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'Africa Civilised, Africa Uncivilised': Local Culture, World System and South African Music

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The paper examines two episodes in the production of music in South Africa. The first was by the South African Choir to England in 1891-92, a group whose performances were full of images that were both modern and local, and perceived by audiences of the times as confusingly 'civilised and uncivilised'. The second episode was the making of Paul Simon's Graceland, which involved the collaboration of the Ladysmith Black Mambazo choir and has been seen by several commentators as a prime example of both 'world music' and post-modern cultural production. Within the context of these examples, the paper looks critically at both the ideology and genesis of 'world music' and argues that the production of aesthetic difference is an intrinsic part of what in late capitalism is one vast, all-encompassing environment of global culture. It goes on to suggest that 'difference' should no longer be seen as something inherent in the content of discrete cultures but rather something to be defined as an intrinsic feature of global music production.

In this paper I offer a preliminary account of a century of South African music and its entanglement with the larger world. In so doing, I shall contrast two episodes, two historical moments which centre around two interrelated genres of Nguni a capella choral music. The first episode I shall examine are the tours of the South African Choir to England and North America from 1891 to 1894. The second episode focuses on the music of Ladysmith Black Mambazo, particularly its role on the Grammy Award winning album *Graceland* by US pop star Paul Simon.¹

These two episodes seem to roughly correspond to two stages in the useful periodisation Roland Robertson has suggested for globalisation processes: the 'take-off phase' of high imperialism and the 'uncertainty' phase of the present.² My aim here, however, is not to propose a periodisation of 'world music' nor to offer a typology of such musics. By covering such a broad historical spectrum and by differentiating between distinct historical phases I wish rather to demonstrate that the transnational flow of commodified forms of music is a process much older than the term 'world music', first emerging in the mid-1980s, suggests. From this perspective, I hope to be in a better position to shed light on the ways in which the production of difference through music is situated within a historically, socially and spatially interconnected world.³

1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the conference on 'Symbols of Change - Transregional Culture and Local Practice in Southern Africa' in Berlin in January 1993. I am indebted to Ulf Hannerz for his comments, and to Ute Luig for co-hosting this event.

2 R. Robertson, 'Mapping the Global Condition: Globalisation as the Central Concept' in M. Featherstone (ed), *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity* (London, 1990), p. 26 ff.

3 A. Gupta and J. Ferguson, 'Beyond Culture: Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference', *Cultural Anthropology*, 7,1 (1992) pp. 6-23.

Ultimately, this kind of analysis should enable us to deconstruct some of the mythologies and pop images constructed around processes of translocal exchange and cultural globalisation. In other words, I am suggesting a critical look at the ideology and genesis of 'world music' of which South African music is only one, albeit particularly evocative and instructive, example. The current role of South African arts in the world of transnational culture, I argue, and the concurrent pop aesthetics inscribed in such prominent recent examples as *Graceland*, are the result of complex historical processes that, beyond marketing strategies, apartheid politics, and black musical talent, fundamentally involve the constant moulding of images of social and geographical space. This is to say that the growing articulation of South African music with the modern world-system, the intertwining of transnational culture and local practice, is both effected by and reflected in the dialectical relationship between notions of locality, identity and authenticity and images of inter-cultural exchange, global ecumene and humanity.

As I have argued elsewhere, the aesthetic production of difference rests on two interrelated attributes of global culture: commodity production and the way in which differentiation is written into the very structural logic of late capitalism.⁴ To briefly recapitulate my argument here, I take as axiomatic the fact that in the new global culture, it is products, images – designed, produced and marketed to represent an experience – that become the basic, universally valid units of culture. But this global commodification, based as it is on a deeply homogenising impulse, at the same time involves relentless differentiation. Following Fredric Jameson, on whose thoughts about the systemic nature of late capitalism much of my argument is based, difference is something that relates disparate realms of experience rather than separates them. The production of difference is inherent in the logic of capitalism itself. The ability of the system to reproduce itself in endless variations and inter-connected sub-systems rests on a deeply 'anti-social', atomising logic that makes for much of capitalism's originality as a historical mode of production.⁵ And thus, the omnipresence of commodity production is the roof, as it were, under which differentiation and homogenisation now comfortably reside as members of the same family. Or, as Jean Baudrillard says in *The Transparency of Evil*, difference, like the rest, has fallen under the law of the market.⁶

Paradoxically, the systemic reproduction of capitalist society through social difference – or, 'growth by internal disjunction', as Niklas Luhmann would say⁷ – does not implode the system from within, in the sense of the structural contradictions producing the collapse of the whole without the intervention of some outside force or acting subject. Differentiation simply increases, on a grander scale, the heteronymy and chaos that are the historical attribute of this society. In Luhmann's systems theory, which strikingly resembles Jameson's argument, the production of difference in ceaseless internal replications of a closed system achieves even claustrophobic dimensions. System differentiation, Luhmann says, merely replicates the difference between a system and its environment. Each sub-system therefore becomes a copy of the whole system in the special form of the difference between the sub-system and its environment. A complex system such as the global economy thus gains integration primarily not on the basis of common values, norms or power relations, but simply by providing an ordered environment to its sub-systems. On this reading, then, a system that constitutively pro-

4 V. Erlmann, 'The Politics and Aesthetics of Transnational Musics', *The World of Music*, 35,2 (1993), pp. 3-15.

5 F. Jameson, *Postmodernism Or, The Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, 1991), p. 343.

6 J. Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil* (London, 1993).

7 N. Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society* (New York, 1982), p. 231.

duces difference remains a system all the same. Difference is no longer an antithesis to the system; it is drawn back inside the system.

