‘Dis ’n Kaapse Kultuur’

The Cape Malay Choir Board & their Moppies

Governing a culture and community, 1939-2009

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Leiden. 2009
Acknowledgments

At this place I would like to thank all those who made my studies and fieldwork in Cape Town to an unforgettable experience. First of all thanks to the African Studies Centre and in particular to my two supervisors, Prof. Robert Ross and Dr. Daniela Merolla, who have guided me and help lay the foundations for this research. Thanks to Dr. Shamiel Jeppie for welcoming me to the University of Cape Town and making it possible to access the university library and other facilities. To Mohamed Shahid Mathee for the inspiring conversations. Thanks to Katie Mooney from Iziko for her constant interest in my work and stimulating exchanges. To Thulani from the District Six Museum for all the help in the archives. Thanks also to Armelle Gaulier for providing me with her collected moppie lyrics. And especially many thanks go to all choir captains, singers, composers and others involved with the ‘Kaapse Klopse’ who all kindly supplied so much hospitality. Thanks to Mr. Brown for introducing me to the world of the Cape Malay Choir Board and to many of his choir board friends. To Abdullah Maged, Adam Samodien, Gamja Dante, Mogamat Meniers, Ginger Harrison, Abubakar Davids and Yunus Richards for being so enthusiastic about my research. Thanks to Melvin Matthews for taking me along for the ride. To Vincent Kolbe for providing me with so much information. And many thanks to Boebie Cassiem who made me feel so welcome in the Violets family. I have greatly enjoyed meeting, working, eating, dancing and of course singing with all of you.
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An Introduction to the Moppies and the Choirs

Oela-la-la-die oujaar is al reeds verby.
Die nuwejaar is hier, laat ons begin met die plesier.
Dis klopsetyd tyd daar bo,
bo in Hanover straat die mense staan en wag tot nog daar in die Kaap
Die lekkerste tyd van die jaar is oujaaraand en nuwejaar
(Abdullah Maged: 2009)

‘The best time of the year is New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day’, the words of a popular song, written and performed in Cape Town to salute the New Year. New Year’s Eve is, as the song claims, seen as the most important event in Cape Town for the Cape Coloured Community (the descendants of the slave population brought to the Cape in the seventeenth and eighteenth century), because the celebrations are considered to be a ‘crossing ritual’. It is a time of remembering the past, a time for closure but also for hope and ideas for the new year. The satiric/comic songs, also known as ‘Kaapse Moppies’ have been an important part of this ‘ritual’. The ‘Moppies’ sung by the Coons Troupes and the Cape Malay Choirs (terminology explained on pages 10 to 12), both musical clubs of the Coloured Community operating in Cape Town and the surrounding area, reflect on the year gone by and comment on the events and characters who have put their mark on the past year. In a way this repertoire of songs are musical annals, presenting in a comical way which issues or events have made an impact on the community in that particular year. The songs give us a unique look into the thoughts, ideas and feelings of the Cape Malay and Coloured Community during past events. It could therefore even be argued that these songs are historical sources.

This ‘tradition’ of singing comical songs is as old as the city of Cape Town itself. ‘Ghoemaliedjies’ were sung by slaves on their picnics, these being an important aspect of a slave culture. In fact, part of the slave owner’s obligation to his slaves was the provision of an annual picnic. The Ghoemaliedjie is thus known as a ‘Malay picnic song’, but also as a ‘straatlied’, a ‘skemliedjie’, a ‘moppie’ or a comic song’. Moppies are still sung by choirs today at the annual Cape Malay Choir Competition.

1 Translation: Oela-la-la-la the old year has past, The new year is here, let us start having fun. This ‘Klopset time’ up there, up in Hanover street the people stand and wait till there in the Cape, the best time of the year is New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day.
2 Christine Winberg, Satire, Slavery and the Ghoemaliedjies of the Cape Muslims, New Contrast, No. 76 (1991), 78.
and the New Year celebrations in Cape Town. The moppies sometimes date back as far as the slave period. “Our forefathers used to be slaves and whenever they had like free moments they used to sing and make music”, says Cape Malay choir captain Abubakar Davids. “They [our forefathers] were oppressed when they came here, says another Cape Malay choir member. “They came here as slaves and so the only way they could express themselves was putting it in words, singing it out in a jolly way so that the next one would think they’re happy about it and in the meantime they’re expressing themselves, how they feel about certain things”3 “And then the carnival parade came in when we were set free”, continues Davids. “When they abolished slavery and the people were so glad and so happy that all the groups and people came here to come and sing in the streets and parade in the streets and that’s where actually the whole parading started and the Cape Malay choirs started”, explains the choir captain.4

Yet with the founding of the Cape Malay Choir Board in 1939, now seventy years ago, this culture of singing comic songs, became an institutionalized affair. Presumably, this change in organisation also changed the creative process, especially since the Choir Board was managed and controlled by state officials in times when the composers of the songs, the coloured community of Cape Town, were losing political power rapidly. The seventy year anniversary of the Cape Malay Choir Board motivates me to take a closer look at the choirs and their songs during these past decades, years in which South Africa witnessed a spectrum of political ideas and a series of events which not only moved those who lived in South Africa, but also people abroad. The events described in these songs will evoke a feeling of recognition, because people have heard of them through the media or history books, or because they have dealt with similar social issues in their own communities. Apartheid- and Post-Apartheid South Africa both left their marks on the ‘coloured’ community and their moppie culture. Therefore, with this research, I will attempt to show the changes which have occurred in this ‘tradition’ during these years and at the same time present the political and social importance of the Cape Malay folksongs in such times.

I have chosen to focus mainly on the so-called Cape Malay choirs and to a lesser extent on the coon carnival, not because I feel the Malay choirs’ interpretation of the moppies is superior to that of the coon troupes, but because the history of the Malay choirs can tell us a lot about the politics of culture. The founding of the Cape Malay Choir Board presents us with an intriguing case-study of the duality of ‘popular culture’, the board being a tool used for official political policies and at the same time functioning as a cathartic outlet for the community. It is this duality that makes the

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3 Denis-Constant Martin, Coon Carnival, New Year Celebrations in Cape Town, Past and Present (Cape Town: David Phillips Publishers, 1999), 49.
4 Interview with Abubakar Davids, October 15th & 26th 2008, Athlone, Cape Town.
Cape Malay choirs and their moppies so special. However, because moppies are frequently copied an re-used by different clubs, some moppies presented in this thesis have been performed by either a Malay choirs or Coon troupe or by both.

**A survey of the changing ideas and thoughts on Moppies**

Though the musical culture of the Cape Coloured and Malay community has frequently been a subject of study, the lyrics and the meaning of the words have generally been overlooked. Besides a few recent publications, by Denis Constant Martin and Christine Wineberg, that go into the symbolic meaning of the lyrics, this aspect of the Cape song culture has mostly been neglected. I.D. du Plessis, founder of the Cape Malay Choir Board also underestimated the value of the lyrics. ‘The words are of no importance in the Ghoemaliedjies, it is the melody and the rhythm that counts’, according to du Plessis in 1935. To him, the songs were nothing more than entertainment without substance.

Yet the idea of the ‘folksongs’ was important to him. Du Plessis wrote his doctorate thesis on the ‘Bydrae van die Kaapse Maleier tot die Afrikaanse Volkslied’ (Contribution of the Cape Malay to the Afrikaner folksong) in 1935, in which he tried to explore this Cape Malay identity and its functionality to the Afrikaner cultural heritage. Heritage and culture had become important issues in the South Africa of the 1930s. The first decades of the twentieth century witnessed an upsurge of interest in folklore in South Africa. The concept of folklore, in Europe developed as part of the 19th century ideology of romantic nationalism, led to the reshaping of oral traditions to serve modern ideological goals. The social and political context in which folklore became popular within South Africa was marked by the struggle to effectively constitute an Afrikaner nation. After the loss of the South African War and the dominance of British imperialism within South African culture and politics in the new Union of South Africa, the Afrikaner bourgeoisie sought a way to ‘elevate’ their own ‘culture and traditions’. It was in this way, for instance, that in 1929, the ‘Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings’ (F.A.K.) was established. The aim of the F.A.K. (Federation of Afrikaner Cultural Societies) was ‘die beskerming en uitbouwing van ‘n eie nasionale kultuur, gegrond op die godsdiens en tradisies van die Afrikaner’ (the protection and extension of a (Afrikaner) national culture, based on the religion and traditions of the Afrikaners). Language was greatly emphasized, as were poetry, literature, and of course, folksongs. Furthermore, ‘Volkekunde’ (ethnology), as an academic

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The ‘volkenduide’ tradition, as it was taught in South Africa in those years, stresses the ethnos theory and assigns tremendous explanatory value to ethnicity: 9 ‘Ethnos theory starts with the proposition that mankind is divided into ‘volke’(nations, peoples) and that each ‘volk’ has its own particular culture, which may change but always remains authentic to the groups in question. An individual is born into a particular volk; its members are socialized into its attendant culture; therefore they acquire a ‘volkspersoonlikheid’ (folk personality). It follows that the most important influence on an individual’s behaviour in any social context is his ethnos membership.10

Du Plessis was not the only one fascinated by the Cape Malay songs. To Romanticists the ‘unknown’ and ‘unfamiliar’ were often the subject of meditation and the source of literary production. The Malay community was a source of inspiration in Cape Town for South African writers, artists, academics. The Malay community represented the notion of ‘other’ and ‘exotic’.11 Many South African scholars, such as Du Toit, Boshoff and L.J. du Plessis, in the forties and fifties continued Du Plessis’s work within this folksong discipline. The romantic notion of ‘volk’ was important in studying these folksongs. D.S. du Toit stated in 1948: ‘Die volkslied is bestem om deur die volk, dit wil sê die gemeenskap, gesing te word, en nie om na geluister te word nie’12 (the folksong is meant to be sung by the people, this means the community, and not necessarily to be listened to). Once again the lyrics are not thought to be important enough to be studied. The main concern in these studies was to find out where these songs came from, basically to find out to which ‘volk’ these songs belonged.

To the scholars Boshoff and Du Plessis, the so called Piekniekliedjies (Picnic songs, another word for Moppies or Ghoemasongs) were “die waarskynlike oervorm van alle poëtiese genres, en as die “natuurlikste, naiefste en direkste digterlike uitingsvorm van menselike gevoel”13 (the most basic of all poetic genres and the most natural, naïve and direct poetic way of expression of human emotion). The emphasis on ‘natural’ and ‘basic’ displays this romantic notion of folksongs being the most ‘pure’ or ‘primitive’ of cultural expressions. This primitiveness was further implied by arguing

that the lyrics were of no importance. ‘Die hoofdestaansrede van die piekniekliedjies, is die behoefte aan ’n woordbegeleiding wat ritmies harmonier met sekere dansbewegings… vandaar dat by die piekniekliedjies die woordritme hoofsaak, nie suseer van woorden nie as van klank op ’n deuntjemaat…’\textsuperscript{14}. Translated to English it means that the main purpose of the picnic songs, or at least the lyrics, was to compliment the music. The words of the lyrics weren’t that important, as were the sound and the rhythm. Du Toit in his study ‘Kaap Maleise Volksliederen en hul Nederlandse en Afrikaanse Bronsvorms, argues the same: ‘ ‘Die teks van ’n volkslied hoef geen sin te hê nie, en kan dus selfs met verlies van betekenis bly voortbestaan, aangesien die melodie die essentiële is by die aktiewe sang (Vgl. die Maleise Ghommaliedjies)’\textsuperscript{15} (The text doesn’t have to mean anything, and can even lose its meaning, because it is the melody that is essential to the active singing (which is common for the Malay Ghoema songs)).

This interest in the ‘pureness’ and ‘primitiveness’ of cultures and ‘people’, which was part of this romantic ideology, fitted in with the concept of apartheid, which was introduced in the fifties. The idea that different people have their own different cultures was one of the basic principles of apartheid ideology and the concept of some ‘peoples’ being more primitive than others, was the ‘justification’ the apartheid officials would use to advocate their new racial laws. While in the rest of the world the ‘romantic ideology’ disappeared and made room for ‘realism’ and perhaps disillusionment after the Second World War, in South Africa, supported by the apartheid regime, this fascination with ‘folk’ and ‘primitiveness’ remained. Oral texts in these years were conceptualised as in some sense existent in and dating from the past. They could suitably be summed up and analysed through such terms as ‘folktales’, ‘tribal inheritance’, ‘oral traditions’ and ‘age old myths’, etc.\textsuperscript{16} which fitted perfectly within the apartheid ideal of ‘folk’. As late as 1977, the ‘Folk Cultural Activities’ of the Cape Coloured community was still a source of inspiration for academics and ‘Malay’ choirs were described as ‘a cohesive force for their community’. “The ‘Malay’ choirs emphasise the natural abilities of the ‘Malays’ to play and sing, especially in their natural harmonies”, as Kim Weichel states in a study for the ‘Urban Problems Research Unit’. “The choirs serve an important function in the ‘Malay’ community. They provide the traditional music, which all ‘Malays’ know and feel part of”\textsuperscript{17}.

\textsuperscript{16} Ruth Finnegan, The Oral and Beyond, doing things with words in Africa (Oxford: James Currey, 2007) 180.
\textsuperscript{17} Kim Weichel, A Study of the Aspects of Folk Cultural Activities Among the Coloured People in the Cape, Urban Problems Research Unit, Cape Town, June 25 (1977), 21-22.
With the end of apartheid also came an end to the political, economic and also cultural ‘isolation’ that South Africa had lived in for so long. There was an overwhelming feeling that large groups and cultures in South Africa had been neglected and needed exploration. Not only South African scholars, but academics from other parts of the world flocked to the new democratic South African republic to witness the changes that were happening and hoped to find ‘untouched’ topics to be studied. The New Year celebration at the Cape was one of these aspects of South African cultures that was ‘rediscovered’ as something typically Capetonian, something that the new South Africa should treasure and protect. Of course this idea of preserving and protecting is not much different from the thoughts on and policy towards the celebrations during apartheid, but the difference now was that this particular South African culture was observed by people from different backgrounds, for different reasons and with new perceptions. These ‘foreign’ scholars saw similarities between the Cape Town celebrations and other kinds of celebrations in other parts of the world. Worth mentioning in this respect is Denis-Constant Martin who, with his book ‘Coon Carnival, New Year Celebrations in Cape Town, Past and Present’ wrote a magnificent work on the culture and long history of this Capetonian custom. Martin writes in his introduction: “I had been collecting data on carnivals in different countries of Europe and the Caribbean. I had been involved in shooting documentaries on the Port-of-Spain carnival and had published several articles on it. I therefore thought that it would certainly be fascinating to study the development of a carnival, taking place at a non-conventional time (New Year), in a society where Catholicism is not the dominant religion, among a population whose origins are extremely diverse and who had been victims of apartheid”.18

The realization that the New Year celebrations could be mirrored to other carnivals and celebrations held in other parts of the world, introduced a wholly new approach to this South African custom. The concept of ‘pure and primitive’ cultures was not important anymore, the idea of ‘Creole culture’ became more popular. The idea that the so-called ‘Coloured’ or ‘Malay’ culture was not ‘pure’ and ‘untouched’ but in fact a construction and mix of the different peoples and cultures, challenged the preconceptions on the New Year celebrations and introduced new terms and thoughts in the study of the songs.

Denis-Constant Martin has focussed mainly on the carnival, the organization and history of it, and not so much on the ‘Malay Choirs’. He has, however, focussed on ‘moppies’ and to a certain extent on the interpretation of the lyrics. The aspect of the New Year celebrations being a cathartic experience for the Coloured and ‘Malay’ community appealed to Martin. “The text is drafted with and for humour, it uses causticity that can deride the most serious events and, at the same time, help

to defuse anxiety and tension as well as criticise reality and the establishment in a discreet manner. All the more so since humour is underlain by a rebellious spirit that respects laws very little." In 2005, Martin called for a study on the ‘Moppies’ and promoted the idea that the lyrics of the songs could be used as ‘oral history sources’. “The permanence of ‘moppies’ repertoire and its symbolic density were to make of it a privileged object of study for historians, linguists, anthropologists or musicologists, ... one could write a new social history of Cape Town by analysing the ‘moppies’”.

This idea of ‘moppies’ being ‘oral history sources’ had been introduced ten years earlier in the pioneering article by Christine Winberg, ‘Satire, Slavery and the Ghoemaliedjies of the Cape Malay’. In 1991 she wrote: “We have in these songs not only a remarkable instance of a tradition that has persisted for three hundred years, but a working class version of South African history. In their burlesques and satires the ghoemaliedjies (moppies) provide us with an alternative account of historical events”. The focus in the study of the New Year celebrations and the moppie songs had completely shifted, from ‘lyrics are of no importance’ to ‘lyrics as accounts of historical events’. With her article on the lyrics of the moppies, Christine Wineberg followed a course within African History that had become tremendously popular and important. The Oral has increasingly become a topic of interest and scholarship over the last half century or so and within the field of African History the use of ‘Oral Literature’ and ‘Oral History’ has proven its value. ‘Oral Literature’ simply means ‘literature delivered by word of mouth’. Seeing that in African history, written sources are rare and, if found, usually written from a colonial perspective, the introduction of ‘oral sources’ was revolutionary. The symbolic statements about common experiences and concerns made in oral genres reflect popular consciousness, and give us ethnography from within and history from below.

In South Africa, it meant that the histories of previously marginalised groups became more accessible.

A scholar who comes to mind immediately when referring to ‘Oral Literature’ in South Africa, is of course David B. Coplan, an American anthropologist who wrote his Ph.D. thesis in 1985 on South Africa’s black city music, ‘In Township Tonight!, South Africa’s Black City Music and Theatre’. Coplan has since written many books and articles focusing on the ‘power of oral poetry’. Other scholars in

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or from South Africa have followed, for instance Liz Gunner and her work on Zulu Praise poetry in ‘Musho! : Zulu Popular Praises’. The idea that songs were used as protest songs during the apartheid era has fascinated several scholars. Comparisons were drawn between the African-American protest songs during the civil rights movement and the songs sung in South Africa during apartheid, like the song ‘Nkosi Sikelel’iAfrika’, which was studied extensively. However, most of these studies have focussed more on the ‘black’ anti-apartheid movement, for instance H.C. Groenewald’s article ‘The Role of political songs in the realisation of democracy in South Africa’ (2005) or the many works of Russell Kaschula on Xhosa oral poetry in contemporary South Africa. Yet, the songs of the Coloured and ‘Malay’ community are still underestimated within the academic field.

**Introducing the project**

This research will focus on the culture of the ‘Cape Malay’ folksongs, its social and political message and its possible role in the apartheid system. The power of these South African protest songs, the black anti-apartheid songs as well as the Moppies, lay in the fact that they were not easily accessible to government authorities, because it is much more difficult to censor the oral word.\(^{25}\) Firstly this was so because the lyrics were hardly ever written down and kept, which made it more difficult for the authorities to obtain them. The second reason was the government officials could not understand the language, in this case of the language of the Moppies, which are mostly written in Cape Afrikaans, a slang version of ‘White Afrikaans’. The songs therefore provided a relatively safe outlet for the ‘Cape Malay’, to express their frustrations. Africa has known a long tradition of using music to voice protest and social conflict.\(^{26}\) Oral performances can not be separated from the socio-political contexts in which they take place.\(^{27}\) The folksongs of the ‘Cape Malay’ which were performed in times of slavery and later apartheid, should therefore be studied in this context. A detailed look at the words of the songs, which I will provide in this thesis, and the way the singers describe and explain these songs, provides us with special insight into their culture and the social and political movement from within, and aims to make visible the social messages hidden in the lyrics and performance.

However, the interaction between government and choirs needs more exploration as well. Within the field of popular music, the idea of contradicting roles and agendas is important. Structural functionalists see all art and Music, not just the popular variety, as part of the tension managing

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mechanism regulating the values and needs of society. Opposed to the advocates of these so-called ‘consensus’ models are the Marxist-influenced conflict theorists who treat popular music and art as an ideological tool used by the ruling class or group to hold power and hegemony.\textsuperscript{28} This concept of popular music having a dual role is particularly interesting for this research, my thesis is based on the assumption that the performance of the ‘Cape Malay’ songs had a dual role as well. During apartheid, the idea of cultural differences between the created ‘racial groups’ was reinvented and/or stimulated by the government, a process which Ranger and Hobsbawn have described as the ‘invention of tradition’. The folksongs of the ‘Cape Malay’ were seen as a ‘harmless tradition’, which could be used to ‘confirm’ and propagandize the different cultural identity of the ‘Cape Malay’ in comparison to other South African ‘racial groups’. I.D. du Plessis who founded the Cape Malay Choir Board in 1939, wrote in his capacity as Chair of the Department of Coloured Affairs: “It is one of the Department’s aims to promote sound race relations and better understanding between the coloured community and the other race groups. One example which may be especially mentioned here, is the Department’s acting as liaison between private organisations and also individuals and Malay concert groups where such people or organisations are desirous of presenting musical performances on special occasions. The Department also assists with the arrangements and organizations of such functions”.\textsuperscript{29} Therefore, this research will further investigate the dual role of this folksong ‘tradition’ during Apartheid, in what way these songs were used as a tool to ‘create’ and ‘advocate’ a social identity of the Cape Malay by the government and if they indeed played a role in the construction of a common cultural identity and memory and a feeling of belonging.

Furthermore, this project will seek to develop a better understanding of this folksong ‘tradition’ and in that way contribute to the debates currently happening in South Africa around the issues of heritage, public history, memory and cultural production. The protection of ‘living heritage’ cultures and sites is an increasingly important aspect for economies and societies, because of its role in education at all levels (broadening our knowledge of the past), but also in international tourism. I hope to recover and document this particular part of Cape Town’s history in a way that will be relevant for the ‘Cape Malay’ community as well as for the whole city.

\textbf{Problems of Terminology}

The word ‘tradition’ in this study is a difficult one and needs to be further discussed. The terminology ‘tradition’ was especially popular during the ‘romantic’ years of Du Plessis and Boshoff, yet nowadays\textsuperscript{28} John Collins, Some Anti-Hegemonic Aspects of African Popular Music in Reebee Garofalo, \textit{Rockin’ the boat: Mass Music and Mass Movements} (Boston, 1992) 185. \textsuperscript{29}I.D. du Plessis, \textit{Report of the Commissioner for Coloured Affairs for the year ended 31t March 1952}, Department of Coloured Affairs, Cape Town.
the generalised image of Africa as the epitome of unchanging ‘tradition’ as opposed to the modernity of the progressive West (in the case of South Africa, ‘European’ or ‘White’), has shifted. Oral texts today are no longer automatically assumed to belong to the past with deep roots in traditional culture, but are appreciated as creations of the present, or as part of on-going concerns in modern life. I realize that the concept and word ‘tradition’ in this study is problematic, because it was this notion of ‘tradition’ that was one of the driving forces behind Du Plessis fascination and support for this custom. However, when I use the terminology ‘tradition’ I use it to emphasise the (possible?) continuity of this song culture and not to imply an ‘unchanging’ character of this practice. It is my assumption that these satirical songs are and were expressions of ‘on-going concerns in (modern) life’. Therefore, I appreciate the creativity of the composer of a moppie song today as much as I am intrigued by songs from the past. Furthermore, I refer to the concept of ‘tradition’, because the idea of the ‘invention of tradition’ will form an important part of this thesis. It is with this theory, first presented by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, that I will try to present and explain the political and ideological offensive undertaken by the Apartheid government and the Department of Coloured Affairs, and study in what way the Cape Malay Choir Board participated in this. Hobsbawm has suggested that ‘custom’ has particular value as a label for organic, situationally flexible cultural practices, as opposed to the invented, inflexible nature of ‘tradition’. Therefore, I will address the culture of singing moppies as a custom instead of a tradition.

The seemingly innocent word ‘culture’ is dangerously slippery as well. Academic social scientists sometimes talk of cultures to refer to the ‘maps of meaning’ through which people make sense of their world. Yet, cultures aren’t fixed, they change all the time. Culture only exists in the act of being performed, and it can never stand still or repeat itself without changing its meaning, says cultural-anthropologist Gerd Baumann. Social scientists therefore have become more careful in using the term ‘culture’ and apply it to one particular group of people or region in the world. American anthropologists Catherine Lutz and Lila Abu Lughod (1990) have even suggested to scrap the word ‘culture’ from the vocabulary of social scientists altogether because of its current misuse in public rhetoric. “For many [now] , the term [culture] seems to connote coherence, uniformity and timelessness in the meaning systems of a given group, and to operate rather like the earlier concept of ‘race’ in identifying fundamentally different essentialized, and homogenized social units.... [It then]

falsely fixes the boundaries between groups in an absolute and artificial way”\textsuperscript{34}. Yet we cannot ban words, says anthropologist Baumann, even if we replace the word ‘culture’ with ‘discourse’, we will still mean much the same thing and thus contend with the same problem.\textsuperscript{35} Therefore, I will just use the word ‘culture’ in my thesis, especially because throughout the thesis I will be aware and discuss how ‘culture’ is used by governmental institutions (official culture) and by the community itself (vernacular cultures). Vernacular cultures refer to cultural forms made and organized by ordinary people for their own pleasure, in modern societies.\textsuperscript{36}

Another difficult term that needs explanation is the term ‘Cape Malay’. With the word ‘Cape Malay’ people generally refer to the Coloured Muslim community in Cape Town and the Western Cape. Their ancestors were slaves brought to the Cape by the Dutch, from, amongst others, the Malay archipelago, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, Madagascar. The term ‘Coloured’ and ‘Malay’ has always been a hotly debated term. It raises many questions, such as: what is ‘coloured and what is ‘black’? Are you Malay when you are Muslim? Is it just a geographical (Cape Town, Western Cape) group or is it an ethnical/genealogical group? Did the views of Cape Malay identity come from within the group itself or from outsiders, etc. Historian Robert Shell says the identification of the group occurred “after the abolition of the slave trade (in 1808) when the convenient name ‘coloured’ was introduced into the South African vocabulary, where it stubbornly persists” (Shell, 2005:98)\textsuperscript{37}. Historian Mohamed Adhikari also argues that the Malay identity emerged after Emancipation and was to a significant extent a consequence of the abolition of slavery. Adhikari, however, posited a very important point and that is that Malay identity was an open identity in that group membership was in no sense ascriptive. He further argued that those from diverse cultural and racial categories, who embraced Islam at the Cape, identified with the Malay community. The Malay group identity was reinforced by the attitudes and behaviour of the rest of the society which was predominantly Christian.\textsuperscript{38} Shamiel Jeppie has argued that the Malay subject was reinvented during Apartheid for the benefit of the Apartheid racial laws and ideals. Achmat Davids (d.2000), the famous South African historian on the history of the Cape Muslims, expediently moved between the two identities; for example in the 1980s he strongly identified with the religious label for local political reasons. He


\textsuperscript{38} Muhammed Haron, \textit{Conflict of Identities, the Case of South Africa’s Cape Malays} (paper presented at the Malay World Conference, Kuala Lumpur, 12-14 October 2001).
however consciously switched to using the ethnic identity in the 1990s when the community began to make close cultural contacts with the Southeast Asians. I have chosen to use the term Cape Malay instead of Cape Muslims, for the reason that the Muslim identity was indeed an open identity for all who converted to Islam or for Muslims that moved to the Cape in later times. Even though Mohamed Adhikari argues that the Malay identity was also ‘open or in no sense ascriptive’, this was however limited to the Coloured community, who if they converted to Islam, could be called Cape Malay as well. Still, it is presumably harder for, for instance a ‘Nigerian Muslim’, who moves to the Cape, to be accepted as being a Cape Malay, seeing that he has no ‘known’ genealogical ties to South-East Asia. The term ‘Cape Malay’ also refers to the historical background of this particular group, which is relevant in this research. Furthermore, I will focus on the Cape Malay Choir Board and consequently I will refer to Cape Malay choirs frequently. It will be confusing when I use the ‘Cape Malay’ terminology in one chapter and ‘Cape Muslim’ in the other, therefore I will stick to ‘Cape Malay’.

Another term which may cause confusion is the term ‘Coon’. The Cape Town carnival is referred to as the ‘coon carnival’. The word ‘coon’ originated in the United States of America where it was used as a demeaning and an insulting word for African-Americans. However, most members and captains of Cape Town’s Coon troupes are not aware of this origin of the word, to them it means just what they are – people playing carnival in a costumed band. Nevertheless, in recent years several people have tried to replace the word ‘coon’ with the word ‘minstrel’ or just refer to the umbrella organization ‘klopte’, which means clubs, the music clubs of the Malay and Coloured Community, because in a non-racial society, which the new South Africa wants to be, the word has become unaccepted. Nonetheless, in this thesis I refer to both minstrels and coons, because during my fieldwork I noticed that both words are accepted and are used by the minstrel/coon troupes themselves. Therefore, I will use them in this thesis as well, to preserve the authenticity of the interviews and the statements made by my informants. My own preference is to use the new word ‘minstrel’, but especially when quoting interviewees, I will mention the words as they used them, whether this is coon or minstrel.

**Thesis outline**

The main focus of this thesis is on the moppies. To interpret lyrics, it is necessary to critically analyse the way these lyrics were preserved, whether lyrics were written down or orally transmitted through time, in order to establish if these songs could be used as ‘historical sources’ or merely as ‘current

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views on the past’. Furthermore, the way these songs were gathered and obtained during fieldwork, is of equal importance to be investigated and questioned. For instance, how can we interpret memories, expressed in interviews and lyrics? Have I controlled the interview and directed the questions and answers in any way? Have I given my informants too much freedom to mix up memories of the past with desires and ideas of today? In the first chapter I therefore focus on the methodology of collecting, listening to and interpreting lyrics.

