"Rocking the boat"? The "Voëlvry" music movement in South Africa: Anatomy of Afrikaans anti-apartheid social protest in the eighties

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The British social and cultural historian, Arthur Marwick, concluded his magisterial book on the cultural revolution of the sixties in the West with a very brief final sentence on the transformation: "there has been nothing quite like it; nothing will be quite the same again".[1] This deceptively simple and deliberately vague assertion masks an array of nuanced historical judgments in which Marwick teased out the complexities and contradictions of the sixties.

In trying to characterise the decade, American author, Hunter Thompson, has succinctly formulated the analytical problem inherent in the dynamics of the period:

> History is hard to know --- but even without being sure of 'history' it seems entirely reasonable to think that every now and then the energy of a whole generation comes to a head in a long fine flash, for reasons that nobody really understands at the time – and which never explain, in retrospect, what actually happened ---. You could strike sparks anywhere.[2]

While there seems to be a firm understanding that the sixties represent the confluence of meaningful social forces, there are some explanatory doubts as to how and why it happened. The conundrum invites historical analysis; the outlines of the phenomenon may appear clear, but the reason for that are not immediately apparent nor is its historical significance self-evident.[3]

In a similar vein Afrikaans anti-apartheid social protest music during the eighties was reminiscent, albeit in a much more muted form, of the cultural and social challenges to the *status quo* in the West two decades earlier. Perceptive observers picked up on this. Thus the American journalist, Tom Masland who was based in South Africa, reported in the *Chicago Tribune* in mid-1989 on the similarities in dress, lyrics and general political outlook between the followers of Afrikaans counterculture and what he considered to be their earlier American counterparts.[4] The analogy, suggestive as it is, should not however be overdrawn. The South African variant had its own local

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[1] A Marwick, **The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States of America**, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998, p 806.
[2] H S Thompson, **Fear and loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream**, Random House, New York, 1971, p.67-68.
[3] For conflicting views in the American context see for example D Cavallo, **A fiction of the past: the sixties in American history**, Palgrave, New York, 1999 and R Kimball, **The long march: how the cultural revolution of the 1960's changed America**, Encounter Books, San Francisco, 2000.
[4] Cited in "Kerkorrel en die nuwe ANC", **Die Burger**, 23 June 1989. The report appeared in the **Chicago Tribune** of 8 June 1989 under the heading of "Afrikaans rock tweaks noses of conservative elders".

character and emphases which impacted in a particular manner and generated its own complicated processes and codes of understanding. These need to be untangled and assessed primarily in the context they were moulded.

This article has several related aims. It seeks to understand the conditions under which anti-apartheid Afrikaans protest music emerged in the 80's and why it took about twenty years after oppositional youth movements in the West for roughly comparable developments amongst Afrikaner youth to gain some traction. Central to the protest was an attempt to question, and even reformulate through the medium of music, what it meant to be an Afrikaner during the latter phases of apartheid. The analysis disaggregates the dynamics and nuances of this process. Moreover, the actual impact of the phenomenon at the time is evaluated through a critical assessment of the claims made by band members and journalists. Finally the way in which the memory of this movement continued to have an influence amongst young Afrikaner people well into the post-apartheid era is explored.

Emergence and social background

One of the salient features of the tumultuous eighties in South Africa was the cycle of on-going black protest orchestrated by the United Democratic Front and other extra-parliamentary anti-apartheid organizations and the declaration of successive states of emergencies by the predominantly Afrikaner National Party government. Overtly anti-apartheid Afrikaner voices were relatively mute during this period. However, initiatives such as the meeting between mainly Afrikaner intelligentsia and some of the leaders of the banned African National Congress in Dakar in Senegal in 1987 as well as the appearance of an uncompromisingly critical Afrikaans newspaper, the "*Vrye Weekblad"*, stand out as distinct markers. To this must be added some tentative soul searching in some Afrikaner churches about the morality of apartheid and a sprinkling of Afrikaans literary works. [5]

Afrikaans anti-apartheid musicians defined themselves as quite distinct from these developments. As one of the prominent band members explained cryptically: "Our protest was not as subtle as those of the novelists; ours was a in your face, f—k you movement."[6] In rock and roll style, with an overlay of punk music, hard hitting lyrics satirized the state, Afrikaans political leaders, the South African Defence Force, the apartheid system and white middle class values. [7] Known as the "Voëlvry" musicians with a band called the "Gereformeerde Blues Band" as the main act, they toured the country in 1989. "Voëlvry" could be interpreted as free as a bird or outlawed – the double meaning was probably intended – and "Gereformeerde Blues Band" was a skit on the Dutch Reformed Churches. These young (ish) musicians with their explicit

[5] H Kitshoff, "Andersdenkende verset: Afrikaanse kulturele verset teen apartheid en Afrikaner kontak met die African National Congress in die tagtigerjare," MA thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 2002, *passim;* C Faure, "Vrye Weekblad" (1988 – 1993): profiel van 'n alternatiewe Afrikaanse koerant", **Communicatio**, 19, 2, 1993, p 22-31: M du Preez, **Pale Native:memories of a renegade reporter,** Zebra Press, Cape Town, 2003,pp 160-167, 171- 211; G Baines, " 'South Africa's Vietnam'? Literary history and cultural memory of the border war', **South African Historical Journal**, 49, 2003, pp 172-192.

[6] M-Net TV Documentary, 12 August 2003. (Koos Kombuis)

[7] The lyrics of some of the key songs appear in Appendix A.

anti-apartheid message unleashed an enthusiasm that was succinctly described as "Boer Beatlemania." [8]

It was seen as a unique phenomenon by the media; for the first time full blown rock and roll with biting social commentary was seen to challenge the generally perceived staid and shackled Afrikaans cultural and political world. The Afrikaans establishment media, though it may have had reservations with the way in which the musicians expressed themselves, nevertheless gave them ample coverage. One of the possible reason for the media's investment in "Voëlvry" was that it was involved in its own repositioning at the time. During the late 80's the mainline Afrikaans press which used to enjoy cordial relations with the government, became increasingly uneasy with the way in which an aging president PW Botha seemed to blunder from crisis to crisis. Apart from the newsworthiness of "Voelvry", giving them exposure was also a way of asserting a modicum of independence from the government.[9]

"Voelvry" could claim diverse places of birth, but central in its making was the small "Black Sun" theatre in Yeoville in Johannesburg where various irreverent Afrikaans cabaret artists under a variety of stage names plied their trade. As the acts attracted a growing and increasingly enthusiastic audience, some of them moved to bigger venues. With a small sponsorship of the "*Vrye Weekblad*" and an enterprising record company, Shifty Records, it was decided to take a collection of the shows on a nationwide tour in 1989.[10]

The driving force behind "Voëlvry" was a number of young men in their twenties or early thirties: Ralph Rabie, known as Johannes Kerkorrel – a stage name taken from a trademark Dutch organ and the adoption of such a name carried strong mocking tones of the somber music of the Dutch Reformed Church - played a major role in dealing with the media. James Phillips who had somewhat of a bilingual background and assumed the stage name, Bernoldus Niemand (Mr Nobody as he liked to style himself) was a talented musician with a degree in music from the University of the Witwatersrand. André du Toit, known successively as André Letoit and Koos Kombuis had a fine turn of phrase and a dry wit. They were managed by "Dagga" (Marijuana) Dirk Uys who shared the general quirkiness of the musicians, but was blessed with certain entrepreneurial and organisational skills. Other musicians were Willem Moller (known as Mr Volume), Gary Herselman with the *pseudonym* of Piet Pers and Jannie (Hanepoot) van Tonder. The lone female was Tonia Selley who went under the name of Karla Krimpelien.[11]

Although these musicians received considerable media attention as a remarkable anti-apartheid strand, seen in a broader African context they slotted into a time-honoured tradition. Oppositional music and decolonization have a long and complex interwoven

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[8] "Nuwe lied vir jong Suid-Afrika",**Die Suid-Afrikaan**, June 1989.

[9] For the Afrikaans media see G Claassen, "Breaking the mold of political subservience: 'Vrye Weekblad' and the Afrikaans alternative press' in L Switzer and M Adhikari (eds.) **South Africa's resistance press: alternative voices in the last generation under apartheid**, Ohio University Press, Athens, 2000, pp 403-457; J-A Stemmet and L Barnard, "The relationship between PW Botha and the pro-establishment press during the 1980's", **Historia**, 49,1,May 2004, pp 154-165.

[10] "Voëlvry ", **Die Burger**, 29 April 2002; Du Preez, **Pale Native**, p207; "Rustelose gees", **Insig**, 28 Februarie 2003, p34.

[11] "Voëlvry", **Die Burger**, 29 April 2002; M-Net TV Documentary, 12 August 2003; "Rustelose gees", **Insig**, 28 February 2003.

history in Africa.[12] In South Africa black protest music has been a well established feature of the cultural landscape. In the 1930's and 1940's jazz and blues music as well as distinctive township music such as *marabi* carried with them their own implicit and at times explicit political messages. During the repressive 1960's with the banning of the African National Congress and strenuous attempts of the government to implement a divide and rule policy based on ethnic divisions, earlier popular music had to contend with officially sanctioned traditional, neo-traditional and religious music. Many jazz and other musicians shunned by the South African Broadcasting Corporation which gave expression to government policy of promoting narrow ethnic music and left in the lurch by recording companies which followed suit, emigrated disillusioned with political developments in South Africa. However, during the 1980's, in tandem with the resurgence of opposition to apartheid, a vibrant and virile popular culture re-appeared. Increasingly, township bands and choirs shared the stage with politicians at huge United Democratic Front and trade union meetings.[13]

"Voëlvry" musicians were aware of these developments and some also moved in the same social circles as certain black artists. One of the members used to play in a multi-racial band, "Winston's Jive Mix." This does not, however, imply that their music incorporated elements of township music or that their lyrics, other than being anti-apartheid, reflected the specific concerns of black people. Their music spoke to a young(ish) white audience and the nature of the issues differed accordingly.[14] It is perhaps significant though that the term "blues" band was adopted. Blues music is of course originally an African-American genre and the use of this term, like their stagenames, may have been a deliberate attempt to jar existing Afrikaner sensibilities.

