

Music performance in retrospect: Memories of New Brighton female vocalists' apartheid experiences

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Abstract

From time immemorial music has been central to the African traditional way of life, expressing and depicting everyday experiences. Before recording technology necessitated the preservation of music performances, memory served as a storehouse of traditional music, life events and experiences. Africans chronicled their history via music. This paper examines the memories of music performance experiences of female musicians from New Brighton Township in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, whose careers span the apartheid and post-apartheid eras. The writer used the biography method of research to allow the vocalists to narrate their experiences during in-depth oral history interviews. The researcher employed Pierre Bourdieu's notions of the field (context), habitus (worldview), and capital (gain/benefit) to analyze and evaluate to see if there is a co-relationship between the three notions through the vocalists' experiences. This paper demonstrated that there is a co-relationship between field, habitus and capital; and that memory, time and context impact remembering and interpretation of life experiences. With the benefit of hindsight on the vocalists' part, their narratives signify a transition from the initial dedication, commitment and sacrifice towards the struggle to the current calls for respect and recognition of their contribution towards the struggle for democracy. The vocalists fought for democracy through their music hoping to enjoy the fruits of their struggle. Yet their narratives show that they feel that they have been used as mere stepping stones for others to climb up the socio-political and economic ladder while they continue to languish in poverty and hopelessness.