


# Performing the sacred – Aspects of singing and contextualisation in South Africa

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After an introduction and views on inculturation (i.e. adapting the liturgy to the context within which it is 'performed' or the context influencing the liturgy), the focus shifts to 'incarnation' and 'contextualisation' in a broader sense, to also include the transformation and adaptation of the 'sacred' for the secular or political sphere. Practices of performing faith through texts and music within diverse liturgical, spiritual, cultural and political contexts in South Africa are discussed. Aspects taken into account are the possible influence of landscape or seasons on the expression of faith and the possible sacro-soundscapes that could come from different contexts, such as the impact of the Karoo landscape on Khoisan descendants singing the sacred; performances in a contextualised music idiom, such as the Genevan Psalms in a Khoi music idiom; and celebrating the Church Year in different hemispheres. The discussion focuses also on contextualising within political contexts – that is, where political space is 'sacralised' through sacred songs and where sacred songs are given political meaning or changed for the political sphere. The article closes with the possibility of songs from Africa being sung in other countries and the meaning it could have, or could be given. It is argued that contextualisation from one context to another context of the sacred, or from a 'secular' to a sacred context, as well as contextualising the sacred into the public ('secular') or political sphere, could lead to contexts and spaces being changed, enrich the performance of the sacred, stimulate creativity, allow for new processes of attributing meaning, change values and motivate people, form new identities and thus also could lead to changed communities.

**Keywords:** Contextualisation; Inculturation; Sacred; Performance; Singing; Songs of Struggle.

## Introduction

This article starts with views on contextualisation and inculturation, but moves out to focus on 'incarnation' and 'contextualisation' (or localisation) in a broader sense, to also include the transformation and adaptation of the 'sacred' for the 'secular' or political sphere. Practices of performing faith through texts and music within diverse liturgical, spiritual, cultural and political contexts in South Africa are discussed. It forms part of a project of researchers from three different countries, Finland, Brazil and South Africa, on the contextualisation of (faith) texts and music within a variety of contexts in various countries.

## Inculturation and contextualisation: A short overview

A process of contextualisation developed from the start of Christendom and was promoted anew in the Protestant churches from the times of the Reformation (1517). It can be argued that contextualisation or inculturation was in essence the spirit that brought about the Reformation. Because of its dominance over centuries and its power as a world-wide church, it took the Roman Catholic Church much longer to recognise the importance of differences between various contexts and the influence these differences could have on the ways in which faith or the sacred could be expressed in each context. The second Vatican Council (1962–1965) opened up possibilities for integral changes.

The insights of the second Vatican Council were based on the sacramental theology of Eduard Schillebeeckx and Karl Rahner that placed the focus on Christ's *incarnation in time and space*. The incarnation of Christ, carried on by the church as *Christ's body located in a myriad of human cultures*, serves as the basis for both the identity and the diversity of the liturgy as the church's self-expression (Francis 2014:5).

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In discussions on the relation between faith and culture, the term 'inculturation' took its place alongside concepts such as 'adaptation', 'acculturation', 'enculturation', 'substitution', 'contextualisation' and other concepts that were formed over time. Inculturation can be defined as 'the process whereby pertinent elements of a local culture are integrated into the texts, rites, symbols, and institutions employed by a local church for its worship' (Anscar Chupongco, cited in Francis 2014:5). The word 'acculturation' or 'juxtaposition' was used to describe the first level of this process, which is the contact between cultures, and more specifically, between the local church and the Roman Rite (Francis 2014:6). Taking the definition from the Special Assembly of the Synod in 1985 (Roman Catholic), Follo (2010) describes 'inculturation' as 'the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures'. It immediately brings up the question: when are cultural values 'authentic' and when not? 'Christianity' is used as if it is a concept free from any (existing) cultural influences and as if 'Christianity' could 'be inserted' as something without (existing) human cultural influences into the various *human* cultures. The definition also refers to 'the Gospel' and the transmission of 'its values', as if the Gospel has values that are free from human influences and that can be transmitted 'as such'.