Despite their on-stage appearance as down-at-heel dissolute punk rock artists, the musicians came from respectable middle class homes. A good sprinkling had had tertiary education. What is striking, is that at least three members were the sons of ministers of religion and some of the others had a strict religious upbringing.[15] Given the nature of the clerical profession, the parents were probably quite articulate and exposure to such a home environment might go some way in understanding the verbal acuity of the musicians and their facility for assembling novel lyrics. Moreover, their intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the Afrikaner social world in which "dominees" played a prominent part, might have honed their senses for selecting suitable cultural elements for subversion. On another level, while bearing in mind that psychoanalytical interpretations of the wellsprings of behaviour can be

[12] For example T Turino, **Nationalists, cosmopolitans and popular music in Zimbabwe**, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 2000; C Waterman, **Juju: A social history and ethnography of an African poular music**, Chicago University Press, Chigaco, 1990.
[13] On the history of South African black music see for example D Coplan, **In township tonight! South Africa's black city music and theatre**, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1985; L Meintjes, **Sound of Africa! Making music Zulu in a South African studio**, Duke University Press, Durham, 2003; I Byerly, "Mirror, mediator, and prophet: The music *indaba* of late-apartheid South Africa", **Ethnomusicology**, 42, 1, pp 1-44; C Ballentine, "A brief history of South African popular music", **Popular Music**, 8, 3, pp 305-310.
[14] M-Net TV Documentary, 12 August 2003; E-mail interview with Koos Kombuis, 5 July 2004.
[15] M-Net TV Documentary, 12 August 2003.

overdetermined, the dynamics of defiance against parental authority may indeed have featured in the make-up of some "Voëlvry" musicians.[16]

The texture of this social composition shows some similarities with what had happened over two decades before in the much vaunted cultural revolution of the sixties in the West. Irwin and Debi Unger have pointed out that in the United States, counterculture

> "was the child of prosperity. Hippies renounced the bourgeois rat race of nine-to-five jobs, manicured suburban lawns, and prudent lives. Some professed to despise private property and possessions generally, but most of them came from that very milieu. Almost all of them were suburban dropouts who lived off the surplus and cast-offs of an affluent society. Some were straight remittance men and women who survived on checks sent by Dad or Mom."[17]

In the case of Afrikaans anti-establishment elements, the degree of financial dependency might have varied, but in general their outlook accorded with that of their counterparts of an earlier epoch in the West.

A delayed 'sixties'

The time lag between developments in the West in the sixties and their late arrival for Afrikaner youth in the eighties calls for an understanding of the social and cultural dynamics at work at different historical junctures. The 1960's in Afrikaner circles were the high point of apartheid and the system was touted as the solution to potential racial conflict.[18] The ideology, illusionary as it was, nevertheless held out as far as Afrikaners were concerned, the promise of a secure future. Consequently there was little need to question the system or the underlying issues and values. In conjunction with this, a conformist youth culture flourished.

Although a so-called "ducktail" subculture – recognizable by distinctive hairstyles and clothing and marked by what was considered anti-social behaviour – had made its appearance in the larger cities during the late fifties, it lacked an overt political dimension and, moreover, was restricted to predominantly white English speakers and failed to make significant inroads in Afrikaner ranks.[19] Rock and roll music was closely associated with "ducktails." Afrikaner culturalists were quick to regard the rock hysteria in the West during the sixties and its emergence in South Africa as an "alien and dangerous culture" representing, in contradistinction to sober and idealized

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[16] KA Kombuis , **Seks en drugs en boeremusiek: die memoires van 'n volksverraaier**, H&R Uitgewers, Cape Town, 1998, p 231(Kombuis explaining the problematical relationship with his parents); M-Net TV Documentary, 12 August, 2003.

[17] I Unger and D Unger (eds.), **The times were a changin': the sixties reader**, Three Rivers Press, New York, 1998, p 158.

[18] The most informed recent analysis of Afrikaners' belief in apartheid in the sixties is that of H Giliomee, **The Afrikaners: Biography of a people**, Nasionale Pers, Cape Town, 2003, pp 534-536 in particular.

[19] K Mooney, "Ducktails, Flick-knives and pugnacity: Subcultural and hegemonic masculinity in South Africa, 1948-1960", **Journal of Southern African Studies**, 24, 4, 1998, p 5.

Afrikaner values, a moral collapse in decadent Britain and America.[20] Elements of Afrikaner youth in the sixties, nevertheless did listen to the music of the time, often transmitted from radio stations in neighbouring Mozambique as it was seldom given official local airtime on the South African Broadcasting Corporation, but to them it was merely music to enjoy and they remained largely oblivious to the possibility of linking it to subversive political agendas or even thinking of it as undermining Afrikaner culture.

A further deterrent to cultural fragmentation was the introduction of compulsory military service for all white males in 1967. Cultural conformity and a firm set of assumptions of Afrikaners as a beleaguered nation in a hostile world became further entrenched as the military assembly line churned out a successive series of like-minded young males. Initially conscription was for nine months, but in the mid-seventies it was extended to two years as the so-called "border war" on the South West African/ Namibian and Angolan borders against the South West African People's Organisation and Cuban surrogates intensified. Internal and cyclical black unrest in South Africa from 1976 onwards also saw the deployment of white troops in black townships which further added to the increased militarization of South African society. Gradually, however, the efficacy of the state's strategy and the imposition of compulsory military service were being questioned in well co-ordinated and innovative initiatives such as the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) during the eighties[21].

Although the ECC was led mainly by white English speakers, the emergence of the organisation also opened up more space for some Afrikaans speakers to challenge the *status quo* through creative cultural expression. One such medium was music which captured the personal disillusionment and angst generated by conscription for a war that was increasingly perceived as morally highly questionable and destined to drag on in a most futile fashion.[22] Now, for the first time, songs also started to appear in Afrikaans, prompting young men not to march to war, but to challenge and ridicule a system that forced conscription on them. Songs such as "Hou my vas korporaal" (Hold me tight corporal) by James Phillips sung in a rock and roll mode as well as offerings by Koos Kombuis in ballad form, were indicative of the appearance of a new Afrikaans cultural dimension. The choice of music as a vehicle of Afrikaans disenchantment happened in the absence of other viable and popular overt forms of specifically Afrikaans anti-apartheid political protests or organizations. In turn the lack of other contenders helped to ensure that the frustrations of the youth expressed through an informal medium were highly profiled in the press. The pressures on white middle-class young people and the exposure of their predicament added a more overtly political edge to the music than what otherwise might have been the case. What had happened in the United States of America with anti-war songs and protests

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[20] C Hamm, "Rock and roll in a very strange society" in R Middleton and D Horn (ed.), **Popular Music 5: Continuity and change**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, p 160.

[21] MW Phillips, "The End Conscription Campaign, 1983-1988: A study of white extra-parliamentary opposition to apartheid", MA thesis, University of South Africa, 2002, *passim*.

[22] M Drewett, "Satirical opposition in popular music within apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa", **Society in transition**, 33, 1, pp 80 – 90; M Drewett, "It's my duty not my choice': Narratives of resistance to the South African Border War in popular music" in C van der Merwe and R Wolfswinkel (eds.), **Telling wounds: narrative, trauma and memory; working through the SA armed conflicts of the 20th century**, Proceedings of the conference held at the University of Cape Town, 3-5 July 2002, pp 127 -133.

against American presence in Vietnam in the late sixties, resonated, albeit in much more muffled way, in South Africa two decades later.

An additional dimension in understanding the late emergence of Afrikaans protest music is the evolving dynamics of class and ethnic subjectivities. Although the Afrikaner middle-class expanded rapidly in the sixties when South Africa had one of the highest economic growth rates in the world, the identification of this class with the state and its support of apartheid had the effect of creating an inward looking bourgeoisie, suspicious of cultural influences from the West which might have contaminated what was regarded as "pure" Afrikaner values. However, as the belief in apartheid slowly eroded, the possibilities of exploring other forms of identification outside the earlier subjectivities shaped by the ethnic fold, presented themselves. Increasingly, Afrikaners regarded themselves in a less insular way. Aided by outside influences such as the introduction of television in 1975, they came to view themselves more overtly in cosmopolitan terms and accordingly participated more self-consciously in styles of consumption prevalent amongst the middle-classes elsewhere in the West.[23]

This was a significant development as Afrikaner children born in the sixties were socialised in a world where globalising cultural impulses held more sway than before and this carried a greater potential of subjectivities being rearranged and narratives of self being renegotiated. It was elements from this generation that led the quest for a new way of asserting oneself as being white and Afrikaans. They found it in rock and roll. It was a fusion of cultural ingredients not thought possible before – Afrikaans as a language was considered too guttural and formal to be turned into credible rock and roll lyrics. Johannes Kerkorrel made the modernising and globalising notion of their work explicit when he stated in an interview in 1989: "Rock and roll is a universal language. It works in Europe, it works in Australia, America – and it works here."[24]

Performance

The "Voëlvry" countrywide tour in 1989 represented the high point of Afrikaans protest rock. Operating on a shoestring budget and under surveillance and threats of the security police, it was not a trouble free logistical exercise. Ironically though, Dirk Uys, the manager, claimed that organizational experience he picked up as an officer in the Defence Force during his period of conscription came into good stead in running an operation of this nature.[25]

They managed to draw full houses for most of the concerts, but had problems at times in acquiring suitable venues. Some Afrikaans universities banned performances on campus and they had to find alternative venues. Their banishment from the University of Stellenbosch campus gave rise to a particular furore as Stellenbosch was supposed to be the heartland of "liberal Afrikaners." The university authorities claimed, somewhat unconvincingly, that the use of offensive language by the bands ran counter to the refined art of academic debate and therefore they were unwelcome on campus.

