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THE MUSICAL DIPLOMACY OF A LANDLESS AMBASSADOR: HUGH MASEKELA BETWEEN MONTEREY '67 AND ZAIRE '74

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Hugh Masekela *This essay attempts to locate the music festival known as Zaire '74 within a continuum of Pan-African festivals by reading it as an 'idiosyncratic laboratory' in relation to the agency of exiled South African jazz musician*
Mobutu Sese-Seko *Hugh Masekela. Masekela was one of the producers of the 1974 event held in Kinshasa. Yet his expertise here draws on his prior participation in the foundational Monterey International Pop Festival (1967), which helped constitute rock music as the soundtrack of choice for a predominantly white American counter-culture. In Monterey, Masekela featured as a conduit for exoticizing tropes of "African ecstasy." While the production of Zaire '74 was largely based on Masekela's experiences in Monterey, it was the representation of the African continent as a musical – cultural construct that rendered Masekela's vision of Zaire '74 into the junction between soul power, black power, anti-imperialism, Pan-Africanism, and Zairean nationalism. The agency of Masekela in both events draws attention to the multiple roles played by exiled South African cultural agents in the*
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transnational circulation of texts, sounds, and images against the backdrop of Cold War divisions. Musical analysis of samples from this formative period in Masekela's career locates Zaire '74 as a pivotal moment of maturation in his transformation from an exiled African jazzman in America into a politically committed cultural producer who played a crucial role in the international explosion of the culturally and politically entangled musical genre known as Afropop.

On an unremarkable day in March 1974, a *New York Times* daily issue was routinely placed on the desk of Stewart Levine and Hugh Masekela at the offices of Blue Thumb Records in Beverly Hills. It contained an article announcing a plan to stage a boxing match between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman in Kinshasa, Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) (Anderson 1974). "I don't know what it was that made me suggest ... that a concert to coincide with the fight would be a good idea," said Levine to the *Guardian* thirty-five years later. "But once the light bulb went on, it couldn't be turned off" (Solomons 2009). Six months later, the *ad hoc* Ace Production Company, managed by the duo, brought together a variety of musical icons from the lively Latin, soul, and blues music scene in the United States, including Celia Cruz (Cuba), James Brown, Bill Withers, and B. B. King (United States), with distinguished African musicians such as Franco Makiadi and Tabu Ley (Congo/Zaire), Manu Dibango (Cameroon), and Miriam Makeba (South Africa) to perform in a three-day black music festival, known as Zaire '74, intended to serve as an opening act for the famous Rumble in the Jungle in Kinshasa.

This essay attempts to position Zaire '74 in relation to the more typical Pan-African festivals of that era, namely the First World Festival of Negro Arts (FESMAN, held in Dakar 1966); the First Pan-African Cultural Festival (PANAF, held in Algiers 1969); and the Second World Festival of Black Art and Culture (FESMAN, held in Lagos 1977).¹ In an attempt to find similarities between the four cultural events that make up this continuum of Pan-African festivals, Murphy (2016, 9) argues "they were driven by a vision of the providential nation-state as the source of all legitimacy, even as the events themselves promoted a dissolution of the national within the transnational vision of Pan-Africanism." This tension between the national and the transnational originates in the issue of political prestige derived from the government funding of these cultural events. The national agendas attached to the funds stood as a barrier to the temporary and improvised Pan-African solidarity that was embodied in these festivals (Apter 2015; Jaji 2014). Zaire '74 intersects with these concerns in distinctive ways. On the one hand, Zaire '74 is very much implicated in Mobutu Sese Seko's mobilization of cultural spectacle in the interests of Zairianization, and is, therefore,

1 Malaquais and Vincent (2016, 196) proposed that, although "The 1974 [musical] event, remembered above all for the 'Rumble in the Jungle' was not a festival *per se*," Zaire '74 should be placed within the continuum of the four Pan-African festivals.

