Breaking into Sound: Dis/Locating Ntu Cosmology and Improvisation in South African Jazz

by

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Declaration

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Abstract

This artistic-led enquiry emerged from the premise that jazz studies exclude or, at least, do not adequately address the significance of spiritualities in South African jazz. Where spirituality is invoked, it is treated as background and not seriously engaged with. Emerging from this premise, this study argues that there is a deep connection between cosmologies and how people come to sound, including in what is known as 'jazz'. As a scholar and an artist with a mature practice, I have come to understand jazz, in the context outlined in this study, as a process in improvisatory realms that dialogues, intimately, with cosmology.

Two chapters formulate *ntu* cosmology as point of departure for engaging (South) African worldviews, in which concepts of wholeness and continuity form governing principles. The study shows how an understanding of *ntu* cosmology provides alternative lexicons for engaging South African jazz improvised musics. It suggests that improvisation could be understood as a form of ritual overlapping between physical and metaphysical planes. This process is understood as the breaking into sound, engaging with 'elsewhere'. The contributions this study makes to jazz scholarship are located in a) theorizing the breaking into sound, b) reading the bandstand as communal and ritual space, and c) proposing divination (or the throwing of the bones) as a different way to think about improvisation. To elaborate on these perspectives the study walks in the footsteps of four seminal artists (Philip Tabane, Busi Mhlongo, Bheki Mseleku and Zim Ngqawana), with whom I have engaged in various ways: as a disciple, band member, session musician and a keen follower of the music.

From a decentering point of view, the positioning of the study as an artistic-led inquiry constitutes an epistemological intervention, making it possible to argue from a musical and artistic standpoint. By advancing, through artistic practice as a primary means of knowing, the importance of the spiritual (rather than ineffable, or transcendent, or sublime), means that one approaches the issue of musical meaning (or importance) through cosmological registers.

Guided by the artistic aspects of my work and that of my interlocutors, the study constructs a framework for understanding jazz improvised musics in South Africa that is cosmologically, ontologically and epistemologically conscious.

Opsomming

Hierdie artistiek-geleide studie vertrek van die premis dat jazz studies nie die belang van spiritualiteite in Suid-Afrikaanse jazz (genoegsaam) aanspreek nie. In gevalle waar spiritualiteit aangespreek word, is dit dikwels ter agtergrond en word dit nie ernstig bespreek nie. Vanuit hierdie vertrekpunt argumenteer die studie dat daar ’n diep verband is tussen kosmologieë en hoe mense na klank kom, insluitend in waarna verwys word as ‘jazz’. As ‘n navorser en kunstenaar wat werk vanuit ’n bestaande praktyk, verstaan ek jazz as ’n proses wat, deur improvisasie, in dialoog is met kosmologie.

Twee hoofstukke formuleer *ntu*-kosmologie as ‘n vertrekpunt om met Suid-Afrikaanse wêreldbeskouings in gesprek te tree, waarin die konsepte van geheelheid en kontinuïteit sleutel beginsels vorm. Hierdie studie wys hoe ’n verstaan van *ntu*-kosmologie ’n alternatiewe leksikon oopmaak vir die verstaan van Suid-Afrikaanse jazz geïmproviseerde musieke. Dit suggereer ’n verstaan van improvisasie as ’n vorm van ritueel waarin die fisiese en metafisiese oorvleuel. Hierdie proses word verstaan as ’n ‘deurbraak in klank’ (‘breaking into sound’), wat ‘elders’ betrek. Die bydraes wat die studie maak tot die veld van jazz studies, is a) in die teoretisering van die ‘deurbraak in klank’, b) in die verstaan van die verhoog (‘bandstand’) as gemeenskaplike ruimte, en c) in die voorstel van ’n begrip van divinasie (die gooi van die gebeendere) as ‘n ander manier om te dink aan improvisasie. Om hierdie perspektiewe uit te bou, volg die studie in die voetspore van vier belangrike kunstenaars (Philip Tabane, Busi Mhlongo, Bheki Mseleku and Zim Ngqawana) met wie ek verbind is/was op verskeie maniere: as ’n dissipel, lid van ensemble, sessie musikant en ’n toegewyde volgeling van die musiek.

Vanuit die perspektief van de-sentrering, maak die posisionering van die studie as artistiek-geleide projek ’n epistemologiese intervensie wat argumenteer vanuit ‘n musikale en artistieke standpunt. Deur artistieke praktyk as ’n primêre modaliteit van kennis te beskou, bevorder die studie die belangrikheid van die spirituele (eerder as die onsegbare, die transendentele of die sublieme), wat beteken dat die kwessie van musikale betekenis en belang deur kosmologiese registers benader word.

Gelei deur die artistieke aspekte van my werk, stel die studie ’n raamwerk op vir die verstaan van jazz geïmproviseerde musieke in Suid-Afrika wat kosmologies, ontologies en epistemologies bewus is.

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Thokozani, sithi makwande nize nikwenze nakwabanye.

Nduduzo Makhathini

Contents

Preface

> I saw several drummers playing in a circular form. There was also a group of elderly women who carried calabashes, the women were singers. I can recall vividly how they looked. In a uniformed dance movement, they came towards me, I then knelt down, pulled by some gravitation, perhaps it came from the intensity of the drum. As they reached me, they started to dance in a circular manner around me, each of them occasionally whispering random words in my ear. It seemed like a language I understood in the dream but nothing I can relate to any language I have heard. I started to go deep into a trance and my eyes were closed. And using *ishoba*, each of them sprinkled some liquid targeting specific parts of my body and I fell into deep sleep.

For several years, I have been thinking about sounds and their connection to other worlds (this I call 'elsewhere' in this study). These worlds are spirit worlds which, I argue, sound (or music) has the ability to open, and dialogue with. Such thinking is not farfetched considering my background in the Zionist church and the broader cultures surrounding the rural sites of KwaZulu Natal. Growing up, I was taught by the elders that music was performed for a purpose ranging from rites of passage to various ceremonial contexts. In this sense, music acted as a bridge to other layers of existence that were beyond physicalness. In the Zionist church, music activated *umoya* (the spirits) which led to prophesies being made and miracles performed. In other words, repertoires were not only understood as pieces of music, but they also carried spiritual functions within Zulu cosmology.

This interconnectedness of sound and spiritual paradigm is at the core of my enquiry, and is also evident in my album titles: *Listening to the Ground* (2015), *Letters from the Underworlds* (2020) and *In the Spirit of Ntu* (2022), among others. *Listening to the Ground* (2015) was concerned with acknowledging and listening to the voices of *abaphansi* (the ones who live beneath the earth, or the ancestors) as a form of knowing. This project came at a period in my life where I was seeking to make sense of the gift of *ubungoma* (healing) inside the practice of improvisation.

I woke up from the dream described at the start of this Preface with blisters everywhere where the herbal concoction had been sprinkled. From this moment I wondered about the distance between dreams and lived realities; an occurrence in a dream had just materialized in my physical body. I reported this to my mother, who was a born-again Christian, and this was gently dismissed as a bad dream. I was prayed for. I felt that it was time to consider a calling that had been shown to me from around the age of eleven but I could not pursue due my family's Christian belief systems. But it so happened that I would also see my paternal grandmother for school holidays, who marveled at the blisters and asked what happened. As I explained, she told me exactly who the elderly women were in the dream, even describing their bodily features. This was followed by a visit to a healer who said I had been handed down a gift of *ubungoma* (Zulu traditional healing practice) which I would have to pursue when I finish school.

During my tertiary education at the University of Kwazulu-Natal between 2001 and 2004, I began a transition out of Christianity, which only took place around 2014. This was met with signs of misfortune, that led to a moment of *ukuthwasa* (an initiation practice of becoming a healer) around this time. This moment marked a significant transmutation: the sonic became closely intertwined with my healing practice as explicitly outlined in *Listening to the Ground* (2015). This ascension would later lead me to connect my practice as an improviser to *ukwebhula* (the throwing of the bones or divination), in that they both require guidance from elsewhere. At the same time, I felt an urge to surrender to allow something deeper to take place in my practice. As these thoughts developed, I started hearing the voices of the ancestors. Sometimes through dreams, and sometimes through an actual sound. At other times, I had visitations where they manifested in a hologram state, sometimes during a performance.

Between 2015 and 2022 the messages from the ancestors were becoming profoundly vivid. I heard songs in dreams and I would wake up and notate them. This culminated in the release *Modes of Communications: Letters from the Underworlds* (2020), which I consider as a body of texts from my ancestors. Some elders were explicit about these connections, arguing that certain songs came from dreams and were sung by *abalele* (the ancestors that have passed). I call these sounds sonic citations from elsewhere.

This, then, is the background that informs my enquiry. Having later studied music in a formal institution, I realized that such connections did not feature inside curricula or even in the conversations taking place within South African jazz scholarly communities. I also noticed that even seminal texts on South African jazz virtually ignored African spirituality and/or cosmology.

In this study, I think about what it means to write from a place of such an awareness whereby the spirit world takes center stage in thinking about sound. I also explore the possibility of 'citing' sounds and teachings from our ancestors who live in spirit dimensions. The integrated soundings and ritualized writings constituting this study map vocabularies for such a practice. I present here texts created amidst my everyday artistic life consisting of soundchecks, long flights, backstage togetherness with other musicians, and communal and personal experiences in other dimensions where sounds transport me during performances.

As a practitioner in the fields of jazz internationally, I am writing from a body that experiences, and is in dialogue with spirit paradigms. This is not where most of the jazz writing in South Africa is situated.

My sounding/writing offers a different centre.

Chapter One: Introducing the Study

1. Locating the Study

I come to this study as a jazz improviser and Zulu traditional[1] healer with a deep interest in African cosmology[2] as an important influence on my artistic work. I was brought up within Zulu cosmologies and received a gift in Nguni healing methods; yet the connection of this part of my life with my work in improvisation as a jazz pianist, has entailed a conscious merging of practices. In this sense, I am particularly drawn to writing about the praxis of situating my work as improviser and jazz pianist within specific African cosmological concepts. While this study borrows from traditional understandings of improvisation within the contexts of jazz[3] in South Africa and elsewhere, it also focuses on developing cosmologically-based forms of engaging improvisation. These emanate from the ways I and my interlocutors think about improvisation in our various practices. Here, I argue that improvisation can be understood as a process of engaging the sonic through three main stages: the known to the unknown towards a new knowing. As I discuss in Chapter Two, this outlook will be likened to the stages associated with rites of passage as understood within some (South) African cosmological paradigms. Although such an approach (connecting music and cosmology) is not unusual in African music traditions (Nketia, 1962; Tracey, 1954; Blacking, 1985), it is mostly absent in the existing literature on South Africa jazz, largely because most who have taught and written about jazz in the South African academy are outsiders to such epistemologies.[4] The focus on cosmology in this study entails an invocation of indigenous (South) African traditions and knowledge systems aimed at

[1] 'Tradition', in this study, is understood as that which is foundationally 'handed down from generation to generation, upheld and practiced…'. In this sense, tradition connects 'the past with the present and the present with eternity' (Awolalu, 1976: 1).

[2] Cosmology is understood as the 'science of the universe' (Kanu, 2013: 533). In this study I use the term to point towards a worldview, an understanding of being in the world that various peoples, here in Africa, developed based on their observations of the universe over time. In this sense, cosmology provides a sense of interconnectedness between people, surrounding environments and the supernatural (Kanu, 2013: 533).

[3] I explain my use of the term 'jazz' (and its relationship to South African articulations) in the theoretical framework section below.

[4] While I am aware of the works of Leonard (1987), Berkman (2007) and Bivins (2015) among many others who explore, in compelling ways, jazz and spirituality in the context of American musicians, this study focuses on specific cosmologies here in (South) Africa. As such, the concepts explored in the studies mentioned here (and others in America) are not as applicable to the South African artists and specific indigenous cosmologies I explore in this thesis. Similarly, this study does not deny affinities with other cosmologies but instead, puts an emphasis on *ntu* cosmology (see Chapter Two) as a paradigm that remains unexplored in South African jazz literature that already suffers literature disparities when it comes to its inherent spiritual connections as I show throughout study.

explicating new approaches to thinking and writing about jazz and other improvised music in and from South Africa.

While a project of this nature goes beyond existing literature on South African jazz (and the lacunae in this literature), this is not a new connection in the world of jazz practices. Traces of some interventions are evident in the artistic practices of artists such as Philip Tabane, Busi Mhlongo, Bheki Mseleku and Zim Ngqawana, to whom I turn as interlocutors to construct a framework for engaging with spirituality in improvisation and jazz practices in this research. These artists, each in their own way, considered their creative work to function within contiguous spiritual[5] and cosmological paradigms. It is in this spirit that I insist that in the creative work of these artists, and that of my own, cosmology functions not only as an important backdrop, but as a framework for meaning-making in jazz and improvisation. This study wishes to explicate the cosmological 'background' as framework. In doing so, it posits improvisation as an extension of spirituality underpinned by specifically South African cosmology, ontology and epistemology that sounds out in what we conventionally call 'jazz' performances.

In this dissertation I write about and reflect on my interactions with the artists I approach as my interlocutors, as well as the interactions with others reported in the literature on these artists. On the one hand, I am particularly interested in the way(s) that these musicians considered their music practice as a mode of spiritual engagement; on the other, I engage literature on spirituality manifest in African cosmology, refracted through my own understanding and experience of these subjects. Due to the broadness of African cosmology and the specificity of each of these improvisers' spiritual understanding of their own musical practices (and likewise, my understanding of my own practice), I limit this study of improvisation and cosmology to two key properties that I deem integral to this study. These are 'wholeness' and 'continuity'; concepts that I regard as governing principles in African cosmologies, but also more specifically in Nguni and BaPedi (and Venda) worldviews, where my interlocutors and my own life and work are located. I examine how these principles are invoked within three South African cultural concepts, namely *ntu* (and by extension *ubuntu*), *ngoma* (and *ubungoma*) and *malombo* (also known as *malopo*), present in the work of all the

[5] Spirituality in this study is understood as a mode through which relationships with and making sense of cosmology unfold.

musicians I am writing about. Even though I will discuss these concepts mainly from a South African point of view, it is important to note that they are not limited to South Africa, but are also invoked in other regions of the African continent under the same names or some equivalent nomenclature. While these concepts are often considered in 'traditional' contexts (as I will show in the next chapter), it is worth noting that this study puts them to work as important musical concepts. That is to say, I examine *ntu*, *ngoma* and *malombo* in an explorative manner with the aim of deepening our understanding of improvisation within jazz contexts in South Africa. Reciprocally, the study considers how jazz/improvisation figures as a medium to articulate/perform/envoice/sound/engage these 'traditional' cosmologies and concepts in ways that develop renewed understandings or takes on *ntu*, *ngoma* and *malombo*.

1.1 Wholeness and Continuity

Mogobe Ramose, in his *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu* (2005), confirms that many African ways of life are anchored in the principle of *ubu-ntu*, defined as 'a whole-ness and a constant flow of being' (Ramose 1995: 51), and thus encompasses notions of wholeness and continuity. While *ubu-* defines an orientation of being as unfolding, *ntu* denotes an ontology of being as manifestation (2005: 36). According to Bhengu (2016), *ntu* is a 'life force', a 'universal creative force' that forms the essence of all things. Thus, the naming of African ancestors as *abantu* (the people) refers to a cosmological insight of locating beings within the broader understanding of their relationship to the universe of wholeness and continuity. *Ubuntu* is a manifestation of this creative force that is inseparable from being. By extension, I suggest in this dissertation and in my praxis as a musician (also encompassed in this work) that this creative force pulses at the centre of improvisation as an artform. Ramose (2005: 36) argues that *ubuntu* forms a fundamental epistemological and ontological tool in African thought — in my case, this further informs the positionality of artists and how they come into music.

The word *ngoma* (music) has various meanings, depending on particular contexts. It refers simultaneously to the drum and drumming, music and singing (Jansen: 290). In other contexts, for instance within the Zulu language, the word *ingoma* may also refer to dance and dancing. In her book *Dust of the Zulu*, Louise Meintjes (2017: 8) defines *ngoma* as a discipline that 'combines choreographed group work and individual improvisation and is danced to a call-and-response singing and clapping.' This adds yet another dimension to the

broadness of *ngoma* and how it refuses a singular idea of music, and instead points to an ensemble of practices engaged in a counterpoint. An equivalent of *ngoma* in the BaSotho context is the word *koma*, which means the 'impartial truth' (Zulu, 1999: 24). Broadly, in Nguni languages, *ngoma* as a verb means to heal. Moreover, the concept of *ngoma* gives birth to the practice of *ubungoma*, which is, in essence, a Bantu healing practice. Thus, the practitioner of *ngoma* is referred to as a *sangoma* (healer). It is clear from the interrelatedness of these words and the concepts to which they refer, that music (*ngoma*), in Nguni cosmology (and others in Africa), cannot be viewed apart from its attendant meanings of truth and healing. In other words, *ngoma* can be viewed as a performative act that brings together art forms such as singing, dancing and drumming (among others), which then constitute and effect healing. I am concerned in this study with describing and performing wholeness and continuity, invoked (and restored) in *ngoma*, particularly within ritual contexts. Ritual is understood as a mode for religious expression, a tool to maintain 'worldly and divine' relationships (Grillo in Bongmba, 2012: 112). My interest, therefore, is in improvisation, and how improvisation can be viewed, for instance, through (and within) divination (the throwing of the bones). In this sense, in my research and performances, I explore improvisation as a technology of revealing the unknown, similar to divination.

In Venda/Pedi cosmology, *malombo* shares similar characteristics with *ngoma* in that they are both therapeutic rituals that function within paradigms of sound. *Malombo* also ties in with the notion of *ntu* (and wholeness): in the Venda cultures *malombo* 'acts as a cohesive force and a link healing between Bapedi and the ancestral realm' (Lebeka, 2018: 2).Traditionally, for the BaVenda people, *malombo* is understood as 'spirits of departed ancestors which are supposed to take possession of a descendant… and after taking possession the spirit delights in dancing, which is a prominent feature of Malombo proceedings' (Van Warmelo, 1937: 141). In this dissertation and in my own performances, I consider *malombo*, particularly as adapted and invoked in Philip Tabane's practice, as a 'spontaneous music that uses voice, drumming, and feet rattle idiophones … played with drums in healing contexts' (Galane, 2010: 3). The characteristics listed here reveal similarities with those of *ngoma*. Both *malombo* and *ngoma* affirm notions of wholeness and continuity that situate sound as a manifestation of particular situatedness within South African cosmology.

Collectively these concepts speak to the notion of 'cosmic harmony' (Ramose, 2005: 45), which is a central concept in Bantu cosmologies. Over many years, my practice as a musician

has invoked performance – specifically improvisation – in continual processes aimed at the restoration of wholeness. This practice has paid close attention to the role of ritual (understood as a bridge to access and harness spirit dimensions) as a tool in maintaining both continuity and creating wholeness. *Ngoma* and *malombo* as healing practices and rituals perform restoration of *ntu*, conferring a wholeness on disruptions such as illness. Both practices are performed in a communal space and are understood as participatory acts. In this regard *ngoma* and *malombo* link with the concept of *ubuntu*, understood as 'the preservation of be-ing as a whole-ness' (Ramose, 2005: 41).

Paramount to the idea of *ubuntu*, is the belief that '*umuntu* (human being)[6] cannot attain *ubuntu* without the intervention of the living-dead' (Ramose, 2005: 46). This connection with the ancestors (and the spirit worlds) is deeply invoked in the practice of *ngoma* and *malombo* and also constitutes a significant theme in African spirituality. *Ubuntu* encompasses more than our existence in the physical realm; it connects to an extended notion of community that includes the living (humans), 'the living dead' (ancestors) and the 'yet-to-be-born' – forming what Ramose (2005: 45-46) refers to as the 'onto-triadic structure of being.' In this way, rituals facilitate greater alignment with the onto-triadic structure of being (Ramose, 2005: 45) recognise *ntu* as a creative force behind all things, including music.

1.2 The art of improvisation inside South African cosmologies

It is in the contexts mentioned above that my research and artistic practice situate the South African art of improvisation in jazz. I view improvisation as an art embedded in the rituals and the sacred spaces (*umsamu*) at which they occur in Nguni and Venda/Pedi cultures. In my understanding and experience of Nguni healing systems, divination in (*ubu*)*ngoma* – the

[6] This study keeps in mind the various problematizations of the term 'human', as noted by extensive scholarship on Euro-modernity and Afro-pessimism. The view of the human stemming from Euro-modernity is premised on its 'autonomy'. It serves the vision of Western hegemony while relegating existence outside of its frames to 'non-being'. In this sense, the West has historically qualified its humanness through the 'triumph of [over] the weak', who then becomes the 'sub-human' (see Akbar, 1984: 400). Moreover, scholars in Afro-pessimism have argued that the concept of 'human' was constructed in negation of what was considered 'native' or 'black'; thus, the term excludes black experiences (Jung and Vargas, 2021). Elsewhere, Fanon (1964: 162) warns that 'there is no question of finding "being" in Bantu thought when Bantus live at the level of nonbeing and the imponderable.' This study proceeds from a different understanding of the notion of the 'human'. Its point of departure is a pre-colonial and inclusive 'human' paradigm that builds on 'ubu-ntu' as a philo-praxis (see Dladla, 2017: 49-63), which advocates for a broader ontological view of 'human' that speaks to wholeness and continuity. Wholeness entails seeing the human in the context of all the dimensions of *ntu*, namely *muntu*, *kintu*, *hantu* and *kuntu*; and continuity refers to a view that human life, in the context of the spirit, is cyclical from birth, death and rebirth. This conception is elaborated in Chapter 2.

throwing of the bones – is a form of improvisation, a performed language overlapping between time and space. In other words, through divination in *ubungoma* there is an overlap between the physical and the metaphysical worlds, and the agreement in spirit dimensions manifests in the harmony of the living. The art of mediating these two paradigms happens after many years of rigorous training known as *ukwethwasa* (initiation), supervised by an experienced *sangoma* or *gobela* (experienced healer and trainer) or at times, through the guidance of the ancestral spirits. The same qualities of spontaneity and tapping into the unknown inherent in divination (the throwing of the bones) in the context of (*ubu*)*ngoma* and *malombo* are also characteristic of improvisation (Berliner, 1994: 218). Furthermore, (*ubu*)*ngoma* and *malombo* practices take on a kind of call and response between the healer, spirits, space and other participants, thus echoing the communal articulations of *ubuntu*. Collective improvisation, in the contexts I discuss here, has likewise been characterized as an interaction, in which one action provokes a response, which in turn becomes the next action (Monson, 1996; Rzewski 1999; Berliner, 1993 esp. Chapter 8). I am therefore juxtaposing (and even overlaying or hinging) the concepts of *ngoma* and *malombo*, understood within *ntu*, with the art of improvisation and its practitioners in this study.