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[23]Compare J Hyslop, "Why did apartheid's supporters capitulate? Whiteness, class and consumption in urban South Africa, 1985-1995", **Society in Transition**, 31, 1, 2000, pp38-40.
[24] "Kerkorrel and Kie", **The Star**, 25 May 1989. It needs to be noted that "softer" forms of Afrikaans rock music has appeared in the mid-eighties by artists such as Anton Goosen.
[25] "'Dagga' Dirk is stryder vir Afrikaanse rock", **Die Burger**, 30 Maart 2002.

What is more likely, is that the political contents of their songs which included a particular sardonic mockery of State President PW Botha, *("Sit dit af, sit dit af";* Switch it off, switch it off) was of decisive importance. Botha also happened to be chancellor of the university and the authorities could hardly be expected to condone the brazen upbraiding of its highest symbolic functionary. Whist petitions, counter petitions and letters appeared in the newspapers, protesting students (for and against) also made their voices heard on a campus more known for its political docility than activism. The concert was held at another venue and given the publicity generated by the banishment from campus, attracted close to 4000 raucous students. To demonstrate what they considered to be the infantile behaviour of the Stellenbosch rector, Mike de Vries, they started the concert off by chanting the adapted lyrics of an Afrikaans nursery rhyme: *"Siembamba, Mike bewaar die sedes, x2, Voëlvry gaan die kampus ontsier, toffie vir Mike ons is hier!*" ("Siembamba, Mike protects the values, x2, Voëlvry is a disgrace for the campus, but we have outsmarted Mike, we are here!")[26]

Elements of the Afrikaner establishment were equally perturbed by the messages conveyed by the "Voëlvry" musicians, but this did not deter the intrepid pioneers of Afrikaans rock and roll. One journalist described their visit to Welkom, a mining town in the Free State countryside, in racy prose:

> There was a full moon shining over the mealiefields of Welkom on the night the Boere punks came to town. They checked in at the Heavenly Bodies Gym, an Olympian fortress of brick and corrugated iron ---. But they hadn't come to pump iron. They had come to party. Banned in Bethlehem, pilloried in Potch, told to 'voertsek' (to leave) in Vanderbijlpark, the Voëlvry Alternatiewe Boeremusiek bandwagon has been rock and rolling around the platteland [countryside] with all the momentum of an oxwagon stuck in a donga [ditch]. You can't blame people for feeling a little nervous. Hiding behind subversive pseudonyms, yelling inciteful slogans … - the Voëlvry brigade mocks the total onslaught with a rock and roll beat. …They are sowing a germ of cultural and spiritual liberation … of politics beyond Parliament and life beyond Welkom.[27]

Proselysing in towns such as Welkom could, however, be an ungrateful mission as a section of the audience pelted them with eggs. [28]

But not all responses in the countryside were hostile. At Kroonstad, close to Welkom, Antjie Krog, destined to become a celebrated author and whose family had a farm in the Kroonstad district, waxed lyrically about their performance. "The familiar outlines of one's town", she wrote, assumed a new dimension as the Voëlvry musicians

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[26] "J Kerkorrel en sy Blues Band maak vriende", **Die Burger**, 15 May 1989. For a sample of the reporting and correspondence see "Voëlvry-groep ontstoke oor Matie verbod", **Die Burger**, 5 May 1989; "Maties hou by verbod op "Voëlvry", **Die Burger**, 10 May 1989; "US-dosent praat oor Voëlvry", **Die Burger**, 9 May 1989;"Foto's van betoging uit blad na versoek", **Die Burger**, 8 November 1989; "Laat kritiek deur musiek toe", **Die Burger**, 5 June 1989; "Verbod op Voëlvry-konsert geregverdig, kritiek nie", **Die Burger**, 12 June 1989; "Alle bewakers is nie paronoïes nie" **Die Burger**, 25 May 1989;"Maties gee een van hulle menseregte prys", **Die Burger**, 30 May 1989.

[27] "When the Boere punks came to town", **Sunday Times**, 30 April 1989.

[28] Kombuis, **Seks, drugs en boeremusiek,** p 214-215.

"launched an attack on the alliance between politics and religion which allowed you to clap your hands and stamp your feet." It was "possible for everyone to participate in protest." [29]

In Johannesburg and Pretoria "Voëlvry" attracted not only students, but also other young urbanites off the street. The audience in Johannesburg was described as

> youngsters with earrings, acne infested girls with purple hair and bright eyes, barefooted pseudo-ethnics nature lovers with beads and kikois, sulking no-goods with bovver boots and other remnants of Britain *circa* 1978, Teds, Mods, Lefties – all with reddish eyes. But with the important difference that they all spoke Afrikaans.[30]

Apart from attracting a particular set of young people, "Voëlvry" extended its generational reach to thirty and forty year old professionals who formed a noticeable part of the audience at some concerts.[31]

On tour, underlying personal animosities coupled with a degree of drug and alcohol abuse, gave rise to frayed tempers at times.[32] It was a rollercoaster experience as the musicians appeared to take the Afrikaner youth by storm. Kerkorrel reflected on this in 1992:

> The adaptation was not easy, but it was exhilarating. I got high on many of the experiences. All of a sudden we met many interesting people. We saw places and did things which otherwise would not have been the case. It was very pleasant, but it also had its downside ----. You had to cope --- you had to be the big star, number one. Things were hunky dory and bright and beautiful and then they started to ban us in certain places, public controversy followed and Afrikaans ministers of religion started playing records backwards to find satanic messages ---. But if I had to add up the pros and cons, it was more than a worthwhile experience.[33]

"Voëlvry" concerts were intense affairs. Kerkorrel was known to "whip his audience into ecstasy with his whooping bopalong brand of boogie and brazen energy."[34] While the rapport between the musicians and their audiences appeared to be one of mutual synergy, there was also an element of power play involved. Johannes Kerkorrel who was the front man of the band was well aware of the way in which an adroit performer could influence his audience. With a certain measure of arrogance he commented:

> I have found that audiences here love to be told what to do. They have been brought up in a country where they are virtually told from the minute that they walk into school – do this, do that. Audiences

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[29] "Protes weerklink luid, viriel en toeganklik", **Vrye Weekblad**, 12 May 1989 (Translation).
[30] "Oranje, Blanje --- Blues," **Vrye Weekblad**, 14 April 1989. (Translation).
[31] " Boereblues oor apartheid," **Rapport**, 4 June 1989; "Nuwe lied van jong Suid-Afrika," **Die Suid-Afrikaan**, June 1989.
[32] M-Net TV Documentary, 12 August 2003; Kombuis, **Seks, drugs en rock en boeremusiek,** p 14.
[33] "Johannes Kerkorrel word groot", **De Kat**, 30 April 1992. (Translation).
[34] "Afrikaans pride and passion mix with fun and laughter", **Sunday Times**, 9 July 1989.

> don't know what to do. They like to be told and then they feel reassured ---.[35]

It is certainly not without irony that Kerkorrel used the very same conformity that he had claimed to despise, to further his dialogue with some audiences.

As part of their political agenda, the "Voëlvry" musicians also sought to ridicule other forms of Afrikaans music. They took issue with those popular Afrikaans singers who sang about beaches, seagulls, puppy love and rugby and argued that these songs lulled Afrikaners into a false consciousness. Typifying this brand of music was a balladeer, Bles Bridges. Bridges had a huge appeal amongst predominantly working class and rural Afrikaners, eager to escape into a fantasy make-believe world. He wore gold lamè, waiter-type jackets and sequenced pants with cowboy boots to complete a Las Vegas-like kitsch glitter package. Bridges sang his songs in safe, easy antiseptic Afrikaans and showered adoring women with red roses as a grand conclusion to his shows. He made it clear "love is the only thing worth singing about. To sing about politics has never done anybody any good."[36] It was the exact antithesis of what the "Voëlvry" musicians stood for and they responded by openly denigrating his music and distributed T-shirts with the logo: "*Ek verpes Bles*" ("I detest Bles").

Ethnic dynamics and social characteristics

It is easy to read into the "Voëlvry" critique of Afrikaner culture, as some analysts have done, a call for radical social change which proceeded from a decentered base intent on an outright rejection of a particular identity.[37] This can be misleading. While "Voëlvry" rejected a certain form of Afrikaner identity, at the core of what they represented was a broader formulation of Afrikaansness in line with the pressures of the time. Although they sought to recast Afrikaner identity in different mould, they were well aware that the very success of their enterprise depended on them being Afrikaans. Without that distinctive hallmark they would have disappeared into the amorphous grey of the wider anti-apartheid movement. Besides the strategic advantage of Afrikaans, Kerkorrel also had a strong belief in the political potential of Afrikaans speakers:

> I am mad about Afrikaans people and therefore I do what I do in Afrikaans, because I think that is where it can happen. These are the people who can make a difference. If I look at these people, our fans, then I scheme; these are the people necessary to get a new South Africa started – for sure. Then I am glad that I am part of this thing ---.[38]

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[35] "Kerkorrel en kie", **The Star**, 27 May 1989.
[36] Cited inB Jury,"Boys to Men: Afrikaans alternative popular music, 1986 -1990" **African Languages and Cultures**, 9, 2, 1996, p.101. See also "There is life after Bles", **Sunday Times**, 11 December 1988; "Bles my soul. Mr Kerkorrel", **Sunday Times**, 12 February 1989; "Bles en Kerkorrel bly maar haaks", **Die Burger**, 10 February 1989.
[37] Compare Jury, "Boys to Men", p 102; D O' Meara, **Forty lost years: the apartheid state and the politics of the National Party**, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1996, p 371.
[38] "Eet Kreef", **De Kat**, 30 June 1989. (Translation).

