

Entertainment, Alcoholism, Music: Individual and Social Struggles in South Africa

Eğlence, Alkolizm, Müzik: Güney Afrika'da Bireysel ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler

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ABSTRACT

Exploring the interplay between entertainment, alcoholism, and music, this article investigates how everyday cultural practices in South Africa have served as both individual coping strategies and catalysts for collective resistance, particularly during and after apartheid. Moving beyond the simplistic opposition of personal escapism and organized political protest, the analysis adopts a contextual and theoretical perspective inspired by Gramscian and contemporary class theories. The study demonstrates that seemingly apolitical actions—such as informal musical gatherings, theatrical performances, and communal drinking—can lay the groundwork for broader social mobilization and emergent collective agency over time. By focusing on examples like Sophiatown's vibrant nightlife, the radical performances of the Market Theatre, and the tradition of protest music, the article highlights the gradual transformation of micro-level acts into sources of collective memory, solidarity, and political opposition. The South African experience reveals that cultural expression is not merely a passive reflection of domination, but a dynamic arena in the ongoing “war of position” against hegemonic structures. The findings argue that significant social change often emerges from the cumulative impact of everyday practices rather than exclusively from organized movements. Ultimately, this article underscores the importance of recognizing the blurred boundaries between individual and collective action, and the crucial role that ordinary life plays in cultivating resilience, resistance, and pathways to social transformation.

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Introduction

Political protest has been a defining element in shaping societies and political landscapes throughout history. From revolutions to civil rights movements, protests have consistently demonstrated their power to challenge existing systems and catalyse societal change. Today, protests continue to play a vital role in pushing for reforms and sparking conversations around issues of social justice, equality, and human rights. In recent decades, the frequency and scope of protest activities have expanded beyond national borders, making them a global phenomenon that transcends cultural and political boundaries. This paper aims to explore the intricacies of protest,

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examining its manifestations as both an individual and collective expression.¹

Contemporary protest is a fluid phenomenon, shaped by the dynamic interplay between individual agency and collective mobilization. Rather than existing as separate or opposing forms, individual and social protests are often intertwined: personal acts of dissent can spark broader movements, while collective campaigns may begin with—and continually depend on—the agency of individuals (Buck-Morss, 2021, pp. 71, 83, 85). These acts of resistance, whether symbolic, spontaneous, or carefully orchestrated, demonstrate that protest operates along a spectrum: it can be both a deeply personal expression and a strategic, organized effort to challenge the status quo.

Social movements traditionally represent the more institutionalized, sustained end of this spectrum. They draw together diverse actors under a common identity and purpose, amplifying the voices of marginalized groups and pushing for systemic transformation. Yet, as recent global and local developments demonstrate, the boundaries between individualized protest and collective mobilization are increasingly porous—particularly in societies undergoing rapid cultural and political change.

South Africa's history provides an instructive case for re-examining these dynamics. The anti-apartheid movement, often remembered for its mass mobilization, was built on countless individual acts of defiance, everyday resistances, and the creative use of cultural practices. Today, the legacy of this struggle continues to inform not only the methods and messages of protest, but also the cultural repertoires—such as music, entertainment, and even everyday practices like drinking—that give protest its local resonance and symbolic power. These practices reveal how protest is embedded within the fabric of ordinary life and collective memory, continually adapting to address new challenges.

This article adopts a contextual reading approach to analyse protest in South Africa, paying close attention to the intersections of culture, identity, and resistance. Rather than focusing solely on the historical narrative, the study seeks to understand how entertainment, music, and social behaviours function as both sites and instruments of protest—past and present. In doing so, it aims to move beyond description, offering an integrated perspective on how protest is enacted, experienced, and transformed in a society marked by both enduring inequalities and creative forms of resilience.

