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APORIAS OF THE CULTURAL BOYCOTT

Anti-Apartheid Movement, ANC and the Conflict
Surrounding Paul Simon's Album *Graceland*
(1985–1988)

The political goal of the Anti-Apartheid Movement was to isolate Pretoria on all levels in order to bring about the collapse of the apartheid regime. One means which initially received much less attention than the economic boycott, but which became increasingly important as time went on, was the cultural boycott with its two complementary components: the cessation of any form of exchange with South Africa and the mobilisation of artists in the fight against apartheid. The importance of both of these instruments grew with the mass mediatisation and inner transformation of ›Western‹ countries into ›experience-driven societies‹. At the same time, transnational entanglements and the increasing opposition within South Africa revealed the limitations of the boycott. Awareness of these limitations increased in the mid-1980s among the general public and not least within the movement itself. A catalyst was Paul Simon's album *Graceland*, which was recorded in South Africa with black South African musicians in 1985 and released in 1986. It formed part of the ›world music‹ revival, which had prompted a renewed recourse to the musical forms of the non-Western world in reaction to what was seen as the increasing superficiality of pop music. Initiatives like Peter Gabriel's Real World label and the ›Festival Jazz and World Music‹ organised by Joachim-Ernst Berendt in New York had been popularising musicians from ›Third World‹ countries since the early 1980s.¹ Artists from South Africa were only involved if they had been exiled – if they lived in the country itself, they were excluded.

1 Timothy D. Taylor, *Global Pop. World Music, World Markets*, New York 1997.



Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) activists protesting in front of the Royal Albert Hall in London (AAM Archives Committee; photo: Andrew Wiard, 7 April 1987)

While part of the Anti-Apartheid Movement believed that Simon had violated the boycott by recording in Soweto, others pointed out that black oppositional artists were not only banned inside the country, but deprived of opportunities abroad as well, because the boycott prohibited any form of cultural contact. At the same time, the riots from 1985 onwards were accompanied by a marked increase in the commitment of artists and others against apartheid both within and outside of South Africa. The politicisation of practices of consumption and everyday life, as has been described by the concept of ›lifestyle politics‹,² contributed to this. Political campaigns used pop music and mass media to popularise concerns with a global reach.³ Music in particular played a

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- 2 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge 1991; Ulrich Beck, *The Reinvention of Politics. Rethinking Modernity in the Global Social Order*, Oxford 1997; Håkan Thörn, *Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Civil Society*, Basingstoke 2006.
 - 3 Reebee Garofalo (ed.), *Rockin' the Boat. Mass Music and Mass Movements*, Boston 1992; Christian Lahusen, *The Rhetoric of Moral Protest. Public Campaigns, Celebrity Endorsement, and Political Mobilization*, Berlin 1996; Sigrid Baringhorst, *Politik als Kampagne. Zur medialen Erzeugung von Solidarität*, Wiesbaden 1998.

pivotal role in these years as a political medium, not least in the confrontation with apartheid.⁴ Paul Simon took a different stance, which the present article will endeavour to clarify and contextualise. The politicisation of everyday life went from strength to strength, even reaching the otherwise not especially political world of pop, which became deeply concerned with what was ›a somewhat sophisticated argument for pop musicians' surrounding *Graceland* in the spring of 1987.⁵ The June 1988 festival in London's Wembley Stadium on the occasion of Nelson Mandela's 70th birthday marked a high point in ›lifestyle politics‹. With particular reference to the controversy surrounding *Graceland*, the article will examine the potentials and problems involved in seeking to maintain a blanket cultural boycott of South Africa in times of rapidly increasing mediatisation on a global level. In addition to printed primary and secondary material, the exposition draws on British Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) sources in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and material from the African National Congress (ANC) and national anti-Apartheid movements preserved in the Mayibuye Archives at the University of Western Cape in South Africa.

1. Concept and History of the Cultural Boycott

Even before the call for a total boycott of South Africa by ANC president Albert Luthuli in 1959, Trevor Huddleston, later president of the British AAM, had called for a cultural boycott in October 1954.⁶ Unions and cultural associations followed suit. In 1956 the British actors' union Equity instructed its members to boycott theatres that practised racial segregation, and in 1961 the British musicians' union urged its members to turn down engagements in South Africa. Bands like the Rolling Stones and the Beatles boycotted performances at the Cape in the 1960s on their initiative. Writers repeatedly called for a boycott over the ensuing decades. Sports were at the centre of

4 Michael Drewett, *Music in the Struggle to End Apartheid: South Africa*, in: Martin Cloonan/Reebee Garofalo (eds), *Policing Pop*, Philadelphia 2003, pp. 153-165.

5 Robin Denselow, *When the Music's Over. The Story of Political Pop*, London 1989, new paperback edition (with added postscript) 1990, p. 186.

6 On the history of the cultural boycott: Conny Braam/Fons Geerlings, *Towards New Cultural Relations. A Reflection on the Cultural Boycott*, in: Willem Campschreur/Joost Divendal (eds), *Culture in Another South Africa*, New York 1989, pp. 170-181; Rob Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem, Hollywood. South African Culture and the World Beyond*, New York 1994, pp. 155-157; Mbulelo Mzamane, *The Cultural Boycott of South Africa (I)*, in: Robert E. Edgar (ed.), *Sanctioning Apartheid*, Trenton 1990, pp. 381-396; Larry Shore, *The Cultural Boycott of South Africa (II)*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 397-411; Nomazengele A. Mangaliso, *Cultural Boycotts and Political Change*, in: Neta C. Crawford/Audie Klotz (eds), *How Sanctions Work. Lessons from South Africa*, Basingstoke 1999, pp. 232-243; Roger Fieldhouse, *Anti-Apartheid. A History of the Movement in Britain. A Study in Pressure Groups Politics*, London 2005, pp. 103-105.

attention in the early 1970s, with the mass medium of television also being affected following its introduction to South Africa in 1976. This changed with the opening of the amusement park Sun City in the Bantustan of Bophuthatswana at the end of 1979. Pop music now became the focus of the boycott efforts, because the regime was paying exorbitant fees for renowned stars to perform at Sun City to break its isolation. Not only anti-apartheid movements, but also the United Nations responded by intensifying the cultural boycott. The UN general assembly had already urged all states to suspend exchange with South Africa in the fields of culture, education and sports back in 1969. On 16 December 1980 it went one step further, calling on writers, artists and musicians to boycott the country. It encouraged anti-apartheid movements to conduct appropriate campaigns, and called on the UN Special Committee against Apartheid to further the boycott.⁷ In October 1983, the committee began publishing a ›cultural register‹ listing artists who failed to comply.