Given this background, my reading of the artistic practices of Tabane, Mhlongo, Mseleku and Ngqawana exemplify connections between *ubuntu*, *ngoma* and *malombo*. In some cases, these artists mention the connections between their practices, spirituality and ritual explicitly in interviews, liner notes, song titles or other commentaries on their artistic practice. I turn to these musicians' work, and also my own, to explicate how particular located-ness(es) within South African cosmological concepts inform improvisation practices. In other cases, my readings develop (further) from reflections on my personal engagements with these artists and their work.

Guitarist Philip Tabane's (25 March 1934 to 4 May 2018) main influence was his mother, who was a traditional healer (*isangoma*), and it was within this understanding of music as a mode of healing that Tabane would further approach his practice as an improviser. He focused his career on exploring healing properties of sound that are embedded in *malombo* rituals of the BaPedi people. In his doctoral dissertation, *The music of Philip Tabane - An historical analytical study of Malombo music of South Africa*, the musician and scholar Sello Galane, whose PhD dissertation is the most extensive academic source on Tabane's work to date, tells us that *malombo* is 'an indigenous, pre-colonial African spiritual presence that

defies any trappings of colonial enclaves even into the post-colonial era' (Galane, 2009: 22). Through reflecting on Tabane's work of *malombo*, I seek to demonstrate how improvisation can be understood as a ritual that invokes the spirits of the ancestors.

Singer, dancer, composer, and later initiated *isangoma* Busi Mhlongo (28 October 1947 to 15 June 2010) worked with many influential musicians such as Philip Tabane, and ensembles Sobiza and Twasa among others. Like many musicians of her era, Mhlongo lived between home (South Africa) and exile. Lusk (2010), one of the few commentators on Mhlongo's life and practice in the current literature,[7] notes that specific cultural references, politics and spirituality come together in interesting ways in Mhlongo's music but does not discuss these intersections in greater detail. It is these connections that this study seeks to explore further. I will consider the ways in which music connects with healing in Mhlongo's works *Babhemu* (1993), *Urban Zulu* (1998), *Freedom* (2003) and *Amakholwa* (2009), and will suggest how Mhlongo viewed her performance (both as a singer and dancer) as forms of rituals that were linked to her *ubungoma* practice and her background in the Shembe movement.

In his work and throughout his career, the pianist and multi-instrumentalist Bheki Mseleku (3 March 1955 to 9 September 2008) was outspoken about the ways in which his music resonated with his spiritual beliefs. He often referred to himself as a spirit medium (*umngoma*) through whom healing vibrations were channelled (Makhathini, 2018: 54). Similar to Mhlongo, Mseleku's work suggests spiritual significance in how it is packaged and presented, for instance through liner notes, song titles and the music itself; 'The Age of Inner Knowing' on *Celebration* (1992) and 'The Age of the Devine Mother' on *Star Seeding* (1995) are two examples, among many others. Mseleku linked his writing and compositional style (often based on cycles that modulate through all 12 keys before returning to the original key that served as point of departure, thus suggesting a circularity in its formal construction) to his ontological understanding of the world and spiritualism as being based on continuity and wholeness. This found expression in Mseleku's notions of the 'afterlife' based on his keen interest in Eastern mysticism, but this study seeks to explore this concept within the broader African ontologies of being situated in *ntu*.

[7] Bongani Madondo's essay on Mhlongo, **'**Life is a Funk: Busi Mhlongo Says I Can Retire anytime I Want Not**'** from his book *Hot Type: Incons, Artistes and God-figurines* (2007), is another text that engages extensively with Mhlongo's life and practice. Most of the other available sources are obituaries.

Zim Ngqawana's (25 December 1959 to 10 May 2011) solo career took off in the mid-1990s with the album *San Song* (1996). Similar to Mseleku, Ngqawana often referred to the ways he utilized improvisation as a platform for connecting with the unseen. Ngqawana's explorations of *ingoma* concepts are evident in his work (for instance in album titles like *Ingoma,* or song titles like 'Sangoma', 'Ingoma', as well as in liner notes), and in interviews he also refers to the 'totality' inherent to the *ingoma* concept (Jacobson, 2011). Throughout his recording career, Ngqawana demonstrated spiritual commitments in his music. Moreover, Ngqawana embraced his IsiXhosa cultural background, particularly the rites of passage repertoires, although towards the end of his life he gravitated towards a more universalist outlook to life which drew on Eastern modes of spirituality, Islam and Sufism. Through Ngqawana's music, teachings and philosophy, the study seeks to demonstrate how *ingoma* (which forms part of Ngqawana's philosophy of Zimology) can contribute to our understanding of the 'totality' evoked in improvisation.

My own musical background emerged from the Zionist church (incorporating African spirituality into Christianity) and I later inherited the gift of *ubungoma* (healing). From very early in my life I understood music to be a mode for communication with the 'unseen': while the Zionist church believed music was a tool for evoking god's presence through trance, singing, clapping, drumming and prayer, the *sangomas* believed it evoked the presence of an ancestor through similar means. As part of my pilgrimage, I live my life exploring parallels and connections between both my practice as a *sangoma* and improviser in jazz, perhaps in similar ways that Mhlongo and Tabane did. Furthermore, I see this type of enquiry as linked to the greater work of *ubungoma*. I have worked out the musical forms of this entanglement in my artistic work, including *Listening to the Ground* (2015), *Ikhambi* (2017), *Modes of Communication: Letters from the Underworlds* (2020) and *In the Spirit of Ntu* (2022) among others. These projects collectively point towards the importance of cosmology as a framework to understand the connections between sounds and spirituality.

As a practicing *sangoma,* I have also been speaking about the ways in which my artistic work is rooted in the practice of *ubungoma*. That is so say, over many years I have been transposing that which is regarded as the traditional *sangoma* practices in Nguni healing systems to my practice as an improviser situated in South African jazz practices. For instance, as part of the alternative and explorative method I have been cultivating, I have substituted the throwing of the bones for spontaneous improvisation, which I term

ingomasbhulo (musicking as a mode of prophecy). I argue that my improvisation is guided by the ancestors and could be understood as messages and texts to both myself and the audiences. An example of this is *Modes of Communication: Letters from the Underworlds* (2020), that situates sounds as voices of the ancestors. In the liner notes to this recording I raise the notion of 'ritual technology' as a way of positioning my practice as sacred work, citing information from spiritual dimensions.

Similarly, I have also been thinking of the bandstand as *umsamu* (a sacred altar). It is worth mentioning that while this is not a 'conventional' way of practicing *ubungoma*, it does speak to the spirit of wholeness and continuity that I referred to earlier and the urgency to re-imagine *ngoma* practices in post-colonial South Africa.[8] I have discussed these notions in liner notes, referenced them in album and song titles, and elaborated upon my ideas in numerous interviews and reflections during my live performances. Collectively, these materials will inform a personal view of my artistic practice.

1.3 Towards a framework

Although the above artists' beliefs came from various cultural and spiritual spaces/backgrounds, and therefore suggest different approaches to and connections with spirituality in their improvisational practices, this study seeks to explore the ways in which their music and lives (including mine) collectively articulate relationships between, music, culture and cosmology. It is exactly the difficulty of articulating, describing and engaging with these musicians' practices that prompts my search for frameworks and lexicons that could elucidate and critically engage with these practices — not least of which is performance. In this sense the study — conducted through both performance and writing — is experimental. Selecting these particular musicians as interlocutors provides an opportunity to survey a range of approaches to develop vocabularies and frameworks of understanding, and allows me the opportunity to consider my own practice through the lens of these earlier musicians' words and music.

[8] I speak about this subject elsewhere. Watch: https://youtu.be/Bq9cFt8Wt7k

This doctoral work is an example of artistic research,[9] in which the artistic practice and the academic reflections upon various conceptual aspects thereof, are reciprocally integrated. I aim to produce (or advance) knowledge surrounding improvised music and jazz in South Africa. The hypotheses on the integration of improvisation and African cosmologies would not have existed but for my upbringing in rural KwaZulu Natal and later, my extensive performance and recording career, which in turn has been shaped by my embeddedness within African cosmological ways of being and understanding the world. In part, therefore, my doctoral submission includes my artistic engagement with scholarly arguments as much as scholarly explications of artistic intuitions, all involved in a dialogue. Essentially, I am writing from/with the music and I am playing/thinking about the text. These practices are all understood within their depth as rituals of alignment with *ntu*.

A series of five 'sonic ritual meditations' are submitted here as integral part of my doctoral portfolio (I provide a more detailed outline of the envisaged performances below), invoking the spirits of Tabane, Mhlongo, Mseleku and Ngqawana via sonic citations.[10] By calling upon these interlocutors musically, I honour them as African ancestors, who can only live for as long as the ones alive recite their names (Mbiti, 1969: 74-81). An invocation of my interlocutors as musical ancestors is also a way of coming to my own work, governed by *ntu* cosmology, which is anchored in the concepts of wholeness and continuity. Thus, the view of self builds from a lineage that I refer to as musical ancestors.

For the current research, the conceptual is understood as a way of coming to or reflecting on the sonic, and a way of thinking about, from and with the sonic in the writing process while perceptual puts forward the experience of being inside the sound. As such, I write and perform in two registers, namely writing/performing through a reflective mode (on text and

[9] Artistic research is a term that refers to 'a way of doing research through art in an integrated way so that practice and theory are not separate procedures' (Pauw, 2015:10). Under this broader moniker, authors use various nomenclatures that emphasize particular approaches that express the relationship between practice and knowledge. Practice-led research is a field of research concerned with 'the nature of the practice' that 'leads to new knowledge that has operational significance' (Candy, 2006: 1). Borgdorff (2011: 49) argues that artistic research makes 'substantial, preferably cutting-edge contribution to the development of that practice —– a practice that is just as saturated with histories, beliefs and theories as it is based on skilful expert action and tacit understanding.' The knowledge that practice-based research produces, according to Stolp, is both 'perceptual and conceptual' (Stolp, 2012: 80). It is not the purpose of this text to debate these nomenclatures; it rather takes the reflexivity between artistic practice and knowledge as a point of departure to address African epistemes and cosmologies as voiced in the sonic.

[10] Sonic citation is concept I coin to refer to invocations of sonic gestures of our musical ancestors (I expand on this in the 'Sonic ritual meditation outline' section.

on the sonic) on the one hand, and writing/performing as ritual (drawing from spiritual paradigms) on the other.

I regard this doctoral work as a form of contemporary musical activism, in the sense that I am campaigning for new/alternative modes of thinking and writing about jazz and improvisation and its practitioners in a South African context. In this spirit, I do not limit my writing or artistic work to academic conventions, but seek to explore the very use of 'mysticism' within African/South African aesthetic and poetic practices as it is articulated in improvised music. My work consciously challenges the registers of writing about jazz and improvisation in South Africa as currently presented by the extant seminal academic literature (see the following section). The ways in which this study chafes against the conventions of scholarship reveal the fault lines of the academic endeavour as a product of Enlightenment rational thought. Where these frictions occur, they indicate the types of shifts that result from centering Africa as a point of departure for thinking about improvisation.

I write from the subject position of a performer-improviser, situated in an expanded notion of being anchored in concepts of 'wholeness' and 'continuity', as briefly highlighted in the previous section. The study contributes a further challenge to the notion of subjectivity in research. I speak/write from an ontology that is situated within *ntu*-cosmology and an onto-triadic conception of being, an ontology that significantly expands the notion of personhood beyond the singular and the physical. This problematizes even further the question of what/who might considered the 'subject' who writes/performs/dreams/divines. This study is experiential, reflective, suggestive and performative, rather than empirical and authoritative. I seek not to provide or pin down answers, as much as I attempt to provoke more questions, to open new avenues for inquiries and new pathways for thinking, imagining, listening and improvising.

Ultimately, this work seeks to build African knowledge systems inside the academy: these are knowledge systems that already live both on the African continent and in its diaspora, evolving in the diaspora via memory and recreation of trans-Atlantic performances. In this sense, some memories of Africa remain connected in 'what is left' here on the continent in the wake of centuries of slavery across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, and of European colonialism. My work builds from the silences, echoes and reverberations from histories of African peoples here in the continent and elsewhere in the diasporas.

The development of jazz in America, inextricably entwined with this history, has been the subject of extensive research (see Schuller, 1986; Giddings, 1998 and Gioia, 2011 among others). This project keeps in mind what I should like to term the 'fellowship' between documented American jazz history and what is still a very partially documented history of musical responses and parallel developments in South Africa, often called 'South African jazz'. I prefer to understand this term as referring to a process of making music, rather than a concrete, generic definition (and ideological understanding) attached to a specific set of stylistic attributes of what the word 'jazz' might mean in South African musical practices. In focusing on South African jazz *as a process*, I am interested in specific sensibilities that are found in the works of my interlocutors (and my own practice); sensibilities that engage aspects of improvisation strategies that connect with what I refer to as 'jazz-iness'.

With the notion of 'jazz-iness', I suggest that some relationships with the sonic, that is now understood as (South African) jazz, have a much older alliances with the musical sensibilities that were practiced in African music predating the slave trade. These include notions of improvisation, call-and-response, repetition strategies, syncopation and polyrhythms (among others) that would later be identified as some of the characteristics of jazz in the United States (also see Gridley, 1984). In his essay 'The Study of African and Afro-American Music', Nketia (1973: 8) considers inherent 'African cultural values as a formative factor in Afro-American culture', and, by extension, African American music. He argues that this dynamic is conceptually 'unbroken' and often result in shared musical expressions through what he terms 'residual strains' (Nketia, 1973: 9).[11] In this way, it can be argued that jazz-iness predates jazz as an African-American artform, but nevertheless iteratively meditates on African-American jazz as an extension of African musical memory that survived the cultural/musical erasure of slavery.

Consequently, the term jazz throughout this text is used to express the affinities (through residual strains) between practices of this artform in America, South Africa and elsewhere

[11] '[what is] exemplified in a limited number of structural characteristics and musical processes [—] belong to African music as a stylistic family and may be met not only in music from West Africa, but also music from other parts of Africa.' (Nketia, 1973: 9)

afforded by pre-colonial memory. This means that manifestations of jazz in Africa should not only be read, one-directionally, as resulting from influences by American jazz, but also as practices inherent to African musical imaginaries and practices that precede the development of American jazz. In this thesis I posit that for some musicians the encounters with American jazz did not only influence their musical ideas and practices, but also reminded or pointed them towards sensibilities that point towards indigenous cultural practices.

While it may seem incongruous to discuss, under the rubric of jazz, figures like Phillip Tabane, who refuted this term, and Busi Mhlongo, who is perhaps better known for her innovations in the maskanda traditions, the understanding of jazz as creative process underpinned by 'jazz-iness' that I posited above, opens this term significantly to acknowledge the improvisation processes they drew on in their practices, and include in this understanding, their retentions of indigenous African music practices.

It is worth adding here that there is a significantly diverse and 'elastic' usage of the term 'jazz' or South African jazz in South Africa. Despite his protestations, Tabane was understood as a jazz musician in South Africa and performed at jazz gatherings, festivals (like the Cold Castle Jazz Festival) and venues. His music is also played on jazz radio shows, media coverage on this artist appears in jazz publications — similar points could be made around Mhlongo whom also did not have explicit connections to jazz in her concept of music as we shall see in the following chapters.

This study's focus on *ntu* cosmology is informed by the Nguni and Venda cosmologies in which my interlocutors' and my own practices are based. While *ntu* cosmology might not speak to the cultural or personal moorings of all artists considered under the rubric of South African jazz, what I hope to demonstrate is how studies of artists' practices rooted in other spiritual traditions could similarly build from the conceptual and cultural towards the explorative dimensions. It goes without saying that spirituality is not an equally important paradigm in all artists' worldviews and work. The proposed framework is not intended as blanket frame, but rather offers strategies to explore spiritual and cosmological anchorings where an artist's practice connects with such notions.

2. With whom am I engaging?

I am writing from an 'insider's' perspective as a practising musician and healer steeped in Nguni cultural practices. My work follows a number of examples of musicians offering 'insider's' accounts of their lives and work as co-authors of texts. These examples include *Musical Echoes: South African Women Thinking In Jazz* (Carol Muller; Sathima Bea Benjamin, 2011), *Makeba: My Story* (Miriam Makeba; James Hall, 1989); *Still Grazing: The Journey of Hugh Masekela* (Hugh Masekela; Michael Cheers, 2004); *Chris McGregor and the Brotherhood of Breath* (Maxine McGregor, 2013)[12]. Collectively, these texts are mainly biographical, and do not delve into musical processes (with the exception of Muller and Benjamin). Rather, the approach in these texts usually entails placing the subject within the historic, socio-political contexts and narratives that surround jazz as art form, often focussing on the ways jazz was used as a tool for resistance during apartheid South Africa, how jazz mirrored or expressed societal grievances, and how jazz was used to create awareness globally about the social injustices under the apartheid regime. The traces of such an approach are evident also in seminal texts in South African jazz literature such as Gwen Ansell's *Soweto Blues: Jazz Popular Music and Politics in South Africa* (2004), David Coplan's *In Township Tonight!* (2007) and Christopher Ballantine's *Marabi Nights: Jazz, 'Race' and Society in Early Apartheid South African* (2012).

While these studies are valuable for assembling South African jazz histories (particularly under the difficulties of apartheid) from primary sources and serve as reference works from which studies such as the present one can proceed, they do not sufficiently address – either through design or omission or otherwise – the questions of how jazz also connected with the practitioners' broader cosmologies or spiritual beliefs through their composition and improvisation. As such, these texts often do not pay enough attention to how musical significance might inhere in the musical structures themselves, and not (only) derive from the assumed 'dichotomy' of musical and social structure – an issue commented on by Agawu (1992: 264-266). It is in this regard that this study wishes to make a contribution, both in the directions taken by the writing, and the articulations of important concepts in performance. This study proposes to locate writing and sounds within their cosmological leanings, thus going beyond the current registers of South African jazz literature.

[12] This text reflects, very closely, observations of Chris McGregor and the Brotherhood of Breath on and off the bandstand. This text is also accompanied by quotations of McGregor's direct words. In this way, this work, although not written by the artists himself (but his wife), offers insider's insights of music and life.

It is important to acknowledge that authors such as Bongani Madondo, Kwanele Sosibo, Percy Mabandu and others have written about the spiritual dimensions of certain South African artists' practices. However, their work on this topic mostly appears as newspaper articles, or in the case of Mabandu's *Yakhal'inkomo: Portrait of a Jazz Classic* (2016), as a single chapter in his book. In all of these cases, the engagements do not offer the detail and depth that this study offers. One notable example of an academic text engaging with jazz and spirituality in South Africa, is Michael Titlestad's book *Making the Changes* (2004). Specifically the chapter on Zim Ngqawana's album *Ingoma* and Lefifi Tladi's *Alphabet of Fire* ('"The Artist Gathers the Bones": Jazz and Shamanic Poetics of Jazz Discourse') is relevant to my research. In this chapter Titlestad (2004) employs a creative and explorative register of writing about jazz in South Africa, a method that goes beyond only asserting the common socio-political connectedness of sounds, and also considers the spiritual aspects of the sonics. Similar to my study, Titlestad (2004: 301) puts forward the idea of jazz performance as a mode for spiritual engagement that has healing properties. In this sense he regards the artist as possessing some 'shamanic' abilities (Titlestad, 2004: 301). Furthermore, he teases out the notion of 'gathering the bones' (divination), and thereby positions the musician as a healer who invokes the silenced voices of the past (or that of the ancestors) to restore a disrupted wholeness through (re)membering (Titlestad, 2004: 301). Although Titlestad's reads from a cultural outsider's standpoint and his discussion of spirituality only spans a section of less than twenty pages that also includes two short stories in a different register, his work does strike some resonance with my research. In this study, I take the argument further, while also creating new points of departures from an insider's perspective.

Two dissertations exist that follow a sustained focus on jazz and spirituality, and also from an emic perspective. Sello Galane's doctoral thesis, titled *The Music of Philip Tabane: An Historical Analytical Study of Malombo Music of South Africa* (2009), discusses *malombo* as spiritual music, and Asher Gamedze master's thesis, *It's in the out sides: An Investigation into the Cosmological Contexts of South African jazz* (2019), situates South African jazz as a 'cosmologically-rooted' 'exponent of the African radical tradition' (Gamedze, 2019: 10). Galane's study interrogates 'elements of the indigenous ritual' of *malombo* in the practice of Philip Tabane, and builds the argument by looking at Tabane's development as a musician growing up in spiritual and musical environments in Pretoria in South Africa (2009: 1-1). In the broadest sense, Galane's study could be understood as a detailed biography on Tabane that considers how the Venda/Pedi cosmological concept of *malombo* impacts Tabane's

artistry. Gamedze's study (2019: 2) builds on some aspects Galane's study, especially the idea of *malombo*, but broadens the scope by including the Blue Notes, Miriam Makeba, Malombo, Zim Ngqawana and myself in his consideration of the cosmological located-ness of South African jazz practices. He postulates the sonic as located within some spiritual paradigms (Gamedze, 2019: 2). Whereas Gamedze theorizes from Amilcar Cabral's pan-Africanist perspective of 'liberation culture' (2019: 2) and Marxist-Leninist takes on 'communism' (2019: 100), among others, I theorize from specific (South) African cultural concepts and praxes. At the time of his research and writing, I had several conversations with Gamedze during concerts and informal hangout sessions, reflecting on my work such as *Listening to the Ground* (2015), *Matunda Ya Kwanza* (2015) and *Ikhambi* (2017). These reflections touched on my situated-ness in African cosmology, in which he had a keen interest and on which he incorporated in his thesis. Subsequently, my work fellowships in a deep way with the works of both Galane (2009) and Gamedze (2019).