Guided by these theoretical perspectives, the central hypothesis of this article is that everyday practices—such as entertainment, music, and even alcohol consumption—though often originating as individual acts of escape or coping, have the latent potential to evolve into nuclei of collective mobilization and new forms of social agency, particularly within contexts of subalternity or colonial domination. The study aims to interrogate the permeability of boundaries between individual and collective resistance by demonstrating how micro-level acts, which may appear apolitical or personal, can incubate shared identities, solidarity, and eventually organized opposition. By situating the South African experience within a broader dialogue that draws on Gramscian theory,

¹ This paper draws substantially on Asef Bayat's theoretical framework, which challenges conventional social movement paradigms by emphasizing that protest and resistance are not limited to large-scale, organized collective actions. Rather, as Bayat (2016) argues, everyday practices, dispersed and uncoordinated acts by ordinary people, and so-called "non-movements" can also effect social change and constitute meaningful forms of resistance, particularly in contexts of political constraint or repression (pp. 23–28, 42, 48–49, 58, 75, 82, 129, 133, 139). Bayat's analysis foregrounds the importance of informal, quotidian practices—what he terms "the politics of the ordinary"—and highlights how individual agency and daily acts of defiance or adaptation may collectively shape political and social landscapes, even in the absence of explicit organization or leadership. For Bayat, such forms of agency and resistance are especially prevalent in authoritarian and postcolonial settings, where overt protest is often risky or suppressed. This approach underpins the analytical perspective adopted in this study.

contemporary class analysis, and theories of radical democracy, the article seeks to move beyond conventional binaries of protest and instead foregrounds the role of cultural, affective, and everyday practices in forging collective subjectivities. Methodologically, this approach relies on interpretive and interdisciplinary analysis, synthesizing insights from cultural theory, political sociology, and social movement studies, to reveal how seemingly mundane acts of survival and enjoyment are woven into the very fabric of political resistance and social transformation.

Protest: Individual or Social

Political protest has long been a central element in the repertoire of political action and the progression of political development. From the French Revolution to the civil rights movements of the 1960s in the United States, and the “people power” protests associated with the Third Wave of democratization, popular protest has played a significant role in shaping political history. Protest has also emerged as a powerful tool for public influence on government policymaking and its execution. Furthermore, protest activity appears to be on the rise not only in advanced industrial democracies but also on a global scale. In fact, several recent studies characterize protest as an almost universal feature of contemporary politics (Dalton, van Sickle, & Weldon, 2010, p. 51).

Protest is an essential part of human existence and has had the potential to create meaningful change throughout history. Individuals come together to engage, persuade, and inspire others, using whatever means they can find to do so: money, media, stories, collective identities, jokes, caricatures, and sometimes weapons. In recent years, scholars of social movements have increasingly appreciated the cultural meanings and sentiments that accompany protests and how people weave them together to make sense of their own lives and develop their moral imaginations. Nowhere else is the creation of culture and its effects on the world we live in more evident. To understand protest, it is necessary to acknowledge the value of culture, but on the other hand, protest helps us understand where culture comes from (Jasper, 2017, pp. 9-11).

Individuals do not always wait for social movements to protest. Some find an individual way to protest, with dramatic actions such as hunger strikes or self-immolation, which cannot be ignored by others. However, individuals who want to coordinate their protests organize some movements (Jasper, 2017, p. 12). Individuals resist things that make them uncomfortable or protest them in several ways (Jasper, 2002, p. 28). When individuals protest, they distance themselves from their roles in organizations, ignore the rules they do not like, criticize, complain, try to disrupt their bosses' plans to various extents, and steal small items. Quiet resistance can become more public, as when individuals write letters to lawmakers or newspapers. In other words, there are protests independent of organized movements. Individual protesters, as we will see later, have various relationships with the formal groups that are most visible in protest movements (Jasper, 2002, p. 29).

Individuals may protest things before (or before) joining organized groups. Going beyond silent forms of resistance such as work slowdowns, poor work, or even sabotage, ordinary and local actions such as complaining or arguing with superiors are also open criticism of existing practices. Like the self-immolation of the Buddhist monk or the package bombs sent by the Unabomber, whistleblowing is a particularly thoughtful form of individual protest. Individual actions sometimes, but not always, occur before joining more organized protest movements (Jasper, 2002, p. 232).