Central in this research is the assumption that songs are a way of communicating social and political principles through music. In Chapter 2 I want to test this assumption and see how I can interpret the Cape Malay Choir lyrics and what information I can retrieve from them. During my fieldwork in Cape Town I collected over 50 lyrics, written over a period of more than 70 years and I discussed these with their writers. For every songwriter, the song has a story behind it and these stories will be addressed in this research. The lyrics, the personal stories of the different individuals, songwriters and performers will support and explain the messages communicated through the songs and help illustrate the social and political background of this community in South Africa during Apartheid.

In Chapter 3, I will focus on the apartheid government’s attempts to promote the ethnic identity of Cape Malay and the role the Cape Malay Choirs played in this. What did the apartheid government hope to achieve by supporting a Cape Malay identity? Were the Cape Malay used as a ‘role model’ for the Coloured community in Cape Town? Was the Cape Malay Choir Board one of the Apartheid tools used by the government to advocate and promote this ethnic identity and culture? Borrowing on theories by Ranger and Hobsbawm about ‘invented traditions’, I will analyse the founding of the Cape Malay Choir Board, its actions in the apartheid period and their rules and regulations for composing and performing moppies. I will also look at the founding of the Department of Coloured Affairs, which was chaired by the same I.D. du Plessis who founded the Cape Malay Choir Board, and how this Department managed to influence the Malay choirs and the production of songs.

In Chapter 4 I will examine the cultural identity of the Cape Malay and how the community, who were referred to as being Cape Malay or believed they belonged to that group, identified and described themselves. Did the views of Cape Malay identity come from within the group itself or from outsiders? Was religion an important motive for the Cape Malays to distinguish themselves from the ‘coloured’ community? Is the notion of class struggle appropriate to describe the need within the Cape Malay community to redefine their culture and identity? In this chapter I will focus on the composers and singers of the Moppies and their experiences. How did they see this ‘tradition’ of singing folksongs, and what did it mean to them to sing them every year. Did they accept non-
Muslim singers into their choir and was there a sense of superiority amongst the Cape Malay choirs in comparison to the ‘coon’ troupes? Furthermore, I will question whether the choice to sing the traditional songs from slave history was a way to lend a sense of continuity to the apartheid struggle.

Chapter 5 will focus on the choirs in post-apartheid South Africa and how they fitted into this increasingly popular concept in South Africa, ‘Living Heritage’. The intangible aspects of inherited culture, the narration of life stories, passing from generation to generation in the form of songs, dance, poetry, etc. became more and more important to explore and preserve history in the new South Africa. The protection and preservation of the Cape Malay culture had been an important apartheid tool in order to advocate and promote the ‘pure’ Malay culture over the ‘bastardized’ coloureds. In the post-apartheid period, these views on ‘pure races’ changed. This chapter will explore how the Cape Malays were perceived by the new government, how the tradition of the annual Cape Malay choir performances were supported by the new city council of Cape Town and the previously marginalized Coloured community and if the choirs maintained their popularity within the Cape Malay community. I will also present some recently composed songs. By looking at the themes that were addressed in these new songs, I will try to find out if the moppies were still used as a way to communicate social issues and which issues were perceived to be important in post-apartheid South Africa.
Chapter 1

‘Ons hoor, almal doen die toyi toyi’ –
Listening, Collecting and Understanding Song Lyrics

Ons hoor
Nou almal doen die toytoytoy.
Daar is onrus in die lande
in Kayalitsa and in Langa.
Ooral in Suid Afrika
hoor ons die mense kla.
Ons lees in die courante
Die Kaap is aan die brand
Ons sien het op die TV
Hoe brand die squater kamp
Die riotsquad was daar.
Om hulle uitmekaar te ja
Olalalalala

At the turn of the year, Cape Town witnesses a series of musical events, the Kaapse Klopse Carnival, the Nagtklopse and the Malay Choir Competitions. These musical celebrations have been part of the cities consciousness and scenery for years. In the past, these moments of singing and making music provided opportunities for the Malay and Coloured Community in Cape Town to ‘relax’ and ‘forget’ about daily sufferings, caused by first slavery and later Apartheid. Today the carnival and choirs still function as a form of release of stress and frustration about modern day obstacles such as poverty, crime, etc.

This song, composed probably around 1994, just after the first democratic elections in South Africa, was a popular tune and it was heard all over Cape Town during the New Year festivities of the Cape Malay and Coloured Choirs. The lyrics refer to the violence and riots during last years of the apartheid era when the country was in a state of emergency. Translated into English it says: “We hear them, now all of them are doing the toyi toyi. There is unrest in the country, In Kayalitsa and in Langa. Everywhere in South Africa, We hear the people complain. We read it in the newspapers, The Cape is on fire. We see it on TV, How the squatter camps burn. The riot squad was there, to separate them, Ohlalalalaa”. The song was immensely popular and emerged in later years in different versions by different Malay and Minstrels choirs. The idea of singing and dancing as a way of dealing with suppression is what makes this song so popular. The choirs could relate to this. The equivalent of the toyi toyi for the Cape Malay choirs was their moppies, their comic songs.
It is this idea of singing as a way of dealing with socio-political situations that has fascinated me. In this research I will focus on these moppies, the lyrics and the performance aspect to find out what role these songs played in the Malay and Coloured Community in Cape Town during the Apartheid years. To understand and analyse lyrics and their impact on a community, it is necessary to critically analyse the way these lyrics were preserved by this community, if lyrics were written down or orally transmitted through time, and to establish if these songs could be used as ‘historical sources’ or merely as ‘current views on the past’. Furthermore, the way these songs were gathered and obtained during fieldwork, is equally important to be investigated and questioned. For instance, how can we interpret memories, expressed in interviews and lyrics? Have I controlled the interview and directed the questions and answers in anyway? Have I given my informants too much freedom to mix up memories of the past with desires and ideas of today? In this first chapter I therefore focus on the methodology of collecting, listening to and interpreting lyrics.

**Listening & Collecting**

From August 2008 until January 2009, I conducted my research in and around Cape Town. My aim was to collect as many moppie lyrics as possible, either on paper or on tape, so I could transcribe them myself. This however turned out to be quite a challenge. Many lyrics, as mentioned before, had not been written down nor recorded. As most of the composers explained to me, moppies are written down on paper when they are composed, but afterwards, the lyrics are usually memorized by the choir. Not many copies of the lyrics are made and frequently the original lyrics on paper get lost over time as well. Seeing that many choirs practice in school buildings, the choirs either learn lyrics by reading them on the blackboard present in the classroom or the lyrics are learnt by memorizing sentence after sentence. Finding preserved written lyrics is therefore difficult. Most of the lyrics I collected are based on the memories of their composers, and in the odd case, on the old original sheets with the lyrics scribbled down on. The first reaction to my question, if they remembered the lyrics, was usually that they did not. Sometimes the lyrics would come to them in a later stage or in a follow-up interview. In some cases I asked the composer of moppies, to try and sing the song for me and this usually worked better for them in recollecting the lyrics, instead of just trying to come up with the words from scratch. The melody of the song appeared to be better stored in their memories and it helped many of them in remembering the lyrics. The rhythm, the beat triggered their memories, leading to a word flow of lyrics. Some informants also presented me with songs that were composed by others, but they just happened to really like them and therefore wanted to share them with me. For the informants the more recent songs, of course, were easier to remember. Furthermore, there were clearly more popular songs, that most informants remembered and could
recite for me. All the songs I have collected, whether on paper or on audiotape (which I then transcribed onto paper) are included in the appendix. I have also made and included a music disc with a selection of songs I recorded during my fieldwork, which will provide a more lively introduction and insight into this musical ‘tradition’. Unfortunately, because of inferior audio recording equipment, the selection of songs is rather small, but nevertheless it will be a pleasant variation to the ‘dry’ lyrics.

It is important to realize that these songs were mostly written for the annual Cape Malay Choir Competitions. This competition element of course greatly influenced the composers perception of which songs were worth remembering or presenting to me, the ‘collector from abroad’. On many occasions the composer of a song would proudly mention that his song had won first or second prize in this or that year’s choir competition. It did not happen often that a composer would show me a song and later admit that it had not been popular in the competitions. The fact that the choirs took the competitions so seriously, meant that the less popular songs were not preserved and were eventually forgotten. “Every year you write and practise something new, so especially when a song didn’t win first prize, you wouldn’t go back to that song. You wouldn’t keep the lyrics”, explains the vice president of the Cape Malay Choir Board Mr. Brown. “Very seldom people kept their lyrics. Only the successful ones survived”\(^40\), according to Mr. Brown. Therefore, I have to take into account that most lyrics I managed to find, were probably of the more popular or successful songs. This however does not impede my research too much. The more popular the song, the more people must have agreed with the theme or the lyrics.

The competition factor did have a negative influence on the success of the songs in the competition because, even though the songs might have been popular within the community, the jury, which consisted of usually white/Afrikaner officials, did not appreciate or promote critical songs about political events. Mr. Brown, today the vice-president of the Cape Malay Choir Board, remembers that in 1990 his choir performed a moppie, inspired by the independence of neighbouring country Namibia and received a lot of criticism from the judges. “We won first prize the year before but that year we got hardly any credits”, sighs Mr. Brown. “Even though it was a sensitive topic, we felt, we were gonna write this and we were gonna sing this, but we didn’t do well”\(^41\). Sadly, Mr. Brown couldn’t remember the lyrics of this song, probably because after the failure in the competition, this song was never copied or repeated again. Luckily he did remember that they had performed such a song, which does give me more perspective on the competition element and its influence on the creative writing process of the songs.

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\(^{40}\) Interview with Mr. Brown, 5\(^{th}\) of November 2008, Heideveld, Cape Town.

\(^{41}\) Interview with Mr. Brown, 5\(^{th}\) of November 2008, Heideveld, Cape Town.
Another aspect which makes it difficult to try and contextualize these comic songs and place them within a timeframe is that many songs were copied, sometimes with almost the exact words and melodies. It is not always clear which choir started with a specific catchy melody or popular phrase and it is especially hard to pin point the exact year and date when the song was written or first performed. I will therefore not use the song lyrics as some kind of ‘eyewitness account’ which describe a historic event, but rather as views on that event in a later stage. As David Coplan says in his book ‘In the time of Cannibals: ‘Oral narratives are no longer regarded, as fragmentary documents, and they cannot be taken at face value or picked clean for ‘referential’ context’’. However, the fact that certain events or ideas were constantly repeated in songs, still tells us a lot about what impact these events, ideas or emotions must have had on the community. Moreover, by studying these reoccurring themes throughout the Apartheid era, I can still get a better understanding of the ‘zeitgeist’ prevalent within the Malay community in this period.

An important aspect to further investigate therefore is ‘memory’. How can we interpret memories, expressed in interviews and lyrics? Can I regard these songs as ‘time capsules’ of emotions and discussions on certain historic events? Should I rather approach these songs as ‘views’ on the past, instead of being real ‘memories’? As Sean Field claims, ‘Oral history is the art of the possible’, because it provides space for individuals to talk simultaneously about their past social experiences and their past and present experiences of needs, wants and desires. For instance, it is beneficial for the Cape Malay community nowadays in post-apartheid South Africa to identify with the former marginalised groups in South Africa, because of economic benefits but also because of political and social status. It is possible that the memories of their experiences through the apartheid years could therefore be influenced by present day needs and desires. Johannes Fabian (1996: 226-277) calls this ‘remembrance of the present’. This does not mean however, that I want to trivialize the pain and suffering that this community endured. I simply want to state that I will be cautious when I present memories obtained through interviews and songs in this thesis and that I will remain aware of the present needs of the interviewees which will possibly reflect in their memories. In Portelli’s words, ‘Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did’.

When an oral history interviewer pays a visit, as I did, people are invited to look back at their lives and create a more holistic narrative which links up their images and dreams of their past, present and future. My informants, who were all kind enough to invite me into their houses, were more than happy to talk about their hobby, their passion, which is singing and the choirs. It was not difficult to start the conversation, especially when their music was playing through a stereo or was performed by themselves on their instruments. Stories and anecdotes would boil up with great enthusiasm. When focusing more on the past though, discussing why certain songs had been written, what the competitions were like 50 years ago, etc, the conversation would slow down and it became apparent that my informants tried to remember correctly what had happened, in a way to not let me down and by giving me valuable information. For instance, they kept apologizing for not remembering certain events or lyrics and in such cases they would refer me to friends who would probably still remember or could help me out in any other way. Remembering ‘correctly’ therefore almost became a ‘polite’ thing to do for them.

The memories discussed in the interviews were therefore also largely influenced by the interaction between me and my informants. “Folklore fieldwork is personal work”, says Bruce Jackson in his work on ‘Fieldwork’ in 1987. “It isn’t neutral and it isn’t objective. It’s too much subject to such factors as the unique chemistry between people at a specific moment in time”. Therefore, what I have been able to collect or discuss is also influenced, not only by what the informants actually could remember, but also by what kind of atmosphere was created during the interviews, the level of trust that was established between me and the songwriters. Being aware of this, I have tried to deal with this by having follow-up interviews. A second or third interview offers the opportunity to re-direct questions, follow up on aspects discussed earlier but also to have a second chance, if necessary, to create a better understanding between me and the interviewee or at least a more comfortable situation in which it is easier for both parties to discuss things.

When doing interviews in communities, it is necessary to first get permission from the organisational gatekeepers of the community, Sean Field advises. These might be the civic associations, political groups or local municipal councillors. In this case this meant the Cape Malay Choir Board and the umbrella organisation Kaapse Klopse Karnival Association, which encompasses the different ‘Coon Carnival’ and ‘Malay Choirs’ organisations. For my research, the Cape Malay Choir Board had the most significance. I therefore contacted them first. Unfortunately, the president of the

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Cape Malay Choir Board was on a pilgrimage to Mecca in the months when I was in Cape Town, but I had a good understanding and contact with the vice-president of the choir board, Mr. Brown. Not only was the contact with Mr. Brown a sign of respect towards the choir board, it also helped getting new contacts, seeing that most choir captains and composers are known to the choir board members. Thanks to my regular contacts with Melvin Matthews, the president of the Kaapse Klopsie Karnival Association, I got a better understanding of the entire New Year’s celebrations organisation. Through Melvin I was introduced to many troupes and choirs, which made it much easier for me to arrange interviews, because people had seen me at official gatherings or in other social meetings which Melvin Matthews invited me to attend. Both men, Mr. Brown and Mr. Matthews, could introduce to the more successful choirs and composers and provide me with the contact details, for which I am very grateful to both of them.

Oral History

‘Oral History’ is a popular discipline within the field of African History. As mentioned in the introduction, in South Africa many ‘oral history’ projects can count on much support and interest. It seems today that everything ‘oral’ is more ‘important’ or more ‘real’ than written historic sources. Of course, for a long time history in Africa was one of a white colonial perspective and the introduction of the ‘Oral History’ method was revolutionary, in that it opened up the continent for more ‘grassroots’ histories. However, to completely discard everything written is equally foolish as well. Especially in contemporary African history, the written sources can tell us as much about ‘common’ societies as the ‘oral’ can. It’s the task of the historian to explore which method or discipline fits his research best.

What is ‘oral history’ exactly and can this research be qualified as an oral history project? Oral history, as a research method, records the spoken memories and stories of people in the interview situation. In this last description, my research qualifies as an ‘oral history’ project, because I have gathered information about the Cape Malay Choir Board, the carnival and the moppies through interviews with the people involved with the organisation of these New Year’s Eve celebrations. However, interviews were not the only means through which I gathered information. I have also searched archives, for instance the archives of the ‘Meertens Institute’ in Amsterdam, which focuses on Dutch language and Culture, in which I found the diaries of Willem van Warmelo or the city archives of Cape Town, from which I retrieved for instance the Rules and Regulations of the

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Cape Malay Choir Board of 1939. Still, the interviews did play an important part in my project as they helped me to put all of the information gathered into perspective, the personal perspectives of the people whose stories I was trying to understand and describe. Therefore, I wouldn’t refer to myself as an oral historian, but as a historian who has conducted interviews as part of her research.

Yet, even for more ‘conventional’ historians, who also use interviews as sources of information, the same methodological theories and questions should be discussed and considered as for the pure oral history projects. What sort of historic sources do I use, informants, but also documents? What do I know about these sources? Who wrote these documents and why? Also, in the case of the informants, what do they gain by telling me their stories? The same ‘source critiques’ should be applied for the interviews as for the written sources. Oral history should also be examined by ‘conventional’ history methodologies. After all, oral history interviewing is part of the historical enterprise. Thus, the historian/interviewer is trapped in the language, practices and ideology of the profession. That ideology, most baldly stated by Fisher (1970), is that history is not story-telling but problems solving. [...] Within the profession a sharp distinction is often drawn between analytic history and narrative history, and between narrative and analysis within a particular historic work (Hexter, 1971). This distinction, Susman (1964) argued, is deeply embedded in the profession and expresses our differing views of a usable past. [...] The language of history used by the interviewee is the language of analysis. Its form is the question. The language of history used by the interviewee is the language of narrative. Its form is the story.50 I have noticed this during my own interviews. Besides wanting to provide me with ‘factual’ information, the songwriters were also keen on telling me a ‘good story’. After all, the composers of moppies are usually good story tellers and enjoy entertaining their audience, in this case, me. Not only do these ‘stories’ (interviews) portray the creativity of the interviewee and his qualities as a performer, they also reveal which themes or events remain important, important enough to ‘be remembered’ and even more so, to be passed on to others.

Alessandro Portelli argued that, “to tell a story is to take arms against the threat of time”.51 But in an interview, we force the story into time, to contextualize it and thereby disarm the storyteller.52 As the historian and interviewer, I kept trying to ‘contextualise’ the story by emphasising the chronological order of events, through questions about ‘when exactly these happenings occurred’, ‘was this or that song composed after this or that event’?, etc. My questions were directed to ‘analyse’ the ‘story’ told by the interviewees, to understand when and why songs were composed.

Oral history, therefore, is both a narrative and an analysis. The analysis of the narrator is embedded in the story he or she tells, the analysis of the historian is embedded in the questions asked. Those questions break the narrative with analysis.53

The oral history interview is also a dialogue, and because of this it provides the interviewee with the space to tell stories about what happened in the past and what possibly happened in a more desirable past.54 The interviewees could not ‘invent’ important socio-political events, because I would have been able, as the historian, to find out that those events described, did not occur. Yet, there was of course room to ‘create’ and speak of a more ‘noble’ ‘personal past’, their own contribution to certain events, or the role of the songs and the choirs during the Apartheid years. These were the things I wanted to find out and did not have much information on before. Therefore, the quotes on this topic, should be used with more care and deliberation. Yet, it is the combined approach of interviews and lyrics, which serve as an informational source for my thesis. The themes described in the lyrics tell me whether ‘personal pasts’ were indeed as involved as they were described, or if the community really was as concerned with certain events as they said they were. The lyrics therefore can be used to ‘check’ certain quotes made in the interviews, whereas the interviews can be used to understand and explain the lyrics.

**Understanding & using lyrics**

My research is based on more than just oral sources. Besides interviews I have also used written documents such as diaries, newspaper articles, etc. The main sources on which I have based this thesis are however, the lyrics. Central in this research is the assumption that (folk)songs are a way of communicating social and political principles through music. Understanding the power of (folk)songs to inspire collective action in politics depends in part on understanding the distinctive qualities of oral tradition.55 The question which first needs to be answered therefore is, in which category these song lyrics can be placed. Are songs oral sources or written sources? I have struggled with this question for some time.

The lyrics were, as was described before, rarely distributed on paper, neither to the members of the choirs nor to others. Yet, most informants told me that they did write the lyrics down, when they were composing the songs. In order to teach the choir members the lyrics, different methods were used. Sometimes songs were taught and memorised, sentence by sentence. Alternatively, the

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composer would write down the lyrics on a blackboard or cardboard in the practice room, so the choir could gather round and read the lyrics from the board, while practising. These boards with lyrics however, weren’t kept, nor brought to the competitions. Singing at the competitions, you are supposed to know the lyrics by heart. Furthermore, the more catchy and successful songs would be copied by other choirs, a year later, yet those choirs usually did not obtain the lyrics on paper by the composer. Once again, the audience or the competitors would memorise the catchy lyrics and re-write them for their own use. Therefore, songs are spread into the community rather in an ‘oral’ way, than in a written form. However, during my fieldwork, most lyrics I received on paper. Yet, my informants would write the lyrics down, which they could only remember after talking about them with me or with friends or after singing and playing the music of the song.

The lyrics seem to fit into both categories, both oral and written. Therefore it is wise to look at how scholars define and describe ‘oral sources’ or ‘oral literature’. According to Kashula, oral literature can be seen as a collective expression and a celebration of communal, culture specific related experiences which enhance values in traditional societies (Kashula, xxii). The moppies are very much part of a communal celebration, the New Year’s celebration. Furthermore, it seems that Malay folksongs weren’t just used as entertainment, as popular variety, but were part of the tension managing mechanism regulating the values and needs of their society, in other words, that they are collective expressions and celebrations of communal and culture specific related experiences. These expressions of values, needs or celebrations are spread throughout the community in an ‘oral’ way, namely by singing. Therefore, it seems logic to approach these songs as ‘oral sources’, especially when studying their impact on the community or what these songs can tell us about ‘communal identity’. Yet, it is always wise to constantly submit sources, oral or written, to ‘conventional’ or ‘standard’ source critiques. All in all, I think it is wise to consider these songs as belonging to an oral/low literature continuum in which they can ‘pass’ from the one position to the other depending on actors and their knowledge and on the informing processes. The flexible relationship between ‘written’ and ‘oral’ and between words and music in these moppies, and the loose rules and ideas on ownership and copyright helped this oral tradition of socio-political song-making survive for use in a variety of socio-political struggles of the Malay community. By using each other’s tunes and phrases in changing situations, a continuity and a feeling of recognition and of shared interests and struggles was created.

As described in the introduction, other academics have researched the New Year Celebrations as well and for some part also the songs. Denis-Constant Martin and Christine Winberg have both argued that these songs had and have a cathartic purpose. The Moppies provided occasions for outbursts of anger and discontent. Carnivals and Choir Competitions in Cape Town
must have been a privileged occasion for singing satirical songs and ridiculing those in power, says Martin. The stage, the uniform, the masses, it all contributes to a feeling of safety in which things can be said and done that you could normally not have done or dared as an individual alone. Other scholars and Africanists have pointed out that Africa has known a long tradition of using music to voice protest and social conflict. Oral performances can therefore not be separated from the socio-political contexts in which they take place. The folksongs of the Cape Malay which were performed in times of slavery and later Apartheid, should therefore be studied in this context.

The method which was used to deal with frustration was to sing Moppies, the satirical songs. The word Moppie comes from the Dutch word ‘Mopje’ which means ‘joke’. Therefore when one speaks of Moppies, you speak of jokes, of comic songs. This is important to realize, they sang funny songs. Their method was to joke about their situation. This is a remarkable aspect to take into account in the reflection and interpretation of this culture. Why was it important to joke about things? Why did they not need ‘sentimental’ songs or ‘protest songs’ to deal with pain or failure? Furthermore, the jokes often made were satirical and satire is a very particular element of comedy. The whole purpose of satire is not necessarily to be ‘just’ funny, but to address an issue which the maker of the joke does not approve of. Political satire for instance, is used with subversive intent where political speech and dissent are forbidden by a regime, as a method of advancing political arguments where such arguments are expressly forbidden. Yet, besides this political aspect, the most important aspect of the Moppies is to be funny. The satire in the moppies has a special characteristic which is called the ‘Joking Relation’. As one of my informants, Mr. Adam Samodien from Woodstock, has explained “In a Moppie, the story teller (leadsinger) takes the piss out of someone or something, because moppies are meant to be funny. On stage you can mock who ever and whatever you want, because you hide your message in the song, you don’t say it straight to their faces”.

The Moppies are perfect examples of satirical jokes, hidden in between the lines. Someone from outside the community might not pick up these satirical sneers, but the target audience, the Coloured and Cape Malay community recognises these subtle jokes, because they have made those jokes themselves many times before.

The moppies refer to the events of the past year, which were important for the ‘Cape Coloured’ community. With their smart sense of humour, the singers and composer of the moppies manages to address and discuss difficult questions. Meaningful words and stories can help

58 Interview with Adam Samodien, January 8th 2009, Woodstock, Cape Town.
individuals to contain the disruptive and unforeseen consequences of feelings. Therefore, studying the (reoccurring) themes of the songs or the symbolic statements of political or social ideology, will provide me with an insight into the ideas and values of the community. I have used many songs as examples of these ‘expressions of the community’ throughout the thesis, although I don’t present the complete lyrics of all the songs used or collected, simply because this would be too much. Yet, all the songs I collected and transcribed, I have added to the thesis in the appendix.

According to Adam Samodien, a Moppie singer doesn’t really sing to the people but more speaks to the people when he is performing onstage. He is telling the story of the song and it is important for a storyteller to deliver the message in such a way that the audience understands it and can laugh at the jokes made. This involves witty lyrics, pronunciation, intonation, facial expressions and also performance. Equally important in the study of songs and trying to understand them, is studying the performance aspect. The form of singing complements the words of the song. An important aspect in a moppie is the interaction between the singer and the rest of the choir, and between the singer and the audience. In many moppies, the lead singer tells a story to which the choir responds. In a way the lead singer addresses an issue and the response of the choir could display the more generally accepted ideas within the community about this topic. Therefore, just focussing on lyrics is not enough. The interviews plus the other sources I collected from the archives, will present me with a more ‘complete’ picture of this specific ‘culture’.

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Chapter 2

‘Wy hebben geen sorgen’
Singing as a form of social commentary

With this song, the composer Gamja Dante put to words a feeling which is shared by many others in Cape Town, that singing is a way to feel happy. ‘We have no worries, we’re having fun. From evening till morning, we go on. This way we can live, we live on happily, We celebrate, we sing, we dance, we jump. Yes, all these things, give us joy.’ This song sums up what the New Year’s celebrations are all about and gives us a great description of how people perceive and experience the celebrations. The annual celebrations are considered to be a way to release all the pressure and stress built up over the past year. Is singing therefore a way of escaping from reality or to express and deal with reality or maybe both? Studying the (reoccurring) themes of the songs or the symbolic statements of political or social ideology, will provide me with an insight into the ideas and values of the community and also clarify for what purpose these songs were composed and sung. Were songs composed in response to socio-political events or because of social discussions within the community about misbehaviours of their own people, or did they deliberately avoid writing about sensitive topics, in order to use the songs as a way of escapism? Looking at the lyrics is a way to find out.

Singing as a form of social commentary

The Cape Malay Choir Board was founded in 1939. Of course before this time, comic songs were composed and performed, but for this chapter I will focus on the songs written after the founding of the choir board. An obvious choice to start this selection of comic songs with is an example from the song book that Izak David du Plessis published in 1939, as a gift for ‘his’ Cape Malay Choirs. Of the hundred songs selected for this book, only ten of these are presented as ‘Ghommaliedjes’, the comic songs. Du Plessis justifies his choice to only publish ten comic songs in the introduction of the song
book: “The Comic Songs are continually changing, influence new compositions and reappear every so often in almost the same form. I therefore did not think it was necessary to present more than 10 examples of these songs”. Du Plessis’s lack of understanding and appreciation for the comic songs is unfortunate, because not many comic songs from this early period were kept and preserved. None of these songs that du Plessis selected seem to be compositions from the first years of the Cape Malay Choir Board.

This first comic song published in the ‘Liederskat’ is the moppie ‘Spierwit gepoeier’ (powder white). This song is a famous comic song, which is still sung today. The song makes fun of coloured women at the Cape who try to look ‘white’ by putting powder on their faces and putting up their hair in a bun, like the white women would do in the early days of the Cape settlement. This is therefore clearly an old slave or ‘ghoema song’, but still relevant in the twentieth century, because also in those days it was, the ‘whiter you were, the better. At least, that was the perception. The song is a form of social commentary, because it responds to this phenomenon and makes fun of it. In the song they make a mockery out of the women who try to look white, but who fail, because they haven’t got the right hair or the powder is too visible, etc.

Spierewit gepoeier
Het nie bêrendous nie
Het nie bêrendous nie
Bolla wil sy dra
Sy’t nie hare nie
Het nie hare nie
Lappe moet sy vat
Om ‘n bolla van te maak
Om ‘n bolla van te maak
(Du Plessis: 1935)

This song is a so-called ‘classic’, ‘evergreen’ if you like, and even though it was not written during the Apartheid years, it is still relevant.

The early years of the Cape Malay Choir Board, the 1940s, were restless times. The world was at war and even at the most Southern tip of Africa, people could feel the heat, remembers Vernie February in his memories. The South African scholar wrote how the Capetonians had sung a merry song "Hitler het ‘n baby en die baby se naam is Abie, nader na die pale toe’. Ons kon toe nog nie weet nie dat die ‘Abie baby's' in die kraaminrigtings van Buchenwald en Dachau afgedryf sou word nie”. There was another famous song, which touched upon a sensitive topic for the Capetonians,
according to February. They had thought of the women who stayed behind during the war: "War mommy kom haal jou pay, war mommy kom haal jou pay, die eendertigste may".61 Songs had also been written during the First World War that commented on the soldiers'wives who were left behind. "Mooie meise, moenie huil nie, Ek gaat na die Duitse Oorlog toe. Ek gaan nie om daar te bly nie, ek gaan om weer te kom".62 ‘Cape Malay’ regiments had been incorporated into the ‘Cape Corps’ during the wars.63 Their worried wives and girlfriends were a visible result of the world war in South Africa and within the ‘Malay’ community and therefore ‘starred’ in these ‘war songs’.

