

Gospel Music as an Intervention for Peace and Social Change in South Africa

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Abstract

Gospel music has played a significant role in promoting peace and worldwide social change throughout history. Apart from the spiritual aspect of gospel music, as a genre, it is deeply rooted in a biblical message of hope, restoration, and reconciliation. In Africa, numerous gospel musicians wrote and performed songs that highlighted the injustices of apartheid and advocated for freedom and equality. The lyrics of these songs often used biblical themes and metaphors to convey messages of liberation. For instance, gospel music was used in South Africa to encourage resistance and promote unity among oppressed communities during the anti-apartheid movement. One of the famous examples of the use of gospel music for social change in South Africa is the song 'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika', which became an official anthem in 1994. This song is still perceived as a symbol of resistance and hope for South Africans. Gospel music in South Africa is essential as the country faces ongoing issues such as xenophobia, corruption, gender-based violence, etc. This article discusses the importance of gospel music as a remedy for peace and social change in South Africa. Using content analysis within qualitative research paradigms, the findings of this article reveal that gospel music plays a crucial role in combating xenophobia, promoting acceptance and understanding among diverse communities. The findings demonstrate that gospel music inspires and unites people from different ethnicities and creates a more inclusive and peaceful nation. This article affirms that the selected gospel songs help foster community and solidarity among diverse groups.

Keywords: *Gospel Songs, Peace, Social Change, Socio-Musicology, Xenophobia, Community*

INTRODUCTION

Gospel music is a genre among numerous others in the music industry. This article explains the convergence of gospel textual content or sentiments with musical expressions to create a whole sum of the two. While this refers to the music and its text, the music industry initially, in the American setting, coined the term “Gospel Music” to distinguish it from other genres and to recognize its uniqueness while also creating a place in the industry for musicians who wanted to sing the gospel as opposed to other styles considered secular (Moshugi 2015). More specifically, this article focuses on two songs commonly performed through the human voice to make and disseminate music rather than the typical instrumentally accompanied styles.

As corroborated by numerous scholars, singing is rooted in various human cultures as an essential artistic, social, and spiritual exercise (Bartolome, 2018; Ilari et al., 2013; Mugovhani, 2016). Ilari et al. (2013) state that singing plays a significant role in each case of various cultures. It is considered one of the leading forms of participatory musicking, and this is supported by its widespread presence in multiple types of communities for religious, political, or recreational purposes (Moshugi 2022). It is considered as natural as speech, and every member of society is expected to sing. It is perceived as a significant communication medium to deliver appropriate messages depending on the event at which people sing (Mugovhani, 2016; Trehub et al., 2015). Notably, throughout history in Africa, singing has been used to portray and communicate particular messages (Bartolome, 2018; Mugovhani, 2016; Welch, 2012).

Furthermore, singing can be recognised as a principal instrument for identity formation facilitating worship, and is a significant source of entertainment across cultures (Yende, 2021). Singing and language are closely related in some African cultures and traditions (Barrett, 2007). There is sufficient research on the role of gospel music in Africa, especially in South Africa (Yende, 2021). Also, in observing the development of choral cultures and

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related studies dating back to the latter part of the 1800s, singing continues reverberating as the broadest form of collective doing in African communities (Detterbeck 2002, Olwage 2003, Moshugi 2022).

In South Africa, before and during the apartheid era, and as will be illustrated in this paper, gospel songs drew on themes of hope, redemption, and healing and became a backbone of liberation in the country, accompanied by biblical stories and messages that convey and reinforce these ideas (Lebaka, 2018; Msila, 2023; Mugovhani, 2016). For example, songs like 'Nkosi Sikelel iAfrika' by Enoch Sontonga (1897) which has since become the first part of the South African national anthem. and 'Lizalis'idinga LaKho' by Tiyo Soga (1861) have continued to speak as a plea for redemption and transformative power encapsulated in the concept of faith, pre- and post-apartheid. The song 'Lizalis'idinga LaKho' was adopted by the African National Congress (ANC) and sung when the party opened its inaugural conference in Waaihoek on 8 January 1912. Given the socio-political conditions of the time, this song's sentiments – now a regular church hymn- resonated, and continues to do so, with Africans and their reality.