The concept of inculturation has gained a prominent place in discussions on the relation between faith and culture, missionary action, evangelisation, and intercultural and interfaith dialogue. It acquired meanings that include the mutual enrichment of people and groups by virtue of the meeting between 'the Gospel' and a given social environment. It has, however, also become a contested term, as it did not acknowledge sufficiently that the church immediately encountered many cultures in its shift from the Judaic to the Hellenistic world and that the expression of the Christian faith therefore has been part of cultural processes and has been subjected to cultural processes from the start. Lauster (2014) refers to 'das frühe Christentum als Kulturrevolution', making clear that early Christianity was a revolution of culture as such. Follo (2010:n.p.) explains that Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger insisted on the need to abandon the concept of inculturation in favour of *interculturality* (which can be seen as a positive development), but later, as Benedict XVI, he said that 'the inculturation of the faith is a necessity, insofar as the specificity and the integrity of the faith are not compromised' and he appealed on several occasions for 'a reflection that would display the riches of the *one truth* [my emphasis] in the plurality of culture' (Follo 2010:n.p.).

The references to 'one truth' and 'the faith' as if truth and faith are not a part of, or influenced and formed by, cultural processes constitute a fundamental problem. The transcultural aspect of liturgy, where liturgy is seen by many as a God-given entity that should remain unchanged, is still

emphasised in many circles in the Roman Catholic Church. The extent to which the liturgy could be adapted or the norms adjusted, therefore, has been an ongoing debate in the Roman Catholic Church. In a recent study in Germany, Stuflesser, Ziebertz and Weyler studied the behaviour of liturgical actors – priests, permanent deacons and full-time pastoral ministers – and found that more than half of all these liturgical actors deviate from the norm for the liturgy set by the church. Their respondents gave many reasons for deviating from the norm, of which the most prominent appears to be that they do it 'for pastoral reasons', that is, to make worship understandable and to bring faith to people within their contexts, today (Stuflesser & Weyler 2018).

Connecting to the discussions in the Roman Catholic Church, the *Lutheran World Federation* (LWF) brought out the Nairobi Statement (1996), describing the four perspectives from which the relationship between liturgy and culture, that is, the dynamics that play a role in the process of inculturation, can be observed:

1. It is transcultural, that is, the same substance for everyone everywhere, beyond culture.
2. It is contextual, varying according to the local situation (influenced by nature and culture).
3. It is counter-cultural, challenging what is contrary to the Gospel in a given culture.
4. It is cross-cultural, making possible sharing between different local cultures.

Many theological aspects, elements and actions of the liturgy are part of a faith tradition or a faith culture that are (and should be) handed on (*tradere*) to new generations. It is true that the transcultural aspect of liturgy is important. At the same time, however, it must be recognised that the structure and content of the liturgy have been formed through processes of contextualisation from the start. Liturgy is an expression of faith (one expression of faith) and in itself a part of ongoing cultural processes. Saliers (2015) states that the essence of liturgical renewal is to ask how our *historically and culturally embodied* liturgies (my emphasis) can remain faithful over time to Jesus Christ and to the mystery of God's triune life in creation and history. This also summarises the essence of the problem of contextualisation or inculturation. Saliers (2015) argues that liturgical reform (and coupled with it inculturation or contextualisation) cannot simply begin with the restoration of past history, nor can it begin with a pragmatic or utilitarian assessment of what works for people now. The Christian liturgy 'cannot be discontinuous with what is claimed in the life, death, resurrection and Spirit-giving of Jesus Christ and his true witnesses' (Saliers 2015:21).

Connecting with the arguments of Schillebeeckx, Rahner, Vatican II and Saliers, as well as Chupongco (2000:249) who said that incarnation brings about mutual enrichment to the people who receive the faith and to the church that incarnates itself, I would also take *incarnation* as the founding principle

for adaptation (instead of inculturation) and speak about the *incarnation of faith* when speaking about *contextualising faith* or *performing the sacred* in various contexts and cultures. The incarnation of faith happens differently in each context. Existing expressions of faith (or culture) are constantly given new meaning and are lived anew. New bodies are mobilised in these processes and bodies are mobilised anew. In this regard, the concept of 'creativity' is also very relevant.