The following song, given to me by Gamja Dante (a well known ‘Cape Malay Choir’ musician from the Bo-Kaap area in Cape Town), seems to have been written at the end of the 1940s, probably for the 1948 elections. The song speaks of General Smuts and the composer’s ideas about this politician. ‘Leier van ons vry land’ (leader of our free nation), ‘Ons staan bij jou tot onderkant uit’ (We’ll stand by you, right to the end). The lyrics seem to refer to the 1948 elections. The Union party of Smuts represented ‘freedom’, or at least relatively more freedom than the campaigners for the ‘Nasionale Partij’ promised the non-European community. This song seems to have been inspired by this political event and even though it doesn’t say in so many words, it is appealing to the community to put their trust in Smuts instead of D.F. Malan.

Generaal Smuts van Suid Afrika
Ons staan bij jou tot onderkant uit.
Ons man’s en ons vrouens
sal altyd by jou staan.
Vertrou maar op ons
Dan sal dit lekker gaan
Oom Jannie jy het al ons liefde
Leier van ons vry land
En ons wil maar net veg vir vryheid en reg
Dwarsdeur tot onderkant.
(Gamja Dante: 2009)

General Smuts of South Africa
We’ll stand by you right to the end.
Our men and women
in truth will follow you.
We wont let you down
you know we’ll see things through
Uncle Jannie, you have our love
You are the leader of the free
And we’re ready to fight for freedom and right
Through to victory.

At the start of the fifties, only four years after the victory of the National Party in the elections, the Cape was preoccupied with the preparations for the ‘Jan van Riebeeck Festival’, also known in the non-white communities as the ‘Apartheid Festival’. The apartheid government, ready and enthusiastic to show the world what they envisioned and hoped to achieve, took this opportunity to

celebrate and display the White and especially Afrikaner political and social dominance in the country.\textsuperscript{64} This social dominance was portrayed by emphasizing the influence the white community had had on the ‘natives’ and other ‘racial groups’ of South Africa and their cultures. The whole festival was seen as part of a ‘civilizing mission’. South Africa’s past was conceptualized as the growth and development of Western Civilization. Separate festivities were designed for those who were not part of the nation. For instance, a special ‘day for Malay and Coloured communities’ was held in the Festival stadium.\textsuperscript{65} The Malay community was asked to contribute to the festival by preparing a Cape Malay Choir performance. At that time there was only one Cape Malay Choir Board, the one founded in 1939 by Afrikaner scholar, poet and Apartheid official I.D. du Plessis. Du Plessis organized and actively intervened in the Cape Malay Choir contribution to the festival. The already apprehensive attitude from the Cape Malay community towards the festival became even more apparent during the preparations for a choir performance.

The festival was to celebrate 300 years of white rule in South Africa and many non-white South Africans, the Cape Malay Choirs included, were therefore reluctant to participate. I.D. du Plessis, however, saw this differently: “Through the festival the Coloured community was given a golden opportunity to show to the world what it had achieved in art, education and other spheres”, writes du Plessis in his Report as head of the Department of Coloured Affairs in 1952. Many Cape Malay singers saw this differently. “During apartheid Dr. ID du Plessis was the whip of the Cape Malay Choir Board. We struggled under apartheid but when there were tourists from other countries the Cape Malay choirs had to show them that we were happy in South Africa,” recalls Adam Samodien, songwriter for the Choir, the Protea Sports club, in District Six in those years. “Du Plessis wrote books about the Malay choirs but it was all racism. The Malay choirs were just used to impress tourists to cover up apartheid and show that the coloureds were happy”.\textsuperscript{66} Because of I.D. du Plessis active interference in the Cape Malay Choir contribution to the festival, five choirs decided that they didn’t want to be part of this particular representation of the Malay community in the festival and were fed up being used as an Apartheid tool. The five choirs broke away from the Cape Malay Choir Board to start their own Suid Afrikaanse Koorraad. “We were unhappy with the system”, says Samodien, who joined the Koorraad as well, “why did the Malay choirs have to participate in this festival? We weren’t going to be used”.\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{66} Interview Adam Samodien, January 8\textsuperscript{th} 2009, Woodstock, Cape Town.
\textsuperscript{67} Interview Adam Samodien, January 8\textsuperscript{th} 2009, Woodstock, Cape Town.
Other choirs however did participate in the festivities. Some saw it, as Du Plessis had described it, as an opportunity to show the world what the ‘Malays’ had achieved in art and culture. Others saw the festival as an excellent platform to sing a satirical moppie, in well chosen words yet difficult to decipher for the Afrikaner establishment, to mock the whole event. A moppie was subsequently composed to reflect on the festival and it became a huge success. Many of those who lived during that period still remember it, more than fifty years after it was first performed, and many of their children can at least still recite the chorus: ‘hey ba-ba-re-ba se ding is vim’. “When I was a little boy my father used to sing that and my mother used to sing that when they were talking their stuff you know”, recalls Abubakar Davids, one of my informants who grew up in District Six and now lives in Athlone on the Cape Flats. “The choirs and the coons would play this song when they paraded through the streets, they sang this for many years”.68 The moppie combined elements from an advertisement for ‘Vim’, a cleaning product, and from an American musical piece that was popular at that time (broadcast by Lionel Hampton in particular and based on onomatopoeias invented by Cab Calloway ‘Hey baba rebop’). Playing on the words, the moppie verse stated ‘hey ba-ba-re-ba se ding is vim’ (Hey ba-ba-re-ba his thing (that of Van Riebeeck) is impotent) (Martin 2005, 6). The word ‘Vim’ had more meaning than just referring to a cleaning product, according to Mr. Richard O Dudley from Elfindale. “In those days, if you wanted to describe something as being totally unacceptable and so on, in learned circles you said it was ‘non you’, in the ordinary language of the market place you just said that it was ‘vim’. It’s got nothing to do with the cleansing powder but that meant that it was unacceptable, that it was something that people didn’t tolerate”69.

This song is a perfect example of satirical jokes, hidden in between the lines. Someone from outside the community might not pick up this satirical sneer, but the target audience, the Coloured and Cape Malay community recognizes these subtle jokes, because they have made those jokes themselves many times before. The following song speaks of the so called Oxford pants. Oxford pants are baggy pants, worn usually as part of a suit, that became particularly fashionable in South Africa in the 1930s and 1940s. “There was a time when everyone wanted the Oxford trousers”, remembers Ginger Harrisson, former captain and song coach. “It was a fashion of the young men of those days, and they expressed that in a song as well. ‘Ma, ek wil die Oxford dra’, mom I want to wear the Oxford pants”.70 This song talks about this fashion hype, in the same way as the song ‘Spierewit gepoeier’. It makes fun of this social phenomenon and ridicules those who want to wear these fashionable but ‘strange’ pants. Furthermore, it ridicules in a way also those who want to look

68 Interview with Abubakar Davids, 15th of October 2008, Athlone, Cape Town.
69 Interview with Mr. Richard O Dudley of Elfindale, interview conducted by Lisa Baxter for UCT on the 12th of September 1995.
70 Interview with Ginger Harrrisson, November 27th 2008, Cape Town.
like ‘Europeans’. In the case of ‘Spierewit gepoeier’, this is quite obvious, because the person described in the song wants to have a white face. In the case of the ‘Oxford pants’ it could also be argued that the pants stood for a ‘European’ standard, standard of fashion, living, etc. After all the pants were specifically called ‘Oxford’ pants and were tremendously popular in Europe. This example shows that random everyday life could inspire a new comic song and it did not always have to be an important social issue that would trigger the creativity of the moppie composers.

Die dag toe ek haar vra om te vry
Het sy gesê: “Jy kan my nie kry.
Solank ek jou sien met die Oxford-broek
Moet jy 'n ander nooi gaan soek”.
O, ek wil die Oxford dra,
O, ek wil die Oxford dra,
My broek is te wyd
En die pype hang daar,
My baadjie is te nou
Maar dis die fashion vanjaar.
(Du Plessis : 1977)

That day that I asked her to make love
She said: “you can’t have me
As long as I see you in those Oxford-pants
You have to find yourself another girl.
O, I want to wear the Oxford pants
O, I want to wear the Oxford pants
My pants are to wide
And the legs are just hanging there
My ‘clothes’ are too small
But this is the fashion of the year.

Another famous and well remembered song from the fifties was ‘Almal in die kamer’. This song addressed a social issue which was becoming increasingly important in those years, with the lack of proper housing and overcrowded households as a result. An area in Cape Town in which one could especially find examples of these poor living conditions was the District Six area. The housing conditions in District Six deteriorated from the first half of the 20th century onwards because of a rapid influx of people from rural areas. (Bickford-Smith 1990: 41; Goldin 1987: 158). There was a general unwillingness on the part of landlords and the local city council to guarantee healthy housing conditions and functioning public services in the area. Adam Samodien, the writer of this song, grew up in this multicultural, overcrowded but lively and much loved neighborhood at the slopes of Table Mountain. Adam Samodien recalls that at the time he was living in District Six as a child, the population was so big, each family just had one room. In that room they started a family, when the children got big, they would stay in that room as well. Everyone was in the same room and this inspired him to write the song ‘Almal in die Kamer’.

Ons woon almal saam,
all in one room
Ons eet almal saam,
We all eat together,
Ons slaap same in dieselfde kamer
We all sleep in the same room
Almal op die grond lê ons rond.
The family that lives there,
Die familie wat daar woon,
it is such a big family
hulle is so groot,
Die skoon ouers woon ook saam,
En die skoondogter met haar kindertjies,
Diese man het weer vir haar laatstaan.
Nou woon ons almal saam in die kamer (3x), etc.
(Adam Samodien: 2009)

The parents in law live with them
and the daughter in law with her children
her husband has left her again
Now we all live together in this room,

The words in this song speak for themselves. ‘Ons woon almal saam, almal in een kamer’. The song functions as a mirror for the District Six inhabitants and reminds them of the living conditions of some people within their own community. It is obvious what the song is about, the poor living conditions in District Six. Looking at the theme of the song, it tell us that ‘shameful’ or sad situations like these are addressed in the songs. Adam Samodien explains that a moppie tells about the events of the year. They speak of important events in the community. This means that the living conditions of the inhabitants of District six were thought to be important enough to be referred to in the yearly held Cape Malay song competitions. The Malay Choirs performed throughout the year for tourists, at receptions, weddings, and of course at New Year’s Eve. The official Cape Malay Choir Board competitions were held only once a year in February and March. Every year, the choirs had to write a new song. Moppies were written related to an event in the country or within the community. The event that was dealt with in a song proved to have made an impact. The fact that these songs speaks of the bad living conditions in District Six, indicates that this must have been on people’s minds, that it was an important social issue in those years. “But”, says Samodien, “the main thing is to joke about it. Don’t make a sad situation even sadder, try to laugh about it, that’s the purpose of a moppie”.

The fact that the community itself is subject to mockery becomes apparent in the following song ‘Gamad Salie’ by Adam Samodien. According to the writer, this song addresses the issue of teen pregnancies in their community. The main character in the song is Gamad Salie, a young man who ‘kan mos lekker vry’ (can make love so passionately), so says the song. The moppie performer tells the story of this ‘bachelor’ and how his free, and presumably in the eyes of the composer ‘reckless’ lifestyle has got him into trouble, as he has to marry the girl he got pregnant. Samodien is not afraid to pass his judgement on the situation. The song states: ‘this is now his own fault’, leaving little room for debate about whether it is wise to ‘sleep around’.

Julie kan se wat julle wil
Maar dit is nou sy eie skuld
Hy moet trou op ’n sondagaand
Met gabieba van die claremont strand
(Adam Samodien: 2009)

You can say what you want
But this is now his own fault
He has to get married on a Sunday evening
With Gabieba from Claremont beach
Besides being very open about his own personal feelings about the situation, Adam Samodien, like most other composers, is not eager to discredit one person in particular. The song is meant as a general word of warning or ‘life lesson’, not to ruin one man’s reputation. Therefore, in most songs in which a delicate community affair is described, the main characters are not mentioned by their real names, to avoid hurting people’s feelings or reputations. The songs are not used to gossip, they are meant to examine events and socio-political changes and discuss the values and needs of the society.

**Ways to preserve some self-respect in the face of constant humiliation**

Johannes Fabian argues that “the kind of performance we find in popular culture have become for the people involved more than ever ways to preserve some self-respect in the face of constant humiliation, and to set the wealth of artistic creativity against an environment of utter poverty. All this is not to be dismissed off hand as escape from reality, it is realistic praxis under the concrete political and economic conditions that reign”. This describes the reality of the comic song tradition perfectly. Moppies were used to reflect on real and sometimes difficult situations, in order to put things into perspective or to find closure.

The socio-political situation worsened in the Sixties and early Seventies. The coloured and Cape Malay community found themselves more and more restricted in their daily lives due to apartheid legislation. In the Sixties the city of Cape Town started planning the large-scale forced removals. Certain area’s in prime locations in Cape town became designated ‘white area’s’, and the Coloured and Cape Malay community that lived there had to relocate to the newly set-up living areas on the cape flats. District Six was declared a white area on the 11th of February 1966. During the following 15 years between 55.000 and 65.000 people were displaced and the district was bulldozed house by house (Hart 1990:126). Neighbourhoods on the Cape Flats such as Bonteheuwel, Heideveld, Manenberg, Hanover Park and later Mitchells Plain were created to house the Coloured and Cape Malay community. Those who had money managed to buy a house in the nicer suburbs on the flats and outskirts of the city, but for those who had no money, they saw their families, their neighbours, their friends, being moved to different locations, randomly designated to them by government officials.

Naturally these forced removals had a major impact on people’s lives. Noor Ebrahim remembers the day that District Six was officially declared an area for white people only. “It was on the 11th of February 1966”. “This is a day I will never forget”, writes Noor in his memoires on his life.

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in District Six. “The newspapers were filled with the news. District Six buzzed with talk about its future. Friends and family began to worry about how life would change. The uncertainty made me feel empty”. Not only were families or friends separated as a result of this political decision, normal daily events changed. People who were used to walk and take public transport in District Six now found themselves stuck on the fast flat lands behind Table Mountain. Many families did not own a car to visit their old friends, so friendships and other contacts faded, clubs and choirs fell apart, etc. People had to build up new lives.

During this period of the forced removals, during the late Sixties and early Seventies, many comic songs were written about the new ‘coloured’ areas. These were songs with titles like ‘the train to Mitchells Plain’ or ‘Manenberg se train’. The emphasis on the train would suggest that it was especially written for the less fortunate parts of the coloured community who did not own a car and had to commute there and back to the cape flats by train. The areas mentioned in the songs, Manenberg, Mitchells Plain, were areas to which the majority of who lived there, had been assigned to by government officials. They were not the areas people went to who had money and therefore a choice to find a good neighbourhood to settle. In a way it seems like these songs were written to highlight the positive aspects of living in these new areas. In this example of the song ‘Manenberg se train’, written by Adam Samodien for the Woodstock Royals, the writer focuses on the fact that many good (Muslim?) women live in Manenberg.

Wat soek Abasie in die Manenberg
Ag, maar net ‘n vrou
So kom dan hier na die Manenberg
Want daar is alles nou
Ja daar is ‘n vrou vir elke ou
‘n vrou wat hy kan trou en altijd hou
So kom dan na die Manenberg –
Waar ons almal bly
Etc.
(Adam Samodien: 2009)

What is Abasie looking for in Manenberg
Oh, just a woman
So, come here, come to Manenberg
there is everything now
Yes, there is a woman for every man
a woman who he can marry and love forever
Cachoes So come to Manenberg, Cachoes
Where we all stay
Etc.

The writers of these ‘train’ songs emphasize that there was no political message in their songs. During our interviews, in which we discussed the meaning of these moppies, Adam Samodien stressed that he didn’t use this song to protest in any way against the forced removals or the government. “It was too dangerous to sing about such things on stage’, he says. “This song wasn’t used as a protest song”. Looking at the lyrics, it becomes apparent that indeed this song in no way complains about the forced removals, it only speaks of the ‘good things’ one can find on the cape flats.

72 Noor Ebrahim, Noor’s Story, My Life in District Six (Cape Town: District Six Museum, 2007) 8.
flats. However, deliberately avoiding to express themselves in a negative way about their situation in these specific songs, to me is a statement in itself. It shows that there was no immediate solution for their problem, no alternative but to try to be happy about their new situation, and that is exactly what this song wants to portray. James W. Carey, in his work on ‘Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society’ argues that the original and highest manifestation of communication is not in the transmission of intelligent information but in the construction and maintenance of an ordered, meaningful cultural world that we can serve as a control and container for human action. In other words, not all the songs were used to ‘inform’, especially in this situation where everyone had been affected and needed no explanation. The main purpose of the songs is to create a ‘meaningful world’, highlight the positive aspects of the situation in order to cope with the situation. As Samodien said before, “don’t make a sad situation even sadder, try to laugh about it, that’s the purpose of a moppie”.

It is also possible in this situation to talk about a form of self-censorship. There are several reasons for individuals to choose for self-censorship, withholding of one’s true opinion from an audience perceived to disagree with that opinion, is one of those, but in this case it could also be seen as a form of denial, ‘silence’ to cope with traumatizing events, such as the forced removals. ‘Silencing and denial are common coping practices widely reported in contexts of violence’, says Patricia Lawrence in ‘Violence & Subjectivity’. The composers therefore could have opted for self-censorship, by not writing about their ‘true’ feelings and experiences concerning the forced removals, as a form of self-protection.

Ali Ismael of Athlone also remembers singing about the trains in the Sixties and Seventies, as a consequence of the forced removals. “It was like... there’s a train, choo-choo-choo-choo, there’s a train, choo-choo-choo-choo, the train to Mitchells Plain, ... you know. All the people used to live in District Six, they all moved to Mitchells Plain and various places like that. The song, it was just telling the people that there was a train to Mitchells Plain and that you can... enjoy yourself there and things like that”. Like Adam Samodien, he also claims these ‘train songs’ were written not to protest, but to deal with the situation in a positive way. He also remembered that besides trying to emphasise the positive aspects of moving to the cape flats, the removals made life very difficult. “Stories in which a ‘good feeling’ is central, in an attempt to deal with loss, to reclaim the ability to make individual

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76 Interview with Ali Ismael of Athlone, 1-11-1995 by Lisa Baxter for UCT Memory Project.
choices and to retain a sense of self’ (Field 2001a: 100, Field 2001c: 118, McEachern 2001: Omar 1990: 193; Swamson & Harries 2001: 79-80). These ‘train songs’ are therefore a wonderful example of what the Moppies are about, singing to create and preserve some self-respect in the face of constant humiliation and suffering.

At the height of the Apartheid years, continuing the ‘tradition’ of singing satirical and critical moppies became more and more impossible. In 1976, because of the protests in the rest of the country, the Coon bands and Malay choirs were confronted with the Riotous Assemblies Act which was supposed to prevent large parties from grouping together on the streets. Because of this, the coon carnival was in serious jeopardy of having to be cancelled that year.77 The Christmas Choirs and Malay choirs however, were not so much affected by this new law,78 in the case of the Malay Choir Competitions probably because they take place inside where they couldn’t be seen as such a threat to national security. Still the general atmosphere surrounding the celebrations around New Year, carnival or choir competition, deteriorated and became less open and peaceful.

The Cape Town Festival, which was organized only one year after the Riotous Assemblies Act was implemented, to celebrate and commemorate the founding of the ‘Mother city’ 325 years before, was welcomed with even less enthusiasm than the festival organized in 1952. Adam Samodien, who belonged to the Suid Afrikaanse Koorraad, did not feel obliged to partake in this official state festival, but he did write a song inspired by the occasion called ‘Hiep Hiep Hoera, Suid Afrika’ (Hip Hip Hoorah South Africa), performed at the Suid Afrikaanse Koorraad Choir Competitions.

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When looking at those lyrics it seems as if the song was actually written for the festival. It is a praise song for Jan van Riebeeck. ‘Dankie sê ons dan van Riebeeck, ons sal jou nooit vergeet. Dankie 1652 net vir hier die dag’ (We say thank you Jan van Riebeeck, we will never forget you. Thank you 1652

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77 ‘City Coon Carnival is in Jeapordy’, Argus, December 23, 1976 in Denis Constant Martin, Chronicles of the Kaapse Klopse, with some documents on the sources of their music (Paris: Ceri-Science Po, 2007) 30.
for this day). Adam Samodien says about this song that it wasn’t meant to protest or deliberately upset the Afrikaner establishment, but it was also not meant as a praise song. When one reads the lyrics again, it is not hard to miss the satirical tone. ‘Toe ek met my skippie in die Tafel kom, Toe kyk ek na die berg en vra toe hoekom, Die berg so plat is soos die tafel in die huis, Toe kry ek die antwoord dit kom uit die kombuis’ (When I arrived in Table bay, I looked at the mountain and asked: How come is the mountain flat like a table. And the answer came from the kitchen). Afrikaans is the language both used by the Afrikaners and the Coloured and Cape Malay community. Afrikaans started out as a settler language, a mixture of Dutch, Malay and other languages that the settlers and slaves at the Cape brought with them. Afrikaans used to be referred to as ‘Kitchen Dutch’, the bastardized Dutch that was spoken by the slaves working on the farms of the Dutch settlers. This reference to a ‘kombuis’ (kitchen) this early in the song, seems to be a reminder to the audience that Cape Town was not just a Dutch/Afrikaner settlement but as much a slave settlement. Further along in the song there is another reference to Afrikaner history. ‘Goud en Diamante is daar gevind, En soe het Kaap die Goeie Hoop begin’ (Gold and diamonds were found, and so the Cape of Good Hope started). The discovery of Gold and Diamonds near Johannesburg meant the end of the two Afrikaner republics and their discovery can therefore hardly be called ‘Good Hope’ for the Afrikaners.

Samodien in this song depends on history for images and symbolism to illustrate his message. He refers to the Afrikaner history to actually point out that the history celebrated and presented at the 1977 festival is inconclusive. By this he is trying to remind the audience that Cape Town was not founded and built by white hands alone, but that the coloured history is as much a part of the history of Cape Town. With this Samodien tries to bring back some sense of dignity and pride to the community. Furthermore, this song honours the satirical spirit of the moppies. The jokes made are well hidden in between the lines, but obvious enough to be understood by the Cape Malay audience.

Besides historical symbolism, songwriters use other symbols to refer to events, people, etc. “We would sometimes use animal names, you know, to talk about important people”, says Gamja Dante. “Cause you see, we couldn’t talk about them directly. Otherwise we would be put in jail. So we sang about them and we used different names, like ‘oom Jakkals’ but it was actually related to those people sitting in the government”. Animal names like a Jackal, which is seen as a cunning and resourceful scavenger, would be used to describe a person who is considered to be authoritarian, judgmental and persistent. Usually the word Jackals was used to refer to politicians or someone else in powerful places. This way, the choirs were more free to discuss individuals without fearing to be censored by the white judges.
The rough see at Laaiplek
This is a sheep that licks the salty rocks
But no, I see this is a blue bull
That covers the brown rock cows.

This song is an example of the use of animal names in order to comment on a social or political event. The songs speak of a place called Laaiplek, which is a small fishing town about 90 minutes drive from Cape Town on the West coast. A blue bull seems to be a reference to a white man, a white man from Pretoria to be precise. The rugby team in Pretoria, a sport which was dominated during the Apartheid years by the Afrikaners and based in the Afrikaner capital, is nicknamed blue bulls, because of their blue jerseys. A blue bull ‘covering’ a brown cow, could imply a sexual act between a white man and a ‘brown’ (non-white) woman. Sexual encounters between white and non-white were forbidden in the apartheid years. In order to sing about this, animal names were used to cover up what was exactly discussed in the song.

The brown dog barks.
I put him down
I pull him with the chain
to his brown dog grave.

Another example of this is the song above about a brown dog. This particular one appears to be very cynical. To me it seems as if with this song the situation of the ‘brown’ (coloured) man is described. As soon as he ‘barks’ (speaks out against the government) he is ‘put down’ (shot or arrested) and taken to his ‘grave’. In other words, this songs could say: If you speak out against the apartheid regime, you basically sign your death sentence. A dark situation is pictured in this song, but not far from reality. Especially during the riot years of the Seventies and Eighties, many protesters were arrested or shot for speaking out against apartheid.

According to African Oral Literary scholar Isidore Okpewho, one major usefulness of any form of literature is that it offers delight and so relieves us of various pressures and tensions both physically and mentally. No matter how cynical, by thus providing an avenue for emotional and psychological release in day-to-day relations between members of society, oral literature helps to promote the bases for social harmony and an emotionally balanced citizenry.

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Manifestation of escapism

The Cape Malay Competition was a difficult stage for the Moppies. On the one hand it fitted perfectly with the idea of the Moppie, a critical and satirical song, to address social issues and in between the lines also ridicule the authorities, as it had always been the case, before Apartheid with the Ghoema songs during slavery. On the other hand, the competitions, which were organized by the Cape Malay Choir Board, with Afrikaner jury members, discouraged many moppie song writers to honour the tradition of comic songs as being a voice of the people in difficult and sensitive situations. “They listened to what we sang and they said we were inciting other people”, remembers Abubakar Davids. “But it was never about violence hey! We were never encouraged people to burn this or to do that. That wasn’t really what the songs were about. The songs that we wrote was just to make fun of them”.61 Folklorists argue that lyrics stress the ‘private experience, the emotional dimension’, and that the effect of this emphasis on emotion is that action is slowed down or arrested, while emotion and mood is explored.62 Such song forms, like Davids describes, do not convey a sense of urgency towards action, but rather create and sustain an emotional attitude or mood towards the issues and, in this case, towards the end of the state of emergency and riots.

At the height of the Apartheid years, continuing the tradition of singing satirical and critical moppies became more and more impossible. In 1976, because of the protests in the rest of the country, the ‘Coon’ and ‘Malay’ choirs were confronted with the Riotous Assemblies Act which was supposed to prevent large parties from grouping together on the streets. Because of this, the ‘Coon’ carnival was in serious jeopardy of having to be cancelled that year.63 The Christmas Choirs and ‘Malay’ choirs however, were not so much affected by this new law,64 in the case of the Malay Choir Competitions probably because they take place inside where they couldn’t be seen as such a threat to national security. Still the general atmosphere surrounding the celebrations around New Year, carnival or choir competition, deteriorated and became less open and peaceful. Towards the end of the 1980ies, the political situation became grimmer and the state of emergency was declared. Many people felt that this was not a time to celebrate. Cape Malay Choir Board president, Mr. Kashief Ernest said in the Sunday Times of November 3th, 1985: “In view of the suffering of the community and the loss of lives in the present crisis, the Cape Malay Choir Board has decided to call off its New Year’s Eve Parade. It commiserates with all those who lost loved ones during the unrest and

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61 Interview with Abubakar Davids, 15th of October 2008, Athlone, Cape Town.
63 ‘City Coon Carnival is in Jeopardy’, Argus, December 23, 1976 in Denis Constant Martin, Chronicles of the Kaapse Klopse, with some documents on the sources of their music (Paris: Ceri-Science Po, 2007) 30.
expresses its solidarity with those striving for a just society in which all South Africans will be free and equal in human dignity and rights”. Mr. Brown, who is now the vice-president of the Cape Malay Choir Board remembers: “We didn’t do anything, we didn’t riot, but we just stopped, we stopped singing that year, out of respect for our community and their communities.” The following year, when we restarted again with the competitions, we didn’t dare to address the topic in our songs. There were songs written in those years of course, and about these things”, says Mr. Brown, “but they weren’t performed during the competitions”.

People took the competitions seriously. Choirs could be disqualified for being too ‘political’, therefore such ‘sensitive’ songs wouldn’t be written anymore. People wanted to win, not protest against Apartheid on stage. Their fear was justified as choirs were occasionally disqualified for singing ‘dubious’ lyrics. Dubious in most cases meant that the lyrics were thought to be too sexually explicit, which was not approved of in the Muslim Choir Board. Critical songs about political events were not promoted either, as the example of the disqualified song about Namibia’s independence shows.

Choir and minstrel coaches remember similar situations where choirs were disqualified or got into trouble for singing ‘dubious dities’. “There was certain things that they [choirs & minstrels] avoided in the moppies in those days” confirms Klops coach Ginger Harrison. “Like, one time, they sang about doctor Malan. It was quite an uproar about it. They sang ‘forever, ever, Malan is dying. Jannie Smuts is buried in the cold earth). But they [the white jury members] didn’t take too kindly on that”.

The more politicised themes started to disappear from the repertoire or became less obvious in the songs during these difficult years. Again, this situation can be described as a form of self-censorship. Fear of being reprimanded for their expressions led to a situation in which people avoided ‘difficult’ topics and general ‘everyday’ events became the more common themes in many comic songs. A popular and especially safe theme was the ‘new years celebrations’ itself. Many successful and popular songs were composed to illustrate the ‘Nagtklopse’ and the ‘2e Nuwe Jaar’ carnival of the cape. The New Year’s celebrations (Coon Carnival, Malay Choir and Christmas Choirs Competitions) are often considered as a manifestation of escapism, an opportunity for oppressed and despised people to express, through excessive unusual behaviour, the tensions and feelings accumulated along the year; of course, these celebrations fulfil such a function. The following song,

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86 Interview with Mr. Brown, 5th of November 2008, Heideveld, Cape Town.
87 Interview with Ginger Harrison, November 27th 2008, Cape Town.
written by Gamja Dante, sums this up perfectly. It is unclear when exactly this song was composed and performed, but it could have fitted in any of the Apartheid years. “We have no worries, we’re having fun”, as long as we sing, as long as we have this opportunity to blow of steam once a year, we will get through this, this song seems to say.

Wy hebben geen sorgen
We have no worries
Wy maken plezier
We’re having fun
Van avond tot morgen
From morning till evening
Gat wy aan dit spree
We go on
Zo kan ons doorleven
This way we can live
Wy gaat vrolik doorleven
We live on happily
Wy hoesen, wy zingen
We celebrate, we sing
Wy dansen, wy springen
We dance, we spring
Ja al deze dingen
Yes, all these things
Doet ons ‘n plezier
Gives us joy.
(Gamja Dante : 2009)

Popular culture not only arises from the need to cope with situations or escape from reality, but also to relate to real life, to talk about real and common situations. It is sometimes hard to imagine for people who have not lived through war, dictatorial regimes or in this case Apartheid, that ‘normal life’ actually went one as much as possible. For an outsider it seems like everyday every action or event must have been related to a bigger anti-apartheid struggle. Of course, people still needed to have and hear about ‘normal’ and pleasant moments, like celebrations. Therefore, the fact that comic songs were not always written with a political message or wish to activate people, does not imply that these things weren’t desired, but they just weren’t the only things people desired, as people also had ‘everyday’ needs and wishes.