Social movements, in their simplest definition, are the coming together of a group of people around a common goal over a long or brief period. Social movements formed by creating a common identity and activity have intensely influenced politics and democracy since the first period when democracy began to be institutionalized. They have undertaken various functions to expand the freedom of individuals and society, especially in the women's, workers', and youth movements (Sanlı, 2005, p. 12). The role played by conflict in the functioning and survival of society is

considered a critical point in understanding social order. Social movements, as a phenomenon, are one of the critical issues that strengthen the belief that the social order is maintained by conflicts and at the same time enable the re-evaluation of society as a political entity. From this perspective, social movements express a conflict, the conflict situation experienced by a regular society, and strategies of struggle and resistance. At the same time, this expression also evaluates social movements as one of the dynamics of social change. Accordingly, we can define social movements as a form of collective behaviour that takes action to create a new lifestyle, a new model in society (Işık, 2015, p. 1).

While social movements are often defined as broad organizations comprising diverse interest groups (Tilly, 2008, p. 13), their scope and structure can vary significantly depending on the issues they address and the social contexts in which they emerge. In addition to formal organizations such as women's associations, student unions, or workers' collectives, social movements frequently involve informal networks and alliances that cut across social strata. This flexibility allows movements to mobilize around a single cause—such as gender equality—or encompass multiple, intersecting issues like labour rights and educational reform. Such complexity highlights not only the diversity within social movements, but also their ability to adapt and persist in changing political landscapes (Tilly, 2008, p. 13).

To further clarify the nature of social movements, it is important to distinguish them from individual acts of protest. While both represent forms of dissent, they differ in several fundamental aspects. Individual protests do not require joining organized groups, whereas social movements are inherently collective. The action repertoire also varies: individual actions may be more spontaneous and short-term, while social actions often require more time and coordination. Social movements typically involve the long-term coming together of a group of people, whereas individual protests tend to be unorganized and of shorter duration.

Literature Review

South Africa's complex history of resistance and resilience cannot be understood without recognizing the crucial role of cultural practices, particularly in the realms of entertainment and music. From the colonial period through apartheid and beyond, cultural expression has been both a site of oppression and a vital resource for survival, identity formation, and collective action (Başer, 2017; Deniz, 2005). In this section, I examine how entertainment, alcohol consumption, and music have intersected as vehicles for both individual coping and social resistance, offering insight into the interplay between everyday life and broader movements for change.

During apartheid, cultural practices became essential tools for preserving identity and resisting systemic oppression. Music, language, and art were harnessed to challenge the racial hierarchies imposed by the state, helping communities to assert their dignity and autonomy in the face of repression (Başer, 2017). Entertainment spaces—most famously, the vibrant social scenes of Sophiatown—served as refuges where cultural identity could flourish despite the oppressive regime, while traditional crafts and artistic practices reflected ongoing struggles against colonial erasure (Deniz, 2005). These spaces enabled a sense of normalcy and community cohesion, creating opportunities for subtle acts of defiance that contributed to a wider culture of resistance.

Entertainment, in its many forms, was not merely a means of escape from the harsh realities of apartheid. Instead, it frequently became a platform for solidarity, resistance, and the forging of collective identity. For instance, live performances, dance, and theatre provided spaces where marginalized communities could both temporarily transcend their immediate circumstances and build networks of mutual support (Erdemir, Yalçiner, & Kulaklı, 2014; Vershbow, 2023). In this context, entertainment functioned as a crucial mechanism for reasserting humanity, fostering hope, and sustaining resilience in the face of ongoing injustice.