Despite the striking absence of any form of human agency, Luhmann's notion of system seems attractive for the analysis of global aesthetic production, because we are in fact dealing with the most ramified, all-encompassing environment ever in the history of artistic production, regardless of how creative individual performers or groups of performers may still continue to be. Consequently, this notion of global culture as a system should not be confounded with 'the system', or 'the West', in the older sense of an imperial centre dominating a colonial periphery. Nor is my theoretical move an attempt at re-centring global cultural production around a single, homogenising term. The notion of a global system is more a relational category which, while trying to arrest the dominant forces in a field, recognises the role of disjuncture and dislocation in contemporary world politics and culture.

At the very least, this interpretative option should enable us to transcend the heteronymy and tautology implicit in the ideology of difference. In contrast to Iain Chambers' discussion of the 'travelling sounds' of the post-modern era, a more systemic notion of global cultural production prevents us from essentialising music as a 'source of difference' *per se*.⁸ Systems theory might provide an opening in which to rehearse an aesthetic theory that goes beyond a random collection of ethnoaesthetics. The meaning of difference would then no longer be seen as inherent in the 'content' of discrete 'cultures' waiting to be bridged by the anthropologist.⁹ Difference would be defined ontologically, as it were, as an intrinsic, internal feature of global musical production.

The relevance of this point for my argument needs to be particularly emphasised, because even where, as in much of the current debate on post-colonialism, the Other is constructed not as an ontologically given, and where the binarisms of 'self' and 'other' are dissolved and differences are seen as historically produced and contingent upon each other, there remains at times a hint of a post-structuralist truism, an unaccounted for space in which difference itself cannot be further theorised. Difference is simply assumed as a given of the pre-colonial condition which is then naturalised through the descriptive juxtaposition of discrepant domains enclosing fixed sets of incompatible meanings.

To understand the tours of the South African Choir, it is instructive to recall, briefly, the political climate of the time. The 1890s were an era of dramatic change in South Africa that saw the birth of an enormous industrial colossus and the expansion and consolidation of the Cape Colony to the largest territorial state on the subcontinent. At the same time, the 1890s were a period when the new structures by and large still found the sympathetic approval of early black nationalist leaders. However, as the colonial administration and perniciously racist settlers increasingly failed to live up to the norms set by imperial ideology, black nationalists and their white liberal allies increasingly began to appeal to the 'white man's burden'.¹⁰ It is in this sort of political climate that the South African Choir left for England in 1891 and 1893 respectively: emissaries to the imperial consciousness, musical reminders of 'England's duty'.

8 I. Chambers, 'Travelling Sounds: Whose Centre, Whose Periphery?', *Popular Music Perspectives*, 3 (1992), p. 144.

9 Gupta and Ferguson, 'Beyond Culture', p. 8; S. Falk Moore, 'The Production of Cultural Pluralism as a Process', *Public Culture*, 1, 2 (1989), p. 43 ff.

10 S. Marks, *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa: Class, Nationalism and the State in 20th Century Natal* (Johannesburg, 1986), pp. 42-73.

The South African Choir had been formed as the African answer to Orpheus McAdoo's Virginia Jubilee Singers, a group of African-American performers whose tours of South Africa in the early 1890s were a pivotal moment in the history of black music.¹¹ For the Jubilee Singers not only sang the Negro spirituals, the heartpiece of the oppressed culture of America's black slaves, deep into black South Africans' hearts, the tours also set ablaze the minds of South Africa's black population with a vision of black pride and dignity more powerful and clear than had ever been voiced before from a South African theatrical stage. The following is the account of the performance of the 'Great American Singers' in Kimberley's Town Hall in August 1890 by Josiah Semouse, a young clerk at the Kimberley Post Office and future member of the South African Choir:

Gentlemen, I do not find the words to describe the way in which these people sang. Unless I am mistaken, I can say that they sang like angels singing Hosanna in heaven. All the people on the diamond fields agree that they sing better than anybody else, white or black ... Hear! Today they have their own schools, primary, secondary and high schools, and also universities. They are run by them without the help of the whites. They have magistrates, judges, lawyers, bishops, ministers and evangelists, and school masters. Some have learned a craft such as building etc. When will the day come when the African people will be like the Americans? When will they stop being slaves and become nations with their own government?¹²