Many successful and popular songs were composed to illustrate the ‘nagtklops’ and the ‘2e Nuwe Jaar’ carnival of the cape. Historically, New Year, or to be more precise ‘2e Nuwe Jaar’ the 2nd of January, was the day that the slaves at the Cape had a day off and would celebrate this by eating, dancing and singing. Ever since, the new year celebrations have been associated with ‘freedom’ and ‘care free’ celebrations. The sentence ‘nuwejaar is hier, laat ons begin met die plesier’ (the new year is here, let us have fun) emphasizes this historical fact of having to wait for the new year to have a ‘fun day’. A reference to the past seems to be more than a sentimental reminder. In a way it is an expression of their need and desire for more ‘fun’ in their lives or at least more ‘cathartic carefree’ days, like the ‘nagtklops’ to celebrate and forget sorrows.

Oela-l-a-l-a the old year is over
Oela-l-a-l-a die oujaar is al reeds verby.
Die nuwejaar is hier,
The new year is here
laat ons begin met die plesier.  
let us begin with having fun  
Dis klopsetyd tyd daar bo x3,  
It’s klopse time up there x3  
Bo in Hanover straat die mense staan  
Up in Hanover street, the people stand  
en wag tot nuwe jaar in die Kaap (Group)  
and wait till the new year in the Cape  
Die lekkerste tyd van die jaar  
The best time of the year  
is ouijaaraand en nuwejaar (lead singer)  
is New Year’s Eve.

Furthermore, the geographical emphasis on the location of the event, which reoccurs a number of times in the song, ‘Bo in Hanover straat’ (Up in Hanover street), a street in the former multicultural neighbourhood District Six, and ‘Die mooi moffie van District Ses’ (the beautiful transvestite from District Six), could be explained as a longing for the ‘good old’ District Six days. Sean Field has described the importance of ‘place’ and remembering a place for constructing and sustaining one’s identity and social relationships. For the former District Sixers, part of this process is the reclaiming of the lost space and community, if not physically then at least mentally.89 The references to District Six therefore are a way to create a community feeling which people feel they have lost now they live scattered around on the cape flats.

Other popular and ‘safe’ themes were subjects like ‘rugby’, ‘love’ or ‘moffies’ (Transvestites/gays). Love for the game of rugby was something both the Afrikaners and the Coloured and ‘Malay’ community had in common. Actually, many choirs were formed out of sports clubs and rugby teams, hence the many choirs named after the sports clubs they derived from, for instance ‘Protrea Sports club’; ‘Violets Sports club’, etc. The rugby union club in the western cape was the ‘Western Province’ Rugby team, known to locals simply as W.P. The club was established in 1883, so in 1983 it celebrated its 100-year anniversary. This fact was celebrated within the Cape Coloured and Malay community with as much enthusiasm as within the ‘white’ or Afrikaner community. “Veel Geluk sing ons ja vir die W.P. se 100ste jaar”, (Good Luck we sing for the W.P.’s 100-year anniversary) was a popular comic song written by Abdullah Maged for this event.

Dus ‘n plukkery hier. Dus ‘n stootery hier  
Some touching here, some pushing there  
Dus ‘n plukkery hier en ‘n trekkery daar  
Some touching here, and pulling here  
Kyk net hoe speel die W.P. daar  
Look how the W.P. plays  
Hulle is die beste vanjaar.  
They are the best of the year.

(Abdullah Maged : 2009)

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89 Sean Field (ed), Lost communities, living memories: Remembering Forced Removals in Cape Town (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 2002 ) 118-120.
Other current (sports) events, that people would read about in newspapers for instance, remained sources of inspiration. An excellent example of this is the moppie about athlete Zola-Budd Pieterse, a former Olympic track and field competitor from Bloemfontein, South Africa, who found herself in the spotlights of the entire world when she was involved in an sports accident between her and American women’s world champion Mary Decker, during the 1984 Olympic games. Not only could this accident be seen as an excellent opportunity to write a comic song about, but the fact that a South African athlete, even though she was running for the U.K., was in the spotlights on a world stage during the Apartheid years when South Africa was not welcome at any sports event, was of course something special and memorable.

Sys die meisie van die Bloemfontien
She is the girl from Bloemfontein
Sy hardloop nes ons blou trein
She runs just like our blue train
Sy is so baie klein en fyn
She is very small and fine
Maar sy is baie goed getrain
but she has trained very hard

Zola gaan verby
Zola passes by
En Mary het gegly
And Mary slipped
Nou lê sy met haar voet in die lug
Now she is lying with her feet up in the air
Op die naat van haar rug
On the crack of her back
Daar lê sy stoksiel alleen (x2)
there she lies all alone
Met haar stywe hoepel been
With a stiff leg
Sy lê nou daar
She is lying there
Met haar bene deurmekaar oe la la la
with her legs twisted, oe la la la
Die olympics van die jaar
The Olympics of this year
(Mojammad Meniers: 2009)

Growing confidence

The confusing and hectic times of the late eighties and early nineties reflect on the state of the moppies and the organisation of the Cape Malay Choir competitions in those years. During this period, not many songs were written about socio-political events, that might have had the purpose of inspiring the community. Creativity was not necessarily threatened during the ‘state of emergency’ years, but perhaps freedom of speech and the will to sing and celebrate was. From 1994 onwards, there was a clear bloom of creativity and a rising number of Cape Malay Choirs participating in the New Year’s celebrations and Choir competitions. The moppie ‘Ons Hoor, Almal doen die toyi toyi’, probably written around the first free democratic elections in 1994 is a wonderful example of this new increase of their courage to be more explicit in their lyrics. Other events were captured in moppies, such as the first Rugby World Cup in South Africa, which, after so many years of having been excluded from international sports events, was a memorable event. A reference to the ‘new
land’ in the song, shows that Abdullah Maged was not only proud that the World Cup Rugby came to South Africa, but more importantly, that it came to the ‘new’ South Africa.

**Ouw my broer dus die Wêreldbeker**
My old brother, so the World Cup

**Vir die eerste keer in Suid Afrika**
For the first time in South Africa

**Daar staan die Haan en Kraai**
There stands the Rooster and the Crow

**Daar maak die Leeus Lawaai**
There the Lions make noise

**Die Bokke Hol Laat die Stof soe staan**
The Boks let the dust come down

**Op die nuweland**
on this new land.

**Die Engelse die Walliesers die Skotte**
The English, the Welsh, the Scots

**Hulle almal kom van vêr**
They all come from far

**Die Leeu die Haan Kangaroe die Bokke**
The Lion, Roosters, Kangaroo and Boks

**Die Tongas die Iere die Pumas**
The Tonga’s, the Irish, the Puma’s

**Hulle will die b ek er he**
They all want the cup

**Die Hane doen die Samba**
The Roosters dance the Samba

**Die Kiwis doen die Haka**
The Kiwi’s do the Haka

**Hier komdie Bakke ja**
Here come the Boks yes

**Vir die Wêreldbeker**
For the World Cup

(Abdullah Maged : 2009)

Another example written by Abdullah Maged is a song which addresses the proposal by the ANC to move the Parliament from Cape Town to Pretoria, where the Union Buildings are. “Hou hier die Parlement’ (Keep the Parliament here) not only calls out to keep the Parliament in Cape Town, it also, cautiously, makes an attempt to mock the new politicians, something that hadn’t been done this directly and openly in a song for a long time.

**Hou dit hier die Parlement**
Keep the Parliament here

**Daar bo in die noorde staandie unie gebou**
There in the north is the Union building

**En nou wil hulle ook die parlement daar bou**
And now they want the Parliament too

**Maar ons in die Kaap sal maar wakker slaap**
But we in the Cape shall be watchful

**En sorg dat ons Parlement behou**
and make sure we’ll keep the Parliament

**Soe waar gaan jy nou Butalezi**
So where are you going Butalezi

**Met jou leopard skins aan**
With your Leopard skins on

**Die ouens hulle vra na jou**
Everyone asks for you

**En volg jou net waar jy gaan**
And follow you where you go

**Hy doen die gumboot dans**
He does the gumboot dance

**Voor die Parlement**
in front of the parliament

**Hy het die Zoeloe blues**
has the Zulu blues

**Daar snooze hy voor die parlement**
And he sleeps in front of the parliament

**Hy’s soe oud en nog soe stout**
He’s so old and so cheeky

**En Winnie maak vir hom benoud**
And Winnie makes him anxious

**Sy sê sy is lank nie koud**
She says she isn’t cold.

**Etc.**
Etc.

(Abdullah Maged : 2009)
Conclusion

Overall, looking at the songs that were produced during the Apartheid era and the themes discussed in these songs, it seems that the moppies functioned both as a way to escape from reality and at the same time to express and deal with this reality. Difficult topics such as the 1948 elections, the forced removals, and petty apartheid were discussed, in either explicit or hidden messages. The way the moppie composers dealt with humiliating or traumatizing socio-political events was to joke about it. Joking is a perfect tool to put things into perspective and at the same time an opportunity to escape from the harsh reality. Yet, the tradition of singing satirical witty songs to comment on socio-political issues became less and less obvious when apartheid policies became more extensive. Composers adopted a strategy of self-censorship, avoiding ‘difficult’ topics in order to evade trouble or retribution from the Department of Coloured Affairs. Not only was there no freedom of speech or room for protest in apartheid South Africa, the competition element was considered to be very important as well, and people wanted to win. Songs addressing ‘sensitive’ themes did not win. Therefore, the themes became more generic and ‘safe’. This however does not mean that the songs were only elements in a competition, that the moppies lost all purpose for the ‘Malay’ community. The moppies, in those years, were more used as a tool for escapism. As the singers and songwriters say themselves, these choir competitions and celebrations were seen as a possibility to have fun, “singing it out in a jolly way so that the next one would think they’re happy”. Having fun is a surviving strategy, especially in the context of apartheid where all dignity was taken away from them. Going through the moppie repertoire, it becomes apparent that many songs are written with this theme in mind. Where it was possible to address more sensitive topics, it was still done in a sarcastic and funny way. It meant singing to be happy, singing to live, singing to keep on going. The song ‘Wij hebben geen sorgen’ (We have no worries) written by Gamja Dante, sums this up perfectly. With the end of apartheid, you can see a rediscovered courage to discuss socio-political issues more prominently in the moppies as well as a revived bravery to be a bit more cheeky in their comments on society and prominent figures.

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Chapter 3

‘Ek is ’n jolly Hotnot’
Du Plessis’ Patronage: The Cape Malay Choir Board

Ek is ’n jolly Hotnot,
En het ’n jolly baas
Ons leef ’n jolly lewe
Op die ou syn jolly plaas.

“I am a happy ’Hotnot’[^91], and I have a happy boss. We live a happy life, on the boss his happy farm”.

This old comic song, first collected and published in 1890 by William Henry Maskew in ‘n Jolly Hotnot en andere snaakse versies uit die ouwe doos’, illustrates the sarcastic tone of the moppies. This song also speaks of the relation between, in this case, ‘baas’ and his subservient (the coloured community) and therefore can quite well serve as an introduction to this third chapter, in which I will discuss the relationship between the apartheid state and the ‘Cape Malays’. In particular, I will look at the relationship between Izak David Du Plessis, the Afrikaner scholar and poet, who became the commissioner of the Department of Coloured Affairs and ‘his’ ‘Cape Malay choirs’. This relationship between Du Plessis and the choirs could be described as a patronage system, a structure in which the Afrikaner scholar and politician acted as the guardian and guide for the ‘Malays’ in order to direct and stimulate first of all this notion of ‘Malayness’ to the benefit of the state, and secondly to further the tradition of singing folksongs as a tool to promote this ‘cultural identity’. Furthermore, I will zoom in on the seemingly contradicting plans for which the ‘Cape Malay Choir Board’ was used, the board being a tool to advocate culture and values and at the same time functioning as an excuse for the segregation policies of the state. The ideas on ‘invented traditions’ will also be explored and applied specifically to the concept of the ‘Netherlands songs’, and, moreover, I will investigate some differential styles, for instance those between the Moppies and the Netherlands songs as well as the ideas about the differences between the ‘coons’ and the ‘choirs’.

‘Die Kultuur van ‘n Volk kan gemeeet word deur die peil wat hy op kunsgebied behaal het’, (the culture of a people can be measured by the level it has managed to achieve in the arts) said I.D. du Plessis.[^92] Yet, ‘the seemingly innocent word ‘culture’ is dangerously slippery’, says Anthony Butler

[^91]: Hotnot is short for Hottentot, which was the old, demeaning word used by the Dutch settlers to name the people of ‘colour’ living at the Cape.
in his work on Contemporary South Africa. Not just today ‘culture’ is a debated item in South Africa, but ‘culture’ has been misused or even ‘abused’ in South Africa for centuries. ‘Culture’ for instance, was used in the Apartheid period as a vehicle for promoting racial and ethnic identities, to justify a discriminatory allocation of resources to Europeans, and as an ideological weapon in the propaganda of the naturalness of culturally distinct ‘communities’.\(^93\) The founding of the Cape Malay Choir Board is an example of such an ‘interference’ by the state in the production of culture. The Board, founded in 1939, was used as an ‘emblem of the social situation they wanted the coloured people to occupy as, in the words of Jan Smuts, ‘an appendage to the whites’.\(^94\) It was, as Du Plessis also emphasised, this link between ‘European culture’ and ‘Malay culture’ that made the idea of ‘Cape Malay Choirs’ so desirable for the Apartheid state.

**The founding of the Choir Board & the institution of an ‘art patronage’**

Du Plessis had got to know and befriended, through his academic fieldwork amongst the ‘Malays’, many choirs in the Bo-Kaap, and it was during one of his visits to the Dantu family, a family known in the Bo-Kaap for being good musicians, in 1938 that the decision to organize a choral-singing competition was taken.\(^95\) The ostensible reason for this first concert, according to Du Plessis, was: “die bedoeling met die konsert was dit as voorbereiding moes dien vir die stigting van ’n organisatie wat deur middel van jaarlikse sang wedstryde bewaring van die ‘ou’ liedere sou bevorder” (the purpose of the concert was that it had to function as a rehearsal for the founding of an organization which, by means of yearly competitions, would promote the old songs). The first concert was a success, “met gesamentlike sang deur troepe wat nog nooit tevore saamgesing het nie, iets wat net in ‘n singende gemeenskap wat nog sy tradisionele liedere ken, gedoen kan word” (with combined singing by groups which had never sung together before, something that only in a musical community that still knows its traditional songs, can be done).\(^96\) After the success of the first competition, it was agreed to hold an annual competition for Cape Malay choirs. In April 1939 eight choirs inaugurated the Cape Malay Choir Board at a concert in the City Hall.\(^97\)

For Du Plessis, the Cape Malay Choir Board was a success. “Die uitvoerings van die Maleiere-kore, tesame met die optrede van die Demonstrasiekoor van die Kaapse Maleier Koorraad, het

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\(^96\) Idem.

\(^97\) Cape Malay Choir Board Brochure: ‘European Tour’ – April 1981. No pagination.
gehelp om die Maleiers se sang redelik bekend te maak”⁹⁸ (The performance of the Malay choirs, together with the demonstration choir of the Cape Malay choir Board, have helped to promote the Malay songs), writes Du Plessis in his memoirs. Besides using the Choir Board as a tool to promote these ‘traditional’ songs, he also intervened in the regulation of the competitions and choirs. Rules and regulations were written to govern the organization of the choirs and the competitions, for example to decide which choirs could join the Board, how to select the judges for the competition, what the dress code on stage was and to decide which songs should be sung at competitions and which shouldn’t. It was decided by the Board for instance that there were three official categories in which the choirs could compete, each club was allowed ten minutes for the singing of the Combined Chorus, and three minutes each for the Solo and the Comic Song. Any team exceeding the time limit forfeited their points for that particular category.⁹⁹

As a poet, ex-journalist and academic, language was very important to Du Plessis. As Afrikaner, he also strongly believed that language is a fundamental element in ethnic identity. “Die jong Maleier praat tuis wel Afrikaans, maar kom ál vinniger onder die indruk dat Engels vir alle ‘deftige’ doeleindes aangewend moet word”.¹⁰⁰ Du Plessis’ observation that many younger ‘Malays’ started to adopt English must have distressed him. Du Plessis made Afrikaans the official and mandatory language of the Cape Malay Choir Board. This was probably in response to the popularity of American songs in the coon carnivals, but also due to the fact that some ‘Malay Choirs’ rapidly added American songs to their repertoire.¹⁰¹ Du Plessis must have feared that the popular American songs would eventually replace the Dutch songs, or even worse, replace Afrikaans with English as the ‘vernacular’ language of the ‘Coloured’ community. In the 1940s, also the ‘Coons’ were submitted to pressure exercised, by in particular Du Plessis, to include songs in Afrikaans in their repertoire. After 1948, competitions were eventually introduced for ‘Afrikaans liedjes’ and ‘Afrikaans moppies’, despite the reluctance of Coon captains whose main sources of inspiration were the bioscopes (cinemas) and the American films they watched.¹⁰²

In the same year of the founding of the Choir Board, Du Plessis published a Songbook dedicated to the Cape Malay Choirs (‘Maleise Liederskat, ‘n sangbundel vir die Kaapse Kore’) with a collection of ‘traditional’ Dutch and Afrikaans songs which the choirs could use. “Mag hierdie bundel

⁹⁹ Cape Malay Choir Board, Rules and Regulations, Cape Town (1939) 9.
¹⁰¹ Denis–Constant Martin, Coon Carnival, New Year in Cape Town, Past and Present (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1999) 77.
The majority of selected songs are Dutch songs. There is also a large selection of Afrikaans songs. The popular ‘wedding songs’ which many choirs would sing at wedding functions are not at all published and the Ghoemaliedjies (Moppies) are published at the end of the book and only a few. Du Plessis writes in his introduction that he saw no reason to publish more Moppies, because “die Ghoemmaliedjies is gedurig aan verander, beinvloed mekaar en keer in ’n nuwe gedaante terug. Ek het dit nie nodig geag om meer as ’n tientaal voorbeelde uit die honderde wat gesing word, te kies nie”. Furthermore, he admits that he couldn’t understand the words of the ‘wedding songs’, which is why he did not select those for his songbook.

During the ‘Cape Malay Choir’ competitions Du Plessis tried to control what was sung. A colleague of Du Plessis’, Willem van Warmelo, who also worked for the Choir Board remembers how Du Plessis continuously pushed the Malay choirs to sing more ‘traditional songs’. “Du Plessis gave a speech again in which he amongst other things said that there should be more room for the traditional wedding songs in the competition”. Even during the competitions themselves Du Plessis persisted. Van Warmelo describes in his diary how the choirs followed his lead: “Du Plessis came onto the stage and said amongst others that the old wedding songs should not be forgotten, after which all the Choirs came up to the stage and sang the old song ‘Rosa’ together”. Du Plessis saw no harm in pushing and stimulating the ‘Malay’ choirs to sing certain ‘morally accepted’ songs. “Aanmoediging van die Maleise sangers, deur hulle, byvoorbeeld voor ’n Europese gehoor te laat optree, sou help om ons skamele liederskat, op die oomblik slegs deur die Maleiers gesing, te verryk”, according to Du Plessis. “Dit spreek vanself dat veral daardie liedere uitgekies moet word wat die Maleier vir ons bewaar het; dus die deftiger Hollandse volksliedere wat tog ons erfgoed is…. ”

This interference of I.D. du Plessis, in the cultural production of the Malays can be described as the institution of an ‘art patronage’. Patronage can be defined as the action of a patron in supporting, encouraging or countenancing a person, institution [or] work of art. Being both an artist (poet) and a politician, Du Plessis became a great patron of the arts in South Africa. At first his attention and efforts were directed at all ‘Afrikaans language art’ such as poetry, songs, etc., but he specialized more and more in the ‘Afrikaans art’ of the Coloured community, and in particular of the

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104 Diary of Willem van Warmelo, Monday, 21th of January 1957.
105 Diary of Willem van Warmelo, Monday 14th of January 1957.
‘Cape Malays’. In this last group he saw the possibility of taking the ‘art’ as it already existed and was practised, to another, and in his view, ‘higher’ level, by supporting and guiding it. He felt that this ‘high culture’ of the Cape Malays choirs needed to be stimulated, in order to ‘survive’ and continue next to the coon carnival. The carnival, despite of being also a sub-culture of the New Year celebrations and having a shared past with the choirs, was considered to be a threat to the choir culture and in particular the singing of old ‘Dutch songs’ and ‘Afrikaans songs’, because of the rising popularity of pop songs, which were replacing the ‘old-fashioned’ ghoemaliedjies and moppies. Du Plessis actively supported and encouraged the Cape Malay choirs, by founding and funding a Cape Malay Choir Board.

The Cape Malay Choir Board, with its set rules according to which choirs were allowed to compete, as to which ‘traditional’ outfits had to be worn, as to when the competitions should take place and more importantly, which determined what was to be sung, functioned as a kind of educational institution, ‘teaching’ the ‘coloured’ community in Cape Town what ‘high’ culture was commendable and which morals and values were attached to this ‘culture’. In its western European countries of origin, the concept of ‘high’ culture refers to the artistic, expressive and aesthetic practices and performances of a society such as its poetry, literature, painting and sculpture. ‘Low’ culture, by contrast, refers to the ways in which people live their daily lives, practise their sports and pastimes, exert their practices of sociability and friendship, their popular music, use their recreational drugs, and wear their styles of dress. This distinction between high and low culture, and the identification of the former with a set of professional artistic practices, is the product of particular (western) historical circumstances, and it carries with it an assumption that the artist, poet or composer stands at some distance from everyday society. In reality the line between ‘high’ culture and ‘low’ culture, if one can even make such a distinction, is very thin. In the case of the Malay Choirs, it is even an invented line, seeing that the ‘tradition’ of singing songs with a choir, which was perceived to be an example of ‘high culture’, had the same origins as the ‘tradition’ of singing songs in the coon carnival, which was again regarded as a lower form of culture.

However, Du Plessis, during his studies on the ‘folksongs’ of the ‘coloured’ community at the Cape in the early 1930s, identified two different musical traditions within the Coloured community. The annual ‘Coon Carnival’ and the Cape Malay ‘strykorkes- en koorwedstrijde (String quartet- and choir competitions). Du Plessis describes this division as follows: “Die jaarlikse karnavals is baie populêr onder die algemene publiek (Kleurlinggemeenskap), maar daar is lede van die hoëre range van die Kleurlinggemeenskap, onder wie daar ‘n sterk klasbewustheid heers, wat voel dat die

karnavals ‘n verkeerde indruk mag skep van die gehalte van die Kleurling se talente op die gebied van musiek en sang. Die meer ontwikkelde stande van die Kleurlinggemeenskap, soos met alle volke, soek hul vermaak en ontspanning op “n hoer peil” (The yearly carnival is tremendously popular amongst the common people (Coloured community), but there are members of the higher ranks of society, who feel that the carnival presents a false image of the achieved level in arts by the coloured community). To Du Plessis, the division between the two different New Year’s celebrations, the Nagtklopopse and the 2e Nuwe Jaar parade, was obvious. To him, the carnival was a clear example of ‘low’ culture, because it involved, besides performing music, also practices of sociability through the interactions with the viewing public while parading on the streets and furthermore recreational drugs were reportedly used during the carnivals. The whole chaotic character of the carnival stood in stark contrast to the ‘Malay’ choirs which, according to Du Plessis’ analysis, behaved in a more controlled manner and had set rules and ‘traditions’ as to how to behave and act during the Nagtklopopse. To Du Plessis, the choirs were a ‘higher’ form of culture and therefore worth investing in. The Cape Malay Choir Board was Du Plessis’ tool to propagate and advocate his ‘Malay choirs’ and promote their ‘high culture’ amongst the ‘Coloured’ community.

Du Plessis continued to promote the ‘traditional’ and ‘deftige’ Dutch/Afrikaans songs over the imported and ‘untraditional’ songs of the ‘Coons’. At one of the coon concerts at the New Year celebrations of 1939 Dr. Du Plessis and his colleague Prof. Kirby suggested that the ‘coons’ should combine and get back to the melodies of the country and its people. The Cape Argus, a newspaper in Cape Town, applauded the suggestion, and expressed its regrets that the indigenous song and music as preserved by the Malay choirs should be overwhelmed by foreign importations. Du Plessis was, with its Cape Malay Choir Board, trying to compete with the annual ‘coon carnival’. The carnival in his eyes was a form of ‘lower culture’, entertainment for the masses. To him, the choirs presented a more distinguished alternative for the ‘Coloured community. He did not anticipate however, that many ‘Malays’ would join a choir as well as a coon troupe. This was possible, because the two musical competitions were held on different days. Even today, most coon troupes have a Malay choir as well and visa versa.

Furthermore, there is a musical category which both the coons and the choirs have in common, the moppie. Du Plessis saw the Moppie as part of this continuing ‘tradition’ of singing songs. Du Plessis writes in his thesis that one of the earliest references to a ‘ghoemaliedjie’ (Moppie) concerns a certain ‘Biron’, who was punished in 1707 for singing dubious ditties half in Dutch and half

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He saw the moppies as a spin-off from the Afrikaner ‘piekniekliedjies’ (Picnic songs). Unlike some scholars who suggested that there was a link between the Indonesian/Malaysian Pantun and the ‘Cape Malay’ moppies, Du Plessis argued in his thesis that the moppies were more a part of European or Afrikaner cultural heritage than of Malaysian/Indonesian origin. “Die hele bou en aard van die Ghoomalied dui egter ‘n Dietse afkoms aan, en kan nie aan die Oosterse tuisgebring word nie”. The moppie therefore fitted into Du Plessis’ grand plan of bringing ‘high’ ‘European’ culture to the ‘Coloured’ masses. According to Du Plessis “syn die ghoomaliedjies essensieel ‘n uitvloeisel en aanduiding van die Maleise beskawingpeil op die oomblik. The Moppies could therefore be accepted as an official part of the Cape Malay Choir Board.

In creating popular cultures people challenge just as much as they reaffirm dominant social practices. Stimulating the writing and performing of moppies, in the case of the Cape Malay Choir Board, popular cultures emerge as a space of contesting viewpoints, values and convictions. Du Plessis did not really challenge the Moppie ‘tradition’, but he did misunderstand the social function of the Moppies and underestimated the importance of the lyrics and their social messages. To him, the moppies were nothing more than rhythmic songs ‘eenvoudige liedjies met onverstaanbare woorde’ (simple songs with unrecognisable words). Therefore, by promoting the ‘traditional’ ‘deftige’ Dutch songs and the moppies, Du Plessis created a space of contesting viewpoints and values. Du Plessis believed that the Moppie ‘nie as ‘n waardevolle musiekprodukt gereken word nie’ by the ‘Malays’ themselves, but in interviews with Malay choir singers, the contrary is confirmed. The Moppie is considered to be an important aspect of the musical productions of the choirs, and the lyrics in particular are thought to be especially important. Therefore, Du Plessis promoted his idea of the Moppies, instead of promoting the ‘real’ Moppie ‘tradition’ as it was seen and practised by the ‘Malays’ themselves.

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112 A pantun is a literary song tradition from Indonesia. It consists of four lines, all of which may rhyme; sometimes the second and fourth lines rhyme. Internal assonance as well as assonance of the final syllables is a feature of pantun. The quatrain is usually divided into two parts of two lines which apparently have little or no connection with each other. Despite the lack of stated connection between the two halves, their co-existence requires the reader to posit a relationship between them. We literally read between the lines of the pantun. – quoted from Christin Winberg, Satire, Slavery and the Ghoemaliedjies of the Cape Muslims, *New Contrast*, No. 76 (1991) 79.


The cultural continuity with the past which is emphasised by ethnic ideologists, like Du Plessis, is not all make-believe and manipulative invention of the past. Professor Anthony D. Smith argues that there is such a cultural continuity with the past, although the nations and ethnic movements themselves are modern creations. In many cases it is clear that group history has been fashioned so as to serve present needs, but this does not imply that anything goes. There are only so many plausible versions of history. I.D. Du Plessis might have misunderstood the historical function of moppies, as being ways to communicate social issues, but he did not ‘invent’ a tradition of singing witty songs. This has been part of the cultural heritage of Cape Town for many centuries.

The Netherlands song & the Invention of Tradition

This process of defining and defending this ‘tradition’ of singing folksongs could also be described as the ‘invention of tradition’ as Terence Ranger and Eric Hobsbwam have explained it. ‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past. The set of these ‘practices’ and ‘accepted rules and rituals’ to which the ‘Cape Malay culture’ had to correspond, were stated and made official in the ‘Rules and Regulations’ of the ‘Cape Malay Choir Board’.

Terence Ranger argues how the invented traditions introduced in Africa were as much invented traditions in nineteenth-century Europe. In this case, the focus on folklore and in particular folksongs surfaced in Europe around the nineteenth century as part of a romantic notion of nationalism. Folklore, in nature, is traditional. All the traditional approaches of people including customs, beliefs, behavioural, drama, dances, art, painting, sculpture of past times of a particular area are the subject matter of the ‘folklore’. The study of folkloric traditions became popular in Europe at the start of the twentieth century, but were eventually also transported to the ‘colonies’ overseas. As Terence Ranger described, this folkloric ‘tradition’ was introduced in the colonies to give the European settlers and certain selected ‘natives’ (in this case the ‘Cape Malays’) a validation of culture. The traditions gave some kind of reassurance in times and places that were different and changing. Afrikaners like the British colonists, tried to create a ‘higher’ (white) culture for themselves.