The social function of entertainment was closely linked to other cultural behaviours shaped by colonial and apartheid legacies—most notably, patterns of alcohol consumption. Initially, alcohol held a regulated and communal role within traditional African societies, serving ceremonial and social purposes. However, colonial interventions such as the “dop system” weaponized alcohol as a means of controlling and exploiting Black labourers, embedding alcohol abuse within structures of socioeconomic domination. This legacy persists today, as unregulated and hazardous alcohol consumption remains associated with unemployment, violence, family breakdown, and public health crises, all exacerbated by poverty and systemic inequality (Setlalentoa et al., 2010, pp. 11–15). Thus, alcohol consumption in South Africa is not merely a social ill, but also a historically rooted response to oppression—serving at times as both a coping mechanism for individuals and a tool of social control.

In contrast to the destructive potential of alcohol, music has historically served as a force for unity, resistance, and social transformation in South Africa. Throughout and after apartheid, music operated as an implicit cultural policy, shaping collective identity, critiquing authority, and galvanizing political action (Nawa & Mugovhani, 2017, p. 77). Artists such as Sello Galane and Rudzani Colbert Mukwevho have used their work to address issues of urban marginalization, cultural erasure, and the tension between tradition and modernity, exemplifying music’s ability to mobilize communities and challenge social hierarchies. Protest songs in particular played a critical role in fostering solidarity, sustaining morale, and articulating shared grievances, making music both a reflection of, and catalyst for, collective struggle (Erdemir, Yalçiner, & Kulaklı, 2014; Power, 2014).

The central role of entertainment and music in South Africa resonates with broader insights from cultural and sociological theory, which emphasize the significance of mass culture in shaping human interactions and social change (Sayre & King, 2003, pp. 3–7; Bates & Ferri, 2010, p. 1; Stebbins, 2007, p. 188). Entertainment’s narrative power and capacity to evoke empathy have enabled it to address social issues, foster activism, and mobilize audiences across diverse backgrounds (McGowan, 2019; Tatarchevskiy, 2011, p. 309; Seçkin, 2008, p. 471). At the same time, the intertwining of entertainment with societal structures has made it both a field of contestation and a source of agency, facilitating individual and collective efforts toward justice.

While alcoholism is recognized globally as a chronic disease with severe social consequences (Morse & Flavin, 1992, p. 1013; Futures, 2023), in South Africa its history and meaning are inseparable from the country’s broader struggles over power, participation, and community. For example, in political contexts such as the Soviet Union, alcoholism has been linked to broader questions of governance and civic engagement (Field, 1955, p. 100). In the South African context, however, this study considers alcoholism primarily as an impediment to, rather than a driver of, organized social movements (Room, 1995, p. 56).

Music, by contrast, stands out as a universal element shaping emotional, moral, and cultural life (ACCSC, 2023; Petrušić, 2021, p. 138). Its capacity to foster social connection, maintain collective memory, and communicate across barriers has made it a powerful catalyst for change—especially in times of conflict or crisis (Eyerman, 1998, p. 19; Dennis, 2016, p. 35; Vilches, 2004, p. 197). Musicians and activists have historically leveraged song to both galvanize social movements and to sustain their momentum, while also transcending dominant cultural narratives and offering new forms of solidarity. The transformative power of music, as seen in the anti-apartheid struggle, demonstrates the vital importance of cultural practices in shaping both individual agency and collective resistance (Danaher, 2010, p. 811).

Taken together, these dynamics reveal how entertainment, alcohol consumption, and music are not merely aspects of daily life in South Africa but are deeply intertwined with broader processes of

societal struggle, resistance, and identity formation. By tracing their interconnections, we can better understand how culture has functioned both as a means of endurance and as a vehicle for social transformation, shaping the contours of individual and collective action throughout South Africa's turbulent history.

Entertainment, Alcoholism and Music in South Africa

The historical dominance of coercion as the foundation of hegemony within the South African social structure has positioned the social sphere as a primary area of contention between the state and its radical opposition forces. Cultural practices have played a significant role in these conflicts due to their capacity to shape individuals' understandings of social processes and transformations. Black theatre, as part of initiatives by radical oppositional movements, has aimed to counter the state's myths surrounding South African history and society by presenting alternative historical narratives and aspirations. The sites of conflict between Black performance and the government have evolved over time, with changes in the themes of plays and the organization of Black performance reflecting the shifting nature and terrain of these struggles (Peterson, 1990, p. 229). Building upon the centrality of theatre as a site of contestation, specific venues and productions played a particularly visible role in challenging apartheid's cultural and social order.