The list was updated on a regular basis. It was consulted by bodies such as student unions and the municipalities that had joined forces in the European campaign ›Cities against Apartheid‹, which then turned down invitations, or refused to perform at certain venues.⁸ This placed artists, who lived by their public reputation, under great pressure. Many of those listed publicly expressed their regret and vowed never to perform in South Africa again, whereupon they were removed from the register. Names on the cultural register included Shirley Bassey, who had performed at Sun City nine times in 1981, David Essex, who had performed there on three days in 1983, Elton John in the same year, and the bands Wishbone Ash, Nazareth, Black Sabbath and Status Quo, who had all played there in 1987. German performers at Sun City included James Last in 1982, Boney M. in 1984 and Modern Talking in 1987; white audiences in Windhoek, Pretoria and Johannesburg were entertained by Heintje in 1983.⁹ In 1988 and 1989, no British artists performed in the South African Las Vegas – a demonstration of just how effective the boycott campaign against Sun City was in raising general awareness.¹⁰

But it was not only pressure from the ANC, Anti-Apartheid Movement and UN that convinced artists of the necessity of the boycott. Developments in South Africa itself also played a role. Things got much worse over the course of the 1980s, with increasing state terror and battles between opposing groups following the declaration of a state of emergency in April 1985. Another factor was the situation in Great Britain, West Germany and the US, where the cooperation of the Thatcher, Kohl and Reagan administrations with the apartheid regime was coming under pressure and anti-apartheid

7 General Assembly Resolution: Politics of Apartheid of the Government of South Africa – Cultural, Academic and Other Boycotts of South Africa, 16 December 1980, in: United Nations (ed.), *The United Nations and Apartheid 1948–1994*, New York 1994, p. 355.

8 The British Contribution to the Cultural Isolation of South Africa and Mobilisation of Cultural Forces in Support of the South African Freedom Struggle, February 1984, Bodleian Library, Oxford (BLO), MSS AAM 1463.

9 All of this according to the lists in BLO, MSS AAM 1467.

10 Fieldhouse, *Anti-Apartheid* (fn. 6), p. 106.

activists were thus also pursuing a domestic agenda.¹¹ And in 1985, with ›Live Aid‹ and the ›We Are the World‹ project (Paul Simon was involved in this), ›a dash of realism and idealism briefly entered the commercial mainstream‹, something which benefited the Anti-Apartment Movement in particular.¹² In parallel to the prohibitive aspect of the cultural boycott, in the mid-1970s artists' initiatives began to be developed and expanded as an offensive instrument in anti-apartheid activism. ANC cultural groups like Mayibuye and Amandla were part of this, performing in many countries and playing a role in the cultural work of the anti-apartheid movements.¹³ A second element was the mobilisation of well-known musicians who enabled access to the major mass media.

The ›Culture and Resistance‹ conference held by the ANC in Gaborone (Botswana) in 1982 was attended by artists within the country as well as those in exile, and underscored the necessity of a cultural boycott in both directions. As benefit concerts proliferated, some musicians became politicised with regard to the situation in South Africa and sought to influence it through rigorous implementation of the total boycott. This politicisation manifested itself in the founding of Artists United Against Apartheid in the US with their first project, the 1985 album *Sun City*. Dozens of famous rock musicians were involved, including Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, Jackson Browne, Lou Reed, Peter Gabriel and initiator Steven Van Zandt. It was an ›awareness-raising project‹ that took advantage of the ›privileged media access of the stars‹ to fight apartheid, as well as a reaction to Ronald Reagan, whose policy of ›constructive engagement‹ further fuelled the boycott movement.¹⁴ The appearance in quick succession of two musical projects with enormous publicity – *Sun City* and *Graceland* – placed the issue right at the top of the public attention scale. In April 1986, Artists Against Apartheid (AAA) was founded in Great Britain. Initiatives in other countries, such as two rock concerts for the ANC with high-profile performers in Göteborg in November 1985 in the presence of the Swedish prime minister Olof Palme, made a strong impression on national publics.¹⁵

11 Simon M. Stevens, Warum Südafrika? Die Politik des britischen Anti-Apartheid-Aktivismus in den langen 1970er Jahren, in: Jan Eckel/Samuel Moyn (eds), *Moral für die Welt? Menschenrechtspolitik in den 1970er Jahren*, Göttingen 2012, pp. 316-342.

12 Denselow, *When the Music's Over* (fn. 5), p. 188.

13 Shirli Gilbert, Singing Against Apartheid: ANC Cultural Groups and the International Anti-Apartheid Struggle, in: *Journal of South African Studies* 33 (2007), pp. 421-441.

14 Peter Wicke, Art. ›Sun City (Artists United Against Apartheid)‹, in: Michael Fischer/Fernand Hörner/Christofer Jost (eds), *Songlexikon. Encyclopedia of Songs*, Mai 2014, URL: <<http://www.songlexikon.de/songs/suncityartistsunited>>. Cf. Neal Ullestad, Rock and Rebellion: Subversive Effects of Live Aid and ›Sun City‹, in: *Popular Music* 6 (1987), pp. 67-76; Danny Schechter, Artists United Against Apartheid, in: *Africa Report* 32 (1987) issue 4, pp. 42-45. See also the article by Andreas Kahrs in this issue.

15 Tor Sellström, *Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa*, Vol. 1: *Formation of a Popular Opinion 1950–1970*, Uppsala 1999; Vol. 2: *Solidarity and Assistance 1970–1994*, Uppsala 2002, pp. 763-765.



The American Committee on Africa and the Africa Fund welcome ANC President Oliver Tambo in New York in 1987. Tilden LeMelle, Chairman of the Africa Fund, presents Tambo with a cheque for 100,000 dollars, a first instalment from the proceeds from the Sun City album, which generated a total of more than one million dollars for charity. Harry Belafonte (right), Steven Van Zandt (left). See also the audio recording at <<http://africanactivist.msu.edu/audio.php?objectid=32-12E-1>>. (African Activist Archive Project; photo: David Vita)

2. *Graceland*: Art and Politics

In 1985, Paul Simon, at this time somewhat of a has-been but freshly enthused by a cassette with township music, worked on a collaboration with South African artists, including the vocal group Ladysmith Black Mambazo. They performed mbube, a specific form of mbaqanga music – dance music that had enjoyed popularity in the townships since the 1960s and which combined the rural Zulu traditions with modern styles like jazz and reggae.¹⁶ *Graceland* was instrumental in popularising mbaqanga

16 Marc Eliot, *Paul Simon. Die Biografie*, Hamburg 2011, pp. 200-202; Charles Hamm, *Home Cooking and American Soul in Black South African Popular Music*, in: idem, *Putting Music in its Place*, Cambridge 1995, pp. 139-149; Gwen Ansell, *Soweto Blues. Jazz, Popular Music and Politics in South Africa*, New York 2005; Louise Meintjes, *Sound of Africa! Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio*, Durham 2003.

outside of South Africa. Simon flew to Johannesburg to spend two weeks recording in Soweto with dozens of South African artists. The album was completed in New York and released on 1 September 1986. As well as recording in South Africa, the American star also brought some of those he had collaborated with there to New York and invited them to take part in the subsequent tour. The record was named after Elvis Presley's Memphis residence, and Simon presented it as a journey to the roots of rock 'n' roll. The connection was not far-fetched. For one thing, African roots were clearly apparent in Afro-American music, and for another, the music played in the townships was heavily influenced by American styles. This complex reciprocal exchange produced a sound that seemed at once familiar and new on both sides of the Atlantic.¹⁷