Du Plessis tried, by using the choirs, to create a ‘higher’ form of culture for the ‘Cape Malays’, by advocating the adoption of this ‘Dutch/Afrikaans’ song tradition by the Malay choirs. Culture to

him was a measurement of the level of sophistication or primitiveness of a ‘people’. To him, the Coloured community was, because of the mixing of different races, moving towards a degenerated level of culture. Yet, the ‘invention’ of a different, distinguished ‘Malay identity’ was perfect for his campaign to bring ‘culture’ and ‘values’ to these (Coloured) ‘masses’. Folklorist William Bascom states that folklore has many cultural aspects, for instance folklore can serve to validate a culture (romantic nationalism), as well as transmit a culture's morals and values. Du Plessis saw in the ‘tradition’ of singing old Dutch/Afrikaans folksongs by some of the coloured choirs, the ‘proof’ that there was such a thing as a separate ‘Cape Malay culture’, which was more cultivated and distinguished than that of the Cape Coloureds. The early contact with the Dutch and the adoption of European traditions had, in Du Plessis perception, given the ‘Malays’ some kind of head start over the other ‘races’ in South Africa. “Tesame met sy godsdiens het die Maleier se aanraking met die Hollandse-Afrikaanse kolonis seker iets te doen met die sindelikheid, sowel op sy persoon as in sy huis, wat hom bo die kleurling laat uitstaan”. The main cultural exchange between the Dutch- and Malay community was, according to Du Plessis, in the Afrikaner folksongs. “Die voornaamste aanknopingspunt tussen die Maleier en die Afrikaner moet egter in die Afrikaanse volkslied geseok word”, says Du Plessis in 1935. Throughout his professional and personal life, Du Plessis focussed on the folksongs of the ‘Cape Malay’. In 1935 he published his doctoral thesis ‘Die bydrae van die Kaapse Maleier tot die Afrikaanse Volkslied’, on the Malay folksongs and their relation to the Afrikaner and Dutch folksongs. I.D. du Plessis puts much emphasis on the ‘tradition’ of singing folksongs, a tradition which “almost disappeared with the movement inlands, where distance did not favour the gatherings which are essential to the folksong and the folkdance... In Cape Town the Malays with their settled way of living retained much of what they had taken over from their Masters”, according to Du Plessis. For Du Plessis this was the contribution of the ‘Malays’ to the Afrikaner folksongs, the fact that they had preserved them throughout the centuries for the Afrikaners.

This ‘contribution’ of the ‘Malays’ to the Afrikaner folksong repertoire, was greatly appreciated. Yet, it was felt that the choirs needed some encouragement to protect and preserve the originally Dutch songs. In the fifties therefore, a fourth category was added to the choir competition, the ‘Nederlands liedjie’ (Dutch song). Gamja Dante, member of the famous Dante family, the family that had taken part in the founding of the Choir Board, remembers it to be mainly due to Willem van

121 Idem.
Warmelo’s efforts that the Netherlands songs became an official part of the competition. “Before they would sing the Netherlands songs as the combined song”, recalls Gamja Dante, “but when Van Warmelo came, he brought in the Netherlands song again. He made it a separate and compulsory part of the competition”.123

Van Warmelo was, like Du Plessis, mainly fascinated by the relation between the Dutch songs and the ‘Cape Malay’ folksong tradition. Van Warmelo was a Dutch ethnomusicologist, who lived and studied in South Africa from 1939 till 1962. “Van Warmelo really knew the songs”,124 remembers Gamja Dante. “He was a musician himself”. In the 23 years that Willem van Warmelo spent in South Africa, he showed much interest in the folksongs. He published a book called ‘Liederwysies’ on the religious hymns sung by the Afrikaners. In his last years at the Cape, he started studying the folksongs of the Cape Malays. He published several articles on this topic, mainly in Dutch papers. Van Warmelo also became actively involved with the organization and promotion of the choirs. Gamja Dante remembers Van Warmelo at one point also being a judge at the choir competition. He contacted the South African/Dutch foundation called ‘Motherland’, a foundation which supported and promoted the economic and cultural ties between the Netherlands and South Africa. The foundation showed great interest in this folksong tradition at the Cape. So, together with the cooperation of the foundation, Van Warmelo managed to introduce the Netherlands songs as an official category in the competition. In his diary Van Warmelo describes how in the competitions of 1960, the Netherlands song was adopted. “De grote verrassing voor mij is de totale omzwenking. Jarenlang heb ik gevochten om erkenning voor wat ik noem het klassieke Maleier leid te krijgen” (The big surprise for me was the complete shift. For years I had fought for recognition for, what I call, the classic Malay song).125 He says: “Since the Netherlands song is an official part of the competition, it has become the most popular part of the program and has been received with great enthusiasm by the audience. This is evidence that a precious tradition should not go forgotten.”126

Besides adding a fourth category to the competition, other ways to promote these Dutch songs were undertaken. The Cape Malay Choir Board had a so called ‘demonstratiekoor’ (demonstration choir). This choir was the official choir delegated by the Choir Board to perform at important functions and shows. Members of this choir were picked by the Board from other choirs, who were part of the Board, and had proven to be good singers. In his diary, Van Warmelo describes how some members of the ‘demonstratiekoor’ were asked to leave, because they did not know the

123 Interview with Gamja Dante, January 12th 2009, Bo-Kaap, Cape Town.
124 Interview with Gamja Dante, January 12th 2009, Bo-Kaap, Cape Town.
125 Diary of Willem van Warmelo, Thursday, 7th of January 1960.
Dutch songs, presented to them by Van Warmelo, well enough. They were replaced by other singers who were more familiar with these specific songs.\(^\text{127}\)

Furthermore, the white officials working for the Choir Board were very determined to ‘teach’ the choirs the correct Netherlands songs by providing them with the lyrics. Willem Van Warmelo, who functioned as a jury member for the Cape Malay Choir Competitions for several years, wrote in his diary, in 1961, how he had to disqualify two choirs from the competitions because they did not sing the songs that were appointed to them by the choir board. He states: “I checked twice if the list (with songs) had been distributed to all the choirs. As this seemed to be the case, I had no choice but to disqualify them). The two choirs were the ‘Tulpjes’ (Tulips), who sang a Netherlands song called ‘Ik kwel my niet’, but which was unknown to me and the ‘Royal Charters’, that sang a song also strange to me called ‘Holland’. This left us with only four choirs, of which none was worthy of the prizes, because they were simply not good enough. But I had to distribute the prizes amongst these four choirs anyway”.\(^\text{128}\)

There seems to have been no freedom in choosing the songs, only those Netherlands songs that were selected and approved of by the choir board were allowed to be performed at the competitions. Today a set list with the ‘official’ Netherlands songs still exists. No one writes a new Netherlands song, says Mr. Brown, vice-president of the Cape Malay Choir Board. “The Netherlands songs is there already, you don’t have to write a new one”.\(^\text{129}\)

To what extend is there really a ‘tradition’ of singing Dutch/Cape Malay folksongs? Van Warmelo admits in one of his many articles on this subject: “Obviously every cultural and historic tie with the Netherlands disappears, if it turns out that this ‘singing’ was encouraged by a few enthusiasts and artificially created and stimulated”.\(^\text{130}\)

This existence of a continuous tradition was hotly debated by those involved in the organisation and promotion of the choirs. Du Plessis claimed, not only in his book ‘Die bydrae van die Kaapse Maleier tot die Afrikaanse Volkslied’, that the tradition of singing Dutch/Afrikaans folksongs can be traced back as far as the 17th century, when the Malay and Dutch communities met at the Cape. “Dis moontlik dat die sangverenigings op hierdie manier ontstaan het. Dat die matrose, wat seer seker soms singend deur die strate gegaan het, hulle deel tot die bestending van die gewoonte bygedra het, word deur die groot aantal matroosliedere wat die Maleiers ken, aangedui” (It is possible that the singing clubs have emerged in this way. The sailors, who quite possibly have sung songs in the streets, have contributed to this tradition, this

\(^{127}\) Willem van Warmelo, Nederlandse Liederen bij de Kaapse Maleiers, Neerlands Volksleven, 8 juli (1961) 61.
\(^{128}\) Diary of Willem van Warmelo, January 6th 1961.
\(^{129}\) Interview with Mr. Brown, November 5th 2008, Heideveld, Cape Town.
becomes apparent by the great number of sailor songs which the Malays still know).\textsuperscript{131} Du Plessis’s thesis that the songs of the Malays were heard and copied in the sailor taverns in Cape Town is backed up by De Kock in his book ‘Those in Bondage, An Account of the Life of the Slave at the Cape in the Days of the Dutch India Company’ from 1950, in which he describes how the taverns near the Cape Town harbour were meeting points for slaves, sailors and lower class colonists and where music was most important.\textsuperscript{132} It is indeed not hard to imagine how music was something that could unite different peoples from other parts of the world, and how different musical influences were adopted and copied, as it probably occurred in the bars of Cape Town.

On the other hand it is far more likely that many Dutch songs found its way into the ‘Coloured’ or ‘Malay’ communities repertoire, because of slavery. The Dutch slave owners occasionally let themselves or their guests be entertained by a group of musical slaves. It is not farfetched to imagine that these slave choirs had to sing Dutch folksongs for their Dutch masters. The adoption of European tunes by the slaves and ‘natives’ at the Cape is documented in old travel accounts. William Burchell’s ‘Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa’ published in 1822, includes several passages dealing with the music of the Khoikhoi. He provides interesting accounts of their indigenous music and also indicates that by the beginning of the nineteenth century they could make European-like instruments and sing European tunes.\textsuperscript{133} We also have information in such travel documents about slave orchestras. In one of his letters (2 July 1825) the Dutch visitor M.D. Teenstra tells of his experiences and his visits to the widow Colyn of Klein Constantia. He writes about how surprised he was by the music of 16 musicians who ‘belong to Miss Colyn as slaves: they perform perfect field music with all wind and other instruments needed, clarinets, flutes, trumpets, bassoon, snake, cymbals and two large drums, and play them as well as the best English corps in Cape Town dare to think’.\textsuperscript{134} In the descriptions of ca. 1800 there is almost always mention of groups that made light music, mostly dance music, says Denis-Constant Martin in his book on the Coon Carnivals. In each home there were a number of slaves who outside of their daily duties loved to play some or other musical instruments, in the city itself and its immediate surroundings as well as on the large farms away from the city.\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{133} Denis–Constant Martin, \textit{Coon Carnival, New Year in Cape Town, Past and Present} (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1999) 58.
\textsuperscript{134} Martin, \textit{Coon Carnival} (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1999) 59/60.
\textsuperscript{135} Martin, \textit{Coon Carnival} (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1999) 59.
All this, however, does not ‘prove’ that the Dutch folksongs, as people like Du Plessis and Van Warmelo presented them in specially published songbooks for the Malay choirs, were preserved over the centuries. All it says is that there is a continuous tradition of singing, not a tradition of singing specific Dutch songs. This critique was also given by C.J. van Rijn, a Dutch teacher living and working in Cape Town. Van Rijn gave piano and singing lessons to a couple of Cape Malay musicians, and provided them with Dutch songbooks. In an article in a South African newspaper ‘Die Burger’ (on the 5th of January 1939), Van Rijn claims that Du Plessis’ statements on the Cape Malay folksong tradition are inaccurate. “Wat hulle bewaar het, is die gewoonte om met Nuwejaar op straat te sing; dog die singer was na 1870, toe die Hollandse matrose niet meer hier gekom het nie (die Suezkanaal was toe geoopen), amper dood. Toe het Frans (Frans de Jong, a Dutch sailor who had settled in Cape Town) in 1899 nuwe lewe in die doodsbeeendere geblaas; hy het geleef onder die Slamse en het baie van sing gehou as ‘n ou matroos”.  

In response, Du Plessis published a report on the ‘Cape Malay folksongs’ in 1949, in which he tries to counter the arguments put forward by Van Rijn. “Sy bewering is nie van toepassing op die oorlewerings wat volgens talryke verklarings deur die Maleiers gedurende die 19e eeu (en miskien vroër) aan die Kaap gesing is nie; oorlewerings wat tagtigjariges van hul ouers geleer het..., oorlewerings wat so by die Maleise gemeenskap ingeburger is dat baie van hulle te eniger tyd deur ‘n paar honderd sangers wat vir die eerste keer saamgenooi word, soos éénman, sonder dirigent, gesing word. So’n kennis kom nie in een geslag nie... Hier die oorlewerings is die Bruidsliedere” (Summarized it states that the statements made by Van Rijn are irrelevant [according to Du Plessis], because so many ‘Malays’ can recite these songs, that this song repertoire can’t have been taught by one man only, but is the product of a tradition of singing which dates back generations).  

From travel accounts from the 19th century it becomes apparent that these ‘wedding songs’ were indeed sung at Malay weddings at least half a century before Du Plessis’s thesis. In a travel document, David Kennedy Junior (1879) describes a Malay wedding. The writer states his appreciation for the songs sung at the wedding and seems to be especially interested in the ‘combined’ ballads. Unfortunately, the traveller is not clear enough about what kind of songs were sung. Denis-Constant Martin also states that weddings were ‘quite an affair’ within the Malay community, and that during the celebrations ‘Djiekers’ (ritual cantillation of the Koran) and eventually more and more

138 Idem.
Netherlands songs were sung at weddings. “Weddings of this type”, Martin continues, “took place at the beginning of the twentieth century; they probably did not differ very much from what happened a few decades earlier, although waiters and bridesmaids would probably have sung other songs.”

It seems that most Netherlands songs were, if not composed, then at least collected and arranged in their present form at the end of the nineteenth century, Denis-Constant Martin states. Martin refers to a quote taken from a book on District Six by G. Manuel; D. Hatfield and B. Franck: “When a Malay Choir leader named Rasdien Cornelius, helped by a retired Dutch sailor, Frans de Jongh, began to record what was rapidly being lost. When Rasdien began, a mere twenty songs were all that could be recalled by the young singers. Other songs were imported from Holland and the older singers were persuaded to recall snatches of songs sung in their youth.” Willem van Warmelo, in one of his articles, also admits that it is very probable that many Dutch songs were imported at a later stage, but he sees no harm in that, “Zij (the ‘Malays’) wilden zingen… mooie, nieuwe Nederlandse liederen, en die overbekende ‘minnatliedjes’ waren voor hen te allerdaags, te oudbakken, te ordinair.” As Van Warmelo had said in his diary, the ‘Malays’ seem to love these love songs from the Netherlands, and also Denis Constant Martin states that: “singers and listeners alike love them: they compose the repertoire which is the most heavily loaded with emotion and they obviously constitute the most original genre of music to have appeared in Cape Town”.

Du Plessis and Van Warmelo successfully upgraded and promoted the Dutch songs in Cape Town. The songs had already been part of the ‘Malay singers’ repertoire, before the founding of the Cape Malay Choir Board, but it had not been such an important aspect as it was in the twentieth century and even twenty-first century. The ‘Netherlands songs’ embodied everything that Du Plessis had written about, it was ‘ontspanning op ‘n hoer peil’ brought to the Malays by the European settlers. First Du Plessis and later Van Warmelo managed to transform a relatively ‘dead’ and almost buried ‘tradition’ into a ‘popular’ musical custom. Especially after the Netherlands song had become an official category in the competition, in 1960, the genre was taken very seriously and became intertwined with the Malay Choirs repute. This is exactly what Du Plessis wanted to see, ‘his’ Cape

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139 Denis–Constant Martin, Coon Carnival, New Year in Cape Town, Past and Present (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1999) 72.
140 Idem.
144 Martin, Coon Carnival (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1999) 27.
Malay choirs being the bearers of ‘cultural traditions’ and advocates of this ‘higher’ (European) form of ‘popular music’ in Cape Town.

**Interference by the state and the growing need for cultural self-determination**

Du Plessis also saw this promotion of culture as a task for the government, and in particular for his Department of Coloured Affairs, of which he became the commissioner in 1951. In his capacity as chairman he wrote: “It is one of the Department’s aims to promote sound race relations and better understanding between the coloured community and the other race groups. One example which may be especially mentioned here, is the Department’s acting as liaison between private organisations and also individuals and Malay concert groups where such people or organisations are desirous of presenting musical performances on special occasions. The Department also assists with the arrangements and organisations of such functions. The performances given by these concert groups or choirs also serve to introduce coloured culture (including Malay and Griqua culture) to other race groups. It gives me pleasure to be able to report that without exception all the functions held were very successful and undoubtedly made a positive contribution towards promoting a better understanding and sound relations between the race groups concerned”.

Right away, the appointed commissioner of the recently established Department of Coloured Affairs could take these promises into action and use music as a way to promote ‘better understanding and sound relations between the race groups’ in South Africa. In 1952, the Cape was busy with the preparations for the ‘Jan van Riebeeck Festival’. Throughout the country, festivities were held but the epicentre of the festival was in Cape Town itself. This festival was to celebrate the Tercentenary Remembrance of the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck at the Cape of Good Hope and the founding of Cape Town in 1652. But the festival was more than the landing, the settlement and the attributes of Van Riebeeck. Here was an attempt to display the growing power of the apartheid state and to assert its confidence.

The apartheid government, which had been in power since 1948 took this opportunity to celebrate and display the white and especially Afrikaner political and social dominance in the country. This social dominance was portrayed by emphasizing the influence the white community had had on the ‘natives’ and other ‘racial groups’ of South Africa and their cultures in the course of 300 years. Therefore participation of those ‘other racial groups’ was needed, not in

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the least to show happy and content ‘natives’ to the outside world, such as tourists, journalists and state officials who were present for the festival.

The Malay community was also asked to contribute to the festival by preparing a Cape Malay Choir performance. Du Plessis organized and actively intervened in the Cape Malay Choir contribution to the festival. The already apprehensive attitude from the Cape Malay community towards the festival became even more apparent during the preparations for a choir performance. The festival was to celebrate 300 years of white rule in South Africa and many non-white South Africans were reluctant to participate for this reason and so were the Cape Malay Choirs. I.D. du Plessis, however, saw this differently: “Through the festival the Coloured community was given a golden opportunity to show to the world what it had achieved in art, education and other spheres”, writes du Plessis in his Report as head of the Department of Coloured Affairs in 1952.

Izak David du Plessis was serving more than one master during the festival organization. He was also appointed chairman of the non-European committee of the Van Riebeeck Festival. He directed and controlled not only the Malay community through the Cape Malay Choir Board, but also the Coloured and Griqua contributions to the festival. Furthermore, in his yearly report as Commissioner of the Department of Coloured Affairs, Du Plessis writes in 1952 that his Department and the Non-European Committee worked together to prepare for the festival. “As the activities of the committee extended, certain members of the staff of the Division of Coloured Affairs co-operated with the Non-European committee to an increasing extent and in the eyes of the non-European community, these two bodies were indivisible. As a matter of fact, although the Division of Coloured Affairs was not officially connected with the festival organization, it was completely identified with the Non-European Committee by friend and foe alike”. It is clear that the festival was used as a political tool when government institutions such as the Department of Coloured Affairs were involved in the preparations of the Coloured community contribution.

The state approved version of ‘Cape Malay culture’ or ‘Coloured culture’ was to be promoted during the festival. I.D. du Plessis was pleased with the outcome of the Malay and Griqua contributions that the department and committee had prepared together. The organisation for a Coloured display, however, proved to be more difficult. The only contribution by the Coloured community were two coon displays. “While this, certainly is one of the aspects of the life of the Coloured community in the Cape, it is not a true reflection of the achievements of the coloured people”\(^{147}\), says Du Plessis in his report from 1952. I. D. du Plessis blamed the organized resistance to cooperate with and participate in the festival, by a part of the coloured community, as the reason for

the ‘unbalanced’ display of ‘Coloured culture’. Many non-white South Africans were forming an opposition against the festival and rallied their communities not to partake in the festival celebrations, not to attend the festivities nor to help the organization with the preparations. I. D. du Plessis who had been proud of and still believed in the collaboration of his Coloured Department and the festival committee, saw the boycott as a rivalry or disagreement of some unhappy individuals against the state, not as a widely supported enmity. “The boycott against the festival was initiated by a small clique of disgruntled teachers, persons with a grudge against the community. It is nevertheless tragic that, owing to its influence in schools, this small group was responsible for causing the world in general to believe that the coons were a typical example of the Coloured life. The coloured community itself will suffer as a consequence, not the other sections of the community”, 148 concludes Du Plessis in his yearly report for the Department of Coloured Affairs. He added that numbers of Coloured leaders and organizations expressed their willingness and desire to participate in the festival and to display the achievements of the people. “Large numbers, including teachers, attended the festival in their private capacities. But owing to the well organized campaigns of intimidation by the comparatively small group and the absence of standing leadership, they were prevented from making a contribution which would have rendered their community an immeasurable service”. 149

Contrary to what I.D. du Plessis portrayed in his function as festival and state official, all indications were that the boycott campaign was a resounding success. Cultural groupings, which the festival organizers had attempted to draw into the celebration, largely rejected participation. 150 Also those groups who, according to Du Plessis’s report had gladly participated, had been either forced into or joined the festival reluctantly, such as the Cape Malay Choirs. Within the Cape Malay Choir Board was great discussion about the festival. Some saw it as a good opportunity to show the world what they could do, but many others were uneasy with the way Du Plessis used the Choir Board for his own political agenda. “During apartheid Dr. ID du Plessis was the whip of the Cape Malay Choir Board. We struggled under apartheid but when there were tourists from other countries the Cape Malay choirs had to show them that we were happy in South Africa,” recalls Adam Samodien, songwriter for the Choir, the Protea Sportsclub, in District Six in those years. “Du Plessis wrote books

149 Idem.
about the Malay choirs but it was all racism. The Malay choirs were just used to impress tourists to cover up apartheid and show that the coloureds were happy”.  

The Christmas Choir Bands had already decided early on in the campaign to boycott, but for the Malay Choir Board it was a different situation. They had to deal with I.D. du Plessis again after the festival was over and could therefore not afford to take such strong stands as other parts of their community could. I.D. du Plessis wanted the Cape Malay Choirs, being the head and founder of the Choir Board, to perform at his non-European stage in the Van Riebeeck stadium. He used all his influence to make this happen. As head of the Cape Malay Choir Board and head of the Department of Coloured Affairs, he had the decision power over visa, housing or funding issues, etc. It was therefore not favourable for the Cape Malays to create animosity between him and themselves. Eventually, a part of the Board vacillated under the threat of losing their venue for the annual Choir competitions.  

Doubts about the way the Malays were going to have to present themselves to the outside world remained. By February 1952 more than half of the main Malay choirs, including the Celtics and the Boarding Boys, had spurned invitations to perform at the Van Riebeeck Stadium. Five choirs took things even further and decided to found their own choir board, the Suid Afrikaanse Koorraad. “We were unhappy with the system”, says Samodien, who joined the Koorraad as well, “why did the Malay choirs have to participate in this festival? We weren’t going to be used”. The choirs didn’t want to be part of this particular representation of the Malay community in the festival and were fed up being used as an Apartheid tool.

Conclusion

Du Plessis took the Cape Malay choirs under his wing and as a true ‘arts patron’ he protected and supported the culture as he saw fit. By promoting the Cape Malay choirs, Du Plessis tried to counterbalance rising popularity of the ‘coon carnival’ and pop culture coming from America. The Cape Malays, in his view, embodied ‘high culture’ and were an example of what ‘coloureds’ could achieve on the artistic front. However, there seem to have been contradicting approaches towards the ‘Cape Malays’. On the one hand, Du Plessis and the Department of Coloured Affairs tried to create this idea of an ‘assimilated’ culture of the Cape Malay, assimilated to the Afrikaner culture, the Cape Malay Choirs Board being one of the projects to emphasise the link between ‘European’

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151 Interview with Adam Samodien, January 8th 2009, Woodstock, Cape Town.
153 Idem.
154 Interview with Adam Samodien, January 12th 2009, Woodstock, Cape Town.
and ‘Malay’ culture. Besides, how the two had cooperated and influenced each other, was a perfect tool in this process of ‘assimilating’ this ethnic minority to a ‘European’ standard way of living. On the other hand, the state also tried to dominate the Malay community by segregating them from the whites, but also from other coloureds. Furthermore, the cultural ‘assimilated’ song tradition as produced by the Cape Malay Choir Board was used as a respectable alternative to the ‘coon carnival’. Yet both New Year’s celebrations had the same origins in slave choirs. Both choir and coon troupe even shared the ‘comic song tradition’. Therefore, the introduction of the ‘Netherlands songs’ into the Choir Board Competitions, was greatly stimulated and promoted by the Afrikaner patron. Furthermore the Afrikaans language became mandatory for the choirs, it being an ‘essential’ aspect of the ‘Malay identity’ as Du Plessis described and advocated it. This insisting on ‘assimilation’ to the Afrikaners eventually led to an ethnic revitalisation movement, for cultural self-determination, in the form of an independent choir Board, the ‘Suid Afrikaanse Koorraad’ in 1952.
Chapter 4

‘Hoe gaat die paadjie naar die Kramat toe’ –
Accepting a Cultural Identity and Making it Your Own

“Hoe gaat die paadjie na die Kramat toe, na die Kramat toe”

The famous South African jazz musician Abdullah Ibrahim was known to promote ‘his’ musical heritage, the Moppies and Ghoemaliedjies. Ibrahim, or Adolph Brand as he was called before he converted to Islam and changed his name, referred to himself as a ‘sound scientist’, but he was also a socially active artist and was forced, like many other South Africans, to live in exile during apartheid. Born in District Six, this neighbourhood was his source of inspiration. The sounds from the East that the slaves had brought with them, the Moppies and Ghoemaliedjies during New Year, etc. all these inspired him. While living in exile, he constantly reminded other South African exiles of their rich musical heritage. He would revive the ‘coon’ carnival, or teach Americans how to sing: “Hoe gaat die paadjie na die Kramat toe, na die Kramat toe”. Ibrahim also addressed the coloured community directly. He insisted that coloured people who were ashamed of their folk traditions were, by extension, ashamed of themselves. He urged them to see their culture and themselves through his eyes. If they did, they would see that they were “all beautiful.” “Look around you and see yourself,” he wrote. “You are my music. My music is you.”

This song ‘Hoe gaat die paadjie naar die Kramat toe’ is characteristic for the ‘Malay’ choirs and also for the older ‘slave songs’, because it so noticeably speaks of the Muslim faith of the ‘Malays’. A ‘Kramat’ is a Muslim shrine, a burial ground for holy Muslims. In and around Cape Town, there are around twenty of these ‘Kramats’, and they play an important role in the profession of faith for the Cape Muslims. Even though this might not be the most popular of the folksongs, the fact that this song was taught to for instance Americans tells us a lot about how the Coloured and ‘Malay’ community saw themselves and presented themselves, even abroad. It illustrated to Americans what the ‘traditional’ ‘coloured’ songs were about and it emphasized that religion is an element considered to be important within their perceived culture and their believed identity.

According to Terence Ranger, all these invented traditions, as described in chapter 3, could not have been achieved or have been successful without a good deal of African participation. This would imply that a part of the community which was described as being ‘Malay’ by the state, supported this idea. In this chapter I will focus on the composers and singers of the Moppies and their experiences. How did they see this ‘tradition’ of singing folksongs, and what did it mean to them to sing them every year? Did the idea of a ‘Malay’ identity appeal to them? Was this idea of a separate ‘Malay’ identity based on ethnicity and which particular elements of ethnicity were regarded as the most influential? Was there a class struggle between ‘Coloured’ and ‘Malay’, between the ‘working-class’ and the ‘educated elite’? Was it their Muslim identity that set them apart from other communities at the Cape? It is mainly through interviews that I will try to sketch the ideas and beliefs of the people involved with the Cape Malay Choirs and thereby give them a voice, in response to chapter 3 in which the version of the state of the Cape Malay choir culture was dominant.

**Accepting a cultural identity, and making it your own**

The Cape Malay choirs were the tool that the Department of Coloured Affairs used to promote the ‘Malay’ identity. Yet, what were considered to be the contributing elements which shaped this ‘Malayness’? Du Plessis and his Department of Coloured Affairs focused on characteristics such as ethnicity, class and religion. The ‘cultural identity’ of the ‘Cape Malays’, according to Du Plessis, had its roots in these three elements which shaped and set, so recognizably, the ‘Cape Malays’ apart from other communities at the Cape. To him it was obvious that the difference in cultural practices between the ‘Cape Malays’ with their choirs, and the ‘Coloureds’, with their ‘Klopse’ bands, were direct results of differences in identity. For Du Plessis these weren’t small differences, but he saw sharp distinctions between the two groups and cultural practices.

However, culture, as a social practice, is not something that individuals possess. Rather, it is a social process in which individuals participate. Therefore, it is usually a decision to partake or submerge in a particular culture, whether this is a decision consciously taken or not, it is not something that is ‘uncontrollable’ or ‘inevitable’ nor ‘biologically determined’. Furthermore, most cultures aren’t isolated islands, but are either bordering other cultures or exist or originate within a different cultural group. Especially in the case of a sub-culture like this one, the ‘Cape Malay Choirs’ which is part of the bigger cultural ‘tradition’ of the ‘New Year’s Eve celebrations’, it is hard to believe that there isn’t and hasn’t been any ‘cultural-pollination’ between the different ‘groups’.

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multicultural city like Cape Town, different ‘cultural groups’ must have interacted and influenced each other, knowingly or unknowingly. Even though the apartheid regime tried to limit these interactions or deny any cross-cultural connections, it seems impossible that any culture remained ‘pure’ or ‘unspoiled’.

