

Makeba!

Mama Africa speaks on music, life,
and how one marriage (nearly) ruined it all

Creative Project: Statement

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HIST E-1672, The Long 1960s

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In some ways, Miriam Makeba is all things to all people. Saturday night fun, dancing to “Pata Pata.” A renegade, married to a political subversive. Champion of Civil Rights. Anti-Apartheid icon. Symbol of Apartheid’s inhumanity. Saint. Mama Africa. Devil incarnate, matched only by Winnie Madikizela-Mandela—wife of Nelson—for anti-white inflammations. But aside from frequent shade and occasional hype, she is somewhat overlooked, showing up as a footnote in online searches for Black Power or her husband, Stokely Carmichael.¹ Makeba’s contributions, however, are significant, her presence weaving in and out of Civil Rights, the rise of Black Power, and the fall of the Apartheid regime. Makeba exemplifies the Long 1960s.

Makeba! Mama Africa Speaks is a one-act, one-woman cabaret, is inspired by Harvard Extension School E-1672, its coursework, and a series of Sections meetings. The work—and research that forms its backbone—suggests Miriam Makeba, both singer and activist, represents a surface onto which South Africans, Africans, and Americans project(ed) divergent narratives around Africa and race relations. Analyzing Makeba’s interviews over the years, a primary point—fundamental to a subsequent dramatic enactment based on her words—is what it means to be viewed as an embodiment of Africanness. This image of Makeba is created by social and political narratives—and allegations—attached to her relating to constructs such as “nation” and “race,” especially in context of the 1950s and 1960s, often when identity intersects with these constructs. *Makeba! Mama Africa Speaks* allows the audience to experience how Makeba, the woman, political voice, and singer, enforces and deflects narratives attached to her.²

Upon her arrival in the United States, it was in characteristically soft-spoken style that Makeba tells her American audience about the system of Apartheid, always doing so in a non-confrontational manner, allowing herself latitude to gesture at correlations between Civil Rights

¹ Peter Doggett. *There’s a Riot Going On*. (United Kingdom: Canongate Press, 2009), 250.

² Lindelwa Dalamba, “The Blue Notes: South African jazz and the limits of avant-garde solidarities in late 1960s London.” *Safundi* 20:2, (2019), 213.

in South Africa and the United States. Throughout her career, she would use fashion, headgear, and her hair to underline the meaning of Blackness, sensuality, and Black Power. However, Makeba could not control the narrative when it came to her marriage to Carmichael, his politics, nor what exactly her perceived endorsement of it amounted to.

Makeba! Mama Africa Speaks is set at Kippies, legendary Johannesburg jazz club, on November 15, 1998, the day her husband, Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Turé), dies. The plot is simple. As her set begins, she receives a call: Carmichael is dead. Makeba reflects on—and sings about—life with Carmichael at the confluence of a growing anti-Apartheid movement, mounting anti-imperialism in Africa, and Black Power in the United States. *Makeba! Mama Africa Speaks* follows the traditional three-component structure over three scenes:

- A. **Scene One** provides setting and setup, followed closely by the turning point when Makeba learns about the death of Carmichael. The scene development consists of her political “awakening” and her early career in South Africa and the United States.
- B. **Scene Two** is the work’s central axis, dealing with her marriage to Carmichael, and her “reformation” as political figure. Makeba’s marriage to Carmichael is formative and pivotal to her life, affecting everything from career, home, politics; her very identity falling into before-Stokely and after-Stokely categories.
- C. **Scene Three** acts as denouement and conclusion. Her “revival” and “revitalization” as Mama Africa and her return to South Africa.³

The purpose of the scene one setup is context, to convey a sense of place and time, thereby creating the world of the stage or film. *Makeba! Mama Africa Speaks* is based on facts and unaltered words, set in the world of music, politics, and Black awakening. The opening

³ William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 1-18.

conveys a core truth about Makeba: that of a singer continually in some metaphoric spotlight. And that of pervasive melancholy, her opening song being a wistful tune and her opening comments recalling a life well-lived but with a sense of heaviness.

Within *Makeba! Mama Africa Speaks*, the catalyst lurks in the news of Carmichael's death. This news orients the audience to the story subject and, while a message or phone call is not the most forceful of events, in relationship-based stories, it is appropriate, believable, and relatable; most of us dreading a midnight call bearing bad news. The catalyst also introduces parallel issues, shaping the play: racism, prejudice, and Makeba's fight for survival while assuming the role of "Mama Africa," in a sense becoming a determined martyr for her cause.

But the catalyst is not the central question. It begins the story, but, in effect, it opens the floodgates to the central issue. Once that is raised, the world of the play is viewed through this lens, the setup is complete, and the story can unfold. For Makeba, three central issues as inextricably linked, her relationship with South Africa, her five marriages—specifically her marriage to Carmichael being so consequential—and her career.

Makeba! Mama Africa Speaks leaves the audience thinking about persistence and consequence. Hearing the voice of Makeba, her raw emotion underpins and animates history. The depth and complexity of the Long 1960s are humanized, going beyond textbook and theory, as she lets us into her struggle to be recognized within the country of her birth, her frustrations with the United States and its issues with civil rights, and the emotional components that make up a "simple" things like falling in love and getting married to a handsome man. Unless he is Stokely Carmichael, as she quickly learns, her words offering glimpses into a timeframe during which two people steeped in their liberation ideologies met and fell in love. And freak out a lot

of nervous whites.⁴ Focusing on Makeba's words, tension is revealed at the intersectionality she represents: that of African musician and American activist against an American audience who shuns her for her politics, suspected of being radical and extremist. The March 28, 1968 *Jet* front cover proclaimed Makeba, "Africa's first lady of freedom fighters," adding she "uses her talent to raise money in fight to free Blacks."