Ron Levi

2 I employ Jaji's distinction between two kinds of p/Pan-Africanisms, drawn from a reconsideration of Shepperson's (1993) early theoretical premise. Jaji defines them as follows: "Small 'p' pan-Africanism designates an eclectic set of ephemeral cultural movements and currents throughout the twentieth century ranging from popular to elite forms in contradistinction to the more formal

Hugh Masekela goes to America: all the way to monterey

organizations comprising capital 'P' Pan-Africanism" (2014, 3). Jaji's distinction emphasizes the cultural-musical component in a way that suits the context of my own analysis.

deeply embedded within a nationalist framing. On the other hand, the musical component of this festival depends on the acutely transnational – exilic and proto-pan-Africanist² – agency of the South-African-born jazz musician Hugh Masekela. Hence, Zaire '74 offers a singular combination of a highly prescriptive statist intervention that provides the excuse and infrastructure for the festival, with musical and cultural agendas that cannot be contained within these parameters. This give-and-take is not only crucial for understanding Zaire '74 as a transnational sound-event (see below), but also helps us to chart a major shift in Hugh Masekela's positioning as a "landless musical ambassador": that is to say, as political activist whose musical trajectory becomes increasingly fused with his political one. This will eventually bring us to a consideration of what I am claiming, drawing on Inglis's (2006) analysis of the cultural impact of live performances, to be the musical after-effect of Zaire '74. These concerns supplement the questions surrounding the paucity of the archive related to the Pan-African festivals that have dominated the critical discussion so far (see Malaquais and Vincent 2016; Murphy 2016).

Hugh Masekela, as we have already observed, was one of the Kinshasa event's producers. Yet his expertise here draws on his prior participation in the foundational Monterey International Pop Festival (1967), which helped establish rock music as the soundtrack of choice for a predominantly white American counter-culture. Before turning to the specific characteristics of Monterey as a site that professionalized Masekela in crucial respects, it is necessary briefly to survey the itineraries that brought him there. My attempt to track Hugh Masekela in this way is based upon the theoretical paradigm of the "restlessness of apartheid" or apartheid's "global itinerary" introduced by Bethlehem (2013), which draws attention to the multiple roles played by exiled South African cultural agents in the transnational circulation of anti-apartheid literary texts, as well as auditory and visual culture, against the backdrop of Cold War divisions. "At determinate stops along the grid of their reception elsewhere," she argues, "South African texts, images, and works of music were channelled through *local* paradigms of reception [beyond South Africa] in taut negotiation with aesthetic, institutional, linguistic and political considerations" (Bethlehem, submitted). Considered in tandem with these networks of circulation, exile may be recast as "a system of interlinked circuits of affiliation and cultural production": one that does not, however, eliminate the deep personal loss it generates (Bethlehem 2013 and submitted).

Before becoming one of apartheid's most renowned jazz exiles, Hugh Masekela had quickly worked his way to the top of the 1950s jazz scene in

3 Because it had developed a rich cosmopolitan black aesthetic strongly influenced by black American culture, this suburb was targeted as a severe threat to the apartheid regime, and was brutally demolished by it in the late 1950s. For an in-depth discussion of Sophiatown, see Coplan (1985); Nixon (1994).

Sophiatown, a black residential neighbourhood in Johannesburg that was a vibrant black cultural hub throughout the first half of the twentieth century.³ As a young man who had just turned 20, he was invited to join Dollar Brand's [Abdullah Ibrahim] band, Jazz Epistles, and performed in the prestigious "jazz opera," "King Kong" (1959). Following the Sharpeville Massacre, the apartheid regime declared a state of emergency (1960) and banned all public meetings of more than three people, thereby paralyzing all cultural activities. Consequently, with the combined assistance of the Anglican bishop Trevor Huddleston, the renowned violinist Yehudi Menuhin, and the English jazz composer John Dankworth, Masekela managed to board a flight to London and from there he continued to New York (Masekela and Cheers 2004, 114). Masekela's subsequent thirty years of exile came to an end only in the 1990s, with South Africa's transition to democracy.

Upon arriving in New York with a scholarship to the Manhattan School of Music, Masekela realized that he had to negotiate his way through the maze of American jazz in its golden age. His relatively easy entry into the American music industry was largely due to his close relationship, including two years of marriage (1964–1966), with the exiled South African singer Miriam Makeba, who was then connected to the well-known musician Harry Belafonte. With Makeba's help, Masekela forged ties with prominent American musicians such as Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie. This, in turn, led to concerts, recording contracts, and further networking that would not otherwise have been possible. Along with a steady job, Belafonte invited Masekela to play muted trumpet on Miriam Makeba's highly successful album *The Many Voices of Miriam Makeba* (1962), earning him reputation among his fellow students and in the New York jazz milieu.

