

Addressing Gender-Based Violence through Music – A Study of the Gospel Song 'Isandla' by Rebecca Malope



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ABSTRACT

Released in 2005 by renowned South African gospel singer, the song 'Isandla' by Rebecca Malope remains relevant as GBV continues to persist in South Africa. Malope uses the metaphorical expression of hand 'Isandla' to illustrate its dual capacity for performing virtuous and harmful actions. The song highlights the positive deeds carried out by the hand before exposing its role in committing violent acts such as hitting, rape, and murder. In 'Isandla,' Malope calls for collective action to combat these issues. This paper, in light of this background, examined the gospel song 'Isandla' by Malope, focusing on its role in addressing and responding to gender-based violence (GBV). This paper emphasized the urgent need for national solidarity and critical examination of the problem. Malope's plea for intervention reflects believers' need for strengthened prayers. A qualitative research approach was adopted, with the analysis centring on the song. Data was collected through the examination of the song, journal articles, online newspapers, and books. The findings suggest that music has been instrumental in addressing societal issues, indicating that artists can significantly contribute to combating GBV. Support for artists on social media and live performances highlights the appreciation of music by the public. Therefore, the researchers recommend that if more artists use their music to tackle GBV, it could make a significant difference. Additionally, other creative media like poetry and television narratives should also focus on GBV to increase awareness and inspire change.

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INTRODUCTION

Music is more than entertainment; it is a force for change. Across genres and contexts, it has been intricately tied to social issues, inspiring movements for non-violence and solidarity among citizens. From folk protest songs to pop and Maskandi, artists have long been instrumental in addressing societal challenges. In South Africa, the role of music in confronting HIV, as seen with a notable example, is the song "Ngafa" by Shwi noMtekhala, which was used to raise awareness about HIV. In this song, the artists warn society about the dangers of engaging in multiple sexual relationships, highlighting how this behavior can lead to the spread of HIV. Through their lyrics, the artists portray themselves as individuals with numerous partners, highlighting the risk of widespread transmission of the virus. The song serves as a powerful reminder of music's impact in raising awareness and educating the public

about critical social issues. Despite the growing discourse on music's societal influence, the role of artists in tackling gender-based violence remains underexplored. Domestic violence continues to escalate, yet few studies analyze how creative works could amplify awareness and drive change. Through a qualitative approach, this paper proposes that artists integrate themes of GBV into their narratives, whether through song, poetry, or stories, to provoke public opinion and inspire action. The study is significant because 18 years after Malope's call for unity to fight this epidemic, the issue of GBV has not improved but has instead intensified. This study will, therefore, examine Rebecca Malope's song titled 'Isandla' and discuss how the song is trying to address the issues related to Gender-based violence and domestic violence, as these are related.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Music as a concept is extensively explored and viewed as entertaining, educative, and enriching, and plays a significant role in shaping societies.¹ It is explored in other genres, such as RnB, hip-hop, classical, maskandi, orchestra, gospel, and other genres. However, it is less explored as playing a role in addressing challenges or societal problems. This subject matter did not receive much scholarly attention in the South African context, as gospel music is a phenomenon that heavily relies on the biblical or spiritual realm and is often neglected in other fields except theological studies. Although authors may focus less on this subject, artists with their songs aim to or use them to transmit messages and usually focus on societal issues.

Although it has not received much scholarly attention, this article will recognize the scholars who have researched music. Petrušić aimed to highlight the significance of educating young people about quality music and the potential benefits this knowledge can have on their musical preferences.² In his findings, Petrušić noted that music is widely popular and accessible to all, yet young adults often shape their musical tastes under the influence of media that promotes music of questionable quality. Rager explored how music has evolved in its role within society, especially in the field of education.³ The study highlighted challenges such as the declining interest in classical music and inequalities in access to music education. The author concluded that music is a lifelong gift that enriches individuals and plays a crucial role in shaping society and the future.