Makeba's relationship with Carmichael strained her career—essentially ending it—her "days of stardom in the United States were numbered."⁵ It got worse since "no longer was she considered mainstream or nonthreatening after becoming Mrs. Stokely Carmichael. Instead, her public persona was recast as angry, threatening, and extremist."⁶ Then, on assuming chairmanship of the SNCC in 1966, Carmichael became an overnight media sensation and the nation's most divisive Black radical since Malcolm X.⁷ To some, the couple emerged as a "Sid and Nancy" archetype—turbulent and truculent—representing a troublesome Civil Rights Movement moment.⁸

To Makeba and Carmichael, shifting public opinion of them felt poignant. Their union was symbolic and romantic, set, as it were, against a political landscape where many Americans disliked militancy and rising Pan-Africanism.⁹ Carmichael writes, "next thing I know, the marriage is suddenly a 'symbolic union between Black America and the continent, 'the motherland with the diaspora.... gimme a break, that's one hell of a burden to load on one

⁴ Miriam Makeba and Nomsa Mwamuka, *Makeba: The Miriam Makeba Story* (Johannesburg: STE, 2005), 75.

⁵ Ruth Feldstein, *How It Feels to Be Free: Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 52.

⁶ Tyler Fleming, "A marriage of inconvenience: Miriam Makeba's relationship with Stokely Carmichael and her music career in the United States," *Safundi*, 17:3, (2016), 312-338.

⁷ Peniel E. Joseph, *Stokely: A Life* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2016), 102.

⁸ Miriam Makeba and Nomsa Mwamuka, *Makeba: The Miriam Makeba Story* (Johannesburg: STE, 2005), 108.

⁹ Francis Njubi Nesbitt, *Race for Sanctions African Americans against Apartheid, 1946-1994* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 62-68.

marriage... Unifying black America and the African world? C'mon, sounds nice, but be serious.”¹⁰ After marrying Carmichael in March 1968, an increasingly shunned Makeba and Carmichael settle in Conakry, Guinea, at the invitation of President Sekou Touré, giving sanctuary to those fleeing the capitalist west. Makeba “was treated as a celebrity in Guinea,” her fame and marriage “helped to validate Guinean culture from the outside.”¹¹ The 1970s correspondingly see Makeba’s music becoming overtly politically motivated, including songs on Guinean politics.¹²

Makeba was “South Africa’s most-famous musical export,” and during the 1960s, one of the most visible Black South Africans to break through American news cycles, and “to put her fame in perspective, the word ‘Makeba’ was mentioned in 329 articles, reviews, and advertisements in the *New York Times* between 1960 and 1967, while the words “Mandela” and “African National Congress” were only mentioned 68 times and 202, respectively.”¹³ *Makeba! Mama Africa Speaks* tracks the arc of her career and we see—through her eyes—the evolution of South Africa as pariah state invested in human rights denial to a rainbow-nation-utopia of sorts.

There is, however, no neat conclusion to the Makeba story—satisfying, yes—since the narrative is driven by real life and verbatim interviews. The play ends before her death, but central questions are answered: we learn about Carmichael and her life with him. But we need to look at why this story matters and what we can learn from Makeba and her life.

Mechanically, *Makeba! Mama Africa Speaks* is in monologue form, culled from interviews with Makeba, some in print, some audio, and some television. It situates the large

¹⁰ Stokely Carmichael and Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture)* (New York: Scribner, 2005), 655-6.

¹¹ Yair Hashachar, Playing the backbeat in Conakry: Miriam Makeba and the cultural politics of Sékou Touré’s Guinea, 1968–1986, *Social Dynamics*, 43:2, (2017), 259-273

¹² Peter Doggett, *There’s a Riot Going On* (United Kingdom: Canongate Press, 2009), 250-51.

¹³ Tyler Fleming. “A marriage of inconvenience: Miriam Makeba’s relationship with Stokely Carmichael and her music career in the United States,” *Safundi*, 17:3, (2016), 312-338.

volume of interviews with Makeba that sees her respond on present tense, the confessional quality being most useful in a dramatic setting, falling in line with the concept of African time.

When interviewed, Makeba answers in present tense, even when reliving events decades back. It is part of her DNA and closely linked to the African concept of time, that the past is a living thing; an alien concept to some in the West.¹⁴ This temporal fluidity gives her words a timeless quality, suspending the drama while setting up a surreal narrative curve, topics weaving into the present and referencing the past with scant regard for the future, except in an aspirational sense. Even a cursory reading of Makeba's words contains immediacy and inherent drama.¹⁵

But beyond her fame—infamy, to some—and her five marriages, Makeba embodies what musicologist Ronaldo Radano refers to as “the Black voice,” the “literal, audible utterance empowering the singing or speaking subject and as a metonym referring to the broad social impact of a highly racialized performative idiom,” that catches our attention today. Makeba's “voice” has different meaning for different people. Besides her singing voice, Makeba's political outspokenness—her voice at the United Nations—suggests unique influence considering the era. When Makeba performs, the “meanings of her voice are therefore in constant discursive formation, influenced by but irreducible to the context in which she performs. Her voice is shaped by the audience that receives it.”¹⁶ Ironically, despite having so much “voice,” her words suggest her struggle to be heard. Or seen.

British cultural studies pioneer, Stuart Hall, writes, “by definition, Black popular culture is a contradictory space. It is a site of strategic contestation.”¹⁷ Makeba's “The Click Song,” for

¹⁴ J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1969), 14.