Makeba and Masekela were among the first and most prominent exiles of the apartheid regime to settle in the United States. Hence, their homes became centres of cultural activity for many expatriates who followed over time (Makeba and Hall 1989). The social kinship created in this context provided a solid ground for Masekela's artistic collaborations with other exiled South African musicians, including Jonas Gwangwa, Caiphus Semenya, Letta Mbulu, and Dudu Pukwana, plus the visual artist Dumile Feni.⁴ These collaborations would prove extremely formative in later endeavours, namely two of Masekela's most highly regarded albums, recorded between 1970 and 1971, before his trip to Africa: *Hugh Masekela & The Union of South Africa* (1971)⁵ and *Home Is Where the Music Is* (1972). Both albums may be musically characterized as a fusion of South African urban and traditional jazz with grooves and patterns typical of the experimental branch of black American soul music of the time. In the early 1960s, however, these developments were still in the future. Masekela's primary ambition at the time was to earn recognition as a virtuoso bebop trumpeter at the top of the New York jazz

4 Bethlehem (2017) discusses the pan-Africanist dimensions of this at length.

5 Chisa was an independent record label established by Hugh Masekela and his roommate at the Manhattan School of Music, Stewart Levine. It merged

Ron Levi

with Bob Krasnow's Blue Thumb record company in 1972.

scene. Given the size and the cultural resonance of the local scene, however, his chances were slim. Louis Armstrong's advice to Masekela was as follows:

Hughie, there are thousands of us jazz musicians in this country. You're just gonna be a statistic. But if you play some of that shit from South Africa and mix it with the shit you know from here, you gonna come up with something none of us can do ... You know what I'm sayin'? (Masekela and Cheers 2004, 165)

Motivated to break through to the top of the music industry in America, Masekela listened and tried his best to incorporate African influences into his music.

Being a gregarious person and a gifted instrumentalist, Masekela was able to secure some bookings in opening acts while befriending the best black artists around, a skill that stood in his favour in 1974, as shown below. Nevertheless, the early years of Masekela's musical career in New York were characterized by frequent movements between record companies and albums that did not receive much popular attention. This period in Masekela's life was also characterized by political activity – mainly through spoken introductions to his performances – in raising awareness of the horrors perpetrated against his people in South Africa by the apartheid regime (Ansell 2004). Following the relative success of his third album, *The Americanization of Ooga-Booga* (1966), in Los Angeles, Masekela settled in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury, the bastion of the beat counter-culture, in the summer of 1966.⁶ A year later, he was invited to perform at the prestigious Monterey International Pop Festival (1967). At around the same time, Masekela recorded the single "Grazing in the Grass," a chart-blazer that sold over four million copies in the United States and throughout Africa. This sequence of events rapidly transformed Masekela into a successful musician. For the next three years he consistently sought to reproduce this success with a second hit. Despite failing to do so, he was prominent enough to be included in the Monterey lineup.

Conceived as the choice event of 1967's "Summer of Love" in San Francisco, the unprecedented international coverage of this three-day music festival turned Monterey '67 into an ideal cultural configuration that expressed anti-establishment and individual liberation while providing – through the realm of popular music – a new collective consciousness on a global scale (Gebhardt 2015). While accelerating the careers of relatively unknown musicians such as Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, and Jefferson Airplane and transforming them into rock icons, the event in Monterey marked a radical change in the American music industry. This was part of the festival producers' stated agenda of establishing rock as an artistic form equal to jazz and folk music, and turning the music industry's attention, by means of a powerful showcase, to the changes that had occurred in the American

⁶ This is where he met his close friend Alan Pariser, one of the most connected figures in the American music industry. Pariser produced the Monterey '67 festival and was, among many other things, the logistics manager of Zaire '74.

popular music field (Hill 2006). The criticism of the music industry underpinning the Monterey event is evident in this account in the *Village Voice*, published immediately after the festival:

For once, the money men back off and with them that cardboard consistency the title “music festival” usually conjures. For the first time in anyone’s memory, the scene exploits back. With a board of directors composed almost entirely of superstars, a press office headed by ace publicist Derek Taylor, the finances of a handful of youth millionaires on call, the First International Pop Festival at Monterey elicited the most potent form of worship. It came to represent rock, in all its parvenu pomp and passion. (Goldstein 1967)