In this sense, this project will take into consideration not only the rather limited number of studies on jazz and cosmology in the literature on South African 'jazz',[13] but will also consider the cosmologies, epistemologies and ontologies of the people who perform South African jazz. In other words, the study will argue that it is important to understand musicians' cultural and spiritual backgrounds and beliefs in order to understand their art. Part of my study therefore seeks to gain a deeper understandings of mythologies, rituals and spiritual practices informing artists' practices. Credo Mutwa's *Indaba my Children* (1998), among several of his seminal texts, serves as a starting point to explore an African cosmology, as it provides an overview of South African tales and legends that could, in my view, be useful as a basic foundation for improvisation. Mutwa's literature generally orbits around African folklore, discussing creation stories that shaped the kinds of cosmological standpoints that this study engages in the next chapter.

Linking to Mutwa's work, Mazisi Kunene's literary works on African philosophy, particularly his interview with Luchembe Chipasha ('An Interview with Mazisi Kunene on African Philosophy' (1997), are important. Kunene (1997) argues that precolonial knowledge

[13] There are various notable studies in American literature (and elsewhere) that have made connections between spirituality/cosmology/religion and jazz. These range from Neil Leornard's *Jazz: Myth and Religion* (1987) to Jason Bivin's *Spirits Rejoice: Jazz and American Religion* (2015), to name just a few. These studies address spirituality from an American (and sometimes, Eastern) perspective rather than a (South) African one.

systems are still an active domain in oral traditions. This is a pivotal point in my artistic explorations, as it allows for the possibility of accessing – through ritual, musical engagement with the work of deceased interlocutors and improvised musical responses – a kind of knowledge that might have resisted the colonial project of erasure. Taking a broader African perspective, I also draw on John Mbiti's classic text *African Religions and Philosophies* (1969), which argues that myths were used by ancient people to understand and construct their own cosmologies, epistemologies and ontologies. Myths therefore furnish significant 'texts' through which this study furthers its understanding of cosmologies, epistemologies and ontologies. Furthermore, Mbiti takes seriously the role of the ancestors in African belief systems as spirits that make interventions on behalf of the living. This returns to the notions of wholeness and continuity, alluded to earlier. Mbiti's texts also provide a framework to locate and read for the differences and similarities in African belief systems in various parts of the African continent.

While the study recognizes the broader literature in the field of African cosmology, it attaches particular importance to South(ern) African perspectives on music, healing and spirituality as ways to acknowledge, engage with and develop indigenous knowledges on these subjects. For instance, Zim Ngqawana refers to 'a total experience' (Ngqawana, 2008), by which he means the totality that is imbedded in the whole(ism) implied in the word *ingoma*, which John Janzen's discussion of *ngoma* in *Ngoma: Discourses of Healing in Central and Southern Africa* (1992) helps to unpack. David Dargie in *Xhosa Music Terminology: How Traditional Thembu Xhosa Musicians Speak and Think About Their Music* (2005) also observes this totality embedded in African language systems. He argues that when dealing with African languages/music it is not enough to understand words, it is also necessary to understand their conceptualization, which imbues them with further meanings (Dargie, 2005: 3). Here it is important to note that the music vocabularies this study cultivates are not limited to music theory (as understood in Western terms), but look for the very functionalities of sounds that Dargie shows are located in languages. As Agawu warns us, colonialism has had an impact on how African music is understood, and therefore the issue of language and developing vocabularies to express African thought and belief systems situated in music, remain pressing (Agawu, 2003: 20-21). This points to the need to extend, deepen and cultivate vocabularies to engage with artists like Tabane, Mhlongo, Mseleku and Ngqawana's musical conceptions, which often operate beyond (and even against) the

confines of the vocabularies Western music discourses (as the primary place from where music as academic discourse has evolved) have bequeathed us.

Earlier, I have pointed to *ntu* philosophy, locating it as one of the principal concepts in understanding an African worldview. *Ntu*, as mentioned above, is a creative life force. The concept of *ntu* is discussed extensively in Placide Tempels's book *Bantu Philosophy* (1959) via the notion of 'Bantu ontology' from which he locates the idea of vital force. Critical perspectives on Tempels's work posit that as a European, he was part of the colonial agenda that speaks on behalf of the 'silenced' without clearly demarcating his ethnological interventions (see Okofar, 1982 and Okot, 1975). Nevertheless, his book *Bantu Philosophy* (1959) was seminal and was welcomed by many African scholars at the time of publication as it advocated for 'Bantu philosophy' that was unimaginable in literature as a field in those years, given that Africans were not regarded as having histories of 'intellectual' discourses.[14] In the present moment of writing, I stand more critical to such work. Although Tempels's work is referenced at times as an additional source where the aspects under discussion are also addressed, this study rather turns to Alexis Kagame's book *Philosophie Bantu-Rwandaise De L'Etre* (1966) which enunciates from a southern African perspective when it spells out *ntu* in four manifestations that are central to this study (see Chapter Two). Extending from *ntu*, Ramose, in his book *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu* (2005), asserts that *ubuntu* speaks to 'the preservation of be-ing as a whole-ness.' At an epistemological level Ramose notes that 'be-ing is conceived as a perpetual and universal movement of sharing and exchange of the forces of life' (Ramose, 2005: 41). In other words, 'it is in rootedness in an ongoing community that the individual also comes to know himself as durable, more or less permanent fact of this world' (Menkiti, 1984: 171-172).

While these concepts are key throughout the study, the idea and practice of ritual act as the apparatus of explication that connects my artistic practice and its rootedness in African cosmological thinking. Christopher Small's concept of 'musicking' in his seminal text *Musicking: The Meanings of Performance and Listening* (1998: 9),[15] describes musicking as part of 'iconic, gestural process of giving and receiving information about relationships which unites the living world' he deems this process as 'a ritual by means of which the

[14] Also see Souleymane Bachir Diagne's book *The ink of the scholars: Reflections of philosophy in Africa* (2016).
[15] Specifically on rituals, see his chapter 'The Mother of all the Arts'.

participants not only learn about, but directly experience, their concept of how they relate… to other beings and the rest of the world' (Small, 1999: 9). His main argument is that music is not a noun but a verb, and that it is 'something that people do' (Small, 1998: 2) that implicates concepts of time, place and social contexts. I believe this understanding to be inherent (if under-theorized) with respect to the South African cosmologies I present in this study. For the purpose of this study, I approach the notion of ritual from two main texts that resonate with my own experiences and understandings of this practice. The first text, Malidoma Patrice Somé's *The healing wisdom of Africa: Finding life purpose through nature, ritual, and community* (1999) usefully articulates what I already know as an insider. The second text, Victor Turner's 'Liminality and communitas' in *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure* (1969), is helpful as a way of mapping alternative forms of thinking about the processes of improvisation within African cosmology. Turner extracts his framework from African practices, and thereby remains quite close to the cosmologies and thought that govern those practices. Moreover, Turner's notion of 'liminality' corresponds with the way I perceive the process of being inside the improvisation, understood as the space of the 'unknown.'

The notion of ritual also informs an approach to the written and artistic aspects of this project. I seek, in this study, to apply a mode of writing that can be thought of as 'writing as ritual.' In other words, I make a claim that in the process of writing or playing I am constantly listening to the voices of ancestors and other spirit divinities. Based on the ontologies and cosmologies of African people discussed briefly earlier on in the text, an ancestor (and other spirit fields) forms a construct of what is experienced in the realm of the living. To acknowledge this in my work, I borrow Clapperton Chakanetsa Mavhunga's notion of 'guided mobility' explored in his book *Transient Workspaces: Technologies of Everyday Innovation in Zimbabwe* (2014). Through the concept of 'guided mobility', Mavhunga argues that all mobility in vaShona (and broader Africa) is guided by a network of the sky, atmosphere, clan and family ancestral spirits (2014: 23). It is on this premise that the study wants to propose a third layer of literature in addition to the notions of primary and secondary literature, perhaps under the term 'terrestrial or celestial literature'. The question of how to cite the ancestors necessitates the acknowledgment of this guided-ness as well as dreams and visitations by the ancestors as sources that inform the work and the praxes I write about, should these occur in the process of writing and that of performance. Mutwa, in his book *Zulu Shaman: Dreams, Prophecies, and Mysteries* (2003) reminds us that to be in deep

sleep (*ubuthongo*) in the Zulu language and etymology, means to be in 'the state of being one with the star gods' (Mutwa, 2003: 173). This connects to the idea of wholeness, in that while we are here (living), we are constantly engaged in an exchange of messages with our ancestors (living-dead) in the spirit worlds. In bringing some of these ideas together from a Zulu cosmological perspective, I also consult Henry Callaway's book *The Religious Systems of the Amazulu* (1970) for the insiders' views it offers in the form of interviews with practitioners of Zulu spirituality.

I experience discomfort in referring to the kind of anthropological and ethnomusicological literature written by cultural outsiders to the practices described, where cultural insiders and practitioners assume the role of the 'informer' who is ultimately edited and represented by the authors. Such approaches, exemplifying Africa enunciated via the colonial library, are problematic in the context of work centering Africa in postcolonial scholarship. Where I consult such literatures, such as the writings of Callaway (1970), Tempels (1959), Janzen (1992), Turner (1969), Bowen (1993) Blacking (1985) and Dargie (2005) among others, I do not regard them as authorities on African concepts, but instead, as Western writers who have contributed to documenting African thought. As such, the authors' views on African matters require careful reading and judicious application.

Resisting the zero-sum approach to epistemology of the colonial matrix, which upholds the fiction of an authoritative, singular, universally applied conception of knowledge to the exclusion of other (even problematic) perspectives, and in recognizing the historical entanglements of the processes through which African knowledge systems were documented and transmitted, I exercise the option to refer to these texts where they help to articulate what I know as an insider and practitioner. I read under the guidance of what I already know about these topics from the perspective of someone culturally situated in the cosmological world views I explicate here and also as a practitioner knowing-doing within these paradigms. In other words, my reading is filtered and verified through my own knowledge and practice, and this process (often tacit in the text, present in the selection of materials, quotes and perspectives I present) operates as a form of critique.

In current scholarship, such perspectives could be understood as advancing the idea of decoloniality but it is important to note that this study does not present itself as a 'decolonial' project. While it does the work of decentering from the hegemony of the global north, its

subject matter is not decoloniality in the sense that decolonial scholars such as Mignolo, Vasquez, et al. (2013), for instance, have theorized decolonial aesthesis. Decolonial scholarship like that of Mignolo, Vazquez et al. (2013) is often still concerned with the doing the work of delinking, which invokes the Western matrix in order to move beyond it. This project departs from the position of having already delinked; it takes the gains made by the critical interventions of decolonial scholarship as its point of departure. In other words, this project is indebted to and builds on the work done by decolonial scholarship as it thinks through what it means to write from within indigenous knowledge paradigms in Africa. I imagine the writing in this thesis as resonating with the frequency of decolonial interventions, as opposed to rehearsing such gains. My qualified resistance against doing so is set out in the next section.

3. Checking out of Western epistemes

It is already known (or at least expected) that writing, thinking and doing in former colonial zones, such as South Africa, is ineluctably confronted with a backdrop of colonial histories. While this is true, in my own project there exists an urgency to write, think and do from that which counts as indigenous knowledges. The challenges of writing, thinking and doing from African knowledge systems mainly stem out of three major catastrophes, namely the slave trade, colonization and (more recently) apartheid. These brutal historical events entailed three main projects aimed at 'the domination of physical space, the reformation of natives' minds, and the integration of local economic histories into the Western perspective' (Mudimbe, 1988: 15). The result is the disruption of precolonial (or indigenous) knowledge systems of colonized subjects through genocides, epistemicides and linguicides (see Ngugi wa Thiongo, 2009). In other words, the epistemologies, cosmologies and ontologies of people in former colonial zones have been hijacked and distorted by those of the West. Due to such a history, it has often been assumed that Africa (and all former colonial zones) had no systems of knowledge[16] and that Africans are thus incapable of thinking. In this way, Africans suffered an 'ideological deformation' that deprived 'epistemic freedom' to interpret and theorize from their own geo-political located-ness (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018: 17).

[16] These assumptions are outlined in Mbembe's reading of the Hegelian paradigm in his article 'Africa in the New Century' (2016).

In varied responses, thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Kwame Nkrumah, Steve Biko, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ibekwe Chinweizu, among others in the broader global South,[17] have made interventions to make Africa and the broader global South visible. Collectively, these interventions seek 'a way of disengaging Africanist [and the broader global South] thought from the violence of its foundational epistemological sagas' (Wai, 2015: 280). The foundation of these interventions can be traced to the Bandung conference in Indonesia where a total of 29 countries from Africa and Asia (and later Latin America, in 1961) joined/established a common stance against capitalism (Mignolo, 2013: 130).

Towards the emancipation of the (once) colonized subject, there is then an urgency for (South) African worldviews to be acknowledged as an available option that is regarded as a valid epistemological perspective. This urgent desire resists the legacies of Western Enlightenment, or what Santos terms 'metanymic reason', that positions the West as the dominant entity determining 'rationality'. According to Santos, the West 'does not exert itself to discover other kinds of rationality or, if it does, it only does so to turn them into raw material' (Santos, 2015: 165) to be harnessed for its own purposes. This is a characteristic of Western knowledge systems that decolonial scholars (such as Mbembe, 2016; Mignolo, 2011; Wai, 2015 and Ngugi, 2009 among others) have identified and described in various ways, and one that this study also disrupts. In my writing and artistic practice I seek to describe and make visible epistemes erased from 'former' colonial zones.

I argue that but for colonialism, it would be unnecessary to take this 'detour' of first accounting for the colonial project and thereby situating indigenous epistemologies against the epistemic hegemony of the global north. This detour burdens African writings with obligations inimical to the epistemes of African writers, invisible to the West. This making visible before a writer engages the core subject of their work is what I term the 'decolonial web' — a systematic construct in the decolonial moment that entangles scholarship of the global south in the labyrinth of the Western matrix. This labour creates a fatigue that emanates from being trapped in the Western paradigm while explaining one's positionality within a knowledge system long marginalised. As a protest against this disadvantage, I want

[17] Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2016:18) defines the global South as follows: 'The global South is not a geographical concept, even though the great majority of its populations live in countries of the Southern hemisphere. The South is rather a metaphor for the human suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism on the global level, as well as for the resistance to overcoming or minimising such suffering.' The concept also includes marginalised populations who reside in the geographic global North (Santos, 2016:19).

to acknowledge the work done by decolonial scholars, arguing that the interventions made in decolonial scholarship allow me to move from a place of understanding that African indigenous paradigms are still valid and knowable to the once colonised society.

It is important at the start of this dissertation to articulate this refusal[18] to regurgitate colonial narratives. To do so, I enlist Mignolo's[19] perspectives on 'de-linking', in which he argues that 'there is no way out of coloniality of power within Western categories of thought' (Mignolo, 2011: 45). I push in my writing and practice towards an African paradigm of 'knowing, sensing, and believing' (Mignolo, 2018: 222), seeking 'to make visible, open up, and advance radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis, and thought' (2018: 17). It is my intention, in this submission, to disturb completely the assumption of a knowledge that camouflages geo-political location ('its location in an ethereal place'), which Mignolo refers to as 'the hubris of zero point' (Mignolo, 2009: 8). I speak outside of Western abstract universals that view former colonial geographies as zones of no discourse, and also against its supposition, namely the need to adopt (or acknowledge, or to situate oneself against) Western epistemes.

The mode of my entire submission enunciates beyond the restrictions of 'scholarly discipline' and 'formal apparatus of enunciation', as constructed by the West. Instead, I propose what Mignolo (2009: 6) terms the 'super-frame' that moves through 'self-reflectivity', chafing against the Western 'epistemology of blindness' inherent to the notion of a 'universal' (Santos, 2015: 156). This self-reflectivity is underpinned by an enunciation from my lived experiences, or from texts that I find helpful to reflect and articulate these experiences. As such the study breaks away from Western epistemic regimes by inserting knowledges transmitted orally and aurally, and research through praxes. In this way my work seeks to transcend the marginalization of African knowledge systems by modernity.[20] The epistemology advocated for in this project can be described as 'a form of knowledge whose

[18] Here I am also thinking of the 'refusal' in the context of Campt (2019: 83), which she defines as: 'a rejection of the status quo livable and the creation of possibility in the face of negation i.e. a refusal to recognize a system that renders you fundamentally illegible and unintelligible; the decision to reject the terms diminished subjecthood with which one is presented, using negation as a generative and creative source of disorderly power to embrace the possibility of living otherwise.'

[19] Walter Mignolo's (2000) work is of particular importance to this study because it advocates for geo-political locatedness of knowledge, or what he calls 'border thinking.' The current research hopes to be an example of a possibility of thinking from and with Africa.

[20] I understand 'modernity' as bound up with Enlightenment rational thought, coloniality and the colonial matrix of power.

point of ignorance is colonialism and whose point of knowing is solidarity' (Santos, 2015: 156). In other words, this work refuses to speak from a singular frame of colonization but moves towards a plurality of worlds. This form of enquiry decenters from Western fictions and hegemonies 'of knowledge we know by creating order' towards an 'epistemology of seeing' (or, in the case of my artistic work, 'hearing'), which looks into (or listens into) the possibilities of generating knowledge solidarity (Santos, 2015: 156). This knowledge register, as Santos describes, moves from 'solidarity as a form of knowledge' that acknowledges 'the other both as an equal, whenever difference makes her or him inferior, and as different, whenever equality jeopardizes his or her identity' (Santos, 2015: 156). It in this spirit that this study seeks to vocalize and counterpose what I term 'epistemological pluralities' that go against the 'nonexistence' status advanced by coloniality.

It is clear that the mode of activism for which I advocate, walks alongside and in the footprints of past decolonial pursuits; it dances in solidarity with the broader 'decolonial' intellectual work. However, I also consciously avoid (where possible) terminologies such as 'pre'-colonial, colonial and 'post'-colonial, regarding these as part of a Western agenda to code itself within African conceptions of time (or period), even in 'post-coloniality.' I therefore refuse to employ this terminology beyond this introductory chapter, as it contributes to assumptions that there was no African epistemology or ontology before colonialism, or during or after. As Kunene (in Luchembe, 1977: 16) reminds us, the arrival of the colonizers can be dated back 'four to five hundred years', a period he deems short against the existence of peoples and their own cosmologies on the continent for thousands of years. For Kunene (in Luchembe, 1977: 17), all African knowledge was not destroyed through processes of colonization, and he argues that people need to re-organize to 'begin to see or create certain significances of thought' in their own systems. I stand sympathetically towards this injunction, and attempt in this study to speak against an Africa that is 'invented'[21] by the West.

I am particularly careful not to embrace, uncritically, what Mbembe and Mignolo call 'delinking', understood as both a way of disobeying Western assumptions based on an abstract universality, and an opportunity to speak from alternative epistemologies. I am wary of the fact that processes of delinking, by default, find themselves 'tributing' significant

[21] This invention of Africa is discussed at length by Mudimbe in *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, philosophy, and the order of knowledge* (1988).

energy to what Mudimbe (1988) terms the 'colonial library.' The colonial library points towards the ways in which Africa as an 'idea' and 'concept', within colonialism, has been a product or an 'invention' of the 'European archive' (Wai, 2015: 276). The library performs two contrasting roles: that of justifying the catastrophes mentioned earlier; and, through its regime, pushing the colonized subject towards a Western discourse. As a result, the colonized begins to produce self-made forms of 'otherness', thus fulfilling the aims of the Western hegemony (Mudimbe, 1988: 19). In other words, while decoloniality advocates for African modes of thinking (as well as those of the broader global south), there is a constant juxtaposition of Western epistemes in order to make sense of (or make visible) an African perspective. This leads to enunciating via (and thus reinscribing) the West, an outcome this research hopes to avoid.

Consequently, I come to writing this project and performing sonic ritual meditations, determined to assign Western thought what I regard as its proper, lesser, place within my positionality as a victim of coloniality. I claim the space for writing from Africa without first discussing the colonial damage, in order to make visible other ways of seeing outside Western epistemologies. To do so, I deliberately centre African cosmologies, epistemologies and ontologies as windows through which one may understand and further engage African scholarship and musics, by which can be understood 'a form of knowledge that aspires to an expanded conception of realism that includes suppressed, silenced, or marginalized realities, as well as emergent and imagined realities' (Santos, 2015: 157). As Wideru reminds us, thinking/writing from former colonial zones 'is not just a critique of [former] doctrine but also fundamental conceptualization of African methods' (Wideru, 1998: 18). By this Wideru (1998: 18) proposes a 'critical examination of the conceptual framework upon which thought of a culture is erected.'