¹⁵ Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, “J. S. Mbiti's African Concept of Time and the Problem of Development,” *International Conference on Humanities*, UAE, January 10, 2015.

¹⁶ April Sizemore-Barber, “The Voice of (Which?) Africa: Miriam Makeba in America,” *Safundi*, 13:3-4, (2012) 251-276.

¹⁷ Stuart Hall, “What Is This Black in Black Popular Culture?,” in Gina Dent, ed., *Black Popular Culture* (New York: New Press, 1992), 21-33.

example, appears non-political. Her engagement with the audience “when she performed this celebratory melody transformed the literal meaning of the lyrics. Performances and reactions to these performances together shaped dialogues about race relations and gender. These, in turn, contributed to shifting expectations about freedom for Black Americans and about relations between the sexes.”¹⁸

Over her career, Makeba’s topics remain constant, with details expanded on in each interview depending on the date and political relevance—the zeitgeist—and the issue at hand. She frequently ruminates about life in exile in early interviews (1950–1962), while, after 1962, she increasingly comments on her cultural exile at the hand of the United States and Britain. During these later interviews, her tone and words harden when discussing the latter while remaining optimistic, if not enthusiastic, when discussing the former. Makeba’s anticipation of Apartheid’s demise becomes apparent when comparing early 1960s comments with those during Paul Simon’s 1987 “Graceland” tour. Under normal circumstances, such temporally diverse opinions would not necessarily be viewed contiguously. Still, with her comments threaded into longer monologue format, Makeba’s emotional shift is not only dramatic but also affective.

Makeba made few political statements during her early years in America, provoking intrigue around African culture, identity, and politics. Her delivery of traditional folk culture while projecting a public image emphasizing the natural beauty of the African woman punctuated her transformation from “Lady of Song” to “Mama Africa” during the early 1960s.¹⁹ As Feldstein puts it, “by engaging her audiences, she did not simply assent to the assumption that the sounds that came out of her mouth were ‘weird’. Instead, the ‘fascinating and exotic’ woman

¹⁸ Feldstein, Ruth, *Africa’s Musical Ambassador*.” In *How It Feels to Be Free*. Oxford University Press, (2013), 7.

¹⁹ Ruth Feldstein, *How It Feels to Be Free: Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

destabilized assumptions about who and what were fascinating and exotic.”²⁰ Feldstein links Makeba’s activism and art, her politics, and social life, participating in emerging political “awakening” while remaining commercially viable as recording and concert artist. But there is tension between Makeba’s “expected Black respectability” and assimilation; the revolutionary tone of her musical excursions, acting as messenger of knowledge and power while encouraging self-actualization—a praxis of transference, both generational and ritualized, in Makeba.²¹

She joins a cadre of female entertainer-activists, including names such as Nina Simone, Lena Horne, and Cicely Tyson. It’s what Bernice Johnson Reagon describes as “mothering/nurturing,” a ritualized process in the transference of culture and markers of identity:

Within the African Diaspora story, there is the opportunity to see a process of continuance and transformation at work among women cultural workers. There is the struggle to contend with a new space where their people and children are defined in new ways. That definition disrupted and threw into severe trauma cultural practices that had been nursed in African societies. These women had to take what they were given from their mothers and fathers and make up a few things. Nurturing was not only reconciling what was passed to them with the day-to-day reality, but also sifting and transforming this experience to feed this child, unborn, this new Black community, in preparation for what it would face.²²

²⁰ Neo Muyanga. Voicing fluid voices: reflections of the multivalence of voice in Miriam Makeba’s art and life. *South African Theatre Journal* 32:1, (2019): 63-76.

²¹ Tammy L Kernodle, “How It Feels to Be Free: Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement”, *Twentieth-Century Music* 12, no. 2 (2015): 274-79.

²² Bernice Johnson Reagon, “African diaspora women: The making of cultural workers.” *Feminist Studies* 12, (1), 1986.

Makeba's experience in South African cabaret culture provides her point of departure.²³ It colors *how* she is presented. By the time she arrives in the United States in 1958, Makeba is a polished artist. Performing at New York's Village Vanguard secures her critical adoration, audiences eager to experience authentic African songs and African beauty.²⁴ Makeba, her language, dress, and hair deconstructs stereotypes regarding African primitivism and the appearance of African women. Her repertoire during the late 1950s and early 1960s underline her evolution from reluctant passivism to supporting the Black liberation struggle.²⁵

Makeba also reacts to events of the 1960s. On March 21, 1960, a massacre occurred in the Black township of Sharpeville, near Vereeniging, South Africa. Police fired on a crowd of Black people, killing or wounding 250.²⁶ In 1963 and 1964, she appears before the United Nations General Assembly, testifying in favor of economic sanctions against South Africa.²⁷

I ask you and all the leaders of the world, would you act differently, would you keep silent and do nothing if you were in our place? Would you not resist if you were allowed no rights in your own country because the colour of your skin is different from that of the rulers, and if you were punished for even asking for equality. I appeal to you, and to all the countries of the world to do everything you

²³ David B. Coplan, "In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre" (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 220.

²⁴ Louise Bethlehem, "Miriam's Place": South African jazz, conviviality and exile, *Social Dynamics*, 43:2, (2017): 243-258.

²⁵ Ruth Feldstein, *How It Feels to Be Free: Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

²⁶ Marissa Evans, "Sharpeville Massacre," September 3, 2019, <https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/sharpeville-massacre/>.