Hugh Masekela, alongside Indian musician Ravi Shankar, played an important role in making the Monterey Pop Festival an international and multicultural event (Brant 2008). Although the festival’s promotion emphasized love and flowers overcoming war and racism, Masekela appeared in Monterey alongside just three African Americans – Otis Redding, Lou Rawls, and Jimi Hendrix – in a surprisingly short list of black artists (Hill 2006). As the sole African representative, Masekela served in Monterey as the conduit for exoticizing tropes of “African ecstasy.” This is evident, in retrospect, in director Donn A. Pennebaker’s decision to include his hallucinatory festival performance of Makeba’s mother healing song, in isiZulu, “Bajabula Bonke” (They all rejoice at my illness) in his documentary *Monterey Pop* (1968), which helped promulgate the mythical aura of the festival. Pennebaker’s specific selection reveals the way in which the image of Africa and of blackness was used in order to reinforce the psychedelic atmosphere surrounding the festival. The production of the 1974 event in Zaire was largely based on Masekela’s experiences in Monterey, but it was the representation of the African continent as a musical – cultural construct that slowly became a cornerstone in his artistic motivation, as I will argue below.

The Rumble in the Jungle heavyweight boxing match, which the Zaire ’74 music festival was aimed at promoting, was scheduled to be broadcast live from Kinshasa to the rest of the world. Based on the tremendous impact of Monterey ’67 and Woodstock ’69 on American consciousness, and considering the great buzz surrounding the upcoming title bout, Zaire ’74 was envisioned as a potential “Black Woodstock” of African music. In Levine’s words: “We planned to utilize this event with the whole world’s attention suddenly focused on Zaire, to create more consciousness [in America, mainly] for African music” (Denselow, Masekela, and Levine 2017).

Gebhardt (2015) considers Monterey ’67 the prototypical American pop music festival and argues this model was rapidly adopted all over the globe. I similarly suggest that the production of the Zaire ’74 music festival was modelled after Monterey ’67 in order to offer an alternative (non-capitalist-driven)

form of a deeply transnational cultural production. Nevertheless, as opposed to the logic guiding the other three Pan-African festivals and in contrast with the African-American diasporic narrative, the transnationality of Zaire '74 was American-oriented rather than African.

The intense branding of Zaire '74 began early on and was integral to the effort to complete the list of performers who were supposed to reflect the most prominent musical trends both in America and in Africa (Masekela and Cheers 2004). Masekela enlisted Chip Monck, the stage designer of Monterey '67 and the master of ceremonies at the Woodstock '69 festival, to deal with the technical matters and he certainly made use of the tremendous budget allocated by Mobutu in setting up the stage at the Kinshasa Stadium (*Billboard*, 2 November 1974). Reflecting his desire to produce a music festival with historical significance, Masekela recounts, "we hired ... some of the finest handheld camera crews available to document the entire event" (Denselow, Masekela, and Levine 2017). In addition, Levine established a state of the art recording studio on the outskirts of the stadium, intended to provide high-quality recording of the sounds that made up Zaire '74.

These lofty aspirations were completely different from those of Zaire's ruler at the time, Mobutu Sese Seko (Malaquais 2009). The strategic significance of bringing Muhammad Ali – the symbol of blackness and anti-imperialism – to Kinshasa was carefully calculated by Mobutu to draw international attention to the culmination of the Zairianization process he instituted in 1971, using extensive political violence, in the postcolonial state under his rule (Levi 2017). Thus, the realization of the vision of Zaire '74 was accompanied by a contingent decision on the part of Masekela and Levine to embed themselves into the statist agendas of Mobutu Sese Seko. Masekela's turn towards Africa, using the tools he had acquired in Monterey, cannot be fully understood, however, without some consideration of Masekela's experiences in Africa during the period immediately preceding the production of Zaire '74.