Simon had consulted trusted friends before his trip to South Africa. Harry Belafonte, for one, had recommended he first obtain the approval of the ANC – advice the musician did not follow.¹⁸ At the record launch in London organised by Warner, he expressed his scepticism towards political intentions: ›I'm with the artists. I didn't ask the permission of the ANC. I didn't ask permission of Buthelezi, or Desmond Tutu, or the Pretoria government. And to tell you the truth, I have a feeling that when there are radical transfers of power on either the left or the right, the artists always get screwed.‹¹⁹ From the very beginning, then, Simon sought to play down the political implications of his collaboration with South African artists; he also ignored the decision-making authority of the ANC and the Anti-Apartheid Movement. In view of the commitment that musicians, in particular, displayed in this matter, this was both unusual and risky. Before *Graceland* they had taken a stance against apartheid with powerful and popular songs, such as Stevie Wonder with ›It's Wrong‹, Peter Gabriel with ›Biko‹,²⁰ and Jerry Dammers and The Special AKA with ›(Free) Nelson Mandela‹. Dammers, leading activist in the recently founded AAA, commented: ›Who does he think he is. He's helping maybe 30 people and he's damaging solidarity over sanctions. He thinks he's helping the cause of freedom, but he's naive.‹²¹ Other musicians like Billy Bragg and Paul Weller were also critical, calling for a boycott of Simon's concerts and demanding a ›complete and heartfelt apology‹ from him in an open letter.²²

Unlike the songs of musical colleagues with their consistent anti-apartheid message, *Graceland* was not an explicitly political album. But it nevertheless transported a political message, namely that of the superior synthesis of multi-ethnic cooperation. This concept was in diametric opposition to the apartheid doctrine, even though the regime had toned down the racial segregation in day-to-day life in the late 1970s, allowing, among other things, concerts for mixed audiences. It is on the musical level, in the

17 Vgl. Steven Feld, Notes on World Beat, in: *Public Culture Bulletin* 1 (1988), pp. 31-37.

18 Harry Belafonte with Michael Shnayerson, *My Song. Die Autobiographie*, Cologne 2012, p. 538.

19 *Guardian*, 5 September 1986. Cf. *Guardian*, 19 April 2012.

20 See the article by Andreas Kahrs in this issue.

21 *New Musical Express*, 21.2.1987.

22 Artists Against Apartheid, An open letter to Paul Simon, 25 March 1987, BLO, MSS AAM 1473; *Anti-Apartheid News*, May 1987, p. 11.

conscious fusion of different styles and languages, that the political dimension is evident on this album, as ethnomusicologist Louise Meintjes has shown.²³ On its release, however, the connection between art and politics was seen less in the music itself than in the political context and in Simon's refusal to comply with the terms laid down by political organisations.

3. From a Total to a Selective Cultural Boycott

Graceland appeared at an inopportune moment for the ANC and the Anti-Apartheid Movement. The ANC was in the process of instigating a change of direction in the cultural boycott policy; the British AAM was not informed of this and would, as it transpired, reject it. On 25 April 1986, Barbara Masekela, head of the ANC's cultural department in Lusaka (Zambia), had described the emerging anti-apartheid culture inside South Africa in a speech to the Irish AAM. She remarked that these artists should also be beneficiaries of cultural exchange in the form of studies, workshops and opportunities to perform, which were often absent in the country itself.²⁴ On 13 September of that year, just a few days after the release of *Graceland*, a general meeting of the ANC's British regional division discussed the policy change from a total to a selective boycott that allowed exceptions for artists who worked for the anti-apartheid cause. It also voiced self-criticism, recognising that it had previously muddled through with an inconsistent ad-hoc policy under an umbrella that was full of holes, in the name of 'flexibility'.²⁵ After weighing up the pros and cons of a total boycott, the members decided on a flexible approach which would, however – unlike the former practice – follow firm rules. A committee prepared guidelines for such a policy and made recommendations, which were confirmed by the Regional Political Committee. They allowed for exceptions, on which the ANC was to rule: 'How the boycott is applied is not an individual matter [...]. Individuals and organisations who wish to define themselves as part of the process of change in South Africa should therefore consult with the ANC.'²⁶

23 Louise Meintjes, Paul Simon's *Graceland*, South Africa, and the Mediation of Musical Meaning, in: *Ethnomusicology* 34 (1990), pp. 37-73. See also Jonathan David Greer, *Paul Simon's Graceland and its Social and Political Statements on Apartheid in South Africa*, Master Thesis, Baylor University, Waco 2006.

24 Documented in *Rixaka* No. 3/1986, pp. 7-9, quotation p. 7.

25 Regional Political Committee (RPC, UK) of ANC General Member's Meeting on Mandatory Sanctions Against Apartheid South Africa, 13 September 1986, University of Western Cape (UWC), Mayibuye Archives (MA), MCH 02-164; Sanctions: The General Context and the Cultural and Academic Boycotts. For discussion GMM 13 September 1986, UWC, MA, MCH 34-20.

26 Public Statement, n.d., UWC, MA, MCH 02-164.



At the conference ›The Cultural Voice of Resistance‹ in Amsterdam in 1982: Barbara Masekela, Mies Bouwhuis and Conny Braam, chair of the Dutch Anti-Apartheid Movement (from right to left), singing the anthem ›N'Kosi Sikelel' iAfrika‹ (›God Bless Africa‹) with raised fists. (International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam; photo: Eduard de Kam)

The recommendations envisaged that the new policy would be announced as soon as possible, especially among the solidarity movements, following clarification of some final, unresolved questions. In Great Britain, a ›briefing meeting‹ would be held to familiarise the AAM with the change of course.²⁷ The new direction was therefore largely finalised, though it had not yet been discussed and agreed on with the AAM, when Paul Simon commented on the conflict surrounding his new album at a spectacular press conference. The ANC and AAM responded with contradictory statements.

Political scepticism towards Simon's project was beginning to dominate in the debate surrounding *Graceland*, but it shifted course when two of the most well-known South African musicians in exile with clear anti-apartheid profiles took his side. At the press conference on 30 January 1987, Paul Simon responded to critics' accusations together with Miriam Makeba, Hugh Masekela and Ray Phiri from the South African band Stimela, who would accompany him on the upcoming tour. Simon repeated his

27 Academic and Cultural Boycott. Recommendations of the Working Party, n.d., UWC, MA, MCH 02-164.

rejection of the right of organisations like the UN or the ANC to arbitrate in artistic matters. ›I as an artist don't feel I have to consult with anybody before I begin a project – I didn't ask permission to do the project – nor did I want any restrictions placed on what I might say or not say or think or write. Perhaps this controversy would have waited had I done that, but when all is said and done, the controversy has been an opportunity for various sides to articulate their position, and I think that is probably all to the good.‹²⁸ When asked why he did not at least include a statement about apartheid in the liner notes, Simon replied that he had approached the matter in terms of culture. While this did have political implications, ›I was not coming from a political angle, and I very intentionally left out that subject to have a concentration put on the music.‹ Joseph Shabalala, the leader of Ladysmith Black Mambazo, was more radical still, declaring that he knew ›nothing of politics.‹²⁹ Much has been made of Simon's alleged naivety – the British press called him ›Simple Simon‹ – to explain the whole affair. But his statement confirms that his actions were carefully considered and aimed to break the political blockade that had come about in connection with the cultural boycott by taking an emphatically artistic stance.