No sooner had the Jubilee Singers left Kimberley than a number of missionaries gathered an enthusiastic group of young men and women and decided to form a similar group that would tour South Africa and Europe in an effort to raise funds for a black university. In January 1891 the group, billed as 'African Jubilee Singers' eventually embarked on a tour of the Cape, before finally leaving for England in May of the same year. Strictly speaking, such tours of black South African entertainers to England were not an altogether novel phenomenon. As early as 1810, one Saartjie Baartman had been put on display as the 'Hottentot Venus', only to be followed in 1853 by a group of sixteen Zulus, variously billed as 'Zulu Kafirs' or 'Exhibition of the Native Tribes of South Africa.'¹³ The difference between these earlier shows and the South African Choir was not necessarily in their financial organisation or content, but in the deliberately political objectives of the tours of the South African Choir.

In any event, the South African Choir stayed in England until June 1892, performing in front of Queen Victoria and to packed houses in almost every major city. The details of this extraordinary adventure are too complex to be reviewed here in full detail. Suffice it to say that, among numerous other difficulties, fighting broke out between some members of the troupe, while another chorister, Sannie Koopman, was later convicted of the concealment of child birth. In the end, the whole enterprise failed abysmally. Losses of more than £1,000 had been accrued, the performers' wages had not been paid, and when finally most musicians were abandoned by their white agents, the tours ended in a total impasse – a 'heartless swindle, perpetrated at the black man's expense', as Lovedale's Principal James Stewart later called it.¹⁴ Despite this, the South African Choir embarked on a second tour in February 1893 that was to take Charlotte Manye and others to Canada and the United States. Like the previous tour of the UK, this tour, too, ended in a fiasco, but beyond the hardship the enterprise also initiated the

11 V. Erlmann, *African Stars: Studies in Black South African Performance* (Chicago 1991), pp. 21-53.

12 *Leselinyana*, 1 October (1890).

13 B. Lindfors, 'The Hottentot Venus and other African Attractions in Nineteenth-Century England', *Australian Drama Studies*, 1, 2 (1983), pp. 83-104.

14 J. Stewart, *Lovedale, South Africa* (Edinburgh, 1894), p. 70.

transatlantic relationship between the African Methodist Episcopal church in the US and the emerging 'independent' churches in South Africa.¹⁵

Although the tours of the South African Choir inaugurated, among other things, the kind of exploitative practices that were to increasingly mark the ways in which black performers in South Africa experience the modern world system, what interests us here are the performances themselves and the discourses about difference and otherness to which they gave rise. For this, it is useful to consider in passing the backgrounds of at least three of the choristers, starting perhaps with the person that later was to gain the most prominence: Charlotte Makhomo Manye.¹⁶

According to her first biographer, Alfred Xuma, Charlotte's father was a Basotho from the Transvaal who travelled to the Cape to buy guns 'with which to fight the Boers'. However, instead of earning his labour for guns – a plan designed by Moshoeshoe – Charlotte's father came into contact with the missionary activities that had been particularly successful since the early nineteenth century with the Mfengu people uprooted and dislocated by Shaka's expansionist policy. Charlotte's father found the prospects offered by missionaries – mainly land – preferable to the uncertainties of trading weapons and waging war against the equally expanding Boers. And so he settled in Blinkwater, married a Mfengu girl, and became a preacher of the Independent Church. Charlotte was sent to Uitenhage to start primary education, and later, after the family had moved to Port Elizabeth, Charlotte enrolled at the Edwards Memorial School sometime between 1883 and 1886. Unable to send their daughter to high school, the Manyes subsequently moved to Kimberley where Charlotte found employment as an assistant teacher and sewing mistress in a Wesleyan school.

In 1890, by the time the entire Manye family had settled in the diamond town, Kimberley had changed from a mining shanty town to a company town that, in the words of Brian Willan, was 'regarded as a triumph of English civilisation.'¹⁷ In fact, the 'supremacy of British culture and institutions was one of those self-evident facts quite inseparable from Kimberley's existence'.¹⁸ Besides British institutions and values, Kimberley also boasted a thriving community of middle-class Africans of varied cultural backgrounds, which quickly absorbed newcomers like the Manyes and offered a variety of avenues to express shared values as a self-conscious urban black community.

Music making provided perhaps one of the main bonds of interest and association for the members of this community. Beyond this, it was an activity that more than anything else, 'demonstrated the intermediate cultural position in which this social group found itself and highlighted the rich possibilities inherent in such a situation'. To sing in a choir, to play the harmonium or the piano was to submit proof of one's place in a civilised community. And thus, it was only natural 'that these buds of musical talent attracted the attention of music lovers among both races in Kimberley's otherwise segregated musical circles.'¹⁹

15 Erlmann, *African Stars*, pp. 47-49.

16 *Illustrated London News*, 29 August (1891), p. 283; T. D. M. Skota, *The African Yearly Register* (Johannesburg, 1931).