In 1976, during the height of apartheid, an extraordinary theatre emerged in Johannesburg. The Market Theatre boldly defied the regime by positioning itself as a venue where audiences of all racial backgrounds could unite to enjoy performances, openly challenging apartheid policies. Soon after its inception, it gained global recognition as the Theatre of the Struggle, symbolizing the fight against apartheid. Mannie Manim and Barney Simon, the founders, held firm beliefs in their ability to influence societal change, and their efforts undeniably left a profound impact. Among the notable productions staged here was *Woza Albert!*, a renowned anti-apartheid play portraying the return of Christ amidst the oppressive apartheid regime's attempt to annihilate him with an atomic bomb. This production stood as the most successful theatrical endeavour in South African history. Additionally, the theatre served as the premiere venue for many of Athol Fugard's acclaimed plays. Fugard remains a revered figure in South African literature and theatre, renowned for his works challenging apartheid (KLM, n.d.). Much like theatre, other cultural arenas—including film—became battlegrounds for shaping consciousness and contesting the dominant political narrative.

From the outset of commercial cinema in South Africa, filmmaking was inherently political. Authorities as having a profound influence on the Black population, whether for positive or negative purposes, warranting strict control, viewed cinema, a highly popular medium. While cinema for White audiences became a vehicle for nationalist propaganda (as in *De Voortrekkers*), artificially constructed "Black cinema" was intended to pacify and distract rather than empower. Yet, even under intense censorship, filmmakers used the medium to challenge the status quo and foster resistance. For example, films such as *My Country, My Hat* (1983) and *Ngomopho* were not merely entertainment, but became symbols of protest by directly addressing discriminatory laws and giving voice to Black South Africans' lived realities. Although these films may not be widely known by contemporary audiences, they played a significant role in the cultural landscape of their time, influencing perceptions, inspiring solidarity, and contributing to the broader anti-apartheid struggle (Davis, 2000; Haynes, 2015; Botha, 2012, p. 1). The use of cinema as a tool for resistance thus highlights the importance of media in shaping political consciousness, even when its legacy may be obscured in the present. Beyond the realms of theatre and cinema, sporting culture also became a contested field where issues of identity, inclusion, and resistance were negotiated.

During the 1960s, apartheid policies extended to sports, with segregated events aimed at minimizing racial tensions. International pressure, spearheaded by countries like the Soviet Union and various global South nations, led to South Africa's exclusion from the Olympics in 1964.

Attempts to integrate sports within the country faced resistance, but gradual progress was made throughout the following decade. While symbolic, the integration of sports marked a significant acknowledgment of the previously denied status of Black individuals within the nation (Gershon, 2022). These developments set the stage for even more consequential confrontations within the world of sports, particularly with international boycotts and solidarity campaigns.

By 1990, South Africa had been expelled from every major international sports federation. This development was not merely a matter of athletic exclusion, but rather a powerful example of how cultural and social spheres—such as sports—became crucial battlegrounds in the struggle against apartheid. The Anti-Apartheid Movement's collaboration with the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SANROC) to secure the country's exclusion from the Olympic movement, along with widespread boycotts of rugby and cricket, demonstrates how international solidarity and collective action extended beyond formal politics or protest marches. These campaigns, supported by organizations and activists around the world, brought global attention to apartheid's injustices and helped to delegitimize the regime on the world stage. The sports boycotts, including high-profile campaigns like the Stop the Seventy Tour and the 1977 Gleneagles Agreement, exemplify how non-traditional forms of resistance—rooted in everyday practices and cultural institutions—can mobilize collective identities and foster international solidarity, reinforcing the broader anti-apartheid movement's goals (AAM, n.d.). Thus, the politicization of sports in South Africa illustrates the interconnections between culture, identity, and resistance, and underscores how even recreational activities can become sites of meaningful protest and social change. The pervasive reach of apartheid, however, was not limited to the fields of culture, media, or sport. Its legacy also extended to deeply personal and social issues, such as patterns of alcohol consumption, which were shaped by racialized narratives and structural inequalities.