Simon was not apolitical. He shared the goal of an anti-racist South Africa, as his two refusals to perform in Sun City make clear. He said that he supported the cultural boycott, and had done so for years, but that he was not prepared to refrain from including South African artists. The presence of their exiled representatives made it clear that there was dissatisfaction with the general boycott even in circles close to the ANC. Masekela had performed as recently as June 1986 with Sting, Peter Gabriel, Sade, Elvis Costello and many others at the big concert marking the foundation of Artists Against Apartheid at Clapham Common. He now said that the public confusion stemmed from the fact that there had never been any clear definition of what exactly was to be permitted or prohibited. South African artists at home and abroad should, he believed, also be consulted. Makeba was critical: ›If you are saying black musicians must not come out of SA you are victimising the victims.‹ She called on the ANC to rethink its position on the cultural boycott.³⁰

Unease was created among AAM activists when Simon said at the press conference that ANC president Oliver Tambo was going to revise his organisation's policy with regard to the cultural boycott in a few days' time – information he claimed to have from Harry Belafonte. It was just one week since the ANC had cabled Oslo from its headquarters in Lusaka to say that it supported the boycott of Paul Simon's tour.³¹ If Simon's announcement was to be believed, the position of the British AAM was at variance with a new ANC policy – something which was indeed supported by the facts

28 Dammers to Tambo and Mbeki, 31 January 1987, BLO, MSS AAM 1473.

29 Quoted in Nixon, *Homelands* (fn. 6), p. 167.

30 Notes taken at Paul Simon Press Conference, ICA, London, Friday 30 Jan 1987, BLO, MSS AAM 1473 (also in UWC, MA, MCH 02-164); Meintjes, *Graceland* (fn. 23), p. 66.

31 ANC, Arts & Culture, to Raymond Mokoena, Oslo, 24 January 1987, BLO, MSS AAM 1473; *New Musical Express*, 7 February 1987.

and borne out by subsequent statements. Considerable confusion had been created at the AAM when the London ANC press officer MD Naidoo, in keeping with the internal position, stated in *New Musical Express* two days before the press conference that the organisation rejected an indiscriminate cultural boycott. It was, he said, opposed in principle to cultural relations with the apartheid regime, but made an exception for those artists who took a stand against and fought apartheid.³² On the day of the press conference, Abdul Minty, Honorary Secretary of the British AAM, telegraphed the ANC president with an urgent request to discuss the ANC's position on this matter.³³ Jerry Dammers from Artists Against Apartheid sent a copy of the press conference minutes marked ›very urgent‹ to Oliver Tambo and Thabo Mbeki.³⁴ On the day of the press conference, the ANC in New York telegraphed the ANC's London bureau with a statement welcoming Paul Simon's support for the cultural boycott.³⁵

The chaos did not diminish when the United Nations undermined the hardliners with its decision of 5 February not to place Paul Simon on its list of breaches of the boycott. Simon himself had written to the head of the UN Special Committee on the day before the press conference, saying that he condemned apartheid and, as an artist who had refused to perform in South Africa, would continue to do so in the future.³⁶ The fact that the Special Committee accepted this statement, in which Simon failed to comment on the accusation of cooperation with South African artists, and did not include him in the cultural register, signified a clear weakening of the official position of the AAM and a strengthening of the revisionist tendency in the ANC. The South African daily newspaper *Cape Times* was not far off the mark when it noted that the ANC ›kept quite a low profile‹ in this matter, whereas the boycott of Paul Simon's tour sprang largely from the initiative of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. There were some signs, it wrote, that the ANC would not advocate a ›total boycott‹. ›It seems likely that ›alternative‹ or ›progressive‹ productions about South Africa might now be given more leeway than they have received in the past.‹³⁷ In April 1987 it was announced from the ANC headquarters in Lusaka that they were working on a position that would combine clarity and flexibility – a Gordian knot that was not so easy to untie.³⁸ The organisations to the left of the ANC did not face problems of this sort. The Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and Black Consciousness Movement in the US supported Paul Simon because he was helping an oppressed people to present their culture and demonstrated that blacks were more than just sufferers.³⁹

32 *Marxism Today*, March 1987, p. 48; *Weekly Mail*, 6-12 February 1987; *New Musical Express*, 31 January 1987; Paper for EC on Cultural Boycott Developments, 13 February 1987, BLO, MSS AAM 1463.

33 Minty to Chief Rep. ANC, BLO, MSS AAM 1473.

34 Dammers to Tambo und Mbeki, 31 January 1987, BLO, MSS AAM 1473.

35 Paper for EC on Cultural Boycott Developments, 13 February 1987, BLO, MSS AAM 1463.

36 Paul Simon to Joseph N. Garba, 29 January 1987; United Nations Press Release, 5 February 1987, both in BLO, MSS AAM 1473.

37 *Cape Times*, 10 February 1987.

38 *New Musical Express*, 4 April 1987.

39 Meintjes, *Graceland* (fn. 23), p. 65.

At any rate, the British AAM saw the need for urgent action and requested a meeting with the ANC to discuss possible divergences in the approach of the two organisations.⁴⁰ This meeting took place on 2 February 1987, three days after Simon's press conference. It was based on a memorandum for the ANC which summarised the position of the AAM and asked about the criteria for, and practical implementation of, exemptions. During the meeting between the London heads of the two organisations, the ANC representatives said that they were discussing a modification of the total boycott. The *Graceland* affair had made the necessity of resolving the matter manifestly clear. But they were at least able to reassure the AAM that Oliver Tambo would not yet make a statement to this effect; the party wanted to await the UN's reaction to Paul Simon's statement. The following day, the executive committee of the ANC in Great Britain amended its position on the cultural boycott to include the commercial side of culture – an aspect which its working group had not considered and which had only become a matter of urgency because of *Graceland*. It condemned any breaking of the isolation campaign 'on the basis of the above motives'.⁴¹ Any cooperation for commercial reasons was thus prohibited. What exactly this meant, however, remained unclear.

On the same day – 3 February – the AAM wrote to Tambo regarding its intention to stage protests against Simon. The ANC president expressed his concern about the matter in a conversation on 7 February 1987 and asked for a more detailed memorandum from the AAM regarding the cultural boycott. The AAM send this to Lusaka two days later.⁴² In it, the organisation described the press reaction to *Graceland* as a full-scale attempt to stir up confusion about the meaning and purpose of the cultural boycott.⁴³ The AAM praised and supported the growing number of cultural activities within South Africa's 'democratic movement' and its need for international integration. However, it viewed as problematic the emergence of numerous groups that were broadly against apartheid, but were not part of the liberation movement and sought contacts abroad primarily for career reasons. These groups, it said, along with the big record companies, were the strongest advocates of a selective boycott. The AAM memorandum presented a series of arguments against a partial boycott, which all boiled down to the problem of practicability. It proposed a top-level meeting to discuss the matter in detail.

Tambo did not immediately make the statement Simon had announced, and the UN corrected its position, if only marginally.⁴⁴ Responding to pressure from the British AAM, and in view of Simon's remarks, the UN clarified that the cultural boycott included performances, recordings, organising cultural events and supporting cultural activities. It did not, however, ask Simon for any further explanation.⁴⁵

40 Memorandum to the ANC, 2 February 1987, UWC, MA, MCH 02-164.

41 The Cultural-Academic Boycott, n.d., UWC, MA, MCH 02-164.

42 Paper for EC on Cultural Boycott Developments, 13 February 1987, BLO, MSS AAM 1463.

43 The Academic and Cultural Boycotts. A Memorandum from the Anti-Apartheid Movement, 9 February 1987, UWC, MA, MCH 02-164. Cf. *Anti-Apartheid News*, April 1987, p. 11.