Masekela's journey in Africa between 1972 and 1974

Unlike other artists who actively harnessed their popularity towards the political struggles that characterized the period – Miriam Makeba stands as a striking example – Masekela steered his newly acquired wealth into the frequent use of drugs and alcohol, habits which before long precipitated financial and professional turmoil. In Gwen Ansell's estimation, this period also marked a radical change of direction in his musical activity: "Masekela's output thereafter was increasingly dominated by varieties of fusion music ... But it is equally true that America was, quite consciously, not the centre of his musical universe" (Ansell 2004, 231). Despite having lost some of his stature in the music industry at the time, Masekela met the African-American

poet and political activist Quincey Troupe, who made him a regular player at poetry readings he organized, which featured black writers such as Amiri Baraka, Toni Morrison, and James Baldwin. It was through Troupe's mediation that Masekela was exposed to contemporary black political thinkers and became acquainted with the diverse political, cultural, and musical processes taking place on the African continent. Upon his return from a trip to Nigeria, Troupe informed Masekela that the Nigerian afro-beat musician Fela Kuti was eager to meet him. Not long afterwards Masekela answered the call (Masekela and Cheers 2004, 244).

As someone who had been exiled by the apartheid regime in South Africa, Masekela's ability to move outside the United States was circumscribed. Miriam Makeba, who at that point had been living in Guinea for several years under the patronage of Ahmed Sékou Touré, intervened on his behalf, persuading the president to grant him a Guinean passport. This made his African journey possible, but also drew him into the complex world of competing postcolonial and pan-Africanist agendas. Nevertheless, Masekela's African itinerary in 1972–1974 was heavily oriented to musical innovation. He gave a number of performances and forged connections with leading musicians, organizers, and political figures in Kinshasa, Monrovia, and Accra. These personal contacts subsequently contributed to the consolidation of the Zaire '74 vision both artistically and economically. Equally crucial was his realization of the enormous impact of both African-American soul music and Latin-American rumba and salsa on the vibrant atmosphere that characterized these African capital cities at the time, a widely studied phenomenon I cannot elaborate on here.⁷ This recognition formed one of the core motivations for Zaire '74, as reflected in the successful performances of James Brown and Fania Allstars starring Celia Cruz, both of whom were received enthusiastically by the festival's audience (Kusama-Hinte 2009).

As discussed elsewhere (Levi 2017), Masekela's arrival in Nigeria, and his engagement with the Afrobeat musician Fela Kuti during 1973, marked a major milestone in the musical journey charted here. Fela Kuti had toured the United States in 1969–1970 and, although the tour itself proved to be a disaster, while on the road he met Sandra Smith, a former member of the Black Panthers, who introduced him to the political principles of black consciousness and the American civil rights movement. Ethnomusicologist Michael Veal argues Kuti's American trip marks a significant turning point in two ways:

While he had given his music the name "Afrobeat" [in Lagos] as early as 1968, it was during his US sojourn that he was finally able to blend elements from a number of popular styles into his own distinctive style. He had also undergone a crucial political and cultural awakening that finally provided his music with the seriousness of

7 For further discussion of Cuban rumba's influence on Congolese music, see White (2002). Veal (2000) provides a broader musical analysis of the Latin and African-American trend that swept popular music in Africa during the 1960s and 1970s. For a vivid personal account of African-American musical and cultural significance in Africa, see Diawara (2009).

purpose he had long sought, serving to counteract the prevailing image of African musicians as mere providers of good-time entertainment. (Veal 2000, 74)

The long-awaited meeting between Masekela and Kuti in Lagos, which was based on mutual musical appreciation, turned into a close friendship. As expected, Masekela integrated effortlessly into the pioneering musical activities of Kuti's band, Africa 70. But, above all, their relationship had a profound impact on Masekela's understanding of the modalities of the corrupt and power-hungry regimes that dictated everyday life across Africa. This was the last and most important element that rendered Masekela's vision of Zaire '74 into the junction between soul power, black power, anti-imperialism, pan-Africanism, and Zairean nationalism (Masekela and Cheers 2004). Kuti was the one who introduced Masekela to the acclaimed Ghanaian band Hedzoleh Soundz, facilitating the culmination of Masekela's African sojourn. Upon their return from Accra to Lagos, they recorded *Masekela introducing Hedzoleh Soundz* (1973). As an initial indication of a musical turn, this album is characterized by a much stronger dominance of African vocal and rhythmic traditions, this time mainly from Ghana.