Odewole, studied how songs can lift people's spirits.⁴ They note that music engages human senses in a unique way, making it easier for to worship and enjoy the experience. While these scholars concentrated on spiritual music, highlighting how individuals can engage with and derive enjoyment from it, their primary aim was to explore the influence of these songs on education and Christianity. Their findings proved that music and songs are created for recreational, ceremonial purposes, and artistic expression. However, the specific nature of this artistic expression remains undefined. Yende argues that gospel music plays a significant role in spiritual liberation.⁵ In his study, Yende calls for further exploration of gospel music's impact, which this present paper attempts to answer the call.⁶

As gender-based violence is also part of this paper's interest, some scholars study gender-based violence as a societal issue. Khosa-Nkatini and Mofokeng focused on stories reported about the women who lost their lives to gender-based violence during the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷ These scholars highlighted cases of women who lost their lives during the pandemic. They argued that gender-based violence has become a major societal issue in South Africa and making headlines on a daily basis. Nortje and Hull agree that GBV is a critical issue in South Africa and suggest more proactive

¹ Daniel Rager, "The Role of Music in Society Past, Present and Future," 2008; Israel Oluwagbemiga Odewole, "The Use of Human Five Senses as Models to Enhanced Music in Worship in Abeokuta, Nigeria," *International Journal of Literature and Arts* 8, no. 4 (2020): 177, <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijla.20200804.11>; Daniela Petrušić, "The Cultural Impact of Music on Society with a Special Emphasis on Consumerism.," *Bulgarian Comparative Education Society*, 2021..

² Petrušić, "The Cultural Impact of Music on Society with a Special Emphasis on Consumerism."

³ Rager, "The Role of Music in Society Past, Present and Future."

⁴ Oluwagbemiga Odewole, "The Use of Human Five Senses as Models to Enhanced Music in Worship in Abeokuta, Nigeria."

⁵ Sakhiseni Joseph Yende, "Sacred Weaponry: The Historical and Theological Role of Gospel Music in Spiritual Warfare and Liberation in Christianity—A Perspective of Acts 16: 25–26," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 2025, 22-pages.

⁶ Yende, "Sacred Weaponry: The Historical and Theological Role of Gospel Music in Spiritual Warfare and Liberation in Christianity—A Perspective of Acts 16: 25–26."

⁷ Hundzukani P Khosa-Nkatini and Jacob T Mofokeng, "Siphefumula Ngenxeba in Our Own Homes: Gender-Based Violence during COVID-19 Pandemic," *Theologia Viatorum* 47, no. 1 (2023): 178.

measures, including improving the role of SAPS and awareness campaigns.⁸ Their article briefly discussed GBV culture and the South African government's efforts to curb it, analyzing how bail proceedings can be amended for greater impact. On the contrary, Deane, in his book "Gender-Based Violence and Femicide in South Africa," explores the extent of GBV and femicide in South Africa.⁹ Their study combined legal and quantitative research to highlight societal and legal challenges in combating violence against women.

Zinyemba and Hlongwana emphasize that GBV is a significant global public health issue that violates women's and girls' human rights and threatens their well-being.¹⁰ They argue that, while GBV is not always unidirectional, women and girls are most often the victims. Their study in Alexandra Township, using semi-structured face-to-face interviews, found that socio-economic factors and evolving cultural dynamics contribute to GBV. They also criticized the government, suggesting that policies granting women "too many rights" lead men to exert authority through abuse. Mazikana, in her article "Challenges faced by Male Victims of GBV in Zimbabwe," focuses on GBV against males.¹¹ She discussed factors contributing to GBV against men and examined the psychological and social repercussions. Despite policy interventions that provide equal access to reporting and support for both genders, men often hesitate to seek help, leading to harmful coping mechanisms like substance abuse. She noted a lack of services available for male GBV victims.

Additionally, Buqa explored sociocultural theories, narrative reflections, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on GBV prevalence in South Africa.¹² She discussed the intersection of religious and cultural effects, social sciences, gender inequality, and the continuous oppression of women and children. Buqa argues that GBV was already a major issue before COVID-19 and has worsened due to the pandemic, pointing to factors like patriarchal culture, religion, gender norms, and lockdowns as contributors. However, this paper overlooks the focus on gender-based violence as a societal issue, but focuses on how such societal issues can be addressed through music, gospel songs in particular.