44 *Guardian*, 19 April 2012.

45 [Statement,] 3 March 1987, BLO, MSS AAM 1473.



Poster promoting the cultural boycott:
 indigenous black class struggle versus imported white hippie commercialism
 (Rob Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem, Hollywood. South African Culture and the World Beyond*,
 New York 1994, p. 158/Mayibuye Archives, Cape Town; undated)

The AAM stated that this made it clear that the musician had broken the boycott; it demanded that he assure the UN that he would comply with a boycott according to this more precise definition. Yet although no such statement was forthcoming, Simon's name did not appear on the cultural register.

After things had calmed down somewhat, Tambo did announce a revision of the ANC policy at a speech in London in late May 1987, indicating the line which future statements by the organisation would follow. The ANC wanted to abide by the cultural boycott but be 'selective in its choice of targets'.⁴⁶ Similar comments were made a few days later by the United Democratic Front (UDF), the umbrella organisation of opposition groups within South Africa.⁴⁷ Tambo explained that this change of direction was due to the emergence of a 'popular culture' that should not be boycotted but rather encouraged, supported and shared with the rest of the world. Speaking for the ANC in London, Wally Serote explained: 'The solidarity movement has produced cultural

46 *Weekly Mail*, 5-11 June 1987. Cited with somewhat different wording by various sources including Pallo Jordan in Amsterdam (Campschreur/Divendal, *Culture* [fn. 6], pp. 264-265).

47 National Working Committee Conference of the UDF, Resolution on the Academic and Cultural Boycott, 29/30 May 1987, BLO, MSS AAM 1484.

workers who firmly support our work and we have to bring them together with progressive cultural workers inside the country. Following *Sun City* and *Graceland*, there was a far greater appreciation of what the boycott hoped to achieve. But they had also opened Pandora's box: how flexible should the boycott be? What were the criteria according to which it did or did not apply, and who should decide on their implementation?

It became less and less clear what exactly should be subject to the boycott and what not. The British Anti-Apartheid Movement intervened in New York to have Simon placed on the UN's boycott list after all. It argued that there was no justification for including figures like Irish producer Phil Coulter, who had likewise recorded in South Africa, but not Paul Simon.⁴⁸ If this was tolerated, there was a danger that films could also be produced in South Africa, as well as other ›commercial projects‹, ›which could do major harm to the campaign for isolation‹. Artists Against Apartheid had raised public awareness of the cultural boycott, ›and whilst Simon has had considerable exposure, the Movement and the AAA have been able to challenge his activities and statements with some success, although his non-appearance on the Register is a stumbling block to further exposing him‹. Opinion differed in Dublin. The Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement, likewise faced with an upcoming concert, decided against a boycott on 17 February 1987. It described its considerations: ›The fact that Masekela and Makeba are appearing with him on his tour is going to double the confusion that now exists. If, by going ahead with the boycott, we are going to alienate people who should be on our side, and cause divisions, it may not be worth the effort. We need to remember that the boycott is a weapon, not a principle in itself.‹⁴⁹

The aporias of the cultural boycott that *Graceland* made apparent had been emerging for some time. The boycott of performances by Western stars in South Africa was unproblematic and could count on most artists taking a critical stance towards apartheid. More problematic was the question of whether all South African artists who wanted to perform abroad should really be boycotted. Over the course of the 1980s, and with the energetic support of the ANC, an increasingly strong culture of opposition was developing in the country itself, and those involved wanted to be active abroad as well. Should there, then, be exceptions to the boycott or not? The British AAM had long refrained from action against South African artists performing in the UK who sympathised with the anti-apartheid struggle.⁵⁰ But it remained committed to its fundamental opposition, because it believed that exceptions would ultimately undermine the boycott. In the controversy around *Graceland*, the focus gradually shifted from the question of whether Paul Simon had flouted the boycott by producing the record in South Africa to the far more relevant question of whether South African artists should

48 United Nations (J.N. Garba) to Paul Simon, 3 April 1987; Draft Letter to Garba UN re Paul Simon, n.d., both in BLO, MSS, AAM 1473.

49 Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement (Louise Asmal) to AAM, London, 12 February 1987, BLO, MSS AAM 1473.

50 AAM National Committee, Cultural Boycott: Revised Statement, 11 December 1982, BLO, MSS AAM 1463.

really be subject to a boycott across the board. It was generally accepted that anti-apartheid activists should cultivate international connections. The far more difficult question was how to proceed in the grey zone of South African entertainment, which was at most indirectly ›political‹.

4. Support or Boycott? The *Graceland* Tour

The tour starting on 1 February 1987 took Paul Simon through four continents over two years. Accompanying him were 25 artists, including Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Stimela, Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela. The set list contained songs from the *Graceland* album, classics by Makeba, Masekela and Ladysmith Black Mambazo, and a few old Paul Simon hits. The concert ended with a rendition of N'Kosi Sikelel' iAfrika, at the time the anthem of opposition to apartheid (and from 1994 the national anthem of the ›Rainbow Nation‹). This format meant that the concerts were first and foremost a presentation of South African music, and only secondly Paul Simon shows.

One of the first gigs of the tour took the musicians to Harare's Rufaro Stadium on 14 February 1987. This visit to the capital of Zimbabwe, South Africa's northern neighbour ruled by the former liberation movement, was also a political sign of solidarity with the opponents of apartheid. The musicians performed two concerts here, each with a 20,000-strong multiethnic audience, many of whom had travelled from nearby South Africa. The tour mostly met with a very positive response, due no doubt in part to its clear political undertones. Only a few of the concerts in the US were marked by protests (and never by the US anti-apartheid movement), while the concerts in Birmingham and London were boycotted by the British AAM. The eight concerts in the USA were planned as the ›charity leg‹ of the tour, with the proceeds being divided equally between local colleges for African-Americans and the organisation Children of Apartheid, established by Allan Boesak, one of the founders of the UDF. The UN, at whose headquarters the musicians had wanted the opening concert of the US tour to be held, refused its support – even after Boesak and Archbishop Desmond Tutu had declared their support for the *Graceland* tour and its anti-apartheid effect. The reason: Simon had not replied to the latest letter from the Chair of the Special Committee, thus failing to make the desired show of humility and penance.⁵¹ One more indication that this conflict had come to be less about the matter at hand than about the right of organisations to make decisions on the permissibility of cultural transfers.

In a flyer targeting concert-goers, the AAM explained its criticism of Simon's project. It said that the Botha government was under pressure and wanted to break its isolation in the field of culture by dividing the artists, and that it was supported in this by the

51 Michael Maran, *The Sins of Paul Simon* (1987), in: Stacey Luftig (ed.), *The Paul Simon Companion. Four Decades of Commentary*, New York 1997, pp. 163-168, here pp. 165-166.