Musically, the impact of Masekela's African journey is clearly discernable in the story of his song "Stimela (Coaltrain)."⁸ The song's background was the mass migration to the cities of rural labourers seeking work in the gold mines and diamond quarries around Johannesburg. The song describes the journey, and hence its name "Stimela" or "steam engine" (isiZulu, *isitimela/izitimela*: train). In his 2004 autobiography, Masekela describes a gloomy evening in 1971, when he sat with two friends in a bohemian Woodstock club, drinking and listening to records:

Suddenly I ran to the piano and began to sing a song about a train that brought migrant labourers to work in the coalmines of Witbank, my birthplace. Ray said: "That's a mean song. When did you write it?" I said between phrases "I didn't write it, it's coming in now." The song was "Stimela/The Coal Train" ... At this low point, for some reason, the tidal wave that whooshed in on me came all the way from the other side of the Atlantic, from Africa, from home. (Masekela and Cheers 2004, 238)

Three years later, in March 1974, after returning to New York from his long African journey accompanied by his Ghanaian band Hedzoleh Soundz, Masekela first recorded "Stimela (Coaltrain)" as part of the album *I Am Not Afraid* (1974).

Masekela describes the song's lyrics and melody as preordained. But in light of the journey described above, the recording act must be read differently: as a composition defined by its "pan-African" musical texture. While analogous to other attempts at mixing musical styles from around the world with rock and

8 Masekela's tribute to the legendary jazz saxophonist John Coltrane embodied in the coupling of the word *stimela* with its English translation (coaltrain) can also serve as an evidence of the syncretism between South African and American jazz culture.

rhythm & blues grooves, such as Santana’s for example, Masekela’s musical arrangement of “Stimela” reveals an interweaving of contemporary styles from different parts of Africa together with mainstream black music from America. The drum set and bass guitar play a classic rhythm & blues pattern; the percussions, led by the cow bell – which from that moment on became an integral part of Masekela’s sound signature alongside the trumpet – play the Afro-beat timeline, in a much slower tempo than usual; and finally, the vocals sung by the whole group evoke South African singing practices. Through these associations, “Stimela (Coaltrain)” was thrown into the global popular music scene armed with layers of sound and cultural significations. As a reflection of Masekela’s double-positioning in both African-American and African cultural fields during the period, “Stimela (Coaltrain)” provides a musical precursor for the Zaire ’74 initiative.

As I have shown in detail elsewhere, Masekela harnessed the “symbolic capital” (Bourdieu 1984) at his disposal to bring leading musicians from the American blues and soul scene, as well as Latin-American stars, to perform alongside prominent African musicians in what turned out to be a unique and influential event for all its participants – the musicians, the audience, and the producer of the event. In exposing the multiple types of affect produced in this historical juncture and the sounds it generated on a transnational level, I proposed that we need to understand Zaire ’74 as a “transnational sound event.” Thus, an investigation of global flows through the relay of sound provided deep contextualization for the various political and cultural vectors operating throughout Africa and the black diaspora during the 1970s (Levi 2017).

The chronicles of Zaire ’74

From the moment of independence, the governing of the Congo as a postcolonial state was characterized by an atmosphere of extreme political violence. The political assassination of Patrice Lumumba and two of his associates just six months after independence rendered the Congo into a battlefield between rival Cold War blocs (Kabwit 1979). From the clash of factions that shaped the new state, General Joseph Desiré Mobutu⁹ emerged to establish a one-man rule that would endure for over thirty years. Alongside efforts to eradicate all signs of former colonial repression, which included the transformation of the country’s name to Zaire, as well as the introduction of a new anthem, “La Zaïroise,” Mobutu launched in 1971 a process known as Zairianization, perceived as essential for the sake of solidarity with African culture and traditions. As part of this process, Mobutu became aware of the immense

⁹ As part of the processes described above, Mobutu ordered a wide-scale renaming process in which he colorfully renamed himself Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa

Ron Levi

Za Banga. That is in English translation, “The all-powerful warrior who, because of his endurance and inflexible will to win, will go from conquest to conquest, leaving fire in his wake” (Dunn 2001, 239).

importance of popular music and the bustling industry which directs it, both locally and across the continent, and acted quickly to subordinate it to his authority (Brown 2010; White 2008).