The Role of Music in Addressing Social Issues

Music has proven to be an effective and powerful medium through which social issues are evoked, even transcending issues of race, class, and culture. Indeed, some of the most emotional moments in music history gave rise to significant social change, and thought-provoking songs are just two examples that have resonated across cultures and caused deep emotional reactions. Some songs incite people to have hope in the face of life's adversity or express their solidarity with individuals, social groups, and their culture because often they are about experiences, whose themes are about the issues that concern them. Songs that address matters of social injustice have a powerful capacity to resonate with a listening public; they possess the ability to feed into, echo, and create social movements against that injustice.

Music not only connects different cultures at the same time; it also connects each person to their own cultural rituals and emotional experiences. Thus, the enjoyment of music is not only determined by individual emotional circumstances but also by the social and communal location people occupy and the cultural background they bring to the musical experience. The reception of music, therefore, is heavily determined by the cultural and musical makeup of the listener. Through the transformative power of music, there is potential for bringing about change. The efficacy of music for social critique is well known. One has only to think of the long tradition associated with protest songs, its socially critical folk music, the socio-religious protest lyrics, as well as the urban life and anti-apartheid songs. For example, South African freedom songs such as 'Stimela' (Masekela) and global protest anthems

⁸ Windell Nortje and Shane Hull, "Uprooting a Culture of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa: Critical Approaches to Bail, Policing and Awareness," *Obiter* 45, no. 2 (2024): 295–309.

⁹ Tameshnie Deane, "An Introduction to Gender-Based Violence and Femicide in South Africa," in *Gender, Justice and Legal Feminism*, vol. 5 (Springer Cham, 2024), 1–11, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-61053-0_1.

¹⁰ Kudakwashe Gracious Zinyemba and Khumbulani Hlongwana, "Men's Conceptualization of Gender-Based Violence Directed to Women in Alexandra Township, Johannesburg, South Africa," *BMC Public Health* 22, no. 1 (November 30, 2022): 2235, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-14616-5>.

¹¹ Anthony Mazikana, "Challenges Faced by Male Victims of GBV in Zimbabwe," *Social Work and Social Sciences Review*, July 10, 2024.

¹² Wonke Buqa, "Gender-Based Violence in South Africa: A Narrative Reflection," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 78, no. 1 (December 22, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i1.7754>.

like 'Blowin' in the Wind' (Dylan) demonstrate music's capacity to mobilize movements. The discussion and analysis of songs must take account of this particular aspect of the interaction between music, social problems, and the impartation of values. It is also clear that, as it pertains to social critique, not all music can perform this function with equal facility and with equal efficacy.

This article analyses the song 'Isandla' by Rebecca Malope. However, it's important to note that artists from various genres have also created songs addressing GBV, contributing to the conversation around violence and abuse. For example, Jabulani Hadebe, known as Sjava, is a South African singer, rapper, and actor. In his song "Impilo," Sjava addresses the issue of relationships where violence occurs in the name of love. He emphasizes that life must continue after a relationship ends, despite the challenges. Sjava stresses the importance of choosing to move forward without resorting to violence, such as using a knife or gun. He uses repetition throughout the song to accentuate and reinforce his points.

Sjava's lyrics resonate with a powerful plea to end violence within relationships, emphasizing that there is no reward in such actions, only harm. He urges individuals to focus on living and finding a better path forward. In another part of the song, Sjava extends his call to action, urging everyone, including elders and pastors, to unite in combating this widespread issue. His message and repeated calls for unity highlight the importance of collective effort in addressing and eradicating gender-based violence. By engaging the community and invoking a sense of shared responsibility, Sjava's song becomes a powerful tool for change and awareness.