On stage in Harare, 14 February 1987:
Joseph Shabalala, Miriam Makeba, Paul Simon and Ray Phiri (in the foreground, from left to right)
(Polfoto; unknown photographer)

big record companies. The mass response to the anti-apartheid protest was now becoming a problem because of its commercial potential. »At the same time big record companies that have always flouted the cultural boycott seek to cash in on the growing popularity of African music and all things »anti-apartheid«. In these conditions the cultural boycott must be defended and sustained with greater consistency than ever.«⁵² The authors accused Simon of deliberately breaking the boycott and, even worse, »he seems to think he is above politics«. They made a plea to his fans: »Think long and hard before you go to Paul Simon's concerts or listen to *Graceland*.« Later, too, the notion of exploitation, already familiar from the adaptation of African-American blues, was often bandied around – white musicians were said to be using blacks and their culture to enrich themselves. It was argued that the success of black music from South Africa following the *Graceland* boom merely served the profit-mongering of international record companies.⁵³

52 AAM, Paul Simon and the Anti-Apartheid Cultural Boycott. What is the Problem?, n.d., BLO, MSS AAM 1473.

53 For instance in *Anti-Apartheid News*, June 1987, p. 10. This is also the crux of American ethnomusicologist Charles Hamm's critique of *Graceland*, *Graceland revisited*, in: *Popular Music* 8 (1989), pp. 299-304. For a much more positive take: Hamm, *Afro-American Music, South Africa, and Apartheid*, New York 1988, pp. 1-2, 37.

But the anti-apartheid movement was deeply divided on this issue. The boycott met with harsh criticism from some AAM members, as evidenced by numerous letters to the leadership of the association. One long-standing member protested that the AAM had been too rigid in its application of the cultural boycott, arguing that it was time to stop telling the black population of South Africa what was good for them.⁵⁴ One fan complained, ›Surely a cultural boycott which silences the opinions of the oppressed as well as the oppressors could hardly be described as coherent?‹,⁵⁵ and an activist said that the AAM leadership had never given clear guidelines about how one was supposed to behave in this matter, and that the boycott now practised was politically short-sighted: ›Who are we to boycott what Masekela and Makeba supported?‹⁵⁶ AAM organiser Mike Terry admitted that both in the broader public and among some supporters, the organisation's confrontation with Paul Simon had given it ›a reputation for being hard line‹.⁵⁷

Press reaction to the album and the boycott was divided. While the musical innovation garnered almost unanimous praise, some papers expressed scepticism concerning Simon's political judgement.⁵⁸ *Melody Maker* announced that it would boycott Paul Simon's London shows.⁵⁹ Robin Denselow, one of the most experienced and knowledgeable music journalists in this field, stated in the *Guardian* that *Graceland* had given African music its strongest commercial boost in the Western world. It was tragic, he wrote, that the well-known anti-apartheid activists Makeba and Masekela were now criticised by the Anti-Apartheid Movement.⁶⁰ The liberal (and sometimes banned) South African newspaper *Weekly Mail* concluded that ›[l]ack of definition has caused substantial confusion in AAM circles‹.⁶¹ There had been no discussion about objectives, scope and results. Instead, the paper wrote, the economic boycott had tainted the cultural boycott to such an extent that *everything* South African was being boycotted.

Within South Africa, Paul Simon was described by black commentators with metaphors from the world of colonialism (›explorer‹, ›missionary‹), while white journalists in search of a common postcolonial identity spoke in positive terms of the link to indigenous black traditions.⁶² Conservative whites emphasised Simon's refinement of the supposedly inferior African sound, while left-leaning whites appreciated the blending of the African tradition with Western pop. The South African regime instrumentalised *Graceland* as proof of the absurdity of the cultural boycott. It viewed the album as an achievement of the South African nation that proved the country was not isolated. Supporters spoke of how Simon had made the global market accessible to

54 R.W. to Chairman, 9 April 1987, BLO, MSS AAM 1473.

55 S.B. to London Committee AAM, 9 April 1987, BLO, MSS AAM 1473.

56 P.A., 28 March 1987, BLO, MSS AAM 1473.

57 *Weekly Mail*, 2-5 September 1988.

58 Quoted in *New Musical Express*, 4 April 1987.

59 *Melody Maker*, 11 April 1987.

60 *Guardian*, 30 January 1987.

61 *Weekly Mail*, 2-5 September 1988.

62 This and the following: Meintjes, *Graceland* (fn. 23), pp. 50-52.

suppressed and censored black culture. It was believed that the increased status accorded indigenous music styles and groups also strengthened opposition to the apartheid regime. Critics, on the other hand, focused on the exploitation of black musicians and the breaking of the cultural boycott.

Despite the protests, *Graceland* became Paul Simon's most successful album. It was awarded the Grammy for best album of the year in 1987 and sold more than 14 million copies worldwide. After the end of apartheid, Simon pointed out the subtle political aspect that had emerged from this musical cooperation across racial boundaries: ›What was unusual about *Graceland* is that it was on the surface apolitical, but what it represented was the essence of the antiapartheid in that it was a collaboration between blacks and whites to make music that people everywhere enjoyed. It was completely the opposite from what the apartheid regime said, which is that one group of people were inferior.‹⁶³ For Masekela, who had always kept in close contact with musicians within South Africa and was interested in their advancement, *Graceland* had brought about the breakthrough of African music into the Western market: ›What Simon had done for African music now [...] was to open it up, the way Stan Getz did for Brazilian music, Belafonte did for calypso, or Clapton did for reggae. Because the market is in the West, and until a Western artist first does it, it just doesn't happen.‹⁶⁴ But it was precisely this point of view that others criticised as ›patronising‹. This was not the first time ›authentic‹ African music had been heard in Europe and elsewhere, they argued – for instance in the form of the ANC ensemble Amandla managed by Dali Tambo.⁶⁵ Jonas Gwangwa, the leader of Amandla, sarcastically commented, ›So, it has taken another white man to discover my people?‹⁶⁶

Nelson Mandela put an end to the conflict with Paul Simon on 10 January 1992, inviting him to a party in Johannesburg and giving him his blessing for a tour of South Africa starting the following day.⁶⁷ Joe Berlinger's 2012 documentary about Paul Simon's *Graceland* album and his return to Africa shows the first meeting between former adversaries Paul Simon and Dali Tambo, co-founder of Artists Against Apartheid, who refused to budge from their positions and yet finally shook hands. In his review 25 years later, Robin Denselow considered possible alternatives. Perhaps it might have been better for Simon to reach a compromise with the ANC beforehand. One alternative could have been to do the recordings with the South African musicians outside the country – though even this, according to Denselow, would have constituted a breach of the cultural boycott.⁶⁸ At the height of the controversy, Marek Kohn wrote in the organ of the reformist wing of the British CP that it was hard to

63 *National Geographic* No. 10-11/2012. Cf. Carol A. Muller, *Focus: Music of South Africa*, New York 2008, p. 58.

64 *Guardian*, 30 January 1987. Cf. also Denselow, *When the Music's Over* (fn. 5), pp. 195-196.

65 Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement (Kader Asmal) to Editor Hot Press, 24 February 1987, BLO, MSS AAM 1473.

66 *Guardian*, 19 April 2012.

67 *Guardian*, 11 January 1992; *New Straits Times*, 12 January 1992.