Kerkorrel was impatient with establishment critics who regarded their lyrics as unsophisticated and who failed to realize that they sought to add an essential new dimension to Afrikaans and wished to uncouple the language from the apartheid state:

> We get a lot of flak from most of the Afrikaans press. They say we are unpractised and "dik gerook" (stoned) and that our lyrics are naïve. They obviously don't realise that our whole idea is to write naïve lyrics. We are liberating the language. If you can make a language into rock and roll, it can't be an oppressive language anymore. It's got to be free. It is just an African language like any other and it is certainly not the exclusive property of the'volk'.[39]

Underlying their position was also an attempt through rock and roll to make Afrikaans part of a wider world. As Bernoldus Niemand explained: " The Afrikaner was the polecat of the world, part of nothing, rejected. I tried to bring him in, make him feel part of something".[40] Similar concerns also fed into their rejection of the term "alternative Afrikaners" which the media bestowed upon them. To them the term implied that they were being "othered," and it carried negative associations which they regarded as inappropriate and superfluous.[41]

In addition, they found the overtures of some "liberal" English speakers patronising and overbearing. They felt insulted to be called "thinking" Afrikaners by the English media and were of the opinion that such a formulation could only stem from a mindset that believed that all Afrikaners "secretly had pictures of Hitler behind their toilet doors."[42] Charles Leonard, a music journalist of the *Vrye Weekblad*, recalled in 2002 that at the time foreign journalists regarded "alternative Afrikaners" as peculiar anthropological species. He caustically commented on the perception of these journalists towards "alternative Afrikaners". "Check that cute one with the ear-ring, chuck him another piece of boerewors", was their attitude according to Leonard.[43] On the same score Koos Kombuis was also irritated by their record company, Shifty Records. Although he found some of the individuals companionable, he summarised what he considered their superior attitude towards the musicians in the phrase: "Jolly good show, old chap, let us help these Afrikaner boykies".[44] Kombuis, moreover, viewed the deferential attitude of some "liberal" English speakers towards black people as insincere and condescending. There was no point in trying to curry favour with black people, he argued; all that South Africans, regardless of colour, had to learn, was to share the same space.[45] Their basic point of departure, as Kerkorrel articulated it, was not to pontificate about other groups, but to help Afrikaners "find a new meaning in the country and a new place for us in the country."[46]

Whilst "Voëlvry" proclaimed a new role for Afrikaners, their performances were marked by an unexamined gender assumption. Tonia Selly (Karla Krimpelien), a fine

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[39] "It is not just what the okes say, man", **Weekly Mail**, 5 December 1988.
[40] "Oupa Phillips se klong mik kop toe", **Die Burger**, 4 January 1994.
[41] "Alternatief ?" Nee, ons rock en roll!" **Die Burger**, 20 May 1989.
[42] "Oranje, Blanje --- Blues", **Vrye Weekblad**, 14 April 1989.(Translation).
[43] "Onskuld-era het gesterf", **Beeld** , 16 November 2002.
[44] http://www.litnet.co.za/koosbrief.asp, Copy of a letter from Koos Kombuis to Dirk Uys, c July 1990.
[45] "New Afrikaners sing different tune", **The Sunday Star**, 5 March 1989.
[46] "Kerkorrel sing steeds die blues", **Insig**, December 1988. (Translation).

vocalist, was cast in the role of a mini-skirted "doo wap" girl and not given much prominence in the overall projection of a "new" identity. Moreover, the lyrics were written from a predominantly male perspective and although sensitive to the way in which Afrikaner women were implicated in the militarization of South African society, they failed to give women an active voice in their protest lyrics.[47] Jennifer Ferguson, a fellow white anti-apartheid activist, welcomed their appearance on the musical scene, but viewed them, in perhaps somewhat exaggerated terms, as swaggering males who play "big cock rock" on stage and who imagined that they could ride "John Wayne style through South Africa to save the country."[48] It was a charge which Kombuis found a bit worrying, but not sufficiently so to ponder upon it with any anguish. "Obviously we were sexist", he responded later. "We were the 'Voëlvry' tour. So what?" [49] This, however does, not imply that they were oblivious to the function of a specific form of white masculinity in shaping the military environment Underlying the lyrics of some of Bernoldus Niemand's songs in particular, there was a clear rejection of the social construction of male gender which forced him to assume the role of a soldier.[50]

In dealing with the complicated relationship between music, culture and politics in the sixties, the work of R Eyerman and A Jamison is conceptually suggestive in probing the dynamics of the "Voëlvry" movement. According to them social movements involve more than pure political activities inasmuch as they open up accessible public space for cultural experimentation and allow for various forms of critiques of the existing order. Social movements then, they argue, can alter "structures of feeling and underlying sensibilities", while "harder" politics are being played out elsewhere.[51] A hallmark of social movements is their nebulous nature. Nevertheless, while social movements do not emerge fully formed with an explicit programme and can moreover take shape in amorphous ways, they are fundamentally affected by the political cultures of the societies of which they are part. Social movements coalesce over time and display a certain hybridity of ideas as part of the convoluted process to produce re-worked identities and political visions.[52] It is in this context that music as one element becomes "both knowledge and action, part of the frameworks of interpretation and representation produced within social movements and through which they influence the broader societal culture." [53]

The "Voëlvry" tour and the well-attended shows combined with a strident political message soon earned the appellation of a "movement". It was perhaps more than just convenient journalistic shorthand. "Voëlvry", like other similar movements, was the product of particular historical circumstances and evolved in an inchoate way. Koos Kombuis recalled in 2000 what he regarded as the founding moment:

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[47] L Hagen, "Kulturele identiteit" die 'alternatiewe Afrikaanse beweging' van die tagtigerjare", Unpublished MA thesis, Rand Afrikaans University, 1999, pp 50, 88.
[48] "Nuwe lied van jong Suid-Afrika" , **Die Suid-Afrikaan**, June 1989.
[49] Kombuis, **Seks, drugs en boeremusiek**, p 231. (Translation).
[50] Drewett, "It's my duty not my choice", pp. 130-131.
[51] R Eyerman and A Jamison, **Music and social movement: mobilizing traditions in the twentieth century**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, pp 42-43.
[52] R Eyerman, "Social movements: between history and sociology", **Theory and Society**, 18, 3, 1989, p 543.
[53] Eyerman and Jamison, **Music and social movement**, pp 23-24.

> The last thing which I, Ralph and Dirk was aware of at the time, was that we were busy with an important cultural movement. We would only realize that later, when the tour began and then only vaguely at the back of our heads - we were simply too busy most of the time and too freaked out to reflect logically about everything.[54]

He stated their non-programmatic political involvement pithily: "We knew there was sh*t in the land and we felt that our music might just make a difference."[55] It later dawned on him: "Something was busy happening. And we were at the centre of it. And the power of the regime was suddenly not all that absolute."[56] Antjie Krog in her description of the show at Kroonstad also picked up on the birth of a new set of perceptions and emotions: "The somber pessimism and burdens of impotent guilt dissolved. Here is the start of something."[57]

The embryonic but palpable sense of imminent change and the appeal to new Afrikaner cultural and political sensibilities as well as the enthusiastic following it attracted certainly gave "Voëlvry" the appearance of a social movement. But the case should not be overstated. It failed to evolve beyond protest music, lacked wider connections and did not inspire their followers to express themselves in unambiguous and meaningful political terms. At best it can be described as a moderate to weak social movement.

A pertinent characteristic of "Voëlvry" was the way in which it dealt with tradition. "Traditions," as Eyerman and Jamison have argued, "are inherited ways of interpreting reality and giving meaning to experience; and thus provide the underlying logical structure upon which all social activity is construed."[58] During times of stress, these authors claim, a selective reworking occurs in which traditions are infused with new kinds of meaning. As a result "traditions are made and remade in a process of mobilization".[59] Despite the apparent rejection then of what has gone before, cultural redefinitions are informed as much by the past as the present; their efficacy depends on an adroit use of an intelligible and known past and adapting it in such a way that it speaks anew in a changed context. Through a process of connecting a selected or usable past with ongoing contemporary life, the potential critical impact is heightened as the familiar is recognizable but in a defamiliarised shape.

Some "Voëlvry" musicians had an appreciation of South African history in which the association of Afrikaners with apartheid since 1948 was regarded as an aberration and distortion when viewed against the background of a more varied past that goes back much further than 1948. Kerkorrel, in response to a journalist's question in 1989 whether he sought to unshackle Afrikaners from their past, explained:

> I mean what is the past? The past 40 years? This country has a past that goes back a long, long way. Must we take the past 40 years as the past? Definitely no. I think it is a little perverse twist, you know, and

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[54] Kombuis, **Seks, drugs en boeremusiek**, p 204.
[55] http://www.kooskombuis.co.za/english.htm, Article by Sam Woulidge, 5 August 2003.
[56] Kombuis, **Seks, Drugs en boeremusiek**, p 211. (Translation).
[57] "Protes weerklink luid, viriel en toeganklik, **Vrye Weekblad**, 12 May 1989. (Translation).
[58] Eyerman and Jamison, **Music and social movement**, p 20.
[59] Eyerman and Jamison, **Music and social movement**, p 39.