Asante's (2007) five Afrocentric principles guide this study's commitment to an Africa-centred approach to its subject matter: 'an interest in psychological location'; 'a commitment to finding the African subject place'; 'the defense of African cultural elements'; 'a commitment to lexical refinement'; and 'a commitment to correct the dislocations of the history of Africa' (Asante, 2007: 41). These paradigms, collectively viewed as a framework,

constitute 'the intellectual tools necessary to decouple from [Western] fiction[22] in the written, verbal, and social narratives of African experience' (Exkano, 2013: 67). Proceeding from the Afrocentric paradigms suggested by Asante (2007), I propose in my writing and artistic work to privilege what might count as traditional African belief systems as a recovery from the dislocations of histories in Africa. Given the dislocations and the sudden erasure, I set out to trace some indigenous ways in which people knew the world in 'precolonial' Africa with the aim to highlight that which is left from those belief systems and how that could be preserved for future generations. Such an approach poses implications resulting from disparities in literary documented histories, and so this work builds both from the traces (in languages, proverbs, songs, places and artifacts) and the silences that were caused by the colonial erasures. In other words, while my work acknowledges the impacts of coloniality and the reverberations thereof, it simultaneously seeks to discontinue what I term 'epistemic check-ins'. That is to say, this study seeks to refuse discussing African concepts via equivalents in the Western world. Writing from glimpses of knowledge that refused or at least survived the impacts of coloniality, I attempt to write outside of the decolonial vocabulary while enacting 'decolonizing.' Moreover, I show how music is an epistemological medium of both what was before and after, while it also played and continues to play an important role in the refusal process.

In instances where this study references 'colonial' languaging in the context of decoloniality, words such as 'coloniality', 'colonization', 'colonizer', 'precolonial', 'post-colonial' and decoloniality among others, will be struck through to express the discomfort referencing such terminologies in the process of writing and meaning-making in Africa. This use of orthography does not signify the erasure of these devastating histories and their continuing effects. Rather, they register the struggle to get away from apartheid and colonization as paradigms that cast long shadows over our language, discourse, and senses of periodicity. They invite the reader to imagine what a discourse might look like that delink from this, that go beyond colonialism/apartheid as looming reference points.

Ultimately, this study views music within an Africa that has its own cosmologies, ontologies and epistemologies sufficient to engage, in meaningful ways, with questions of how South

[22] Here 'fiction' is understood as the assumption by the West that Africa can only be understood (or written about) from Western hegemony.

African jazz improvisation is sounded from a place outside Western hegemony. In it, I hope to move towards a worldview that is 'interested in centeredness as opposed to marginality, being as opposed to nonbeing, and an active instead of passive role for African culture and ideas in the world' (Asante, 2007). Thus, from this point onwards, this study makes an attempt to check out of Western epistemes as a praxis of revealing African ones.

4. Sonic ritual meditation outline

Practice/doing is an important aspect in African life. It precedes theory but creates motion for knowing through the process of *ntu* as a constant becoming. This is the context for the performances in the project; they form a core part of knowledge production through a deep engagement with the sonic and by extension, the spirit worlds engaged by sound. *Ntu* is a philo-praxis inherent in our ancestry, birth, socialization and the various moments of initiation (rites of passage). All these moments of being and becoming give context to music making as an integral part of being. It is this understanding of *ntu* as creative force that leads to the breaking into to sound.

Improvisation, then, becomes a way to connect with our pre-existent spirit essence and enter the infinite dialoguing inside the onto-triad. In dealing with the physical-metaphysical dialogics, I use the term 'sonic citations' to indicate a sound strategy based on the belief that ancestors are kept alive in spirit dimensions through the chanting of their names. In this sense, the living carry a responsibility of re-membering the departed ones and their spirits in ritual practices. Thus, songs form part of the broader repertoire of re-membrance and the immortalization of ancestral spirits through invocations. In the context of this study, I invoke the ancestral spirits via their artistic voices and identities, or what some of my interlocutors regard as 'playing in the spirit' of a particular artist. With this practice, I proceed from the culturally contingent position that for musical ancestors to be alive, we need to appease their spirit through song. Sonic citation, then, is the conscious use of musical materials of the ones who have passed (ancestors), whether through a transcribed musical idea or something heard and recalled before being channeled 'in their spirit', keeping them 'alive' in a synchronous elsewhere. In order to achieve this, I set out to engage a variety of improvisational approaches in a total of five performances, presented as meditations and/or rituals or ritual meditations, comprising of four studio recordings and one live performance. The first four ritual meditations focus on specific strategies unique to each interlocutor as way of invoking

their individual spirits, while the final (and fifth ritual meditation) attempts to summon the various influences towards presenting my own practice. From a conceptual standpoint this informed the durations of these meditations. The first four explorations focus on specific sound strategies, around 10min of length, inherent in each of my interlocutors' improvisation languages. The fifth ritual seeks to bring everything together by invoking multiple sound strategies (lasting over an hour) as part of what has become my own improvisation vocabulary inspired by all my musical influences.

As highlighted at the beginning of this chapter, the research centers around the ideas of continuity and wholeness as tools to make sense of *ntu* cosmology. By extension, the study discusses some ritual practices in South Africa that keep such worldviews intact. These are *ngoma* and *malombo* (both related to music and spirit worlds). In my sonic ritual meditations, I explore how improvisation engages with these cosmological precepts. For instance, I explore manifestations of *ntu* on the bandstand via a way of relating to others, environment, space, time, form and the spirit worlds. Through the invocation of the spirit worlds, I also explore how music produces meaning, projecting a healing energy via *ingoma* and *malombo* rituals. Here I function between three ritual stages that inform the sequences in my presentation, moving between the known (pre-identified thematic materials from each of my interlocutors vocabularies), the unknown/liminality (improvised sounds resulting from a connection to ancestral paradigms) and the new knowing (a return to known materials with a new knowing having gone through the unknown).

These sonic ritual meditations enact improvisation as a liminal phase, in that it stays nameless and unidentified until a choice to resolve or return from elsewhere occurs. In improvisation, ideas (musical or otherwise) exist in a state of 'moving' potentiality. It is this potentiality that my artistic work explores, using the concepts discussed in Chapter Three: surrender, breaking into sound, sonic citations, ritual technology, elsewhere, guided-ness and the throwing of the bones.

The sonic ritual meditations are not compiled in a portfolio style, as accompanying materials, but are instead situated in-between the chapters, engaged in an intertextual fellowship with my scripted citations, as it were. Structurally, these meditations precede the written component of Chapters 4-8 as forms of libations and spirit invocations that guide the writing. I regard performance as a space for meaning making which can be perceived and further

understood as a form of literature, a type of 'performed literature' that emerges from elsewhere — a window into the voices of the ancestors. It follows, therefore, that both performance and writing utilize strategies such as style, methodology, form, rhythm and citation (literature review). I am particularly interested to show how both performance and writing could be understood as ritual practices, at least within the context of this study (see Chapter Two). I use both modes of thinking to argue for a connection with spirit worlds, particularly around *ntu* cosmology. Employing various kinds of ritual approaches (written and musical) as forms of technologies, I connect practice to mystical dimensions. Practice, then, becomes a result of living in an onto-triadic reality that combines the physical and metaphysical.

Each of the five sonic ritual meditations explore a different theme and concept; the first four within a studio recording environment, the final one on a concert stage. All sonic ritual meditations are submitted in an audio-visual format, following the outline below.

4.1 The Spirits of Malombo: Mato

This sonic ritual meditation is a ten-minute *malombo* inspired piece in the style of Philip Tabane as presented in his seminal works *Unh* (1991), *Ke a Bereka* (1996) and *Muvhango* (1998). It features some of the recurring musical gestures that are evident in Tabane's musical vocabulary, recorded in his extensive catalogue. Each of these themes is an excerpt of no longer than four bars in length. Via the concept of *mato* (discussed in 'Chapter Four) the meditation explores musically the repetition of these short themes as an invocation of spirit worlds.

Personnel/ Instrumentation	Nduduzo Makhathini: piano and Mpho 'Azah' Mphang: spoken word and Malombo drums
Attire	African prints
Lighting	Natural Light
Location	Moya Studios in Johannesburg
Video Recording	Bongani Ndlovu
Sound Recording and Mixing	Goran Josipovic

4.2 Thwasa: Conversations with the Unseen

This recording borrows from Busi Mhlongo's maskanda vocabularies as displayed in her albums *Babhemu* (1990) and *Urban Zulu* (2000). I focus on the idea *ukuthwasa* (a constant unfolding and becoming) and how it informs improvisation via embellishment — this gradual moving to the unknown via repetition of known materials towards a trance-state. This meditation builds on the 'expanded' notion of call (*ubizo*) and response (*ukuvuma*) (discussed in Chapter Five) as a lens to engage the dialogic(s) of here and elsewhere. By extension, I keep in mind Zulu metaphors of *indlamu* dance in developing the material, that is to say, the dance becomes an internal pulse that drives the music. In this sonic ritual meditation, I seek to invoke Mhlongo's spirit through her many worlds of singing, dance, spoken word and surrendering (via the notion of *ukuthwasa*).

Personnel/ Instrumentation	Nduduzo Makhathini: piano and Omagugu: vocals and praise poems
Attire	Open
Lighting	Natural
Location	Home studio in East London
Video Recording	Thingo Makhathini
Sound Recording	Moyo Makhathini

4.3 Cycles: The Shrine

This sonic ritual meditation pays tribute to Mseleku's compositional style of writing in cycles, as evident in *Meditations* ((1992) and *Star Seeding* (1995). I examine the idea of endlessness and how it relates both to the sonic and a cosmological situatedness. This improvisation features sonic citations that Mseleku circulates in his improvisation as invocations of spiritual-ness. This meditation also opens up poetics of relation in Mseleku's ongoing becoming and dialogues with other cultures and cosmologies: African American jazz and Eastern mysticism among others.

Personnel/ Instrumentation	Nduduzo Makhathini: piano
Attire	Open

Lighting	Jazzy feeling
Location	Fismer Hall in Stellenbosch University
Video Recording and Lighting	Aryan Kaganof
Sound Recording and Mixing	Philip Jordaan

4.4 Zimology: Ingoma

In this sonic ritual meditation I explore modal music as demonstrated particularly in Ngqawana's album *Vadzimu* (2003) and his broader concepts of Zimology discussed in Chapter Seven. My interest is the application of meditative sounds towards revealing a prophetic message. I engage *ngoma* divination as an approach to improvisation situated in liminality. Ultimately, this sonic ritual meditation situates improvisation in jazz as a shamanic practice.

Personnel/ Instrumentation	Nduduzo Makhathini: piano + voice, Linda Sikhakhane: tenor sax and Mpho 'Azah' Mphago: percussion effects and voice
Attire	Open
Lighting	Natural
Location	Moya Studios in Johannesburg
Video Recording	Bongani Ndlovu
Sound Recording and Mixing	Goran Josipovic

4.5 Final Meditation: Umgidi

Umgidi means a celebration. ~~This performance might include animal slaughtering symbolizing gratitude to ancestors who would have guided me through the work. A group of traditional singers, dancers and drummers will be invited to perform a series of traditional music that I will arrange for a sextet to improvise over.~~

The setting and concept of *Umgidi* in the initial proposal was abandoned due to the internal ethical clearance procedures of Stellenbosch University, which I felt deeply violated the spiritual dimensions of my project. The problems encountered during the ethics application process that resulted in some omissions in the vision and articulations, do present a limitation

to this project. The limitation is located at the level of what could have been achieved, for instance, if administrative provision had existed for the ritual meditations – including animal slaughter – to be accepted on their own cultural terms, which would preclude the requirement to process such endeavours through animal ethics regimes designed for scientific experimentation. Nonetheless, as an explorative and improvisation-based study, my practice became a meditation on the urgency of shaping spaces such as Fismer Hall in Stellenbosch University to afford the *ntu* cosmologies for which this project advocates. In this sense, I suggest that the very failure and absence of a pluriversality in the epistemology of Stellenbosch University's ethics application processes led to Umgidi ritual taking place inside the university, making visible a world that remained 'unknown' to it. I attach, as Addendum A, a letter written to the ethics committee addressing the discomfort of researching in a paradigm that does not yet have a 'home' and 'language' for my spiritual culture in their application forms.

At the core of this performance, I demonstrate the importance of a community (in the form of a large ensemble with an audience) in the process[es] of music making as a collective process. Here I work inside the concepts of *ngoma* and *ntu*, an invocation of wholeness. This performance forms part of locating my own approaches in improvisation, which I call *ingoma-sbhulo* (a divining sound-field that reveals elsewhere). Part of what this meditation does, is to (re)contextualize the piano in an African context, both within African music practices/repertoires and as an instrument. This improvisation is a sonic exploration and manifestation of 'the throwing of the bones' during divination.

Ultimately, this performance will be a thanksgiving ritual to pay gratitude to the spirit guides that collaborated with me in creating this work.

Personnel/ Instrumentation	Nduduzo Makhathini: piano; Dane Paris: drums; Stephen De Souza: double bass; Justin Bellairs: alto saxophone and Mbuso Khoza: vocals and spoken word

	Also: pre-recorded spoken word: Inyosi uMncwango
Attire	Various African garments
Lighting	Mood
Lighting Engineer	Philip Jordaan
Location	Fismer Hall in Stellenbosch University
Video Recording	Aryan Kaganof
Sound Recording and Mixing	Izan Greyling

These events perform findings to questions, enactments of citation, and operationalized forms of knowledge integral to my thesis. Among other goals, this research is deliberate about the ways in which spiritual practice itself (in this case, through the sonic ritual meditations) should be located at the center of the research efforts to understand the works of Tabane, Mhlongo, Mseleku, Ngqawana and that of myself.

5. Itinerary

Underpinned by the notion of 'writing as ritual', a mode of listening-writing, I propose *indlela* (a way) as a method to navigate this dissertation. *Indlela* is a Zulu word that encompasses both a pathway (in a sense of a route) and a way of doing within a creative paradigm.

In offering itinerary as a concept for navigation in this project, I borrow from Mavunga's (2014: 17) submission of *nzira*,[23] which is a VaShona word for path. The practice of walking the path is understood as the 'creative work' of mobility (Mavunga, 2014: 17). In this sense, the way becomes a site for knowledge production both guided by the experience and the guided-ness by a totality of *ntu*. In IsiZulu we have two proverbs that I deem to be useful in considering itineraries. 'Ukuhamba ukubona' loosely translates as 'to walk is a way of seeing'. This speaks to epistemologies, and to motion as a way of knowing. The other proverb is 'indlela ibizwa kwabaphambili', which means to know the way one has to consult the ones that have walked before. The notion of *Ndlela* connects the 'path and the traveler', and facilitates a meeting of 'body and place' (Mavunga, 2014: 19-20). Subsequently, I

[23] In IsiZulu there are two words for this: *umzila* which is a pathway and *indlela* which is a way.

suggest that the underpinning sense of guidedness in the itinerary is shaped by listening, which is central in the reading of this dissertation. In chapters 4 to 7, I include text boxes that act as sites for resounding the sonic ritual meditations, to point to sound or listening as a significant paradigm for hearing-understanding this work.

This chapter introduces the study, situates it within the broader discourses within jazz in South Africa and advances the issue of cosmology as a frame for thinking about future studies. In advancing (South) African cosmologically-based propositions, I consider the issue of writing in former colonial zones, interrogate decolonial scholarship and 'check out' of Western paradigms in favour of 'checking in' to an Africa-centered paradigm. I introduce the concepts of situated-ness as a way of approaching practice (practice-led enquiry).

Chapter Two discusses a worldview and a site in which this study situated. Here the focus is on *ntu* cosmology and how it expands the frames of both ontology (onto-triad) and epistemology. *Ntu* then becomes a way of enunciating the (South) African worldview via notions of wholeness and continuity in *muntu*, *kintu*, *hantu* and *kuntu*. In making sense of this worldview, I explore the relationship between peoples, spirits, environment, time and space, and notions of the aesthetic in different artistic paradigms. Ritual is suggested as a way of keeping these relationships intact.

Chapter Three is explorative of a framework that works towards languaging a musical world when situated in *ntu* cosmology. I propose an understanding of improvisation in jazz as a form of ritual. I also outline some of the relationships between ritual sequences and form/formlessness in improvisation, and consider how these connections may contribute to renewed understandings of jazz practices in (South) African literature. In bringing South African jazz to *ntu* cosmology I employ concepts such as 'breaking into sound', 'guided-ness', 'the throwing of the bones' and 'elsewhere' that do not readily have a place in existing scholarship of South African jazz. I argue that without the engagement of *ntu* cosmology and, by extension, the language proposed in this chapter, a greater part of (South) African jazz literature (particularly as it relates to Tabane, Mhlongo, Mseleku and Ngqawana) is exiled from its own situated-ness in Nguni, Pedi and Venda cultures.

I present, at this point in the itinerary, my first ritual meditation as a sounding-knowing engagement with Philip Tabane's music, before continuing in Chapter Four in my writing-

knowing to read Philip Tabane's work as a particular contribution to South African jazz sensibilities and concepts from the standpoint of BaVenda and BaPedi cosmologies. I focus on how *malombo* informs his ancestry, socialization, rite of passage, approach to improvisation and compositional techniques. Through *malombo,* Tabane had a specific relationship with his music and improvisation that informed his understanding of place and that of rituals of healing. An exploration of this ritual strategy as a lens for improvisation is outlined in the concept of *mato*, which is an element of *malombo*. Throughout a long career, Tabane invoked his alignment with *malombo* practices, which he modulated and explored as the name of his genre, different ensemble configurations and a style of improvisation.

I present, at this point in the itinerary, my second ritual meditation as a sounding-knowing engagement with Busi Mhlongo's music, before continuing in Chapter Five to introduce Mhlongo, her influences in the Shembe church and how that informed both her sonic world and the posture around her creating, considering particularly how she presents this on the bandstand. While Mhlongo had this particular Christian background, she was also initiated as a *sangoma*, which manifested in her practice as signaled by her album with Twasa titled *Babhemu*. This anchored Mhlongo's artistic practice deeply in *ngoma* matrices, which accounts for the elements of dance, singing, spoken work and strong drumming aspects in her music.

I present, at this point in the itinerary, my third ritual meditation as a sounding-knowing engagement with of Bheki Mseleku's music, before continuing in Chapter Six to explore Mseleku's modes of spiritually that moves between Zulu mythologies, Christianity and Eastern mysticisms. I explore universalist notions and their resonances with *ntu* cosmology in Mseleku's spiritual and musical worlds. In exposing these relationships, this chapter considers Mseleku's philosophical, compositional and improvisational paradigms. Mseleku's notions of 'afterlife' are explored in dialogue with his concept of composing and improvising using cycles. I show how Mseleku's practice, inside his universal consciousness, have strong resonances with *ntu* cosmology.

I present, at this point in the itinerary, my fourth ritual meditation as a sounding-knowing engagement with of Zim Ngqawana's music, before continuing in Chapter Seven to consider Ngqawana and Zimology, which is a complex of spiritual plurality. Ngqawana consults Zen mysticism, but also has a deep anchor in Xhosa indigenous practices such as those of rites of

passage. The memory of these rites of passage are evident in his many recordings of ‘Qula’. He also spoke openly on *ngoma* concepts. The chapter considers Zimology as a site for knowledge, a school and a philosophy that lives through Ngqawana’s disciples.

I present, at this point in the itinerary, a fifth ritual meditation as a celebration, before concluding with Chapter Eight. Here I integrate in my writing-knowing the elements of cosmology and artistic approaches discussed in this dissertation and shown in the ritual meditations. Through self-reflection and with the help of my guides/interlocutors, I expand notions of being informed by wholeness and continuity encompassed by *ntu*. This chapter articulates my sounding-knowing and writing-knowing as options for thinking/hearing and playing/writing with/from/about South African jazz.

Chapter Two: Outlining Ntu cosmologies, ontologies and epistemologies: Towards a sound-world

This research claims that sounds happen within contexts of being in the world, including entwined physical and spiritual dimensions. To understand the artistic practices of the musicians I discuss in the following chapters, it is crucial to understand, also, their worldviews and how the music sounds out experiences of living within specific cosmologies. Cosmology, as this study understands it, gives context to spirituality; and music emerges (in ritual contexts) as a mode to maintain harmonious relationships between peoples, spirits and environment.

This chapter therefore creates a conceptual paradigm for the study through developing an understanding of (South) African cosmology, epistemology and ontology. Here I connect cosmology to notions of gods, divinities and ancestors as the invisible or the metaphysical side of the spirituality via the concept of *ntu*. In seeking to highlight the connections between humans, environment and spiritual counterparts I discuss rituals as acts of establishing and maintaining harmony between these paradigms.

This study is principally concerned with Nguni and Venda cosmologies, in which my own practice and those of my interlocutors (discussed in the following chapters) are based. The following discussion locates spirituality within a broader (South) African cosmological view to understand the various practices of the selected improvisers, as well as my own. The vastness of the field relating to African cosmologies, and its use as a framing device only, means that comprehensiveness is not attainable (or desirable) in this study. As Molefe (2018: 22) reminds us, although we cannot speak of African cosmology in a 'monolithic, static and homogenous' sense, it is worth noting that there are 'overlapping commonalities and continuities' in African worldviews (also see Ramose, 2005 and Mbiti, 1990 among others). Where such connections are apparent, I explore these in order to situate the specific views that pertain to my interlocutors' and my own practices, which are anchored, I argue, in *ntu* cosmology.

Ntibagirirwa (2012: 75) notes that the core 'metaphysical backbone' of African cultures is a shared 'belief that the individual is ontologically part of the community and that the community is ontologically prior to the individual'. As I will show below, such a philosophy

finds expression in *ubuntu*. In laying a foundation to further explore the practices of Tabane, Mhlongo, Mseleku, Ngqawana and Makhathini, I highlight selected key concepts and themes fundamental to the relevant cosmological concepts in their work. As indicated in Chapter One, these concepts are *ntu*, *ngoma* and *malombo*, expressed within notions of continuity and wholeness integral in understanding African cosmologies.

As a prelude to discussing the selected concepts, I first consider some of the challenges of discussing cosmology and by extension spirituality in Africa, taking into consideration the ~~colonial~~ pasts which both distorted indigenous practices and gave birth to hybrid religions[24] that prioritize Western worldviews. Given such a history, I briefly discuss some of the key commonalities in African worldviews, although these might already be familiar for cultural insiders, as a premise to argue for the significance of cosmology in practices of jazz improvisation.

