin of this South African popular music genre, he notes that the undercurrents of nationhood prevent a sense of "authentic locality." What is meant by this statement is that because there was a prevailing sense of African nationalism or Pan-Africanism in the face of white oppression, black communities could lack more site-specific identities. Drawing on the writings by Jacques Rancière, Steingo looks at the

[84] Gavin Steingo, *Kwaito's Promise: Music and the Aesthetics of Freedom in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 10-11.

relationship between aesthetics and politics, drawing connections between a "South African musical experience" and a "promise", or hope, for a true democracy and a free South Africa.[85]

One of the way in which to foster a "South African musical experience" was to return to the traditional music of indigenous Africans. Barbara Titus's book on *Maskanda* (2021), delves into the genealogy of music in South Africa, specifically referring throughout to *maskanda,* the Zulu word for music which was derived from the *maskanda* Zulu folk music, and appropriated by the popular music industry in the mid-to-late twentieth century. Titus looks to the modern practice of performance and research creation as a mutually reinforcing duality, rather than independent forces. She acknowledges her position as an academic who ascribes to Western models of research in an attempt to reconcile it with a performance-based research approach more commonplace in ethnomusicological fields. Titus views her research as a "social, culturally situated and performative practice", whereby music analysis can be used to contextualize musical traditions as social, culturally situated performative practices.[86] By exploring how maskanda musicians rely heavily on oral musical traditions of the past while simultaneously making use of distinctly contemporary, North American models such as jazz and R&B, Titus argues that the fusion of traditional and contemporary models allows the musicians to observe and experience multiple subject positions simultaneously.[87]

The fusion of African music traditions with black American genres is further explored in the collection of essays *Hip Hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalizing World* (2012), which focuses on music genres such as rap, reggae, urban drumming and the birth and spread of

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[85] Steingo, *Kwaito's Promise*, 212.
[86] Barbara Titus, *Hearing Maskanda: Musical Epistemologies in South Africa* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 8-9.
[87] Titus, *Hearing Maskanda*, 209.

rap culture in the African diaspora. In the chapter "A Capsule History of African Rap," Eric Charry muses on the fact that, while popular in their home countries, African rap artists struggle to achieve international fame the way that North American- and U.K.-based rappers do. Charry turns to the 1970s as a turning point in rap for two reasons: the popularization of recordings and concerts featuring rap music.[88] These conditions brought rap to the attention of Africans in Africa, where artists could put a more traditional Africa spin on a heavily Westernized black music experience. This is not an uncommon phenomenon, as seen with jazz that has made its way back to Africa, and popular music such as bubblegum, which was co-opted by South African musicians such as Brenda Fassie in the 90s. The appropriation of black American culture into black African music traditions, Charry argues, creates an illusion of a sort of centrality or universality of the black youth experience, forging a mega-community that transgresses geographical borders. However, Charry also points to the distinction between cultures via vernacular languages and local social commentary in the lyrics of the music, a distinction that can be attributed to a strong need for socio-political commentary, which can be seen across multiple musical genres in countries such as South Africa. One such musician was Fassie, who was noted as South Africa's first black pop star and often hailed for her cross-cultural musical influences and, in particular, her choice to sing in indigenous African languages such as Zulu and Xhosa.

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[88] Eric Charry, "A Capsule History of African Rap," in *Hip Hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalizing World,* ed. Eric Charry (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2012), 2.

1.2.5 Published Literature on Brenda Fassie (1964-2004)

The 1980s marked a significant time in South African popular music, reflecting both the international influence of American hip-hop, and the desire for a more "South African" music. In 1983 the South African music group, Brenda and The Big Dudes, released their debut album, *Weekend Special.* The titular single, sung by Fassie, quickly dominated the South African music charts and even made it onto the international scene. At the forefront of this newfound popularity was a young girl who would go on to be dubbed by *The Guardian* as South Africa's "first black popstar." Yet, as shown in published scholarship, she was so much more than just that. In the article "Brenda Fassie and Busiswa Gqulu: a Relationship of Feminist Expression, Aesthetics and Memory," Siphokazi Tau notes the importance of struggle in the black South African community, and the solidarity that Fassie displayed through the cumulative audio-visual platform of both her song lyrics and music videos.[89] Tau suggests that Fassie's choice to break the rules and reject the expectations placed on her as a black woman was, in itself, a performative role that she took on in order reject the expectations of black femininity in South Africa.[90] Tau's exploration of the intersection of Fassie's gender and racial identities is a fascinating one, yet lacks the element of queerness that was so central to Fassie's identity. At the precipice of a new South Africa, Fassie would have had to navigate newly emerging narratives on the black female body. Tau hints at some helpful themes regarding the intersection of racial and gender identities in apartheid and early post-apartheid South Africa, such as the role of labour and the lived experience of black women as depicted in Fassie's music videos. These themes posit interesting

[89] Siphokazi Tau, "Brenda Fassie and Busiswa Gqulu: a Relationship of Feminist Expression, Aesthetics and Memory," *Social Dynamics* 47, no. 1 (2021): 26.
[90] Tau, "Brenda Fassie," 27-31.

questions regarding the essentializing of those bodies, but without the explicit element of queerness, further investigation is invited.

An intersection of sexuality and gender or a queered gender narrative is, however, explored in Nicol Hammond's "National Mothers", which paints Fassie as "the rebellious daughter" of a new South Africa.[91] Nicol suggests that "the notion of national mothers is sometimes used to celebrate women's contributions to the New South Africa and sometimes to sustain heteronormative gender relations."[92] According to Nicol, Fassie's queer identity and her struggle with drugs painted her as an "unfit" mother – in the sense of an idealized woman – , and as such was a representation of the alternative freedom available to those who rebelled against a heteronormative society. As the forebearer of a new musical genre, kwaito, Fassie could not escape the role of mother. However, Nicol suggests by Fassie subverted and expanded the limiting traditional association of "mother", and reinvented the term in a new way that was "defined by individual freedom, political voice, and relationality, rather than marginality and biogenesis."[93] Hammond's article advances the conversation on queer South African musicians, but does not extensively address music itself. Focused on Fassie's life and personal relationships, Hammond does not account for how identity is portrayed in the lyrics she sung and musical performance and how the music stands as a subversion of the national mother archetype. Herein lies an issue of a binary assumption (either focusing on the material body *or* the representative self through music).

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[91] Nicol Hammond, "National Mothers: Singing a Queer Family Romance for the New South Africa," *Women and Music* 19 (2015): 78.
[92] Hammond, "National Mothers," 81.
[93] Hammond, "National Mothers," 84.

In an article published in 2016, Senayon Olaoluwa deconstructs anti-Apartheid messages in Fassie's song lyrics to rationalize her popularity across racial lines in a particularly racially tense era in South African history.[94] Olaoluwa's suggestion that this was possible due mostly to Fassie's extraordinary voice discredits the importance of political-protest music in South Africa. In the brief and superficial analysis of Fassie's *Weekend Special,* Olaoluwa reduces the song lyrics to a woman's simple renouncement of an unfaithful man. In my reading of the song in Chapter Two, I offer alternate readings that ownership over one's own body. While pursuing a narrative of peacemaking and interracial community building in post-Apartheid South Africa, Olaoluwa almost entirely neglects any gender trouble in Fassie's life or music. In the article, Fassie's entire identity is reduced to that of representing an idealized black nation without ever acknowledging that the "black nation" itself was divided into hundreds of smaller factions, or the creative labour that went into this representation, such as the use of vernaculars in her songs at a time when English and Afrikaans remained largely at the forefront of music-making languages.

The importance of language to group-identities in South Africa is, however, explored in the article "Township 'Women's Language of Empowerment.'" There the co-authors theorize a lower-class vernacular language called "isi-Tsotsi" as a tool for empowerment in queer black music-making in South Africa.[95] Though not explicitly considered an "exclusively gay register," their analysis of isi-Tsotsi in song lyrics (including Fassie's) reveals the queer African woman as a site of power, who indicates sexual and political liberation by living "their life 'in the way they

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[94] Senayon Olaoluwa, "Singing Peace, Harmonizing Discordant Tunes: Tracking a Transnational Trajectory of Peace," *Peace & Change* 41, no. 4 (2016): 497.
[95] Stephanie Rudwick, Khathala Nkomo and Magcino Shange, "Ulimi Iwenkululeko: Township 'Women's Language of Empowerment' and Homosexual Linguistic Identities," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, no. 67 (2006): 62.

want', because they chose to speak in the way they want."[96] The suggestion that political power can be gained through language is a powerful one, given that language is one of the strongest markers of racial identity in apartheid. The emancipation of vernaculars from these stigmas of the uneducated created a site of validation for the interlinked political and queer identities through song lyrics.

Although Fassie wielded some political power through her music, it is also important to consider her own body as a political site. Martina Viljoen paints Fassie as an unpredictable, genre-defying rebel who struggled with drug and sex addiction yet at the same time Viljoen ignores the body as a site of sexual power and gender expression. Fassie's sexuality and sexual exploration (both in her personal life and in her music) is quickly glossed over in the article. It was mentioned only twice in relation to a failed marriage and the accidental drug-overdose of her lesbian lover.[97] While the article explores South African identities, it mostly discusses Fassie in relation to the burgeoning new musical genre of kwaito and her journey from bubblegum pop. Viljoen paints a picture of Fassie as a rebel but also as an unpredictable pop princess with a severe drug problem. Yet, there is no explanation for the *why* of any of her actions or how the black female body was perceived other than as a vehicle for catchy songs that bridged racial divides. Viljoen acknowledges the body as political but does not delve any further into using the body for a musical performance as a means to political ends.

The idea that Fassie constructed a character that could push boundaries that she, as an ordinary South African black woman, could otherwise not, is one that pervades much of the

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[96] Rudwick, "Township 'Women's Langauge of Empowerment,'" 62-63.
[97] Martina Viljoen, "On the Margins of Kwaito," *The World of Music* 50, no. 2 (2008): 60-61.

scholarship on her. Though some of the above scholars have hinted at this construction, Philippe Gervais-Lambony draws attention to this dichotomy of a "bad girl" character (similar to the "rebellious daughter" trope explored by Hammond) who could subvert expectations, and the real Fassie, a black woman who existed in a space catered predominantly to white men.[98] To illustration her crossing of these two worlds, Gervais-Lambony offers an analysis of her 1994 song, "Not a Bad Girl", which navigates the space between trying to give audiences what they want and staying true to herself in the face of massive public interest in her life. While Gervais-Lambony considers how racial, cultural and gender boundaries shifted as Apartheid ended, he does not ground his analysis in theoretical foundation. Like many scholars mentioned above, Gervais-Lambony does not consider the larger-scale on which Fassie's boundary-pushing impacted gender and racial perceptions in South African music as an artist who herself was in a "space of crossing".[99]

Though Brenda Fassie could still be considered a household name even twenty years after her death, there has not yet been any substantial research presented on her legacy. While scholars have theorized her queerness, her blackness, or her gender, there is a distinct lack of intersectional analysis in this research. To fill this gap, I employ intersectionality as an analytical tool in this thesis. In order to theorize black female body politics in the context of a country and music industry undergoing massive political-racial change, I propose considering all these identities—racial, gender, sexuality, cultural—in relation to each other and the musical output through which these identities manifest. Such a combined consideration has not yet been

[98] Philippe Gervais-Lambony, "(I'm) Not a Bad Girl," *ACME* 16, no. 1 (2017): 89, 95.
[99] Gervais-Lambony, "(I'm) Not a Bad Girl", 95.

undertaken in published scholarly work, and this gap in the research can be bridged by analyzing how Fassie's music represented her own self-exploration, which simultaneously gave a voice to marginalized demographics in a late- and post-Apartheid South Africa.

1.3 Chapter Outline

This first part of this chapter provided a short introduction to Brenda Fassie and her significance in South African popular music and has demonstrated that, despite her importance, the intersectional nature of racial and gender identities and the cultural impact of apartheid on her life and music has not been extensively explored. In this light, I offer an intersectional approach to research on gender, race, and cultural identity that can be used to contextualize my research on Fassie. The second part of this chapter has identified the most relevant existing scholarship on race studies, gender studies, South African cultural and political history, and South African popular music. The goal of this chapter is to provide an overview of the scholarship that is necessary to the analysis of Fassie's music, providing the theoretical foundations on which her music will be analyzed. Furthermore, the synthesis of this research demonstrates an intersectional understanding of how gender and race structures (both social and governmental) are imposed on Fassie and her music.

My research is presented through the lens of three selected songs: "Weekend Special" (1983), "Black President" (1990) and "*Nomakanjani*" (1999). Chapter 2 analyzes "Weekend Special" (see appendix A), which appears on Fassie's debut album of the same name and released in 1983 when she was just nineteen years old. The song, performed in English, depicts a casual sexual relationship with a man who does not respect her and only comes to visit her on Friday nights. However, Fassie rejects this situation claiming that she is not a "weekend special."

I have selected this song as the first point of entry into Fassie's music because it is overall relatively accurately representative of her early musical style. To date, the official music video on Fassie's YouTube account has amassed over one million views and the recording of the live performance of "Weekend Special" at Ellis Park Stadium in 1985 has eight hundred thousand views.

Chapter 3 analyzes "Black President" (1990), which foreshadows Nelson Mandela's 1994 inauguration as the first black president of South Africa. Overtly political, the lyrics of the song never explicitly state Mandela's name, but the cultural context of the lyrics "the people's president" dictates that the song is about him. This song was selected for its politicalness and because it demonstrates Fassie's interaction with South African race relations and opens an interesting avenue for the consideration of political protest in popular music.

Chapter 4 analyzes "*Nomakanjani*" (1999), one of several songs that Fassie wrote and recorded in Zulu. "*Nomakanjani*" is particularly significant because it was released at the same time the new "rainbow nation" ideology that promoted intercultural relationships between white people and people of colour was coming into effect. In the music industry, this meant that white audiences were largely gaining interest in African popular music (Afro-pop) genres such as kwaito, bubblegum and township pop. At the same time, to release a song in an African language that most white audiences would not understand could be seen as a reclamation of cultural identity.

In the conclusion, I consider how intersectional approaches to understanding how race, gender, and cultural identity in Brenda Fassie's music reflects changing ideologies surrounding South African politics at the time, and can offer new perspectives on South African music-making at a crucial time in the country's political history. By situating her works in an

intersectional identity framework, a clear narrative of musical and social change in the late- and post-apartheid years emerges.

Chapter 2: "I'm No Weekend Special": Sex, Sexuality and Race in Brenda Fassie's Debut Single

I first heard Brenda and the Big Dudes' "Weekend Special" in 2010, at a dance held at my all-girls high school in Cape Town. It was not inside the dance that I heard the song, however, but in the school courtyard where some older students were listening to music being played through small Bluetooth speaker connected to someone's phone. This was years before Spotify would become popular or Apple Music even existed. Based on the crackling, distorted quality of the music it was likely they had pirated the song. Some of the girls laughed and chatted while watching the boys dance and mess around. It was almost exactly the same scene one might have expected of the bubblegum, Afropop song when it was released in the 1980s if you replaced "school dance" with "club" or shebeen (popular illegal bars in townships). The lyrics, "I'm no weekend special" were lost on most of us, being too young to understand what a "weekend special" is, not to mention the gendered and sexual subtexts that make the song risqué. However, it would not have been lost on our parents, many of whom grew up listening to Fassie's music in its original context—whether as white or "non-white" listeners—which was the same politically and racially divided apartheid country that Fassie grew up in and became a musical icon of.