The social and cultural contexts in which the incarnation of faith takes place or in which the sacred is performed are ever shifting over time. Contextualisation is used not only to depict the ongoing dialogue or process of cross-fertilisation between 'faith' (the sacred) and 'culture' (the secular), but also to depict the processes of sharing cultural expressions of faith between various (secular) cultures and between various cultures of faith, thus processes of cross-pollination, where, over time, elements from one culture are adapted into another culture or sub-culture of faith, and vice versa. In this article, aspects of change within the context of the 'sacred' (i.e. primarily within churches) are discussed, and it is also shown how expressions of faith or expressions of the sacred are changed and utilised in 'non-sacred' or 'secular' contexts, and where 'the sacred' could receive new (religious, cultural, political or patriotic) meaning. Ways in which non-sacred contexts could be sacralised by the use of 'sacred' material, whether kept in the original form or adapted for the new context, are also discussed, together with the ways that 'non-sacred' or 'secular' cultural products could be used in sacred contexts and in those contexts receive deepened or 'sacred' meaning. These aspects emphasise the cross-cultural possibilities of liturgy and of performing 'the sacred'.

## Representing the sacred through music: The influence of nature

### The possible influence of nature, landscape and seasons

Ferguson and Tamburello (2015:296) wrote, '[n]ature may impact the religious structuring of a region'. They argue that 'beautiful weather, water and mountains', thus 'nature' is a 'spiritual resource' that competes with local traditional 'religious' organisations. From sociological studies they have conducted, they conclude that people in 'sunny' counties in America, such as California, receive so much spiritual energy from the landscape itself that there is not as much need for formal religion and that there are lower levels of adherence to religious organisations accordingly. They conclude that the natural environment therefore would pose a challenge for institutionalised religion. One could ask whether it really is 'spiritual' energy that people draw from nature in such a way that the spiritual energy of nature competes with the spiritual or religious energy of religion. Seeing also the role formal religion plays in Africa – a continent receiving abundant sunshine – it is clear that their conclusion also could not be applied one-dimensionally to include people everywhere.

If nature could be a spiritual resource, however, one could ask whether nature, climate, landscape and environment could influence the soundscape and, if so, what sacrosoundscapes would come from different regions? Would they really differ? Could long periods of darkness, fires, droughts or floods have different influences on the (sacred) songs and sounds that would express the spirituality of people in a region? Would there be a difference in the kind of hymns and religious songs that are sung? Would different metaphors be prominent?

There are many hymns and religious songs in Finnish that lend the (sacred) beauty of the snow and the silence of the woods a spiritual dimension. This will be explored in another article. Another possibility to explore is whether specific keys are prominent in the sacro-scape of various countries. Through contact with Finnish hymnologists, I knew that hymns in the minor key are prominent in Finland. In many of the churches in South Africa, however, hymns in the minor key are minimal. It is accepted that in general the minor key has a feeling of sadness and that the major key is more upbeat or 'sunny'. Could the difference be related to Finland being dark and wet for long periods in the year, bringing forth the melancholic minor key, and that South Africa, being bright and sunny and dry almost all of the time, would bring forth the bright major key that is heard as a 'happier' sound? No definitive answer could be given, but it can be noted that Afrikaans-speaking people have indeed contextualised (or inculturised) a number of the Genevan or Strasbourg melodies by replacing the modal tunes of the 16th century (as included in *Het boek der Psalmen* – Anon 1875) with home-grown tunes in the major key, such as the tunes for Psalm 18 (PK de Villiers), Psalm 31 (JS de Villiers), Psalm 33 (AC van Velden), Psalm 38 (Liederwysie or folk tune), Psalm 100 (PK de Villiers) and Psalm 130 (Liederwysie or folk tune). These tunes were included in the first official hymnal in the Afrikaans language, the *Psalm-en Gesangboek* (1944). In an elitist way, the hymnal committee for the official *Psalm-en Gesangboek* (1978) replaced these 'local' tunes with the Genevan or Strasbourg melodies of 1562, but in most of the churches the 'local' tunes were still sung – thus 'illegally' carrying forth the process of indigenisation or contextualisation. These 'home-grown' or 'local' tunes are included again in *Liedboek van die Kerk* (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk en Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika 2001), the current hymnal of the Reformed churches in which the Afrikaans language is used. These tunes in the major key sound 'happier' than the original Genevan melodies. Looking at the texts of these psalms, however, one sees that four of the examples are psalms of lament or plaintive psalms (Psalm 18, 31, 38 and 130), which means that there must be discrepancies between the 'dark' or 'sad' content of the texts and their 'happy' tunes. One could ask how these differing moods could be reconciled? Speaking from personal experience as a participating singer and listener in church services, I can say that it happened primarily through the performance practice: in general, the psalms were sung in a slow tempo, a psalm of praise or a psalm of lament.