1. The politics of spirituality in Africa

While this study has an interest in primordial histories of African spiritualities, it cannot but take into consideration the recent historical encounters with the colonizing West that impact on African views of spirituality. As such, this section briefly pays attention to historical encounters of African religions with 'foreign' ones. While Africa has its own religious belief systems, ongoing tensions exist between those religions (that are 'traditional') and others (that are 'foreign') (see Ramose, 2005: 56). Given the long history of these tensions and co-existences there have naturally been cross-pollinations and influences between African religions and foreign ones.

Both Christianity and Islam have impacted upon African religious systems. For instance, Olupona (in Bongmba, 2012: xx) notes that Christianity and Islam co-exist in a 'a triple religious heritage' with African religions. In *African Religions and Philosophy* (1996), Mbiti argues that Christianity and Islam present challenges to Africa as they also count as 'indigenous' to the continent (see Mbiti, 1990: 223-255). In the 1960s when his book was first published, Christianity had been in Africa for two thousand years, present in about half

[24] Religion here is understood as the 'human way of connecting to "that" which promises or gives us the ultimate ecstasy that we seek or desire, whether on earth, in another dimension or in another realm' (Mawuli, 2014: 8).

the continent geographically, while Islam was adopted by one-third of the continent's population (Mbiti, 1990: 256). While this study advocates for an African perspective in spiritual approaches, this long entanglement with Western and Middle-Eastern religious values constitutes one part of Africa's encounters with modernity.[25] 'Africa' has never been hermetically sealed from the rest of the world, rather, it is conversant with it. As a product of these historical encounters, we find hybrid religions such as 'Afro-Christianity' and (though less in southern Africa) 'Afro-Islam' (Ramose, 2005: 56), that became dominant in West Africa.[26] Turning to African indigenous religions, much of importance have not been documented in writing, but have been passed down orally from one generation to the next. Thus, while these practices have been documented in the literature, it needs to be borne in mind that this is only a partial archive. What, then, counts as indigenous to Africans to which the project of delinking would lead, and to what forms of knowledge-making and –practices should such a project look?

For the purpose of this study, I adopt Platvoet's definition of African indigenous religions as community religions 'of the indigenous societies of Africa since palaeolithic times' (Platvoet, 1996: 5), including their evolutions and legacies. As Platvoet (1996: 4) notes, there is evidence that religious practices in Sub-Saharan Africa precede those in the Near East and Europe. In his study of what he calls 'Africa's rainbow of past and present religions' (1996: 35), Platvoet proposes a chronology of how religions in Africa may have unfolded:

- The indigenous religions of the traditional societies of Africa, mainly south of the Sahara, which have usually been termed African traditional/indigenous religions
- Christianity
- Islam
- Judaism
- Hinduism
- Sikhism
- the Parsee religion
- Jainism
- Chinese religions

[25] This study keeps in mind that religion is 'constantly in motion' due to the continuing effects of modernity, technology and immigration (in Bongmba, 2012: xx).
[26] Here I am also thinking of the Zionist and Shembe churches that I will mention later in my text as examples of this religious hybridism.

- Buddhism
- The new esoteric religion
- The Baha'i religion
- African-American religions in Africa

Although the current study meanders between some of these historical moments (keeping in mind that there could also be overlaps), its focus is mainly on the former, the ~~precolonial~~ indigenous religions of the traditional societies of Africa.

In the context of the diasporas, Du Bois (1903) notes that as a result of dislocation, black peoples find themselves caught in a 'double consciousness.' Dislocation creates a conflicted identity, in which the subject negotiates their sense of self within a foreign citizenship, looking at themselves from the 'revelation of the other world' or Westernized worldview (Du Bois, 1903: 03). Foreign religions (like Christianity) contributed to the creation of multiple consciousnesses in the continent, introducing a foreign hermeneutic (or viewing Africa from 'a revelation of the other world'). While some people maintained their ~~precolonial~~ belief systems, others practiced them alongside those later introduced ~~through the imposition of colonization and imperialism~~, effecting a pluralization of practices.[27] While acknowledging the diversities of African religions that interact in this dynamic (Platvoet, 1996: 2), my engagement with the notion of *ntu* (below) focuses attention on commonalities found among indigenous religions.[28]

This section acknowledges the intertwined influences that have shaped African spiritual and religious experiences over time. The encounters with other ('foreign') religious belief systems undoubtedly impacted positively and negatively on African worldviews, yet ancient relationships that our ancestors might have had with indigenous cosmologies survive (among other spaces and practices) in songs and rituals.[29] These, therefore, may offer windows that preserve indigenous knowledges and practices ~~from the erasures effected by colonization~~. This study seeks to advance the idea that, through musical practice as ritual practice, the African ancestors can be engaged with.

[27] These include the Shembe and the Zionist church movements, which I discuss in relation to Mhlongo in Chapter 5.
[28] Later I show the specific characteristics that are shared between the cultural practices of my interlocutors.
[29] It is worth noting the intersection between songs and rituals. African history lives in songs, songs that animate the spirit (of the ones ignored by 'modernity'). This is one core function of song in ritual.

2. Introducing Ntu: Shared principles of African cosmologies

I position this section between secondary literature and that which is known as embodied forms of knowledge and experience. Most of the religious knowledge in Africa is embodied and lives in social practices, rituals and art — it is 'performative and communal' (Drapper and Mtata in Bongmba, 2012: 97). This section consults literature that was selected because it articulates what is already known to me and my interlocutors from an insider's perspective. African knowledge systems are comprised of both oral traditions and writing and symbols (Platvoet, 1996: 4). Mbiti (1969: 4) notes that 'religion in African societies is written not on paper but in people's hearts, minds, oral history, rituals and religious personages.'

I understand cosmology[30] as a worldview, how people understood/understand their being in the world over time. Imhotep (2012: 3) reminds us that cosmology in Africa also includes 'theories [cosmogony] for man's place and purpose within this creation/universe.' In this sense, cosmologies are understood as being religious,[31] 'which gives a sense of purpose and direction to the lives of people and enables them to act purposefully and exercise a measure of control over their environment' (Kanu, 2013: 533). One could argue that cosmology is essentially about human beings' relationship with the universe and the supernatural (Kanu, 2013: 533). In view of the above, Africans have tended to derive their cosmology from their observations of the cosmos and how they contemplated it over time. Cosmology looks into the 'lens through which [Africans] see reality' and how that impacts on their 'value systems and attitudinal orientations' (Kanu, 2013: 533). For Africans, cosmology informs 'value system[s], philosophy of life, social conduct, morality, folklores, myths, rites, rituals, norms, rules, ideas, cognitive mappings and theologies' (Kanu, 2013: 534).

A significant commonality across African belief systems is that the universe is made up of three conglomerate dimensions: the sky, the earth and the underworlds. Chris Ijiomash (2005: 84) notes that 'the sky is where God… and angels reside; the earth is where man, animals, natural resources, some devils and some physical observable realities abide; and the underworld where the ancestors and some bad spirit live.' At the centre of all things, African

[30] In Greek, 'cosmos' is a word for universe and 'logos' means science; therefore, the word cosmology could be understood as the 'science of the universe' (Kanu, 2013: 533).
[31] Here religion is not understood in terms of orthodoxies 'grounded in right expressions of belief'. Instead, African religion is orthopraxes 'grounded in right action, especially ritual action' (Grillo in Bongmba, 2012: 112)

peoples believe in what Francis Etim (2013: 15) refers to as 'force' or sometimes referred to as 'vital force' (Bikopo and Van Bogaert, 2009: 44; also Tempels, 1959: 44-49). Vital force could be understood as 'a sacred gift, a spiritual energy and an offshoot of God that characterizes every object' (Molefe, 2018: 24). It is this force that is a shared belief among African peoples and also of interest in my work. This force exists in a state of potentiality or becoming; subsequently all things are a manifestation of force or energy. Examples of such notions of a vital force are n|om,[32] associated with the San people (see Mnguni, 2015: 136) and *ase*,[33] associated with the Yoruba people (see Abiodun, 1994). Closely related to the concepts of this study is the notion of *mupasi*, which denotes an African conception of spirit, and the Ancient Kemetic philosophy of *maat*. In essence *mupasi* locates human as being a part of 'the community of life within the realm of the [creator] cosmic spirit' (Nalwamba, 2017: 1). *Maat* is understood as 'a principle and force constitutive of creation itself, [and] comes to mean, then, an order of rightness which permeates existence and gives life' (Karenga, 2003: 8).

This study focuses on *ntu* as a 'life force' (a creative force) that informs the essence of all things (Bhengu, 2016).[34] Put another way, all creation is a manifestation of *ntu*. *Ntu* is a shared African philosophy found in all Bantu-speaking cultures in sub-Saharan Africa (including South Africa, Kenya, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Angola,Tanzania, Mozambique, Uganda, Nigeria and Congo, see Tempels, 1959). These peoples locate their ancestral origin from a larger group named Niger-Kongo that spreads over the entire region south of the equator. Ntibagirirwa (2012: 76) asserts that 'Bantu form 60% of the African population in Sub-Saharan Africa, and occupy geographically a third of the whole African continent.' Due to the historical spread of Bantu knowledge systems, *ntu* could be thought of as a key concept in many African cosmologies. Given this background, *ntu* has a particular relevance to this study, since all the artists I discuss in this project – Tabane (Venda, Sotho and Pedi), Mhlongo (Zulu), Mseleku (Zulu) and Ngqawana (Xhosa), Makhathini (Zulu) come from Bantu cultural backgrounds.

[32] *N|om* is understood as the presence of spirit in all things.
[33] According to Abiodun (1994: 78), *ase* is the energy that manifests existence.
[34] Although Bhengu is mostly self-published, he is an important interlocutor for this section as he enunciates from 'closer to home'. In other words, while other authors in this section speak from a West African and East African perspective, Bhengu speaks from a Nguni and Zulu perspective.

According to Alexis Kagame's seminal text *La philosophie băntu-rwandaise de l'Être* (1956), *ntu* can be understood within four dimensions as evident in Bantu languages (Bhengu, 2016):

- Mu-*Ntu* refers to a human being or an intelligent being.
- Ki-*Ntu* refers to things or non-intelligent beings.
- Ha-*Ntu* refers to space-time or localising being.
- Ku-*Ntu* refers to manner of being or modal being.

The *muntu* dimension includes the divine, human beings, the spirits of gods and ancestors (Bhengu, 2016). The *kintu* dimension includes plants, animals and objects, while in some African cultures, for instance in the Zulu culture, these may fall under the *muntu* dimension as they are believed to be endowed with intelligence (Bhengu, 2016). The *hantu* dimension encompasses events and motion, and thus governs space and time (Bhengu, 2016). The *kuntu* refers to a state of being such as beauty (Bhengu, 2016) and the performing arts. As Negedu (2014: 10) argues in his reading of Kagame, *ntu* 'is the force in which all four categories [dimensions] find their unity and express their being.' In this sense, *ntu* is understood within its 'becoming', and Bhengu (2016) argues that it could be understood as energy (i.e. potential to do work). Therefore, *ntu* is the spiritual essence in all things through which all existence comes alive. As Etim (2013: 15) states, 'from the lowest to the highest being has a force'. It is a force that extends to nature, plants and animals, which explains why according to many African cultures *ntu* is invoked in mountains and rivers among other natural environments (Etim, 2013: 15). Nature is understood, in this sense, as a place for rituals or a place for connection making. Ultimately, *ntu* contains the conditions of cosmology.

In *Introduction to African religion* (1975), Mbiti asserts that an African view of the universe and being is 'unending' (Mbiti, 1975: 34). Thus, being in the universe is underpinned by two registers of events that locate time and space: 'the minor rhythms' and 'the major rhythms.' By minor rhythms he refers to properties that 'are found in the lives of things of this earth (such as men [people], animals and plants), in their birth, growth, procreation and death' (Mbiti, 1975: 34 - 35). The other register refers to:

> The major rhythms of time [that] are events like day and night, the months (reckoned on basis of the phases of the moon), the seasons of rain and dry weather, and the events of nature which come and go at greater intervals (such as the flowering of

> certain plants, the migration of certain birds and insects, famines, and the movement of certain heavenly bodies) (Mbiti, 1975: 35).

In this manner, the natural world takes precedence over the human world (human life as minor and natural events as major). It is in these two 'rhythms' that continuity and wholeness is performed. In these workings of the cosmos, *ntu* cosmology imagines an unending world and considers the universe to be permanent and eternal (Mbiti, 1975: 35). God understood as life force (as described in *ntu*), in this sense, is understood as both the creator and 'the sustainer, the keeper and upholder of the universe' (Mbiti, 1975: 35), and is thus responsible for the continuity. As Mbiti (1969: 101) notes, 'fundamental concepts like belief in God, existence of the spirits, a continuation of life after death, magic and witchcraft' are some of the things that African peoples preserved when they moved around the continent, forming various ethnicities. Hence these 'fundamental beliefs' are found 'over wide stretches of Africa' (Mbiti, 1969: 101).

4. Notions of God and networks of divinities

African cosmologies embrace the notion of God, who is perceived as 'high [upper force] and is expected to be reached through intermediaries' (Kanu, 2013: 539; Sanni, 2016: 5). Although notions and concepts of God differ in various regions in Africa (Kanu, 2013: 536; also see Mbiti, 1970),[35] there seems to be a shared and collective belief in the existence of God in the whole of Africa. As Mbiti (1990: 48) notes, 'according to African peoples, man [sic] lives in a religious universe, so that natural phenomena and objects [humans and other divinities] are intimately associated with God,' and moreover, 'they [objects] not only originate from Him but also bear witness to Him'. In this sense, 'man [sic] sees in the universe not only the imprint but the reflection [or a manifestation] of God' (Mbiti, 1990: 48).

In many African religions the various names of God point towards attributes of God which Kanu (2013: 537-539) lists as: 'God is real and active', 'God is Unique', 'God is the absolute controller of the universe', 'God is one', 'God is creator', 'God is King', 'God is omnipotent', 'God is eternal', 'God as Judge'. The word *Mvelinqangi* in IsiZulu, for

[35] Mbiti's *Concepts of God in Africa* (1970) discusses over 270 groups of peoples in Africa and their specific concepts of God.

example, often means the one who appeared first, or 'creator', 'maker', 'potter', 'originator' and 'moulder' among other meanings (Mbiti, 1975: 44).

Paired closely to the notion of God, African cosmologies hold that humans and nature are tied to God through divinities. Divinities are believed to have emanated from God, understood as 'offspring of the Supreme Being' (Kanu, 2013: 539). Kanu (2013: 540) asserts that divinities are 'functionaries in the theocratic government of God, sometimes referred to as his messengers and at other times as his sons.' In Mbiti's terms (1990, 74), divinity refers to 'personifications of God's activities and manifestations, of natural phenomena and objects, the so-called "nature spirits", deified heroes and mythological figures.' Other groups of people in Africa (Kanu, 2013: 41-42), such as the Yoruba, due to the large number of their divinities, group them according to their functions, such as 'primordial divinities' that have dwelt in heaven since the creation of the universe; 'deified ancestors' who were once humans and 'lived extraordinary or mysterious lives' on earth; 'personified natural forces and phenomena' understood as myriad spirits that live on 'mountains, hills, rivers, seas, oceans, trees, roads, markets, caves, brooks, lakes and forests' (Kanu, 2013: 541). Closer to home, the Zulu people believe in *Nomkhubulwane,* who is understood as the supplier and regulator of rain. Moreover, these networks of divinities are intertwined with what Mbiti (1970: 121) refers to as God's 'assistants, servants, messengers and agents.'[36]

5. Ontologies and conceptual frameworks in African traditions

In African worldviews, personhood is understood as wholeness, hence the saying '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*' meaning 'I am through the existence of others', or, as Ramose (2005: 37) puts it: 'to be a human be-ing is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others.' The word *ubuntu* stems out of the word *umuntu* (personhood), the specific entity which continues to conduct an enquiry into be-ing, experience, knowledge and truth (Ramose, 2005: 36). In this sense, personhood could be understood as something that is 'attained in direct proportion as one participates in communal life through the discharge of various obligations defined by one's stations' (Menkiti, 1984: 176). This communal life includes the spirit dimension, thus '*umuntu* cannot attain *ubuntu* without the intervention of the living-dead' (Ramose, 2005: 46). Of significance is the interconnectedness and continuity

[36] These are discussed in detail in Mbiti's *Concepts of God in Africa* (1970), more specifically in Chapter 11, "God and other Spiritual Beings"

of all things as they contribute towards composing a greater wholeness. At an epistemological level, my creative and intellectual work depend on two main concepts that I deem central in African cosmology, namely continuity and wholeness.

5.1 Continuity

I associate my belief that life is cyclical with continuity. Being encompasses more than our existence in the physical realm, but connects to the metaphysical through what Ramose refers to as the 'onto-triadic structure of being', which encompasses the living (humans), 'the living dead'(ancestors) and the 'yet-to-be-born' (Ramose, 2005: 45-46). African cosmology perceives the living, the living dead (ancestors) and the ones-not-yet-born as being in an infinite cyclical mode of existence. By extension, in wholeness, I locate *ntu* (life force) and the belief that personhood (*ubuntu*) is an acknowledgement of interconnectedness to others and the broader cosmic fields.

The expression of continuity, as Mbiti notes, can be found in the African notion of life-death, symbols in art and rock painting (Mbiti, 1975: 35). It also exists in music, as I demonstrate in my artistic practice and show in later sections (most particularly in Bheki Mseleku's work, who explored this approach as a framework for composition). This extends to the practice of rituals to 're-enact birth, death and rebirth, showing that life is stronger than death', thus signaling that 'continuity on a larger scale is more important than change in small details' (Mbiti, 1975: 35). It is the spirit that carries this continuity, either through the body or outside the body. Mankanyezi, an African sage from the Zulu nation in South Africa, argues that a man has a body, 'within that body is a soul; and within the soul is a spark or portion of something [his ancestors] called Itongo', which can be understood as the 'Universal Spirit of the Tribe' (Mankanyezi in Bowen, 1993: 2). Furthermore, Mankanyezi notes that when the body dies, 'the soul (*Idhlozi*) after hovering for a space near the body departs to the place called *Esilweni* (Place of Beasts)' (Mankanyezi in Bowen, 1993: 2). After a period, long or short, the soul 'moves onwards to a place of rest' where it sleeps, awaiting a dream that aligns its purpose on earth, upon which one is then reborn as a child (Mankanyezi in Bowen, 1993: 2). Here, once more, I also want to invoke Mutwa's notion of dreams that I referred to in Chapter One, in which he tells us that *ubuthongo* (deep sleep) in isiZulu translates to 'a state of being one with the star gods' (Mutwa, 1996: 173) or with the 'Universal Spirit', *itongo* (Bhengu, 2015).

The example above is a demonstration of how these continuities inhere in human existence. At a philosophical level, Ramose understands the above in three 'interrelated dimensions' (Ramose, 2005: 45) as the onto-triadic structure of being. In this sense, the living is understood as being in and with the body, while the living dead has to do with 'beings who have departed from the world of the living through death' (Ramose, 2005: 45). These beings continue to live in the ancestral realm. As Mbiti (1990: 24) notes, 'after physical death, the individual continues to exist.' The final part of the triad is completed by the 'yet-to-be-born', the beings of the future who rest upon the living to ensure that they are born again when the soul finds purpose on earth and awakens from the dream. Similarly, the living relies on the intervention of the living dead (ancestors) for protection (Ramose, 2005: 46). Thus it is imperative that harmony between the living, the living dead and the yet-to-be-born is kept intact to harness the spirit of harmony and continuity (Ramose, 2005: 46). This is done through rituals that encompass song and dance, as will be enacted and described in my artistic work and my consideration of my interlocutors.

These two examples above point to the immortal nature of being in African ontology through which the cyclical nature of being, or continuity, is made possible. Ramose notes that 'the universe of living things claims that there is a continuity of life directly associated with the dead body by asserting that it is the spiritual, immaterial dimension of the human person which survives the bodily death' (2005: 50). In this sense, he concludes that immortality does not belong to flesh ('bodily corporeality') but rather to the spirit (the 'immaterial', Ramose, 2005: 50). Mbiti asserts that 'personal immortality is externalized in the physical continuation of the individual through procreation, so that the children bear the traits of their parents or progenitors' (1996: 25).

This cyclical nature of being is best described by the Zulu mystic Mandhlalanga:

> Man [the human] is on a journey, the goal of which is union with the source of his being—the Itongo. To reach that goal he must first pass through all experience the Cosmos affords, and must shake off all accretions accumulated on his descent from individualized Spiritual Mind into grossest Matter. To do this, he is born and born again, for his physical body dies, as do his lower mental principles; only his higher

> mental principles which are akin with the Itongo survive individuality bestowed upon them at its opening (Bhengu, 2015).

Concurring with this belief, VaShona of Zimbabwe believed that 'death was the process not of final expiry but merely an elevation into an ancestral spirit' (Mavhunga, 2014: 24). Similarly, seen from a West African perspective, Kanu (2013: 549) explains that 'death is not understood as the final end of man [the human]', since after death, 'the soul nkpulobi goes back to Chukwu [god].' This is evoked in the relationships between the living and the living dead (ancestors) in African cosmology. Thus, as Kanu asserts (2013: 549), 'the after-life for the African is a life of continuing relationship with the living dead'. In other words, the cycle of birth, death and rebirth within African cosmology is an expression of the continuity of life inside and outside of the body (2013: 549).