In 1983, six young black artists came together in Johannesburg to form a band called Brenda and the Big Dudes. Brenda Fassie, Rufus Klaas, Desmond Malotana, Job "Fats" Mlangeni, Dumisane Ngubeni, and David Mabaso released their debut album titled *Weekend Special* just a few months after they formed their group and quickly rose to fame amongst black South Africans. The album, which featured songs such as "I Wanna Be Single", "Touch

Somebody", and "It's Nice to be with People", went multi-platinum by selling over 200 000 copies in its first two years.[100] While it is not clear the exact demographic of lsiteners, it can be assumed that the album was primarily marketed for and consumed by black and coloured (i.e. non-white) South Africans, though it would not have been restricted to them and it is likely that some white South Africans also found the music appealing. Fassie's debut single, "Weekend Special", written by songwriter Melvin Matthews, became extremely popular in clubs in the black townships. It was also a staple at community street parties, with local DJs often remixing the song and sharing it with their fanbases.

In this chapter, I will discuss how gender, sexual experiences and sexuality are explored in Brenda Fassie's single "Weekend Special." How did Fassie work her own lived experience into her music and what did this mean for her fans who were dealing with similar experiences and grappling with parts of their identity (sexual or otherwise) and the ways that they engaged with her? What was the reception to the song and how did the reception change over time What makes the song still relevant to Fassie's fans today, years after she passed away? These research questions point to not just the impact and legacy of "Weekend Special", but also its relationship to Fassie's career and sexual identity. Furthermore, what role did the male gaze (specifically white male) play in the sexualization of Fassie's and other black women's bodies in the popular music industry? These are some of the initial questions that arise when considering not just the impact and legacy of "Weekend Special" but also its relationship to Fassie's career and sexual identity, and its role in the popular music scene in South Africa.

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[100] Viljoen, "On the Margins of Kwaito," 58.

The socio-political context of 1980s South Africa was extremely important to the creation of art. The South African Broadcast Channel *de facto* banned many songs that were sung in African languages, such as Zulu and Xhosa. Songs could also be banned for being too sexually provocative or encouraging relations (whether sexual or platonic) between races.[101] The first section of this chapter will explore the social, political and cultural contexts in which Fassie emerged as both an artist and a black woman, in order to better understand how she navigated her career in the racially segregated apartheid era. Furthermore, although Fassie had not yet come out as a queer woman, she was struggling with her sexual identity at the time, in addition to gender and race identities, which would have added layers to her performance and identity both on-stage and off-stage.[102]

The second section of this chapter delves into the lyrics of Fassie's "Weekend Special." Although the lyrics were actually written by songwriter Melvin Matthews, I argue that through Fassie's performance they can be interpreted in at least three ways:

1. Fassie is speaking to her lover, a male lover by default, as she was not yet out as a lesbian singer, who does not acknowledge her except on the weekends when they have arranged to meet. Perhaps he is married or has a girlfriend and Fassie is his mistress. Or perhaps he is simply not ready to commit to her.
2. Fassie could be referring to a white male lover who, due to the laws in place at the time stipulating that black and coloured people could not have engage in sexual relations with whites, could only sneak out to meet her on Friday nights.

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[101] Martin, *Sounding the Cape,* 143–145.
[102] Njabulo S. Ndebele, "Still Thinking of MaBrrr," in *I'm Not Your Weekend Special*, ed. by Bongani Madondo (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2014): 98.

3. Although not explicitly stated in existing scholarship "Weekend Special" is understood in queer communities in South Africa to be referring to a secret lesbian lover (I cite my own, lived knowledge, as a member of the South Africa queer community). Though Matthews likely would not have written it along these lines given that, at this point, Fassie was not yet "out" as bisexual or as a lesbian it is interesting to consider the queer connotations.

The third section of this chapter turns to the music itself. My research questions are as follows: How did Fassie's performance style and vocals create meaning in the song? How did the instrumentation and her band contribute to popularizing the bubblegum/Afro-pop genre in South African townships and ghettos? How did music videos and broadcasts of live performances contribute to evolving narratives around sex and sexuality in apartheid? Specifically, how/did perceptions of black women's bodies change when disengaged from the male gaze? Fassie's suggestive lyrical content, risqué dance moves, and ambiguous representations of black femininity and queer sexuality can be interpreted multiple ways depending on the listener's experience, which significantly impacted perceptions of desire surrounding black women's sexuality. In this chapter, I posit that "Weekend Special" offers an intersectional exploration of the limitations placed on the black female body—both queer and heterosexual—during apartheid in South Africa, and a growing desire to change these narratives both in music and on a larger political scale.

2.1 Bubblegum/Afropop in Context

Globalization and the spread of European and American music in the African diaspora in the 1980s gave rise to Afro-American fusion genres that blended traditional African styles with popular Western styles. *Mbaqanga* (African jive), for example, was the result of an American

jazz/African indigenous fusion that first grew popular in the townships and slums of Johannesburg in the 1960s, before becoming one of the most popular musical styles in South Africa among young people of all races. This was particularly significant as most musical styles in South Africa had previously been as segregated as the country until this genre that white, black and other South Africans could find mutual enjoyment in appeared.[103] As Brenda and the Big Dudes rose to fame in the early to mid-1980s, they became a part of this culture of fusion by producing music in these genres and listening to them. The evolution of genres like *mbaqanga* in the 1960s and 1970s led to the popular "township music" which infused political hopes and social commentary into lyrics.[104] Township music, in turn, led to the popular genre of bubblegum music, or township pop, in the 1980s. Bubblegum pop was a light, unserious dance style that originated in the US, but it was popularized in South Africa by black musicians like Fassie, who appropriated the use of repetitive, simple lyrics propped up by dance beats and suggestive music videos or live performances. Western bubblegum pop was popularized by fictional bands such as the Archies or Josie and the Pussycats—animated bands in cartoon shows. Real bands, such as the 1910 Fruit Gum Company also achieved success with the genre in the 1960s.[105] Unlike Western bubblegum which was largely unserious, however, some South African bubblegum artists did not shy away from political or sensitive topics, although they were still packaged and presented in a fun and upbeat manner.

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[103] Lara Allen, "Mbaqanga," *Grove Music Online*, 2001, https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/display/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo–9781561592630–e–0000051740?rskey=JQVcLm&result=1.
[104] David Copland, "South Africa, Republic of," *Grove Music Online,* 2001, https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/display/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo–9781561592630–e–0000043028?rskey=Ak09Fw&result=2.
[105] Jonas Westover, "Bubblegum (USA)," *Grove Music Online*, 2001, https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/display/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo–9781561592630–e–1002240316?rskey=OPOV7i&result=1

Bubblegum was popular with many young black people as a type of dance music that offered a reprieve from much of the intense, political music that dominated the South African music scene in the 1980s. However, while "townships were held in thrall by the bright, light dance styles of local bubblegum", Fassie and other artists were well-known for covertly slipping socio-political commentary into their songs.[106] They would use a mix of African languages such as Xhosa and Zulu with "Iscamtho" or "Tsotsitaal" (slang derived from combinations of multiple languages) and English to represent events and tensions developing in the country at large, and within the smaller communities of the artists specific townships. One of the greatest appeals of this type of music was the synthesis of American trends with more locally accessible vernaculars and themes. Bubblegum was just broad enough as a genre that it could capture a global essence and make use of elements of jazz, R&B and American hip hop while still representing local identities.[107]

That South African bubblegum was able to fuse elements of American and South African music was a particularly pertinent observation given that most young people of colour in South Africa in the 1980s would have been far enough removed from their tribal ancestry that their indigenous musics alone did not provide any relevant meaning to their lived experiences. One of the main goals of the apartheid government was to dissolve Indigenous African practices, culture, and history, but the cultural genocide of Africans had been occurring since the involvement of missionaries in African education.[108] Artists instead looked to African-American

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[106] Viljoen, "On the Margins of Kwaito," 58.
[107] Viljoen, "On the Margins of Kwaito," 63.
[108] Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution Vol. 1*, 11; Roosenschoon, "Keeping our Ears to the Ground," 266.

reclamations of racial identity through genres such as hip hop and jazz.[109] Hip hop music, in particular, used lyrics to reaffirm cultural identities and create meaningful narratives. Along those lines, bubblegum (and its subsequent evolutionary form, kwaito, to be discussed in later chapters) embraced a need to reclaim cultural identities in the wake of Afrikaans hegemony. Through the genre mixtures of Bubblegum, artists like Brenda Fassie became voices for a disenfranchised, disgruntled black youth who existed within township culture, yet yearned for something bigger.

2.2 An Intersectional Approach to Interpreting Lyrical Content in "Weekend Special"

Bubblegum, township pop, house music, *kwaito*. Whatever the genre, it was easy to dismiss the lyrics of these dance music genres as unimportant in comparison to the beats and grooves that made them so popular.[110] These genres were often trying to emulate "American" sounds and so the music itself would have been held in higher regard than words, as comes across in the constantly repeating choruses and sparsely composed verses of songs like "Weekend Special" (see Addendum A for the complete lyrics). However, a consideration of how these lyrics is presented and interpreted is still beneficial, particularly when it enables multiple interpretations.

The first interpretation I offer is, perhaps, the most obvious one: that Fassie is directly addressing her lover, who only comes into contact with her once a week at their prearranged meeting. Perhaps the most widely accepted interpretation, due in large part to the title of

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[109] Eric Charry, "A Capsule History of African Rap," in *Hip Hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalizing World,* ed. Eric Charry (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2012), 2.
[110] Viljoen, "On the Margins of Kwaito," 57.

"Weekend Special" which is derived from weekend grocery sales and used in this context to signify a casual sexual relationship, is that Fassie is secretly meeting with a man that does not want her in his day-to-day life and wants to keep their affair private. The first stanza claims:

> You don't come around
> To see me in the week
> You don't have the chance
> To call me on the phone

In these opening lines, Fassie directly addresses the "you" she is referring to, never naming, or attaching a specific person from her life to the song, likely because these words were not written by her, but by Melvyn Matthews. However, based on the period (1980s) it would not be unwarranted to assume that it is a heterosexual man, by default. The slightly accusatory opening instead creates a sort of one-sided dialogue between accuser (Fassie) and accussée: You don't come around/ to see me in the week. The unknown "you" is not an everyday fixture in Fassie's life. The line "you don't have the chance/ To call me on the phone" implies that he is too busy to talk to her.

Yet, this person still plays some role in Fassie's life, as depicted in the following stanza: "But Friday night, yes I know/I must be ready for ya, just be waiting for ya." This lyric suggests that even though he is too busy to visit her during the week, he will be seeing her on Friday. "Waiting" would suggest that he is coming to her. After a repeat of this stanza, the chorus is presented for the first time: "I'm no weekend special." The term, "weekend special" is used with inferred knowledge that listeners will understand that it means a casual sexual relationship that typically takes place on the weekend. What is particularly interesting in the chorus is the

rejection or refusal to be viewed as a weekend hookup, yet the previous lyrics would suggest that she is exactly that.

Certainly, the following stanza also serves to confirm this imagery:

Another lonely night
On my own again
How I long for your love
I need your touch
Yes I do

The line "another lonely night on my own again" could be interpreted in several ways. The first and perhaps most obvious one would be any one of those weeknights when her lover does not come around. The second could be the Friday night after he has visited her and has gone home. This would certainly reinforce the notion of a casual relationship if her lover did not stick around after their tryst. "How I long for your love" would suggest that she certainly does not view this relationship as casual, but instead hopes for something more. The longing is felt throughout the song and gives a new depth to the chorus of "not your weekend special", suggesting that not only does she no longer wish to be casual, but is wanting something more out of this arrangement. Yet the desperation of "I need your touch, yes I do" could also suggest that she will continue with the current arrangement because she is so invested in this man (as we assume him to be).

After several repetitions of the line "I'm no weekend special" in the chorus, Fassie states: "You don't love me no more." This lyric is particularly interesting as it implies that the antagonist did, at some point, love her (or she thought/assumed that he did). This idea is not taken up anywhere else in the song, and it feels strange to introduce the concept of love into a song about a casual relationship right towards the end. It is also interesting to note that at no point does Fassie claim to love this man. She wants his touch and there is certainly longing in

these lyrics, but when it comes to love, it is suggested that he has now fallen out of love with her. The song ends with the repeating words "I'm no weekend special", which fade to silence as the song comes to an end.

While I argue that there are multiple, open possible interpretations of "Weekend Special", existing scholarship largely accepts the face-value interpretation I have offered as my first point of entry, without presenting any further analysis. In the article "Singing Peace," diaspora and transnational studies professor, Senayon Olaoluwa, calls "Weekend Special" no more than a "critique of male adultery sung as a [female] lament about an unfaithful boyfriend."[111] Similarly, in the article "God Rock Africa," anthropologist David B. Coplan calls the song, "political only in the sexual sense of protesting the subordinate romantic status of the 'weekends-only' girlfriend of the philandering African man."[112] To my mind, however, these accounts fail to consider that the simple act of a black women navigating such a topic so publicly is, itself, inherently politically subversive. By only considering face-value lyrical analysis, three large assumptions are made in this critique expressed by these two scholars: first, the song holds no more depth than a simple critique of non-committal men; second, the person Fassie addresses is indeed a man, and, lastly, this man is black. While it would be highly likely, based on the time and location of the production, that this was the standard interpretation for many listeners, a closer reading of the text offers several alternative interpretations.

One such interpretation is that the lyrics might refer to the unfairness of racial segregation, and the secrecy that interracial couples had to commit to. In "On the Margins of

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[111] Senayon Olaoluwa, "Singing Peace, Harmonizing Discordant Tunes: Tracking a Transnational Trajectory of Peace," *Peace & Change* 41, no. 4 (2016): 498.
[112] David B. Coplan, "God Rock Africa: Thoughts on Politics in Popular Black Performance in South Africa," *African Studies* 64, no. 1 (2005): 12.

Kwaito," Viljoen does suggest that the lyrics of "Weekend Special" could point to the "so-called apartheid 'pass system' that forced couples into separation."[113] However, the point is not elaborated upon. It an interesting argument and while (to my knowledge) neither songwriter Melvyn Matthews nor singer Brenda Fassie ever made any suggestions that this song implicitly pointed to the pass laws of apartheid, that is not to say that a deeper meaning was not interpreted by its young, black fanbase. Pass laws (as discussed in Chapter 1) were a group of laws intended to segregate black and coloured South Africans from whites, and restrict their movement, employment and living to designated areas. These pass laws also forbade the intermingling of people of different races and prohibited sex between races. Specifically, the *Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act No. 55* made interracial marriage—and therefore interracial romantic relationships—illegal.[114] However, while interracial relationships were uncommon because of their illegality, they did still occasionally occur. Comedian and talk show-host Trevor Noah details his life as the illegal child of a black mother and white father during apartheid in his autobiography, *Born a Crime.*[115] Interpreting Fassie's "Weekend Special" as the product of one of these illegal affairs would certainly place the song in a more politically subversive light.