Regarding peace and social change, these songs assert the gravitas of forgiveness and the need to overcome divisions and conflicts (Yende & Yende, 2022). For instance, Yende and Yende (2022) highlight that the South African anti-apartheid struggle was one of the periods in which songs were sung to boycott the apartheid system. The anti-apartheid struggle songs before and after 1994 still hold meaning to South Africans even after decades since the collapse of the apartheid system. Struggle songs continue to shape post-apartheid South Africa (Tönsing, 2017, p. 3). Arguably, this reflects the ongoing social realities that still prevail with the qualities of the past, as observed in the use of these songs to reflect on history and express the present.

Given the fundamental essence of the Gospel message, gospel music continues to carry this in expressions of reconciliation, peace, love, and unity that can be particularly powerful in settings of violence and conflict, as often evidenced in South Africa and other parts of Africa and the world, where there are social and political forms of strife. Gospel music encourages people to unite and work towards a common goal in non-violent ways that value peace (Trehub et al., 2015; Vorster, 2018; Yende, 2021). Scholars assert that gospel music in Africa is not just a leisure activity but a central part of the process of African life itself (Malembe, 2017; Ndemanu, 2018). This was substantiated by Tönsing (2013), who states that gospel songs emphasize the importance of forgiveness, love, and unity. Therefore, the role and relevance of gospel music in post-apartheid South Africa remain significant.

Gospel music in both formal and informal sectors as an industry and community form has the potential to educate people about the harmful effects of xenophobia and encourage them to take action to combat it. This is based on the significance of gospel music in social change (Karonwi, 2016; Lebaka, 2018). Gospel music has been essential for spiritual worship and is critical in promoting the nation's messages of love, unity, and reconciliation (Karonwi, 2016; G. Tönsing, 2013; Vorster, 2018). Gospel music can also be used to fight against the inhumane xenophobic attacks that have emerged as a national plague (Phakathi, 2019; Viljoen, 2022). A similar sentiment is shared by Ayorinde and Ajose (2022) highlighting that the scope of gospel songs has widened in Africa from spiritual content to social context. The gospel songs sung for worship and devotion are now sung to combat xenophobia. Gospel music in South Africa has inevitably become essential to the nation (Lebaka, 2018; Tönsing, 2013; Vorster, 2018; Yende, 2021).

Songs have been essential in social and political movements because they foster unity, increase awareness, and spark action against oppressive systems or regimes (Msila, 2023; Yende & Yende, 2022). They have helped to establish a sense of togetherness and shared purpose among the populace by acting as potent vehicles for voicing common complaints, desires, and forms of resistance. Songs can inspire passion, mobilize people, and effect social change by fusing music and lyrics that resonate with the experiences and sufferings of the oppressed (Tönsing, 2017). Within the focus of the present article, we assert that gospel music provides the tools and qualities essential in combating the ongoing xenophobic attacks in the country. The problem of xenophobic attacks is social. It influences and affects peace, love, and unity. In South Africa, given the high levels of unemployment, poverty, and inequality, community members have developed the idea that the dire state of the country is a result of the influx of foreigners. On such premise, xenophobia is somewhat justified by those who perpetuate it. As a result, foreigners live in fear of acts of violence and discrimination against

them as refugees or immigrants. This problem has, in recent years, surfaced in different regions across the country. However, this is not the first form of national social unrest, considering the elaborate history and encounters the country had with apartheid. Here, the place of a song in the past and how it helped negotiate social difficulties now offers opportunities for the present issues.

'Ukuthula' and 'Lizalis'idinga lakho' are part of the repertoire of several choirs and artists, sung on various occasions and recordings. They are popular within congregational and choral cultural settings. Here, these songs were chosen to transcend the popular understanding of gospel music and somewhat bridge traditional and contemporary conventions. In these selected songs, original authors express their aggrieved hearts during distress. The function of the songs 'Ukuthula' and 'Liza lis'idinga lakho' is relevant, as will be further illustrated, in the context of engaging xenophobia.

Immediately following the introduction above is an explanation of the research design adopted to provide insights into the tools utilized and the subsequent reasoning for the choices made. This is supported by an explication of Socio-musicology theory, adopted as a lens for interpreting the selected songs. An analysis of the importance of gospel music as a remedy for peace and social change in South Africa is provided, followed by a discussion of how gospel music can be used for well-being. Lastly, the paper concludes by outlining the critical role of gospel music in combatting xenophobia.