5.2 Wholeness

While the discussion above is anchored in the notion of continuity, its context is based on a conception of wholeness. Wholeness is central in African worldviews and, to a certain extent, it also ensures continuity. In Bantu speaking communities and beyond, this wholeness is displayed in the concept of *ubuntu*, described as 'the preservation of be-ing as a whole-ness' (Ramose, 2005: 41). At an etymological level, *ubuntu* is a composite word consisting of *ubu* and *ntu*. *Ubu* is concerned with being in the sense of becoming within 'incessant continual concrete manifestation through particular forms and modes of being' (Ramose, 2005: 36),[37] while *ntu* denotes being which is 'common to everything in the universe in the metaphysical sense of being' (Ntibagirirwa, 2018: 119). Thus, '*ubu-* is always oriented towards *-ntu*' (Ramose, 2005: 36). In this sense, the two words constitute two dimensions of being as a 'one-ness and indivisible wholeness', both at an epistemological and ontological level (Ramose, 2005: 36).

Ramose (2005: 56) points out that this notion 'does not deny human individuality as an ontological fact', but 'ascribes ontological primacy to the community through which the human individual comes to know both himself and the world around him.' Here one can claim that African epistemology is based on the experience of being with others (community)

[37] Here we see how aspects of continuity are carried over inside the wholeness of being.

and the entire experience of being in the world as a wholeness. In this sense, a person's individuality belongs to a greater wholeness, thus 'individual human beings must be seen as partial wholes' (Ramose, 2005: 56). This suggests that human beings, within this concept of wholeness, come to know themselves in the context of surrounding environments. Thus, 'the human individual is inextricably linked to all-encompassing universe' (Ramose, 2005: 57).

This wholeness goes beyond human beings, the environment and all living things, but also acknowledges the 'invisible' (Mbiti, 1975: 35); as manifested in the belief in God and ancestors. In other words, the wholeness of being acknowledges a coexistence between the physical and metaphysical dimensions. As Ramose notes, the ontology of 'invisible beings', or the 'unknown unknowable', is the metaphysical branch of *ubuntu* (Ramose, 2005: 46). Further linking with this ontology, Kanu (2013: 552) asserts that 'the African worldview is a unified reality.' That is, being is understood as a way of being in communion with the greater cosmos. In this way, 'the interaction of the two worlds instils a greater sense of the sacred in the African because he [she] sees and feels the presence of the Supreme Being, divinities and spirit beings (ancestors) always present' (Kanu, 2013: 552). There is also a third dimension, I mentioned earlier: that of the yet-to-be-born. Continuity happens within the life cycle inside the onto-triadic conception of being, and the wholeness of being sees these three paradigms (the living, the living dead and the yet-to-be-born) as unified. Ramose understands this unification as a manifestation of 'cosmic harmony', which governs the concept of *ubuntu* in that this harmony is 'persevered and maintained' in all aspects of life (Ramose, 2005: 46).

The onto-triadic conception of being could be thought of as a representation of the immortality of being within an African worldview. The immortality is achieved by means of transcendence, as the overlap between the physical and the metaphysical. According to Ramose (2005: 59), 'transcendence is seen as a quality that belongs to the subject as subject' and furthermore, 'the human person is not definable as an object in the sense that his or her transcendence cannot be quantified.' This explains the belief in life as a continued cycle that transcends the material world. For instance, the continuous recognition of ancestors via ritual 'is an affirmation of the belief in personal immortality' (Ramose, 2005: 63). In this sense, death is understood as 'a natural gateway to the world of the transcendent' (Ramose, 2005: 46) until one is reborn again into this endless cyclical mode of being.

6. Honouring the spirits

In this section, I expand on the notion of what an ancestor is, with an intention to explore the theme artistically and intellectually through the musicians whose work and artistic philosophes constitute my interlocutors. All the musicians with whom I engage are deceased and have become ancestors (or living dead). As a way of honouring them, I am interested in how the ancestors, via ritual (performance), 'take part' in music making. In other words I am interested in how their sonic gestures as musicians, while they were still alive, manifest during certain moments of my own improvisations. I refer to this idea as 'sonic citation', which I understand to mean that during a performance a musician may connect spiritually with the ancestral dimensions, cite messages and convert them to sound as part of improvisation.

In a traditional sense, the ancestors are the departed ones who still have ties to their human families (Mbiti, 1990: 82). Mavhunga (2014: 23) asserts that in the VaShona people *vadzimu* (ancestral spirits) were the guides, who interceded for the people of *Mrawi* (God). Moreover, these ancestral spirits existed in the form of a network; from the spirits of the skies, clan and to those of the family (Mavhunga, 2014: 23). The latter (family spirits) are of great concern in the worldviews of the African peoples, as they understand languages of humans and thus can translate their messages to and from other spiritual beings, gods and divinities (Mbiti, 1990: 82). In most African cultures, the ancestors are regarded as 'guardians of family affairs, traditions, ethics and activities' (Mbiti, 1990: 82).

When and where these spirits appear, for instance in a dream or a vision, such an appearance is taken seriously as a symbol in African life (Mbiti, 1990: 82; Ramose, 2005: 64). Among the Nazarites,[38] experiences in dreams and visions carry equal weight to those in 'waking reality' (Muller, 1999: 84). For instance, in the Nazarite religious culture, the sacred is defined by the interventions of cosmological connections primarily through dreams, visions and 'hearing of voices'. Experiences in dreams and songs are experiences that assist to 'mediate between the living and the dead', and both dreams and songs 'have potential to create connections with the cosmology' (Muller, 1999: 57). Furthermore, they 'create disjuncture in the circumscription of space – connecting the ordinary with the extraordinary'

[38] Nazarenism is a hybrid religion in South Africa that articulates Christianity through Nguni epistemologies and indigenous Zulu belief systems.

while causing ‘rapture in the flow of time’ (Muller, 1999: 84), living here and elsewhere simultaneously.

As is evident in my artistic work, there is a deep connection with and focus on the veneration of the ancestral paradigm. According to Etim (2013: 13), ‘the ancestors are dear forefathers [and foremothers] who were revered while alive because of their good standing in the society.’ As a result, ‘at death they become unfettered spirit, therefore, can interfere in the affairs of the living, and can also be approached by the living through rituals and sacrifices’ (Etim, 2013: 13). He concludes that the ontological premise of the notion of the afterlife or ‘re-incarnation’ builds on the ‘unfettered nature’ of the ancestors (Etim, 2013: 13). That is to say ‘the ancestors through projection could naturally be re-born while still existing in the spirit world’ (Etim, 2013: 13). An example of this could be found in notions of spirit possession.

While these views are significant to locate cosmological coordinates in Africa, it is also surrounded by the misperception that people in Africa worship their ancestors. I argue that ancestors are not worshipped, but acknowledged and honoured. Kanu (2013: 549) observes that in Igbo worldviews, the ancestors are ‘the guidance of morality and the owners of the soil.’ Furthermore, he asserts that the ancestral realm is similar to the ‘human world’, except that theirs is invisible while our is visible (Kanu, 2013: 549). Thus, when the ancestors are honoured in ritual, this is done ‘on the principle of reciprocity and philosophy of reincarnation: having been honoured, they are expected to reincarnate and do for the living members what they did for them’ (Kanu, 2013: 549). Ultimately, this becomes a cycle of continuities between the living and the living dead that hinges on ritual.

According to Nyamiti (1984), there are two distinct concepts of ancestorship. The first is ‘natural relationship’, which is based on one’s lineage in terms of bloodline, for instance parents and siblings. Such relationships can be ‘consanguinous or non-consanguinous’ in that they stretch beyond immediate family lines but can be found in ‘clan, tribe, religious sect or society’ lineages (Kanu, 2013: 550). The second type of ancestral relationships are ‘sacred or supernatural’. This relationship is based on the ‘consequence of [that particular ancestor’s] death’ (Kanu, 2013: 550), whereby one becomes a type of divinity that intervenes in humanity’s needs beyond any lineage-based terms. These ancestors join a network of divinities and spirits that functions as intermediaries between God and the humans (Mbiti,

1990, 74). Divinities should not be confused with the ancestors. Divinities in their inception were created as spirit, whereas the ancestors were once humans (Mbiti, 1990: 74).

Ultimately, it is the spirit worlds that provide guidance to the living. A major part of ritual practices has to do with creating passageways for this guided-ness. I had mentioned in Chapter One that mobility, as noted in Mavhunga (2014: 23), is guided by a broader network of spirits residing in the atmosphere, the clan ancestors and the sky divinities. These are the dimensions that find unity in ritual.

7. Rituals in African contexts

Having elaborated how, in my understanding, African cosmology relies on continuity and wholeness, I turn to ritual as a passageway in enacting the relationships between humans, universe, gods, ancestors and the yet-to-be-born.[39] Ritual[40] is a mode for religious expression through ceremonial actions or 'culturally-patterned-symbolic' actions based on particular values and belief systems (Etim, 2019: 1-2). Etim (2019: 1-2) provides an important definition of ritual for the purposes of this study, describing it as 'man's creative action as a symbolic being.' Put another way, ritual is a tool to maintain 'worldly and divine' relationships (Grillo in Bongmba, 2012: 112). In the section that follows I look at how improvisation inside the cosmologies and ritual contexts described here moves us towards a deeper understanding of the artistic practices of the musicians and artistic practices that concern me in this thesis. I am advocating for performances that, similar to ritual, maintain the connection between human beings, environment and the spiritual paradigms, and in doing so invoke *ntu*.

Somé (1999: 142) contends that ritual is a process of the 'gathering of people, under the protection of the spirit, [that] triggers a body of emotional energy aimed at bringing them very tightly together.' Thus, rituals represent a visible demonstration of what African peoples believe in – an embodiment of their values (Mbiti, 1975: 126) – but also a way of revealing these values at the deepest level (Wilson, 1954: 240). Wilson (1974: 240) concludes that ritual is 'an essential constitution of human societies.'

[39] This ensemble of relationships is also found in the unity of all four *ntu* categories outlined earlier.
[40] Ritual is a Latin-derived word for 'customs' or 'rites' (Etim, 2019: 1).

Given this context, through ritual 'Africans believe the spirit/force [or *ntu* in the case of this study], which is the fundamental substance in reality, can be harnessed and manipulated to their personal benefits' (Etim, 2013:15). Given the 'African Ontology' expressed in Etim (2019: 4) that perceives the African worldview as a 'unified whole with dual complements' – the spiritual and the physical – it is not farfetched to argue that ritual actions in the physical realm have 'spiritual inspirations and causations'. In this sense, the esoteric nature of ritual in Africa is a result of blurring the border line between the physical and the metaphysical which then informs a layer of spirit in African epistemology (Etim, 2019: 1). Thus, the fundamental position in ritual is to harness the spirit and restore connectedness between the physical and the metaphysical dimensions. Somé (1999: 141-142) posits that the practice of ritual is a way of 'binding a community together in a close relationship with spirit' while also maintaining 'balance between body and soul' of a spiritual being. It is important that rituals are practiced to restore harmony in the case of societal contradiction or disharmony with the cosmos (Etim, 2013: 16). Nabudere (2005: 4) warns that 'conflicts are part of these uncertainties of existence', and thus rituals can be understood as a 'reconciliation process in which the ancestors are implored to sanctify whatever is decided upon.'

Through prayers, dance, drumming, chants and invocations, the invitation to gather is extended to the spirit/invisible world (Mbiti, 1975: 127). This connection between the world and the spirit world is an important aspect of ritual and a strong focus of my artistic work. Somé (1999: 146) notes that 'ritual is a dance with the spirit, the soul's way of interacting with the Other World.' This suggests that ritual is divided into two aspects: the prepared aspects within which people choreograph events in a planned manner, and the unprepared aspects that are associated with the presence and the charge of the spirits (Somé,1999: 142).

There are various types of rituals, ranging from 'personal rituals' for pregnancy, birth, naming, initiation, marriage, eldership, death and afterlife, among many others (Mbiti, 1975: 127). Then there are also 'agricultural rituals' for farming and hunting, 'health rituals' with focus on healing, 'homestead rituals' to bless and protect the homestead and 'festivals', among others (Mbiti, 1975: 129-136). Most of these rituals in their context and detail as 'events' have been dealt with in Mbiti's seminal book *Introduction to African religions* (1975). For instance, in the context of a festival, rituals are also performed as a tool of passing on particular knowledges and belief systems from one generation to the next. In this sense, ritual ensures both continuities of traditional practices while playing the role of

bringing together beings in the space of gathering (Mbiti, 1975: 126), or creating wholeness. The continuities of traditional practices suggest that rituals in themselves are 'dialogical' and constantly in a process of 'competition, negotiation, and argumentation' (Drewal, 1988: 25). Rituals, in this sense, step beyond performing and reciting practices that are based on past articulations, and repeating them; rather, rituals are in the present and evolve with time.

Given the scope and focus of my own study, I will not deal with the details of each of these rituals as events, but instead I will focus on the shared cycles and frameworks that inform the carrying out of most ritual in (South) Africa. As mentioned before, the core intention is to return to the sound and expose commonalities between ritual cycles (and approaches) and improvised music. In another context, Maddumage and Samarasinghe (2019) note that ritual 'is a sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and performed according to set sequence.' This is of particular resonance with my own understanding of improvisation, which consider all these aspects or modalities within my own practice and that of my interlocutors. To further elaborate my understanding, I turn to Turner's (1969: 359) notion of 'liminality' which he discusses in the context of the various phases of ritual.[41]

Turner notes that ritual unfolds in three major stages: the separation stage, the liminal stage and the reincorporation stage. In the separation stage, an individual or a group is detached from their 'earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a "state"), or both' (1969: 359). Then follows the liminal stage which is characterized by what I call the 'unknown'. In this phase there is an ambiguity concerning the subject's 'cultural realm', where the subject moves into a phase that has 'few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state' (Turner, 1969: 359). Finally, the subject reaches the last stage of reincorporation where he/she 'is in a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-à-vis others of a clearly defined and "structural" type' (Turner, 1969: 359). Thus, the subject is expected to 'behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents of social position in a system of such positions' (Turner, 1969: 359).

The liminal phase is of great interest in my practice as a musician and in this study, as I will show in the coming sections where I bring this to bear on improvisation in jazz. Turner likens

[41] Also see van Gennep (1960), who is echoed in Turner.

liminality to 'death',[42] 'invisibility' 'being in the womb' or 'being in the wilderness' (Turner, 1969: 359). I understand these descriptions as operating in the symbolic paradigm and argue that the essence of ritual is to collapse into this unknown, an act of surrender, then to emerge as a renewed being that is reincorporated into its community, as Turner suggests.

In Somé's (1999: 151-157) terms, ritual process moves in four stages – preparation, invocation, healing and the closing – which I have adapted as conceptual framing in my own practice. The preparation stage entails the preparing and dressing of the ritual space itself, focusing on symbols and ambience to create a gateway into the sacredness of a given space (Somé 1999: 151-152).[43] The invocation stage centres around prayers, songs, drumming and chanting as a way of enticing and inviting the invisible world (gods, deities and ancestors) to gather in ritual (Somé 1999: 152). This is followed by the healing stage that verifies the 'success of ritual itself' (Somé, 1999: 154). Somé (1999: 154) argues that this particular stage is about hearing the voice of the spirit, or being 'elsewhere' as I want to suggest later in this research. In the healing stage, according to Somé, 'we must test our listening ability to see if it can include the low-frequency waves of the other planes', that is to say that 'healing includes hearing the sound that can move us to surrender to healing' (Somé 1999: 154). Here healing is understood as a surrendering[44] into a particular energy field; in this sense it is a deliberate act of succumbing. The final stage is the closing whereby the subject or the congregation pays gratitude and acknowledges the 'presence of Spirit' (Somé, 1999: 154). The final stage is also seen as release of the spirits back to the spirit dimension.

Closely related to both Turner and Somé's outlooks on ritual, Wilson (1954: 234) notes that in the context of Nyakyusa people the ritual framework moves between 'induction', 'seclusion', 'brooded over' and 'bringing out'. All three authors seem to agree upon a ritual process as that which moves from one paradigm of knowing to another. I read these transformative aspects of ritual as overlaps between the physical and the spirit worlds. In other words, rituals could be thought of as a (meta)physical expression of African cosmology towards a harmonious co-existence of all things.

[42] It is worth nothing that 'death' is a term that Zim Ngqawana often invoked in his work as a way of thinking about his practice.
[43] Space is a theme I revert to later as a way of looking at the bandstand.
[44] Surrender is a theme I invoke later when I speak about improvisation as ritual.

In Southern Africa (and in Bantu communities), as a way of connecting to song, *ngoma* could be understood as a hinge between the body and spirit worlds in a given ritual process. In a literal sense, *ngoma* is a shared word for ritual in various Bantu communities. While *ngoma* denotes ritual, there is a wholeness that resides in the practice of *ngoma* (Janzen, 1991: 290). As mentioned in Chapter One, *ngoma* has various meanings in different contexts: drum, drumming, singing, dancing, and 'the complex of constituent behavior and concepts' (Janzen, 1991: 290). A significant part of *ngoma* practices entails notions of divination, which consist of revealing that which is not obviously visible. As a practice in the Nguni culture, *ingoma* 'may last all night' during which 'shorter units of song: self-presented, and response' are performed (Janzen, 1991: 291-292). This practice takes place in various contexts: 'purification, celebration for established healers, or celebrative points in the initiatory course of novices' (Janzen, 1991: 292).

In the VhaVenda and BaPedi cultures a similar concept, called *malombo* (or sometimes *malopo*), is practiced. *Malombo* is an indigenous healing ritual that uses music, singing, drumming and dancing as a way of summoning the spirits in order for a healing vibration to occur (Dhavula, 2016: 1-3; 1-6). The practice of *malombo* is a 'bridge by means of which the living can reach the ancestors' (Dhavula, 2016: 2-15).

In the case of *ngoma*, during an initiation process[es] of becoming *isangoma* (healer), the function of 'song-dance' articulations is to 'punctuate the sufferer-novice's course through experience what we may call the white' (Janzen, 1991: 291). 'The white' is a translation of the Zulu term *umuntu omhlophe* that is used to describe the one who is in the initiation process going through training to become a *sangoma*. At an etymological level *isangoma* could be read as a hyphened word: *isa-ngoma*. While *isa-* references a thing that acts or behaves like, *ngoma* refers to song. In this sense *isa-ngoma* could be understood as the one who is possessed by song. This is also the case in *malombo*, where the ancestral spirits enter the sufferer through singing and dancing (see Dhavula, 2016). Du Toit notes: 'a person who is called by the spirits to wander woods and to become an *isangoma* has no control over this' (1971: 53). This further suggests that '*ngoma* brings together the disparate elements of an individual's life threads and weaves them into a meaningful fabric. It does this, particularly, through devices of mutual 'call and response, sharing of experience, of self- presentation, of articulation, of common affliction, of consensus over the nature of the problem, and the

course of action to take' (Janzen, 1991: 291). Part of what is believed is that a graduated *sangoma* should present *ingoma* (a song) received from the ancestors (Janzen, 1991: 292).

It is also important to understand that each healer adopts her/his own technique and method of divining. Among many types, there are 'stick diviners, bone diviners, *umlozi* (whistling doctors) who listen to the voices of the spirits, thumb diviners, heaven doctors who cause rain fall, *ukuvumisa* diviners who depend on verbal responses from those who are consulting to guide their statements' (Du Toit 1971: 53) and various other kinds. Another common characteristic is the use of dreams and visions to guide their process[es] of divination (Du Toit 1971: 53). What all of these techniques and methods have in common is that they connect the ones living and the living-dead (*idlozi*). Thus the core function of a healer is to vocalise the spirit of the ancestors from spirit dimensions to living beings (Bryant, 1917: 141). As we will see with my work and that of my interlocutors, the work of healing that is dealt with focuses on a much broader alignment with the cosmos. It is understood as a restoration of *ntu* through ritual states, rather than a traditional approach of healing via biomedicine (Thornton, 2017: 26). As Thornton (2017: 26-17) notes that 'it is not simply the person – as "body", "spirit", or "soul" – that the healer attempts to "work on" (*kusebenta*) and thus to heal, but rather the network of influences that affect the life of the person.' In the context of this, it is bringing the person (*umu-ntu*) back to a state of in-tune-ness or *ntu* using ritual strategies.

As noted by Grillo (in Bongmba, 2012: 112), 'African rituals are reflexive strategies seeking practical ends: they establish identity, elicit revelation, access divinity to foster empowerment, and effect transformation.' I situate my own artistic practice (and those of Tabane, Mhlongo, Mseleku and Ngqawana) as an improviser who is located in these cosmological frames, and healing works as a tool for creating alignment to *ntu*. In this way, I come to improvisation seeking to enunciate sounds as expressions and emanations from inside, living cosmological dimensions. Thus, I perform sounds as a 'reflexive strategy seeking practical ends' (Grillo in Bongmba, 2012: 112).

Chapter Three: Proposing new perspectives and vocabularies in improvised musics

The previous chapter outlined the 'world' (via cosmology) in which different peoples in Africa live, how they understand being (ontology) and perceive surrounding (epistemology). By extension, it also discussed the context(s) of ritual as a practice that keeps this African worldview intact. In discussing all these aspects, Chapter Two comes to an understanding that all existence, in the context explained, is a manifestation of *ntu* (or vital force) as proposed in the four categories of *muntu*, *kintu*, *hantu* and *kuntu*. I have also argued that *ntu* cosmology finds expression in two major principles: wholeness and continuity. Ritual, I argued, is a passageway for maintaining a continuous relationship with the whole in which music takes a central place.

These concepts, assembled into an approach, present a novel vocabulary for engaging with artistic work conducted under the broad aegis of South African jazz. While these themes are present in varying ways within the artistic practices of the interlocutors I present in this thesis, they have not been made explicit in academic discourse; nor have they been connected in the ways I suggest here. Similarly, while spirituality in Africa has been discussed in various texts, as I have shown in Chapter Two, there is no obvious counterpoint between these texts and improvised musics. As a response to such lacunae, this chapter takes a particular interest in *ntu* cosmology (and African cosmology broadly) to locate (improvised) music and its inherent properties. In doing so, this chapter follows an explorative and transdisciplinary method that employs *ntu* cosmology both as a conceptual home and a point of departure that opens to deeper understandings of the practice of improvisation in (South) Africa.