## Performance in an indigenous, contextual music idiom

### 'Nege Fragmente uit Ses Khoi'nPsalms' – Genevan Psalms in Khoi music idiom

Unique possibilities for the contextualisation of the psalms are reflected in a programme of six psalms with Genevan tunes, interpreted and improvised with the elements of music in a Khoi idiom. South African Khoi music on bow, saxophone and blik'nsnaar is played by Garth Erasmus and laced into fragments of 16th century Genevan psalm melodies played by Marietjie Pauw (transverse flute) and Francois Blom (organ). The first performances of the programme were given in June 2018. A documentary film was also made by Aryan Kaganof (2018). The theme underlying this fusion is the subjugation of the Khoi by the Dutch colonisers in the mid-17th century and the complex ways in which belief and religion have played a role in the subjugation. In the process of bringing the music of the Genevan psalms to the Cape of Good Hope, the colonisers also silenced the music of the indigenous people, the Khoi. To depict this, there is no spoken dialogue (Pauw projects n.d.):

The psalms are woven into memories of Khoi music to engage with shared, violent histories, including imperial genocide and violence from apartheid and social engineering of people, legislated in 1948 – harms that still persists. (n.p.)

In this programme the performers use something of each of their backgrounds, however painful it might be.

This certainly is a form of contextualisation where the opportunity is created for people from different backgrounds to be reconciled and be enriched through combining the 'sacred' music of their forebears (or what is the 'imagined' music of the forebears) with that of the others (or what is the 'imagined' music of the others), by fusing them into new works of art, that could *be given* sacred meaning and could give new meaning to the lives of people.

### Indigenous singing of Khoisan descendants in the Karoo

As descendants from indigenous peoples known collectively as Khoisan, European settlers and slaves, the people known as 'coloured people', and officially designated as one of the apartheid government's four main racial categories, have long endured oppression (Jorritsma 2011, 2016:228–247). Jorritsma conducted research on the choruses, choir music and hymns of the Karoo region to present a history of the people's traditional, religious and cultural identity in song. She investigated music within the specific local context of three churches with membership of mixed race people in the rural town of Graaff-Reinet. She argues that the sound and style of their religious singing are unique to this group of people. Through examining their tradition in the context of its surrounding landscape, she shows that not only does landscape exert a palpable power over its inhabitants but also that landscape affects the musical traditions of these residents. Utilising theoretical insights from the scholarly literature on music and landscape, she asserts that questions of landscape and power are highly relevant.

## The role of landscape, nature, seasons and the Church Year

Very relevant questions regarding nature and the Church Year are the following: what influence does the year in nature have on the way in which the Christian message is expressed in songs in the various times of the Church Year? How do metaphors differ between the Northern Hemisphere and the Southern Hemisphere? Which specific metaphors are found, for example, in the Christmas carols in the South, where Christmas is celebrated in summer?

### Somerkersfees

Apart from a few exceptions, the same (old) Christmas hymns and carols are sung in translated form over the world, also in South Africa. A 'local' folk song, '*Somerkersfees*', written by the folk singer, Koos du Plessis in the 1970s, has become the most popular carol in the Afrikaans language. In the first line, the silent night of peace 'under the Southern Cross' is welcomed. Voices from the past and the present are heard over silent fields. At the beginning of the second stanza, the singer asks another person whether he or she is listening – and hearing: how the bells are ringing in 'a language of ages'. The fields join in silent praise. It means even the silence of the night speaks: it tells 'the old story'. Combined with a nostalgic tune (even if in the major key), it speaks to the hearts of people.

### A Summer Christmas (translation)

Welcome, O night of peace and silence,  
the Southern Cross above;  
with voices past and voices present,  
telling of endless love.  
Christmas comes, Christmas comes, glory be to God!  
Grant us a blessed summer Christmas,  
here in our land, dear Lord.  
Hark, how the bells now tell the story,  
their ringing sound from far,  
the fields join in to spread His glory,  
with stillness and with awe.  
Christmas comes, Christmas comes, glory be to God!  
Grant us a blessed summer Christmas,  
here in our land, dear Lord.