> it's done an incredible amount of damage to us as Afrikaans people. But at the moment there is a whole 'new future' type of feeling.[60]

Kombuis also gave considerable thought to South African history. In 1989 he had a novel published in which he took the reader on a tour through his version of South Africa's convoluted past.[61] For Kombuis, like Kerkorrel, there was much more to South Africa's history than forty years of apartheid. Apartheid was seen as a present curse and he preferred to reach back further into the past. "Each generation rebels against its fathers and makes friends with its grandfathers," he concisely summarised his position.[62]

The keen understanding of history and the way it could be redeployed in the present found creative expression in some of their lyrics. Traditional Afrikaans songs and symbols were reworked and presented in rock and roll style. A particular popular song in this respect was *Ossewa* (Oxwagon). In Afrikaner representations of history the oxwagon has become the symbol of god fearing 19th century Voortrekkers (Boer pioneers) who "tamed" the "wild" interior of South Africa. At night the Voortrekkers were occasionally known to arrange the oxwagons in a *laager* - a defensive circle as precaution to possible attacks from the indigenous population. In the late 20th century "Voëlvry" interpretation of this history, the oxwagon is transformed into a modern modified car with a V6 engine and a tape deck blaring Elvis Presley music. The passengers in this new oxwagon were on their way to the beach for a carefree holiday. Symbolically the oxwagon was now being put to a different use. Where the oxwagon was usually associated with a closed inward looking world views, often referred to as a *laager* mentality, the new revamped oxwagon was to lead Afrikaners out of their political and cultural impasse into a brighter future. But even though it was now billed as a "funky" oxwagon, the refrain of the song – "sweet, sweet *Ossewa*" - was a constant reminder of the enduring familiarity and almost endearing reliance of the symbol. "We did not discard or wrote off the oxwagon", they explained, "we gave it a facelift, repainted it and filled it with a V6 engine. It was the kind of attack which the Botha apartheid government did not expect." [63] Kerkorrel took the analogy further: "It is as if we are Voortrekkers again, breaking away and looking for a new future, finding new boundaries, building bridges and experimenting."[64]

Another song which drew upon the past is that of *Boer in Beton* (A Boer in concrete) by Koos Kombuis (or Andre Letoit at the time). The lyrics deal with the process of Afrikaner urbanisation and adaptation to city life. The artist's on-stage rendition of this was well described by a journalist:

> Then the music faded, the lights dimmed and Andrè Letoit mooched on stage. Cocooned in a sunflower yellow pullover he hunched over his scratchy guitar and sang a song about the pain of being a misplaced urban Boer, mummified in concrete like Oom Paul [President Paul Kruger] in old Church Square. Lost in his freedom in

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[60] "Kerkorrel and Kie", **The Star**, 25 May 1989.
[61] A Letoit, **Suidpunt Jazz**, Hollandse Afrikaanse Uitgewersmaatskappy, Pretoria, 1989.
[62] " Letoit, Punk en plesierig", **Die Burger**, 20 August 1988.
[63] "Uit die perd se bek", **Beeld** 29 April 2002. (Translation).
[64] "Ruk en rol saam met Kerkorrel", **Die Husigenoot**, 20 April 1989. (Translation).

> the city Letoit resented his heritage and history as much as he felt it calling him somewhere in the bitter watershed of his soul.[65]

The occurrence which prompted this song is instructive as it carried within itself a certain tension between the past and what was then the present. Letoit explains that he was sitting in a café in Pretoria:

> Some CP [Conservative Party] 'toppies' [elderly men] were talking at the table next to me and I resented everything they stood for. Then I started getting empathy when I realized that in their way they were completely honest and their fears were completely justified. Believing that democracy can work is a very high-risk thing. I got this nostalgia feeling. When they left I wrote *Boer in beton*.[66]

"Voëlvry" music, as Ingrid Byerly has pointed out "served prominently as a site of contemplation concerning the image of the Afrikaner – whether the old stereotype or the new incarnation of Afrikaner." [67]

Although in form and presentation Afrikaans rock was a radical new departure, it should be clear that "Voëlvry" did not emerge out of a vacuum. Particularly in the search for lyrics, they seemed to have scoured earlier sources for possible subversion. Some of the songs which appeared in the time honoured and revered songbook of the 'Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurkringe" (FAK) found their way in a revised form into the repertoire of the "Voëlvry" musicians.[68] In addition, they searched for earlier Afrikaans music that reflected realities other than those that appeared in the ethnically inclined lyrics in the FAK songbook. They discovered these in the music of the Briel family singers. The Briel family's first long player appeared in 1956 and their songs were heartfelt renditions of Afrikaner poverty and working class life on the Rand during the thirties and fourties. The Briel music was considered authentic and committed social commentary of an earlier era which could complement that of "Voëlvry" some decades later. These linkages were demonstrated by playing Briel music as fillers between events, and later some surviving Briel members were also invited to perform live.[69]

Certain elements of the way in which "Voëlvry" presented itself as a movement, resonated with those of the punk movement in Britain during the late seventies and early eighties. In an analysis of the punk movement abroad, P Lamy and J Levin have outlined its characteristics:

> The punks have taken to expressing their disillusionment with society by mocking it in exaggerated style. Punk breaks all codes of accepted behaviour and lifestyle and reproduces entire philosophical and

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[65] "When the Boere Punks came to town", **Sunday Times**, 30 April 1989.
[66] "Afrikaans Pride and passion mix with fun and laughter", **Sunday Times**, 9 July 1989.
[67] Byerly, "Mirror, mediator, and prophet: The music *indaba* of late-apartheid South Africa", p 19.
[68] Hagen, "Kulturele identiteit", p 45.
[69] "Die Briels was toeka al betrokke", **Die Burger**, 31 May 1990; "Briels helde van Houtstok", **Beeld**, 2 June 1990."Kerkorrel se doodsbrief", **Rapport**, 17 November 2002.

> sartorial history of subcultures in "cut-up" form, combining elements that had originally belonged to different epochs.[70]

The use of offensive language on stage and the proclamation of an apocalyptic prophecy completed the repertoire.

Kerkorrel was wary of accepting the punk label. Part of this reluctance might have been due to an artistic desire to be seen as original and independent, but he also felt that overseas artists made no sense in South Africa because they did not address South African issues.[71] This, however, did not deter him from dressing local content up in a distinctly punk fashion. The parodies of Afrikaner society, the uses of history and the disaffection with middle-class establishment values, often expressed in swear words on stage, all carried punk overtones. Kerkorrel though, when criticized for swearing, sought to provide an indigenous rationale:

> I have learnt to swear during my compulsory military service and I do swear on stage and some people find it a much. But if you think about it carefully, Afrikaans has the most wonderful swear words. Nobody swears better than the boers. What is Afrikaans without its swear words?[72]

"Voëlvry" musicians did not gravitate towards hard punk activities such as physically destructive behaviour on stage which was a hallmark of some punk bands overseas. Theirs was a somewhat softer expression. But as the British punks who advocated anarchy as an antidote to society's perceived ills, "Voëlvry" had similar problems in dealing with the intricacies of the South African situation. Hence the escapist message with which they sought to end their shows and round off their commentary on the South African condition:

> "*Almal moet gerook raak, so hoog soos 'n spook raak --- die gemors hier skoonmaak--- ja ---almal!* Everybody must get stoned --- become as high as a ghost --- clean up the mess here--- yes --- everybody.)[73]

Impact

Although Voëlvry was widely heralded in the media as a unique and significant movement, its importance beyond that which the media wished to bestow is harder to fathom. Certainly as far as the musicians themselves and their sympathisers were concerned, the movement had a major effect on Afrikaner consciousness. In 2000 Koos Kombuis considered the impact to have been "*moerse*" (extremely) big. He explained that "under normal circumstances, what we did might not have been that important, but it was the right thing, in the right place, at the right time." [74] In his autobiography Kombuis duly acknowledges the wider political forces at work during the eighties, but still believes that their contribution was the "*doodskoot*" (the killer

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[70] P Lamy and J Levin, "Punk and middle class values: a content analysis", **Youth and Society**,17,2, 1985 , p160. See also C O' Hara, **The philosophy of punk**, AK Press, San Francisco, 1982, pp 4-5.
[71] "Alternatief ? Nee, ons rock en roll"! **Die Burger**, 20 May 1989.
[72] "Ruk en rol saam met Johannes Kerkorrel", **Die Huisgenoot**, 20 April 1989. (Translation).
[73] "When the Boere punks came to town", **The Suday Times**, 30 April 1989.
[74] http://www.kooskombuis.co.za/english. htm, Article by Sam Woulidge, 5 August 2003

blow).[75] The journalist, Max du Preez, was of the opinion that "Voëlvry" is "entitled to more recognition for the fundamental change in the minds of Afrikaners which made 1994 possible than the politicians such as FW de Klerk who like to receive all the accolades."[76] Bernoldus Niemand was equally outspoken about their perceived influence: "It was the type of encouragement which the reformers required, the knowledge that the "*laaities*" (the youth) were with them".[77] These assumptions, appealing as they might appear, are difficult to prove analytically. Hence, to try and determine the movement's reach and powers of persuasion it is necessary to probe wider and deeper.