17 B. Willan, 'An African in Kimberley: Sol Plaatje, 1894-1898' in S. Marks and R. Rathbone (eds), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa; African Class Formation, Culture and Consciousness, 1870-1930* (London, 1982), p. 239.

18 *Ibid.*

19 Xuma, *Charlotte Manye*, p. 10.

Another member of the choir whose enthusiastic report on the Virginia Jubilee Singers we already heard, was Josiah Semouse. Like Charlotte Manye he was given prominence by the British press, mainly, it appears because of his involvement in the Gun War against Britain in 1880-81 and the Queen's special request to see him shortly after their arrival in England. Semouse was born in Quthing in 1862, but he received mission education at Korokoro where his father was appointed as a local preacher. Having completed his primary education, Semouse proceeded to the nearby Morija Training Institute, by then one of the most prestigious colleges in Southern Africa. After taking part in the Gun War, Semouse walked to Lovedale and took up courses in 1881. In 1886 he joined the Telegraph Department in Kimberley, a post he held until March 1891 when he 'received an esteemed offer from the manager of the African Choir to join the choir for England'.²⁰ Semouse died in January 1893, shortly after his return to South Africa, allegedly of a disease contracted in England.

Paul Xiniwe, finally, was the most senior member of the choir and perhaps also the most vocal. Born in 1857 in Bedford, Xiniwe started as a lineman for the Graff Reinet Telegraph Department, gradually working his way up to the position of a telegraph clerk and timekeeper. With the money earned, he entered Lovedale in 1881, in the same year when Semouse entered the College. In later years Xiniwe also taught at the Edwards Memorial School in Port Elizabeth, before he finally opened a number of shops and hotels in East London, Port Elizabeth and King Williamstown. In sum, and in the words of Mveli Skota, Xiniwe's son-in-law and compiler of the *African Yearly Register*, Paul Xiniwe was an 'upright man, honest gentleman, and a thorough Christian and a staunch temperance apostle'.²¹

Apart from these singers, the choir also comprised a few other Lovedale graduates and people of similar cultural backgrounds: Xiniwe's wife Eleanor, Johanna Jonker, Sannie Koopman, and Charlotte's sister Kate Malabese as sopranos and altos, Frances Gqoba, Mbikazi Nobengula, John Mbongwe, Albert Jonas, Neli Mabandla, George McLellan, Samuel Konongo, and Wellington Majiza as tenors and basses.

Thus clearly, the South African Choir consisted of devout Christians, most of them educated mission graduates from the Cape and members of exceedingly prosperous farming communities, as well as of the two white promoters Walter Letty and J. Balmer who, in the parlance of the time, could best be described as 'friends of the natives'. In other words, the group comprised people whose careers were exemplary of the tiny stratum of educated Africans and whose vision of proper relations between the colonisers and their subjects was based on the firm belief in a common core of Christian values, the 'uplifting' role of education, and in the need for some form of enlightened African self-rule. This credo was perhaps expressed nowhere as succinctly as in the first interview given by the choir to the English press:

Let us be in Africa even as we are in England. Here we are treated as men and women. Yonder we are but as cattle. But in Africa, as in England, we are human. Can you not make your people at the Cape as kind and just as your people here? ... Help us to found the schools for which we pray, where our people could learn to labour, to build, to acquire your skill with their hands. Then could we be sufficient unto ourselves. Our young men would build us houses and lay out our farms, and our tribes would develop independently of the civilisation and industries which you have given us.²²

20 *Illustrated London News*, 29 August (1891), p. 283.

21 Skota, *The African Yearly Register*, p. 109.

22 *The Review of Reviews*, 1V, 2 (September 1891), p. 256.

The question then for the choir was how to present this vision in performance, how to deliver to a metropolitan audience images of Africa at once modern and unmistakably local and autochthonous. Perhaps predictably, the performers tried to solve the dilemma by having it both ways by, as one Dublin paper put it, 'illustrating Africa civilised and uncivilised'.²³

The singers appeared on stage in the Victorian formal wear of the time, and alternatively and much against their own wishes, in a traditional garb of sorts, composed of blankets, leopard skins, shields and the like (photos 1-2). Analogous to the stage costumes, the repertoire of the group consisted of English part songs, African-American jubilee songs, and a medley of 'native songs' that included, among others, John Knox Bokwe's arrangement of Ntsikana's *Ulo Thixo omkhulu*, *Singamawele*, and the 'Kaffir Wedding Song'. Although all these titles were unmistakably South African, none could in fact be described as 'native' in any specific sense. Rather, these songs were classics of a repertoire called *makwaya* (choir songs), a genre that was largely based upon the Western Baroque hymn and in part only on traditional African material.