Afrikaans text and music: Koos du Plessis  
Translation: Horst Müller, Gertrud Tönsing

The refrain, beginning with 'Christmas comes, Christmas comes', ends with the prayer: 'Send us a bright summer Christmas, here, in our land, O Lord'. By the references to Christmas in summer, a night under the Southern Cross, and by singing of 'our land', the text gets a local, South African atmosphere. But the text, together with a simple tune with a limited rhythmic pattern, reflects rather the silent night than a bright summer Christmas, and 'the bells ringing softly in the language of centuries...' is also an image taken directly from the European context. It may be rather the fusion of images that makes this song so popular. For the people in and from South Africa, there is, however, a subtext lining the text while singing it. With high levels of crime and a high rate of murders, the fields are not as peaceful and the nights are not as silent – not even at Christmas time. It gives the prayer an urgency,

heard even stronger by the people living in 'this' country: 'Give us a bright summer Christmas, in this, our land, O Lord'. The singers are actually saying: 'Take the gloom away and make it really summer, O Lord'. People on the 'sunny side' of the globe do not escape the many forms of darkness in them and around them (I note that these remarks could also bring into question the possible reason for the preference of the major key that I mentioned - it shows that there could be more reasons for the preference of the major key).

Many performances of this song are available on YouTube – some by very professional choirs. I find a performance of a South African congregation in London (2014) most touching, as their singing has an authenticity to it. Dressed in thick winter clothes, they express a longing for their country, for their families, for the sun and the light and the warmth of December.<sup>1</sup> These people, singing this carol in London, have learnt how dark winter can be in the Northern Hemisphere – and how long it can be. They are singing against the darkness. They are singing to keep the darkness at bay. And joining voices past and voices present, they bring hope – to themselves and to the people around them: 'Grant us a bright summer Christmas, *in this, our land, O Lord*'. Singing it, remembering where they come from, it also becomes a prayer for *the country where they now live*, in these dark times – it thus receives a more universal meaning. This performance proves that the carol that originated in the Southern Hemisphere can also be contextualised into a different context in the Northern Hemisphere – coming 'home' in a new context, as well as in other contexts and joining people together over the world. The great number of recordings show the wide appeal of the song – it has indeed become part of the repertoire of choirs and congregations in other parts of the world and thus was contextualised into new contexts.

## The role of history in singing the sacred

There is no doubt that the culture of various groups and the history of a country play a significant role in the manifestations of religiosity in a region and amongst certain groups. The influences of different histories of people on the religious songs they sing would be a relevant topic for research. What is the influence of culture, customs and traditions on the spirituality of peoples and regions? What role could a form of 'patriotism' play, for example? What role could performance and various performance practices play to bring about or promote contextualisation?

### Contextualising into political contexts: Sacred songs given political meaning or political space sacralised through sacred songs

The Genevan tunes that were substituted for local or home-grown tunes were mentioned above. A psalm, however, that

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sjKHxruT1t4>. Somerkersfees can be heard at 1:21:44.

was sung to its Strasbourg/Genevan tune all over the world is probably one composed by Matthäus Greiter (Strasbourg 1526) and later attached to the names of Guillaume Franc (Geneva 1542) and Pierre Daventès (Geneva, 1562). In the Dutch context, this psalm already had a strong patriotic meaning and political connotation of God being on the side of those singing it – thus the Dutch Christians. But it did not happen only in the Netherlands: this psalm was indigenised in the same way in Calvinist churches in countries such as Scotland, Hungary and the USA, where the Genevan psalms played a strong role. The white Afrikaans-speaking people had a similar subtext playing in their heads when singing it: God will stand up for his people against all enemies: those from outside – and those from within.

Given the political use of a psalm (and other sacred texts not discussed here), it is no surprise that texts from the psalms and other biblical texts (thus texts associated with the sacred) were also adapted during the years of struggle against the apartheid government – to be sung not only as songs for worship in church buildings or places of gathering but also at political rallies (Maluleke 2018):

The South African struggle against apartheid often fed off the music of the African churches. Many of the tunes sung as songs of struggle, are in fact appropriated African church hymns and choruses re-purposed for the struggle. (n.p.)