While the racialized attitudes toward alcoholism in South Africa can be traced, back to colonial-era Social Darwinist discourses and economic interests in the liquor trade, the real impact of these beliefs extended far beyond policy and profit (Mager, 2004, pp. 736–739). By constructing Africans as “naturally heavy drinkers,” colonial and apartheid authorities not only justified exclusion from support and treatment but also perpetuated a narrative that undermined community well-being and dignity. These stereotypes, rooted in both racism and economic exploitation, contributed to the normalization of alcohol abuse as a social problem that was deeply intertwined with broader patterns of inequality. Importantly, the persistence of these narratives—despite evidence that alcohol abuse affected all racial groups—reflects how issues of public health and morality were used to reinforce social divisions. In my view, understanding the evolution of these discourses is essential for recognizing how legacies of colonialism and apartheid continue to shape social and health challenges in South Africa today. The shift toward “responsible drinking” campaigns in the 1990s, while an important development, must therefore be seen in the context of a much longer and more complex history of racialized control and marginalization. This historical background helps explain why alcoholism emerged as a particularly pervasive issue among Black workers during apartheid, and why it remains a significant social problem in contemporary South Africa.

Alcoholism emerged as a pervasive issue among Black workers during apartheid, a problem that persists today, with South Africa ranking highest in alcohol consumption on the continent. Despite initial denial by authorities, social workers highlighted the prevalence of alcoholism among Africans, leading to the establishment of treatment centres. Apartheid policies, including the ban on homemade alcohol, fuelled resentment among Black communities, further highlighting the injustices of the regime (London, 1999, p. 1407; Harker et al., 2020, p. 3537; Mager, 1999, p. 381; de Haas, 2020). Despite these challenges, South African communities continued to draw on cultural resources for resilience and resistance—most notably through music, which provided both a voice for protest and a means for forging collective identity.

Apartheid's influence extended to cultural domains, including music, which became a tool for political manipulation. The regime implemented strict censorship measures, controlling broadcasts and recordings to suppress dissenting voices. However, music, particularly jazz, emerged as a powerful medium for expressing frustration and resistance. Originating from local adaptations of African American genres like Ragtime and Dixieland, South African jazz, epitomized by artists like Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela, became a beacon of hope and liberation during turbulent times, resonating not only within the country but also on the global stage (Schumann, 2008, p. 19; Hiney, n.d.). The political role of music was further amplified by organizations such as the African National Congress, whose use of protest songs helped sustain the momentum of resistance and foster a sense of unity among diverse communities.

The African National Congress (ANC), founded in 1912, utilized music as a means of unity and resistance, with iconic songs like *Nkosi Sikelel iAfrika* becoming anthems of the struggle. Jazz, with its ability to transcend barriers, provided a platform for expression and activism, fostering a sense of solidarity among oppressed communities. As the apartheid era unfolded, music evolved into a potent force for change, challenging injustice and inspiring movements for liberation (Hiney, n.d.).



Figure 1: A Graffiti of Rap Music Artist “Biggie”, Johannesburg, South Africa, Photo: Özgür Yılmaz

Music helped Black Africans in South Africa in their fight against racism and oppression. Music also gave a voice where politics could not, particularly for protest. The songs provided the opportunity to directly address certain political issues and politicians. Songs of the time reflected social reality and offered an effective way to acknowledge and protest an unjust political system (Power, 2014, p. 3). Music has also been used to keep alive the memory of murdered political icons such as Steve

Biko, Chris Hani, and Solomon Mahlangu. They also helped ensure that resistance leaders who were imprisoned, such as Nelson Mandela, or exiled, such as Oliver Tambo, were not forgotten. These dead and living people represented the political struggle of the country. The songs were also a way to mark moments of grief, and occasionally moments of hope, which were numerous as Black South Africans impatiently, awaited the collapse of apartheid (Nkoala, 2022). Taken together, these examples reveal how cultural practices, whether through music, entertainment, or even coping mechanisms such as alcohol consumption, operated on both individual and collective levels throughout the apartheid era.