As a result, most critics and the English public seemed rather discontented, if not by the quality of the performances, by the apparent lack of an 'exotic', 'indigenous' element in the shows. *The Musical Herald*, one of the opinion leaders in matters musical, rather disappointed, found much of the music not to 'differ much from European music.'²⁴ Other journals disgruntledly stressed the fact that the music was 'tainted by harmonies suggestive rather of an English tonic sol-fa class than of savage strains.'²⁵ The mission press in South Africa, for its part, deplored the wearing of the 'native dress' as 'barbarian' and 'physically and morally dangerous.'²⁶ By wearing skins, it was alleged, the choir was misrepresenting the aspirations of black Christians and 'showing the English public how like savage heathen they can become, and how unlike civilised men and Christians'.²⁷

But what exactly did this relationship between local tradition and its modern metamorphosis for international consumption look like? How did songs that had emerged from the culture of the missions come to represent the 'native?' The story of *Ulo Thixo omkhulu*, painstakingly reconstructed by Janet Hodgson and David Dargie, will provide a useful example of this process.²⁸ *Ulo Thixo omkhulu* or, 'Great Hymn' as it is also known, is the work of Ntsikana Gaba (c.1780-1821), the first Xhosa Christian and a somewhat mysterious figure in Xhosa history. Born from a noble family of councillors to the famous chief Ngqika, Ntsikana, after a series of visions, converted to Christianity around 1814. As a direct reflection of that experience, he composed four hymns whose words and music, in modified form, were first published by John Knox Bokwe, a renowned Xhosa churchman, teacher and musician at Lovedale College. In 1876, Bokwe whose grandparents had been taught by Ntsikana, had found that Christian congregations were singing Ntsikana's hymn in two forms, and in 1885 he published one of these in '*Amaculo ase Lovedale – Lovedale Music*'. Today, Ntsikana's hymn continues to be sung widely, both in and out of church, and in some cases even as a statement of defiance. There is even evidence to suggest that some of Ntsikana's compositions made

23 *Irish Times*, 15-16 March (1892).

24 *Musical Herald*, 1 July (1891), p. 216.

25 *South Africa*, 4 July (1891), p. 17.

26 *Christian Express*, 2 November (1891), p. 170.

27 *Inkanyiso*, 17 March (1892).

28 D. Dargie, 'The Music of Ntsikana', *South African Journal of Musicology*, 2 (1982), pp. 7-28; J.Hodgson, *Ntsikana's 'Great Hymn': A Xhosa Expression of Christianity in the Early 19th Century Eastern Cape* (Cape Town, 1980).



'Africa civilised and uncivilised'—The South African Native Choir in street clothes and in 'native dress', 1891.



THE AFRICAN NATIVE CHOIR
WHICH SANG BEFORE H.M. THE QUEEN AT OSBORNE

'Africa civilised and uncivilised'—The South African Native Choir in street clothes and in 'native dress', 1891.

their way back into rural 'folk' culture. Thus, a recording of the 'Great Hymn' made by the eminent folk music collector Hugh Tracey in 1957 shows that in its present 'country' form, *Ulo Thixo omkhulu* is being sung in wedding dances of Red Xhosa – the context from which it is said to have emerged originally.²⁹

We have of course no means of telling what Ntsikana's hymn sounded like when it was performed in the early nineteenth century, and whether, consequently, the Bokwe arrangements deviate substantially from Ntsikana's original composition. But, as Dargie's analysis amply demonstrates, it is clear that the Bokwe version, despite numerous similarities, differs from the more 'traditional' wedding song recorded by Hugh Tracey in several respects. Apart from a number of Western features such as the stolid metre and the awkward disparity between Xhosa prosody and the melodic accents in the Bokwe arrangements, some of the melodic and harmonic changes introduced by Bokwe deserve particular attention. Thus, in the printed version of 1885 we have a perfect fourth (b flat) in bar 1, and a dominant chord in bar 5. Both these are atypical of Xhosa music, based as it is on a hexatonic scale which is derived from the harmonics that are obtained from two fundamental tones played on the *uhadi* musical bow. In other words, there is no perfect fourth, the fourth degree in such a hexatonic scale being derived from the 5th harmonic – which would be b natural in a series based on the fundamental G.

But how then did Ntsikana's 'Great Hymn' sound when it was performed by the South African Choir? Did their rendering of *Ulo Thixo mkhulu* sound more like the 'country' version or did the singers follow the John Knox Bokwe arrangement, published only five years earlier? Fortunately, the ears of music critics during the 1890s were rather well-trained and it is thus that the *Musical Times*, in a detailed account of the London performances of the choir, dwelled rather extensively on the unfamiliar and frequent use of parallel fifths, neutral thirds, and augmented fourths in the music. 'The notes', the gazette observed, 'to their minds, have no relation to each other as with us. Hence they avoid our mi, fa, and sing the fa sharp'. From these features, the paper concluded, 'a very good idea might be formed of the cradle of music'.³⁰

Although, from the account given in the *Musical Times*, we may not tell whether all songs featured the fa sharp – or the b natural – and whether the performance of the 'Great Hymn' was sung closer to Ntsikana's original version or J. K. Bokwe's Tonic Sol-fa arrangement, the fact remains that the augmented fourth – the 'traditional' Xhosa interval – seems to have been a prominent interval.