These wide-ranging changes were carried out with acute awareness, on Mobutu’s part, of the activities of other rulers throughout Africa, as well as of the Pan-African sentiments that accompanied them in one form or another. According to Malaquais and Vincent (2016), in light of the success of the First Pan-African Cultural Festival (PANAF) held in Algiers in 1969 with the approval of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), “Mobutu dispatched key aides to Addis Ababa to request (and receive) the OAU’s permission to hold the second PANAF in Kinshasa” as early as 1971 (Malaquais and Vincent 2016, 197). Although the approved plan was never carried out, these issues would become decisive for the Zaire ’74 event, as will be shown below.

Mobutu’s success in preserving the presumed prominence of Zaire during the early 1970s has been attributed to his ability to invest public spectacles of undeniable power with symbolic attributes, which came to permeate the social imaginary (Young and Turner 1985, 404). In her book *Rumblin’* (2009), the most significant study of the unique complex of events that took place in Zaire during September and October 1974, Dominique Malaquais points to Mobutu’s “superb coup” in securing the selection of Kinshasa to host the event over major cosmopolitan centres such as New York and London (which had also expressed great interest in hosting the fight). Mobutu’s willingness to award five million US dollars to each of the contestants in the heavyweight title bout between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman led to the creation, in real time and retrospectively, of an unprecedented historical event.

Mobutu’s attitude towards the accompanying music festival, which was characterized by strict supervision from the preparation stage to the actual performance, indicates a pattern of “top-down coercion.” Mobutu refused to fund the music festival that preceded the boxing match or its documentation, which were ultimately financed by Masekela’s friend Steve Tolbert, the Liberian minister of finance (Masekela and Cheers 2004, 276). Nevertheless, he shrewdly employed it to place Zaire on the international stage and emphasized its importance for the emerging cultural heritage of postcolonial Africa. Mobutu’s efforts to integrate Zaire ’74 into the continuum of Pan-African festivals are apparent in the variety of planned concurrent events listed in the party newspaper *Elima* – art exhibitions, dance shows, and a conference on African-American literature – none of which, incidentally, came to fruition (Malaquais 2009, 41–42).

In addition, Mobutu demanded that government-allied musicians, such as Tabu Ley or Franco and the OK Jazz, be given precedence over other participants in the festival. Thus, despite the many efforts of producer Hugh Masekela

to bring other African musicians to the festival, ultimately, Miriam Makeba was the only African from outside of Zaire to perform. Two prominent examples of musicians scheduled to perform who were removed from the lineup are the Nigerian Fela Kuti and the Cameroonian saxophonist Manu Dibango: the former was under house arrest as a political threat to the Nigerian government and the latter, while already in Kinshasa, was sidelined in favour of a local musician under government pressure (Kusama-Hinte 2009).

The producers' aspiration to attract international audiences to the rare repertoire of performances that formed Zaire '74 was ultimately foiled by reality: George Foreman's injury while training a few days before the match forced organizers to postpone it by five weeks. Masekela and Levine, nonetheless, decided to proceed and hold the music festival at the scheduled dates (22–24 September 1974). Consequently, the vast majority of the audience, sixty thousand at its peak, were locals. According to the festival promoter, Lloyd Price, this was also a result of Mobutu's blatant intervention:

On the first night of the actual festival, the show started around 8 pm, and that's when we got our biggest shock. Almost nobody showed up. We were charging \$30 a ticket, but we didn't know that \$30 was more than the annual wage for most Zaireans. The performers went on and played to an empty stadium, and we're supposed to be filming this as the greatest black music concert ever. So, immediately, we start speaking to Mobutu and the next morning he sent army helicopters out to all the surrounding towns and villages commanding everyone to attend the festival. We couldn't charge them anything. (Black 2000)

There is no evidence fully substantiating this account, although it can still serve as a clear indication of both Mobutu's top-down coercion and the inherent complexity of casting distinctly American practices into the Zairian cultural field as it was manifested circa 1974.

In contrast to what Murphy (2016) views as a unifying factor, my analysis of Zaire '74 so far points to a tension between the national (Zaire) and the transnational (United States) that substantially distanced it from the other Pan-African festivals on the continuum. Let me return to the *longue durée* of transnational priming that went into the making of Zaire '74 as a result of Hugh Masekela's exile. If we were now to shift our focus away from the festival as an abstract construct, towards the festival as a personal milestone, we might begin to see an alternative archive emerging in the consolidation of a pan-African political consciousness for one of the key figures in the evolution of popular music in Africa. This involves repositioning Zaire '74 as a constitutive component of Masekela's maturation as he evolved from exiled African jazzman in America into a cultural producer, politically committed to the dissemination of contemporary music made in Africa, in all its facets, on the other side of the Atlantic.