Political surveys undertaken at Afrikaans universities such as Rand Afrikaans University in Johannesburg and the University of Stellenbosch in 1989 and earlier reflected that students were wedded to the *status quo* and not given to entertain fundamentally changes.[78] One of the researchers, Susan Booysen, of Rand Afrikaans University expressed grave doubts about the impact of "Voelvry" and in an interview with a newspaper dismissed the response of the students on campus as a mere "flirtation."[79] While making allowance for possible methodologically shortcomings in questionnaire type surveys which fail to register qualitative subterranean disaffection, the evidence of the surveys nevertheless serves as a salutary reminder that beyond the "Voëlvry" movement there was a vast number of white young people set in their ways and untouched by the "Voëlvry" message. By the same token though, the fact that "Voëlvry" did manage at least to attract some apparent dissidents is not without significance.

In evaluating the impact of "Voëlvry" the nature of the concerts and the reception of their songs should also be taken into account. On face value the concerts certainly signaled change, but the level of commitment and the degree of change and even whether there was a clear understanding of what the "Voëlvry" lyrics implied, need to be examined. There is no doubt that the concerts were popular and that "Voëlvry" music, being banned from the state run South African Broadcasting Service, sold very well.[80] Youthful enthusiasm can, however, be deceptive. Dirk Uys the manager on tour, conceded that many attended the concerts primarily as a "jol" and according to him only about 40% of the audience understood and agreed with the lyrics. But he regarded it as "socialising process and even the aggressive ones could learn something from the concerts."[81] It remains doubtful though what they learnt. At some concerts the ironies in the lyrics were completely misunderstood. The song *BMW* was a biting satire on white middle class values. ("I drive a BMW; I give black people f—k—l";

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[75] Kombuis, **Seks, drugs en boeremusiek**, p 218.
[76] http://www.afrikaans.be/ artikels/htm M du Preez, "Die kunste of die politiek: wie doen die meeste om iets nuuts in Afrikaans aan te vang?" 2002.
[77] "Oupa Phillips se klong mik kop toe," **Die Burger**, 4 January 1994.
[78] S Booysen, "Politieke verandering en die sosialisering van Afrikaanse studente: 'n gevallestudie", 'n gevallestudie", **South African Journal of Sociology**,21,4, 1990, pp181-192; H Kotze, "Political education and socialization: a comparative perspective at two Afrikaans universities", **South African Journal of Sociology**, 21,3, 1990 pp 133 – 143; J Gagiano, "Ruling group cohesion" in H Giliomee and J Gagiano (eds.), **The elusive search for peace: South Africa, Israel, Northern Ireland**, Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1990, pp.191-208.
[79] "Boereblues oor apartheid", **Rapport**, 4 June 1989. (Translation).
[80]"Kerkorrel out of tune on SABC", **Pretoria News**, 18 May 1989; "Eet Kreef uitverkoop", **Die Burger**, 11 May 1989.
[81] "Nuwe lied van jong Suid-Afrika", **Die Suid- Afrikaan**, June 1989 (Translation).

do not talk politics or I'll shout blue murder" – translation). In Potchefstroom, however, the lyrics were met with a roar approval from a section of the audience who interpreted it very literally that no concessions should be made to black people and politics should not be discussed. There was no or very little indication that the "Voëlvry" performance was creating a sense of uneasiness.[82]

Apart from those who were evidently tone deaf in picking up a different ideological beat, in an overall assessment it should also be factored in that at least for another section of the audience it was a matter of preaching to the converted. Although it was not his intention, Kerkorrel implied as much when he revealed: "We all thought the Afrikaans youth supported the National Party, but when we went on stage and told them, the 'king has no clothes,' they responded with, 'Yes, we know.'"[83] These youths were thus predisposed to receive the message favourably. Writing in a wider context, R Rosenthal in his evaluation of the role of music in social movements has made the valid analytical point that the test is to "find proof from *the audience* that the power of music goes beyond raising the spirits of those already committed ---."[84]

The reach of "Voëlvry" was mainly restricted to white Afrikaans audiences. At the predominantly brown campus of the University of the Western Cape, known for its activism in the eighties, the "Voëlvry" concert had some novelty value but a low turnout and a lukewarm response. Neither did the musicians have any contact with major black political organisations.[85] One also searches in vain in the African National Congress mouthpieces of the time for evidence that the movement registered with the exiled organisation. Koos Kombuis though, relates that after 1990 he met former Robben Island political prisoners who claimed that they had "cheered" the movement on.[86]

While it is clear that the movement's impact is more problematical than often projected, its influence in a less formalistic sense cannot be completely discarded. Analysing the influence of social movements in Latin America, S Alvarez, E Dagnino and A Escobar have made the point that social movements, even if they are politically relatively weak, often involve dense webs of different forms of understanding. They argue "discourses and practices circulate in weblike, capillary fashion (eg. are deployed, adopted, appropriated, co-opted, or reconstructed, as the case may be) in larger institutional and cultural arenas."[87] These processes can happen almost imperceptibly. In similar vein it can be argued that "Voëlvry" carved out a new space for cultural contestation where the vague discomforts of Afrikaner youths could be addressed and perhaps assume a different form. As a student at Stellenbosch in 1989 recalled:

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[82] "Nuwe lied van jong Suid –Afrika, **Die Suid-Afrikaan**, June 1989; "Die swart gevaar in Potch", **New Nation**, 27 April to 4 May 1989.
[83] "Gryser en wyser", **Rapport**, 9 June 2002.
[84] R Rosenthal, "Serving the movement: the role(s) of music", **Popular Music and Society**, 25,3/4, Fall/Winter 2001, p15. (Emphasis in original)
[85] "Kerkorrel en kie," **The Star**, 27 May 1989; "Protes hier om te bly ?" **Vrye Weekblad**, 19 May 1989.
[86] Kombuis, **Seks, drugs en boeremusiek**, p 218.
[87] S Alvarez, E Dagnino, and A Escobar (eds.), **Culture of politics/Politics of culture: Re-visioning Latin American social movements**, Westview Press, Boulder, 2000, p. 16.

> At that time our air waves were filled with government filtered, imported pop music and our local artists, English and Afrikaans, were churning out sterile songs about abstract concepts like love, loss and clowns who drink too much ---. The first time I played my *Eet Kreef* cassette --- I realised that I was listening to real songs about real problems which at that moment transcended the petty issues of love and alcoholism ---. This was something I have never encountered before and it struck a ready chord.[88]

While surveys amongst university students in Britain have shown them to be more attentive to lyrics than other comparable youth groups,[89] there is no ready evidence to claim that it was in general the same with "Voëlvry" music. Nevertheless "Voëlvry" did introduce Afrikaner youth to a new and vibrant discourse at a particular important historical juncture – *before* the watershed announcement of FW de Klerk on 2 February 1990, unbanning the formerly proscribed and exiled political organisations. This meant that on the eve of the post apartheid South Africa of the 1990's, an element of Afrikaner culture has already been publicly moulded to accept change. However, whether this actually facilitated the political transition in the mid-nineties in a meaningful way, remains conjectural.

Legacy

Predictably Voëlvry musicians welcomed the changes in the country. In 1990 Kerkorrel declared: "I have great faith in the political abilities of both Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk. At least one gets the feeling these days that maybe we are not going to kill everybody."[90]

Slowly, however, a sense of caution set in as to what the political future held in store and there was a certain wariness in accepting the credentials of the ANC. In 1994, just before South Africa's epochal election, Koos Kombuis who five years earlier had rejected the National Party in no uncertain terms, stated that he would be voting, ironically, for none other than the National Party.[91] In the post 1994 period and particularly after the advent of Thabo Mbeki, Kombuis became increasingly critical of what he regarded as authoritarian tendencies in the ANC and a romanticized representation of the African past in ANC circles.[92] Dirk Uys, again, was concerned about the white "brain drain" from South Africa and he claimed that a fair number of those who had left the country were "Voëlvry" supporters in the eighties.[93] Kerkorrel, the only white Afrikaans artist asked to perform at the inauguration of Nelson Mandela in 1994, shared the rising tide of white disillusionment with the direction of the ANC after 1999. Mbeki in particular was accused of re-racialising South Africa. Kerkorrel could not, however, bring himself to sing in public about what he considered the ills of contemporary politics:

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[88] http://www.andrew.co.za/article, "Kerkorrel", 13 November 2002.
[89] PG Christenson and DF Roberts, **It is not only rock and roll: popular music in the lives of adolescents**, Hampton Press, New Jersey, 1998, p.63.
[90] " 'Gatvol' of being branded", **The Daily Mail**, 17 July 1990.
[91] "Daar is 'n boemelaar in die kombuis", **Die Burger**, 25 March 1994.
[92] K Kombuis, **Afrikaans, my darling**, H&RUitgewers, Cape Town, 2003, pp.33-38.
[93] "Vroumense en ou karre rock", **Beeld** , 6 April 2002.

> It was just so disappointing that somebody [Mbeki] came to breathe life in the racial ghosts of 'there are whites, and there are blacks', and so on. It was nauseating. I did write songs about it, but I decided not to bring it out. I felt, just give these guys a break. Don't break them down, it is a new broom finding its feet.[94]

On a personal level "Voëlvry" musicians also had to adapt to a new reality. Their rationale as protest musicians fell away in 1990 and the group broke up. The switch from minor cult heroes in the eighties to ordinary musicians in the nineties was not always easy. For individuals like Koos Kombuis the aftermath of the "Voëlvry" period was marked by an increase in the use of drugs.[95] Over the course of time though, Kombuis succeeded in re-inventing himself as an entertainer and noted author.[96] Kerkorrel experimented with more sedate cabaret music and also established links with Flemish singers in Belgium. In the process he lost some of his earlier appeal. Kerkorrel, known to be a complex and temperamental person, was also given to fits of depression. It was during one of his dark and despondent moods that he committed suicide on 12 November 2002.[97] Another "Voëlvry" member, James Phillips (Bernoldus Niemand), passed away seven years earlier after a car crash.[98]

Kerkorrel's death in particular sparked a renewed interest in the "Voëlvry" movement. The tragic circumstances of his suicide received considerable media attention and he was widely hailed as a fine musician and anti-apartheid activist. Remembrance services were held in Johannesburg and Cape Town; in parliament speeches were made in his honour and during the annual Klein Karoo Arts Festival in Oudtshoorn in April 2003 a special exhibition of his work was showcased.[99]

Death bestowed on Kerkorrel an exalted position. While due allowance must be made for the fulsome nature of obituaries, some commentaries amounted to unrestrained exaggerations. In one tribute Kerkorrel was unashamedly linked to international figures that had died tragically:

> Many creative people --- burn too brightly to survive the night. Not all of them actively commit suicide but there is often a distinct tendency towards self-destruction that shortens their lives. One only needs to think singers and musicians like Billie Haliday, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison and Kurt Cobain; writers like Scott Fitzgerald, Yukio Mishima, Sylvia Plath and Arthur Rimbaud; actors like Marilyn Monroe and Montgomery Clift; and painters like Amedeo Modigliani and Vincent van Gogh[100].