²⁷ "18th Meeting of Special Committee Against Apartheid," United Nations Audiovisual Library, accessed December 1, 2021, <https://www.unmultimedia.org/avlibrary/asset/2553/2553678/>.

can to stop the coming tragedy. I appeal to you to save the lives of our leaders, to empty the prisons of all those who should never have been there.²⁸

Makeba assumes an outright political stance, her citizenship revoked, resulting in her exile from South Africa, a fact she discovers when attempting to return to South Africa for her mother's funeral. When discussing her early career and leaving South Africa, this moment emerges as definitive—her Damascus moment—realizing her potential to help raise awareness of Apartheid's injustices. Although she consistently labels herself as merely a singer and not political—something she would do throughout her career—her music takes on a deliberately politically charge, eventually becoming a body of political rhetoric.

Lionel Rogosin's 1959 *Come Back Africa*, partially set in Sophiatown, catapults Makeba to international fame while inviting negative attention from the South African government seeing her passport revoked.²⁹ Her performance in *Come Back Africa* is an early example of her challenging Apartheid through dress norms not deemed appropriate for Black South Africans. The American noir influence on her dress, and natural hair, become a signature of her 1950s image.³⁰ In a country where Black is not appreciated for aesthetic appeal, nor held in regard for its style, by insisting on natural hair in a glamorous setting, Makeba challenges the racist insistence that Black women wear a wig or some form of a scarf. In *Come Back Africa*, Makeba interprets beauty in a way that is acceptable to her, defining her intellect and culture. While her dress signals European sensibility, her Blackness is established and projected through her hair, reflecting a view that “historically and contemporarily, hair has acted as a means of representing

²⁸ Miriam Makeba's Historic Speech Remembered,” The World from PRX, <https://theworld.org/stories/2008-11-10/miriam-makebas-historic-speech-remembered>.

²⁹ Lionel Rogosin, “Come Back, Africa (1959),” Cinema of the World, May 7, 2020, <http://worldscinema.org/2012/12/lionel-rogosin-come-back-africa-extras-1959/>.

³⁰ Meg Samuelson, “The urban palimpsest: Re-presenting Sophiatown”, in Ranka Primorac (ed) *African City Textualities*. (London: Routledge, 2013), 160.

themselves and negotiating their place in the world...Black hair is an expressive element of appearance, and the body that offers insights into the individual and the collective culture.”³¹

The 1950s is known as the *Drum* era, a time in South African history viewed as both the beginning of the modern anti-Apartheid movement and the beginning of Black protest culture. “*Drum* style” is a visual identity influenced by emerging Black urban culture viewed through an American film-noir lens.³² It is the antithesis of the image of Black South Africans propagated by the Apartheid government, which veered closer to either tribal or servitude, suggesting a “present absence,” that of subjugated and diminished natives within their land, their culture and dignity reduced to a performative version of itself.³³

“*Drum* style” existed to address this perception head-on, and the *Drum* effect on Makeba cannot be understated. One *Drum* cover, captured by Jurgen Schadeberg in 1955, specifically reflected the glamour of Sophiatown, hub of Black culture.³⁴ Sophiatown was the epitome of anti-government, anti-Apartheid thinking. As a result, it would be razed by the South African government in 1956—its residents forcibly resettled in the sprawling Soweto township.³⁵

Makeba’s interest in African style went beyond the stage, and in 1968 she opened “Makeba’s Hut,” an African boutique in the Bahamas, with the country’s president Lyndon Pindling present at the ribbon-cutting in Nassau. Fashions for “Makeba’s Hut,” were designed

³¹ Ashley R. Garrin and Sara B. Marcketti, “The Impact of Hair on African American Women's Collective Identity Formation,” Iowa State University Digital Repository, accessed November 30, 2021, https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/aeshm_pubs/118/.

³² Michael Chapman and John Matshikiza, *The Drum Decade: Stories from the 1950s* (Scottsville: University of Natal, 2001).

³³ Dennis Brutus and Ben Cashdan, “Africa: World Racism Meeting: Between a Rock and a Hard Place,” August 15, 2001, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200108150429.html>.

³⁴ David Adler, “Story of Cities #19: Johannesburg's Apartheid Purge of Vibrant Sophiatown,” *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, April 11, 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/apr/11/story-cities-19-johannesburg-south-africa-apartheid-purge-sophiatown>.

³⁵ Ellen Otzen, “The Town Destroyed to Stop Black and White People Mixing,” *BBC News* (BBC, February 11, 2015), <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-31379211>.

jointly by Makeba and her personal designer, Mamsie Mthombeni, who also did duty as back-up singer to Makeba on stage.³⁶

Makeba would use dress and hair as semiotic messaging system for the rest of her career.³⁷ Her visual identity shifts from “*Drum style*” *femme fatale* songstress into “Mama Africa” over time, first during the 1960s while becoming famous in the United States, and again when resettling in Africa, after her 1968 marriage to Stokely Carmichael. Between 1965 and 1968, Makeba introduces pan-African elements to her wardrobe, headdresses in particular. Most recognizable was the elongated, flat-topped fez, a version of Nefertiti’s Egyptian *Khepresh* war crown. A regal symbol on the part of Makeba, worn both during performances and offstage, the look elevating “Mama Africa” to African queen.³⁸ It is noteworthy since her international success defied her Apartheid provenance. Makeba used her visual identity to challenge Apartheid tropes on Black inferiority.³⁹ She deploys African aesthetics as code to influence beauty ideals, infusing it with African pride and African citizenship, as opposed to secondary to European standards. When modernity and elegance were defined by straightened hair, Makeba, Pam Grier, Angela Davis, and Jimi Hendrix rocked the Afro. Hair was/is political.⁴⁰

Besides politics, Makeba’s music contains sexual undertones, “Pata Pata” suggests swaying girls, enticing men on township sidewalks, promising an “easy touch.”⁴¹ Her music challenges African middle-class value systems, “the body, particularly the body acting, whether

³⁶ Dave Potter, Daily Defender, “Miriam Makeba Says Wedding Date Soon: But Wants to Keep Mum on Exact Date.” *Chicago Daily Defender (Daily Edition) (1960-1973)*, Mar 21, 1968.