68 *Guardian*, 19 April 2012.

explain the virulence of the ›absolutist feeling‹ in the AAM, considering that the ANC clearly supported cultural cooperation if it contributed to the struggle against apartheid. He concluded: ›The idea of »total isolation« obviously has a symbolic appeal. But it would be regrettable if policies founded on a sense of loyalty and resolution were to ossify into a dogma which replaced a dynamic approach to debate and action.«⁶⁹

The anticipated problems of differentiating and examining individual cases if they moved away from a total boycott were precisely what led the AAM to hold fast to this position. And yet it was only with the discovery of South African music for the commercial global market as a result of *Graceland* that the music industry began to develop the market there, taking the question of the cultural boycott to an entirely new level. Unlike in previous decades, pop music no longer only emanated unidirectionally from mainly one or two countries – the US and the UK. Instead, it increasingly moved in a global ›flow‹ between various regional centres, and this revealed the limitations of the cultural boycott. The controversy surrounding *Graceland* had shown the structural weakness of this instrument of the liberation struggle. It was a first indication that the ban alone was insufficient as a means of addressing the growing problem of cultural interdependence. Instead of dwelling on the highly controversial matter of the boycott, for which there was no satisfactory solution, the Anti-Apartheid Movement decided to use the power of the music industry to its own advantage. Instead of engaging in defensive battles that it was bound to lose, it went on the offensive and prepared, with a clear political message, one of the biggest events in the history of pop. It worried less this time about whether commercial considerations may have also played a part for some of those involved.

5. A Highlight of Politicised Mass Culture: The ›Nelson Mandela 70th Birthday Tribute‹ in 1988

The transition to a more flexible cultural boycott was unstoppable. Two conferences of anti-apartheid activists in Arusha (Tanzania) and Amsterdam in December 1987 called for a counterculture to be developed which would give rise to ›a microcosm of a liberated South Africa.«⁷⁰ Both events underscored the importance of cultural practices for the liberation struggle, and this included contacts between South African artists, their colleagues in exile, and the European anti-apartheid movement. The resolutions adopted advocated the concept of flexibility while in principle upholding the boycott. Foreign artists should be able to enter the country if the liberation struggle believed they made a contribution to the ›national democratic struggle‹;

69 *Marxism Today*, March 1987, p. 48.

70 The Academic and Cultural Boycott, ANC Discussion Paper, UWC, MA, MCH 02-164.

South African artists should consult the movement regarding engagements abroad.⁷¹ It also became clear in Amsterdam that Simon was not alone in not wishing to have his work as a musician considered a direct political statement. Rejecting the view that art should serve the struggle, the opinion was just as frequently voiced that artists should formulate their own objectives and be free to translate these into politics as they pleased.⁷²

The British Anti-Apartheid Movement had already staged the ›African Sounds Festival in Celebration of Nelson Mandela's Birthday‹ in London in June 1983 on the occasion of Mandela's 65th birthday. Mainly South African jazz musicians performed here. The event five years later, on the other hand, featured the crème de la crème of international pop music and attracted much greater attention. The AAM had spoken internally of the impact of concerts as early as 1984: ›Activities of this sort [...] reach the public in a very different and often more powerful way than more conventional forms of communication.‹ Even before ›Live Aid‹, then, it had seen the potential of the initiative of musicians and resolved to invest ›much more consistent work‹ in this field.⁷³ Looking back, Mike Terry explained, ›Popular music was a way of getting our message across.‹⁷⁴

The culmination of this policy was the concert for Nelson Mandela's 70th birthday in Wembley Stadium on 11 June 1988. It was broadcast by the BBC to 67 countries around the world and watched by some 600 million television viewers at home. Presenting stars like Sting, George Michael, The Eurythmics, Joe Cocker, Tracy Chapman, Whitney Houston, Dire Straits and many more, it became, in Robin Denselow's words, ›the biggest and most spectacular pop-political event of all time‹, a ›more political version of Live Aid.‹⁷⁵ Shortly after the *Graceland* crisis, in June 1987, Jerry Dammers had concentrated all his efforts on getting the huge event off the ground and redirecting energies from a fruitless dispute to a major PR campaign.

The AAM had originally planned to further politicise the festival, to extend its message to include all prisoners in South Africa and link it to the call to boycott. Instead, however, the organiser and producer of the Mandela festival, Tony Hollingsworth, narrowed the focus to concentrate on Mandela the individual and his release. With this less militant but still political strategy, the worldwide broadcasting of the five-hour show went ahead, despite opposition from some quarters. And its message, conveyed by the artists, their songs and their sometimes political statements, was unequivocal. The mobilisation of the global public by a number of the most popular musicians

71 Preamble and Resolutions of the CASA Conference, in: Campschreur/Divendal, *Culture* (fn. 6), pp. 214-222, here pp. 215, 217-218.

72 Joost Divendal/Willem Campschreur, *From Amsterdam with Euphoria. A Report of the CASA Conference and Festival*, in: idem, *Culture* (fn. 6), pp. 206-213, here p. 210.

73 The British Contribution to the Cultural Isolation of South Africa and Mobilisation of Cultural Forces in Support of the South African Freedom Struggle, February 1984, BLO, MSS AAM 1463.

74 *Guardian*, 8 December 2008.

75 Denselow, *When the Music's Over* (fn. 5), p. 276.



Symbols instead of political slogans: Wembley festival stage, 11 June 1988
(AAM Archives Committee; photo: Gideon Mendel)

together with the most important mass medium placed considerable pressure on the apartheid system and played a role in Mandela's release just 20 months later, in February 1990.⁷⁶ At a follow-up event entitled ›Nelson Mandela: An International Tribute for a Free South Africa‹ on 16 April 1990, likewise held in Wembley and broadcast worldwide, the iconic figure took to the stage himself.

One conflict that stemmed from the boycott debate and shone a stark light on the ongoing aporias of the cultural boycott also affected the Wembley concert: the exclusion of Johnny Clegg. Clegg, like Paul Simon, was not invited to Wembley. A white South African with a British passport and an outspoken opponent of apartheid, he faced repression in South Africa with his bands Juluka and Savuka. When Clegg came to England with Juluka in 1983, the performances were condemned by the musicians' union on the grounds that the band had flouted the cultural boycott. The union also

⁷⁶ Cf. Lahusen, *Rhetoric* (fn. 3); Baringhorst, *Politik* (fn. 3), and the informative Wikipedia article ›Nelson Mandela 70th Birthday Tribute‹: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nelson_Mandela_70th_Birthday_Tribute>.

threatened to expel Clegg if he returned to South Africa. The band Savuka had an even stronger political profile. It played an important role in the fight against apartheid within South Africa, and was considered by the ANC ›progressive, and in the forefront of the artistic struggle‹.⁷⁷ But when Savuka came to London in 1987, the musicians' union again tried to stop the performances.⁷⁸ The following year it accused Clegg of ›behaviour damaging to the union‹, because he continued to work in South Africa. Clegg wanted to perform at Wembley, had consulted the United Democratic Front and received their support for his performance in London. He returned with a letter of recommendation from the UDF, in which it stated, ›We are trying to build bridges among sympathetic and committed artists in the country, not trying to destroy existing ones.‹⁷⁹ But he had since been expelled from the British musicians' union, and the AAM avoided engaging with the complexity of the issue by refusing to let Clegg perform. Thus not even the unequivocal support of the freedom movement within South Africa was sufficient now to secure an exception to the boycott, as originally intended by the flexible ANC concept. The limits of this policy had clearly been reached.