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[94] http://www.litnet.co.za/mond/kerkorrel , "Die mond is nie geheim nie", 2002. (Interview with Kerkorrel).
[95] Kombuis, **Seks, drugs en boeremusiek**, p 219.
[96] "Boesembroers", **Insig**, November 2003; http:// www.boekwurm.co.za/blad/koos/html "Koos Kombuis -Voëlvry Pappie"; "Ons rebelle nou die nuwe establishment", **Rapport**, 12 Oktober 2003.
[97] "Gefolterde mens" **Beeld**, 14 November 2002.
[98] "East Rand Cowboy: a son of Springs", **Sunday Times**, 21 September 2003.
[99] "Hulde in parlement", **Die Burger**, 14 November 2002; "Remembering Kerkorrel", **Mail and Guardian**, 14 November 2002; "Troebadoer leef voort", **Die Burger**, 3 April 2003; "Moving tribute to Kerkorrel", **Cape Times**, 2 April 2003; "Rock icon recognized", **Star**, 2 April 2003; "Nog geen vrede oor Kerkorrel", **Beeld**, 20 December 2002;"Andersheid lê nie in kleur nie", **Die Burger**, 19 July 2003.
[100]"Visionary outsiders", **Natal Witness**, 22 November 2002

For a journalist of an Afrikaans newspaper in the Free State there was no doubt that "his death ensured his iconic status ---."[101] In numerous tributes he assumed a central role in converting Afrikaners from apartheid ways.[102]

The beatification of Kerkorrel was based on a generalized understanding, infused with a certain degree of romanticism, of what the movement had achieved in the eighties. The actual impact and the complexities of defining the political reach of "Voëlvry" as well as Kerkorrel's increasing disillusionment with the ANC in the late nineties were elements that ran counter to sanctification and thus remained outside the orbit of appraisal. The movement was now assigned a powerful and pure past.

Such dynamics are not unique; certain interpretations of the significance of the sixties in the West suffer from the same overload. In reviewing the associations engendered by "Voëlvry", it is instructive to note the work of Eleanor Townsley who has explained the general phenomenon of "the sixties" in America in terms of semiotic tropes:

> The answer is that 'the Sixties' is an important political trope of the last quarter of the 20th century; that is, a figurative use of words, which organizes our understanding of contemporary US politics and society. The trope's specific function is to compress and inscribe historically developed collective understandings in a very short space; it reduces complexity and represses contentious detail in favor of 'what everyone knows'.[103]

In a similar way "Voëlvry" in Afrikaner circles came to represent "common knowledge". The outcome of developments after 1989 placed "Voëlvry" on the winning side of history which imparted an element of prescience to the movement. For a new generation of Afrikaners, eager to be redeemed from what they consider to be apartheid guilt, particularly after the unsettling revelations before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, "Voëlvry" represented a dimension of Afrikaner culture untainted by apartheid. In contrast to much else relating to the Afrikaner past, it was argued, "Voëlvry" could be construed as compatible with post-apartheid South African society. Hence in the quest for a new identity, the movement readily presented itself as a useful trope. One Afrikaner of this generation made it clear:

> The "Voëlvry" tour indirectly paved the way for us – the generation that still played marbles in the eighties while the country was burning – to tackle the future without the chains, the stresses and the angst of the past.[104]

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[101] "Kerkorrel", **Die Volksblad**, 16 November 2002.

[102] For example "Kerkorrel het nasiebou gehelp", **Beeld**, 14 November 2002; "Hy het geweet sy tyd is verby", **Rapport**, 17 November 2002; "Sanger was ook aktivis, komponis, **Die Burger**, 13 November 2002; http://www.litnet.co.za/sênet/asp "Ralph het ons geleer", http://www.pretoria.co.za/survey "Gaan julle Kerkorrel mis", November 2002; "Johannes Kerkorrel was reg oor die onreg", **Beeld**, 27 November 2002. For a more sceptical view see "Diè mense laat hom wriemel", **Die Burger**, 23 November 2002.

[103] E Townsley, " ' The Sixties' Trope", **Theory, Culture and Society**, 18, 6, 2001, p 99

[104] http://www.litnet.co.za/klank/ernsjk.asp "Al lê die berge nog so blues" (E Grundling)

Afrikaans music went through various permutations during the nineties, some of it drawing musically on "Voëlvry", but overtly political elements remained absent from the lyrics. Certain Afrikaans artists involved with the music scene, did wish, however, to demonstrate their attitude towards the new dispensation by invoking personalised domestic imagery of the Afrikaans cultural past and juxtaposing these with scenes of black people rioting. These images were reflected on huge screens that serve as backdrops to rave and trance music concerts. In essence it was an attempt to balance "good" memories (homely poems, stories, popular objects, sport) with "bad" memories (violence, troops in the street and protesting black youths under apartheid). The visuals were soft and the two sets of images were seen to cancel each other out, deliberately making light of politics. As one of the organizers of the rave explained: "Whatever needed to be said, has already been said. It is time for people to enjoy their freedom."[105]

An analyst of this development has recently criticized this position and claimed that it stood in contradistinction to the "Voëlvry" movement of the eighties which was about resistance and political engagement and not about fun and freedom.[106] Such an interpretation is somewhat of an oversimplification; at least part of the appeal of the "Voëlvry" movement was precisely its ability to bring a light and mocking touch to the heavy hand of politics. Perhaps the irreverent and creative probing of politics can even be seen as potentially the movement's most enduring legacy to a country where a new round of politicians are not necessary immune to illusions of grandeur.

Conclusion

"Voëlvry" did rock the boat, but more gently than often assumed. It was mainly a white middle class movement which in the eighties sought to redefine elements of Afrikaner ethnicity without fully rejecting it. Although the movement was largely restricted to the white community and its proselysing effects were uneven, it was a brave stand to take at the time. As a social movement it was overtaken by events from 1990 onwards and predictably it lost its impetus. The boat, however, did not sink. The "Voëlvry" stance taken in the eighties still resonated sixteen years later to help manufacture an anti-apartheid past for a younger generation of Afrikaners grappling with a sense of identity in quite a different context.

Writing on the potentially explosive mix between social movements and music and their longer term effects, Eyerman and Jamison have commented perceptively:

> For brief, intensive moments, the habitual behaviour and underlying values of society are thrown open for debate and reflection, and, as the movements fade from the political center stage, their cultural effects seep into the social lifeblood in often unintended and circuitous ways.[107]

This accords well with the creative turmoil unleashed by "Voëlvry" and the subsequent unscripted trajectory of their abiding influence.

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[105] S Marlin-Curiel, "Rave New World: Trance-mission, Trance-Nationalism and Trance-scendence in the 'new' South Africa", **The Drama Review**, Fall 2001, 45, 3, p 4.
[106] Marlin-Curiel, p. 4.
[107] Eyerman and Jameson, **Music and social movement**, p.6.

Appendix "A"

SIT DIT AF!

Die ander dag toe voel ek lam
Ek wou 'n klein bietjie ontspan
En 'n boer maak 'n plan
Ek sit my TV set toe aan
Jy sal nie glo wat ek sien
Op my TV screen

Dit was 'n nare gesig
Dit het my heeltemal ontwrig
Dit was 'n moerse klug
Dit was PW se gesig
En langs hom staan oom Pik
O, ek dog ek gaan verstik

Sit dit af x4
Want dit was 'n helse straf

Ek stap kombuis toe, kry 'n bier
En skakel oor na TV 4
O my God wat het ons hier
Wat my TV screen ontsier
Is daar nêrens om te vlug
Van daai man se mooi gesig ?

Met sy vinger in die lug
Gaan hy my lewe net ontstig
In die programme op die lug
Sien jy net PW se gesig
Ek vat jou nog 'n wed
Al die bure het M-net

Sit dit af

Ek sê jou dit is finaal
Voor hulle my kom haal
En ek met al my verstand
In die gestig beland
As daar iets is wat my kwel is dit my TV stel

Hey – sit dit af
Sit dit af x 4
Want dis 'n helse straf

SWITCH IT OFF

I was somewhat tired the other day
I wanted to relax
A boer devises a plan
I switch on my TV set
You won't believe what I saw
On my TV screen

It was an unpleasant sight
It completely unhinged me
It was a huge joke
It was PW's face
And next to him stands uncle Pik
Oh, I thought I'll choke

Switch it off x4
Because it is heavy punishment

I then walked to the kitchen for a beer
And switched to channel four
Oh my God what have here
That is spoiling my screen
Is there nowhere to hide
From that man's pretty face?