³⁷ Iola Killian, “Cover Girls of the Anti-Apartheid,” *Messy Nussy Chic*, May 28, 2021, <https://www.messynussychic.com/2021/01/26/cover-girls-of-the-anti-apartheid/>.

³⁸ Marjon Carlos, “From ‘90s to Now: Janet Jackson’s Still Got It,” *Vogue* (Vogue, October 23, 2015), <https://www.vogue.com/article/janet-jackson-video-music-alek-wek.evening.gowns>.

³⁹ Earl L Ertman, “The Cap-Crown of Nefertiti: Its Function and Probable Origin.” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 13 (1976): 63-67.

⁴⁰ Angela Y Davis, “Afro Images: Politics, Fashion, and Nostalgia.” *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 1 (1994): 37-45. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343885>.

⁴¹ Miriam Makeba, *The Miriam Makeba Story*. (Johannesburg: STE Publishers, 2004), 45.

in dance or protest, or indeed both, may read as text too. And so, the dancing of the “pata pata,” the “kwela,” as well as the women’s defiance of South African bus boycotts, the 1956 Women’s Marchers’ thirty minutes of standing silence, appearing in African attire at the seat of the racist Apartheid government, can be read as texts authored by African women in the public sphere.”⁴² Andrade comments that “these were writing and rioting” women, contributing oral texts, petitions, and manifestos for, among others, the Federation of South African Women.⁴³ But they were also actively organizing rebellions and uprisings in both South Africa and Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, threatening the existence of colonial order.

Makeba is a complex figure. Rejecting the Jezebel or “mammie” binary of her era, she transformed the meaning of Black femininity.⁴⁴ Inhabiting both an African and American space, Makeba was vulnerable to backlash, arriving in the USA months before the first Civil Rights sit-in in February 1960 and the March 1960 Sharpeville massacre in South Africa. It was against this backdrop that Makeba’s New York debut assists in what Martha Biondi calls “a creation of a global Black political identity.” Makeba’s presence in the United States helped reinforce this.⁴⁵

So, yes, Makeba was many things to many people. *Ebony* called her “the most exciting foreign singer to hit big in the United States in recent months.”⁴⁶ After her death, Nelson Mandela, former South African president, eulogized that “her music inspired a powerful sense of

⁴² Panashe Chigumadzi, “Voices as Powerful as Guns: Panashe Chigumadzi on Dorothy Masuka’s (w)Ri(o)Ting Woman-Centred Pan-Africanism,” *The Johannesburg Review of Books*, April 9, 2020, <https://johannesburgreviewofbooks.com/2019/05/06/voices-as-powerful-as-guns-panashe-chigumadzi-on-dorothy-masukas-wrioting-woman-centred-pan-africanism/>

⁴³ Susan Z. Andrade. Gender and the Public Sphere in Africa: Writing Women and Rioting Women Author(s) in *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, No. 54 (2002), 45-59.

⁴⁴ Kelli Morgan, “We Are Roses From Our Mothers’ Gardens: Black Feminist Visuality in African American Women’s Art” (2017).

⁴⁵ Ruth Feldstein, “Screening Antiapartheid: Miriam Makeba, Come Back Africa the Transnational Circulation of Black Culture & Politics.” *Feminist Studies* 39, no. 1 (2013): 12-39. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23719285>.

⁴⁶ Belafonte’s Protégée: African in Coast-to-coast Debut,” (*Ebony*, February 1960), 109-110.

hope in all of us.” She was all that. And more. *MAKEBA! Mama Africa Speaks* aims to reveal at least some of it. And inspire the audience to go and learn more. The Long 1960s, its art and music, are alive and well, its influence still felt—and heard.

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“Makeba! Mama Africa Speaks” Discography

A comprehensive list of music incorporated in constructing the project.

Baby Ntsoare (1954)

Label: Gallotone Jive – GB.2007 (South Africa)

Traditional, Arranged by Joe Mokgotsi

“Manhattan Brothers – Baby Ntsoare / Laku Tshoni 'Langa (Shellac).”

<https://www.discogs.com/release/8603803-Manhattan-Brothers-Baby-Ntsoare-Laku-Tshoni-langa>.

Lakutshon'ilanga (1954)

Label: Gallotone Jive – GB.2007 (South Africa)

Written by Makhwenke Dvushe

“Manhattan Brothers – Baby Ntsoare / Laku Tshoni 'Langa (Shellac).”

<https://www.discogs.com/release/8603803-Manhattan-Brothers-Baby-Ntsoare-Laku-Tshoni-langa>.

Hush (1959)

Label: Wrasse Records – WRASS 088 (South Africa)

Traditional, Arranged by Abigail Khubeka

“Miriam Makeba – the Best of the Early Years (2002, CD).” 1970.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/4458928-Miriam-Makeba--Best-Of-The-Early-Years>.

Do Unto Others (1959)

Label: Gallo Record Company – CDGSP 3130 (South Africa)

Composer Unknown

“Miriam Makeba–Best of Miriam Makeba and the Skylarks 1956-1959 Vol. 1.” 1970.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/2398168-Miriam-Makeba-The-Best-Of-Miriam-Makeba-And-The-Skylarks-1956-1959-Vol-1>.

The Retreat Song (Jikele Maweni) (1960)

Traditional

Label: RCA Victor – LPM 2267, RCA Victor – LPM-2267 (USA)

“Miriam Makeba – Miriam Makeba (1960, Vinyl).” 1960.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/1677650-Miriam-Makeba-Miriam-Makeba>.