As can be seen, entertainment, alcoholism, and music are important tools for individual and social struggles. In South Africa, the anti-apartheid struggle, entertainment, alcoholism, and music were often used in social contexts. However, these practices were generally rooted in individual experiences and agency. Thus, when examining the South African context, it becomes clear that while entertainment, alcoholism, and music sometimes functioned as means of personal escape from an oppressive regime, they also evolved into powerful vehicles for expressing dissent and transmitting social messages. This dual function underscores the intricate relationship between individual acts and collective resistance and highlights how culture can both reflect and shape the ongoing struggle for justice.

In the aftermath of apartheid, South African cultural practices such as entertainment, music, and alcohol consumption have reflected the paradoxes of democratic transition and neoliberal transformation. As Ballard (2005, pp. 77-80) notes, the liberalization of the cultural sphere allowed previously marginalized forms of expression—especially protest music and grassroots artistic performance—to become more visible and widely accessible. However, the incorporation of these once-radical forms into mainstream markets has sometimes blunted their oppositional power, as commercial imperatives increasingly shape the production and circulation of music and entertainment (Ballard, 2005, pp. 87-89). Meanwhile, Madlingozi (2007, pp. 90-92) argues that the post-apartheid era's social movements continue to leverage cultural practices as vehicles for critique and mobilization, yet they do so within a neoliberal context that often commodifies dissent and narrows the scope for transformative action. Changing patterns of alcohol consumption further mirror broader inequalities, as commercialized recreational spaces both reflect and reproduce new social divisions in the so-called 'new' South Africa (Ballard, 2005, pp. 92-95). Thus, the evolution of cultural practices since 1994 demonstrates the complex interplay between resistance, commodification, and the ongoing quest for genuine social transformation.

Discussion

The preceding section explored the conceptual spectrum between individual and collective protest, emphasizing that the boundaries between these forms of resistance are often porous rather than absolute. Building on this foundation, this discussion now moves beyond basic definitions to analyse how such dynamics played out in the South African context, especially under apartheid and in the micro-politics of everyday life. As discussed earlier, acts of entertainment, music making, and even drinking may originate as personal coping strategies. However, the South African experience demonstrates that these practices frequently developed into nuclei of broader social mobilization and emergent collective agency. Venues like Sophiatown's entertainment spaces, the radical performances at the Market Theatre, and the evolution of protest jazz and song exemplify how micro-level practices and localized acts of endurance became catalysts for collective memory, shared identity, and long-term solidarity.

From a Gramscian perspective, as developed by Ransome (2011, pp. 103-112), everyday cultural acts are not merely passive responses to domination but are part of the ongoing "war of position," in which consent and hegemony are simultaneously reinforced and contested. This aligns with

Gramsci's view—outlined earlier in the article—collective identities can germinate in the contradictions of daily life, before fully developed class-consciousness or explicit political organization emerges. Thus, informal gatherings and coded cultural expressions, even when seemingly apolitical, are not peripheral; rather, they may create fissures in the dominant order and lay the groundwork for resistance. While earlier sections clarified the distinctions between individual and collective action, contemporary theories of social movements highlight their practical interconnectedness. As theorists like Kioupkiolis and Katsambekis (2016, pp. 32-35) and Hardt and Negri (2013, pp. 31-42) argue, resistance today is often networked, fragmented, and plural. The South African case vividly illustrates this: music, theatre, and sport did not simply provide emotional release for individuals but functioned as key sites for sustaining resistance and generating new forms of collective power. Protest songs, communal celebrations, and sporting boycotts operated as both outlets for personal agency and as mechanisms for articulating grievances and maintaining organizational momentum, particularly under conditions of repression (Benlisoy, 2012, p. xvii).