This chapter presents my own reading of these two subjects (music and cosmology), based on knowledge as a practicing jazz improviser and an insider in Zulu (and broader South African) cosmologies. This positionality enables me to build a paradigm for thinking about improvised music as sonic manifestation(s) residing within particular cosmologies here in (South) Africa. In this sense, I argue that cosmology, ontology and epistemology discussed in the previous chapter, collectively, inform the ways we make and experience sound/music while also providing tools for thinking/writing about music in meaningful ways that produce alternative vocabularies. I have shown that *ntu* cosmology already has a vocabulary, and in this chapter I

explore what such a vocabulary, situated as a space for theory and conceptualisation, offers improvised music. The surfacing of these vocabularies inside improvised music produces novel perspectives. Here I introduce notions such as 'breaking into sound', 'the throwing of the bones', 'elsewhere', 'guided-ness' and 'bandstand theory', among others, as options for engaging with improvised musics situated in the cosmology I have outlined. These constructions of conceptual frameworks are some of the major interventions of this study.

Consequently, this chapter plays a role of introducing and proposing a language and a vocabulary that will assist in navigating the relevance of *ntu* cosmology towards a deeper understanding of improvised musics in South African jazz. In Chapter Eight, I build from this constructed language and expound into theorisation of my own artistic practice, based on an understanding of the sonic in the paradigm of *ntu*.

1. Some Aspects of Sound and Orientation

My study seeks to read and understand sound (and by extension music), as results, expressions, manifestations and elaborations of a situated-ness in specific cosmological spheres. Here, sound is understood as a 'vehicle for articulating an abstract idea [in sonic means]' (Adegbite, 1991: 45). Sound is therefore both evocative and mystical, and music is an embodied expression of wholeness (or *ntu*), and thus forms 'a bridge between ideas and phenomena' (Adegbite, 1991: 45). While this sentence spells out the definitions for 'sound' and 'music' for the purposes of this section, these distinctions blur when considered within the wholism invoked in the concept of *ngoma*. There is therefore a measure of interchangeability in my usage beyond this section, where 'sound' and 'music' point to each other.

Sound and music sing out of their situatedness in cosmologies. I do not subscribe to the idea of sound or music in 'conventional' Western musical terminologies and vocabularies, as I deem them inadequate to express, in meaningful ways, the sound/music contexts I intend to discuss. This study understands the limitations of viewing African musics through Western lenses, a position that favours a 'European or Eurocentric agenda, placing its music as the standard measurement, thereby creating tensions particularly for African continental researchers, musicians, and composers' (Kidula, 2006: 100). I therefore dismiss the

overstated (and at times exoticized) 'rhythmic' and 'polyrhythmic' notions of African music (while leaving other parameters such as melody and harmony unattended found in ethnomusicological literature in the late '50s to '60s (Pooley, 2018: 179-180) and the implications of those legacies, often written from a European perspective (see Blum, 1991 and Agawu, 2003). I also steer away from the attempt to discuss African music inside a singular narrative (or a 'continental musicology') that diminishes 'its diversity to substantiate the claim that shared principles of musical structure and function in sub-Saharan cultures can be read as ideal types for the continent as a whole' (Pooley, 2018: 177). Informed by this background, and consistent with the issues of the ~~colonial~~ library raised in Chapter One, this study does not approach sounds through a musicological lens; rather, it focuses on sound as located in *ntu* cosmology. In moments where this study engages with particular musical moments in the sonic meditations or elsewhere, it engages through listening/hearing sound as a modality of/for knowing, and considers how the sounds interact with the wholeness of being.

I regard sound, and by extension music, as a manifestation that is preceded by something: a thought, a feeling or an intention within cosmological situatedness. My interest is therefore located in that which lives inside the sonic (intention), the functionality of music, the moment of sound production as manifestation (what I term a 'breaking into sound'), the spirit guided-ness in sound-making, and, ultimately, how all this happens with a situatedness in cosmology. In this sense, I discuss sounds particularly in the contexts of their potency in 'ritual-like' states. In this section I borrow from a range of materials (and lexicons) that might have not been previously explored in paired contexts, such as *ntu* and improvisation, *ngoma* or *malombo* and jazz, improvisation and ritual, *umsamu* and the jazz bandstand among others. The perspectives I explore here are not conventional in extant literature on jazz in South Africa. I think and write towards producing a (South) African cosmologically-based mode for playing-thinking-writing about sound (and by extension music), which is crucial for coming to terms with the region's particularised socio-spiritual meanings of sound.

I maintain that music can be heard, understood and felt differently if perceived or heard from an emic perspective and a communal ethos. This kind of hearing is based on the communal aspects of *ntu* cosmology. As Agawu (2007: 2) asserts, inspiration arises from 'an awareness of a primal togetherness' of the presence of others; to which I specifically add, those of the unseen spirits. Thus, the meaningfulness of a given music relies on the 'participatory

framework.' This participatory framework is the essence of *ntu*; it is the articulation of wholeness. Looking towards the artistic practices of Tabane, Mhlongo, Mseleku, Ngqawana, and also in my own, I suggest that in seeking to define music in Africa inside a participatory framework, it is important to imagine it as part of a broader universal existence. Meki Nzewi articulates this 'broader universal existence' in the following manner:

> Music in traditional Africa is the science of being; the art of living with health. Music is the intangible resonance of which the human body and soul are composed: The human body is the quintessential sound instrument; the human soul is the ethereal melody. A matching of human souls is the foundation of African harmonic thought and sound. (Nzewi, 2002: 2)

2. Towards the break

According to Zulu sacred mythology of creation, it is said that in the beginning of times, Umvelinqangi (God, or the one who appeared first) and later, *abantu* (humanity) broke off the reeds (*ukudabuka ohlangeni*) (a source that documents this mythology is Callaway, 1970: 2). *Ukudabuka* means 'to separate, or to spring or break off, from something by fissure or division' (Callaway, 1970: 1) and *uhlanga* means the reeds, or sometimes may refer to the earth. For instance, some Zulu people refer to themselves as Abasohlangeni, the one that broke off the reeds. It is worth noting that in some parts of KwaZulu Natal people still practice rituals and celebrations of the reeds, such as 'Umkhosi Wohlanga', as annual events surrounding origin story. In the mythology, it is suggested that God and humanity broke off 'from an eternal or at least pre-existent spiritual being' (Callaway, 1970: 2), which also links with the ancestral belief systems and conceptions of the gods of the Bantu peoples as highlighted in Chapter Two. In this sense, *ukudabuka* refers to origin, a manifestation of a portion from the whole. Thus, when the Zulu people invoke this term, it signifies where their early ancestors came from. It is within this cosmological understanding that I want to discuss some conceptions of sound in Zulu traditions that locate songs as emerging from the greater spiritual sources as vital forces (*ntu*).

I term the synchronicity of *ntu* dimensions inside the sonic as 'the breaking into sound', understood as the collapse of the borders between the physical and the spiritual. It gives

recognition to the way my community 'came to sound' in my upbringing. This was most evident in *sangoma* ceremonies and the Zionist churches, where people would say, for instance, 'besihleli savukwa usinga', meaning 'we were caught by a sudden inspiration that led to our singing'. I argue that in order for music to occur, a sound-world needs to open, and this world is 'elsewhere'. In the context of this study, elsewhere refers to spiritual paradigms that co-exist with the physical world bounded inside the onto-triad (the living, the living dead and the ones not yet born). Growing up in KwaZulu Natal, the elders would refer to initial moments of sound enunciation in these ways: 'uqhume ngengoma' (she/he burst [broke] into song) or 'uvukwe ingoma' (a song arose in her/his spirit) or 'uhaqwe ingoma' (she/he is immersed in song) or 'ufikelwe ingoma' (song visited him/her). There are many other examples of spoken phrases that refer to this breaking into song, or song arising or visiting from elsewhere. In this sense, song (similar to being) has a pre-existence and the breaking into sound is the moment of song emerging into audibility. This analogy suggests that song/music is part of a metaphysical reality that is constantly alive, an ancestral paradigm. Thus, the breaking into sound signifies surrender to a force greater that ourselves, a moment of tapping into the unknown (elsewhere). I regard 'surrender' as a field of discovery and an unfolding of revelations from the spirit dimension. Explained another way, songs could be thought of as messages from our ancestors that require of us a particular receptive posture in order to receive.

Surrender could also be described as a posture cultivated through ritual in service of readiness to receive a particular message carried inside song. It is a bridge to spirit paradigms. In this moment of ritual, a surrender, there is a break that occurs for meaning to be translated. In isiZulu a word for surrender is *ukuvuma*, which means both to agree and to sing. The phenomenon of *ukuvuma* is also invoked in the *sangoma* vocabulary when one is initiated to *ukwethwasa* (the becoming). The word 'uvumile' is used in this regard, which means she/he has agreed. In other words, she/he has obeyed the voice of the ancestor that seeks to speak through her/him. The idea of 'call and response' is a recognized formal principle in African music, but in this study I want to suggest an expanded notion of call and response that operates between the physical and spirit worlds. This suggests that to surrender is an agreement to listen and dialogue with the spirit-world. In other words, it is a way of sensing-hearing (*ukuzwa*)[45] inside a ritual-state (to be here and elsewhere all at once). This

[45] In isiZulu we use the same word 'ukuzwa' to denote both sensing and hearing.

could be likened to *ukwebhula* (the throwing of the bones or divination) that uses physical objects, such as bones and shells to cite and reveal a message from elsewhere inside a ritual-state.

I therefore posit singing as a breaking into the wholeness of being, an invocation of essence and a form of agreement between the singer and the broader *ntu* cosmology. Hence some elders in Nguni cultures, in my experience, have argued that the word *ukucula* (to sing) is a foreign word in Zulu or Xhosa languages. Some say that this word was popularised by the missionaries in ~~colonial~~ South Africa. Taking a close reading into the word — having explored the etymology of the word with various elders from my village and elsewhere — I argue that the word *cula* came as a result of the mispronouncing of the world *cwila*, which means to dissolve or be deeply immersed in a given state. Thus, to break into sound is to be aware of your being as connected to a world and ancestral realm where 'singing' never stops — in other words, to be inside in an 'altered-state' of consciousness — to experience *ntu*.

3. The context of personhood and song in *ntu* cosmology

Having discussed the various manifestations of *ntu* in cosmological terms in Chapter Two, I here demonstrate how music and sound form part of the *ntu* expressions in a particular way. If we were to situate music within the four *ntu* dimensions proposed in Kagame (1961) and mentioned earlier, then music will fall within the category of *kuntu*, which represents a 'state or quality of being of that which has been fashioned/created' (Imhotep 2012:13). In this sense, sound and music could be understood as manifestations of *ntu*, which carry similar properties of wholeness and continuity. For instance, wholeness could describe collaboration between musicians or between the music and spirit dimensions, and continuity can be applied as a concept to view musical form inside a ritual state. Such a view also exposes other relationships that music has with other *ntu* categories beyond *kuntu*, understood as the realm of aesthetic. For instance, *muntu* is invoked as a being that performs and experiences and who, by extension, is connected to ancestors, gods and divinities. Thus, while *umuntu* performs the music, he is constantly in the presence and connected to the spirit world/beings, a breaking into wholeness. When music is conceptualised within the relationship of *kuntu* and *muntu*, its spiritual-ness becomes self-evident, or even a default ontological proposition. The artist in this sense operates within an expanded notion of being (*muntu*) that involves spirit dimensions. This connection of the spirit and music via *muntu* is a significant hinge in this

study. By extension, music also invokes *kintu* and *huntu*, which provide the environment and surrounding, time and space within which a given performance is experienced and which could also be 'altered' through ritual states.

I propose that the interconnectedness of these categories (or the four *ntu* dimensions) articulates the wholeness that characterizes African cosmology, but also a wholeness of views on sound. What this perspective crucially foregrounds is that music does not happen outside of a broader field of being that seeks wholeness and continuity. That is to say, the music maker is viewed within an expanded notion of person that is inextricable from ancestors, gods and divinities within time and space. In this spirit, music making can be viewed as fundamentally a participatory act, not only at the level of performers/audiences (as suggested in notions of 'call and response'), but also in how such a view involves participation of spirit beings, environment, time and space — as invoked in *ntu*.

In keeping with this idea of music making as a participatory act, Ramose argues that 'the dance of be-ing is an invitation to participate actively in and through the music of be-ing rather than being a passive spectator thereof' (Ramose, 2005: 43). In my native tongue, we say *akudlulwa ngendlu yakhiwa*, which means: in an event where some gather with a collective mission, one cannot pass by without participating. In this sense, participation is both an 'ontological and epistemological imperative' and thus it is 'indeclinable' (Ramose, 2005: 43). Ramose (2005: 43) further asserts that a refusal to participate in such circumstances is a form of out-of-tune-ness and by contrast, 'to dance along with being is to attune to be-ing.' This view has its roots in the philosophies of *ubuntu* that posit existence in 'the universe as a musical harmony' (Ramose, 2005: 43). This suggests that being, according to *ubuntu*, is to be 'persistently in search for harmony in all spheres of life' (Ramose, 2005: 43). These aspects of (South) African cosmology, I argue, are the properties of (or what lives inside) sound. As such, *ntu* propels 'coming into sound' as the general attitude within *ubuntu* as concept. In other words, within such a perspective people come to music looking for a harmonious vibration with *ntu*. In this way, music making can be viewed as a practice of being in the world that is in a constant search for wholeness. I argue that the potencies of African music are in its relationship with *ntu* and how sounds are invitations oriented towards the restoration of wholeness and continuity. If we were to follow this line of thought, it is allows for the proposition that the fundamental force in (South) African music is directed

towards restoring collectiveness that informs broader aspects of life and being within *ntu* paradigms.

In the same vein, *ubuntu* could be (as I will show through my interlocutors) an approach in a bandstand context during improvised musics where the shared musical ideas are 'invitations' that are indeclinable. These invitations overlap between the bandmates, the audience, the space and time and the spirit dimensions – an invocation of wholeness (*ntu*). Thus, jazz improvisation in South Africa, as this study proposes through its selection of interlocutors, could be understood as this dancing along with an expanded understanding of dimensions and participants, which produces an in-tune-ness heard in a band sound. In this sense, breaking into sound is a breaking into essence (*ntu*). Here the band sound becomes a manifestation of *kuntu*, but also a projection or a symbol of being in the world.

If one imagines sounds as invitation (a call), then the responses could also be understood as a kind of agreement. In IsiZulu, another word for singing is *ukuvuma* (to agree). This word also means 'to surrender', the importance of which has already been articulated. Surrender, or *ukuvuma* in this context, can be understood as way of invoking essence and dissolving into a broader totality of being. Given the earlier discussion on rituals, it follows that music, in ritual contexts, enables people to keep the *ntu* cosmology intact.

4. On surrender and guided-ness

If the art of improvisation is a form of surrender, then in the liminal space one submits to a spiritual guided-ness. In the case of a ritual ceremony, Somé (1999: 142) reminds us that the 'gathering of people' in ritual happens under the guidance of the spirit. Mavhunga (2014: 23) terms this process 'guided mobility', and argues that all actions in the paradigms of the living are guided by the spirit realm. In this sense, the visible and the invisible are 'hidebound together' as all aspects of life are understood to be spiritual (Mavhunga, 2014: 24). Surrender could therefore be interpreted as a field of intentionally opening the self to guided-ness.

In the context of the VaShona people, to be an expert in any artform (*unyanzvi*) is understood as a working together of spirit, talent, skills and knowledge understood as *mashave* (Mavhunga, 2014: 32). This is also the case with playing a musical instrument, with the subsequent understanding that someone who performs at an exceptional level is deemed to be possessed by the spirit of the ancestors (*vadzimu*) that guide the talent. The spirit is even

acknowledged in the naming of some indigenous instruments, such as *mbira dza vadzimu* (the mbira of the ancestors). In some Zimbabwean folklore, as I heard from the elders on two occasions during visits to Bulawayo, it is believed that the first generation of mbiras were not built by man but were collected from the ancestral spirits of the underworlds and brought to the riverbanks of Zimbabwe by the mermaids. Thus, the spirit is understood as important since it is believed to guide the performance of a particular music. That is to say, performance is a field of discovery. Travelling as if on a pilgrimage, a master musician, drummer or poet would first consult *vadzimu* (the spirits of the ancestors) 'to guide them in their practices' (Mavhunga, 2014: 18).

In my upbringing, the elders considered the highest level of proficiency in playing music as an inheritance from an ancestor that lived before. They would say: 'udlala sengathi wayilalela emathuneni', which means 'you play as though you slept at the cemetery and in dream, you were taught by the ancestors'. This is a very common phrase in KwaZulu Natal to commend greatness, especially among maskanda guitar players. In the Eastern Cape I once met an elderly man who claimed to have been guided to spend three nights at the cemeteries, after which he woke up knowing how to play the guitar. He continued to tell me that the ancestors broke the sixth string and to this day he only plays the five strings that were left. This suggests a deep connection between spirit worlds and some registers of musicking in South Africa, to which I will turn in my engagements with my interlocutors and the particular commitment of each individual and his/her music to spirituality.

Breaking into sound can be thought of as the moment of tapping into inspiration that is eternal and beyond the limitations of human imagination. In other words, what I term 'the unknown' (in the context of improvisation) can be understood as the manifestation of sounds from elsewhere, a moment of surrender (*ukuvuma*) allowing the ancestral voices to speak through an instrument. It is within this moment that the notions of improvisation and embellishment become blurred. On the one hand, improvisation, in jazz contexts, often concerns spontaneous creation of new melodic/harmonic/rhythmic motifs over a familiar chord structure. On the other, in most African music, embellishments could be understood as organic unfolding of what resides in the state of sonic potentiality. In other words, through repetition of musical motifs, music organically 'steps out' of the original theme stated by an improviser, and breaks into endless fields of possibilities from elsewhere. In this way, both the improvised material and the embellishments could be considered as breaking into sound

in different ways.

Indeed, breaking into sound could be described as a process of guided-ness that moves between the known (a stable identity/familiar surrounding) into the unknown or a liminal phase (where one exists in a state of suspension). It is in this unknown through which the voice of the ancestor vocalises. In other words, *ntu* is revealed when wholeness and continuity between the material and spiritual are evoked. Similarly, improvisation in jazz could be thought of as the harmonisation of the physical and spiritual paradigms, while the intention of composition is to create music in an energy field that allows the artist to surrender to the broader cosmic sounds that are constantly awaiting the 'break.' Hence most traditional music in (South) Africa tends to focus on repetitive musical motifs resulting in a time-space overlap. It is the meditativeness of the music that allows the borders between the physical and spiritual to collapse, enabling the breaking into the music of the spirit dimensions. In this sense, meditative sounds can be understood as multiple invitations of the whole and essence towards a mode of guided-ness.

5. A look into ritual strategies

While the above section refers mainly to the collectiveness of people and sounds, spirit worlds, time and space as *ntu* manifestations, here I emphasize the spirit component of sound as part of a collective essence. I am particularly interested in locating music in ritual contexts and how such an approach allows an invocation of wholeness with the onto-triadic nature of being that is central in (South) African cosmology. In other words, the gathering of people (in ritual) is by extension an invitation to the spirit dimensions (those not-yet-born and those who have passed). In Chapter Two I discussed ritual in a broader sense; in this section I seek to highlight two main rituals in South Africa, namely *ngoma* and *malombo*, by way of foregrounding the music aspect of ritual.

I understand improvisation as ritual, particularly the practices of *ngoma* and *malombo*, which Thornton (2017: 45) describes as 'modes of knowledge practice[s]'. The notion of wholeness finds particular expression in *ngoma* and *malombo*, during which the performer performs a song (singing) while s/he is also thinking about movement and gestures (dance), the time and space he/she is in, and how they are dressed. All of these performance actions are activated in a ritual context that, through its directedness, provides the intensity of the vibration in a given

experience. Within this experience, the relationship with the world is altered. In *ngoma*, for example, the abilities of the participants are heightened, sometimes to a point of a prophetic state where things happening in other dimensions can be revealed. During divination one is believed to enter the realm of the ancestor, which is in itself an altered state, where meanings may be cited and understood as coming from the ancestors.

This provides a critical insight into the thinking behind the function and role of song in *ngoma* and *malombo*. *Ngoma* is based on the totality of all *ntu* dimensions as being in conversation. Thus music emerges from 'the whims, creative changes and artistic bursts of conversations between participants' (Janzen, 2000: 55) but also the environment and the spirit dimensions. In this sense, there is something that precedes sound (for instance in *ngoma* rituals) that provides sound with its intention. Ritual enables this breaking into sound, this moment of the collapse in borders between material and spiritual worlds towards engendered wholeness. Similarly, the *malopo* (or *malombo* rituals) of the BaPedi people of South Africa transcends entertainment, 'but acts as a cohesive force and a healing between BaPedi and the ancestral realm' (Lebeka, 2018: 2). *Malopo* in the Sepedi context refers to a complex of disorders believed to be the result of possession by ancestral spirits, which can only be cured through the therapeutic ritual of performing the *malopo* dance (and by implication, through musical performance; Lebeka, 2018: 2).

Improvised music, ritualized, happens 'elsewhere' in a state of liminality conducive to breaking into sound. In this way, music performance, as it relates to trance, meditation and spirit possession widens how one understands experience in a way that transcends physical surroundings, but also involves spirit presence. Music in this context is not the end in itself but the beginning of a journey. That is to say, sound breaks into a multiplicity of being in the world. Wholeness, as multiplicity ritualized, becomes a central indicator for sound production in ritual contexts. In other words, sounds breaks into a state of multiplicity, here and elsewhere, sounding being as simultaneous and plural. I argue that the invocation of existing music during ritualized improvised performance constitutes a form of citation of sounds and texts from spirit dimensions. In this sense, the primary objective of improvisation in the context of *ngoma* and *malombo* could be understood as an the act of surrendering into the greater wholeness of all past and present (musical) being.