Research Method: Content Analysis

Creswell (2009) explains the qualitative research approach as a methodology that recognizes subjects, patterns, and themes and describes situations. This article used qualitative research and content analysis as the principal tools for data collection. A qualitative content analysis ensures that the data logic matches the argument and that the idea in the research project is convincing. The purpose is to recognise significant characteristics of the subject and express them clearly and efficiently in the article (Bailey, 2008; Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002). Since the primary purpose of this paper is to analyse the importance of gospel music as an intervention for peace and social change in South Africa using the already stated songs titled: 'Ukuthula' and 'Liza lis'idinga lakho.' Therefore, qualitative content analysis is one of the multiple research methodologies commonly used to analyse text data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

Qualitative content analysis involves systematically reading the written transcripts to ascertain the frequency with which themes are discussed and to examine what is said relating to each theme. Additionally, the intention of qualitative content analysis is typically driven by the explanations and descriptions given Graneheim and Lundman, 2004; Vaismoradi et al. 2013). Thus, content analysis was selected in this article because of its flexibility in analysing text comprehensively and accurately.

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) point out that the research question developed by the researcher guides qualitative content analysis and is grounded on analysing the content. This article's primary research question was: *What is the importance of gospel music as a remedy for peace and social change in South Africa?* This question identifies gospel music and social realities in the quest for solutions.

Theoretical Framework

This article is anchored on the theoretical framework known as Socio-musicology theory as a lens for interpreting the findings. The researchers used Socio-musicology theory as a theoretical framework introduced by scholars Lundquist, 1982; Shepherd, 1982). Socio-musicology theory quickly grew and gained popularity in the late 1980s. Scholars have Feld (1984) and Keller (1986) used it to understand the connection between society and music. Lundquist (1982) It points out that Socio-musicology focuses on studying music in its social context. As a result, Socio-musicology is linked to ethnomusicology, psycho-musicology, and historical musicology. Its point of view has an impact on both aesthetics and critique. Socio-musicology addresses issues frequently overlapping with one or more research fields (Lundquist, 1982). In broad terms, Socio-musicology can be defined as a branch of musicology that seeks to produce outcomes with a social influence (Keil, 2003; Poznań, 2000). The Socio-musicology theory carefully studies the use of music in society to address various issues.

In this article, the researchers adopted the Socio-musicology theory for its usefulness in addressing various issues of everyday societal experience through music. Socio-musicology theory is crucial in this paper because it seeks to bring an in-depth understanding of the relationship between ‘*Ukuthula*’ and ‘*Liza lis’idinga lakho*’ to society. This theory points to the importance of music in addressing various societal issues. With this in view, we recognize the caution that Sandoval (2016) offers in over-extending the positive usefulness of music without acknowledging that in its neutrality, it has potential for both conflict and peace depending on the intentions of involved parties.

Analysis and Discussion: ‘*Ukuthula*’ and ‘*Lizalis’idinga lakho*’

It is essential to foreground this section by providing original lyrics of the selected songs titled: ‘*Ukuthula*’ (Peace) and ‘*Liza lis’idinga lakho*’ (Fulfil/realise your promise). ‘*Ukuthula*’ and ‘*Liza lis’idinga lakho*’ are songs of pleading for God’s intervention, and these songs were first sung during the apartheid era.

This gospel music was a powerful tool for resistance against the oppressive regime (Msila, 2023; Nthali, 2019). These songs became songs to protest apartheid and call for social change (Yende & Yende, 2022). Furthermore, these songs contain a deep metaphorical language, expressed in a way that can be understood from a Socio-musicology perspective. We will analyse the following songs: ‘*Ukuthula*’ (Peace) and ‘*Liza lis’idinga lakho*’ (Fullfil/realise your promise) to provide a clear understanding that gospel music can play a pivotal role in addressing such social dissonances as xenophobia, gender-based violence, and corruption in the country and promote peace, reconciliation, and justice. This was affirmed by Tönsing (2017, p. 10), who states that:

Currently, choruses and freedom songs are being sung in protests nationwide. Since gospel music and struggle songs have been vital mediums in expressing social challenges, the setting in South Africa provides ample empirical evidence to this end. Similarly, struggle songs were used to intimidate the opposition and win over hearts and minds. People had the resolve to face an implacable foe because of singing (Tönsing, 2017). The following songs were selected to demonstrate how they can be used to address xenophobic attacks and other conflict-inducing issues in the country. This next piece, “Peace Perfect Peace”, one of the thirty that are in everyday use among those penned as nineteenth-century Christian hymns by Edward Henry Birckersteth in the mid-1800s, appears in more than 300 hymnals. The music to the lyrics was written and arranged by Charles J. Vincent in 1876. A rendition closest to the original as scored is accessible numerously for reference. The words as they appear in the original hymn are:

Peace Perfect Peace

Verse 1

Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin?