Another aspect of the ‘Cape Malay’ ‘culture’ which Du Plessis enthusiastically advocated, was actually the cultural interaction between the ‘Malays’ and the Dutch, for instance the adoption of ‘Netherlands songs’. A cultural interference had taken place and even Du Plessis didn’t deny this. However, this ‘interaction’ was seen by Du Plessis as more of a one-way influence. The ‘Malays’ adopted the Dutch folksongs into their repertoire and it was a one-way connection, from ‘white’ to ‘Cape Malay’, in Du Plessis’ vision. To him, the ‘culture’ as it existed in his time, at the founding of the Cape Malay Choir Board in 1939, was the ‘desirable’ one, which had remained relatively untouched by ‘bad’ influences, such as from the ‘coon’ carnivals.

We have discussed in chapter 3 what people like Du Plessis and other governmental officials thought of the ‘cultural identity’ of the ‘Cape Malays’, and how Du Plessis as a patron of the choirs, used the choirs to advocate his ideal ‘Cape Malay’ identity. What intrigues me, however, and is equally important to be understood, is what the community, described as being ‘Cape Malay’ thought of all this themselves. After all, the community embraced the choirs enthusiastically. Not only did many men join the choirs, family and friends also went out to watch the choirs perform. As David Bergerson argues, one should not ignore (paying) audiences as being major patrons to the art.158 If the community had not enjoyed the choirs and their traditional songs, the choir board would not have lasted, and yet the choir board still exists, 70 years after it was founded.

Since its start in 1939, the Cape Malay Choir Board steadily accumulated membership to its fold with a membership of 26 ‘teams’ in 1945159 to more than a 150 choirs divided over 3 different choir boards in 1994160. Each team consisting of between thirty to forty members, the choir board in those early Apartheid years easily had the active participation of more than a thousand men in any of its concerts. Around each ‘team’ gravitated a network of households of supporters potentially incorporating the whole of the Bo-Kaap and Onder-Kaap (as District Six was known).161 The community support for this ‘invented tradition’ was of considerable proportion. It was not forced on to them. Most people happily joined a choir or supported them at a choir competition. Even today,

people are proud to belong to a Cape Malay Choir. The long ‘history’ of the choirs and their cultural characteristics, which were so important to Du Plessis are proudly recalled in conversations about the choirs. It seems that the ‘official’ invented ideas about the Cape Malay Choirs, have evolved into more vernacular cultural expressions or ‘public memory’ as it is also called.

According to historian John Bodnar, public memory speaks primarily about the structure of power in society because that power is always in question in a world of polarities and contradictions and because cultural understanding is always founded in the material structure of society itself. Public memory, to Bodnar, is a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present and by implication, its future. It’s fashioned ideally in a public sphere in which various parts of the social structure exchange views. The major focus of this communicative and cognitive process is not the past, however, but serious matters in the present such as the nature of power and the question of loyalty to both official and vernacular cultures. Bodnar wrote this with the United States of America in mind, not South Africa during apartheid. Still, his views on public memory could also be applied to the situation for the ‘Malays’ in apartheid South Africa and their perception and even active involvement in their public memory. The ‘Malay’ past as formulated and promoted by the apartheid state addressed this issue of the structure of power in South African society. For instance, by emphasizing the ‘noble’ past of the ‘Malays’, they were elevated above the ‘working-class’ ‘coloureds’ who were from ‘common’ slave descent, and by stressing the cultural ‘collaboration’ between these ‘Malay’ exiles and ‘skilled’ slaves and the Dutch settlers, by, among other things, adopting their language and folksongs, the idea of an ongoing tradition of ‘collaboration’ between the two groups was suggested. By supporting or at least accepting this ‘memory’, the ‘Malays’ also ‘accepted’ the structure of power which was laid out in this presentation of the past.

Bodnar argues, similar to Terence Ranger, that ‘the construction of memory in ethnic enclaves (like the Malays in Cape Town) could not be completed without the participation of powerful interests outside the ethnic communities, which in this case is the Apartheid state, but also by negotiations between various interests within the community itself’. If the so-called ‘Malay’ ethnic group would have consistently resisted a ‘Malay’ identity, this idea of such an ethnic group in Cape Town would not have ‘persisted’ for long. Why would the ‘Malays’ have supported this idea of a distinctive ‘Malay’ past and culture, what do people gain from supporting the idea of an ‘ethnic culture’? Bodnar argues that most scholars have viewed ethnic culture and heritage as a strategy by

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which people organized their lives. For some, ethnicity is a source of identity or ‘genuine culture’, he says, from which people create a community based upon shared perceptions of ‘primordial attachments’. For other scholars, ethnic identity is merely a means or a ‘strategy’ by which groups mobilize their members to pursue scarce resources in society or political power.\footnote{John Bodnar, \textit{Remaking America, Public Memory, Commemoration and Patriotism in the 20th century} (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992) 42.}

Political power is probably not what the ‘Malays’ envisioned when they actively supported the ‘Malay’ identity, but certain privileges or opportunities is probably what they hoped to achieve by ‘agreeing’ with the ‘Malay’ label given to them. One of such ‘privileges’ was the restoration and protection of the Bo-Kaap, the only non-white neighbourhood right next to the city bowl of Cape Town, that was not forcibly removed and turned to a ‘whites-only area’. Former District Six and Bo-Kaap resident Vincent Kolbe remembers: “The place in Cape Town called the Malay quarter was created by the Apartheid government. And if you said, yes I am a Malay, you could stay there. And if you said, no I’m not a Malay, then you had to stay in the townships”.\footnote{Interview with Vincent Kolbe, January 14\textsuperscript{th} 2009, Athlone, Cape Town.}

\textbf{Ethnic identity – ‘Malay’, Coloured or simply just Capetonian?}

The term ‘race’ is a fallacious nineteenth-century fiction, and the term ‘ethnicity’ in its presumed biological sense is its late-twentieth-century photocopy. Even the most racist biologist has failed to establish any link whatsoever between race and ethnicity and behaviours or preferences for behaviours. In social science code, we therefore speak of ‘shifting identity’ or ‘contextual ethnicity’. ‘Ethnic identities’, the term which is used in this chapter, are thus nothing more than acts of ethnic identification that are frozen in time. As the social climate gets colder, they can go into deepfreeze and harden; as the social climate gets warmer, they can unfreeze and melt into new forms. Analytically speaking, ethnicity is not an identity given by nature, but an identification created through social action.\footnote{Gerd Baumann, \textit{The Multicultural Riddle, Rethinking National, Ethnic and Religious Identities} (New York: Routledge, 1999) 20/21.} In this case, this ethnic identity was given to the ‘Malays’ by the apartheid government. “The ‘Malay’ identity was an idea created by the Apartheid government to create ethnic groups in South Africa”, declares Vincent Kolbe, social activist, musician and source of inspiration and knowledge for many Capetonians. “Even the music, the Malay music, it’s nonsense, because that music was composed here in Cape Town, even by people who weren’t Muslim. I sing those songs, and I haven’t got Malay blood”\footnote{Interview with Vincent Kolbe, January 14\textsuperscript{th} 2009, Athlone, Cape Town.}. The old theories on ethnicity or ‘race’, focusing on genetics, were ideas that had shaped the apartheid ideology, and that were used as arguments for policies such as the forced removals. The designated ‘Malays’ must have been equally worried as most other non-
whites about how far these racial policies were going to develop and control their lives in the last decades of the twentieth century.

James O’Toole argues that the ‘coloureds’ in South Africa were taught two mythical lessons:
1. white is positive and black is negative; and 2. racial purity is superior to ‘mixing’ (1973: 27). Therefore, the myth that ‘Malays’ were racially ‘pure’ and furthermore the idea of the ‘Malays’ sharing a common cultural ‘tradition’ with the ‘whites’ must have been seen as something positive or even as an opportunity for this community to claim more political rights. Rather side with the political powerful whites than with the ‘excluded’ blacks, the ‘Malays’ must have thought. Being constantly exposed to this message of ‘white is good, black is bad’, in addition to the efforts of people like Du Plessis and his Department of Coloured Affairs to promote this idea of a ‘Malay’ culture, which was supposedly higher than the ‘coloured’ or ‘native’ cultures because of their ‘noble past’ and interaction with the Dutch and later the Afrikaners, created a willingness to believe the cultural politics of the apartheid government and a readiness to believe in their own ‘superiority’ over other non-white communities.

“It was the classic ‘divide and rule’ tactic”, says Kolbe. “What they did with the non whites, they divided them into ‘Coloureds’, ‘Malay’, ‘Xhosa’, ‘Zulu’, etc. the non-whites were divided into several different identities. They gave each one special rules and rights so they could fight amongst themselves over these rights and privileges”. “Therefore the anti-apartheid movement was all about not accepting this apartheid language about ‘races’”, explains Vincent Kolbe. “In District Six we had the Non-European Unity Movement, that said don’t accept ‘Malayness’, don’t accept ‘colouredness’, don’t even accept whiteness, only accept that we are citizens. And that was a politics that the Apartheid government did not like”, remembers Vincent Kolbe. The cultural politics carried out by institutions like the Department of Coloured Affairs and the Cape Malay Choir Board, were equally questioned. “I think that what we were concerned about was the public face that this kind of activity was being given by the then so-called Coloured Affairs Department, and the individuals who sort of specialized in attaching so-called cultural labels to different communities there”, remembers Richard O Dudley, former participant within the NEUM. A core objective of the Non-European Unity Movement, founded in 1943, was to implement a policy of non-collaboration with white authorities, using the tactic of boycotting all racist institutions. These were institutions such as the Cape Malay Choir Board.

169 Interview with Vincent Kolbe, January 14th 2009, Athlone, Cape Town.
Racist white regimes in South Africa had consistently nourished the ‘hope’ of the ‘coloured’ or ‘Malay’ communities that they were regarded as ‘higher’ than other non-whites. ‘Some were encouraged to feel more equal than others’\textsuperscript{171}, as Terence Ranger would say. False promises were made of ‘coloured’ assimilation into the white community by for instance the Hertzog government.\textsuperscript{172} But during the last half of the twentieth century it became apparent that there was no political goodwill towards the ‘coloured’ community. A series of apartheid acts made this obvious, for instance, in 1956, the ‘coloureds’ were removed from the common voters roll, mixed marriages were forbidden, formal interracial political cooperation was outlawed and in the late sixties and seventies, ‘coloureds’ were forcibly removed from the city to the townships on the cape flats. O’Toole argues that a feeling of political powerlessness prevailed among ‘coloured’ people, especially in the working-class. But this feeling was counterbalanced by a feeling of belonging.\textsuperscript{173} People wanted to feel being part of a community, even though it was an invented one.

‘Community’ and belonging’ were considered to be very important. Almost all choir members describe the choir as a community activity, a group activity that brings the neighbourhood together or an extended family. “A Choir is basically a community thing”, confirms Abubakar Davids from Keytown, Athlone. “In Athlone at the moment there is about 4 choirs. But we are the only choir in this area. If you go to Belgravia, that’s another area, they have their own choir too. If you are in this community, then you belong to this choir. And if you’re from that community, you belong to that choir. That’s how it works”, says Davids. Also in the past, the choirs and coon troupes were created based on community ties, recounts Ali Ismael from Athlone: “in those days of District Six and the Bo-Kaap, would most of the people in one troupe or choir all be from one small area, like they would be from that side of District Six or Hannover street, etc.”.\textsuperscript{174}

Choirs and troupes were torn apart, like families and neighbourhoods, as a result of the forced removals. In the beginning, ‘some people would start new troupes but others tried to stay with their old troupes’\textsuperscript{175}, remembers Ali Ismael. The latter wasn’t always easy. There was hardly any public transport on the Cape Flats and not a lot of people owned cars. Therefore, most of the choirs and troupes were reorganized, new location, new members, new friends. “But in those difficult years”, says Abdullah Maged, “the music sort of kept the community together”. “We use music to

\textsuperscript{173} Denis-Constant Martin, Cape Town’s Coon Carnival, in Sarah Nutall’s ‘\textit{Senses of Culture, South Africa culture studies}’ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
\textsuperscript{174} Interview with Ali Ismael of Athlone, interview conducted by Lisa Baxter on the 1\textsuperscript{st} of November 1995, UCT.
\textsuperscript{175} Interview with Ali Ismael of Athlone, interview conducted by Lisa Baxter on the 1\textsuperscript{st} of November 1995, UCT.
unite people” verifies Vincent Kolbe, “music to bring people together”. However, Vincent Kolbe speaks of uniting people from all different ‘race groups’, not just within one family or area. Kolbe: “The government used music to keep us segregated, in culture and in mind, but we used music to emphasize that we were all the same”.

**Class struggle?**

As the Department of Coloured Affairs and the Commission for Coloured Culture liked to see it, the Cape Malay Choir Board was for the ‘elite’ ‘Malays’ and the Coon Carnival was for the working class ‘coloureds’. This propaganda worked, because many Malay Choir singers did not like to be confused with Coons, states Denis-Constant Martin, because they consider the latter as unruly, low-class people, bunches of gangsters, a far cry from the respectability and honesty ‘they’ want to embody. “There was a kind of class opposition to the coons”, admits Richard O Dudley. “People disassociated themselves from the coons, because they reckoned that the coons belonged to the hoi-poli and those people who were aspiring shall I say, to be accepted into so-called ‘White’ society, to them I think the transformation was both a strengthening of not so much just position to the coons as position to use of an institution for those purposes. So it had an ideological input”, explains the former member of the Non-European Unity Movement Richard O Dudley.

“It was a sort of social judgment that was placed upon these ‘cultures’”, says Richard O Dudley. “The coons were associated with a certain underclass and with the kind of persons whose social status, their way of earning, their living and so on, is not regarded with any kind of admiration”. In comparison, Du Plessis had described the ‘Malays’ in such a flattering and complementing manner, that it was hard for those who were designated to be ‘Malay’, not to ‘want’ to believe these so-called ‘typical’ ‘Malay’ characteristics. Therefore, to distance oneself from the Coons, and in the meantime to advocate oneself as a member of a ‘Malay’ choir, could be seen as an attempt to ‘show off’ one’s class, or at least ‘class-awareness’. This ‘class distinction’ between the Choirs and the Coons might not have been believed to be true by all of those who participated in the choirs, but this idea could have been used by ambitious people who agreed and lived-up to governments ideals in order to be accepted into ‘higher’ social positions.

However, Abdullah Maged remembers that the ‘Malay’ choirs weren’t always seen as something positive either. “Some people didn’t like the choirs back then. They didn’t like the stigma

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176 Interview with Vincent Kolbe, January 14th 2009, Athlone, Cape Town.
177 Interview with Vincent Kolbe, January 14th 2009, Athlone, Cape Town.
178 Interview with Richard O Dudley of Elfindale, interview conducted by Lisa Baxter on the 12th of September 1995, UCT.
179 Interview with Mr. Richard O Dudley from Elfindale, by Lisa Baxter on the 12th of September 1995, UCT.
attached to it. Especially the moppies, they felt it was too, uhm... it wasn’t too serious enough, you know”. It was the joking aspect, the foolish attitudes that was openly displayed on stage that was considered to be ‘indecent’. For instance during the moppie performance, where the lead singer often behaved like a ‘clown’, but mainly the coon carnival parades, where it seemed that all members took on a clown’s masque, was frowned upon. For many members of the ‘coloured’ educated elite, especially after 1948, the Coon Carnival was seen as a display of alienation, an ‘undignified’ and ‘degrading’ occasion where ‘idiots’ were making monkeys of themselves’. It was seen as reinforcing white prejudices regarding the uncivilized nature of ‘coloured’ people.

Theories of social class always refer to systems of social ranking and distribution of power. Social ranking (based on the colour of your skin) and the distribution of power (land rights, voting rights, etc.) according to those social positions, formed the basis of the apartheid state. The ‘Malays’ were favoured by people like Du Plessis, because of their alleged ‘noble’ past and ‘purity’ of ‘race’ and therefore socially ranked ‘higher’ than their fellow ‘coloured’ community members. Moreover, the ‘Malay’ choirs were preferred over the Coon troupes by state officials, because they embodied a more ‘eminent’, ‘orderly’, ‘controllable’ tradition compared to the chaotic and wild coon carnival. Therefore, community support for this idea of ‘class differences’ between the two celebration groups can be seen as a form of ‘political tactics’, a strategy in the struggle for political power.

Social Anthropologist Thomas Hyland Eriksen, argues that revitalization movements are largely an elite or middle class phenomenon. The ‘re-invention’ of a ‘Malay’ culture, by promoting the Cape Malay Choirs, was such a ‘revitalization movement’, bringing the idea of a distinct ‘Malay’ culture again into activity and prominence. This ‘reviving’ of such a culture, was done mostly by those who had money to be busy with things like ‘culture’ and ‘social status’. A choir membership cost money, so did the suit needed for the competitions, as well as travel costs, food, and all other kinds of support for the choirs. “You could, if you had a closer investigation, actually see a class distinction from the point of view of the economics”, argues Richard O Dudley, “because the people who had the money with which to sort of constitute a band or choir were living in a sort of different economic class from those who formed the coon troupe, who’s membership and uniforms cost less”.

There was, however, a growing awareness in the community that the coons and the choirs were used by the state to display the stereotypical roles that they would see fit for the ‘coloured’ community. Richard O Dudley: “persons like myself never accepted the coon carnival in the way

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180 Interview with Abdullah Maged, December 3th 2008, Athlone, Cape Town.
184 Interview with Mr. Richard O Dudley from Elfindale, by Lisa Baxter on the 12th of September 1995, UCT.
which we were sort of persuaded to do by the powers that be. We always regarded it in that particular era as something that was being manipulated to produce the stereotypes that were classified as so-called ‘Coloureds’ persons, and they generally associated the activities like those in which the coons were involved as being sort of representative of the so-called ‘coloured’ culture that they were trying to generate in order to underline this sort of stereotyping.”

Also the Malay choirs were attacked, being fabrications of the apartheid state.

The anti-apartheid movement was largely influenced by ideas on ‘class struggle’. The traditional position of Unity Movement thinkers has always been that race or racialism is a ‘mere excrescence of capitalism’, its existence the bondage of forms of false consciousness. Marxist ideas were important in the anti-apartheid politics of organisations such as the ANC, who worked together with the South African Communist party, and also in the Non-European Movement Marxist ideas about class struggle were popular. “I think that in the leadership of the political movement our ideas were based upon those derived from the philosophy of historical materialism, Marxism, and certain aspects of Classical Marxism…” recalls O Dudley, a former member of the NEUM.

The Marxist view of social classes emphasizes economic aspects. A social class is defined according to its relationship to the productive process in society. The ‘coloured’ community in this respect was regarded as belonging to the third class, the ‘working-class’, selling their labour to the ‘capitalists’. For many ‘Malays’ this situations was not much different. Many of them were labourers as well, but some also owned small shops or worked independently as fishermen, clerks or teachers, etc. However, to define the ‘Malays’ as a clearly different ‘Marxist’ class is difficult. Therefore, instead of talking about classes, it might be more sound to speak of ‘status groups’, as for instance Weber would have preferred. The Weberian view of social classes, combines several criteria in delineating classes, including income, education and political influence. In the case of the ‘Malay’ opposite the ‘Coloureds’ or ‘Coons’, the distinction between the two groups which was advocated by the state focussed more on ‘status’, than on economic power. Furthermore in reality, the differences that people believed to be there or indeed existed, were mainly differences in political power and the level of education obtained. Most of the ‘Malay’ choir captains for instance, were members of higher, educated families, residing in the ‘better-off’ neighbourhoods such as Rondebosch East or

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185 Interview with Richard O Dudley of Elfindale, interview conducted by Lisa Baxter on the 12th of September 1995, UCT.
187 Interview with Richard O Dudley of Elfindale, interview conducted by Lisa Baxter on the 12th of September 1995, UCT.
Claremont, compared to the overcrowded District Six or later on places like Mitchells Plain or Bonteheuwel.

When one asks the choir members about the difference between the Malay Choirs vs. the ‘Coon’ troupes, the word ‘decency’ seems to be important in this description. Words like ‘decent’ or ‘respectable’ vs. ‘rowdy’ or ‘uncontrollable’ are often used to describe the differences between the Choirs and the Coons. Also words like ‘traditional’ or ‘serious’ vs. ‘party’ and ‘fun-loving’ are used to illustrate the ‘believed’ difference between the two different kinds of New Year’s celebrations. Most of my informants underlined that the Malay Choirs took the competitions very seriously, that they practised months before and that they did not tolerate people who took it as a joke. There was no skipping practices nor financial contribution. There are rules to be followed. If you just wanted a ‘jol’, you might as well join a ‘coon’ troupe, is what they entrusted me. This does not mean that most of these choir singers whom I interviewed did not enjoy being in a Malay choir. The ‘nagklopse’, the parade of the Malay choirs at New Year’s Eve and the competitions in February and March were occasions that these men lived and worked towards with great anticipation.

Adam Samodien, who coaches both a ‘Malay’ Choir and a ‘Coon’ troupe explains that another difference between the Malay choir and the Coon troupe is the characters of the members. “To the Malays you will say, ‘Ons sal dit nooit weer se..’ and they will do it like that. Maar as jy vir die Coons se, ‘Ons sal dit nooit weer se..’ they will sing ‘Ons sal dit nooit weer se...’ but sung more roughly. That’s the difference. So my task with the Coons is so much more challenging. Because the effort and to get these people from daai op die hoek staan, dis nou lekker gerook en sommer geraas.. to get that away from them”. Samodiens explanation seems to point again at the ‘lack of discipline’ of the ‘Coons’ compared to the ‘Malays’. Not only the singing voice, but the way the singers were coached is what makes the difference according to Samodien.

Rules and regulations were thought to be very important. “The rules are there to keep you out of trouble”, says Miley Ferris. “We have our president, we have our chairman, we’ve got our club captains and so on, and the club captains, they must see that there’s no trouble on the streets, that the members behave there..”. The performances were a community thing. People would bring their families to the road parades and competitions, and of course people wanted their families to be safe. It was supposed to be fun for all, for young and old. “En dit was altyd vir ons geleer, dat enige sport is om mense en vriende bymekaar te bring. So as ons more in die straat loop, dan kan ons se,
‘Salaam Aleikum’ of ‘Good Morning’ en dit was die aard van die sport in daie dae gewees\(^{192}\), explains Adam Samodien.

So, was the main difference between the choirs and the coons the love for- vs. the lack of rules? In an interview with the vice-president of the Cape Malay Choir Board, Mr. Brown explained that the main difference between the coons and the choirs, at least according to him and the choir board, was ‘singing’. “The choirs is more about the singing”, he says. “We love singing. These guys would be singing on street corners in the old days. They would sing all the time. And now it comes to this, you join a group and you go sing in a competition. That’s how it starts off. It starts with a group of people that loves singing. Most people that join the minstrels go for dancing, singing and performing. But they are not really singers. That is where our group comes in. The Malay choirs sing for the minstrels to make it in the competitions. The ’Malays choirs have the singing voice’.\(^{193}\) Adam Samodien, moppie singer and composer for the Woodstock Royals supports this view: “Within the Malay and Coloured Community it is generally accepted that the better singers join the Malay Choirs. The carnival troops are more about marching, dancing to the drums, it’s all about the jol, about the party. The Malay choirs are all about singing, there is no big band supporting them, the voices and the melodies are important\(^{194}\).

**Religious rift?**

For Du Plessis the Muslim faith was an element which set the ‘Malays’ clearly apart from other groups at the Cape, and was something that had left an important mark on their ‘culture’. I.D. du Plessis defined the Cape Malay as a Muslim sub-group of the Cape Coloured people, with a way of life determined by their religion, by their former contact with the far-east and the Cape Dutch colonists and by their growing contact with Arabia.\(^ {195}\) But how did the ‘Malay’ community see this? Was their faith an important element for their cultural identity?

The organized propaganda for the existence of a ‘Malay’ identity, which I.D. du Plessis hoped to achieve through the Cape Malay Choir Board, was not welcomed by all Muslim leaders. “There was an imam, imam Haron, who said, I’m sorry I cannot racialize my religion, I am a Muslim I am not a Malay. Malays come from Malaysia. Of course he ended up in jail and died in jail, they killed him in jail”\(^ {196}\), says Vincent Kolbe. Imam Abdullah Haron, founder of the Claremont Muslim Youth

\(^{192}\) Interview with Adam Samodien, interview conducted by Michael Nixon for the District Six Museum, January 17\(^{th}\) 2002.

\(^{193}\) Interview with Mr. Brown, November 12\(^{th}\) 2008, Heideveld, Cape Town.

\(^{194}\) Interview with Adam Samodien, January 9\(^{th}\) 2009, Woodstock, Cape Town.


\(^{196}\) Interview with Vincent Kolbe, January 14\(^{th}\) 2009, Athlone, Cape Town.
Association, was arrested in 1969 for bringing Islam to the underprivileged in Cape Town, coloured or black, he saw it as his duty to approach all segments of South African society. By ignoring the ‘racial boundaries’ as set up by the Apartheid state, he soon was regarded as a ‘threat’ by the government. On the 28th of May 1969, the Imam was arrested and several months later, in September of the same year, it was announced that the Imam had ‘died’ while being kept in detention.

During the following difficult decades of the 1970s and the 1980s, the ‘Coloureds’ and their sub-categories appended ‘so-called’ to their ethnic identities that clearly reflected that the communities had been experiencing an identity crisis amidst a continuous traumatic socio-political and economic crisis. It was particularly during these critical times that the younger generation of ‘Cape Malays’ chose to employ the religious label instead of the ethnic one; they thus preferred to be called South African Muslims instead of South African Cape Malays. The religious label was preferred for political reasons, and the 80s were the times of for instance the United Democratic Front, the non-racial anti-Apartheid organization, and of more and more open resistance against the Apartheid state. It was a time when most underprivileged South Africans openly rejected the racial state of South Africa and therefore also rejected their ethnic labels imposed upon them.

There was a growing sentiment that an ethnic label was not what set the ‘Malays’ apart from their fellow ‘Coloured’ community members. The post-graduate thesis ‘Historical Process and the Constitution of Subject: I.D. Du Plessis and the Reinvention of the ‘Malay’, by Shamiel Jeppie for the University of Cape Town, displays this way of thinking unequivocally. In his thesis, Jeppie argues that the ‘Malay’ label had no historic roots, yet “a Muslim subject-position, has had a long currency in the Western Cape”. Jeppie, like other Muslim intellectuals in those days, were actively advocating to use the ‘religious label' instead of an ‘ethnic’ one. Cape Town scholar Achmat Davids for instance, categorically stated that the term ‘Cape Malay’ was unacceptable, and that it teems with racial prejudice.

If the ethnic label was becoming less important, was it the religious identity that was used to define the difference between the two communities, the ‘Christian coloureds’ and the so-called ‘Cape Muslims’? Was this believed to be the facet that set the Choirs apart from the Coon troupes? During my fieldwork in Cape Town, I noticed that many choirs consisted of both Muslims and Christians. According to officials of the Cape Malay Choir Board, around 30% of the Board members are Christians. “Even in the past it wasn’t that strict”, recalls Abdullah Maged, “as a Christian you

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197 Muhammed Haron, Conflict of Identities, the Case of South Africa’s Cape Malays (paper presented at the Malay World Conference, Kuala Lumpur, 12-14 October 2001).
199 Haron, Conflict of Identities (Malay World Conference, Kuala Lumpur, 12-14 October 2001).
could join the Cape Malay Choir Board. Mr. Brown is Christian for instance and he has been with the Board since 1965 and now he is also the vice-president of the Board.²⁰⁰ The religious differences didn’t seem to be a major influence in the perceived contrast between the choirs and coons. It hadn’t been an issue of divergence in the decades before, when the ‘class’ aspect proved to be more important in the presumed differences between the choirs and the coons.

Even though both religions were welcome in the choirs, there was however a perception of distinct differences in behaviour between the two groups. As Ali Ismael explains: “There was always a mixture between Christians and Muslims in the Malay Choirs and Coon troupes, but when you had a Christian chap in the Malay choir, then he just had his limits, he must know we don’t allow Christian chaps to have a tot you know, because whenever we go and sing at that particular place there is no booze or anything like that. But if a Christian chap is with a Malay choir he must know his limits and he knows that some of the Malay chaps, doesn’t like you to be alcoholic. But in the Coons, ya, everybody is drinking (laughs).”²⁰¹ The Coon Troupes had a reputation of being a group of ‘rowdy’ and often drunk men. The ‘Cape Muslims’, who formed the majority of the Cape Malay choirs membership, were of course not allowed to drink alcohol because of their religion and were therefore seen as more ‘respectable’, seeing that they were never drunk. Of course, this public perception was only partly true and most people were aware that there was drug use, for instance ‘Dagga’ (Cannabis), amongst the Muslim community as well.

Most choir members did not see a clash of interest between joining a choir and being a faithful Muslim at the same time. As long as people honoured their religious beliefs, such as no alcohol or honour the Sabbath on Friday, etc. partaking in a choir competition proved to be no problem. The Choir Board and the Carnival Association both take religious holidays or rituals into consideration when they plan competitions or rehearsal practices. For instance, during the Ramadan months, there are usually no choir practices. When the 2nd day of January, which is traditionally the day of the Coon Carnival, in 2009 fell on a Friday, the carnival was organized to take place on the Saturday, to accommodate the Muslims in the carnival. However, some friction and discussion on the ‘morality’ of the ‘coon’ carnival exists within the Muslim community at the Cape. In 2005 for instance, an Imam told the gathered Muslim youth at a Youth Forum organized in Cape Town, that “the Coon Carnival was condemned as ‘un-Islamic’.²⁰² Recently, in 2009, there was a small row when Muslim leaders from the Bo-Kaap complained that some ‘Coons’ had urinated against the walls of the Mosque in the neighbourhood. This latest incident, in my view, doesn’t seem to be directed

²⁰⁰ Interview with Abdullah Maged, December 3th 2008, Athlone, Cape Town.
²⁰¹ Interview with Ali Ismael of Athlone by Lisa Baxter, 1st of November 1995, UCT.
against Islam per sé, but seems to be more a case of ordinary public drunkenness and a disregard of common good values, which would have upset any caretaker of a house of worship, Muslim or Christian.