Loyiso Gijana, known as Lloyiso, is a South African singer, songwriter, and producer from the Eastern Cape. In 2020, he produced a song titled "Madoda Sabela." In this powerful track, Lloyiso pleads with men to listen and stand against violence and killing, acknowledging that they are the perpetrators of these malicious crimes. In the song, Lloyiso prays and entreats God to hear the prayers of the people of South Africa who are seeking an end to this violence. He calls for divine intervention, stressing that men are responsible for these killings and that it must stop because enough is enough. "Madoda Sabela" was released in a year when cases of GBV were at their peak. One of the comments on YouTube sadly states, "*This song needs to be our national anthem until it gets to people's heads that this killing has to stop. Thank you, Lloyiso, for this beautiful song.*" This comment highlights the need for continued emphasis on GBV themes in music until the message resonates deeply and creates change. Lloyiso's sincere appeal and the song's powerful message serve as a call to action, urging everyone to take a stand against violence and to strive for a safer and more compassionate society. Other artists have joined in the fight through their music, for example: Sechaba Pali and Trica Selala's 'Rekgopela Bothlale' is a gospel song that fervently prays for divine intervention to halt GBV. The song embodies a collective plea for spiritual guidance and healing, emphasizing the role of faith in addressing societal issues. Additionally, the song titled 'Ukubulawa Kwabesifazane' by Abafana BakaMgqomeni is a maskandi song that condemns the brutal killings of women and children. The track uses traditional musical elements to deliver a powerful message against violence, urging listeners to reflect on the devastating impact of these crimes.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted a qualitative research approach to gather data. According to McCusker and Gunaydin, "qualitative research is characterized by its methods which (generally) generate words, rather than numbers, as data for analysis and its aims, which relate to understanding some aspects of social life."¹³ As for McMillan and Schumacher, the importance of a qualitative research approach resides in its capacity to advance theory and practice.¹⁴ Kumar believes that the qualitative approach is rooted in the empiricism philosophy; it employs an open, flexible, and unstructured method of inquiry; it seeks to explore diversity rather than quantify; it places more emphasis on the description and narration of emotions, perceptions, and experiences than on their measurements; and it conveys findings in a

¹³ Kevin McCusker and Sau Gunaydin, "Research Using Qualitative, Quantitative or Mixed Methods and Choice Based on the Research," *Perfusion* 30, no. 7 (2015): 537–42.

¹⁴ J. H. McMillan and S. Schumacher, *Research in Education, Evidence Based Enquiry*, 7th ed. (Virginia: Commonwealth University, 2010).

descriptive and narrative style rather than an analytical one, with little to no emphasis on generalizations.¹⁵ Within this methodology, this paper utilized content analysis to analyze collected data. Content analysis is defined as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context”.¹⁶ Assarroudi et al. explain content analysis as a research technique that is used to provide a descriptive knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study.¹⁷ The primary focus was on analyzing the song ‘Isandla’ by Rebecca Malope, in the context of its societal impact. This means that this paper utilized content analysis to analyze the lyrics of ‘Isandla’ to identify themes related to gender-based violence and empowerment. The chosen song, ‘Isandla’, has been available on YouTube, Spotify, and other social networks since its release in 2005. This spiritual song was selected because of its message and ability to address societal issues such as gender-based violence. It has gained significant popularity due to its powerful message, which has been relevant since 2005 and remains significant in contemporary South Africa, yet it has not received scholarly attention. Other secondary sources, such as articles, books, journal articles, and other academic texts, were consulted to support claims made in this paper.

DISCUSSION

Gender-Based Violence as a Concept

Gender-based violence is an umbrella term that has not been universally defined. A narrow interpretation confines the term to mean rape and related sexual assault. More commonly, the term has been used to cover a spectrum of violence involving a gendered element, such as domestic violence, human trafficking, harmful traditional practices (such as female genital mutilation and both early and forced marriage), as well as other forms of physical and emotional abuse.¹⁸ The United Nations defines gender-based violence as violence directed at an individual based on their perceived gender, which results in or is likely to result in sexual, physical, mental, or economic harm.¹⁹ This type of violence can occur in both public and private settings and encompasses threats, coercion, and manipulation. Gender-based violence consists of all forms of harm inflicted on individuals or groups due to their actual or perceived sex, gender, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity. It is a pervasive issue and a significant public health concern, posing a threat to women’s health, especially in underdeveloped countries worldwide. This kind of violence is a major problem society faces today. UNFPA agrees with this statement, describing GBV as a broad term for any acts of harm inflicted on a person against their will.²⁰ This violence is rooted in socially assigned differences between males and females. GBV includes actions that cause physical, sexual, mental, or emotional suffering, along with threats of such actions, coercion, and other forms of deprivation of liberty.