Of course, my point here is not the reconstruction of the 1891 performance *per se*, of 'real history' as it were, but rather the question how musical images of nature and origin, during the high phase of colonialism and dawning modernism, was cast as part of the more general discourse about otherness. Thus, on the one hand, the position 'difference' occupies in the colonial discourse becomes manifest here as a 'fixed form of difference', as Homi Bhabha calls it. The fa sharp is seen as a regression into nature, as a note without rationality, an 'other' as such.

But 'difference', on the other hand, is not only constructed from the upper end of the colonial power hierarchy. The performers themselves, as their biographies revealed, had distanced themselves from their own 'other' in the course of a long process of missionisation and Westernisation. It is thus that the representation of that 'other' –

29 AMA record series of the International Library of African Music (Grahamstown), TR 26, B1.

30 *The Musical Times*, vol. 32, 1 August (1891), p. 483.

'Africa uncivilised' – itself amounted to a construction devoid of 'authentic' content. A sense of this may be gained perhaps from a comment that appeared in *South Africa*. Although *South Africa*, as one of the leading mouthpieces of British imperialist interests, was concerned to show, rather cynically, that the young performers were the products of agitators and 'negrophilists' who only claimed to represent the oppressed African soul, the journal, in a not entirely unfounded and shrewd vein, commented on the show as follows:

The Zulus are not the 'raw' article at all, but a certain manufactured product, which, though no novelty in the mother country, may be profitable to proprietors of a show, whatever it is to any one else.³¹

As the above interpretations of *Ulo Thixo mkhulu* and of the performances by the South African Choir generally reveal, the mutual cannibalisation of sameness and difference during the take-off phase of global culture was carried out over a number of key elements such as dress, tonal system, and so on. Likewise, it became clear that these key elements were sharply marked as representations of particular fundamentally fixed, quintessential local – Western and African – cultural practices, construed as mutually exclusive, neatly bounded spheres: the civilised and the uncivilised, the raw and the manufactured, the heathen and the Christian. In themselves, the performance practices – their sameness or difference – tell us little about the degree and nature of globalisation; it is the travels from difference to sameness and back, and the boundaries that are crossed during these semiotic journeys, that count.

Paul Simon's *Graceland* has been among the most celebrated and commercially successful 'world music' projects in recent years. A wide-ranging roster of musicians participated in the making of the album, but most notably a number of well known South African acts, including the a capella choir Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Simon has been variously praised and criticised for involving these South African musicians in the making of his LP, and much of the debate following the release of *Graceland* concentrated on political issues such as the UN proclaimed cultural boycott of South Africa, the economic plight of black musicians in South Africa, and so forth.³²

Taking these debates into account and, at the same time, going beyond them, Louise Meintjes, in a trenchant analysis of *Graceland* as a text, has pointed out that the plural authorship in many of the tracks is a celebration of the social collaboration and dialogue between centre and periphery.³³ At a deeper level, however, Meintjes observes, highly power-laden images of the 'other' are involved in this conjunction between global economic and political systems on the one hand and the local lived experience of specific creators and interpreters on the other, in the production of transcultural musical styles.³⁴

Critiques such as Meintjes' are of course indispensable if we are to understand the very real power processes at stake in the transnational production of difference. What has largely been overlooked in the debate on *Graceland*, 'world music' and post-modern cultural production, is the fact that unlike any other project involving musicians from such disparate cultural realities, Simon's multimillion dollar enterprise probably

31 *South Africa*, 11 June (1892), p. 451.

32 The debate is usefully summarised in R. Denselow, *When the Music's Over: The Story of Political Pop* (London, 1989) and P. Humphries, *Paul Simon: Still Crazy After All These Years* (New York, 1989).

33 L. Meintjes, 'Paul Simon's *Graceland*, South Africa, and the Mediation of Musical Meaning', *Ethnomusicology*, 34,1 (1990), pp. 37-74.

34 *Ibid.*, pp. 37, 69.

represents one of the most powerful expressions to date of the modern world-system that has far-reaching implications for the aesthetics of popular music. The profound shifts in the aesthetics of transnational cultural flows as represented by *Graceland* become particularly apparent when the album is contrasted with earlier regimes of musical globalisation, such as the story of the South African Choir.