The blood of Jesus whispers peace within.

Verse 2

Peace, perfect peace, by thronging duties pressed?

To do the will of Jesus, this is rest.

Verse 3

Peace, perfect peace, death shadowing us and ours?

Jesus has vanquished death and all its powers.

Verse 4

Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown?

Jesus we know, and he is on the throne.

Verse 5

It is enough: earth's struggles soon shall cease,

and Jesus call to heaven's perfect peace.

The local Zulu vernacular translated version performed by such formations as the Cape Town Choir presents a variation of the lyrics in the following manner:

UKuthuka

Verse 1

Ukuthula kulomhlaba wezono *(Peace in this sinful world)*
Igazi likaJesus limemeza ukuthula *(The blood of Jesus shouts peace)*

Verse 2

Usindiso kulomhlaba wezono *(Salvation in this sinful world)*
Igazi likaJesus limemeza usindiso *(The blood of Jesus shouts salvation)*

Verse 3

Ukubonga kulomhlaba wezono *(Gratefulness on this sinful world)*
Igazi likaJesus limemeza ukubonga *(The blood of Jesus shouts gratefulness)*

Verse 4

Ukukholwa kulomhlaba wezono *(Faith in this sinful world)*
Igazi likaJesus limemeza ukukholwa *(The blood of Jesus shouts faith)*

Verse 5

Ukunqoba kulomhlaba wezono *(Victory in this sinful world)*
Igazi likaJesus limemeza ukunqoba *(The blood of Jesus shouts victory)*

Verse 6

Induduzo kulomhlaba wezono *(Comfort on this sinful world)*
Igazi likaJesus limemeza induduzo *(The blood of Jesus shouts comfort)*

Looking carefully at the first verse, the message is about peace in this sinful world. The verse indicates that peace can only be possible through the blood of Jesus, who shouts for peace. This is a line from the book of Hebrews 12:24: "To Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel" (New King James Version, 1982). Although the hymn verses that follow in the localised version present other themes and concepts like "salvation, comfort, victory, faith and gratitude," the idea that it is a song about peace reverberates along the words on referring to the sinful world and the blood of Jesus. This song has a unique role in socio-musicology as it addresses the country's social issue of peace, although from a religious positionality. Even though this song along with several other Christian hymns became prominent during apartheid, it retains its relevance in post-apartheid South Africa for both its heritage and activism. Still, in a country bound by hatred, anger, and discrimination, this song continues to offer solace and impetus for confronting the ills of xenophobia by encouraging humanhood among the peoples of Africa. From the given analysis, these songs express the importance of living in peace and draw on gospel sentiments and ideals for believers.

Lizalis' idinga lakho

Verse 1

"Lizalis' idinga lakho, (Fullfil/realise your promise)

Thixo Nkosi yenyano! (Faithful/Truthful God)

Zonk' iintlanga, zonk' izizwe, (All races, all nations,)

Ma zizuze usindiso. (must be saved)

Verse 2

Amadolo kweli lizwe, (All knees in this world)
Ma kagobe phambi kwakho; (Must bow before you)
Zide zithi zonk' iilwimi, (So that all tongues)
Ziluxel' udumo lwakho. (Proclaim your glory)

Verse 3

Law'la, law'la, Nkosi, Yesu! (Govern/Prevail our God)
Koza ngawe ukonwaba; (Happiness can only come through you)
Ngeziphithi-phithi zethu, (Because of our struggles/challenges)
Yonakele imihlaba. (The world is damaged)

Verse 4

Bona izwe lakowethu, (Look at our world)
uxolel' izoono zalo; (Forgive our sins)
Ungathob' ingqumbo yakho, (Do not send your wrath)
Luze lu' usapho lwalo. (To kill the children)

Verse 5

Yaala, Nkosi, singadeli (Prohibit us God from disobeying)
Iimfundiso zezwi lakho; (The teachings of your Word)
Uze usivuselele, (Revive us)
Sive inyaniso yakho. (We can hear your Truth")

This song is attributed to Reverend Tiyo Soga, who was a Xhosa hymn writer. The hymn is an outcry for God to fulfil his promise. This song was perhaps influenced by God's promise in 1 Timothy 2:1-5 which reads:

Therefore, I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.