In an African context, it includes defilement, incest, and sexual abuse within the family, rape, physical battering, and violence. The estimated prevalence indicates that a quarter of all people will experience gender abuse in their lives, some of it closely tied to war and political conflict. Gender abuse is also linked to dual systems of law and equality, including patriarchy, which in traditional settings and even in the private sphere, blurs any distinctions between legitimate acts of authority, parenting, and abuse. The term ‘domestic violence’ consists of physical, verbal, haranguing, or psychological intimidation that is used by one partner to coerce the other partner or family members. Studies have shown that up to thirty percent of women and thirty percent of men, out of a sample of six thousand people, will experience physical violence or, in statistics, some form of abuse. According to recent studies, the incidence of domestic violence and child abuse is so high in South Africa that the challenge is indeed moral and political to protect and nurture families and loved ones from cruel acts of violence.

¹⁵ R. Kumar, *Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners*, 5th ed. (Melbourne: SAGE Publications, 2019), 16.

¹⁶ K. Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (Beverly Hill: Sage, 1980), 21.

¹⁷ Abdolghader Assarroudi et al., “Directed Qualitative Content Analysis: The Description and Elaboration of Its Underpinning Methods and Data Analysis Process,” *Journal of Research in Nursing* 23, no. 1 (February 10, 2018): 42–55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987117741667>.

¹⁸ Andrew Simon-Butler and Bernadette McSherry, “Defining Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the Refugee Context,” *IRiS Work. Pap. Ser. Birm. Inst. Res. Superdiversity* 2 (2019).

¹⁹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Addressing Gender-Based Violence Against Women and People of Diverse Gender Identity and Expression Who Use Drugs* (Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2023).

²⁰ UNFPA, *Ending Violence Against Women: A Human Rights and Health Priority* (UNFPA, 2001).

For example, Pijoo, reported that 957 women and 315 children were murdered in South Africa over three months.²¹ These numbers prove that GBV issues in South Africa are a real challenge and a pandemic.

Biography of Rebecca Malope and synopsis of the song ‘Isandla’

Batsogile Lovederia Malope, widely known as Rebecca Malope, is a celebrated icon in South African gospel music. With a career that has lasted more than three decades, she has earned affectionate nicknames like ‘Sis Ribs’ and the ‘Queen of Gospel’ for her soul-stirring voice and inspirational messages. However, her influence extends beyond music—she is also a passionate advocate for social change. Through her songs, she addresses pressing issues such as poverty, inequality, and moral decline while spreading Christian teachings. Her music is not just for worship; it also encourages listeners to take action and reflect on the challenges facing society.

‘Isandla’ is one of her most significant songs in the Nguni language, conveying a profound and urgent message about GBV. The song connects emotionally with audiences, uniting them in its call for justice. ‘Isandla’ is more than just a gospel hymn; it is a social anthem that demands an end to violence, particularly against women and children. The song challenges men to rediscover their conscience, protect the vulnerable, and stand against injustice. With its stirring lyrics, ‘Isandla’ promotes peace, fairness, and human dignity.