While Fassie was by no means a documented political activist on the frontlines of the anti-apartheid movement, as a black musician living under an oppressive white government, she was congenitally involved in political music-making. Ethnomusicologist Gavin Steingo has suggested that "Brenda Fassie's music did not comment upon, reflect, or produce the social conditions in which it was created and heard. It bore no direct relation to its 'actual' social

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[113] Viljoen, "On the Margins of Kwaito," 58, 62.
[114] Laura Moutinho, "Condemned by Desire: Miscegenation, Gender, and Eroticism in South Africa's Immorality Act," *Social Dynamics* 49, no. 1 (2023): 130–31.
[115] Trevor Noah, *Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood* (Canada: Anchor Canada, 2019).

conditions," and that "like the music of her songs, Fassie's lyrics typically suspended any direct relationship with the conditions of 1980s South Africa."[116] Yet, many of her songs contained overtly political themes, such as her 1990 hit "Black President" (see Chapter 3 of this thesis), which details Nelson Mandela's arrest, the 1963 Rivonia Trials, and his eventual release from prison in 1990. In the song, Fassie proclaims "Freedom for *my* black president" [emphasis mine]. Even Fassie's post-apartheid decision to stop singing in English and instead embrace a more African-centric music style using Xhosa and Zulu languages were her political choices. Although Steingo's claim about on her earlier music of the 1980s, such as "Weekend Special," might be true in the sense that there were no obvious social commentary evident in her songs. It would, however, be inaccurate to suggest that political commentaries are altogether absent in these songs. Certainly, two of the most important aspects of music (classical and popular music alike) are audience interpretation and analysis. While I do not suggest that anyone can completely reinterpret music produced under apartheid through an *ex post facto* historical lens, one can imagine how contemporary listeners might have perceived and understood the subtilties of Fassie's subtext. In that regard, the song "Weekend Special" could be interpreted as an illicit affair between two people of different races under apartheid segregation.

If one were to take the "Weekend Special" lyrics at face value, another possible consideration is the need for light-hearted, fun music that could offer some joy against the otherwise bleak backdrop of township life. In a different journal article Steingo writes: "It is true in some sense that the 1980s was a decade of violent struggle. However, it is also true that the struggle often

[116] Steingo, *Kwaito's Promise*, 41.

took on the form of frenzied 'fun'."[117] Steingo offers an explanation of what he calls a "politics of refusal" – the idea that political movement does not only occur in serious protests and riotous action but also through what he calls "chaotic enjoyment" in the face of governmental oppression.[118] Taking this idea in the context of Steingo's other suggestion that Fassie's music did not relate to the social conditions of South Africa, one might consider that even her "non-political" music might have reflected social conditions in other ways. Removed from the suggestions of mixed relationships one could return to my original, surface level consideration of "Weekend Special" as exactly that, namely, a tale of a woman who no longer wishes to participate in a weekend dalliance without the promise of a deeper relationship. However, it would be a fallacious argument to suggest that there is then no further meaning that can be inferred by listeners and critics alike. If to simply exist as a black woman during apartheid is political, then to deliberately create light-hearted entertainment in the form of superficial dance music in the face of that oppression is inherently subversive. In the preface to his book, *Kwaito's Promise,* Steingo writes: "It is a truism in music studies that talking about 'the music itself' is not only wrong but also problematic and even 'dangerous.' We all know that music does not exist in a vacuum and that it is always connected to society, culture, gender, politics, power, and so on."[119] The fact that Fassie existed and performed as a black woman within the societal and cultural conditions that she did ultimately situates her music as both a site of production within and a product of these conditions.

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[117] Steingo, "Historicizing Kwaito," 85.
[118] Steingo, "Historicizing Kwaito," 85.
[119] Steingo, *Kwaito's Promise*, x.

Another interesting reading of this song that is yet to be theorized is that of a queered one. While commonly accepted by listeners and critics that "Weekend Special" deals with a heterosexual relationship, I posit an alternative understanding that even though Brenda Fassie was not "out" as a queer person when she released "Weekend Special," she was still a queer woman at that time. After her coming out as bisexual in the late 1980s and then lesbian—though she used this term mostly for its shock value, as she continued to engage in sexual relationships with both men and women—Fassie performed her repertory as a queer woman. Thus, when analysing sexual and gendered themes in this song, one can retroactively consider it within a queered context. Offering a queer reading of Fassie's heterosexually themed songs reclaims the typically erased black queer identities in house and kwaito music. In *Queer Voices in Hip Hop*, musicologist Lauren Kehrer suggests that "the particular intersections of blackness and queerness are so often subsumed under either race or sexuality—that is, black *or* gay, not black and gay."[120] Popular music spaces in South Africa that focused on "international" music styles such as disco, hip hop, R&B or bubblegum were notorious for promoting music through a heterosexual lens, regardless of the artists' sexuality, musical content or any other perceived connections to queer communities. Particularly in the case of black artists, who were already held to a higher standard of conformity than their white counterparts would have, if the choice was to recognize an artist as black *or* queer, they would largely have been placed within that black framework instead of a queer one.

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[120] Lauren Kehrer, *Queer Voices in Hip Hop: Cultures, Communities, and Contemporary Performances* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2022), 24.

In this regard, the need for an intersectional approach to identity becomes imperative. Fassie was black, and a woman, and queer. To consider one aspect of her identity without the others offers a shallow understanding of who she is as a complete person. Social theorist Patricia Hill Collins suggests that intersectional research can bring together "ideas from disparate places, times, and perspectives, enabling people to share points of view that formerly were forbidden, outlawed, or simply obscured… because they inform social action, intersectionality's ideas have consequences in the social world."[121] In Fassie's case, the need to contextualize her as black, queer, woman stems from the fact that each of these facets of her identity were marginalized. By sharing these points of view intersectionally, one not only gains a clearer understanding of how South African apartheid society worked, but also how spaces were created for progress.

It therefore comes as no surprise that as a queer black woman, little consideration has been given to Fassie's earlier music as a part of a queer South African music canon. After all, without an intersectional approach to interpretation, "Weekend Special" is widely accepted as a default heterosexual work and there is little argument that the person referred to in the song might be someone other than a man. Kehrer notes that genres like hip hop (one of the Western influences that kwaito was derived from) were typically considered "masculinized" spaces that rejected both women and non-heterosexual experiences.[122] However, there is much ambiguity in the lyrics of "Weekend Special". Note the lack of pronouns that signify a gender, any references to names or socially regarded "masculine" traits, and a complete lack of racial connections beyond Fassie's own skin. These ambiguities allow a queering of the song, making it eligible for

[121] Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*, 2.
[122] Kehrer, *Queer Voices in Hip Hop*, 40–41.

a space both in a *post- factum* queer BIPOC music narratives, and in its contemporaneous south African context. Even the songwriter, Melvyn Matthews, explained that "the song tells the story of a woman who complains about being treated by her lover as second-best" without the use of any gendered pronouns that might give insight into the deliberately ambiguous sexual dynamics in the song.[123]

One of the main criticisms that often arise in queer interpretations of supposedly heterosexual works (or vice versa) is a misinterpretation of the artist's intention—in the case of "Weekend Special" however, the lack of overt gendering in the song or in the artists' discussions of it makes this issue moot. However, the implication of a heterosexual default remains problematic. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler suggests that "The replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original. Thus, gay is to straight not as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy."[124] In this regard, that Fassie as a queer woman continues to be reduced to a heterosexual stereotype (i.e., the "copy" Butler refers to) demonstrates that even in the case of non-heterosexual situations (such as a queer female using non-gendered language in her song), heterosexist assumptions (defaulting to male-female categories) are pervasive. As Butler makes clear, the issue of constructing heterosexuality even where the case is not explicitly apparent demonstrates how heterosexuality is never the "original" state, but only a repeated imitation. Butler's critique of heterosexual constructs demonstrates the importance of not defaulting to an

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[123] Bongani Madondo, *I'm Not Your Weekend Special: Portraits on the Life + Style & Politics of Brenda Fassie* (Johannesburg: Picador Macmillan, 2014), 59.
[124] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 43.

"original" when approaching identity intersectionally, and instead challenging existing social orders in order to contextualize, criticise and ultimately rectify social inequalities.

2.3 Objectification and the Male Gaze in Audio/Visual Aspects of "Weekend Special"

If lyrics were considered secondary to the music (i.e. instrumentation and beat) of dance music genres (as discussed in the previous section), then an analysis of the music both independent from, and in conjunction with, the lyrics is warranted. "Weekend Special" opens with a synth keyboard solo, accompanied by plucked chords on electric guitar, a simple bass line, and a consistent drum (high-hat) beat in the back. Immediately, listeners are presented with a simple 4/4 beat, electronic instrumentation and a tempo situated somewhere around the tempo of a quarter note = 120. The music is simple, fun and repetitive, and it is easy to see why so many fans, critics and scholars alike might be so quick to dismiss it as a shallow dance song.

Even the imagery in the official music video on Fassie's official YouTube channel would suggest that this song is just five minutes of grooving: it opens with a ceiling shot featuring a spinning disco ball before panning to Fassie, alone in the middle of a dance floor. Fassie, who dons a sparkly blue and white jumpsuit with high slits up the legs, sways back and forth to the beat provided by her instrumentalists, smiling brightly at the cameras. Panning to the band, the screen shows smiling, grooving musicians before movie back to a wide angle of Fassie, structing around the dance floor and showing off some dance moves. The whole time that Fassie is singing, she smiles and dances and almost appears to flirt with the camera. Even as Fassie denounces her role as a "weekend special" in her relationship, singing the chorus "I'm no weekend special" several times over, she remains smiling and dancing while her band reacts similarly. As Fassie moves into the second verse, stating "another lonely night, on my own

again", her face gets slightly more serious. No longer smiling, she continues to move around the dance floor to the beat of the song. However, the overall vibe of the song remains upbeat and unserious. Throughout the video, it is clear that dance plays a very important role in this song. Fassie's provocative moves when she states "just be waiting for you"—bending her legs and running her hands down the exposed skin from the cut out in her jumpsuit—indicate some element of sexual connotation in the song.

In the lyrics to "Weekend Special," Fassie both refutes and acknowledges her objectification by her lover, for whom she would appear only to be exploited as a female body, devoid of any emotional attachment. Yet, if one were to argue that the objectification of women is prevalent in this song, both as performed by Fassie and as interpreted by the listener, the argument would more likely be made in favor of the official music video found on her YouTube channel.[125] In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," media studies scholar Laura Mulvey posits that the "male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly."[126] The woman is viewed as a sexual object in the eye of male desire. In the "Weekend Special" music video, Fassie is the sole focus, the only female band member, and the only one gyrating on the dance floor while the rest of her (all male) band remain in one location in the background. Furthering the analysis of the male gaze, Communications and Media Studies professor Mark Flynn suggests that "women are the most frequent targets of objectification within music lyrics, and female artists are more likely than male artists are to objectify

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[125] Brenda Fassie, "Weekend Special," YouTube video, 4:43, uploaded 26 November 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VjQD—fgCFM.
[126] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings,* ed. by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford UP, 1999): 837.

themselves."[127] Because the sexualization of female bodies is so common in both visual media like music videos and lyrical-musical content, women often objectify themselves without even consciously realizing they are doing so. Furthermore, when female artists are so openly objectified, it often affects how female listeners and viewers perceive themselves. In short, "individuals [women] may internalize media and other external perspectives in the process of defining their physical selves."[128] In dance music genres such as house or kwaito, in particular, women are held to a different standard than men, and objectified either in their own performances or as background entertainment in male artists' music videos.

Black women's centrality to the kwaito genre, and their impact on black popular music in South Africa has historically been undervalued due to perceived notions of sexual promiscuity and bodily performance that do not align with a male-dominated industry. Female artists, particularly black women like Fassie, faced these stereotypes and double standards on a daily basis, yet today it is her name that is commemorated when discussing the formative years of kwaito in the 1980s. Some scholars, such as Xavier Livermon, point to artists like Fassie and her female successors like Lebo Mathosa (1977–2006), as artists who "pushed against the sexism embedded within kwaito, the larger South African music industry, and South African society to create a space for imagining gender and sexuality outside of societal norms."[129] Fassie would have faced a particularly layered type of sexism that focused on black women and their bodies under apartheid rule. While all women have felt some degree of sexual discrimination at every point in history, everywhere in the world, black women certainly would have faced a more

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[127] Mark A. Flynn, Clay M. Craig, Christina N. Anderson, and Kyle J. Holody, "Objectification in Popular Music Lyrics: An Examination of Gender and Genre Differences," *Sex Roles* 75, no. 3–4 (2016): 164.
[128] Flynn et al., "Objectification in Popular Music Lyrics," 165.
[129] Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 123.

reductive and othered approach to sexism than their white counterparts. In this regard, then, Fassie would have been confronted with the paradoxical task of embracing her black femininity and reimagining the black woman's body in performance without being completely reduced to the hypersexual black woman stereotype. As Livermon notes, "the cult of femininity is enacted through performances that require women to 'exhibit traditionally feminine traits, in other words, that as powerful as women are at work, they submit to the [hetero]patriarchal cult of femininity elsewhere'."[130]

Historically, white– dominated heteropatriarchal societies have viewed black women not just as inherently more sexual beings than white women but as perpetrators of sexual deviance. While Fassie would have dealt with these perceptions, it is also clear through her performance of "Weekend Special" that she both embraced her own feminine, sexualized body (e.g., touching herself in front of the camera) while simultaneously rejecting the accepted conventions of femininity in order to exert some residual agency. My argument begs the question of *how* Fassie disidentified from stereotypes of, and attempted to reinvent, black femininity in her music in general, and in "Weekend Special" in particular. Arguments could be made that Fassie leaned into the so-called "cult of femininity" by participating in sexual performativity, that is, by acknowledging herself as a sexualized woman in her music and in her personal life. I, though, offer the counterargument that her awareness (whether conscious or subconscious) of how black woman were perceived in South African apartheid society and her subsequent refusal to give power to those stereotypes became an important, authentic representation of black women's' sexuality without reducing it for a (white) male gaze.

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[130] Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 126.

Fassie's reclamation of her sexuality from the male gaze can be heard in her refusal to be a "weekend special" but, perhaps more importantly, it can also be *seen* in the situated lens-based performance of the music video. A specific camera style was adopted by township pop/early kwaito musicians whereby the camera "feels part of the circle – it never feels intrusive" because the performance is for the camera, but also for the community that the music belongs to. Rangoato Hslane calls this style "an evocation of unfolding narrative in which the camera is both a participant and a witness."[131] In the case of "Weekend Special," one can immediately notice this style of cinematography. The space between the camera and Fassie feels almost intimate, and it never strays far from her for long. It also fits with Hslane's narrative that "it is not unusual to find a kwaito song that is perceived as social commentary employing a video that looks banal."[132]

In my opening analysis of both lyrics and the music/video, I note the simplicity of the musical style, and of having Fassie alone on a dance floor for the entire song. However, a consideration of the visual representation of feminine pleasure through this situated lens-based performance shows that, for many viewers, the subject of both lyrical content and video is desire, sexualized or otherwise. In my view, it is Fassie's desire to be more than a weekend special in the lyrics that invites both her and the viewer's possible sexual desire in the somewhat risqué dance moves displayed in the video. Either way, the song is rooted in desire (heterosexual or otherwise) and "feminine" sexuality that discloses the limitations imposed on the black female

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[131] Rangoato Hslane and Bhekizizwe Peterson, "Matters of Kwaito and Why Kwaito Matters," in *Routledge Handbook of African Popular Culture*, ed. Grace A. Musila (London: Routledge, 2022), 355.
[132] Hslane and Peterson, "Matters of Kwaito," 356.

body. These limitations, I argue, frame Fassie's desire to change these narratives not just within the black music community, but also the sexual politics of the apartheid regime at large.