Songs with biblical quotations and references to psalms were transformed; for example, the well-known text from Psalm 121, 'I look up at the mountains, whence shall come my help?', became *I look up at the mountains and I remember June 16th*, which refers to the start of the political uprisings in Soweto on 16 June 1976 (South African Freedom Songs CD 2 2000). 'Lead us, Saviour' became *Lead us Tambo*, referring to Oliver Tambo, one of the leaders of the Struggle (South African Freedom Songs CD 2 2000). A song that originally spoke of believers' resolve to follow Jesus, 'We shall follow Jesus', became *We shall follow Luthuli* (South African Freedom Songs CD 2 2000). From a strict Western point of view, this could be criticised theologically, saying that space is created for saviours other than Christ. It can be seen, however, as contextualisation, as incarnation in time and space, as 'Christ's body located in a myriad of human cultures', therein that strong leaders are imbued with the power of a saviour and with Christ-like qualities – enabling them to bring concrete freedom NOW, in a world where there is or was no freedom for certain groups of people – thus acting as a 'Christ-like' figure, and for the people singing, also as someone receiving the power from Christ or from God.

According to Prof. Tinyiko Maluleke, the most 'sacred' tenet of Christianity, namely freedom in Christ, was taken up as creed for political freedom. Writing in 2016, he criticises Jacob Zuma (the then President of South Africa) and the African National Congress (ANC) leaders who supported him, for not living up to the expectations. Giving a sharp description of the processes in the struggle for freedom, he argues that, in deference to the ANC, many African Christians 'have

auctioned their *sacred* beliefs and proceeded to substitute the ANC for God and heroic ANC leaders for Jesus – in several songs of freedom, stolen from the churches' (Maluleke 2016):

At the break of dawn, they gather atop the holy local mountain singing 'there is no one like Jesus', in the afternoon at the political rally of uKhongolese, to the same tune and rhythm, they croon, 'Nelson Mandela ga o yo a tswanang le yena', meaning there is no one like Nelson Mandela.

Resplendent in their flowing white, purple and green church uniforms, they sing 'ha Modimo a le teng ha ayo mathata' (as long as God is here there will be no problems) by day, while by night they chant 'ha ANC e le teng ha ayo mathata' (as long as the ANC is here there will be no problems). (n.p.)

Texts often are considered as the main political component of songs of resistance, yet many songs were not only politically subversive through their texts alone, or because of the idiom of the music, but through their use and function in a specific context. The most well-known example would be *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* [God Bless Africa], the text of which is 'an unthreatening prayer'. Used as a politically subversive song, however, it received new meaning (Coplan & Jules-Rosette 2008:185–208 present an interesting discussion on the song). Another example is *Makubenjalo kuthe kube kunaphakade* [May it be so until eternity] (South African Freedom Songs CD 2 2000) – a song originating in the sacred space of the church – also applied or contextualised as a political song, whereas it actually has a theme that rather endorses the status quo. Clearly other layers of meaning were given to it, helping it to be contextualised into a 'non-sacred', political context (Allen 2003):

The ability of cryptic lyrics to accommodate multiple interpretations is particularly useful in a repressive political climate. On occasion, a song's surface meaning thinly veils a coded message, whose interpretation can be reinforced by the performance context. (p. 235)

Numerous songs sung in the struggle against apartheid became so widely known and their texts so frequently altered and adapted that their authorship is collective. This is also true for the Christian hymns and choruses: their texts were adapted collectively according to the circumstances. Texts were changed so spontaneously in different contexts and the line between 'sacred' and 'secular' was crossed so often that it would be impossible now, after years, to speculate and try to determine the possible dates of 'when' and the spaces of 'where' a 'sacred' song could have been used in a 'secular' context for the first time and vice versa. The premise of an article by Tönsing (2017) is that one could try to determine when and how these choruses moved from 'sacred' to 'secular' and vice versa. Such an endeavour would be similar to spending a whole article on trying to determine when, how and by whom certain melismas were inserted in the 'Liederwysies'. Trying to determine the 'age' of songs and choruses based only on small differences in the tunes is also a futile exercise, as oral delivery in essence provides for deviations and differences in the performance of a melody. No convincing theories can be given.

