

Abstract

Struggle songs have continued to pulsate in South Africa after the advent of democracy in 1994. This study examines the deployment of song as a form of intangible heritage. It looks at why the songs originally composed under the oppressive conditions of apartheid continue to be deployed with such vigour in a democratic South Africa, and what the effects and meanings of this deployment in different spaces are. It also explores what it means for the field of heritage as well as the performance of song if struggle songs are considered a form of intangible heritage. This thesis draws on the seminal work of James Young (1992) on the notion of the counter-monument to examine the deployment of song, and the multiple twists and turns it takes during its performance journey. Three case studies are presented to examine the utilisation of song: The court transcripts of the 2011 *Dubula ibhunu* trial between 'Afrikaner' civil rights organisation AfriForum and Julius Malema, at the time President of the Youth League of the African National Congress (ANC), the ANC's National Conference in 2012, and the *Singing Freedom: Music and the struggle against apartheid* museum exhibition at the Iziko Slave Lodge. This thesis shows that the notion of heritage has become enormously potent in post-apartheid South Africa. It concludes that song operates as a sonic counter-monument that defies containment in heritage frameworks, local and international policies and formal memorialisation projects. It is a form of *active* heritage – one that is deeply felt by its singers.