Chapter 3: "Let Us Sing": Musical Activism in "Black President" (1990)

In the years following Brenda Fassie's 1983 hit "Weekend Special," the young pop star enjoyed immense success both internationally and in South Africa. Some of her most memorable performances include her first international performance at Zenith concert hall alongside Johnny Clegg, Via Afrika and Hotline,[133] and the 1988 Standard Bank Miss Black South Africa pageant, which at the time was the only major black beauty pageant in South Africa.[134] Following a brief affair with fellow Big Dudes bandmate, Dumisani Ngubeni, she gave birth to her only child, Bongani Fassie, in 1985. Two years later Brenda and The Big Dudes announced the band was splitting up and she continued her career as a solo artist with the release of her first individual album, *Ag Shame Lovey*, in 1987. In 1989 she was married to Nhlanhla Mbambo in a small, private ceremony but the two also went on a large and expensive wedding tour across South Africa that flaunted the extreme wealth Fassie had accumulated over her short career so far, totaling over ZAR300,000 (around ZAR2.8 million or USD146,000 today) in comparison to the average yearly income of black person which, in 1989, was on average less than ZAR25,000.[135]

As Fassie's career picked up momentum, she began to carry more weight in both South Africa and international music scenes in Europe and the US, allowing her to be more outspoken about the apartheid political landscape. In the early days of her career in the mid 1980s, she claimed that: "When the interviewers asked questions concerning politics. I said that with the

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[133] Emily Boulter, "The Unforgettable Concert that History Somehow Forgot," *The Forward*, May 18, 2021, https://forward.com/culture/469773/the–unforgettable–concert–that–history–somehow–forgot/.
[134] Mmabatho Selemela, "Touch… Touch Me Baby: Soundtrack to My Sowetan Childhood," in *I'm Not Your Weekend Special*, ed. Bongani Madondo (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2014), 113.
[135] Janet Smith, "Little Red Corvette," in *I'm Not Your Weekend Special*, 94; Mike McGrath and Merle Holden, "The 1989–90 Budget," *Indicator SA* 6, no. 1–2 (1989): 32.

State of Emergency, it would be dangerous to say anything… it would put me in real trouble."[136] By the late 1980s, by contrast, she felt emboldened to share her views with the media, claiming that "as a black woman I am very political. I eat politics, I sleep politics. Everything in my life is political because I can't run away from it."[137] Not only was she political because she was a black woman living through apartheid, but—importantly—she was also the niece of the apartheid activist and the first black president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela. Fassie's family ties to South Africa's most famous activist, combined with the fact that she was in fact a black woman no matter how popular she became with white audiences, made almost every action she took or opinion she made political by default.

Regardless, one of her most direct contributions to political activism was made through her music. In 1990, Fassie released a studio album, *Black President*, which featured tracks with provocative titles such as "I Won't Run", "Shoot Them Before They Grow", and the titular "Black President". The album was largely inspired by Nelson Mandela's twenty-seven-year imprisonment (1964–1990) and the international outcry for this release. However, due to restrictions imposed by government censorship, the album could not explicitly be named after Mandela.[138] Instead, Fassie used metonyms such as the catchy "my black president" and "the people's president" in the lyrics indicating phrases commonly associated with him, for audiences familiar with South African politics. The "Black President" single was launched on February 9th,

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[136] Smith, "Little Red Corvette," 93.
[137] Viljoen, "On the Margins of Kwaito," 62.
[138] Duma Ndlovu, "Brenda Fassie's Crossroads," in *Not Your Weekend Special*, ed. Bongani Madondo (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2014), 132.

1990, just a few days before Mandela was pardoned and released from prison, and it became a popular soundtrack to the end days of apartheid and the dawn of a free South Africa.

The immense popularity of "Black President" with both black and white audiences raises several thoughtful questions: What role did Brenda Fassie's music play in bridging the divide between the black communities who fought for justice (particularly for black women in South Africa, who were often excluded from justice movements), and the white allies who helped expose said injustices? As she established an international reputation, especially with her growing success in the US, how did musical activism contribute to a sense of African nationalism and black identity that belonged to a community beyond the geopolitical borders of South Africa? And finally, how did "Black President" and Fassie's outspoken behaviours towards the end of apartheid help create a soundscape of national identity and belonging for black South Africans and, in particular, black women?

In this chapter, I offer an analysis of "Black President" against a number of contexts: the socio-historical lens of late-apartheid music-making, musical activism, and Fassie's identity, her public persona and her roles within the South African and international (mostly US and UK) music scenes. In these contexts, the importance of an intersectional research approach becomes evident. During the dissolution of apartheid in the 1990s, understandings of racial and national identities began to shift. Collins suggests that "Intersectionality offers a window into thinking about the significance of ideas and social action in fostering social change."[139] Musical activism was instrumental in fostering social change throughout apartheid. Particularly, the confluence of musical protestors of all races (discussed in the next section of this chapter) to promote new

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[139] Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*, 286.

ideas for a new, post-apartheid South Africa. As discussed in Chapter 1, black South Africans during apartheid were not recognized as citizens of South Africa. As apartheid came to an end, questions emerged regarding which groups had the right to call themselves "South African" and how best to foster a new, inclusive sense of national pride in the aftermath of decades-long legislated segregation. In this way, an understanding of the intersection of ideas revolving around nation and race are particularly significant.

The first section of this chapter, following the introduction, explores the impact of apartheid activism—and shifting understandings of nation and race—on music and musical activism. In response to their harsh treatment under apartheid, black South Africans turned to African nationalism to overcome oppression by creating solidarity amongst black South Africans, regardless of tribal, geographical or other political affiliations, and to create a broadened, more inclusive sense of community.[140] One of the ways in which they achieved these goals was through art and music, first in the form of musical-political activism, and then later as a tool for reconciliation. The second section of this chapter evaluates both implied and explicit political commentary in "Black President." Additionally, I explain how the lyrics of Fassie's "Black President" inspired listeners to reject apartheid ideals and work towards racial equality, and how the lyrics subverted the expectations associated with black dance music. Section three looks at how her political music-making empowered specially women: by performing this music, she was not just a witness to history but an active participant in *making* it and ultimately inspired other black women to voice their demands for freedom. By using her fame to combine serious political commentary with the perceived less serious dance music she was known for, I posit that

[140] Comaroff, *Body of Power,* 40.

Brenda Fassie's "Black President" demonstrates musical activism in fostering African pride and bridging the divide between black and white communities and exemplifies black women's music-making at a time when it has largely been considered insignificant to historical-political narratives in music scholarship.

3.1 The Significance of Music in Anti-Apartheid Activism

The colonization of Indigenous populations in South Africa dates back to the seventeenth century. As in other colonized lands, when South Africa received its first settlers in the 1600s, a clear narrative emerged that the culture of the West through the colonizers was inherently superior to that of the natives and, therefore, the sense of Western superiority justified the natives' subordination. Much of this colonialist way of thinking was demonstrated in the writings of nineteenth-century historiographers who, according to musicologist Olivia Bloechl, "designated certain nations and races as possessing history in…and others who did not."[141] In the context of the colonization of African nations, the darker-skinned natives were denied their history and were instead subject to the Western settlers who believed themselves superior and behaved accordingly. Certainly, in the case of South Africa one can see the execution of this colonializating logic and institutionalization process in official nationalism of the country (encouraging white Afrikaner pride and denied people of colour), which formed the political condition for its music. The prevailing thought regarding European art music in the 1800s was that it was vastly "better" than that of the ethnics. National histories of music were reserved for

[141] Oliva Bloechl, "Introduction," in *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship,* ed. by Olivia Bloechl, Melanie Lowe and Jeffrey Kallberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 11.

notated forms of music which were considered a higher art form than those of the oral tradition, while folk musics and popular musics were excluded from serious consideration by music critics unless they were appropriated into more cultivated categories. For this reason, one must consider how much music played a role in politics and how the act of music-making could itself become a political act by subverting Western hegemony by rejecting these conventions.

In studies of cultural musical histories and the musics of cultures who have been subjected to Western colonization, it is important to acknowledge how these cultures and their identities interact with and have been influenced by Western thought, whilst simultaneously acknowledging that "Differentiation affects musical dispositions and capacities as well as choices and actions, such as creation, listening, or judgment. Viewing identity via a critical concept of difference involves conceiving it temporally and contingently, as a particular understanding of a self, another person, or a group that is formulated relative to others."[142] Identity is always expressed in companionship or opposition to something else, which could be rooted in linguistic, emotional, or social identification in oppositional terms (i.e., us versus them) or historical ties such as ancestry (i.e., us and our ancestors). Studies of exoticism and Orientalism have used these constructs to understand "foreign" musics through the lens of Western scholarship.[143]

To understand the significance of the nation, nationalism and nation-ness, one needs to consider how they have "come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy."[144] In this context, the

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[142] Bloechl, "Introduction," 5.
[143] Bloechl, "Introduction," 32.
[144] Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London & New York: Verso, 2006), 4.

nation is defined, "an imagined political community… imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."[145] In this context, then, nationalism refers to the process of creating that community, while nation-ness expresses one's belonging to it. It would be interesting to consider how these concepts apply (or do not apply) to colonised countries (such as South Africa) and colonised people (such as indigenous Africans) beyond the European continent where these concepts of nationalism were first applied. In the case of apartheid South Africa, black people from different tribes, geographical locations and cultural backgrounds were all forced into one umbrella category framed by the white government. By denying black Africans any sort of official nationalism (i.e., the benefits afforded to citizens of a country) and differentiating them from white South Africans, the apartheid government in effect forced black Africans to create an oppositional community—an assembly of Africans from various backgrounds (that otherwise might not have been so receptive to working together)—that is now understood as African nationalism or Pan-Africanism.[146] This comradery was fostered by segregated black people beyond politics, including arts and music-making, and numerous facets of life.

During apartheid, the restrictions on black music-making were severe. In 1945 the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) proposed radio programmes exclusively for black listeners to promote European culture as superior to Africans' and apartheid ideologies presented in native languages. The vernacular radio initiative was named "Radio Bantu," referring to the

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[145] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.
[146] Benyamin Neuberger, *African Nationalism* (London & New York: Routledge, 2023), 5–6.

languages spoken by indigenous Africans.[147] The later principals of separate development in the 1960s, which materialized in large part due to the distinction of Bantu (black), Coloured and White South Africans in the Population Registration Act of 1950, also paved the way for what scholars such as Grant Olwage have called "musical citizenship."[148] Consequently, Afrikaner music was heavily promoted by the apartheid government while black music was regarded as inherently "lesser-than" and, therefore, excluded from South African musical citizenship. However, the separate development of music and Radio Bantu also allowed black music and musicians to create their own, new styles and write music that served their own purposes and listening agendas.

In the 1970s the SABC had seven broadcast channels (Radio Zulu, Sesotho, Setswana, Xhosa, Lebowa, Tsonga and Venda) with around five million Radio Bantu listeners.[149] However, there was no way to stop listeners from tuning in to different services and by the mid-1980s nearly half of Springbok Radio's (a white service that often played European or "light"/white South African music) listeners were black, meaning that black South African musicians were simultaneously cultivating vernacular music styles for Bantu radio, and mixing it with the popular European music styles (e.g., Fassie's early music such as "Weekend Special" discussed in Chapter 2). Music became an important tool for promoting a homogeneous white Afrikaner identity, but it was also used oppositionally to establish a sense of community and cultural identity for black South Africans. As the production of protest music was popularized (due in

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[147] Charles Hamm, "'The Constant Companion of Man': Separate Development, Radio Bantu and Music," *Popular Music* 10, no. 2 (1991): 157, 169.
[148] Grant Olwage, "Apartheid's Musical Signs: Reflections on Black Choralism, Modernity and Race–Ethnicity in the Segregation Era," in *Composing Apartheid: Music for and Against Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008), 39.
[149] Hamm, "The Constant Companion of Man," 167.

part to the rise of rock 'n roll politics in the West, and in part because of the political climate of South Africa), the apartheid government became even more restrictive regarding public music spaces, music production and radio broadcast. Historically protest music has offered a creative space to express resentment toward oppressive states, demand change, and share information about their cause with international sympathizers.[150] In South Africa, indigenous protesters imbued their performances with their identity—either through spoken (lyrics) means or through more surreptitious evocations of specific imagery or cultural references—a politics of recognition that granted agency to protestors who were not recognized by the colonial institution.

The rise of popular protest music in South African can be seen to originate around the 1980s and perhaps one of the most significant shifts in South African music during apartheid was the establishment of white, Afrikaans musicians who publicly decried racial segregation and demanded the fair treatment of black citizens in their music. Historian Maria Suriano suggests that a counterculture of white anti-apartheid music began to appear in the Yeoville neighbourhood of Johannesburg in the 1970s. According to Suriano, Yeoville was "one of the first urban spaces in apartheid South Africa where the Group Areas Act of 1950 began to break down."[151] This counterculture meant that people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds began to work together as allies and create together long before the official dissolution of apartheid segregation laws. Consequently, it also meant that these allied groups collaborated interracially to spread awareness to other South African citizens and international supporters about the horrors black people were facing.

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[150] Erik D. Gooding, Max Yamane, and Bret Salter, "'People have Courage!': Protest Music and Indigenous Movements," *Comparative American Studies* 18, no. 3 (2021): 383.
[151] Maria Suriano and Clare Lewis, "Afrikaners is Plesierig! Voëlvry Music, Anti–Apartheid Identities and Rockey Street Nightclubs in Yeoville (Johannesburg), 1980s–90s," *African Studies* 74, no. 3 (2015): 404.

White Afrikaans protest music, coined *Voëlvry* (directly translating to "free bird"), emerged in South Africa in the 1980s—a social and musical movement that constituted a satire-based, punk-influenced rock music sung in Afrikaans. Due to the breakdown of racial segregation in Yeoville, Afrikaans musicians were able to "express oppositional identities in sharp contrast to the hegemonic Afrikaner identity that had been constructed and was closely guarded by the Afrikaner nationalists and the [National Party]"[152] without the same fear of repercussion white activists in other communities faced. Of course, white Afrikaners were just one among many demographic groups producing anti-apartheid protest music at this time. Though it was far more dangerous for black artists to do the same, white Afrikaners too were expressing their dissatisfaction with the apartheid regime through music.

At this point in her career, in the late 1980s to early 1990s, Fassie was living in a neighbourhood called Fleurhof, not too far from Yeoville and certainly close enough to witness the effects of the *Voëlvry* movement. In 1992 Charl Blignaut—a white journalist working for the progressive Afrikaans newspaper, *Vrye Weekblad*—was visiting Yeoville where he was introduced to Fassie's music. He quickly fell in love with her style and documented his fascination with her popularity in the multi-author memoir *Not Your Weekend Special* (2014). He requested an audience with Fassie, which she accepted, and he recalls of the meeting that "Brenda Fassie was the most liberated South African I'd met – black or white."[153] This remark came two years after Brenda had released her most politically subversive album, *Black President*, of which the title track became one of the most popular protest songs of late apartheid.

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[152] Suriano, "Afrikaners is Plesierig!" 404–405.
[153] Charl Blignaut, "In Bed with Brenda: A White Moffie Falls for a Black Vixen," in *Not Your Weekend Special,* ed. Bongani Madondo (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2014), 72.

The album was different to her earlier pop success in that the music was more emotional and far more explicitly political. Her *Black President* coproducer and cowriter, Sello "Chicco" Twala, claimed that she "became the Winne Mandela of song" by creating an anthem that reflected the demands of "young people…in the streets every day challenging a system that had incarcerated their fathers and sent their brothers and sisters to prison. Everyone, including white liberals, was calling for the release of Nelson Mandela."[154]

3.2 Anti-Apartheid Rhetoric and Socio-Political Commentary in the Lyrics and Music of "Black President"

The official music video for Brenda Fassie's "Black President" (1990) opens with the famous lines declared by Nelson Mandela in a 1961 interview regarding peaceful versus violent protest: "There are many people who feel that it is useless and futile to continue talking about peace and non-violence against a government whose only reply is savage attacks on an unarmed and defenceless people."[155] Ironically, the African National Congress (of which Nelson Mandela was a key member) established its armed forces known as *Umkhonto we Sizwe* in December of the same year in which that speech was made.[156] The serious, but hopeful speech is followed by music, which consists of a poppy drumbeat (hand drum in the original, added drum set in the radio edit) with tambourine and subtle choral-like harmonies in the background. The first stanza follows:

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[154] Ndlovu, "Brenda Fassie's Crossroads," 132; 134.
[155] Brenda Fassie, "Black President," 21 October 2021, YouTube Video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRkSi3tJDlE.
[156] Mia Swart, "'The Road to Freedom Passes Through Gaol': The Treason Trial and Rivonia Trial as Political Trials," in *The Courtroom as a Space of Resistance: Reflections on the Legacy of the Rivonia Trial,* ed. Awol Allo (London: Routledge, 2015), 162.