Following Paul Simon, the songs on *Graceland*, at the broadest level, represent a search for truth. They had 'a very similar theme: acceptance, aiming at some state of peace, looking for some state of redemption or grace'.³⁵ After two decades during which 'Graceland', Elvis Presley's Tennessee retreat, had symbolised 'the first lost promise of rock and roll', the appropriation of the name *Graceland* on the Simon album 'offered the possibility of the dream being reborn'.³⁶ A century earlier, it will be recalled, the search for some state of grace had compelled the South African Choir to seek acceptance in the heart of the imperial power, by walking the tightrope between a self-conscious cosmopolitanism – 'Africa civilised' – and a self-styled nativism – 'Africa uncivilised'. In the 1980s, by contrast, the quest for redemption did not lead Simon back to a centre. Where the tours of the South African Choir sought to assimilate the periphery to the idiom of the centre by subjugating its truth to a narrative of redemption through the progressive march of history, *Graceland*, at least as seen through the artist's own discourse, is about the fashioning of an authentic identity from the margins, from the position of the subaltern. On first hearing the music of the South African townships in 1984, Simon was reminded of the 1950s rock 'n roll out of the Atlantic Records school, and of Zydeco music. What bridged the South African material and the more familiar down home sounds was that it was 'Third World music', music that 'really is just outside the mainstream'. It is here, at the margins, Simon confesses, 'outside the mainstream ... where I always enjoyed being'.³⁷

Another reading of the album by First World consumers might suggest that, although the songs on *Graceland*, on the face of it, are about the fashioning of an identity from the position of the subaltern, they open up a new frontier between the saturated West and some other space before time. In contrast to English nineteenth century fantasies about an Africa in various stages of 'civilisation', this frontier is not an impenetrable one. Rather, the attempt on *Graceland* to construct an authentic identity, is informed by a semiotic traffic back and forth across this frontier. In trying to bring to the fore the voices of difference while at the same time recognising the universal in the local, *Graceland* partakes of what Arjun Appadurai has called a certain kind of cannibalism, a 'politics of the mutual effort of sameness and difference to cannibalise one another and thus to proclaim their successful hijacking of the twin Enlightenment ideas of the triumphantly universal and the resiliently particular'.³⁸

This symbolic traffic becomes perhaps nowhere clearer than in 'Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes', one of the two songs on the album performed jointly by Paul Simon and Ladysmith Black Mambazo. What is striking about the juncture between Simon's Manhattan and Black Mambazo's Zululand in 'Diamonds', is the degree to which this cannibalism is encoded at the level of sound texture – itself to a large extent the product of far-reaching developments in sound-recording technology – and on-stage

35 Humphries, *Still Crazy*, p. 131.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 132.

37 Warner Brothers, Media Informaion. Paul Simon talks about *Graceland*, accordion, jive and 'life outside the mainstream' (n.p.), p. 5. I am indebted to Louise Meintjies for this and other sources from her files.

38 A. Appadurai, 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy' in Featherstone, *Global Culture*, p. 308.

presentation. The seamless, blurred and almost contourless cross-referencing that is achieved in the vocal parts, between call-and-response, English and Zulu, is accentuated by the on-stage positioning of Black Mambazo and Simon, most vividly perhaps in live performances such as the famous 'African Concert' in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1987.³⁹ Here the group, like all *isicathamiya* choirs, stands in a straight line with the lead singer Joseph Shabalala moving about freely in front of the choir. Simon, for his part, stands on the side at a little distance, almost extending the line formed by the choir. While the choir sings the introduction, Simon watches them silently, later unobtrusively blending in on the same E-major chord with Shabalala on 'She's a rich girl'. Following this, a subtle, low-key pattern of call-and-response establishes itself between Shabalala, the choir, and Simon, each taking turns in singing either the solo vocal line or the chorus.

All of this suggests, as Louise Meintjes correctly points out, that the collaboration celebrated in *Graceland* is metaphorically configured in structurally integrated rather than merely juxtaposed musical styles.⁴⁰ At a deeper level, however, *Graceland* might be used as an exemplary text to interrogate the ability of the post-modern, global aesthetics to capture an identity, to offer redemption in the first place. A brief look at the lyrics of 'Diamonds' may demonstrate this. The track is really two songs in one, loosely strung together: a brief introduction in Zulu, followed by Simon's eerie story about the rich girl and the poor boy floating – disembodied and physically forgotten – through the somewhat unearthly space that could be New York City. At the end of the track, elements of the first section ('Ta na na') resurface.

Awa awa,
Awa awa,
akucwayele kile
[it is usually not like that].
O kodwa ezinsukwini uzongenelisa namhlanje.
[Oh, but in the days ahead, she is going to satisfy me, today].

Zanamuhla sibona kwenzeka kanjalo amantombazane ayazondla.
[Today we are witnessing that the girls are self-reliant].
Awa awa sibona.
[Awa, awa, we see].
Kwenzeka kanjani?
[How does it happen?]
Awa, awa amantombazane ayeza.
[Awa, awa, the girls are self-reliant].