Dubula (1964)

Written by Miriam Makeba

Label: RCA Victor – 86.374 (USA)

“Miriam Makeba – Dubula / Kwedini / Umhome / Amampondo (Vinyl)” 1964.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/7637782-Miriam-Makeba-Dubula-Kwedini-Umhome-Amampondo>.

Khawuleza (Hurry, Mama, Hurry!) (1965)

Written by Dorothy Masuka

Label: RCA Victor – LSP-3420 (USA)

“Belafonte / Makeba – an Evening with Belafonte/Makeba (Vinyl).” 1965.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/2400355-Belafonte-Makeba-An-Evening-With-BelafonteMakeba>.

Beware Verwoerd! (Ndodemnyama we Verwoerd!) (1965)

Written by the Vuyisile Mini

Label: RCA Victor – LSP-3420 (USA)

“Belafonte / Makeba – an Evening with Belafonte/Makeba (Vinyl).” 1965.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/2400355-Belafonte-Makeba-An-Evening-With-BelafonteMakeba>.

Malaika (1965)

Written by Fadhili William

Label: RCA Victor – LSP-3420 (USA)

“Belafonte / Makeba – an Evening with Belafonte/Makeba (Vinyl).” 1965.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/2400355-Belafonte-Makeba-An-Evening-With-BelafonteMakeba>.

When I've Passed On (1965)

Written by William Salter

Label: RCA Victor – LSP-342 (USA)

“Belafonte / Makeba – an Evening with Belafonte/Makeba (Vinyl).” 1965.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/2400355-Belafonte-Makeba-An-Evening-With-BelafonteMakeba>.

Give us Our Land (1965)

Label: RCA Victor – LPM-3420 (USA)

Written by Belafonte

“Belafonte / Makeba – an Evening with Belafonte/Makeba (Vinyl).” 1965.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/2400355-Belafonte-Makeba-An-Evening-With-BelafonteMakeba>.

Four Letter Words (1966)

Written by Margo Guryan

Label: Mercury – SR 61095, Mercury – MG 21095 (USA)

“Miriam Makeba – All about Miriam (1966, Vinyl).” 1966.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/6180429-Miriam-Makeba-All-About-Miriam>.

To love and to Lose (1966)

Label: Mercury – SR 61095, Mercury – MG 21095 (USA)

Written by William Salter

“Miriam Makeba – All about Miriam (1966, Vinyl).” 1966.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/6180429-Miriam-Makeba-All-About-Miriam>.

Pata Pata (1967)

Written by Jerry Ragovoy, Miriam Makeba

Label: Reprise Records – RS 6274 (USA)

“Miriam Makeba—Pata Pata—the Hit Sound of Miriam Makeba (Vinyl).” 1967.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/7534226-Miriam-Makeba-Pata-Pata-The-Hit-Sound-Of-Miriam-Makeba>.

The Click Song Number One / Qongqothwane (1967)

Written by Miriam Makeba

Label: Reprise Records – RS 6274 (USA)

“Miriam Makeba—Pata Pata—the Hit Sound of Miriam Makeba (Vinyl).” 1967.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/7534226-Miriam-Makeba-Pata-Pata-The-Hit-Sound-Of-Miriam-Makeba>.

West Wind (1967)

Written by Caiphus Semenya, William Salter

Label: Reprise Records – RS 6274 (USA)

“Miriam Makeba—Pata Pata—the Hit Sound of Miriam Makeba (Vinyl).” 1967.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/7534226-Miriam-Makeba-Pata-Pata-The-Hit-Sound-Of-Miriam-Makeba>.

Ha Po Zamani (1967)

Written by Dorothy Masuka

Label: Reprise Records – RS 6274 (USA)

“Miriam Makeba—Pata Pata—the Hit Sound of Miriam Makeba (Vinyl).” 1967.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/7534226-Miriam-Makeba-Pata-Pata-The-Hit-Sound-Of-Miriam-Makeba>.

A Piece of Ground (1967)

Written by Jeremy Taylor

Label: Reprise Records – RS 6274 (USA)

“Miriam Makeba—Pata Pata—the Hit Sound of Miriam Makeba (Vinyl).” 1967.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/7534226-Miriam-Makeba-Pata-Pata-The-Hit-Sound-Of-Miriam-Makeba>.

Quit It (1974)

Written by Sibongile Makeba / Caiphus Semenya

Label: RCA Victor – YSPL 1-544 (USA)

“Miriam Makeba and Stokely Carmichael, 1968.”

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/image/miriam-makeba-and-stokely-carmichael-1968>.

Malcolm X (1974)

Written by Angela Sibongile (Bongi) Makeba

Label: Cabal (2) – INT-6003 (France)

“Myriam Makeba – Live Au Palais Du Peuple De Conakry (Vinyl).” 1974.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/6968527-Myriam-Makeba-Live-Au-Palais-Du-Peuple-De-Conakry>.

Lumumba (1974)

Written by Angela Sibongile (Bongi) Makeba

Label: Supraphon – 1 13 1474, Gramofonový Klub – 1 13 1474 Czechoslovakia

“Miriam Makeba – Miriam Makeba (Vinyl).” 1974.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/8498159-Miriam-Makeba-Miriam-Makeba>.

Woza (1975)

Written by Hugh Masekela

Label: [RCA](#) – PJL2-8042, RCA – 26.28111 (USA)

“Harry Belafonte & Miriam Makeba” (Vinyl).” 1975.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/1404788-Harry-Belafonte-Miriam-Makeba-Harry-Belafonte-Miriam-Makeba>.