The year 1963
The people's president
Was taken away by security men
All dressed in a uniform
The brutality, brutality
Oh no, my, my black president

The opening verse, which is set to a poppy drumbeat (hand drum in the original, added drum set in the radio edit) with tambourine and subtle choral-like harmonies in the background. While it does not consist of similar high-energy pop style of "Weekend Special," it is a surprisingly cheerful melody for a topic as serious as the incarceration of Nelson Mandela, but not entirely unexpected considering Fassie's typical upbeat dance music style. The verse is referring to the Rivonia Trial, which began in 1963 after several anti-apartheid activists were arrested for conspiracy and sabotage against the ruling National Party.[157] Nelson Mandela had actually been caught and arrested a year before the activists' farm hideout was discovered and raided, yet he was put on trial alongside his fellow ANC conspirators who were labelled "terrorists" in accordance with the *Unlawful Organizations Act*, which allowed the National Party to effectively ban any group activity they considered a threat to public (white) safety.[158] Found guilty, Nelson Mandela was sentenced to life in prison and remanded to Robben Island Prison, where he would spend the first eighteen years of his twenty-seven years of imprisonment, from 1964 to 1982.

Fassie was born in November 1964, meaning that she would have had no first-hand memories of her uncle as a free man. The imagery she depicts in this first verse was likely passed

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[157] Shana L. Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 246.
[158] Act No. 34 of 1960, *Unlawful Organizations Act*, 7 April 1960. https://disa.ukzn.ac.za/sites/default/files/pdf_files/leg19600407.028.020.034.pdf.

to her through family members' accounts, documentation in news sources and perhaps a dash of urban legend, as Nelson Mandela's notoriety as an anti-apartheid leader grew as she grew up. What is most interesting to note in the song opening is that at no point does she explicitly state Nelson Mandela's name, yet it was immediately recognized amongst South African listeners that the song ought to refer to him. The insinuation of the 1963 Rivonia Trial, as in the first verse "The year 1963," might have provided important contextual clues, but it is the next verses—"the people's president" and "my black president"—that point to Mandela, as these expressions served as aliases commonly associated with him when his name was banned from all media, including songs, in attempts to quell black resistance.[159]

Continuing to carefully avoid any direct mention of Mandela or other freedom fighters, Fassie cleverly weaves a story that is open to multiple interpretations—either literal or metaphorical—that allow the listener some added agency in the listening process, creating a more engaging and participatory listening experience. The next two stanzas of the song are as follows:

> Him and his comrades
> Were sentenced to isolation
> For many painful years
> For many painful years
> Many painful years
> Of hard labour
>
> They broke rocks
> But the spirit was never broken

[159] Redmond, *Anthem*, 236.

Never broken
Oh no, my, my black president

The second and third stanzas describe the life of Nelson Mandela and his fellow political prisoners on Robben Island. Though never explicitly stated, Fassie's lyrics depicting "many painful years of hard labour" breaking rocks suggest the years Mandela and other prisoners on the island working as hard laborers, extracting materials from a lime quarry as part of their punishment.[160] The highlight of these verses are the words "the spirit was never broken." This is the first indication that this song is not simply lamenting a past full of suffering but is also one of empowerment and even joy that emerge from forced labour. What is particularly interesting to note is the phrase "*the* spirit" instead of "*his* spirit." Left open to multiple interpretations, one could argue that "the spirit" is that of the anti-apartheid resistance, a collective resistance shared by many instead of his personal resilience. According to this song, the spirit of resistance could not be broken as readily as the rocks in that quarry were, though difficult for them to be broken as they presumably were.

Alternatively, perhaps, the definite article "the" refers here also to the spirit of the political prisoners whose rebellious spirit remained unbroken despite years of hard physical labour, abuse, emotional, verbal, and mental sufferings they must have faced at the Robben Island prison. This group would, of course, include Mandela, which would be corroborated by the final line of this stanza "oh no my black president." As I discuss in Chapter Two, the use of suggestive language and indeterminate references leaving the lyrics open for interpretation is not

[160] Fran Lisa Buntman, *Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 49–50.

unusual for Fassie. In "Weekend Special," she never explicitly states the gender or race of her lover. Thus, she must have been fond of lyrical guesswork. Open-ended references give informed listeners a sense of autonomy in the listening process. They open a space for multiple interpretations according to their familiarity of the sociopolitical contexts at hand.

Like the previous stanza, the next one can also be interpreted openly, depending on the listener. This time, however, Fassie does not lament the past, but envisions a future (that would come about a few days after the song's release):

> Now in 1990
> The people's president
> Came out from jail
> Raised up his hand and said
> "Viva, viva, my people"

The first verse of this stanza fast-forwards the history from 1963 to 1990. The *Black President* album was released by CCP Records on the 9th of February 1990. Two days later, Nelson Mandela was released from prison. The album was by no means prophetic, as talks of his release had been in the works for some time already. Negotiations for the release of political prisoners began in 1989 and on February 2nd, 1990, the newly elected president of South Africa F.W. de Klerk announced that previously prohibited organizations (such as the ANC) would be legalized, and that all political prisoners who were innocent of inciting violence would be freed.[161] This group included Nelson Mandela, who was released unconditionally. Fassie had obviously no idea of what he would actually say upon his release. The lyrics "viva, viva, my people" can be

[161] Lodge, "Resistance and Reform," 481.

interpreted in two ways: as an exclamation of black resilience throughout apartheid and Mandela's imprisonment, or as a symbol of the forthcoming unity of South Africans of all races (in this instance, long live "my people" could refer to South African citizens as a whole, including all racial groups). This verse does anticipate his first speech after his release broadly. His first words to the public as a free man were as follows: "Comrades and fellow South Africans, I greet you all in the name of peace, democracy and freedom for all. I stand here before you not as a prophet, but as a humble servant of you, the people. Your tireless and heroic sacrifices have made it possible for me to be here today. I therefore place the remaining years of my life in your hands."[162] In a sense, both Fassie's "viva, viva my people" and Mandela's "comrades and fellow South Africans" inspire a similar sense of unity and hopefulness for the future. This stanza of "Black President" then serves as an important musical connector, not just to the suffering and significance of apartheid activism, but to fruits of those labours.

Continuing in the linear narrative style that Fassie has employed up until this point, one might expect her to continue envisioning a future beyond the present-day 1990 she arrived at in the previous stanza. Notable by this point is that unlike most pop/dance songs, "Black President" lacks a chorus in the traditional sense of a song form, which would be repeated several times after a section of verse. Instead, it employs analogous phrases such as "my black president" at the end of each stanza, functioning as a sort of structural anchor for the different historical markers, locations, and feelings she evokes throughout the song, in place. This formal anomaly might indicate Fassie's intent to present a linear narrative of historical events from 1963 to 1990

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[162] Nelson Mandela. "Text of Nelson Mandela Speech," *The Associated Press*, 12 February 1990, https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3SJJ–H7D0–0038–72RC–00000–00&context=1516831.

where the use of a chorus would structurally disrupt a sense of linear narrative. However, if one were to look for some musical focal point, as it were, in the music (as a refrain would typically present), one could use the stanza in which Fassie calls for the celebration of Mandela's freedom and the support of his presidency: "let us rejoice for our president/let us sing for our president." In these two verses, the music is joyful: the crescendo sung by Fassie and her backup singers, with intensified drumming and celebratory handclapping, contribute to the effect of jubilation.

Note that the majority of the 4 minute 30 second of the song focuses on Mandela. The song mentions the first-person pronoun "my" only at the end of each stanza to acknowledge a South African subject's relation to him. This distribution of uneven attention reaffirms the temporal locus on the hero: Although Mandela may not be the current president of South Africa, when the song was released, he *is* the president Fassie and so many other South Africans envision for the future. This vision is further reified in the final stanza of the song ("I will die for my president/I will sing for my president"), when Fassie changes the focus of the song for the first time in the song from the Mandela and other freedom fighters to herself, declaring unequivocally her singing as a political act in support of Mandela as *her* president. As shown in this shift, Fassie emerges as a singer and a political subject by pledging her allegiance to the anti-apartheid cause and declaring through singing the dawn of a new South Africa. The juxtaposition of being willing to "die" for Mandela versus wanting to simply "sing" for him in the next line is stark. To my mind, the two desires—a willingness to sacrifice for Mandela and a craving to use her sing for Mandela's presidency—demonstrates both the extremes of anti-apartheid activism and the importance of music as an act of political protest. As South African poet Duma Ndlovu put it, "not only did Brenda and Twala join the masses who were constantly marching and calling for a change to the oppressive regime, they put their money where their mouths were and

started singing, not *for* the masses, but *with* the masses."[163] Through singing, recording, and releasing the song "Black President" at the threshold of a critical political moment in the history of South Africa, Fassie was able to acknowledge not just the suffering of black people during apartheid, but also their hopes for a new democracy, presenting them as intertwined elements of an anthem that would be heard across the nation.

3.3 Black Feminism in Fassie's Musical-Political Activism

At first consideration, the political messaging of "Black President" appears only to address the racial injustices of apartheid, crying out for a future where a black man will be president. While there is no content in "Black President" that specifically addresses feminist issues, it is important to explore and understand the role that women of colour have played in music-making, politics, and arts activism. The *Black President* album illustrates a shift not just in Fassie's work, but also in the role of popular musicians and women musicians in political protest and musical activism in the late apartheid years. In Chapter Two I discuss how Brenda Fassie was a kind of "mother" of the kwaito-style music that began to emerge in the 1980s. However, some scholars, such as Viljoen, have argued that only in the 1990s when kwaito was cemented as a genre in the South African music canon.[164] The period from the 1980s through the 1990s marked a particularly poignant time as black musicians began to make their mark in the late anti-apartheid struggle and imagine their future as the apartheid system would be dismantled.[165] Women, particularly women of colour, made significant contributions to this field of musical

[163] Ndlovu, "Brenda Fassie's Crossroads," 134.
[164] Viljoen, "On the Margins of Kwaito," 58.
[165] Coplan, "God Rock Africa," 14.

activism, and regardless of whether their musical content explicitly dealt with feminist issues (as in this case, it did not) the representation it gave women in the anti-apartheid movement is valuable.

Much of the output of protest music in the anti-apartheid movement was exclusionary in some way, whether intentional or not. "*Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika*" (1897/1927) for example, which was the anti-apartheid anthem of the ANC and future national anthem of South Africa), consisted of quotes of choral hymns or old folk songs in indigenous languages that the majority of white South Africans and international sympathizers did not understand. On the other side, the Afrikaans *Voëlvry* music informed Afrikaans sympathizers, but did little to inspire black listeners who unfavorably regarded Afrikaans as a colonizer language or international listeners who simply did not understand the words. Fassie's political music was popular because it depicts details of townships and the black freedom struggle as they were happening, in English, using the stylizations of American popular musics that were internationally familiar.[166]

Understanding her music's place in the protest movement is important because, although many women were involved in anti-apartheid resistance, their contributions and struggles have largely gone undocumented in scholarship. Historian Kalpana Hiralal uses the same Rivonia trial that features in "Black President" as evidence of male political activists receiving more media attention than women activists: "In the 1960s well known political activist Dorothy Nyembe was sentenced to 10 years in Kroonstad prison. During this time the Rivonia trials received world attention… Dorothy's imprisonment on the other hand, received scant attention."[167] Although

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[166] Viljoen, "On the Margins of Kwaito," 58.
[167] Hiralal, "Narratives and Testimonies of Women Detainees in the Anti–Apartheid Struggle," *Agenda* 29, no. 4 (2015): 35.

Fassie herself was never a political prisoner in any legal sense, she was bound physically and mentally by a different kind of imprisonment, as she had to follow an industry standard different from that of male musical activists such as Hugh Masekela, Abdullah Ibrahim, or Lucky Dube. Some of this may have had to do with the musical genre that these songwriters used. The bubblegum pop that she had become so well-known for was "influenced by 'pre-packaged' globalized cliches."[168] The aforementioned musicians enjoyed a certain prestige due to their more "serious" pursuit of genres such as jazz and reggae, in opposition to the mass-produced pop industry. Yet, as Fassie's bubblegum style evolved with the early kwaito movement, her work did shift noticeably to address more broadly issues of African identity, local pride, and political resistance rather than women's experiences. One might consider that the combination of "globalized cliches" (i.e., her American hip hop, house, and pop influences) with serious localized issues allowed her to connect nationally with her South African audience whilst simultaneously fostering an awareness of South African issues on a global stage. Unlike more complex music whose nuances were not widely understood or enjoyed, by participating in an international popular music culture, Fassie was able to engage with a broad audience both in South Africa, and internationally.

When attempting to historicize Fassie's contributions to South African protest music and the late years of the anti-apartheid movement, I find it important to recognize that black women were often considered a threat to societal hierarchies.[169] Notions of black femininity were inextricably linked to ideas that women, especially women of colour, should be quiet and

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[168] Viljoen, "On the Margins of Kwaito," 65.
[169] Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 125–126.

obedient. As Fassie pushed back against the heteropatriarchal constructs of black women in Africa, she proffered a great deal of representation for the groups who felt excluded from the anti-apartheid movement. In her musical world (both onstage and offstage as a carefully constructed public persona), she performed the physical labour of a musician, but she also performed the invisible labour of a black woman who was constantly subject to scrutiny by a racist and sexist industry within a similarly racist and sexist country. Her work thus offered black women a way to reconstruct perceptions of their identities and their places not just in the music industry, but across black communities. Reading and listening to her "Black President" from an intersectional analytical framework, I argue that her music offered a promise of a new era of democracy in South Africa as apartheid began to be dismantled.

Chapter 4: South Africa's "Kwaito Queen": African Pride and Cross-Cultural Reconciliation in "*Nomakanjani*" (1999)

The years following Nelson Mandela's release from prison in 1990 were tumultuous. While the National Party's ideals of Afrikaner nationalism were slowly being dismantled and the ANC was unbanned, political violence continued. In the four years between Mandela's release his and his 1994 inauguration as the first black president of South Africa, around four thousand casualties of armed conflict between the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and ANC supporters were reported.[170] While the IFP and ANC's anti-apartheid stances initially aligned in the 1970s, by the late 1980s the IFP's Zulu-centric vision was in contention with the ANC's multicultural vision for the future. IFP leaders claimed that the ANC was targeting them in attempts to make them appear ungovernable, while the ANC claimed that Inkatha was the main instigator and perpetrator of the violence. Rumours that the IDF was colluding with the apartheid government to discredit the ANC ultimately led to a decline in public support and strengthened support for the ANC. When apartheid finally ended and a new era of democracy dawned, South Africans needed to look toward a more inclusive future where people of all races could live in harmony in a new, united society coined in 1994 by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and adopted by Nelson Mandela as "the rainbow nation."[171]

In 1994, a precarious peace was settled between the indigenous Africans who had been persecuted for so many years and their white Afrikaans oppressors who had considered themselves the "true" South Africans even before apartheid. While racial tensions were still high

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[170] Lodge, "Resistance and Reform," 481; 483.
[171] Carolyn Holmes, *The Black and White Rainbow: Reconciliation, Opposition, and Nation-Building in Democratic South Africa* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020), 45.

in the aftermath of apartheid, the National Party agreed to share power with the ANC, while the ANC agreed that social reforms would be "incrementally gradual, rather than radically redistributive."[172] The looming question of the new South Africa was: what did it mean to call oneself South African? Indeed, the preamble of the new 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa reads: "We the people of South Africa, recognize the injustices of our past; honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land; respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity."[173] The inclusion of the statement that South Africa belongs to "all" who live in it, with the indication of a diverse demographic is significant. From one side, it included South Africans of colour who had previously not been regarded as citizens, and from the other side it included the white South Africans of European descent who questioned their place in the new South Africa.[174] The hope was to foster a common sense of nationhood amongst black, white, and other South Africans of colour and to elicit a homogenous sense of South African pride. South Africans of all races realized an opportunity to reconstruct a South African identity they could be proud of.