She's a rich girl
She don't try to hide it
Diamonds on the soles of her shoes

He's a poor boy
Empty as a pocket
Empty as a pocket with nothing to lose
Sing Ta na na
Ta na na na
She got diamonds on the soles of her shoes

39 Paul Simon, *Graceland: The African Concert*. Video-tape. Peregrine/Zenith Productions (938136-3) (1987).

40 Meintjes, 'Paul Simon's *Graceland*', p. 43.

People say she's crazy
She got diamonds on the soles of her shoes
Well that's one way to lose these
Walking blues
Diamonds on the soles of her shoes

She was physically forgotten
Then she slipped into my pocket
With my car keys
She said you've taken me for granted
Because I please you
Wearing these diamonds

And I could say oo oo oo
As if everybody knows
What I'm talking about
As if everybody here would know
Exactly what I was talking about
Talking about diamonds on the soles of her shoes

She makes the sign of a teaspoon
He makes the sign of a wave
The poor boy changes clothes
And puts on after-shave
To compensate for his ordinary shoes

And she said honey take me dancing
But they ended up by sleeping
In a doorway
By the bodegas and the lights on
Upper Broadway
Wearing diamonds on the soles of their shoes

And I could say oo oo oo
As if everybody here would know
What I was talking about
I mean everybody here would know exactly
What I was talking about
Talking about diamonds

People say I'm crazy
I got diamonds on the soles of my shoes
Well that's one way to lose
These walking blues
Diamonds on the soles of my shoes
Ta na na.

The introduction in Zulu sung here by Ladysmith Black Mambazo is based on a wedding song and forms part of a tradition of choral song called *isicathamiya*. Popular among migrant workers since the 1930s, songs within this genre symbolically reconstruct a vanished world of regional identity, domestic cohesion, and specific gender hierarchies.⁴¹ The majority of *isicathamiya* lyrics, including the introduction to 'Diamonds' celebrate a sense of local identity by extolling proper relationships between men and women in self-reproducing home-

41 V. Erlmann, 'The Past is Far, and the Future is Far: Power and Performance Among Zulu Migrant Workers', *American Ethnologist*, 19,4 (1992), pp. 45-66.

steads that are rooted in ancestral lineages. Thus, in the opening lines we hear a voice deploring the growing independence of young women. Written by Joseph Shabalala as a comment in response to Simon's lyrics – 'awa, awa' expressing amazement at the unusual Manhattan story – the introduction in reality echoes some of the patriarchal concerns of migrant workers over the growing independence of women in South African society.

At the same time, *isicathamiya*, like most other South African music, is a genre in which traces of the American minstrel show, the Methodist hymn, and doo-wop have become the signs and vehicles of a long and irrevocable entanglement of local performance practice and modern world system. Thus, the historical moment that produced *isicathamiya* and, within the wider genre, the music of Ladysmith Black Mambazo, is therefore anything but a beginning, a primordial juncture 'where it all began'.⁴² By appropriating *isicathamiya* Paul Simon did not introduce to the world 'Black African music ... in a purer and more recognisable form' than the one that Elvis Presley wove into rock and roll in the 1950s.⁴³ Labour migration, in other words the growing encroachment of the forces of global commodity exchange upon black South Africans' lives, is the pivotal context in which these opening lines have to be read, and not some pure black African identity.

The contrast between this intensely laden personal response to a particular historical disjuncture between the world of custom and habitus – 'it usually is not like that' – and the present moment of growing female autonomy might of course suggest a whole range of alternative readings. Without wanting to forestall any of these, the most obvious interpretative option would be that we are dealing here with a bricolage of sorts between two different types of gender relations in two radically different times and places. Ultimately, of course, stylistic bricolage – even in the most integrated fashion – cannot re-capture the experience of a local world, firmly framed by the clear-cut binary relation between signifier and signified. Nor does a bricolage such as that in 'Diamonds' necessarily disrupt the hegemony of the First World.⁴⁴ Rather, it appears that *Graceland*, in the final analysis, has dissolved all but any concrete historical referential frame. The album and the Black Mambazo tracks, in particular, represent a global soundscape in which the boundaries between the symbols, perspectives and interpretations of culturally distinct spheres have become almost seamlessly enmeshed with each other to produce a post-modern space littered with semiotic debris without any referent to authenticity. *Graceland* offers a sonic scenery without actors, pulverised into gazes, copies of copies, a world filled with ubiquitous role models and, as 'The Boy in the Bubble', another track on the album says, with 'cameras that follow us in slow mo; a distant constellation that's dying in the corner of the sky, a loose affiliation of millionaires and billionaires, the way we look to us all'. *Graceland*, despite all the outstanding musicianship, resembles what Jean Baudrillard, the master-thinker of simulation, has called a 'melodrama of difference'. In the melodrama of interfacing, Baudrillard claims, we acrobatically simulate and dramatisé the absence of the 'other' that has been swept away by the universal triumph of the sign. In the interaction that results from this artificial dramaturgy, the subject becomes the 'other' to no one. Fashioned in this manner, the interactive, transversal subject is not the product of some new form of exchange, but of the wholesale disappearance of the social and of otherness as such.⁴⁵

42 Humphries, *Still Crazy*, p. 156.

43 Ibid.

44 J. Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People* (Chicago, 1985); D. Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London, 1979).

45 Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*, p. 125 ff.