Furthermore, recent scholarship suggests that in the neoliberal and post-political era, movements frequently arise from dispersed, everyday acts rather than organized class struggle alone (Negri, 2017, p. 194; Taşkale, 2015, pp. 11, 22, 29). Brown (2021, pp. 55-56) notes that as neoliberalism erodes collective security, new solidarities and forms of collective identity are forged through micro-resistances in cultural and recreational domains (Balta & Keyman, 2022, pp. 44-45). The persistence of protest music and the transformation of entertainment venues into loci of opposition show how everyday life itself can become political—what Bayat terms “the politics of everyday life”—even if not always intentionally progressive. This analysis also echoes Poulantzas's (2014, pp. 29, 69) insight that class and social power function across multiple, overlapping levels—economic, political, and ideological. Méda's (2018, pp. 27, 173) reflections on work and sociality further highlight how cultural and affective labour—embodied in music, theatre, and sport—are central, not peripheral, to the formation of new social relations and collective identities.

In summary, the South African case demonstrates that individual acts of survival and escape—such as music, entertainment, and even drinking—are deeply intertwined with the emergence of collective resistance. Rather than seeing meaningful social change as the exclusive result of explicit, organized movements, this analysis—supported by Gramsci and contemporary class theorists—shows that collective subjectivity often emerges from diffuse, everyday practices and contradictions (Ransome, 2011, p. 112; Özpınar, 2018, pp. 34-36; Hardt & Negri, 2013, pp. 31-42; Poulantzas, 2014, pp. 29, 69). In conclusion, everyday practices under apartheid did not merely offer coping mechanisms; they became resources for political opposition and social transformation. The evolution of these micro-resistances into powerful movements reaffirms that the boundaries between the individual and the collective, and between personal endurance and political action, are more porous and dynamic than traditional social movement theories suggest.

Conclusion

This study has explored how entertainment, alcohol consumption, and music in South Africa, often understood, as individual responses to oppression, also constitute powerful resources for collective resistance and social transformation. By focusing on the interplay between culture, identity, and protest, the article has challenged the binary between personal coping and organized political action. The analysis demonstrates that individual acts of resistance—such as participation in musical gatherings, artistic performances, or even everyday acts of endurance—should not be dismissed as apolitical or isolated phenomena. Instead, they can provide the groundwork for the emergence of collective memory, shared identities, and new solidarities.

The South African context illustrates that practices originating in the sphere of the everyday

frequently acquire wider social and political significance over time. As discussed, entertainment venues in Sophiatown, the radical performances at the Market Theatre, and the persistent tradition of protest music all began as localized, often informal responses to apartheid but ultimately became central in mobilizing larger communities and shaping oppositional cultures. These micro-resistances, while initially fragmented, helped foster a climate where new collective subjectivities and alliances could be articulated. The discussion section has emphasized how such transformations are best understood through perspectives that move beyond traditional models of class-consciousness, drawing on Gramscian and post-Marxist theories to highlight the emergent, processual nature of “becoming-class.”

Moreover, this analysis underscores that social change does not always arise from grand, organized movements. Rather, as highlighted throughout the discussion, it is often the cumulative effect of everyday acts—music, celebration, and even seemingly apolitical escapes—that weakens hegemonic structures and creates openings for new forms of solidarity and action. The South African case, therefore, exemplifies how cultural practices can be both sites of domination and creative tools for contesting social order, supporting the argument that individual and collective resistances are deeply intertwined.

In conclusion, understanding protest and resistance in contexts marked by enduring inequalities requires a more nuanced approach—one attentive to the porous boundaries between the personal and the political, the individual and the collective. The South African experience demonstrates that everyday cultural practices are not merely peripheral to social movements but are foundational to the development of oppositional agency and the reimagining of social possibility. Thus, the transformation of individual “escapes” into collective mobilization serves as both an analytical framework and a call to recognize the power of everyday life in driving historical change.

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