Brenda Fassie is one such person who sought to reconstruct the parameters of South African pride, and black South African identity. In a 1992 interview, journalist Charles Blignaut asked her if she was the black Madonna. She replied, "Yes. I'm also the black Brenda."[175] It was

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[172] Lodge, "Resistance and Reform," 485.
[173] Preamble to the Consitution of South Africa, 1996. https://www.gov.za/documents/constitution/constitution-republic-south-africa-1996-preamble-07-feb-1997#:~:text=We%2C%20the%20people%20of%20South,it%2C%20united%20in%20our%20diversity.
[174] Gavin Steingo, "'I am Proud to be South African Because I am South African': Reflections on 'White Pride' in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *African Identities* 3, no. 2 (2005): 198-199.
[175] Blignaut, "In Bed with Brenda," 75.

clear that while she did not disagree with comparisons to the internationally famous Madonna, she also wished to be recognized as herself: a black South African musician. Later in the same interview, Blignaut asked: "You don't want to go overseas and try and break into the pop market there?" She did not. "I must break it here first. People must go crazy for me here first. *Boer of nie boer nie* [Afrikaner or not], black or white. They must go Brenda Fassie! Brenda Fassie! As much as they go Michael Jackson! Or Madonna! This is my country and I have to prove myself here first."[176] The statement had a twofold meaning: Brenda declares South Africa as her home, yet she still felt the pressure of needing to prove herself not just to the black communities with whom she shared history, but to the whites (specifically the *boer* [Afrikaner]) who occupied her ancestral lands and had oppressed her people and her culture for centuries.

Shortly after this impassioned interview in 1992, Fassie's musical relevance began to decline. To be clear, she remained a household name and continued producing music, but her next few albums, such as *Umuntu UyaShintsha* (1995) and *Now is the Time* (1996) were met with only moderate success compared to her previous releases like *Black President*. The once vibrant popstar was struggling with drugs and alcohol and, the death of lover, Poppy Sihlahla, in 1995 from accidental drug overdose.[177] After that, Brenda was admitted to a rehabilitation facility. In the years following Poppy's death, she found herself struggling to find her place in the post-apartheid world, going in and out of drug addiction. Young South African were less fascinated with American sounds than they had been in the past, as the 1990 lift on the arts ban and growing accessibility to the internet made international music genres Fassie had drawn from

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[176] Blignaut, "In Bed with Brenda," 80.
[177] Staff Reporter, "Weekend Special Bites Back," *Mail & Guardian*, December 1, 1995, https://mg.co.za/article/1995-12-01-weekend-special-bites-back/.

more accessible than ever and therefore less exotic. Instead, black South African pop artists began working to turn kwaito into a more local genre with less of the outside influence cultivated by its bubblegum and hip-hop predecessor like Fassie. It was not until 1998 that she made a true come back with the album, *Memeza,* which produced one of the biggest hits of her career, "*Vulindlela*" (Open the Way). This was her cultural resurgence, and the start of a five-year streak winning best-selling album of the year at the South African Music Awards (SAMAs).[178]

Perhaps one of the most interesting points when considering "*Vulindlela's*" success is that the song was sung entirely in Zulu and Xhosa with some other Nguni colloquial expressions that would have been identifiable to listeners proficient in these languages. It was not Brenda's first song to be sung in an African language, but it was the first to receive a recognition such as a SAMA and the popularity of a song using indigenous languages was unprecedented. The hit was followed up by what many fans consider to be the climax of Brenda's career, namely, the album *Nomakanjani* (1999). South Africa cultural theorist Bongani Madondo called the 1999 album a "collection of 'bonus' or 'hidden' tracks for *Memeza.*"[179] It was also her first album to go triple platinum, a feat that had media outlets hailing her as "South Africa's Kwaito Queen."[180] The titular song, "*Nomakanjani*", remains a staple in the South African pop music canon. Its popularity amongst South Africans of all races, as well as its reach into surrounding countries such as Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Namibia, raises several questions. What prompted the increased white interest in Afropop music? How did the meaning change when this song was

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[178] Lara Allen, "Chocolate Ice Cream Tests & Other Tough Loves," in *Not Your Weekend Special,* ed. Bongani Madondo (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2014), 125.
[179] Bongani Madondo, "Shut Up and Play," in *Not Your Weekend Special,* ed. Bongani Madondo (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2014), 240.
[180] Allen, "Chocolate Ice Cream Tests," 125.

sung in languages these white audiences did not use? Did white listeners use "*Nomakanjani*" to identify more closely with an "authentic" African culture as they came to terms with the new, multicultural South Africa? When considering black listeners, how/did "*Nomakanjani*" help foster African pride? How could this song be seen as a reclamation of cultural identity? Is there an intersectional approach to understanding how Brenda used this music to deconstruct the social hierarchies of apartheid?

In this chapter, I propose that "*Nomakanjani*" served two purposes (whether intended by Fassie or not) in bridging the divide between races around in the early post-apartheid years in two ways. First, by using indigenous languages in tandem with the more recognizable conventions of popular South African music, Fassie was able to appeal to listeners of all races, regardless of their language proficiencies or level of comprehensive of certain indigenous languages in the lyrics. Second, by normalizing the use of and listening to indigenous languages within popular music genres, she contributed to a growing sense of African cultural pride that younger generations could connect and identify with. Thus "*Nomakanjani*" simultaneously serves as a musical example of reconciliatory efforts in post-apartheid South Africa, the desire to build African pride and a sense of nationhood, and the possibilities for distinctly South African popular music. The second section of this chapter explores how perceptions of cultural and racial identities shifted in the early post-apartheid years. Specifically, how cross-cultural and cross-racial listening experiences contributed to a process of remediation. Looking at how changing understandings of identities affected and were reflected in the South African popular music scene, I offer a situated explanation for the ways popular music began to move away from attempts to mimic international styles, and instead began to use traditional African music elements (primarily language, but also instrumentation and compositional style) to create more

"local" sounds for South Africans. The third section offers a textual and stylistic analysis of "*Nomakanjani*" based on the contexts outlined in the first two sections. I argue that Brenda Fassie serves as an example of the influence popular music had on building new, and repairing old, cultural identities in post-apartheid South Africa.

4.1 Shifting Understandings of Identity in Post-Apartheid Music and Politics

On April 26, 1994, Nelson Mandela won the first free, democratic presidential election held in the Republic of South Africa and on May 10 he was officially inaugurated as the country's first black president. Mandela's inauguration was a momentous event attended in-person by thousands of South Africans of all races, international dignitaries, royalty from around the world, and millions more viewers watching the live international television broadcast. In his presidential speech Mandela proclaimed: "We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity - a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world."[181] The idea of a "rainbow nation", wherein people of all races and cultures were accepted and could live together in harmony, would become widely romanticized in post-apartheid South Africa, despite continued racial tensions.

In reality, however, the mid-to-late 1990s saw a steady increase in unemployment and the disparity between the wealthy white minority and the poor black majority continued to increase.[182] The apartheid government was not overthrown quickly. White citizens had feared

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[181] Nelson Mandela, "Inaugural speech," from *Full Nelson Mandela Inauguration on 10th of May 1994*, posted May 8, 2015, 59:51, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3OrcQ18JtY&t=200s.
[182] Steingo, "'I am Proud to be South African'," 195.

mass retaliation from the formerly oppressed black masses and a drastic reallotment of resources, but in actuality the new constitution allowed the majority of white South Africans to keep their properties even if located on stolen lands, and the lack of mandated wealth distribution ensured that many whites did not have to make any financial reparations. South African scholar Gavin Steingo suggests that in the transition from apartheid to democracy there was an "absence of a radical rupture with the past – the transition was merely a negotiated change and not a revolution in the classical sense."[183] The lack of abrupt radical change left many black citizens feeling disempowered and unhappy with the gradual dispersal of social reforms rather than "radically redistributive."[184]

The socio-political need to bridge the racial divide between South Africans in the early post-apartheid years was also reflected in the music industry. Until 1997, South Africans needed to look no further than their own national anthem to see the disparity between races and the lingering discrimination of apartheid. The national anthem of apartheid, *Die Stem* (1958-1993), referred to South Africa as the "fatherland" of Afrikaners and called them the true "children of South Africa."[185] In an attempt to represent the black majority, a second official national anthem called *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* (Lord Bless Africa) was introduced in 1994 and would be performed alongside *Die Stem* at all events requiring the singing of a national anthem. *Nkosi*, which was originally penned by African musician and pastor, Enoch Sontonga, in 1897 with several added versus by Xhosa poet Samuel E. Mqhayi in 1927, had been adopted by the ANC and the anti-apartheid movement as a musical symbol of both black consciousness and indigeneity. Its

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[183] Steingo, "'I am Proud to be South African'," 196.
[184] Lodge, "Resistance and Reform," 485.
[185] David B. Coplan and Bennetta Jules-Rosette, "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika and the Liberation of the Spirit of South Africa," *African Studies* 64, no. 2 (2005): 302.

inclusion as an anthem alongside *Die Stem* was an attempt at unification. However, that goal could not be achieved under the irreconcilable ideologies represented by these two anthems: black liberation and white Afrikaner supremacy. It was only in 1997 that a new idea was eventually proposed to combine the two anthems into one. In the new anthem, the first two verses were taken from the Sontonga-Mqhayi version of *Nkosi* with the first verse sung in Xhosa and Zulu, and the second verse translated into Sesotho. The third verse was lifted from *Die Stem* and sung in Afrikaans, while the fourth verse contained a newly composed English part by South African composer, Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph.[186] Government officials hoped that the linguistic mix of the new anthem would better foster a sense of national pride for all citizens in the wake of continued racial and political tensions engendered by the remnants of apartheid ideologies that left citizens questioning their identity in the new South Africa. However, some citizens maintained that it was disrespectful to include a song of black liberation alongside one of the oppressors, while others critiqued the descriptor of a rainbow nation as inaccurate, for it suggests all past atrocities had been forgiven and where all races now lived in harmony.[187]

The new national anthem was just one example of how music was being used by the government to curate multiracial and multicultural sites of reconciliation. In Johannesburg, a new culture of black youths who "approach[ed] identity as something malleable and fluid, which may actively be created through various cultural resources, including clothing and music" was emerging.[188] Dubbed "Y culture" (youth culture), these young black South Africans believed that

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[186] David Coplan and Bennetta Jules-Rosette, "'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika': Stories of an African Anthem," in *Composing Apartheid: Music for and against Apartheid*, ed. by Grant Olwage (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008), 201-202.
[187] Coplan and Rosette, "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika," 302.
[188] Mary Robertson, "The Constraints of Colour: Popular Music Listening and the Interrogation of 'Race' in Post-Apartheid South Africa." *Popular Music* 30, no. 3 (2011): 456.

music played a crucial role in self-construction and that race itself was largely a social construct that each individual identified with in their own way. While the idea of race as a social construct might seem rather obvious today, in 1990s South Africa races were considered "real, natural entities; thus race-thinking remained entrenched, and a non-racial future simply meant that the future would be 'multiracial': at best a co-existence free of racism."[189] The "Y culture" desire to disengage from essentialized understandings of race, and to deconstruct these identifications was extremely forward-thinking for the time.

In "Y culture," notions of the self and race were reflected in popular music, especially the kwaito genre of which Brenda Fassie was a progenitor. Since the first European colonies settled in the 1600s, and throughout apartheid (as discussed in Chapter 1) traditional African music-making had been discredited and considered "less than" white music and the use of Afrikaans and English as the medium of instruction in black schools had even further removed Africans from their musical-cultural heritages. One way of reclaiming this lost culture post-apartheid was by incorporating indigenous languages and musical influences into popular music. According to kwaito artist Arthur Mafokate, kwaito "came about in the sense that we, as the youth of South Africa [felt] that there's a lot that we need to say that hasn't been said before through a music format…we felt we need to express ourselves in a way that would be more appropriate for ourselves."[190] The traditional music-making practices specific to certain tribes or regions were no longer as relatable to modern black South Africans, but the desire to connect with their heritage and reclaim their identity required some reconciliation with these roots. The struggle was not

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[189] Christopher Ballantine, "Re-thinking 'Whiteness'? Identity, Change and 'White' Popular Music in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Popular Music* 23, no. 2 (2004): 106.
[190] Gavin Steingo, "Historicizing Kwaito," *African Music* 8, no. 2 (2008): 86.

about liberation from an oppressive government, but rather a struggle of the self and identity construction in the face of freedom. By incorporating traditional African languages and even the occasional fusion of traditional instruments and musical styles with the international popular music genres young people enjoyed (as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3), kwaito musicians and listeners alike were able to participate in the reclamation of their cultural heritages.

Kwaito also signified a departure from the traditionally media and arts production in South Africa owned by whites. Because much of the professional music industry had been monopolized by white South Africans during apartheid, kwaito became one of the first opportunities for black artists to seek identity and self-expression in the dissemination of commercial music made for and by black people. One of the most popular language styles used in kwaito was *tsotsitaal*, a South African vernacular that combines words from several languages, including Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu, and some English.[191] The word *tsotsi* loosely translates to "criminal", and the language was primarily considered to be that of the uneducated and poor. Because of the negative association with the word, linguist Sizwe Satyo suggested that the word *tsotsitaal* be replaced with "kwaito-speak" because it better "reflects the dynamism of language.".[192] Kwaito-speak was a result of the post-apartheid youth's desire to remove themselves from the restrictive environments they had grown up in. In the aftermath of Afrikaans language requirements in black schools and bans on indigenous languages during apartheid (see Chapter 1), kwaito-speak became a tool for reinvention.

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[191] Ellen Hurst, "Tsotsitaal, Global Culture and Local Style: Identity and Recontextualization in Twenty-First Century South African Townships," Social Dynamics 35, no. 2 (2009): 245.
[192] Sizwe Satyo, "A Linguistic Study of Kwaito," *The World of Music* 50, no. 2 (2008): 91.

However, it was not just black music-making that was undergoing significant change. White listeners also engaged in the creation of new music more representative of the post-apartheid nation. The Afrikaans protest-rock music of the *Voëlvry* movement as discussed in Chapter 3 was no longer relevant to this period, but the progressive whites who had participated in the movement still desired further integration. Some white artists, such as Johnny Clegg, appropriated black aesthetics and styles such as *mbaqanga* and *kwela* into their white music. Clegg was famously referred to, paradoxically, as a "white Zulu" for his immersion in Zulu culture and use of Zulu music styles and even the Zulu language in his music.[193] Moreover, many white youths also listened to urban black music genres, such as kwaito, in an attempt to cross racial divides. By listening to black artists who sang in indigenous vernaculars, musicians and listeners alike participated in a process of post-apartheid reconciliation and unification.