Overall, the relationship between the religious leaders and the Choir officials is described by the choir members to be a good one. It just depends on how the choir members behave, says Ali Ismael. “I don’t think there is any problem... depends how do you do it and when you do it, right. Because, when it comes to one o’clock right, that’s a praying time all right, then.. I wouldn’t say all but then usually some of the Malay choirs if they are near a mosque right, then the chaps will go to the mosque, then the choir will just sit still, you know. As long as the choirs don’t compromise your religious life, there is no problem. Muslim Leaders understand that the competitions and Carnival are a form of entertainment.

Anti-‘Malayness’ or opposition to ‘racialism’ in general, was mostly something for the intellectuals, the educated elites, who took part in organizations such as the Non-European Unity Movement or the ‘Muslim Judicial Council’. But generally these educated elites, disassociated themselves also from popular forms of entertainment such as the choirs and the carnival, because they saw these as expressions of ‘underclass’ culture. “Our general attempt was to encourage people to find other ways of finding expression for their sort of basic feelings and so on” explains Richard O Dudley. For the choir members however, the religious label played a less bigger part in the decision to join a Cape Malay Choir. Singing for a ‘Malay’ choir wasn’t seen as something conflicting with their religion, nor was it a reason to join the Cape Malay Choir Board because it was something expected from a ‘Muslim’. Even though being Muslim was seen as an important aspect of their ‘Malay’ identity, it wasn’t the driving factor behind joining a ‘Malay’ choir and after all Christians joined the choirs as well.

The Muslim identity of the choirs however, did influence the composing of the moppies. “Being Muslim, for instance, you had to be careful about singing of sex”, says Abdullah Maged. “But we had lyrics that had a double meaning. We were very good in that. That’s what we usually did. We would sing about people, about their mischief, and they didn’t know we were mocking them”. In chapter 2, I have given some example of moppies that discuss issues regarding good ‘Muslim’ values. For instance the song ‘Gamad Salie’, which addresses, according to the composer Adam Samodien, the problem of teen pregnancies in the ‘Cape Malay’ community. Another song by Adam Samodien,

203 Interview with Ali Ismael of Athlone by Lisa Baxter, 1st of November 1995, UCT.
204 Interview with Richard O Dudley of Elfindale, interview conducted by Lisa Baxter on the 12th of September 1995.
205 Interview with Abdullah Maged, December 3th 2008, Athlone, Cape Town.
called ‘Ou Tiefie en sy Houmeit’, refers to a situation of an adulterous man and his ‘houmeit’ (mistress).

Ek is jaloers bokkie, ek’s jaloers bokkie  
Jy moet my man laat bly  
Jy kan maar hardloop na die doekoem  
Maar my man sal jy nie kry  
Sy skel die houmeit, slaan die houmet,  
jaa die houmeit uit haar lewe uit  
Galiema galiema, het weer haar man!  

(Adam Samodien : 2009)

In the song, the wife finds out about the affair and confronts her husband. In the song, the wife comes across as a hysterical woman, who to the amusement of the audience, tries her best to get rid of the ‘houmeit’ and to get her husband back. Even though she is the laughing stock of the song, at the end of the song, the wife does succeed by scaring away the mistress. Furthermore, the song also seems to judge the husband for going out with his mistress, giving her all of his attention and ignoring his children. The composer of the song even lets an Iman appear in the song, to ask where the father of the children is. “Die Iman het kom vra waars die kinders se pa”. Overall, the wife is the clown in the song, but the husband is the ‘bad guy’.

I sing, therefore I am

The songs or the choices for the songs give us an insight into the ‘cultural identity’ that the choir members fashioned for themselves. The fact that ‘Nederlands liedjies’ became the most important part of the competitions, says a lot about the culture which they tried to create or live up to, and an originally ‘European’ folksong tradition such as the Netherlands songs, appears to be an aspiration for the ‘Cape Malays’ to associate themselves rather with ‘white’ culture than with ‘coloured’ culture. Also the choices for songs, ‘Netherlands’ or comic songs, shows us what topics and themes were considered to be important or how they would like to portray themselves. For instance, the song ‘Fisherman of the Cape’: My naam is Achmat Samsodien, Die oop see is my koning. Ek is ‘n vister van die Kaap, Die Bo-Kaap is my woning (“My name is Achmat Samsodien, the open sea is my king. I am a fisherman of the Cape, the Bo-Kaap is my home.”) portrays the Malays as the exotic fishermen from the far East, who mainly resided in the neighbourhood on the slopes of Signal Hill, called the Bo-Kaap. It also suggests a longing to ‘differentiate’ themselves from the common ‘coloureds’, by for instance focussing on their ‘special’ residence, the Bo-Kaap. Old Dutch sailor songs or folksongs which were centralized around the themes fishing or sailing were greatly promoted by the Cape Malay Choir Board. For the Afrikaner board members such as Du Plessis, songs which
referred to sailing or the sea in general, had been central in the process of adoption of the European language and songs into the Malay community at the Cape. “As fishermen in contact with vessels passing through, and as chosen servants of the burghers, they had ample opportunity to learn those songs which the Dutch brought out with them”, as Du Plessis describes in his book on the ‘Cape Malays’. It was this link between the Dutch/European culture and the Malay culture which fascinated the Afrikaner scholar the most, the successful and ‘voluntary’ adoption of white culture by a non-white community.

However, indirectly, this song actually refers to the slave past of the ‘Malays’ and contradicts the ‘voluntary’ adoption of white songs into the ‘Cape Malay’ community. Many freed slaves at the Cape lived mostly in the Cape Town and formed small and united communities. They were excluded from many occupations reserved for whites and could not farm because they did not have access to credit; therefore many of the freed slaves became fishermen, as well as artisans or shopkeepers.

The reference to a fishermen community in Cape Town actually reminds the audience of this particular aspect of Cape Town’s slave history.

In an American study on the protest songs of the civil rights movements in the Sixties and Seventies, it became apparent that many African-American activists sang old slave songs during the protest rallies. In many ways, the choice to sing the traditional songs from black history lent a sense of continuity to the contemporary struggle, linking it, in the minds of the activists, to the ongoing struggles of African Americans in the United States. I think a similar situation occurred in Cape Town. By singing old Ghoema songs, written in times of slavery, the ‘Malay’ choirs could refer to their ongoing struggle for freedom.

Another example of such an old ‘ghoema song’, is the song ‘Hoe gaat die paadjie naar die Kramat toe’. The song explicitly refers to a ‘Muslim’ identity. This in itself still fits into the ‘Malay’ ‘cultural identity’ as advocated by the Cape Malay Choir Board, but the Kramats historically were areas where the slaves would gather to have religious meetings, political meetings or where runaway slaves would find shelter. The song therefore also has a very clear reference to slave times. “In the past, people would sing songs at weddings or when they had picnics or when they would go to the Kramats, to the shrines. If it was far away, while they were travelling, they would sing ‘Hier gaan die paadjie naar die kramat toe, naar die kramat toe’. The slave community turned to Islam. That’s

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why it’s important. Some things remain popular, like going to the Kramat song.” explains Vincent Kolbe. The slaves and servants learned those folksongs in the homes of the Dutch colonists, but they made subtle changes to these songs in order to comment on their master. Most of the ‘Ghoemaliedjies’ or Moppies have therefore an obvious satirical character. “All over the world, you’ll find that the slave communities had a language of their own. And they had references of their own. The American slave history is full of it and the American jazz movement is full of it. But here for instance, when the Afrikaans language was developed it was a language of the slaves. Everybody else spoke Dutch. So lots of the times, the master didn’t know what they were saying. So some things are traditional, some things are very old, something people forgot the meaning of”, explains Vincent Kolbe.

Post-slavery, the Moppies still kept an obvious satirical spirit and were sometimes still used to mock the establishment, in the case of Apartheid, to mock the Afrikaner officials. “We said it to them in singing”, says choir captain Abubakar Davids. “We made funny songs, so they wouldn’t catch on. And our people were laughing, and they, the officials, wanted to know what are these people laughing about”, laughs Davids. “That was our way to get little bit back at them”, explains the choir captain from Keytown Athlone. “But you had to really be careful doing things like that (singing critical songs)”, says Vincent Kolbe, “because when you are on stage, and the big boss who is paying for the party is there, you must be very careful what you sing in front of him. But what people sang in their homes and amongst themselves, that’s where they are free to do things, but even there you have to be careful, because there were spies, it wasn’t open”, recalls Vincent Kolbe.

But not only officials were mocked, also the community itself was the object of satire in the moppies. “Songs were made to comment on your neighbours or friends”, remembers Vincent Kolbe. “The nylon poppie, met die kortste rokkie’ sings Kolbe, speaks of girls with fashionable nylon skirts, but very very short skirts. That wasn’t considered to be a proper dress code in a Muslim community. “Or like ‘Spierewit gepoeier, heb nie hare nie, heb nie hare nie’, which speaks of women who powder their faces white, but still have the curly black hair which reveals they aren’t white”. There were many old slave songs, but also newly composed moppies which commented on the so-called ‘Neuropeans’ (near Europeans), people who desperately tried to look and act ‘white’. “These songs were slave songs’, says Kolbe, “but still very relevant during Apartheid as well”.

The ‘Cape Malay’ community was pushed to ‘forget’ or discard their slave ancestry. At least they were pushed to believe that they were descendants from more skilled artisan slaves, and

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209 Interview with Vincent Kolbe, January 14th 2009, Athlone, Cape Town.
211 Interview with Vincent Kolbe, January 14th 2009, Athlone, Cape Town.
therefore more noble than the common field working slaves, as Du Plessis promoted this in his many books on the so-called ‘Cape Malay’ identity and history. For many years, a large part of the community which was labelled ‘Malay’ went along with this portrayal of Cape Town’s slave past. However, some ‘Malays’ were conscious of their past, not at all ashamed of it and this increasing awareness of a slave past was displayed in both cultural activities and politics, by for instance boycotting the Jan van Riebeeck festival or by continuously singing these slave songs at the ‘Nagtklopop’. Towards the end of the twentieth century, more and more ‘Malays’ became aware of their slave ancestry and made no attempts to ignore this part of their heritage any longer. This increasing awareness of a slave past and the link to the old slave songs and the ‘tradition’ of singing these songs, became an aspect of the choirs which was something people were proud to advocate. “The choirs are actually originated from the slavery time”, explained a beaming informant during an interview. “Our forefathers used to be slaves and whenever they had like free moments they used to sing and make music. Now the parade came in when we were set free. When they abolished slavery and the people were so glad and so happy that all the groups and people came here to come and sing in the streets and parade in the streets and that’s where actually the whole parading started and the Cape Malay choirs started”, explained the choir captain Abubakar Davids.

Most of the choir captains I spoke were aware of the historical baggage attached to the songs, such as songs with references to the slave past. Furthermore, besides having a function of commenting on social behaviours and events, the songs were also viewed as being ‘displays’ of the ‘Malay’ or ‘Muslims’ way of life. A song like ‘Rosa’, the most famous and beloved of the ‘Netherlands songs’ was practically regarded as an unofficial anthem of the ‘Cape Malays, says Abdullah Maged. “The song belongs to the ‘Malays, because it shows how the cape Malays think, they don’t believe in living together, they believe in getting married. This song depicts that. This songs speaks of a girl, falling in love with a boy, and he goes to her parents to ask for her hand. And he waits for her. Now the last words are, now we will get married and you will be my housewife. Met liefde en met vrede sal ons saam leef. It is a love song. Everybody knows that song, even the Christians, they will also know the song Rosa”, says Maged.

**Conclusion**

Du Plessis’ patronage, carved out a new social and cultural world, the world of ‘being Cape Malay’. This ‘world’ acted as a base from which the Malay singers addressed notions of identity, traditionality, and authenticity, through their song tradition that drew on diverse cultural and artistic sources. The idea of ‘Malayness’, advocated by Du Plessis, was adopted by the designated ‘Cape Malay’.

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212 Interview with Abubakar Davids, October 15th 2008, Athlone, Cape Town.
Malays’, but it was moulded into a cultural identity of their own, one which they felt more comfortable with. Even though opposition towards ‘class opposition’ and ‘racialism’ grew, the Cape Malay Choirs, however, remained popular and actually grew in numbers of support over the years. The rules, the rituals and the whole concept of a ‘tradition’ that had a rich ‘history’, was intriguing to many choir members and made the whole concept more attractive. Particularly the ‘history’ of the Malay choirs, as Du Plessis had described it, found much support amongst the ‘coloured elites’, who fashioned themselves a more ‘noble’ past. The elite among ‘coloured’ Capetonians were distancing themselves from their slave past, not least for the distance it imposed between a ‘respectable Malay’ heritage and the bastardized culture of the ‘cape coloureds’ who were rapidly being excluded from political and social status in the Apartheid state.213 ‘Malayism’ gave an identity for these ‘elite’ Cape Town Muslims with Islamic and South-East Asian origins but neglected the slave roots of such a culture.214 This eagerness to adopt such a ‘cultural identity’, can be seen as a ‘surviving’ tactic. Most supporters of this ‘Malayness’ could be found in the Bo-Kaap area, which was saved from destruction under the Group Areas Act215.

The importance of having ‘traditions’, ‘rituals’ and a reoccurring cultural event through which people could channel their emotions was recognized also by those who opposed the state and all state institutions, such as the Cape Malay Choir Board. As Richard O Dudley, former member of the NEUM, says: “I think what we were saying to ourselves, look, these are oppressed people who have very little in the way of finding a cultural outlet and so on, a sort catharsis in their lives, and there was no way in attempting to crush that kind of thing. But on the other hand, that didn’t mean that we agreed that they should be exploited and sort of regarded as being a kind of icon in the so-called ‘Coloured’ society that they were attempting to invent or re-invent”.216

215 Idem.
Chapter 5

“Volk van ons land, hoor ons lied en sing saam”
The choirs in post-Apartheid South Africa

Volks van ons land
Hoor ons lied
En sing saam
Sommer is hier
Soet melodie
Staan hand aan hand
Daar’s plesier in ons land
Sommer is eens en vergaan
Van jaar tot jaar
Soos lewens gaan
Sing die lied van harte
Vrolijkheid nooit smarte
(Gamja Dante: 2009)

‘People of our nation, hear our song, and sing along. Summer is here, sweet melody, stand hand in hand. There is pleasure in our country. Summer comes and goes, like lives. Sing this song with great joy, happiness never sorrow’. These are the words of a ‘combined’ song, written by Gamja Dante, to activate fellow South Africans to participate in the choirs’ celebration of the summer and the start of a new year. Not only a new year, but also a new South Africa was celebrated. In 1994 a new and democratic government was elected and South Africa was rapidly changing towards a modern and ‘free’ country. Ideas changed, ideas on ethnicity and belonging for instance, ideas on what it meant to be South African and the place one had in the new South Africa. This chapter focusses on which place the ‘Malay’ choirs were granted in this new South Africa, and which place they saw fit for themselves. Furthermore, this chapter will look at how all these changes inspired moppie composers and if the role of the moppie, as a way of communicating social issues, changed or remained the same. For instance, was there still room and need for criticism and critical remarks on society and politics in the moppies, despite the hope for a better South Africa.

‘Cape Malay’ choirs had performed regularly at official government functions during Apartheid, portraying ‘typical’ ‘Malay’ culture and in that way emphasizing the differences in cultures at the Cape. After 1994, the choirs continued to be invited for state functions, for instance ‘Coons’ and ‘Malay’ choirs paraded when Nelson Mandela made his state of the nation address from the balcony of the City Hall in April 1998 and that same year they sang at the inaugural banquet of the
new Mayor of the city, Ms. Nomaindia Mfeketo.\textsuperscript{217} As much as ‘culture’ had been used during colonization and apartheid as a vehicle for promoting racial and ethnic identities, so ‘culture’ was also used in post-apartheid South Africa to celebrate the different cultures of the new ‘rainbow nation’. The term ‘Rainbow Nation’, first used by Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town Desmond Tutu, described South African society after apartheid rule and emphasized the unity of the multi-cultural nation. Instead of division and segregation between these different groups, unity and cooperation was promoted. However, ‘differences’ among the cultures were emphasized nevertheless.

Moving towards a ‘Rainbow Nation’

A shift in power meant a change in political interests and many ‘coloureds’ feared that now, instead of on ‘white’, the focus would be on ‘black’ and the ‘coloureds’ would once again be ‘caught in between’. Hope for a better future in a new and democratic South Africa was shared with the other millions of South Africans, but there was also some reluctance to embrace the new powerful black officials without hesitation. Rumours, reinforced by the National Party campaigns, that once in power, ‘Africans’ would rob coloureds of their jobs, their houses, even of their wives and their daughters, were widespread and it was sometimes believed that they would also do away with the ‘Klopse’ because it was ‘a coloured thing’ and because the ANC was supposed to be hostile towards it. The ANC, however, wanted to defuse anxiety regarding its supposed attitude towards the Coons and ‘Malays’ and tried to attract coloured voters. It therefore endeavoured to demonstrate its support for the carnivals. On ‘Tweede Nuwe Jaar’, just before the parade started, the ANC gave each of the rival boards a cheque for R5000, and Lerumo Kalako, its secretary, explained this gesture: ‘Donations are a token show of support for the people’s culture. It is so much part of the Western Cape Culture, we all have to promote it. The council should get behind the carnival which contributed to city revenue, it deserves the city’s support’.\textsuperscript{218}

The National Party on the other hand also used the ‘Choirs’ and ‘Coons’ to attract the coloured vote. They had ‘supported’ the ‘Malays’ through their Department of Coloured Affairs and Cape Malay Choir Board and were aiming at the ‘coloureds’ sympathy because of this cooperation in the past. Moreover, many ‘Malays’ and ‘Coloureds’ felt more comfortable with the old political powers, scared of what the new party would bring them. “You see, the cooperation between the Afrikaners and the ‘Coloureds’ goes back a long time”, explains Vincent Kolbe. “The Apartheid government, and even before the Apartheid government, used to have great control over the people

\textsuperscript{217} Denis-Constant Martin, Coon Carnival, New Year in Cape Town, Past and Present (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1999) 170.
\textsuperscript{218} Martin, Coon Carnival (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1999) 164.
with mixed blood, the ‘coloured’ people, because they are part of the history of Cape Town. They helped to create the Afrikaans language. They helped to fight against the British when the British came here, you know, and it is only in modern times during the Apartheid years that they were disappointed, but still when it comes to the elections, they still wont vote for the black man. They feel they are white people with brown skin, you see”.

During the Apartheid times, the Afrikaner establishment had used (arts) patronage to create a level of trust amongst the coloured and Malay community towards the Afrikaner rulers. Describing this situation, in the political climate of 1994, as a political patronage of Afrikaners over the coloureds, goes too far, however. The National Party was unlikely to win, and could therefore not promise a reward to the coloured community for their electoral support. By funding and supporting the choirs and the coon troupes, the National Party did gain some sympathy from the coloured voters, but it was not the main argument for coloured voters to support the old Afrikaner party. As Vincent Kolbe explains so eloquently, it was the fear for the unknown new ruler that was more persuasive. In a way the choice of the coloured community to vote for the National Party could be seen as a choice, in their perception, for the lesser evil, the evil they already knew.

This fear for the new South Africa had to be breached. South Africa’s ‘diverse’ people, still characterised by separate and discrete ethnicities, had been placed on a path of achieving ‘reconciliation’ as the basis for the new ‘rainbow nation’. Nelson Mandela’s great mission was to make every South African feel included in the new nation. In 1995 for instance, Mandela appeared at the Rugby World Cup final, wearing a Springbok jersey, as a gesture towards the Afrikaners. In order to reach out to the ‘Coloured’ community, just before local elections in Cape Town in 1996, President Nelson Mandela appeared at the Malay Choir Competition held at the Athlone Stadium, to deliver a message: ‘I am aware of concerns among the coloured community that the programmes of the government aimed at redressing the wrongs of the past are not always benefiting them as they should. All those who have been disadvantaged by Apartheid have a claim’. His efforts were unsuccessful however, as the majority of the ‘coloured’ voters supported the National Party.

Government participation or interest in people’s pastimes and traditions are strategies during election times. Bonding with the electorate by showing up at popular manifestations, such as the ‘Malay’ choir competitions by both the ANC and the National Party, and in recent years also by

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219 Interview with Vincent Kolbe, January 14th 2009, Athlone, Cape Town.
222 Denis-Constant Martin, Coon Carnival, New Year in Cape Town, Past and Present (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1999) 169.
the Democratic Alliance, suggests interest in the communities’ ideas and values in order to attract their votes. However, after the elections not all the campaign promises can be realised and the interest of the government in the ‘Klopse’ faded. For instance, the city’s financial contribution to the carnival has been meagre, according to the organisers of the event. “The city contributes like 1,5 to 2 million Rand”, says Melvin Matthews, chairman of the ‘Kaapse Klopse Karnival Association’. “But that hardly covers all the expenses. It is certainly much less than what the Cape Flats are paying. You cannot imagine the amount of money that goes into these troupes. These massive troupes cost over 300.000 Rand”, explains Matthews, “so it’s about 12 million that’s involved here from the Cape Flats. The Cape Flats are paying this money. The people themselves are paying the money”. 223

The cooperation between the new government and the ‘Kaapse Klopse’, as the ‘Coons’, ‘Cape Malay’ choirs and Christmas choirs are called together, has become one of more and more misunderstandings and even some distrust. Melvin Matthews, president of the ‘Kaapse Klopse Karnival Association’ revealed: “We have had terrible fights with the city, for quite a while now. The city just doesn’t understand the carnival, cause they have not done their research on the carnival properly”. 224 According to a choir member from the Bo-Kaap the situation isn’t that dramatic. “They are not fully against it, the city council I mean”, explains Mr. Abrahams. “But it’s these people like Disaster Management and the police and traffic department, you know, who are making things difficult. The people who are involved now, like from arts and culture department from the city, they are structuring the ‘Klopse’ as they want it, how things should be done now”, explains Mr. Abrahams. “You must have adequate public toilets and stuff. And it all costs money. We don’t have that kind of money. They want us to put up fences alongside the road. We never had to do that before. The people should be close to the choirs, not locked up behind fences”. 225

These changes facing the carnival were not demanded by the new city council because of a lack of support for the carnival or misinterpretation of this street festival. They are simply the result of an increasing awareness of the importance of safety issues. The security implementations required by the city, such as fencing alongside the roads, might diminish the pleasantly chaotic and spontaneous character of the New Year celebration, but they will also guarantee more protection for the participants and spectators. It is something that proves to be quite valuable especially now the carnival and the ‘nagtklopse’ have become such popular attractions for local Capetonians and foreign tourists at the same time.

223 Interview with Melvin Matthews, December 9th 2008, Cape Town.
224 Interview with Melvin Matthews, December 9th 2008, Cape Town.
225 Interview with Gairorien Abrahams, November 24th 2008, Bo-Kaap, Cape Town.
The choirs as an industry

Tourism was and is an important source of income for South Africa. Efforts to attract more tourists did not only focus on wildparks and beaches, but culture and history were also used to entice the international community to come and discover South Africa. The campaign ‘Explore South Africa – Culture’ was launched in April 1996 and would seek to uncover ‘the other side of South Africa’. In this hidden heritage, discovered and imagined in the tourist campaign, South Africans would be called upon to exhibit their ‘unique and wonderful expression of life’ and, through the camera, be affirmed as ‘the country’s rainbow people’. This unveiling of the past of ‘old traditions’ and ‘historic sites’ for the tourist campaign is envisaged as a grand celebration, in which ‘exuberance is the keynote’. The ‘coons’ and choirs as ‘old traditions’, specific to the ‘coloureds’ and ‘Cape Malays’, are a perfect example of such a heritage tourist attraction.

The song ‘Hoor ons lied en sing saam’, seems to fit perfectly within this ‘culture-tourism’ industry. The first part of the song states: ‘Volk van vreemde lande, Welkom ons met klanke, O geniet die kans, Van een soet melodie, Al ons land is jolend, Blomme veele kleure, So sjarmant en stralend, Soet die geur’ (People of strange lands, we welcome you with our sounds, oh enjoy this opportunity, of a sweet melody. Our country is jolly, flowers in many colours, so charming and glowing, sweet that smell’). This song was mainly composed to entertain tourists in Cape Town. Gamja Dante says he wrote this song for all the tourists who come to Cape Town enjoying the summer, both international tourists and South African tourists. Dante would sing this song, with his choir, at the Waterfront to welcome the tourists to his city.

The South African tourist spectacle of cultural stereotypes, which was partially constructed in the colonial setting, and which is now being re-imagined and repackageged, was not only directed at the international traveller. It is also directed at the ‘rainbow people’ and their constitution as a nation. The visit to the cultural locality is presented as a way to know oneself and to learn about the other and to become a nation in that way. Acts of visiting, looking, taking in and learning in tourist contemplation and celebration are to be encouraged as part of the process of nationmaking.

However, active participation of all South Africans in the New Year’s celebrations is not always encouraged. Integration of black South Africans from the neighbouring area’s on the Cape Flats into the ‘coon’ troupes or ‘malay’ choirs is virtually non existent. Occasionally a black or white face can be spotted in a ‘klopm’ team, but no real attempt has yet been made to include other groups living on the cape flats into the New Year’s celebrations. Furthermore, this non-

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communication between different groups living in one area has led to some problems between the new inhabitants of the Bo-Kaap and the ‘Malays’, having affected the planning of the ‘Nagtklopse’, the parade of the Malay choirs on New Year’s eve. Of late the ‘Nagtklopse’ were not allowed to march all the way up on Walestreet into the Bo-Kaap. According to the ‘disaster prevention team’ of the city, the choirs would block all ways in and out of the area if they were allowed to march up all the way on to Signal Hill. Disgruntled Bo-Kaap residents and choir members blame the new inhabitants of the Bo-Kaap, who are, according to these ‘Malay’ singers, not accustomed to the ‘Cape Malay’ traditions and therefore complain about these typical ‘Malay’ practices. The Bo-Kaap district is growing in popularity with more fortunate South Africans and also with the foreign privileged, who have been buying up property in this quaint quarter of Cape Town, very much to the displeasure of the ‘Cape Malay’ residents, who financially can’t keep up with the increasing house and rent prices. However, these safety precautions and regulations which have become more and more strict over the years are mainly due to an increasing awareness of the security problems and improved knowledge on how to deal with such matters and an ordinary neighbourhood row will not be the cause of modernising the entire carnival organisation.

Despite being able to include all South Africans as active participants in the New Year’s celebrations, community building is still an important aspect of the choirs today. The choirs and ‘coon’ troupes consist of families, grandparents, parents, children, neighbours, friends and therefore the choirs work as a form of social control in the neighbourhood. Of late, some choirs extended their work as social controllers in the area and also started to employ the choirs as part of a community development project. The Violets Sportsclub Minstrels based in Manenberg are an example of such an initiative.

“No gangs nie, no alcohol and no drugs nie”, is what Boebie Cassiem reminds his band and choir members of. “Seriously people, ons het a clean image and ons wil dit hou”. Boebie, as everyone calls him, is the proud founder of the Violets Minstrels, a combined ‘Coon’ troupe and ‘Cape Malay’ choir, based in Manenberg. Besides competing for ‘best dressed team’ or ‘best moppie of the year’, Boebie also likes to compete for the kids on the streets opposing the local gangs. The Violetes are based in the middle of one of the most dangerous parts of Manenberg, where gangs and drug abuse are a daily problem facing many families living on the Cape Flats. In recent years, more and more ‘Coon troupes’ and ‘Malay’ choirs used their ‘Klopse’ to keep the community kids off the streets, by presenting them with an alternative to gangs. “More than half of these kids in Manenberg end up in a gang”, says Boebie, “but we try to get these kids to join our ‘family’. We teach them to play instruments, learn how to sing, give them a reason to stay off the streets and on the right path”. In Manenberg, there are three similar clubs, which have taken up the same kind of community
development tasks, in which, all in all, around a thousand kids participate. “This is not even 1/3 of all the children in Manenberg, but it’s a start. Every kid that we can get off the street is great”, says Boebie228.

Also Abubakar Davids from Athlone uses his ‘Cape Malay’ choir to give the children in his community some distraction and a suitable and safe pastime. Funds to support his choir financially, he gets from America, Davids says. It costs a lot of money to buy all the instruments, but with the promises of a ‘community development project’, donors are more willing to give to a Cape Town choir, explains Davids229. The ‘Malay’ choirs always had this image of being ‘clean’ from drugs and crime. Du Plessis had advertised this image of the choirs as being ‘respectable’ and ‘upper-class’ entertainers very successfully. They certainly were not the ‘skollies’ from the ‘Coons’, who had a reputation of being funded by drug lords. Yet, also the Coon troupes today proudly change their names to ‘Youth development project minstrels’ from this or that area. Like Abubakar Davids, other choir and troupe captains have realized that foreign funds can be obtained when a ‘development’ project is attached to a ‘Klopse’. The ‘tradition’ of singing in a choir therefore sometimes seems to be promoted rather for the benefit of ‘youth development’, than for the ‘preservation’ of this culture.

“But, says Boebie, “we also teach our children to be proud of their heritage and descent. Preserving this ‘tradition’ for the generations to come is important for me as well”, adds Boebie, “next to offering these kids an alternative to the life on the streets. You know, our forefathers came here as slaves, they sang these songs, through slavery and apartheid, these songs were used to voice our contempt and frustration. That culture was never lost, so now we must teach this coming generation the same songs, you see”, says Boebie, “because we ought to be proud of these songs. Furthermore”, adds Boebie, “parading in the streets or singing on stage makes these kids feel special about themselves, which is something they all desperately need. And I hope they can take keep that positive attitude and hold on to it throughout the rest of the new year, so they don’t need to find refuge in alcohol or drugs”230.