African Convention (1980)

Label: Pläne – 88 202 (Germany)

Written by Hugh Masekela

“Miriam Makeba – African Convention (Vinyl).”1980.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/3543617-Miriam-Makeba-African-Convention>.

Icala (1988)

Traditional

Label: Warner Bros. Records – 25673-1 (USA)

“Miriam Makeba – Sangoma (Vinyl).” 1988.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/1029932-Miriam-Makeba-Sangoma>.

Ungakanani (1988)

Traditional

Label: Warner Bros. Records – 25673-1 (USA)

“Miriam Makeba – Sangoma (Vinyl).” 1988.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/1029932-Miriam-Makeba-Sangoma>.

Soweto Blues (1989)

Label: PolyGram Records – 838 208-1 (USA)

Written by Hugh Masekela

“Miriam Makeba – Welela (Vinyl).” 1989.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/1564112-Miriam-Makeba-Welela>.

Aluta Continua (1990)

Label: African Cream – ACM - CD0059 (South Africa)

Written by Manley Buchanan / Herbie Miller

“Miriam Makeba—the Legend (CD).” 1990.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/12022670-Miriam-Makeba-The-Legend>.

Thank You Mama (1992)

Label: Qwest Records – 9 45060-2, Warner Bros. Records – 9 45060-2 (USA)

Written by Mbongeni Ngema

“Mbongeni Ngema—Music from the Motion Picture Sarafina! the Sound of Freedom (CD).” 1992.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/1459686-Mbongeni-Ngema-Music-From-The-Motion-Picture-Sarafina-The-Sound-Of-Freedom>.

ADDENDUM

Additional Notes and Background on Music featured in *Mama Africa Speaks!*

The Manhattan Brothers and Makeba, enjoyed a string of hits, including the Sepedi love song, “Baby Ntsoare,” from 1954. Its release was announced in the November 1954 issue of *Drum*, without mention of Makeba, Gallo Records crediting the song “with accompaniment.”⁴⁷

In his 1989 *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary*, Prof Njabulo Ndebele poses that South Africa narratives must venture past the “oppressor or oppressed, anti-Apartheid hero or black victim.” Instead, Ndebele argues, we need to establish a “politics of the ordinary, where we begin to go deep into the inner worlds and everyday encounters of living while black, while woman, while poor, and draw our universal lessons from this understanding.”⁴⁸ Makeba’s “Lakutshon’ilanga” is wholly that, dealing as it does with mothers and their disappeared children at the hands of the police.⁴⁹

Makeba was made famous when featured in the 1959 film, *Come Back, Africa* by American filmmaker Lionel Rogosin. The film was a success at the 1960 Venice Film Festival. Her appearance is non-narrative, and she explains, “my one and only scene takes place in a shebeen⁵⁰, a club where Blacks who are not permitted to drink, are illegally served alcohol. A group of journalists are discussing politics, I come in, and they recognize me. I sing a song, but they won’t let me go. ‘Sing us another!’ I do, and that is the last anyone will see of me in *Come Back, Africa*.”

⁴⁷ http://www.flatinternational.org/template_volume.php?volume_id=384

⁴⁸ Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006).

⁴⁹ Binwe Adebayo, “Lakutshon’ Ilanga,” nataal.com, March 7, 2021, <https://nataal.com/lakutshon-ilanga>.

⁵⁰ A shebeen⁵⁰ in the South African context is a local tavern in Black-designated townships.

Makeba first recorded a swinging *Miriam and Spoke's Phatha Phatha*, with her Johannesburg group The Skylarks in 1959. The 1967 version renamed "Pata Pata," proved a resounding mainstream breakthrough, US R&B producer Jerry Ragovoy taking the helm. "Every Friday and Saturday night, it's "Pata Pata" time!" says Makeba. "Pata" means "light touch," and the Xhosa song describes a flirtatious dance routine with sexual undertones, as both Makeba and Dorothy Masuka comment in interviews, Makeba frequently expressing her dislike for the song. But "Pata Pata" was also the last song Makeba sang on stage, suffering a fatal heart attack after performing at a charity concert in Naples for Roberto Saviano, a fierce anti-Camorra crime syndicate writer, on November 9, 2008.⁵¹

Miriam Makeba and the Skylarks blended American influences of pop, gospel, and jazz with South African tribal rhythms and mbube, a four-part harmony style invented by Zulu miners. Makeba's vocals are pure and innocent. The rest of the line-up comprised Mary Rabotapi, Abigail Kubeka, and Mummy Girl Nketle. Sam Ngakane, a deep bass, produced some of the Skylarks' biggest hits, including "Hush."

Xhosa is one of the few remaining languages retaining phonetic clicks, the result of incorporating members of the /Xam Bushmen.⁵² Three click sounds, represented by the Roman letters X, Q, and C, are frequently explained by Makeba during performances. She uses the opportunity to point at colonial rule, its disregard for native language and disinterest in learning pronunciation. The song, a traditional Xhosa wedding song, is brisk. Just three lines repeated with minor flourishes. "Qongqothwane" means "knock-knock beetle" (Afrikaans *Toktokkie*), a

⁵¹ Alan Cowell, "Miriam Makeba, Singer and Activist, Dies at 76," The New York Times (The New York Times, November 10, 2008), <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/10/arts/10iht-11makeba.17680209.html>.

⁵² Bohm, Susanne, "Clicks in Xhosa and Nama: A comparative analysis" (2010). Thesis, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

beetle with a distinctive tapping sound when they knock their abdomens on the ground and are thought to bring good luck and rain.