One of the most prominent musical artists in the 1990s who brought together indigenous languages with popular music stylings was Fassie. Her albums, *Memeza* (1998) and *Nomakanjani* (1999), featured songs in Zulu and were met with major success. As she matured as an artist, she began to incorporate township vernaculars with Nguni languages (specifically Zulu and some Xhosa) in a way that could make her music almost unrecognizable to most white South Africans and older black South Africans, but identifiable to those young people who kept up with the latest township lingo. Yet, a lack of linguistic understanding often did not dissuade these listeners, who celebrated the increased popularity of uniquely South African music. Her

[193] Barbara Titus, *Hearing Maskanda: Musical Epistemologies in South Africa* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 27-28.

use of African languages and lingo, in combination with a cross-country tour schedule, allowed her to create "a sense of South African musical space familiar to millions across the land."[194]

In the early post-apartheid years, a clear narrative began to emerge: many South Africans of all races looked towards a future where diversity could be celebrated. One of the ways this desire appeared in the music industry and music-listening trends was a shared listening experience of music genres that were unique to South Africa, such as kwaito. Regardless of whether listeners could understand the languages presented in the songs or not, they welcomed the development of a new, distinctly South African sound for the new era of democracy.

4.2 "*Nomakanjani*" as an Example of a New South African Music Tradition

"*Nomakanjani*" opens with a vibrant synthpop beat. In the background, excited male vocalizations are heard before Fassie comes in with the opening words in Zulu:

[Zulu]	[English translation]
Nomakanjani we dali wam'	No matter what [,] my darling [,]
Ngeke ngikushiye	I will never leave you
Siyofa silahlane	Till death do us part

The first verse is sung in unison by Fassie and an uncredited male singer as a duet. The vocalizations continue in the background, at least three voices overlapping each other. The vocalizations are reminiscent of the ululations one can hear at almost any event in South Africa. Sometime ululations signify a celebration—I recall the many ululations heard at my 2019 undergraduate graduation ceremony—or to express a moment of grief. In this case, the mood is

[194] Allen, "Chocolate Ice Cream Tests," 102-104.

undoubtedly positive. Starting the song with lyrics in Zulu (see Appendix C for translation) with "no matter what my darling/ I will never leave you/ Till death do us part", Fassie shows no indication of whom she might be singing to or about. She also does not give any context for not intending to leave this unidentified "darling." Nevertheless, she repeats the opening verse for a second time. The repeated verse suggests an almost conversational setting. She seems to suggest that she is not singing *about* someone, but rather *to* someone through her song.

The next verse takes a surprising turn:

Noma bekuthuka	Even if they insult you
Bathi awugezi	They say you don't wash
Unuk'umlomo	Your mouth stinks
Ngikuthanda unjalo	I will love you as you are
Nomakanjani	No matter what

"*Nomakanjani*" is clearly a love song: the opening part a duet with the next verse directed from Fassie to her partner. However, love is presented in an unexpected way by focusing on her partner's physical shortcomings, rather than positives. Certainly, listening to this song for the first time, one would not expect it to turn in this direction. Yet, the message remains clear with the repeated titular message of "*nomakanjani*," which means "no matter what". Up until this point, the verses have been sung over a consistent background of synthesizers, bass and the continued background vocalizations. The end of this verse, however, introduces new thematic musical material.

The introduction of drum kit signifies the next stage of the song. If one were to analyse "*Nomakanjani*" as a typical American pop song, it might be considered an instrumental pre-chorus interlude. However, instead of introducing a chorus verse, Fassie returns to the opening

lyrics of the song (*Nomakanjani we dali wam'/ Ngeke ngikushiye/ Siyofa silahlane*). As mentioned above, the opening verse comes across as abrupt. The repetition of that first verse, suggests that *it* is actually the chorus. This suggests that Fassie composed a beginning that departed from the standard song form. Instead of following the verse-chorus structure, as is typical of song form, she opens the song with the chorus. This atypical structure is confirmed by a second repetition of the chorus.

After the chorus, she introduces a new point of view. This time, the male singer who accompanies Fassie in the chorus becomes the focal point of the verse. He sings:

Noma bengithuka	Even if they insult me
Bethi nginuk'umlomo	Or say my mouth stinks
Ehh dali wami ungithanda unjalo	My darling you love me as I am
Unjalo Ehh Unjalo	Just like that ehh just like that
Ungithanda unjalo	You love me as I am
Nomakanjani	No matter what

The song has taken a sort of call-and-response form, with the male singer responding to Fassie's previous lyrics. Interestingly, the male part offers no new material for the song. Instead, it simply repeats Fassie's earlier lyrics, but presents a male voice suggesting a male perspective. Fassie's voice is powerful, overwhelming her duet partner and the background ululations that has continued throughout the song. The music itself is relatively simple: no major key changes, a straightforward instrumental part and lyrics that do not offer nearly the same depth that her more political music like "Black President" did. The instrumental music is presented cyclically, repeating over each new lyrical stanza. Indeed, its simplicity might be one of the reasons it was so popular, as no in-depth musical understanding was required of the listeners. In this case, it

appears that the significance of the song does not lie in the complexity of its lyrics or music, but rather in its association with a new era of music-making.

This new era was specifically signified in music through the kwaito music genre, in which "*Nomakanjani*" falls, simultaneously exemplified indigenous music-making and cross-cultural listening experiences. There are several possible reasons for "*Nomakanjani's*" success. The first is perhaps the most obvious: it is sung in Zulu. While this is not the only outstanding reason that the song did well, the use of Zulu did offer a wide appeal to many South Africans of different racial backgrounds who hoped to connect with music that felt more local. While Fassie herself was Xhosa, her time in Johannesburg had heavily influenced her use of the language. Not only is there a large Zulu culture in Johannesburg, but it is common even for non-Zulu black people to speak the language as a *lingua franca* both in South Africa and in surrounding countries such as Mozambique and Lesotho.[195] The use of indigenous African languages like Zulu was a prominent characteristic of kwaito music as a way of reclaiming musical spaces from white dominance, but it also points to the desire for a deeper connection to the cultural roots that young black people had been denied their entire lives.[196]

A second explanation for "*Nomakanjani's*" popularity is that it took influence from multiple different African music styles and might help foster a wide appeal to black South Africans of different backgrounds. While the afro-fusion stylings of Fassie's earliest music took influence from black American genres of hip-hop and house music, the local *marabi* and *mbaqanga* genres as discussed in Chapter One might contribute to its appeal. The cyclic nature

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[195] Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 33.
[196] Byerly, "Decomposing Apartheid," 33.

of both the music and lyrics in "*Nomakanjani*", whereby repetitive music is used to unify sections, is typical of *marabi*. The structure whereby only one chord change occurs across each measure, which is also typical of Western popular music, is another prominent feature of *marabi* .[197] While *marabi* is most closely linked to the roots of South African jazz, one can also hear its influence in the work of other kwaito artists such as Arthur Mafokate, Lebo Mathosa, and Mandoza. Whether Fassie intentionally drew inspiration from *marabi* is unclear, as she never verbally credited its influence on her music. Yet, the stylistic traits are apparent in the song. She might have picked up on it when listening to township music in her youth or from her parent's generation. Moreover, "*Nomakanjani*" employs a simple I/IV/V/IV four-chord progression—similar to the simple progressions associated with American popular music—but is also common of both *marabi* and *mbaqanga.*[198] The song's phrases are often short, repetitive, and in a call-and-response style between the soloist and chorus, which suggests *mbaqanga* music. Fassie does not employ the call-and-response style in that way, as the there is no chorus. However, similarities are found in the back-and-forth of the duet—whereby almost the same words are called out by Fassie and then responded to by the male singer.

A third explanation for its initial popularity in 1999 and its continued prominence in South African popular music is that it gained immense popularity with white audiences, too. The use of Zulu lyrics and African-influenced styles suggest that it was intended for a black African

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[197] Christopher Ballantine, "Marabi," *Grove Music Online*, 2001, https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/display/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000051496?rskey=B40vI5&result=1.
[198] Christopher Ballantine, "Marabi," *Grove Music Online,* 2001, https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/display/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000051496?rskey=B40vI5&result=1; Lara Allen, ""Mbaqanga," *Grove Music Online,* 2001, https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/display/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000051494?rskey=bavcg3&result=1.

audience, if not for the emerging white interest in a more local sound. Many young white South Africans who had pushed away from the racial segregation of apartheid and towards a future of multiculturalism were looking for a more authentic (i.e. African) musical experience as they negotiated their whiteness in the new age of democracy, and found that in the multilingual, genre-crossing musical stylings of kwaito music and artists like Fassie. Artists like the 'White Zulu' Johnny Clegg had helped to popularize African cultures amongst white citizens. His desire to share a "a personal journey to try and discover my place as a white African', 'to explore what it is for me as a white person to be an African'" reflected a changing attitude towards indigenous African culture, music and identity.[199] While Clegg was fluent in the Zulu language, most white South Africans were not. Despite the language barrier, however, they demonstrated a desire to understand and connect to the music. While some of the appeal in listening to music like "*Nomakanjani*" was its use of the Zulu vernacular, for non-Zulu-speaking listeners it was more about the confluence of stylistic elements that simultaneously made the music seem more authentically local than white South African music, but still exotic particularly to white listeners who had not grown up familiar with the township pop music of apartheid. Cross-cultural listening experiences satiated this desire for new experiences that crossed racial and ethnic identities.[200]

Ultimately, the result of Fassie's transition from singing in English to singing in Zulu, Xhosa and *tsotsitaal* creoles was twofold: first, it allowed both her and her listeners to reaffirm and reconstruct their blackness in a post-apartheid context by bringing their previously

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[199] Gary Baines, "Popular Music and Negotiating Whiteness in Apartheid South Africa," in *Composing Apartheid: Music for and Against Apartheid* ed. Grant Olwage (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008): 106.
[200] Titus, *Hearing Maskanda*, 33-34.

discredited indigenous heritages and African languages into a new era. Second, it offered an opportunity for reconciliation and cross-cultural sharing by transcending the boundaries of black versus white music, resulting in a unique blend of cultural experiences that all South Africans could participate in.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

"When Brenda Fassie sang, South Africa stopped and danced."[201]

In the years following the acclaim of Fassie's *Nomakanjani*, both her health and musical success began to decline. While her first albums of the 2000s, including *Amadlozi* (2000) and *Mina Nawe* (2001), continued to win the South African Music Awards for Best Selling Album, it was clear to fans that she was no longer the vibrant popstar they had fallen in love with.[202] Fassie's worsening struggles with drug addiction caused several close friends, including her lover Gloria Chaka, to express serious concerns for her health. On April 26, 2004, Fassie was rushed to hospital where she remained in a coma until she passed away on May 9, 2024, at just thirty-nine years old.[203] While initial news reports suggested that she had suffered from a fatal asthma attack, it was later suggested that she had died from a crack-cocaine overdose. Regardless of the exact circumstances surrounding the young star's life death, one thing remains certain even two decades later: Fassie was one of the most significant South African popular musicians of the late 1900s — black or white, man or woman, heterosexual or queer.

In the introduction to this thesis, I posited that research on Brenda Fassie and her music should be situated within multiple identity frameworks, including gender, race, and cultural identity. Her gender, sexuality, race, and cultural heritage played a significant role in

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[201] Ndlovu, "Brenda Fassie's Crossroads," 129.
[202] Allen, "Chocolate Ice Cream Tests," 125.
[203] Donald G. McNeill, "Brenda Fassie, 39, South African Pop Star, Dies," *The New York Times* (May17, 2004). https://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/17/arts/brenda-fassie-39-south-african-pop-star-dies.html

understanding how both artists and listeners used popular music to foster cross-cultural and transracial collaboration, to break down gendered barriers in society and the music industry, and as a site of self-exploration. As a black female musician who rose to prominence despite the racial oppression and segregation of South African apartheid, Fassie, as Bongani Madondo has shared, "kicked down barriers for the entire African female and African male species. But also… her own life and behaviour released me from having to carry an imaginary black race on my shoulders. From the night I saw her, I knew that I didn't have to make sense to anyone anymore and that's OK."[204] Both her artistic output and public persona (through good times and in times of struggle) inspired black South Africans to explore their own multifaceted identities.

In this thesis, I have considered Fassie's music within the context of both Fassie as the individual artist and as the public persona. In all discussions of Fassie's music, language has emerged as one of the most significant ways in which to express these identities — whether by expressing sexuality through lyrics, expressing political discontent and hopes for a better future, or by fostering African pride through singing in various indigenous languages. By navigating the different possibilities of language, Fassie's music becomes a vehicle for multiple interpretations of identity expressions, creating a sense of agency that defies the socio-political expectations ascribed to black women during apartheid. Another prominent narrative that appears throughout the course of this research is that of Fassie's sexuality. While Fassie on several occasions refers to herself as a lesbian, throughout my research it has become apparent that the term "lesbian" is used loosely. While Fassie enjoyed sexual experiences with women, she continued to have

[204] Madondo, "Introduction," 3.

heterosexual experiences long after calling herself a lesbian. Finally, through Fassie's music I have demonstrated how she bridged divides between listening

Scholarship that refers to Fassie's music either in the context of the kwaito music genre, political music of apartheid, or gender studies has mostly neglected intersectional approaches to identity in the musical works and life of Brenda Fassie. Therefore, I have offered a complex and nuanced understanding of how multifaceted aspects of Fassie's identity interact and subsequently have demonstrated the multiple positionalities that she inhabited as a black, queer female musician within a late and post-apartheid framework.

The research presented in this thesis is by no means exhaustive. While I chose these three specific songs because I felt they best represented the diversity and intersectionality of Fassie's music, any number of her songs could be included in further analysis. This thesis has developed a critical approach to intersectionality in Fassie's music, and offers the opportunity for further research on Fassie's repertory and lasting significance in South African popular music. However, it also provides a foundation for intersectional approaches to studying other musicians who participated in and were influenced by socio-political change and existing gender and race norms in late and post-apartheid South Africa, or—on a broader scale—any multi-dimensional, interdisciplinary studies of popular musicians in South Africa. As intersectionality becomes of increasing importance in creating well-rounded, representational music scholarship, my research has demonstrated how it can be used to reevaluate and provide new depth and nuance to already-established musicians in the popular music canon, and beyond that scope presented in this thesis.

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Discography

***Weekend Special* (1983), Brenda & The Big Dudes**[205]

You Just Need Someone
Hot Shot
Weekend Special
I've Got Feelings
Get Up! Get Up!
Are You Ready

***Cool Spot* (1984), Brenda & The Big Dudes**[206]

It's Nice To Be With People
If I Hurt You Little Boy
Love Action
Mirror Mirror

***Let's Stick Together* (1984), Brenda & The Big Dudes**[207]

Gimme Gimme Your Love
Let's Stick Together
Could We Do It?
Do It Now
Can't Stop This Feeling
I Wanna Be Single

***Someone To Love* (1984), Brenda & The Big Dudes**[208]

Someone To Love (Maxi Version)
Someone To Love (Radio Version)
Someone To Love (Instrumental Version)

***Higher And Higher* (1985), Brenda & The Big Dudes**[209]

Higher
Sugar Daddy
Promises
I'll Find You

***Touch Somebody* (1985), Brenda & The Big Dudes**[210]

Touch Somebody
Bongani

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[205] Brenda & The Big Dudes, *Weekend Special*, EMI Records, 1983.
[206] Brenda & The Big Dudes, *Cool Spot,* CCP Records, 1984.
[207] Brenda & The Big Dudes, *Let's Stick Together,* CCP Records, 1984.
[208] Brenda & The Big Dudes, *Someone To Love,* CCP Records, 1984.
[209] Brenda & The Big Dudes, *Higher And Higher,* CCP Records, 1985.
[210] Brenda & The Big Dudes, *Touch Somebody,* CCP Records, 1985.