Revisiting the choir tradition
In South Africa, music has been undergoing a period of more general and rapid innovation and development. The apartheid period saw a progressive racial segregation of musical output as the cosmopolitan communities that sustained non-racialism were destroyed and their populations

228 Interview with Boebie Cassiem, November 28th 2008, Manenberg, Cape Town.
229 Interview Abubakar Davids, October 15th 2008, Athlone, Cape Town.
230 Interview Boebie Cassiem, November 28th 2008, Manenberg, Cape Town.
relocated. At the same time, however, music was an instrument of opposition to apartheid, or it was used as a form of escapism from that situation. Post-apartheid South Africa’s artistic and cultural communities were presented with new opportunities and also new influences. Local historical and continental influences became one of these new important sources of inspiration. The ‘Coon’ carnival and ‘Cape Malay’ choir traditions were also rediscovered. It became more important for the participants to understand the history of this cultural tradition. For a long time, history in South Africa had been one of mainly white men and thus a need to rediscover and re-write their own history existed.

In the case of the Cape Malay Choirs, which had been an object of study for decades already, these new attempts to understand the history behind this tradition focussed largely on slavery times. The article ‘Satire, Slavery and the Ghoemaliedjies of the Cape Muslims’ by Christine Winberg from 1991, is such an example. Attempts to highlight a slave heritage at the Cape as a rallying point for political mobilisation has had a checkered past. By the late nineteenth century, the elite amongst Coloured Capetonians were already distancing themselves from their slave past in order to claim a more privileged position in the colony. By the late 1980s, raising the issue of slave heritage at the Cape was considered divisive within the labour movement because it separated the historical experience of coloureds and Africans (Worden, 1996). In post-1994 however, a claim on a slave past, helped to claim a position amongst the formerly ‘marginalised’ groups in the new South Africa, in order to benefit from the new relocations of power.

This increasing awareness of a slave past and the link with the present day ‘coon carnival’ and ‘Cape Malay’ choirs, was marked by all sorts of cultural activities. A musical called ‘Rosa’ was performed to packed audiences at one of Cape Town’s main theatres in April-May 1996. Rosa was the most beloved of the ‘Nederlandsliedjies’ of the Cape Malay choirs and it has even been called the unofficial anthem the ‘Malay’ choirs. The musical ‘Rosa’ presented the Malay ‘traditional’ dance, songs, stories and this entire culture of celebration that goes back to the slave days (which) has been manipulated and ultimately lost. Ten years later, in 2006, another musical production, called ‘Ghoema’, commemorated the rich musical heritage of the Capetonians. The multi-award winning production, composed by Taliep Petersen and David Kramer has enjoyed repeated seasons in Cape Town.

231 Anthony Butler, **Contemporary South Africa** (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 133.
Town and Johannesburg and has even been performed internationally. The Musical was a celebration of 350 years of music styles at the Cape. From Fado, to Dutch folksong and to the Malay Choir songs, the musical influences from every ‘ethnic’ group at the Cape throughout history were represented and remembered. Building on the enormous song collection that Cape Town possesses, David Kramer and Taliep Petersen re-discovered and revived the old ‘traditional’ songs of the coloured community, such as ‘Die Alabama’; ‘Die Visserman van die Bo-Kaap’; ‘Spierewitgepoeier’ and many more ‘classic’ songs, and in a special way honoured this musical heritage. Furthermore, the jokes made in the musical were quite similar to the ones made in the moppies. Sexual encounters between master and maid, or words with a double meaning, were frequently used to make a statement and to tell the story of the history of the ‘Coloured’ community at the Cape. For instance, the two hip-hop artists who functioned as storytellers, were called ‘Hot’ and ‘Tot’, as a reference to the Dutch name ‘Hottentot’ which was used in the past as a degrading way to name the original people at the Cape.

The emphasis in the musical was on the ‘goemaliedjies’ and the slave past. However, also a funny re-enactment of a present day ‘Malay’ choir competition was welcomed and recognized by the audience with much laughter and applause. The ‘Malay’ sound was very prominent in the musical. The band, always on stage in the background, consisted of what could be seen as a typical ‘Malay’ choir band, consisting of a banjo, a goema, etc. No brass band or other kinds of horns were used, which are more ‘typical’ for the present day ‘Coons. Even in the storyline itself, the ‘Malay’ musical heritage was strongly represented. So were for instance, the historical characters of Frans de Jong, the sail that had supposedly brought a number of Dutch folksongs to the Cape and of Rasdien Cornelis, who copied these Dutch songs and introduced the ‘Cape Malay’ musicians to them. Both were mentioned in the play and towards the end of the chronological representation of the musical heritage at the Cape, a ‘Cape Malay’ choir and not a ‘Coon’ parade was re-enacted. However, people like Du Plessis or Van Warmelo were not mentioned, and furthermore the importance of the hidden ‘social commentary’ in the moppies were an important aspect in the musical storyline.

The musical also toured through the Netherlands, the country from which many of the ‘Cape Malay’ choir folksongs had supposedly come. When the musical toured around the low countries in 2007, the production was advertised by propagating the old Dutch folksongs with a ‘South African sound’, to intrigue the Dutch audience. An interest in this ‘song tradition’ had been shared by both countries for years. In Holland the audience were pleasantly surprised to hear songs like ‘Piet Hein’ in a South African musical production but they were not able to understand or recognise most of the so-called ‘Nederlands liedjies’. As a contrast, the mainly ‘Coloured’ audience, during the performance

http://www.davidkramer.co.za/ghoema.htm
of the musical at South African theatres, were singing along throughout the show, seemingly knowing every song word by word. This ‘heritage’ proved to be very much alive and is still greatly appreciated, also amongst the younger generation of ‘Coloureds’ at the Cape.

The Cape Malay Choir Board today takes great pride in the rediscovered slave roots of their choir tradition. On the new website of the Choir Board, put online in 2009, the history of the ‘Cape Malay Choir Board traditional singing’ is described with much emphasis on the tradition of choral singing in the early years of the Cape colony. “Although physically and culturally isolated from their country of origin, they sang songs conceived in bondage”. The fact that quite a number of songs were written based on historical events, is also mentioned on the website and even several examples are given, such as the famous ‘Daar kom die Alabama’ and ‘Piet Hein’. Choir captains and song composers have shown an increasing curiosity for the history of this cultural ‘tradition’. For instance Adam Samodien, moppie composer for the Woodstock Royals, has done his own research on the origins of the comic songs. All this interest in their heritage is reflected in the song themes as well. Plenty of songs, before 1994, were sung about the New Year’s celebrations, but recently composed songs on this topic explicitly refer to the historic events which have shaped and made the choir tradition to what it is today. “So we say thank you to our people, for keeping it [the song tradition] alive”, states the English moppie from the Violets composer for the last competitions in January 2009.

**Moppies in Post-Apartheid South Africa**

As discussed in chapter 2, from 1994 onwards, there is a clear bloom of creativity and newly found pride and confidence. Furthermore, there was a rising number of Cape Malay Choirs participating in the New Year’s celebrations and Choir competitions after the end of the Apartheid years. The moppie ‘Almal doen die toyi toyi’, probably written around the first free democratic elections in 1994, is a wonderful example of this new increase of courage being more explicit in their lyrics. Another example of such a song with an obvious political satirical connotation is the song ‘Hou hier die Parlement’ written by Abdullah Maged, which addresses the proposal by the ANC to move the Parliament from Cape Town to Pretoria, where the Union Buildings are. These two songs were a fresh break with the careful inexplicit songs during the state of emergency years and an attempt to go back to the ‘original’ purpose of the moppies, the mocking of society.

With a new South Africa, old problems disappeared but new ones presented themselves. A look at the moppies shows which socio-political issues were considered to be important in the post-

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236 http://www.capemalaychoirboard.co.za/history.html
apartheid years. State oppression had made room for other kinds of worries and social issues such as poverty, but also matters of sexual values were discussed or problems related to drug abuse. Also, other ‘contemporary’ matters seemed to occupy people’s thoughts and appeared as themes in moppies. For instance, in the first few years of the new millennium, the Coloured and Cape Malay community were confronted by the fast growing problem of tik (a crystal meth drug) abuse. “Tik is a bigger problem here on the Cape Flats than any other place in South Africa. Proportionally we also have the most drug users”, says Samodien. “Children between the ages of 13 and 18 are the biggest drug users, and eventually they become criminals. This is a big problem for our community and it has torn apart many families. That is why I wanted to use our moppie to address this problem”, explains Adam Samodien.

Adam Samodien composed the Moppie ‘Tik’, for his choir, the Woodstock Royals. “The song was very well received by the audience. They loved the performance our moppie singer made on stage, especially the body movements he made, faking the effects tik has on your body”, Samodien remembers. “But not everybody was impressed, especially not the judges. They thought it was too gruesome and an inappropriate subject to sing about. At that time we were upset that we didn’t do better in the competition”, says Samodien, “but people still sing my song today and it has been copied a few times by other choirs, so I now look at it as a success”.

The problem with ‘Tik’ is a sensitive topic, not many families easily open up about having to deal with drug addiction, yet the drug related problems became more and more a public affair. To write a comic song about such a serious issue, seems inappropriate, but Adam Samodien wanted to confront his audience with the seriousness of the problem within their community and he also used his song to warn people about the drug and advised them to stay away from the drugs. “Dit is ons boodskap, ons boodskap aan ons jeugdes ja, Moenie tik nie” (This is our message, our message to our youth yes, don’t use tik). Besides having an entertaining value, the song also had a purpose to activate. In no single other song written by Adam Samodien, which deals with different but equally important social issues, does he express his own views on the situation as clearly as in this song.
As mentioned before, successful songs were frequently copied, sometimes with the exact same melody and practically the same lyrics. An example of this is the song ‘Ons Hoor, almal doen die toyitoi’. The ‘toyitoi’ song had been sung during the election times of 1994, reflecting on the riot years which preceded the elections. However, this 1994 version is a shortened copy of a comic song with almost the exact same wording written in 1991, commenting on the introduction of the Value Added Taxes (VAT). The backgrounds are as follows. South Africa has a progressive tax system, which means that a larger percentage of people’s income is taken as their incomes become larger. However, because the wealth in South Africa was (and still is) so unevenly distributed, the General Sales Tax (GST), mentioned in the song, was introduced during the second half of the 1970s in an attempt to spread the tax burden across a broader section of the population. The idea that everyone regardless of their income, purchases goods and services and were therefore subject to the GST, was not welcomed with enthusiasm by all, especially not by the less well off. In 1991, the GST was replaced by the VAT, which, people feared, would result in even higher costs for the poorer households.237 Subsequently, a song was produced to comment on this and in a way protest against it as well, ‘Come on people, lets toyi toyi together’, states the song, let’s all protest against the introduction of VAT.

Before, we did not worry because everything was tax free
Then came the GST and now it’s the VAT
VAT on coffee, VAT on tea
There’s VAT on meat and rice
But there’s no VAT on reefers, no
The people stayed away from work for two days
COSATU said they will get their full salaries
One is walking in front with the flag in his hand
The others are behind
In the street on to the Parade they’re all doing the toyi toyi
Come on people let’s toyi toyi all together
(‘Ons Hoor’ – Adam Samodien & Rashaad Maliek : 2009)

The ‘toyitoi’ theme reoccurs in another of Adam Samodien’s moppies in 2007, ‘Die toyitoi vir 12%’. The song speaks of the longest public service strike in South African history. The dispute began on June 1st, when workers from 17 unions took all-out strike action in support of a demand for a wage increase of 12 percent across the board. The final settlement was for a 7.5 percent raise and increases in housing and health benefits. 28 days later, the unions accepted the governments offer and agreed upon a 7,5% general salary increase.238 Even though the strike had already ended in June 2007, the moppie was composed in November 2007 and only performed on stage in

238 Pretoria News, 29 June 2007
January/February of 2008. The song not only reflects on what had happened earlier that year, but is used to express the composer’s own opinion on the situation. Clearly the composer is not satisfied with the 7.5%, ‘12% is wat on wil he’ (12% is what we want), states the song.

Statements about common concerns in popular culture, such as in moppies, reveal the general perceptions and uncertainties within that community. The fast-growing drug use was one of such social issues that needed to be mentioned. Also the issue of the rising number of ‘squatter camps’ on the Cape flats, was a matter which was discussed in a song. With the end of apartheid an end to all segregation laws came as well. A fast rising number of then free citizens moved from the economically marginalised rural lands to the big cities such as Cape Town. Many new informal settlements were built on the Cape Flats. The immigration to Cape Town happened in such big numbers and within such a short period of time, that many of these new Capetonians had to live in hastily constructed shacks, made of tinplates and wood. This phenomenon did not go unnoticed to the inhabitants of the neighbouring ‘coloured areas’. A comic song was composed which addressed this topic.

\begin{verbatim}
Nou bou hy vir hom een hokie in die squatter kamp
Met zaagplaate en ou pale
Slaan hy nou sy hokkie anmekaar
Oelalalalaaa
Hy kry so swaar want die hokies staan so anmekaar
Die hokkie is skeef en nou is sy hokkie seef
('Die Squatter Camp' - written by the Rising Stars, 2004)
\end{verbatim}

The moppie describes the building of the squatter camps, the problems of living in such housing conditions and all the problems that the inhabitants of such townships face. Still, the song says, the new neighbours are ‘gastvrij’ (hospitable). Furthermore, the singer invites all to join him on a visit to the squatter camp, ‘Wie gaat almal saam, Naar die squatter kamp’. This song could therefore be seen as an attempt to stimulate more interaction with the different groups living at the Cape, something which had not been allowed during Apartheid.

This new freedom to interact with whoever you want and to go wherever you please, was a theme which was not explicitly mentioned in the songs, but was however quite evident in the setting of the song themes. An example is the moppie about the new minivan taxis, which had been forbidden by the Apartheid regime, but thanks to the newly gained freedoms these transport entrepreneurs rapidly took over the streets of Cape Town and filled the need for more public transport, connecting the many different neighbourhoods on the Cape Flats. This new phenomenon evoked curiosity but also some hilarity. The tiny buses filled to the maximum, like sardine cans, were an amusing sight at first and inspired comic composers to illustrate this new trend into a song, for
instance the moppie ‘Die ontmoeting in die taxi’ written by Adam Samodien. *Nou ry is gou ry, freeway oor die highway. Hoor hoe skree die taxi boy. Mowbray, bonteheuwel, hanover park, mitchellsplain.* This song speaks of this new form of transportation, the freedom of movement, and also in a way of the freedom to interact and meet ‘others’. The taxi was a meeting place where the different ‘race’ groups interacted and shared one common space, something which had been unthinkable during Apartheid. Not only did people like Samodien have to get used to the minivan taxis, they also had to get used to ‘sharing’ their time and space with all these ‘different’ groups living at the cape. These interactions and the misunderstandings which followed were the inspiration for this comic song. As we have seen, a perfect way to ease up misunderstandings among cultures is to joke about the situation. A moppie therefore seems the perfect tool to address these incidents.

The jocular aspect of the Cape Malay folksongs is particularly important in the song ‘Die Moffie’. The word ‘moffie’ refers to a transvestite or a gay man. When speaking of a moffie in the context of choirs and coon troupes, it usually refers to transvestites. The transvestite is an important aspect of the coons and Cape Malay culture. Most coon troupes have a male member dressed up as a woman, dancing in front of the troupe during carnival and also the Cape Malay choirs sometimes have a transvestite on stage during the performance of the moppie. According to Samodien, a Moppie singer doesn’t really sing to the people but rather speaks to the people when he is performing onstage. He is telling a story and it is important for a storyteller to deliver the message in such a way that the audience understands it and can laugh at the jokes made. This involves witty lyrics, pronunciation, intonation, facial expressions and also performance. The Cape Malay Choirs only have male members. When a moppie tells a story about a woman and they want to illustrate their story in an onstage performance, they need one of their team members to dress up like a transvestite to play the role of the woman. However, within the more strict, Muslim, Cape Malay Choirs, the idea of transvestites was just as immoral as homosexuality. An anecdote by a friend and choir colleague of Adam Samodien’s, Noor Ebrahim, illustrates this: “Our choir leader said that one of us had to dress up as a woman for the moppie. Yusuf Abrahams volunteered. On the night of the competition, we first performed as a combined chorus. After this came the moppie and Yusuf had to appear next to the lead singer. The song included words like, ‘Toe vat ek om haar nekkie en soen haar in haar bekkie’ (so I placed my arms around her neck and kissed her on her lips). At this stage the lead singer had to take ‘her’ in his arms and kiss ‘her’ on the mouth. The audience roared with laughter and the people shouted, “Boeta Sulaiman, that’s you son dressed as a woman!” They teased Boeta Sulaiman so much that he became upset. He had not, in the first place, approved of the idea of...
his son dressing like a woman. We were very happy, however, as that night our team won second prize!\textsuperscript{239}

Transvestites during carnival and the Malay choir competitions were generally, socially accepted. Homosexuality or transvestism on a permanent basis, however, were seen as a sin in the, mostly Muslim, ‘coloured’ and ‘Cape Malay’ community. Yet, in 2006 South Africa became the first African country to allow same sex marriages. It was only natural that the ‘Coon’ troupes and ‘Cape Malay’ choirs would address this in their moppies that year. Adam Samodien’s song ‘Die Moffie’ is one of the many ‘moffie’ songs from that year and following years. This song however, very explicitly talks about the new law. It specifically refers to this socially and politically important event and gives us an insight into the responses and feelings about the new law within the Cape Malay community in 2006. “Daar’s ‘n nuwe wet in ons land, en almal weet daarvan, ‘n vrou kan trou met ‘n vrou, En ‘n man kan trou met ‘n man. Kyk hoe lekker kry die moffie nou, Sainie’t gevra om met haar te trou. Want dit is die fashion nou, ‘n man met ‘n man, en ‘n vrou met ‘n vrou.” (There is a new law in our country, and everyone knows about it, a woman can marry a woman and a man can marry a man. Look how good the Moffie gets it, Sainie asks her to marry him. Because this is fashionable now, A man with a man, a woman with a woman). Looking at the lyrics, it appears that the writer of the song felt that it was just a ‘fashionable’ thing to do, a phase maybe that could pass. It was a marriage that in Adam Samodien’s eyes shouldn’t be taken too seriously. At least the idea of same sex marriage was taken seriously enough to sing about during the annual competitions. This song in particular, and most of Adam’s other songs as well, show that these ‘Cape Malay’ folksongs weren’t just used as entertainment, as popular variety, but were part of the tension managing mechanism regulating the values and needs of their society.

Conclusion

The 1994 elections brought freedom to South Africa, freedom to vote, freedom of movement and freedom of speech. The freedom of speech spurred a newly found creativity and confidence for the moppie composers. The moppies again were used to make statements and comments on society. The newly composed moppies reveal the post-1994 concerns about social issues, which were mainly the fast growing drug use, poverty and degrading values in society, but also politicians and their policies were not safe anymore from the sharp wit of the composers.

Whereas the moppies were used to address these issues and create awareness about these matters, the choirs were also used as instruments to tackle such social problems, as crime and drug

\textsuperscript{239} Noor Ebrahim, \textit{Noor’s Story, My Life in District Six} (Cape Town: District Six Museum, 1999) 38, 40.
use. Many choirs have extended their attention from teaching people how to sing, to a community development project, in which they try to involve whole families and especially the children in a community, giving them a pastime and responsibilities in order to keep them off the streets and out of the hands of gangs. At the same time, through the songs, the new generation learns more about this particular ‘tradition’ and its origins, and is offered an extensive learning about their own social past.
**‘Dis ’n Kaapse Kultuur’**

**Conclusion**

*Dis’n kaapse kultuur en dis hoe ons mense vuur*

*Hou plesier tot in die oggend uur*

*Dis gebring oor die see en gemeng met die ritme hier*

*So was die goema gevier*

*(Die Angeliere : 2007)*

“This is a Cape culture and this is how we people get fired up. Have fun until the morning. This (culture) has come from overseas and mixed with the rhythm here. That’s how the Ghoema is celebrated”. This song by the Cape Malay Choir ‘Die Angeliere’ gives a brief description of the New Year’s celebration, states where it comes from and what it means for the people who partake in it. They first point out that this is a ‘Kaapse kultuur’, originated at the Cape in South Africa, with some influences from overseas, from the Netherlands and Indonesia, but a ‘Cape culture’ nonetheless, which is as old as the ‘mother city’ (Cape Town) itself. It has provided them with a special outlet, for frustrations, discontent, but also an outlet for joy and laughter. Especially laughter is important in the moppie tradition. The songs have commented on society and have made a mockery out of those people or events that have caused trouble for the community. Likewise, the songs functioned as a distraction for worries. Laughter has served as a defence mechanism for sorrow, a simple but effective way to deal with problems.

However, the founding of the Cape Malay Choir Board in 1939 and the increasing interference of state officials in the organisation of the choirs and the choir competitions did effect the songwriting process. Looking at the songs that were produced during the Apartheid era, it seems that the tradition of singing satirical witty songs to comment on socio-political issues and events was less obvious than during earlier periods and eventually in the free South Africa of today. Especially the competition element, which grew in importance after the founding of the Cape Malay Choir Board, influenced the creative process of songwriting. Songs with less explicit lyrics on socio/political issues were more successful in the competitions. Especially in the state of emergency years, composers deliberately avoided political topics.

Where in other parts of South Africa music was used to voice protest and social conflict because it was a relatively safe form of communication, this for the ‘Cape Malays’ was more difficult. First of all this was so because of the presence of state officials at the competitions who listened and judged the songs. Furthermore, the fact that the songs were not written down and that they were
sung in the ‘Cape Afrikaans’ dialect was not enough insurance for many choirs that they would not get into trouble for singing ‘dubies ditties’. Using the songs to express frustrations about the treatment of the ‘Malays’ in Cape Town by the state was therefore less easy as it had been during times of slavery, when the distance between Dutch, spoken by the Masters and the ‘kitchen Dutch’ of the slaves was further apart than it is in present-day Afrikaans and ‘Cape Afrikaans’. Examples of choirs getting into trouble for singing about ‘sensitive’ topics, for instance the song about Namibia by Mr. Brown which resulted in a disqualification of that choir but could have ended even worse, are known and these incidents must have warned other choirs thinking of singing about more ‘difficult’ matters, to be wary when choosing their words.

Choirs became more careful when singing about political situations. They were for instance less explicit in their lyrics, but they did not avoid ‘difficult’ topics altogether. Instead they used old ‘tools’ which date back to the ghoema songs of the slaves, to say what they wanted without being too explicit. For instance, they used synonyms, like animal names, to refer to certain people or sarcasm to deliver the message they wanted, as was done for example in the song ‘Hip Hip Hoera Suid Afrika’. This does not mean however, that the songs which were more openly commenting on important social issues or mocking those in power were less popular with the community itself. For example, the song ‘se ding is vim’, written in 1952 in response to the Jan van Riebeeck Festival, was a huge success. However, these open expressions of discontent were rare in the Apartheid years, in comparison to post-apartheid times. However, choir members have instigated that even though ‘frustrations’ weren’t uttered openly through the songs, the choir competition and the carnival both functioned as cathartic events. They were still occasions where the community could ‘have fun’ and ‘forget’ about daily sorrows. Having fun in a way is equal to living, to surviving, especially in the context of apartheid in which all dignity had been taken away from them.

Going through the moppie repertoire, it becomes apparent that many songs were written with this theme of ‘escapism’ in mind. The carnival itself was a popular and frequently reoccurring theme for moppies for example. So were other themes which in first instance seemed a-political, such as the songs about the ‘trains to the Cape Flats’. Yet, by not explicitly referring to political events, such as the forced removals, these songs made a political statement nonetheless. It was a statement of powerlessness, but with a reference to the need to create a meaningful word, amidst all the changes and problems. Therefore, such songs highlighted the positive aspects, in this case of ‘living on the Cape Flats’, in order to cope with the situation. The moppies functioned both as a way to escape from reality and at the same time to express and deal with this reality. Difficult topics such as the 1948 elections, the forced removals, and petty apartheid were discussed, in either explicit or hidden messages. The way the moppie composers dealt with humiliating or traumatizing socio-
political events was to joke about it. Joking is a perfect tool to put things into perspective and at the same time an opportunity to escape from the harsh reality. As Samodien has put it so eloquently: “don’t make a sad situation even sadder, try to laugh about it, that’s the purpose of a moppie”.

The history of the song tradition, and especially the slave roots of the choirs only became more popular with the community after the Apartheid years and the loosening of the influence of the state on the Cape Malay Choir Board, who had systematically ignored this slave past of the choirs. Most of the choir captains I spoke during my six months in Cape Town, were aware of the connection between slavery and the choirs. They were aware of how this choir culture had started out from slave choirs to entertain the masters and of the historical baggage attached to those songs that had persisted from those times onwards. These songs like ‘Ek is een visserman van die Kaap’ or ‘Hoe gaat die paadjie naar die Kramat toe’. The ‘Malay’ choirs of today still recognise and understand the double meanings and mocking references hidden in between the lines in those old slave songs. The fact that many choirs today still know and sing these old slave songs shows their interest and appreciation for this history. Above all, many of those subtle jokes made in these older songs, on changing morals and values, could still be applied to society in South Africa today. These songs therefore haven’t lost their charisma and popularity yet.

Towards the end of the 20th century this need to comment on society through songs lives up again, and with the end of Apartheid the choirs regain their confidence to do so. I have found many examples of witty, satirical songs that comment on events as well as discussions about such issues capturing South Africans today. ‘Almal doen die Toyi toyi’, ‘Hou hier die Parlement’ and ‘Tik’ are all examples of this attempt to go back to the ‘original’ purpose of the moppies, the mocking of society and the establishment. Furthermore, these new songs have also given us a unique insight into the thoughts and feelings of the ‘Cape Malay’ community on the new South Africa. Contemporary South African problems, such as poverty, drugs, unemployment, etc, are present in the moppie repertoire of the last decade. This shows that folksongs are indeed a way of communicating social and political principles through music and moreover, that interpreting these songs can only be done if one knows the socio-political background that has shaped the writer of this song and his community.

The perception of the government on the choirs has also evolved into a more balanced view on the choirs’ history and their influences on Cape Town’s culture in the past and today. The Apartheid state saw the choirs as an ideal example of a ‘distinguished’ and ‘dignified’ form of ‘coloured’ culture which could be promoted to other ‘coloureds’ at the Cape. The current officials are more interested in the ‘slave past’ of the choirs and the preservation of this slave heritage, which fits into the national attempts to pay more attention to the history of the formerly marginalised groups. Furthermore, the idea that this ‘tradition’ was an example of ‘Creole culture’ formed at the Cape,
became popular with the new government too, albeit a ‘Creole culture’ limited to the cape and the ‘coloured’ community only. The current government, like the previous one, still sees the choirs as ‘a tradition’ which could be used to ‘confirm’ and propagandise the different cultural identity of the Cape Coloureds in comparison to other South African ‘racial groups’.

So, there seems to be a continuity in insisting on a special and distinguishable ‘Cape Malay’ community. Especially in the tourism industry today, the ‘Cape Malay’ identity is advocated as the unique flavour that spices up Cape Town and sets it apart from other cities in South Africa. The ‘Malay cuisine’, the Bo-Kaap, these are all attractions which are used to attract tourists to Cape Town. Furthermore, with the worldwide attention for Islam, the Muslim identity has become more important for the ‘coloured’/‘Cape Malay’ community themselves, but with an emphasis on the ‘international’ Muslim identity and not limited to only those ‘Cape Malays’ in Cape Town.

The main difference between this promotion of a clearly recognisable ‘Malay’ culture by the apartheid state and the one advocated now in present-day South Africa, is that the first mainly focussed on the link between the ‘European’ and ‘Malay’ culture in order to promote a process of ‘assimilating’ this ethnic minority to a ‘European’ standard way of living. Today the emphasis lies not on ‘assimilation’ into white or black culture, but on the preservation of this culture which is so unique to Cape Town. The idea of a rainbow nation does not advocate ‘assimilation’ of the many different cultures into one encompassing South African culture, but supports the expression of all these different cultures in order to ‘celebrate’ this diversity.

Yet, the choirs have, so far, not taken a prominent position in the ‘rainbow nation’ nor in the ‘tourism’ industry, in comparison to the ‘coon carnival’ which draws great numbers to Cape Town every January. Where the choirs used to be the Apartheid state’s ‘favourite’, the ‘coon’ carnival now seems to have taken over that position. The choirs are not disliked, but there seems to be some more indifference towards or unawareness of this aspect of the ‘Klopse’ tradition. This is probably because the choir competitions take place inside and are therefore first of all less visible to the public and secondly they cause less trouble and time to be organised for the city. However, the disaster management team of Cape Town, in December 2008, still questioned whether there was really a ‘need’ for the ‘Nagtklopse’, the night parade of the ‘Malay’ choirs on New Year’s Eve. Would one parade not be enough the city wanted to know, because two parades organised so closely together would be rather inconvenient, they thought. This ‘ignorance’ on the part of the city as to what the complete ‘Kaapse Klopse’ entails is counteracted by the founding of one central coordinating organisation, the ‘Kaapse Klopse Karnival Association’, which looks after the interests of the three different Cape Malay choir boards and the different ‘coon’ carnival boards, in order to prevent such misunderstandings becoming problems in the future.
Today, Capetonians are becoming more aware of the function of the choirs for the ‘Cape Malay’ community and also of what role they could fulfil for the city. Besides preserving a truly South African ‘living heritage’ and adding a lively cultural event to the Cape Town calendar, these songs also provide, not only academics but all who are interested, with a special insight into the community’s beliefs, needs and desires.
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**Photo on Cover:**

Practice of Cape Malay Choir of the ‘Violets Sportsclub Minstrels’, Manenberg, Cape Town, November 14th 2008. (Own photo).