6. Conclusion

Even after Nelson Mandela's release and the legalisation of the ANC in 1990, opinion was divided on whether the cultural boycott should be continued. At a time when Hugh Masekela, Miriam Makeba and Abdullah Ibrahim were giving concerts in South Africa again and musicians in the country itself were eager for international exchange after the years of isolation, the ANC continued to support the boycott in principle, but signalled a gradual relaxation.⁸⁰ Firstly, the borders were opened for artists from South Africa, as long as they had political authorisation. The ANC had stated in 1989 that exchange was only possible following consultation with anti-racist organisations, and for individual artists, ›as a result of conversation between their organisation and the ANC, not individuals and the ANC.‹⁸¹ The ›trend towards organisation‹ evident in the country itself and around the world in the form of artists' associations against apartheid was to be strengthened ›as the cultural worker's first line of defence against potential and actual exploiters.‹⁸² Contact was not possible for cultural workers who

77 On Clegg, cf. Denselow, *When the Music's Over* (fn. 5), pp. 198-200, quotation p. 201.

78 *New Musical Express*, 2 May 1987.

79 *Weekly Mail*, 2-5 September 1988.

80 *New Nation*, 21-27 September 1990; Robert von Lucius, Mandela zeichnet, Dollar Brand singt, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 17 October 1990, p. 37.

81 ANC London, Tactics of the Cultural Boycott, 28 April 1989, BLO, MSS AAM 1487.

82 Position Paper on the Cultural and Academic Boycott. Adopted by the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress, May 1989, Lusaka, BLO, MSS AAM 1487.

did not belong to any organisation, but the borders were at least being relaxed for larger groups. In 1990, the ANC's cultural department sent 95 artists to a festival in London, and 60 others to a festival in Glasgow the following year, to document the culture of resistance.⁸³ But the selective policy of the ANC's cultural desk and its associated unions also attracted harsh criticism; the *Weekly Mail* spoke of a ›neo-Stalinist disaster‹.⁸⁴ Having been increasingly perforated from the outside as well, in 1991 the cultural boycott was considerably relaxed, though formally maintained. This not only meant opportunities for local artists but also triggered an influx of international stars.⁸⁵ In the same year, the British musicians' union conference decided to lift the boycott. This then happened in March 1992, with conditions: support from representatives of the black population, a levy on some of the proceeds for social projects.⁸⁶

Looking back in 1994, shortly after the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as President of South Africa, Johnny Clegg, who had been allowed to perform at the second Wembley concert, reflected: ›I found the way in which the boycott was implemented not at all helpful for the development of South African culture – or for the communication of progressive cultural values.‹⁸⁷ Barbara Masekela later described the cultural boycott as one of the most effective campaigns, but one which had also caused a lot of conflict. The biggest controversy had been the one about Paul Simon's album and tour. ›I think it was a very painful experience as a cultural administrator of the ANC because my brother was involved in it and Miriam Makeba was involved in it. [...] I think they have done a great deal to contribute to the understanding of the international community about apartheid and I think that it was very unfortunate that the whole issue of the Graceland tour became so controversial.‹ It had become clear to her in retrospect that the identification of apartheid and South Africa had been a mistake – at least at a time when the regime was increasingly isolated and the opposition within the country itself had grown stronger. ›So I think the confusion came out of the fact that people thought that the cultural boycott was aimed at South Africa, whereas it was aimed at apartheid South Africa. [...] And it became ridiculous when the Movement itself was picketing these South African artists who were not part of the system.‹⁸⁸

The cultural boycott was essentially a political instrument that was best suited to the situation in the 1960s and early 1970s, when the opposition in the country was weak and only pressure from outside could make a difference.⁸⁹ At the time of Sun

83 Fieldhouse, *Anti-Apartheid* (fn. 6), p. 108.

84 Quoted in Robert von Lucius, Mandela: Die Kultur muß Südafrika heilen, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1 June 1993, p. 35.

85 Statement by the Department of Arts and Culture of the ANC, 7 February 1991, BLO, MSS, AAM 1486; Robert von Lucius, Scat-Gesang im Friedenshemd, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 3 November 1993, p. 35.

86 MU to lift South Africa Boycott, 30 March 1992, BLO, MSS AAM 1484.

87 *taz*, 13 June 1994. The quotation appears in a German newspaper article and has been retranslated here into English.

88 Hilda Bernstein, Interview with Barbara Masekela, UWC, MA, Oral History Collection.

89 Cf. Nixon, *Homelands* (fn. 6), pp. 164-165.

City it was an appropriate instrument to counteract the tactics of the regime and increase public awareness. But the inflexible way in which it was administered became counterproductive when the cultural potential within the country became eager to assert itself more strongly, as *Graceland*, more than anything else, had made clear. In structural terms, the logic of the cultural boycott was in line with that of the economic boycott: no support for South Africa, in any shape or form. Unlike the world of commodities, where there were no anti-racist forms of production or economic currents, a vibrant anti-racist culture emerged within South Africa, especially in the 1980s, that was eager for international exchange. A sharper distinction therefore had to be drawn between the apartheid system and the South African population. This made consistently upholding the boycott, as the strategic core of the anti-apartheid movements' campaign, much more complicated.

In 1989, as the conflict was still subsiding Denselow reflected that if Paul Simon had only been ›less arrogant, and a little more politically sophisticated‹ and had consulted the UN and the ANC from the start, ›he could have turned the whole sorry affair into a unified triumph for African pop music and anti-apartheid.‹⁹⁰ Barbara Masekela had made the same argument back in 1987.⁹¹ Instead of making personal accusations, it is perhaps more useful to take Simon's venture and the controversy as an indication that the mass media world of the late 1980s could not be managed by dirigisme – not even by organisations with as much authority as the UN and the ANC. It was unrealistic to think that the complex actions of innumerable actors all over the world could be regulated through consultation with the ANC. The boycott by Western artists was an effective means, particularly because the UN register exerted enormous pressure on musicians, who depended on a positive reputation at concerts and in the public eye. There was no comparable positive instrument for the promotion of South African artists, so a total boycott targeting both sides was ultimately doomed to fail. The tremendous success of the Mandela concert, which mobilised artists instead of curtailing them, masked the aporias of the boycott that were becoming increasingly apparent within South Africa.

The fact that it was often music journalists who reflected on this problem not only on the aesthetic, but also on the political level, demonstrates the extent to which the cultural sector was permeated by politics. Lifestyle and politics were converging, and the cultural boycott against apartheid in South Africa was one area in which this connection was systematically promoted and practised. More than any other art form, pop music became the catalyst for this symbiosis. At the same time, Paul Simon's insistence on artistic autonomy from the decision-making authority of political organisations made it clear that room was again opening up within a politicised lifestyle for more subtle political aspects of art – and of course also for quite different forms of

90 Denselow, *When the Music's Over* (fn. 5), p. 198.

91 Cf. the interview in: The ANC and the Cultural Boycott, in: *Africa Report*, July/August 1987, p. 19-21, here p. 21.

musical expression. Music was pivotal, because it was precisely the politics of the apolitical espoused by musicians like Simon and Shabalala that suggested the political dimension of a music that transcended ethnically defined boundaries. In the context of apartheid and the cultural boycott strategy that aimed to defeat it, the cooperation of musicians from different backgrounds was a political project that programmatically insisted on transcending politically drawn dividing lines, because what was at stake was what mattered to them most – the music.

(Translated from the German by Joy Titheridge)

For additional photos and footage, see the internet version at
<<http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/2-2016/id=5355>>.

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