Dizzy Love
Thrilling Love

***No! No! Senór / Amalahle* (1986), Brenda & The Big Dudes**[211]
No! No! Senór (Single Version)
Amalahle (Single Version)
No! No! Senór (LP Version)
Amalahle (LP Version)

***Brenda* (1987), Brenda Fassie**[212]
Izolabud
Jah Man
High Class
Don't Deny Me
Mr. No Good
Our Love Is A Celebration
Nobody Loves You Like I Do

***Ag Shame Lovey* (1987), Brenda Fassie**[213]
Ag Shame Lovey
I Can't Stop Loving You
The Lord Is My Shepard
Party Time – Kuya Ngothuki Ungubani

***Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu* (1988), Brenda Fassie**[214]
Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu
The Wedding
Eloyi Lamasabathani
Goeie More More More
Why Did You Lie
Going Crazy

***Too Late For Mama* (1989), Brenda Fassie**[215]
Too Late For Mama
Jail To Jail
Baxakekile Oo'Xam
Don't Follow Me I'm Married
Good Black Woman
Orphan

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[211] Brenda & The Big Dudes, *No! No! Senór,* CCP Records, 1986.
[212] Brenda Fassie, *Brenda,* CCP Records, 1987.
[213] Brenda Fassie, *Ag Shame Lovey,* CCP Records, 1987.
[214] Brenda Fassie, *Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu,* CCP Records, 1988.
[215] Brenda Fassie, *Too Late For Mama*, CCP Records, 1989.

***Black President* (1990), Brenda Fassie**[216]

I Won't Run
Bump Bump
Stay Away (From My Man)
Heroes Party
Shoot Them Before They Grow
Black President
Street Girl
Bump Party Time

***(I'm) Not A Bad Girl* (1991), Brenda Fassie**[217]

Tracklist:

(I Am Not) A Bad Girl
Ngiyakusaba
Big Stuff
Maybe
Solve The Problem
Expression
Romantic World
Malibongwe

***Yo Baby* (1992), Brenda Fassie**[218]

Tracklist:

Yo Baby
I-Straight Le Ndaba
Call Me Up
Boipatong
Buti-Lo
Give Love To The World
Natural Instinct
I-Straight Le Ndaba (Club Mix)

***Mama* (1993), Brenda Fassie**[219]

Tracklist:

Ama-Gents (Club Mix)
Siyajola
Higher And Higher
Mama
Lonely

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[216] Brenda Fassie, *Black President,* CCP Records, 1990.
[217] Brenda Fassie, *I Am Not A Bad Girl,* CCP Records, 1991.
[218] Brenda Fassie, *Yo Baby,* CCP Records, 1992.
[219] Brenda Fassie, *Mama,* CCP Records, 1993.

Ama-Gents (Hip-Hop Mix)

***Abantu Bayakhuluma* (1994), Brenda Fassie**[220]
Tracklist:

Kuyoze Kuyovalwa (Until Closing)
Abantu Bayakhuluma
Shame
Ungishaya Ngaphakathi (Inner Feeling)
Tata Mxolele (Forgive)
Phansti
You Give Me Joy
Let It Be
Kuyoze Kuyovalwa Remix
Shame (Radical U.K. Club Dub)

***Umuntu Uyashintsha* (1995), Brenda Fassie**[221]
Tracklist:

Sgaxa Mabhanti (Maestro Mix)
Ngeke Unconfirm
S'enza Sonke
Ngeke Unconfirm
Umuntu
Sgaxa Mabhanti (Club Mix)

***Now Is The Time* (1996), Brenda Fassie**[222]
Tracklist:

Uwile
Kutheni
Se Pasta
Kiriya
Antique
Ngiyakuthanda Papa Wemba
Tonight Is The Night
Mina Ngithanda
Poppy
No Yana
Rastafaria

***Paparazzi* (1997), Brenda Fassie**[223]
Tracklist:

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[220] Brenda Fassie, *Abantu Bayakhuluma,* CCP Records, 1994.
[221] Brenda Fassie, *Umuntu Uyashintsha,* CCP Records, 1995.
[222] Brenda Fassie, *Now Is The Time,* CCP Records, 1996.
[223] Brenda Fassie, *Paparazzi,* CCP Records, 1997.

Akushesh' Akusheshe
Paparazzi
Generation
Akungcon' Ugoduke (Remix)
I'll Meet U One Day
Sungxama
Ukungcon' Ugoduke
What's The Matter
Thula Vicky
Kharilitshe
Akusheshe (Remix)
Sorry

***Memeza* (1998), Brenda Fassie**[224]
Tracklist:
Qula
Sum' Bulala
Vuli Ndlela
Msindo
Memeza
Vuli Ndlela (Remix)
Qula (Remix)
Sum' Bulala (Remix)

***Nomakanjani* (1999), Brenda Fassie**[225]
Tracklist:
Nomakanjani
Jiva
Moya
Mpundulu
Mingi Mingi
Kenang Bohle
Nomakanjani (Come What May Mix)
Soon And Very Soon (99 Remix)
Mpundulu (Gruff Mix)
Jiva (Sparse Vocal Mix)

***Amadlozi* (2000), Brenda Fassie**[226]
Tracklist:
Thola Amadlozi
Nakupenda (I Love You)

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[224] Brenda Fassie, *Memeza,* CCP Records, 1998.
[225] Brenda Fassie, *Nomakanjani,* CCP Records, 1999.
[226] Brenda Fassie, *Amadlozi,* CCP Records, 2000.

Monate
Ngizobuya
Monate (Kwaito Remix)
Oxamu
Shoot Them Before They Grow
Thola Amadlozi (Remix)

***Mina Nawe* (2001), Brenda Fassie**[227]
Tracklist:
Mina Ngohlala Ngi Nje
Wewe (African Wedding)
Vuma
Lekwaito
Ubani Ozokufa
Uyang'Embrasa
Mina Ngohlala Nginje (Home Mix)
Wewe (Wedding Mix)
Mina Nawe
Life Is Going On

***Myekeleni* (2002), Brenda Fassie**[228]
Tracklist:
Sgubu Se Zion
Duma Duma
Baxakekile Oxam
Shikhebe Shamago
Kesiyile Bana Baka
Hintoni
They All Want Me Down
Duma Duma (Gospel Mix)
Come Duze
Mama I'm Sorry
Sgubu Se Zion (Zion Mix)
Thixo Ongiphile

***Mali* (2003), Brenda Fassie**[229]
Tracklist:
Ponci Ponci (Pontjie Pontjie)
Mali
Ntsware-Ndibambe
Ngwanona

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[227] Brenda Fassie, *Mina Nawe,* CCP Records, 2001.
[228] Brenda Fassie, *Myekeleni,* CCP Records, 2002.
[229] Brenda Fassie, *Mali,* EMI Records, 2003.

Undikolota Malini
Siyobonana
My Baby
Ngizilahlela Kuwe
Ponci Ponci (Guitar Man Mix)
Ngwanona (Dub Mix)
Ponci Ponci Pinda (Club Mix)

***Gimme Some Volume* (2004), Brenda Fassie**[230]
Tracklist:

Gimme Some Volume "Matshidiso
Malibongwe
Hake Batle Sepe
Thule Baby
Zam' eNext Door
Ong Shapa Kamogare
Umfazi Uyazimela
Tell Me
Ngi Nje
Brenda & Sbu's Party

[230] Brenda Fassie, *Gimme Some Volume,* CCP Records, 2004.

Appendices

Appendix A : "Weekend Special" (1983) by Brenda and the Big Dudes[231]

You don't come around
To see me in the week
You don't have the chance
To call me on the phone

You don't come around
To see me in the week
You don't have the chance
To call me on the phone, yeah

But Friday night
Yes I know
I know I must be ready for ya
Just be waiting for you

Friday night
Yes I know
I know I must be ready for ya
Just be waiting for you

I'm no weekend, weekend special
I'm no weekend, weekend special

I'm no weekend, weekend special
I'm no weekend, weekend special

I'm no weekend (daddy's home), weekend special
I'm no weekend (daddy's home), weekend special

Another lonely night
On my own again
How I long for your love
I need your touch, yes I do

You don't come around
To see me in the week
You don't have the chance
To call me on the phone, yeah

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[231] Brenda & the Big Dudes, "Weekend Special," track 1 on *Weekend Special,* CCP Records, 1983.

But Friday night
Yes I know
I know I must be ready for ya
Just be waiting for you

But Friday night
Yes I know
I know I must be ready for ya
Just be waiting for you

I'm no weekend special
I'm no weekend special
I'm no weekend special
Daddy’s home

I'm no weekend, weekend special
I'm no weekend, weekend special

I'm no weekend, weekend special
I'm no weekend, weekend special

Don't love me no more
You don't love me no more
You don't love me no more

You don’t love me no more
I know

(I'm no weekend) I am your weekend special
(I’m no weekend) weekend special

(I'm no weekend) I am your weekend, weekend special
(I’m no weekend) yes I am your weekend special

(I’m no weekend) I am your weekend special)
I am your weekend special

Appendix B : "Black President" (1990) by Brenda Fassie[232]

The year 1963
The people's president
Was taken away by security men
All dressed in a uniform
The brutality, brutality
Oh no my- my black president

Him and his comrades
Were sentenced to isolation
For many painful years
Many painful years
Many painful years
Of hard labour

They broke rocks
But the spirit was never broken
Never broken
Oh no my- my black president

Let us rejoice for our president
Let us sing for our president
Let us pray for our president
Let us sing, let us dance
For Madiba, Madiba's freedom

Now in 1990
The people's president
Came out from jail
Raised up his hands and said
Viva, viva, my people

He walked a long road
Back, back to freedom
Back to freedom
Freedom for my black president

Let us rejoice for our president
Let us sing for our president
Let us pray for our president
Let us sing, let us dance

---

[232] Brenda Fassie, "Black President," track 6 on *Black President,* CCP Records, 1990.

For Madiba, Madiba's freedom

(vocalizing)
Madiba
(vocalizing)
Madiba

I will die for my president
I will sing for my president

I will stand and say
Viva, viva, viva, viva, viva, viva my president

Appendix C : "*Nomakanjani*" (1999) by Brenda Fassie[233]

(translated from Zulu to English by Amanda Lawrence, assisted by Likhona Tokota)

Nomakanjani we dali wam'
(No matter what, my darling)
Ngeke ngikushiye
(I will never leave you)
Siyofa silahlane
(Till death do us part)

Noma bekuthuka
(Even if they insult you)
Bathi awugezi
(They say you don't wash)
Unuk'umlomo
(Your mouth stinks)
Ngikuthanda unjalo
(I will love you as you are)
Nomakanjani
(No matter what)

Nomakanjani we dali wam'
(No matter what, my darling)
Ngeke ngikushiye
(I will never leave you)
Siyofa silahlane
(Till death do us part)

Noma bengithuka
(Even if they insult me)
Bethi nginuk'umlomo
(Or say my mouth stinks)

Ehh dali wami ungithanda unjalo
(My darling, you love me as I am)
Unjalo Ehh Unjalo

---

[233] Brenda Fassie, "Nomakanjani." track 1 on *Nomakanjani.* CCP Records, 1999. Translation from Zulu to English, Amanda Lawrence, 2023.

(Just like that, just like that, ehh, just like that)
Ungithanda unjalo
(You love me as I am)
Nomakanjani
(No matter what)

Sondela sthandwa sami
(Come closer my love)
Sondela sweety lami
(Come closer sweety)

Ohh ngisho ngayo ikhanda yami ey'khulu yo
(Ohh I say this with my big head)

Nomakanjani we dali wam'
(No matter what, my darling)
Ngeke ngikushiye
(I will never leave you)
Siyofa silahlane
(Till death do us part)

Nomakanjani
(No matter what)

Appendix D : Chronology of Major South African Political Events (1948-1996)

1948

May 26	The National Party wins the General Election (widely observed as the beginning of apartheid).
June 4	D.F. Malan becomes the new Prime Minister

1949

July 1	The *Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act* is passed, making marriage between whites and non-whites illegal.

1950

April 27	The *Group Areas Act* is passed, segregating neighborhoods based on race and only allowing whites to live in the most developed areas. Many people of colour were forcibly removed from their homes and relocated to ghettos.
May 1	18 black protestors affiliated with the African National Congress (ANC) are killed by police for protesting.
unknown	Henrik Verwoerd (the 'architect of apartheid') becomes the Minister of Native Affairs.
	The *Population Registration Act* is passed, classifying all citizens as white, coloured, black or Indian.
	The *Immorality Act* makes sex between whites and non-whites a criminal offense.

1952

April 6	The Defiance Campaign (lead by the ANC, South African Indian Congress and Coloured People's Congress) begins.

1954

October 11	D.F. Malan announces his retirement.

1955

June 25 A multi-racial organization called the Congress of the People (later known as the Congress Alliance) is formed in Soweto.

1956

March 16 The *Riotous Assemblies Act* is passed, forbidding any gatherings deemed a threat to public peace.

December 5 Nelson Mandela and Albert Luthuli are arrested on charges of treason.

1958

September 2 Hendrik Verwoerd becomes Prime Minister.

1960

March 21 Sharpeville Massacre - police opened fire on and killed 69 peaceful protestors in a black township.

April 8 The *Unlawful Organizations Act* is passed and the government bans the ANC and Pan-African Congress.

April 9 Attempted assassination of Hendrik Verwoerd.

1961

May 31 South Africa leaves the Commonwealth, becoming the Republic of South Africa.

Unknown The military wing of the ANC, *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, is formed.

1962

August 5 Nelson Mandela is arrested and charged with organizing illegal strikes and leaving the country without travel documents, and for his involvement with *Umkhonto we Sizwe.*

1963

July The *Sabotage Act* removes free speech and allows anyone who opposed the National Party to be arrested for sabotage. Burden of proof no longer applied and all were considered guilty until proven innocent.

July 11 Police raid a farm and arrest high-ranking members of *Umkhonto we Sizwe.*

October 6 The Rivonia Trial begins.

November 6 The United Nations calls for sanctions and many countries begin boycotting South Africa.

1964

June 12 Nelson Mandela, Dennis Goldberg, Walter Sisulu and other freedom fighters are sentenced to life in prison on Robben Island.

1966

September 6 Hendrik Verwoerd is assassinated.

1967

June 12 The *Terrorism Act* is passed, allowing prisoners to be detained for 60 days without trial.

August 4 Military conscription is enforced for all white males over the age of 16.

1970

Unknown Assigned all black people to Bantustans (homelands) and stripped them of their South African citizenship.

1974

May 6 The government imposes free, mandatory education for black children.

1976

June 16 Soweto Uprising – 10- 20 000 students protest the implementation of Afrikaans in black schools. Police open fire and are estimated to have murdered anywhere between 180 and 700 children with thousands more injured. This day is now called "Youth Day" in remembrance.

1977

September 12 Anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko is beaten to death by police while in their custody.

1978

October 9 P.W. Botha becomes Prime Minister.

1980

April	Over 60 coloured schools and the University of the Western Cape begin boycotts & hundreds of students are arrested.

1984

September 14	P.W. Botha becomes the first State President of South Africa.

1985

March 21	47 people are murdered by police at the Langa marches commemorating 25 years since the Sharpeville Massacre.

1989

September 20	F.W. de Klerk becomes State President.

1990

January 16	F.W. de Klerk announces the beginning of the transition to end apartheid. He unbans the ANC, PAC and Communist Party.
February 11	Nelson Mandela is released from jail.

1991

February 1	F.W. de Klerk signs national peace accord promising to end apartheid.

1994

April 26	The first general election in South Africa takes place.
May 10	Nelson Mandela becomes the first black president of South Africa.

1996

April 15	The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is established.