Hymns, songs or choruses received (and still receive) meaning according to the context (religious or political) in which they were (and are) performed. Religious songs sung outside the sacred space of worship were given political meaning and could have added a dimension of sacredness to the political context. When 'taken back' and sung again in the sacred space of the church, these songs then carried a subtext with them, thus also turning the struggle against apartheid into a kind of sacred struggle. Desmond Tutu (South African Freedom Songs CD 1 2000) explained the ambiguous singing of freedom songs in worship as a way 'to get rid of the energy, the spirit of war', indicating that singing about war would prevent people from physically making war. It thus means a kind of pacifying use of the freedom songs, keeping people to the Christian principles of peace. Freedom songs sung in church, thus contextualised into the sacred space of the church, however, also politicised and radicalised the people in the church. In this regard, Desmond Tutu's reference to the role of performance is significant: '[p]erformed at a high volume these songs scared the living daylight out of [...] the enemy out there. Whenever they heard it, it sent shivers down their spine' (South African Freedom Songs CD 1).

Not surprisingly, the South African government had taken over this trend of musical fusion and in 1986 promoted a song to further its own motives. The government sponsored an official 'peace song', entitled 'Together We Will Build a Brighter Future'. Many prominent musicians were hired to sing in English, Afrikaans, Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Tswana and Pedi. According to Ingrid Byerly, it turned out to be a scandal: 'Musicians were particularly angry that their *sacred ground* had been usurped by the very camp against which their music was most fervently and effectively being targeted' (Byerly 1998:29). Note her significant use of the description 'sacred ground'. It shows that the very act of singing these protest songs could be seen as 'sacred ground', changing the context of singing into a place so important that it could be perceived as a 'sacred' place and a 'sacred' act.

### Thuma Mina – Problems and new opportunities

With its call and answer singing between cantor and group, *Thuma Mina* (533, 534) has the typical features of song amongst oral cultures in Africa. I have touched on the problems that were encountered when *Thuma Mina* was included in the hymnal for the churches in which Afrikaans is spoken and sung (Kloppers 2016; Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk en Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika 2001). A minister of a Reformed Church wrote that he cannot accept the song, because in the farming community where he lives the song is strongly associated with the veneration of the ancestors. This is a good example of the processes where the transportation of a cultural product from another culture or group, that is, contextualisation or inculturation, is met with resistance. The use of the song will pose no problem for people in another context, hearing it for the first time and hearing the meaning of what is sung. It is one of the choruses sung in South Africa's churches that are

based on biblical verses quoted directly or creatively responded to by singing. *Thuma Mina* takes up the story of the prophet Isaiah's interaction with God in Isaiah 6:8 in the Old Testament: and I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me'.

Sung in different indigenous languages, *Thuma Mina* is very popular in South Africa's churches, with as many versions of the song as there are church denominations. It is also included in hymnals over the world, which means it already functions as a sacred song across countries and cultures – it was already contextualised in different contexts. According to Maluleke (2018), it speaks about popular themes in African churches, themes that have stood the test of time, namely, recruiting others to a changed lifestyle or evangelisation, taking individual responsibility, personal change (repentance) and personal sacrifice seriously.

A good opportunity was created for a song from the 'sacred' sphere of religion, to become even more widely known and to function within a broader sphere, when *Thuma Mina* was quoted by the (then) new President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, at the end of his inaugural address to South Africa's Parliament in February 2018. He quoted *Thuma Mina* through the recording of Hugh Masekela, who had died only a few weeks before this speech.<sup>2</sup> In a column in *AllAfrica* on 21 February 2018, Maluleke (2018) writes the following:

[It] was Ramaphosa's quotation of the words of Hugh Masekela's song, *Thuma Mina/Send Me* at the end of his speech that appears to have been particularly inspirational. So much so that – as he told Parliament in his reply to the debate on his speech – many South Africans sent him messages consisting of only two words: 'Send Me'. (n.p.)

After the endless corruption of the previous president, Jacob Zuma, people were ready to gather behind Ramaphosa and start anew, helping to eradicate corruption and poverty. Maluleke argues that a willingness to be sent to carry out a task or mission and the capacity to muster the obedience and discipline necessary to accept being sent are pervasive and creative ethical principles. He concludes that when Cyril Ramaphosa quoted the song *Send Me*, he was not only honouring the memory of one of the best musicians in Africa and the world, but he was 'also evoking the bewitching lyrics of an immensely popular African church chorus', with a view to a changed lifestyle, individual responsibility, personal change (repentance) and personal sacrifice. Through the use of this song, the so-called *Thuma Mina Campaign* has begun.