“Jikele Maweni” (The Retreat Song) tells of Xhosa warrior men and the art of stick fighting. Stylistically rendered in a lighthearted tone, the song was sung by women as a protest song, especially during marches.

Produced by Hugo Peretti and Luigi Creatore—of *The Lion Sleeps Tonight* fame—Makeba’s third album, “The World of Miriam Makeba,” has a pop luster, including an orchestra under Hugh Masekela, who would soon marry Makeba. Makeba’s version of “Dubula” shimmers, and she lands the word “Lumka!” (Watch out!) with a playful touch.

Khawuleza was initially recorded in 1959 by Zimbabwean-born South African singer Dorothy Masuka. Although competitors, Masuka and Makeba were friends, Makeba singing many of Masuka’s songs. Makeba announces the song on stage, saying “Khawuleza is a South African song. It comes from the townships, locations, reservations, whichever. Near the cities of South Africa where all the black South Africans live. Their children shout from the streets when they see police cars coming to raid their home for one thing or another. They say, ‘Khawuleza Mama.’ Which means, ‘Hurry Mama, please, please don't let them catch you’.”⁵³

“Ndodemnyama we Verwoerd” directly references Hendrik Verwoerd, Prime Minister of South Africa, from 1958 until his assassination in 1966. Verwoerd is considered the “architect of apartheid,” passing laws that stripped Black South Africans of Civil Rights. Under the Verwoerd regime in the 50s, several events solidified and entrenched the Apartheid system, including the Sharpeville Massacre, the Rivonia Treason Trial, and the banning of the African National

⁵³ “Apartheid Songs—Rate Your Music,” <https://rateyourmusic.com/list/JBrummer/apartheid-songs/>.

Congress. The song tells Verwoerd, and white South Africans in general, to “Lumka!”, (Watch out!) for the rising Black revolution described as an approaching Black man.⁵⁴

Throughout the early 1960s Makeba drew large crowds, on national and international tours with Belafonte, collaborating on and winning a Grammy Award for, *An Evening with Belafonte/Makeba* in 1965. Meaning “angel” or “darling,” Malaika is possibly the best-known Swahili song. Several versions present different lyrics and versions of the title. Kenyan, Fadhili William, is recognized, by some, as composer, others claiming Malaika was composed by Tanzanian, Adam Salim, in Nairobi during 1945.⁵⁵

Sung in October 1965, at the Organisation for African Unity summit in Accra, Ghana, the event was the first live performance recorded by the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation. Both sound and video were believed to have been lost. Marconi’s engineers, however, made audio recordings of the concert and interview with Makeba. It resurfaced in 2016 and released. Makeba recorded a studio version in September 1965 for RCA Victor in New York City.

“Ha Po Zamani,” composed by Dorothy Masuka, is an indictment of white Afrikaner presence in Southern Africa, and whiteness standing in the way of Black autonomy. The song style is *mabira*, fusing swing and Zulu melodies, sung with power and intensity.

From the original album, “The Promise,” the song was recorded, produced, and released in East Germany and not widely available to the then-West. Makeba’s music by this stage assumes an early 70s funk style without quite foreshadowing the burgeoning disco movement. Later in 1975, *Quit* It was covered by jazz cornetist and trumpeter Nat Adderley—a frequent collaborator with his brother, Cannonball Adderley—in a secular, bluesy gospel-jazz style.

⁵⁴ Charles Leonard , “Political Songs: Ndodemnyama – Miriam Makeba,” New Frame, February 17, 2020, <https://www.newframe.com/political-songs-ndodemnyama-miriam-makeba/>.

⁵⁵ Andrew Ford, Chapter 73, in *The Song Remains the Same: 800 Years of Love Songs, Laments and Lullabies* (Carlton, VIC: La Trobe University Press, 2019).

Composed by Bongi Makeba, “Lumumba” is a tribute to Patrice Émery Lumumba, whom Makeba’s grandson was named after. Lumumba was an anti-colonial leader becoming the first prime minister of a newly independent Congo at thirty-five. Lumumba—both man and mention of his name—triggered the South African establishment. The South African aversion to Lumumba is rooted in its fierce anticommunist stance, a fact that ingratiated Pretoria into the US worldview, turning a blind eye to Apartheid that would last well into Ronald Reagan’s term as President of the United States, until he begrudgingly acted against the South Africa government when he signed the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act in 1986. Many exiled anti-Apartheid leaders within the banned African National Congress (ANC) trained at Lumumba.⁵⁶

The album *Sangoma* is a tribute to Makeba’s mother, a traditional mystical healer. Each track is created by multi-layering Makeba’s voice. “Icala” means “trouble,” and, while the song is about a bird, it’s also about sex. Makeba says that “we do talk indirectly because we cannot say certain things directly in our tradition. So, this is a warning to young men and women that—of course, more to the young men—in this case, the young lady is a bird. But actually, it means that young men should not have sex with young ladies before they go and ask for their hand.”

Fueled by her 1986 Graceland participation with Paul Simon, *Sangoma* was Makeba’s return to the recording studio after ten years. As such, the album seems somewhat eager to bask in the glow of Simon’s project. *Sangoma* is a collection of traditional songs performed in a sensitive and musical manner. *Ungakanani* translates as, “How Big Is He?” It’s a traditional song celebrating Shaka, the great Zulu king and conqueror⁵⁷, and his victories.

⁵⁶ Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, “Patrice Lumumba: The Most Important Assassination of the 20th Century | Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja,” *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, January 17, 2011), <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/jan/17/patrice-lumumba-50th-anniversary-assassination>.

⁵⁷ During his reign, more than a hundred chiefdoms were amalgamated into the Zulu kingdom, surviving not only Shaka’s death in 1828, but military defeat and attempts to break it up.