Malope’s music consistently blends spirituality with social awareness, offering both comfort and guidance. As a devoted Christian artist, she views her work as a ministry, winning souls for Christ while fostering love and unity among people. Her albums, such as *Ngiyekele* (1993), *Umoja Wam* (1994), and *Baba* (1996), have touched millions, become bestsellers and solidified her legacy in gospel music. In the song ‘Isandla’, Rebecca Malope addresses the dual nature of human hands, which can either nurture and care or inflict harm. She focuses on the urgent need to end GBV, emphasizing that violence destroys communities. The song’s powerful chorus, “*Uh mas'khulume, mas'khulume*” (“Let us talk, let us talk”), is repeated by backup singers while Rebecca prays, reinforcing the importance of open dialogue. She calls on the nation to unite against violence before it erodes society completely. Since abuse often happens behind closed doors, those who witness it, whether family, friends, or neighbours, must take responsibility. If someone knows of abuse, they should speak up, as victims may be too afraid to do so themselves. GBV thrives in silence, and only collective action can stop it.

The Hand as Instrument of Harm

Malope's song ‘Isandla’ (“The Hand”) uses personification to show how hands can both create harm and represent human choice and moral responsibility. The strong lyrics, like “*Ngiswabiswa imisebenzi yezandla zethu*” (“I am ashamed of the deeds of our hands”), highlight the conflict between the hand's ability to nurture and its potential for violence. The line “*Ingane encane imemeza, ithi uyangilimaza*” (“The small child cries out, saying 'You're hurting me!'”) shows the terrible impact of violence, even as victims ask for mercy. Malope's powerful voice adds emotional weight to these scenes, especially as she expresses the child's cries. This choice makes ‘Isandla’ more than just a song; it becomes a strong call to address society's indifference to issues like gender-based and domestic violence. By using the hand as a metaphor, Malope encourages listeners to think about the dual nature of human actions. The same hands that can give life and love can also cause destruction and harm.

The song reflects society, challenging attitudes that allow cycles of violence to continue. It critiques the reasons often given by perpetrators and highlights how systems fail to support victims. In this way, ‘Isandla’ is not just a display of artistic skill, but also a deep commentary on accountability and the responsible use of power.

²¹ Iavan Pijoo, “Crime Stats: 957 Women and 315 Children Murdered in South Africa over Three Months,” news24, November 25, 2024, <https://www.news24.com/southafrica/news/crime-stats-957-women-and-315-children-murdered-in-south-africa-over-three-months-20241125>.

The Suffering of the Vulnerable

Nguyen-Trung and Forbes-Mewett define vulnerability as "the potential to suffer from physical attacks."²² However, this idea has changed since the late 1600s. It now includes not only physical harm but also emotional, moral, and spiritual suffering.²³ This wider view means society should look at how artistic forms like music, which can touch the human spirit, can address serious issues like GBV. In South Africa, women and children are the most vulnerable groups and face high rates of physical and sexual violence.²⁴ Malope's song "*Jehovah Nkulukulu wami*" ("My God Jehovah") includes the heartfelt line "*Ngizisondeza phambi kwebuso bakho*" ("I draw near before Your face"). This song serves as both a spiritual plea and a social commentary. It expresses the desperation of vulnerable groups and calls for help, highlighting the urgent need for action in a country where child abuse cases are increasing.²⁵

This musical message highlights two main points. The first one is that vulnerability continues when laws do not protect people. South African law has been failing its citizens, as the #Justice never ends.²⁶ The second one will be that music can inspire awareness and action. Songs like Malope's and others like Lloyiso's do more than show suffering; they call on governments, individual South Africans, and law enforcement to fix the problems that allow GBV to continue.²⁷ The powerful spiritual nature of music can speak to one's soul, drive policy change and promote social improvements.

The Call for Change and Divine Intervention

Malope's song serves as both a spiritual invocation and a social critique, beginning with a prayerful appeal to God to transform human hands from instruments of harm to vessels of love, as captured in the lyric: "*Faka uthando ezandleni zomuntu*" ("Put love in human hands"). Remarkably, despite the song's release 24 years ago, South Africa continues to grapple with persistently high rates of GBV.²⁸ This enduring crisis has led scholars to argue for the continued relevance of musical interventions, suggesting that artists have a critical role to play in addressing GBV where governmental efforts have fallen short.²⁹ Malope's emphasis on love as a solution to violence reflects what Nussbaum identifies as the "transformative power of emotional re-education", suggesting that lasting change requires not just policy reform but cultural and spiritual renewal.³⁰ The song's enduring relevance gives emphasis to both the failure of institutional responses to GBV and the untapped potential of artistic activism in South Africa's struggle against systemic violence.