This process, which had crystallized over a decade of artistic activity (1967–1977) in America and throughout the African continent, began with Masekela’s performance in Monterey ’67, where he became the metonymy for Africa and continued in the channelling of the social and professional circles he has woven over the years into the production of the Kinshasa event. These motions can be felt in the slow formation of a pan-African texture in Masekela’s musical *oeuvre* which reached its peak in the period following Zaire ’74.

Zaire’s musical after-effect: Masekela’s “Casablanca records” years, 1975–1977

In his efforts to determine the contribution of live performances to fundamental changes in the musical focus of influential musicians and, thus, on the popular music field as a whole, Ian Inglis argues in-depth understanding of constitutive events “can have long-lasting and far-reaching consequences for both the production and the consumption of music, and for its shifting form and content” (2006, xiv). On the continuum of Masekela’s global itinerary, the Zaire ’74 production serves as what I call an “idiosyncratic laboratory” for testing his ability to channel his agency as a South African exile towards activating a network of transnational cultural production (Bethlehem 2013). As noted above, ultimately, Levine and Masekela’s initial desire to raise awareness of African music in the United States was largely unfulfilled (Woollard 2010). Furthermore, paradoxical as it may seem, musically, Zaire ’74 was a non-event for Masekela since he did not perform. Nevertheless, it was the after-effect of Zaire ’74 in Hugh Masekela’s musical practice that established him as a key figure in the development of popular music in Africa in the ensuing years.

Immediately after Zaire ’74, eager to spread the musical innovation of Africa to the western world, Masekela formed his second African band, Ojah, which found its musical home with the wildly adventurous Casablanca Records. Ojah made four albums between 1975 and 1977. Its sound continued to develop the pan-African musical texture formulated in *I Am Not Afraid*, and presented a mix of complex rhythm patterns, R&B horn riffs, and funky electric piano that made an unwavering musical statement. From a broad perspective, a fundamental change can be felt at the level of the lyrics as well. According to Alan Leeds:

Throughout these songs, Masekela’s lyrics celebrate his own return to roots. In the new Africa, he finds no room for Tarzan wannabes. Historical explorers and colonialists are evaluated from the viewpoint of those explored and exploited. And even the trumpeter’s tribute to Brazil’s popular samba is careful to point out the rhythm’s African heritage. (Leeds 1998)

Masekela and Ojah joined Miriam Makeba’s highly successful 1975 West African tour, and recorded their fourth album, *You Told Your Mama Not to Worry* (1977), in Kumasi, Ghana. It included the song “Soweto Blues,” written and composed by Masekela in tribute to the black South African students who rejected Afrikaans as the sole language of school instruction. Expressing his various circuits of influence, which now formed a clear artistic statement, the lyrics combine English and Xhosa, with the latter a protest shout against the adults who stood by while the army used machine-guns to suppress the riots. “Soweto Blues” also became one of the most popular items in Miriam Makeba’s repertoire and signified Masekela’s transformation into an icon of the global anti-apartheid struggle. In retrospect, this phase in Masekela’s musical career represents the core of his pivotal role in the international explosion of the culturally and politically entangled “Afropop” musical genre (Leeds 1998).

Zaire ’74 marked a watershed for the exiled South African musician Hugh Masekela on his path to international renown and influence. While Masekela enjoyed the unique status of a “landless musical ambassador” throughout postcolonial Africa, the Zaire ’74 production with its transnational resonance was also where he experienced the significant consequences of the event’s framing as the culmination of an accelerated national renewal process in Mobutu’s Zaire. These firsthand lessons accelerated his transformation into a political activist, a process that was articulated musically through broad exploration and extensive development of a pan-African texture. I offer here – through an exploration of Zaire ’74 and its implications for an individual musician straddling the national and transnational – an alternative avenue to exploring the pan-African aspects of popular music in Africa, although, of course, much remains to be done in this respect. Viewed from the perspective of the individual performer, the Pan-African festival is momentarily detached from its institutional overdetermination to reveal an alternative archive that links manifestations of pan-African solidarity with the development of popular music in Africa.

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