With his finger in the air
He is an annoyance in my life
In the programmes in the air
You only see PW' s face
I'll take you another bet
All the neighbours have M-net

Switch it off x 4
Because it is heavy punishment

HOU MY VAS KORPORAAL

Hou my vas korporaal, ek is ‘n kind skoon verdwaal
Gaan ek weer my cherry sien, as ek van die trein afklim
Ja sowaar korporaal
Dis maar swaar korporaal
Ek speel oorlog met my beste dae
Ja ja ja
Ek en al my maatjies bymekaar

Sal so doen kolonel
Sal nie weier alhoewel
Elke dag deurgekruis
Al hoe nader aan my huis
Hot en haar korporaal
Ek word naar korporaal

My ou man se eerste kamp is klaar
Ja ja ja
Amper al sy maatjies bymekaar, bymekaar

Oogklappe sorg vir ‘n skoon gewete
Dis my plig nie my keuse
Hier sit ek, ek sit en vrek
Dis nie my skuld maar ek hou my bek
Hou jou bek boet

Sy is my nooi en haar naam is min dae
Ja ja ja
Ek en al my maatjies bymekaar
Ja x7
Korporaal

Yo yo
Troep kom hier
Sien jy daai boom
Niemand sien die boom nie
Bring hom hier ek wil hom rook
Hou my vas korporaal

HOLD ME TIGHT CORPORAL

Hold me tight corporal, I am child completely lost
Will I see my cherry again when I get off the train
Yes indeed corporal
It is difficult corporal
I am playing war with my best days
Yes yes yes
Me an all my mates

Will do that colonel
Will not refuse, though
Everyday is a cross
One day closer to home
Here and there corporal
I am getting nauseous corporal

My old man’s [father’s] first camp is finished
Yes yes yes
Almost all his mates, together, together

Blinkers make for a clean conscience
It is my duty , not my choice
Here I sit , I sit and die
I am not guilty, but I have to shut up
Shut up young man!

She is my girl and her name is “min dae”
Yes yes yes
Me and all my mates together, together, together
Yes x7
Corporal

Yo yo
Troop come here
Do you see that tree
Nobody sees the tree
Bring it here, I would like to smoke it

Hold me tight corporal

BMW

Ons ry ‘n BMW x3
Ons gaan elke jaar oorsee
Miskien gaan ons volgende jaar twee keer
Ons ry ‘n BMW x2
Ons sal jou nie ‘n lift gee [Ons sal jou fo-k-l gee]
Ons ry ‘n BMW x3
Vir ‘n ryloper sê ons nee
Ons ry ‘n BMW x3
Moet ons dan alles verniet weggee
Ons ry ‘n BMW x3

Polina gaan maak vir die miesies tee
Ja ja toe Polina
Ons drink net suurlemoentee
Ons ry’n BMW x3

Wel jy weet, ons stem vir die PFP
Ons stem vir die NP
Ons stem vir dieKP
Ons stem vir alles met ‘n P
Net nie die ANC, nee

Ons ry ‘n BMW x2
Moenie politiek praat hier nie
Ons sal blou moord skree
En dan sal ons vir Mevrou moet Valiums gee
My kop is so seer
Kan iemand asseblief vir ‘n sonbril aangee
Die lig, die son is so helder
En het enige iemand nog ‘n idée
Geen rus, niks meer rus
Ek weet nie meer nie x2
Waarom ry ons nie weer ‘n keer nie

BMW

We drive a BMW x 3
We go overseas annually
Perhaps we’ll be going twice next year
We drive a BMW x 2
We won’t give you a lift[We will give you fo- k-l]
We drive a BMWx3
For a hitch hiker we say no
Do we have to part with everything, and get nothing in return
We drive BMW x3

Polina, go and make tea for the madam
Yes, yes Polina
We only drink lemon tea
We drive a BMWx3

Well, you know, we vote for the PFP
We vote NP
We vote KP
We vote for anything with a P
But not the ANC, no

We drive a BMW x2
Do not talk politics here
We’ll shout blue murder
And then we’ll have to give the Mrs Valiums
My head is so painful
Can somebody please pass me dark glasses
The light, the sun is strong
And has anybody still an idea
No more rest, no more rest
I don’t know any longer x2
Why don’t we go for another drive

BOER IN BETON

Ek is ‘n Afrikaner in die stad
Ek dra my masker soos ‘n kat
Deur donker stegies en geboue
Vat vyf, by broer vat vat

En iewers in my onderbewussyn
Sien ek nog die Karooson skyn
Hoor ek die grensdrade se gesing
Voer ek die kabouters in my tuin

Ek rook ingevoerde fags
Ek lees Engelsprekende mags
Ek gaan nooit kerk toe
Want dis ‘n drag

Want ek’s boer in beton
Soos Oom Paul op ou Kerkplein
Niemand weet van my pyn
Want ek is goed vermom
Ek is ‘n boer in beton

Iewers in my klink die stem
Van Strydom, Verwoerd en die knipmeslem
Van die patriotisme wat nog flits
Al maak ek Sondae nog vuur met Blits

Elke voorvader ‘n pionier
En ek weet ek hoort nie hier
Ek sit in laatnag kroeë rond
Maar ek ken nie meer die reuk van grond

Daar is iewers nog velde wat roep
Daar is iewers nog ‘n Boerestoep
Die Groot Trek oor die savanna
Die blink loop van ‘n sanna

Daar is ‘n ketel wat nog kook
Daar is ‘n kampvuur wat nog rook
Daar is vroue wat nog ween
En uitlanders wat brande stook

En ek net so vreemd soos jy
In hierdie stad van fuifery
Hier tussen die wolkekrabbers
Waar speedcops spied en karre ry

My handpalms is wit soos jy
Ek bedel troos waar ek kan
In hierdie land van blik en glas
Is ek in sak en as

BOER IN CONCRETE

I am an Afrikaner in the city
I wear my mask like a cat
Through dark alleys and buildings
Take five , my brother, take five, take take

And somewhere in my subconsicious
I still see the Karoo sun shining
I hear the boundary fences sing
I feed the gnomes in my garden

I smoke imported fags
I read English mags
I never go to church
Because it is a drag

Because I am a boer in concrete
As “oom” Paul on my old Church Square
Nobody knows about my pain
Because I am well camouflaged
I am a boer in concrete

Somewhere in me is the the voice of
Strydom, Verwoerd and the blade of a
pocketknife
Of a flash of patriotism
Although I use Blits to make a fire on Sundays

Every ancestor a pioneer
And I know I don’t belong here
I sit in bars late at night
But I no longer know the smell of the land

There is still somewhere fields that are calling
There is still somewhere a Boer veranda
The Great Trek over the savanna
The glittering rifle-barrel

There is a kettle boiling
There is a campfire still smoking
There are women still crying
And ‘uitlanders’ still stoking fires

And I am just as estranged as you are
In this city of carousing
Here between the sky scrapers
Where speed cops speed and cars ride

The palms of my hands are as white as you are
I beg to be consoled where I can
In this land of tin and glass
I am in sackcloth and ash

OSSEWA

Ek staan hier langs die highway met my ou vriend Mike
Ons twee was op pad om Transkei toe te hike
die son bak neer, dit was baie warm weer,
Ons was amper reg om moed op te gee
maar skielik in die verte blink ‘n spikkel in die pad
Dit kom vinnig nader, ja die ding het laat spat
ek kon my oë nie glo nie, my verstand kon dit nie vat nie
Genade Gert dit ‘n nuwe soort ossewa ossewa, ossewa, ja ‘n ossewa

‘n Klein entjie verder begin die ding kalmeer
Hy kom tot ‘n stilstand met remme wat skree
‘n ou oom klim uit, sê ons moet nadertree
Hy gee nie om om vir ons ‘n lift te gee
Hy het sy ossewa woema gegee
Hy het ‘n V-6 engine binne-in gemonteer
en ‘n tape-deck waarop Elvis kliphard skreeu

Dit was ‘n regte egte rock ‘n roll ossewa osewa, ossewa, ja ‘n ossewa

Ons cruise langs die highway af
duidelik nie van hier
Teen ‘n honderd en sestig kilometer ‘n uur
die ander karre op die pad het ons gou verbygegaan
Hy bied vir ons bier uit sy wakis aan
‘n groot span osse sleep hy agter ons aan
in ‘n uniek ontwerpte dubbel-sleepwa
Hy trap die lepel plat en ons is vinnig by die see
in ons funky nuwe rock ‘n roll ossewa ossewa, ossewa, ja ‘n ossewa
sweet sweet ossewa ons ry in ‘n ossewa.

OXWAGON

I’m standing at the highway with my old friend Mike
The two of us are hiking to the Transkei
The sun bakes down, it is very warm weather
We were nearly ready to give up hope
but suddenly in the distance shines a dot in the road
It approaches very fast, yes the thing can fly
my eyes could not believe it, my mind could not take it
Mercy me, it’s a new type of oxwagon oxwagon, oxwagon, yes, an oxwagon

A small distance further the thing settles down
He comes to a halt with brakes that screech
an old uncle gets out, he says we must approach
He doesn’t mind giving us a ride
He revved his oxwagon
He had a V-6 engine mounted inside
and a tape deck on which Elvis screams loudly

It was a real, true rock ‘n roll oxwagon oxwagon, oxwagon, yes an oxwagon

We cruise down the highway
clearly not from around here
At one hundred and sixty kilometers an hour
the other cars passed us quickly
He offers us a beers out of the wagonchest
a great span of oxen he pulls behind us in a new double-trailer
He puts his foot down flat and we’re soon at the sea
in our funky new rock ‘n roll oxwagon
Oxwagon, oxwagon, yes, an oxwagon
sweet sweet oxwagon, we ride an oxwagon