Accountability and Self-Reflection

This song urges people to reflect on their actions. The lyrics "*Mzalwane wami, bheka izandla zakho, usbhekisise*" ("My brother, examine your hands closely") serve as a strong moral call. The song further encourages individuals, especially men, to think about how they use their power.³¹ This message contrasts sharply with the biblical idea that men should be protectors (Isaiah 1:17) and highlights South Africa's troubling reality, where 86% of GBV perpetrators are male acquaintances or intimate partners. Recent cases, such as the Cwecwe incident, illustrate this issue. Malope's lyrics go beyond just music; they suggest a way to use art for activism.³² She uses gospel music to address serious issues, connects with youth through hip-hop, and reaches rural communities with Maskandi's cultural ties. Research shows that music can challenge the mindset of perpetrators.³³ The song's closing line, "*Siyafa siyaphela*

²² K. Nguyen-Trung and H. Forbes-Mewett, "Conceptualising Vulnerability," *Journal of Social Issues* 75, no. 3 (2019): 12–34.

²³ Nguyen-Trung and Forbes-Mewett, "Conceptualising Vulnerability."

²⁴ "How Covid-19 Changed the Way We Learn.," *Census* (Stats SA., 2022).

²⁵ South African Police Service (SAPS), *Annual Crime Statistics Report*, 2023.

²⁶ S. Mkhize, "Legal Gaps in South Africa's GBV Response," *SA Journal of Human Rights* 37, no. 2 (2021): 45–67.

²⁷ N. Dlamini, *Artistic Activism in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (University of Cape Town Press, 2020).

²⁸ "How Covid-19 Changed the Way We Learn.,"

²⁹ Dlamini, *Artistic Activism in Post-Apartheid South Africa*.

³⁰ Martha C Nussbaum, *Political Emotions* (Harvard University Press, 2013).

³¹ Pumla Dineo Gqola, "Rape: A South African Nightmare," 2015.

³² Ntombi Khulu, "#JusticeforCwecwe: Women for Change Calls for GBV to Be Declared a National Disaster," news24, March 31, 2025, <https://www.news24.com/truelove/she-lives/justiceforcwecwe-women-for-change-calls-for-gbv-to-be-declared-a-national-disaster-20250331>.

³³ N. Dlamini, *Sonic Justice: Music as Gender Activism* (HSRC Press, 2022).

sonke...Mas'khulume" ("We are all perishing...Let us speak") turns a sad message into a strong call for social change.

This analysis of 'Isandla' has explored how the song gives voice to the suffering of abused women and children, bringing their often overlooked stories to light. Through this song, Malope not only raises awareness about GBV but also stands in solidarity with survivors. The song's themes encourage reflection, accountability, and action, urging society to confront this deep-rooted issue.

CONCLUSION

The study has explored how Rebecca Malope has used the song 'Isandla' to tackle the issue of gender-based violence, which seems to be the cancer of a democratic country such as South Africa. This paper has also shown how music can be used as a tool to convey a message of social justice to society, and not only as a source of entertainment. It is an educational and enriching experience. Music has been used as a tool to shape society and protest against those who are in power, for example, through Afro-pop, Maskandi, RnB, Kwaito, etc, but it is rare to find it in gospel songs such as 'Isandla' because people believe that gospel music should only link people to God. However, in 'Isandla', a song that shapes the community is evident. The song was released twenty years ago, while GBV was not a major issue in South Africa, which shows how intellectual and prophetic Malope was with the song that is found on music platforms such as Spotify, YouTube, etc. The study further shows that hands can be harmful, and there are vulnerable souls seeking divine intervention and self-reflection. It proves that accountability and calling for help are very important, as many people are dying at the hands of those they love. The study recommends that there should be an increase in the number of artists who should address GBV through their music. This could have a meaningful impact on society. Furthermore, creative platforms should emphasize GBV as a theme to promote greater awareness and drive transformative action.

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