Throughout the country's volatile history, 'Lizalis' idinga lakho' is an intervention and a vehicle for communicating the people's difficulties, hopes, and aspirations. It evolved into a vehicle for confronting social concerns such as xenophobia, inequality, and injustice, as well as bringing comfort and inspiration to communities. The hymn has become a significant part of Christian worship and is often sung in churches and religious gatherings (Tönsing, 2013; Vorster, 2018; Yende, 2021). Arguably the selected songs convey a timeless message of unity, justice, and the inherent dignity of all people.

Furthermore, gospel music was crucial in fostering unity, healing, peace, and social change in post-apartheid South Africa. It brought together people from many backgrounds across racial and cultural lines. In South Africa, gospel music can catalyse social change, offering a voice to the oppressed, marginalised, inspiring hope, and promoting peace, justice, and reconciliation. It continues to be a powerful force in shaping the nation's collective consciousness and fostering positive transformation. This was also supported by Tönsing (2017), who affirms that the role of song in our political battle will certainly not diminish, and Christian choruses and protest singing will probably continue to influence one another.

CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of this article was to discuss and highlights the importance of gospel music as an intervention for peace and social change in South Africa. The study looked broadly at the role of gospel music using the Socio-musicology theory. The article recognises that since South Africa is affected by various issues such as xenophobic attacks, gender-based violence, and corruption, gospel music has potential to serve as a rectification to promote positive values such as love, compassion, forgiveness, peace, and social change. Through the lyrics and messages of the analysed songs, gospel songs are inevitably essential in bringing peace.

The article demonstrates that the selected gospel songs continue to be used for community building and empowerment. Churches and community organisations in South Africa, where xenophobic attacks are high, use the gospel to unite people, foster a sense of unity and belonging, and promote positive values and behaviours and music is at the centre of this crusade. Socio-musicology theory supports a strong connection between society and music in ways that are evident in the historical and contemporary usefulness of music of the gospel. Observing this with a retrospective view of pre-apartheid incidents, during apartheid turbulences and post-apartheid realities, gospel music continues to be a source of hope, inspiration, and healing from various social ills such as xenophobia, gender-based violence, and corruption. The analysed songs focus on forgiveness, reconciliation, and social justice.

The selected songs' themes are biblically based and serve to raise and lead persons on their religious journey, providing encouragement, consolation, and spiritual nutrition. In addition, the songs highlight gospel music's rich spiritual legacy and its strong link to biblical teachings. 'Lizalis' idinga lakho,' for example, echoes biblical teachings on God's promise of salvation for all people.

The chosen songs were motivated by biblical teachings on justice and equality; gospel music frequently confronts social issues and advocates for justice and equality in society, consistent with Socio-musicology theory. Gospel music inspires listeners to combat oppression, inequity, and injustice, echoing the biblical command to seek justice and love mercy.

Using a framework of analysis informed mainly by the central tenets of Lundquist's (1982) and Shepherd's (1982) Socio-musicology theory, the study discussed the importance of gospel music as a remedy for peace and social change in South Africa. By so doing, the article has argued and revealed that gospel music plays a vital role in South Africa. The approach and analysis in the article were informed by Socio-musicology theory, which is essential in understanding the role of music in society.

This article acknowledges that gospel music has been utilised to convey messages of hope, faith, and social justice since the apartheid era. It is clear from the songs chosen that they motivated people to make positive changes in their communities. The selected songs' lyrics and themes promote peace, compassion for one another, and societal change. Gospel music clearly becomes a driving factor for social transformation within communities.

Based on these findings and reflecting on the study, the following recommendations are made: Gospel music must be promoted in society as it contributes to the well-being and strength of communities, promoting unity and positive change. It was recommended that promoting gospel music is essential as it can unite individuals from many backgrounds together, generating a sense of belonging and unity. Individuals can join through their shared love of gospel music, regardless of colour, age, or socioeconomic status. This enhances social cohesion, bridges gaps, and fosters a sense of community.

The selected gospel songs help foster community and solidarity among diverse people. Gospel music has a long history of being a powerful tool for organising and bringing people together to fight tyrants. Songs can transmit important ideas, generate strong feelings, and provide those who support a cause a sense of shared identity and purpose through lyrics, melody, and rhythm. Songs have been utilised in various social and political movements to promote unity, increase awareness, and spark action against oppressive systems or regimes. In conclusion, gospel music potently motivates community development and empowerment. It draws people together, promotes shared values and habits, spiritually uplifts individuals, engages and empowers youth, and provides

outreach and service to the larger community. Gospel music helps communities' well-being and strength by promoting unity and transformation towards the good.

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Gospel Music as an Intervention for Peace and Social Change in South Africa

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