In a so-called 'post-secular' world (Lauster 2014), it is now accepted more generally that sharp distinctions between faith, religiosity, spirituality and 'the secular' cannot be made (anymore). In Africa, the lines between sacred and secular have been fluid all along. Contextualised wider into the public domain, *Thuma Mina*, the chorus from the church, was given a strong political and patriotic meaning. It is so deeply

embedded in the consciousness of many South Africans that it could not be separated from its spiritual or 'sacred' meaning. By playing into the subtext of sacredness and religiosity through this song, people were motivated and inspired on various levels of consciousness.

In concluding his *State of the Nation Address*<sup>3</sup> more than a year later, on 20 June 2019, President Cyril Ramaphosa quoted a text by Ben Okri, urging the people of South Africa to 'begin today to remake your mental and spiritual world'. Coupled with a further call in the text by Okri to 'Infect the world with your light' and 'Help fulfil the golden *prophecies*' (italics added), Ramaphosa certainly meant to remind people of the 'spiritual' dimension of the earlier speech and the call to action, when he quoted a text originating from the biblical prophecies, *Thuma Mina*. With these quotations and references, he also implicitly renewed the meaning, pledge and prophetic dimension of the song.

## Current trends – Trending the sacred

The marks of missionary traditions from Europe and America are still very strong in the black churches in Africa. The influences of Western or European songs and hymns brought into the South African context seriously limited the use of indigenous African hymnody and still deeply influence the singing in African churches. In the past 50 years, many people have worked to change the situation. The contribution of the musicologist and ex-Catholic priest, Dave Dargie, could be mentioned especially. It is ironic, however, that now that hymns and songs from Africa are included in hymnals all over the world, choruses from the charismatic and Gospel traditions in the USA have taken over – a form of neo-colonialism now further limiting the use of local music, or music 'from the African soil'. Even if the music of the African American people formed the roots of the music of charismatic world Christianities (Bohlman 2016:677), it still is music that was 'Americanised' in the process of contextualisation or localisation in the USA. The music was changed over time and in further processes – not the least in the process of dissemination by mega record companies aimed at 'the market'. In another context, Bohlman (2002:xii) refers to the 'homogenising effect' of world music that threatens 'village practices' as it privileges 'the space of the global village'. This is indeed the predicament of the material from religious contexts in Africa, unearthed and restored on a much smaller scale in the last 50 years.

The current context of Africa or South Africa still has much to offer, and it is indeed a positive development in cross-cultural sharing that songs from Africa are included in hymnals over the world. These songs are given the possibility to be contextualised in new contexts. It remains relevant, however, to ask why they are included? Because of a 'taste for the exotic' – thus also a form of colonisation? I have emphasised previously (Kloppers 2017:185) that people

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jL8Uu9APWQk> (version sung in churches). See also <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvHuuCauJNM> (version by Masekela).

<sup>3</sup> State of the Nation Address on 20 June 2019. <https://www.gov.za/speeches/2SONA2019>.

using material from other cultures should be cautious of cultural imperialism or cultural 'tourism' and that they should ask themselves whether they are singing these 'exotic songs' because of a 'good feeling' or because of a superficial way of 'acknowledging other cultures', without really bearing in mind the possible circumstances under which a song came to be sung. The 'homelands' or 'stories' of hymns and songs should be acknowledged even if they are adapted in the process of 'being used'. They could represent (re-present, make present) the particular (sacred) story and cultural expression of people in other contexts – people who may have been oppressed and have suffered. This requirement works into all directions and covers all contexts.

## Conclusion

In this article, it is shown that contextualisation from one context of the sacred to another context, as well as contextualising the sacred into the sphere of the secular or political, could contribute to enrich the performance of the sacred, could allow for new processes of giving meaning, could change values and motivate people, could form new identities and could lead also to transformed communities. It is argued that people from different backgrounds can be reconciled and be enriched through combining the sacred music of their forebears (or what is the 'imagined' music of the forebears) with that of the other, by fusing the music into new works of art that could *be given* sacred meaning and give new meaning to the lives of people (such as the interlacing of Khoi music with melodies from the Genevan psalms). Performing the sacred becomes more meaningful in various contexts when the roots or the original contexts are known and are also acknowledged. By acknowledging the other and what is taken from the other, hymns and songs can be contextualised into new contexts and receive sacred meaning – be it sacred meaning of a different kind.

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