In seeking to connect ritual practices and approaches in improvised music, I return to Turner (1969) and Somé (1999). According to Turner (1969: 359), ritual moves through three major stages entailing separation, liminality and reincorporation. Somé (1999: 151-157) proposes that ritual moves through preparation, invocation, healing and the closing. My interest is in understanding how improvised jazz relates to these theories of ritual. One could think of the separation stage as the hours of intense practice that most improvisers invest to establish relationships between themselves and their instruments. Or one could view the preparation and invocation stages as the processes of preparing space (*umsamu* and *ukuphahla*),[46] and those of citing sonic gestures from the musicians who came before (the ancestors) as a way of inviting their spirits (thus invoking properties of *muntu*). *Ukuphahla* is a ritual used to invoke spirit dimensions through libations as a passageway to communicating with the ancestors.

While exploring these ritual stages in various ways throughout the study, I give priority to the concept of liminality here. I had already indicated earlier that Turner likens liminality to 'death', 'invisibility', 'being in the womb' or 'being in the wilderness' (Turner, 1969: 359). Expanding from these notions, I have also argued that in my own understanding the liminal phase is a stage of unknown (and surrender) and thus, can only be known through experience.

In my own practice I think of improvisation in three stages: the known, unknown and new knowing. The known concerns pre-rehearsed thematic materials and sonic vocabularies explored by a given improviser over many years. The known enables a practice directed towards mastery. The unknown deals with improvisation (and embellishments in other instances) in a state of 'surrender' as part of the liminal phase. The new knowing entails new relationships with what was known before breaking into the unknown (liminality). In the jazz vocabulary these stages could be loosely compared to the notions of the 'head' (which is a written/composed theme), 'solo' (which pushes composed materials into new possibilities) and 'head out' (a reprise back to the main theme after improvised sections). Although this is a standard sequence, well known to jazz practitioners, my improvisational stages are more clearly directed towards epistemological encounters, and less linear in a diachronic sense. In other words, my staged approach to improvisation directly addresses forms of knowing and knowledge, and does so in a way that does not preclude the unknown from preceding the known, or the new knowing from informing circling back to the unknown.

[46] A ritual used as a passage to communicating with ancestors and invocation of spirit dimensions.

Closely related to *ngoma* and *malombo*, which are the key underpinning ritual concepts in this study, I introduce the sequence of *ukuthwasa* (initiation as a healer). Similar to the ritual stages described above, *ithwasa* (an initiate) exists within this continuous state of emergence into a new state of being. Based on my own experiences, I propose that *ukuthwasa* moves through three main stages: acceptance, emergence and new self. In the acceptance stage one acknowledges the calling as a text from the ancestors via a dream or a vision and acknowledges its authenticity. The emergence stage is the moment of being extracted from the village to an unfamiliar environment via a liminal phase in pursuing the gift. Finally, the new self is realized in an intimate co-existence with the ancestral worlds. This brings us to a sequence I already introduced, but now with a diachronically unfolding sense of time: known-unknown-new-knowing.

I contend that sound/music/song in these contexts plays a role of divinition, and in so-doing blurs strict distinctions between sound and text. While sounds produce aesthetic beauty, they are simultaneously evoking and generating divine spiritual messages. Thus, at an epistemological level, as already noted with regard to 'be-ing', *ntu*, *ingoma* and *malombo* articulations could also be 'conceived as a perpetual and universal movement of sharing and exchange of the forces of life' (Ramose, 2005: 41). Similarly, in healing, divination or in song, *ngoma* practice could be understood as this 'exchange of the forces of life' (Ramose, 2005: 41). In this sense, participation is a way of experiencing existence, or to be in the moment. This is an integral aspect of how I regard ritual, and my artistic practice. But it is also an exercise of being in all time-space logics (here and elsewhere) which contribute towards harmonizing with *ntu*.

The artistic meditations I present as integrated with this writing, are best approached as rituals, i.e. ways of making sense of being, the spirit worlds and surrounding environments. Ritual in the context described here could be summarised as a singular connection of the body and spirits, space and time. In other words, it is a total manifestation and synchronicity of all four *ntu* dimensions explained earlier.

6. Mapping out bandstand perspectives

Given the above views on performance as ritual, it becomes possible to rethink the notion of the bandstand beyond the norm (a performance space), and to imagine it as a space of

multiple occurrences, a 'sacred space.' 'Sacred' here is understood as a place 'where the spirit occurs' (Somé, 1997: 73) and where time can be suspended. What happens if the bandstand space is viewed as a space of ritual? For one thing, 'preparation' would mean that the space itself requires both symbolic and spiritual devising, a ritualization, re-inscription with the divine and with spirit. In discussing 'the ritual process,' Somé (1999: 151-152) asserts that the symbolism in ritual space is a means of 'keeping the psyche focused away from the turbulence of everyday life.' In other words, ritual space should transcend the ordinary; hence the use of ornaments in African rituals to appease and invite presence of the spirits. Similarly, various artists (as I will show in the next chapters) have approached their work on the bandstand as sacred, in that there is a constant invocation of the invisible paradigms or symbolic reference to spirit dimensions.

I hold that such artistic approaches take seriously the orientation and the importance of being socialized in particular cosmologies, such as those described in Chapter Two. In most Nguni homesteads (and beyond) there is a sacred place called *umsamu* where the ancestors are addressed via *ukuphahla*. It is a place where the ancestors are believed to reside and it is often found in a homestead's main hut (Berglund 1976: 102), where the ancestors are respectfully appeased. Nguni people believe that some of the most powerful ancestral spirits speak through sounds and melodies during *umsamu*, which is also a process that unfolds in *umsamu* the place. This process takes place through *umlozi* (a whistling spirit) that speaks from *umsamu* through ventriloquism. This whistling spirit projects itself from the walls as a sonic manifestation of the voice of the spirit. As a child, I experienced this spirit during a consultation with a healer. The chosen ones (*izangoma*) are able to interpret and translate the melodies of *umlozi* to the people who seek help (Bryant, 1917: 141; Berglund, 1976: 89). The interpretations of *umlozi* is another iteration of sonic citation.

Umsamu carries physical, spiritual and auditory presences, not unlike the space of the bandstand that allows multiple projections of here and elsewhere (for both the performers and the audience). Within the cosmological viewpoint, the bandstand/performance space (similar to *umsamu*) could be viewed as a space of worship, prayer, sacrifice, consultation, confession and a meeting place with the ancestors. It is something like Somé's dialogic place (1997: 74) in ritual contexts, enabling an entering 'into a kind of solemn dialogue with the spirit and with ourselves.' Somé writes: 'When we call in somebody who doesn't have a physical form, we are giving a different contour to the place that we are sharing with other people.' In the

context of my work, I use musical phrases that occur in the music of my ancestors to open invitations to spirit presence.

For Somé, 'the ritual space is opened whenever the spirit is invoked' (1997: 74). What makes the space sacred is the invitation and invocation of spirit via the core intention of a given ritual or a performance. As Somé notes, 'when you invoke the spirit world you initiate a different context or condition by bringing in witnessing that is non-human' (1997: 73). It is this altered view of space and suspended time that occupies my artistic practice as it concerns the bandstand, and that pertain in some form or other to all the spiritually-informed artists discussed in this work. By extension, the concept of space and time in their practices are understood as properties of the broader *ntu* analogies.

7. Improvisation through divination

The supernatural is important to this study as a way to move towards wholeness; and improvised music discussed in this research is constantly invoking the connections between multiple worlds. A significant part of the artistic practices of Tabane, Mhlongo, Mseleku and Ngqawana concern themselves with aspects of the unknown (liminality). In this manner, I believe, their sound is constantly progressing towards divining what lives elsewhere. I posit that through improvisation, insights and meanings are brought to audiences in the form of sound. Therefore, improvised music, in the context of this study, is central to connecting the worlds of the living, living dead and not-yet-born, and African notions of divination. That is to say, the improvised musics I discuss here are always oriented towards revealing some kind of newness or breaking into other spatial and temporal dimensions.

I propose in my artistic practice, and in this written explication, the notion of 'sonic citations' as technologies that bring forth messages from the ancestors. Divination can be understood as 'fundamentally a quest into the unrepresentable or unspeakable which lies buried in one's shadowy side or unconscious otherness of self' (Devisch in Bongmba, 2012: 80). It is this 'unspeakable' for which the sonic, as a result of improvisation, offers a language, and this language, I hold, is the voice of elsewhere. In this sense, divination 'is a process involving complex – bodily, affect-laden, sensory, mediumnic, artistic – folds of skills of human consciousness' (Devisch in Bongmba, 2012: 79). Divination rests on a 'fundamental unknowability' (Croucamp, 2013), and the fact that the universe is unpredictable due to

multiplicity and overlap of existence. Divination in this way embraces the possibility of 'inter-world interconnectivity' (Devisch in Bongmba, 2012: 79); in other words, while the throwing of the bones happens in physical dimensions, it seeks to interpret meaning of elsewhere. It is the process of drawing from the liminal space and making the unknown knowable. This suggests that what we do not know as humans is always already known elsewhere. This knowledge is available, I argue and demonstrate in my artistic practice, to the improviser or a *sangoma*. In essence, divination is a form of improvisation, a performed language overlapping between time and space.

The art of improvised music practices in South Africa, I contend, precedes the development of jazz cultures of the early 1900s. Here I want to propose that it is the 'jazz-iness' that connects (South) Africa to jazz (understood as an African American artform) via the shared properties in improvisation that possess African origins. It is, for me, an article of faith that ancient music practices explore and interpret a totality of being that encompasses all aspects of *ntu*. These are the technologies of our ancestors (what I term ritual technology), and I am proposing that these indigenous knowledge systems can provide deeper and cosmologically situated connections with the various practices in South African improvised musics. In order to argue this, I will, in the following chapters, engage with the artistic practices of Tabane, Mhlongo, Mseleku and Ngqawana as particularly relevant approaches to improvisation that are situated within (South) African cosmologies. In these chapters I will look at how these artists regarded improvisation in their artistic practices and/or words, building on the vocabularies and ideas developed above.

What follows is my own sonic ritual meditations, which cite and dialogue with the sonics/rituals/meditations of my interlocutors. I regard this sonic realm as a major site for theorizing, as it points us to the cosmology that this study explicates. Here I argue that listening to these sounds is as important as reading their accompanying texts. It is another mode of sense-making; the sounds enunciate where written texts do not reach. This is expressed in the IsiZulu word *ukuzwa*, which refers to both hearing and feeling. The elders in my village would say 'ulahlekelwe imizwa, akaseyena umuntu', meaning that he/she has lost his/her senses (or sense of hearing) and thus he/she is no longer human. Elsewhere, in the Basotho context, in an exploration of 'African mathematical linguistics' and 'morphological strategies' of African ancients, Zulu (2022) notes that:

> The Sesotho word Tseba has two parts namely (1) Tse and (2) Ba. Tse is about the sensing and Ba is about the pluralistic principles of knowing. Thus, Tseba says in order to know you must know about sensory knowledge and the plurality of knowing as confirmed in Tsebe (ear) which is a sensing organ of plurality.

This suggests that there is an epistemological dimension to hearing suggested by these morphological paradigms. Ergo, I suggest that to experience *ntu* cosmology, as expressed in the sonic ritual meditations to follow, is to be able to hear/sense. In this way, the sonic allows an opportunity to hear/sense elsewhere. This is experiencing the breaking into sound, a surrender to *ntu* wholeness.

Chapter Four: Philip Tabane and the concept of Malombo

First sonic meditation - The spirit of Malombo: Mato

Available: https://vimeo.com/africaopen/download/758205991/5f3024d83e
https://vimeo.com/758205991
Password: @VisserClari9105

The opening in this sonic meditation features the *phalaphala*, the BaSotho horn. In most parts of Africa, animal horns are traditionally used to make a call to the ancestors: in rites of passage, declarations of war and other types of gathering including hunting. For this meditation, the sound of the horn is applied metaphorically as a text, an invitation to Tabane that he responds to via the echo. Essentially, what follows is a dialoguing based on listening back. The *phalaphala*, in this meditation, symbolizes an itinerary into the unknown.

Tabane comes to mind foremost among the pioneering jazz musicians of his generation who, earlier in their careers in the 1960s, created explicit connections between music and their surrounding cultural concepts in South Africa. In the 1950s musicians embraced jazz as an artform that was mainly American-derived and thus, for the most part, their learning and practice were based on imitation of their American counterparts.[47] In this chapter's reading of Tabane's life and works through *malombo*, I suggest that his orientation stemmed from his significant connection to the place and space in which he was culturally situated, which anchored his cosmological standpoint. Given the political climate in which Tabane begins his career during apartheid in South Africa, I read Tabane's deliberate embrace of Venda culture (and *malombo* more specifically) as a mode of refusal of Western epistemologies. Moreover, Tabane is part of the group of musicians who remained in South Africa in the 1960s (or 'inxiles', to borrow a term used by Washington, 2012), when prominent musicians such as trumpeter Hugh Masekela and Miriam Makeba among others, fled into exile due to unbearable conditions under the apartheid regime in South Africa.

All of the above, in the context of this study, makes Tabane an interesting figure with regards to how one can construct an alternative path and language, via cosmology, for engaging improvisation in jazz in ~~postcolonial~~ South Africa. In this sense, I write this chapter not as a biography of Tabane in a conventional sense, but in rehearsing selected moments of his biography, I start pointing to ways in which cosmology is integral to the artist's practice, and outline how a reading of the artist's life and practice might look if cosmology is placed central. Ultimately, this chapter consolidates Tabane's concept of *malombo* and situates it within notions of *ntu* and rituals that keep such a world intact. By extension, I look at Tabane's sonics as performing a role beyond music itself, producing a way of being.

1. Tabane and spatial echoes in *ntu* paradigms

Philip Tabane was born in 1934 in rural Ga Ramotshegoa in Pretoria, in the northeast of South Africa (Ansell, 2018; Sosibo, 2018), and grew up in a musical family. As Galane puts it, Tabane's 'entire family was unanimous about music being a natural and normal way of human expressiveness' (Galane, 2010: 3-3). What I take Galane to suggest here is that for the

[47] This is a topic I discuss elsewhere, see Makhathini (2021). Christopher Ballantine has also done significant work in understanding these dynamics and politics of looking to the United States as opposed to 'inwards' to South African indigenous practices in *Marabi Nights* (2012). Ballantine's work, however, comments on the period up to the end of the 1950s.

Tabane family, music was embedded in their day-to-day life experiences. This was passed on to all his siblings, who were also musicians. His eldest sister Ntibi was a singer, followed by his brother Lori, sister Mmaloki and brother Mabitisi, who were all guitarists, his sister Stephina, who was a singer, Philip Tabane himself who was a singer and played guitar among other instruments, followed by his sisters Stella and Anna, who were both singers (Galane, 2010: 3-3).

The Tabane family had multiple cultural reference points which Tabane would draw on later as a musician. Tabane's father, Hoseah Modise Tabane, was Tswana and his mother, Motjale Tabane, was of Ndebele origin (Coplan, 2007: 252). Tabane's home language was SePedi, yet Tabane also took a keen interest in Venda music, language and culture. This becomes evident in naming his group Malombo: as a cultural concept, *malombo* originates from tshiVenda healing traditions (Galane, 2010: 3-3). *Malombo* means spirit (Mabandu, 2018), but also refers to the drum, dance and healing among other faculties – once again, pointing towards the *ntu* cosmological orientation that seeks wholeness between the body, sounds and spirits. Particularly, for Tabane *malombo* came to be a unique musical idiom and personal philosophy inherent in his music and artistic practice. Essentially, Tabane's diverse cultural linkages, especially those of Venda/Pedi traditions, left audible traces in his music as he later dedicated most of his work to *malombo* music, cultures and drumming styles – an approach that was novel at the time he emerged on the South African jazz scenes in the 1960s. At the time jazz artists had mostly looked outward, to the United States, for inspiration. This move to look inwards, to local traditions and articulations of jazz, was a noteworthy contribution by Malombo. This is evident when considering the Cold Castle 1964 recording, where even the album cover poses Philip Tabane with his Malombo percussion, in contrast to Early Mabuza with a drumkit and double bass. Listening to the two sides of the album (Malombo on Side A, Mabuza on Side B) also highlights the two influences.[48]

The Tabane's as a family were also religious. During evening prayers, Hoseah tasked the young Tabane to lead in the singing of hymns. Reflecting on these nightly rituals later in his life, Tabane believed that these moments were partly responsible for shaping his fondness for music, which would later expand in multiple directions (Ledwaba, 2014). In his primary

[48] Listen: https://youtu.be/0wK-FFe9SyU
Look: http://flatinternational.org/template_volume.php?volume_id=168

schooling in Riverside, Tabane became a choir conductor (Ledwaba, 2014) even though Tabane did not spend much of his time at school. He left school in grade three and spent most of his time developing his sound (Ledwaba, 2014) into what would later become, as Coplan (2007: 252) describes it, 'an impressionistic, loosely structured and intensely personal style.' This description evokes some characteristics of *malombo* music that I will unpack in the following sections, including spontaneity and an improvisation-based musical approach among others. Tabane's gravitation towards these spheres of sound drew inspiration from his mother, who was also a musician and a *sangoma*. Tabane's mother had developed specific leanings towards African modes of spirituality and healing methods in her artistic practice. This also meant that Tabane, from a young age, was exposed to the repertoires of the *sangoma* rituals through witnessing his mother's practice. These rituals involved humming songs and drumming to the sick as a form of therapy (Ansell, 2005: 129). Despite the fact that at his age one was not allowed to attend certain rituals (including those of *sangomas*) and social functions, Tabane became an exception to the rule (Ansell, 2018). The connection between sound and spirituality is an aspect that Tabane harnesses over time.

While Tabane drew his inspiration from his family and nearby communities, he also had a great awareness of surrounding environments[49] as sources of inspiration. For instance, part of a rural upbringing is that most boys spent their days hunting and fishing. In the great Moretele river far from home, Tabane also fulfilled such duties. During breaks the boys would sit under the trees playing *morabaraba* (Ledwaba, 2014). Soon, Tabane developed unusual attitudes towards particular behavioural patterns that most of his peers adopted. Out in the wilderness, far away from the village 'the older boys in the group would often pit the younger ones against one another in bare-knuckled fistfights' (Ledwaba, 2014). As a young boy, Tabane disliked violent games that were perceived, in the tradition, as essential exercises for toughening towards manhood. These contests often took place when boys took herds to drink. This was a part of life that only took place in the pastures and was not spoken about back home. Growing up, Tabane distanced himself from such activities and, from this cultural point of view, children such as himself were portrayed as being weak and perhaps not man enough (Ledwaba, 2014). Instead, Tabane excavated the sonic potential of the landscape:

[49] The reader will recall this as one of the manifestations of *ntu*; the connectedness to nature is invoked in *kintu*.

> So when other boys were engaged in the business of becoming tough guys, Philip walked to the quiet and serenity of the veld. He walked to the banks of the Moretele and carefully selected a reed which he fine tuned into a flute, known to the Ndebele people as sompiro[50] (Ledwaba, 2014).

On the riverbanks of the Moretele is thus where Tabane also did his first solo explorations (Chimurenga, 2018). In Ga-Ramotshegoa, Tabane would sit alone for several hours performing, amongst others, songs from the Matjene band. Soon his mastery in playing the flute was compared to that of his cousin, the master pennywhistle player Spokes Mashiyane who became very popular in the 1950s (Chimurenga, 2018). In some (South) African traditions, as I have learnt growing up, it is believed that flutes and other solo instruments are used to suspend loneliness and boredom in the wilderness. It is also believed that these instruments were not just objects used for performance, but formed a particular closeness to the artists as the artist him/herself would have collected materials and built the instrument from scratch. Wholeness here is triangulated in the relationship between the musician-instrument-environment as intimately connected. In other words, an artist is viewed as collaborating with his/her instruments (rather than merely playing an instrument) and the environment whence the instrument is derived, thus formulating a type of dialogue and companionship. These conversations with an instrument arose from being alone in the wilderness as a herd boy, as happened with Tabane. Inspired by the landscapes (mountains, caves and valleys), at times these dialogues might extend beyond the musician and his instrument and became conversations with space (for instance in the form of an echo, where the resounding(s) are literally shaped by the space of performance). This is of particular interest to this study, as space is a crucial consideration in rituals between man and his ancestors, but also within *ntu* as wholeness.

The landscape infused the sound: according to Ledwaba (2014), Tabane was 'inspired by the calls of the birds of the wild, [and] the soothing sound made by the flowing waters of the Moretele…'. Ledwaba's language here is poetic, and if we were to consider the cosmologies outlined in Chapter Two, one could argue that these poetics stem out of a worldview that this study is situated in. Furthermore, it is the poetics of the environment that gave birth to repertoire that Tabane performed in the wilderness that Ledwaba (2014) describes: the pieces

[50] Sosibo (2018) suggests that the *sompiro* (a type of Ndebele flute) was the first instrument that Tabane started playing at the age of seven.

'were sad, emotionally haunting songs' ranging from original (spontaneous) compositions that emerged in the moment and others from memory evoked by loneliness. These included *sangoma* songs he heard from his mother, and traditional Ndebele and Pedi songs. It is evident that Tabane's initial orientation to sound had been centred around improvisation (or embellishment), that will later find resonance when he is exposed to music such as 'neo-traditional, mbaqanga, African Christian, and American jazz styles that floated about the township' (Coplan, 2007: 252). When these engagements happen, Tabane already understands improvisation in the context of space (environment), religiosity and within its functionality in modes of healing. He comes to popular styles from a situatedness within a cosmological place, with a musical approach that evokes (or in other ways, seeks) wholeness. Present in the musical sensibility of the young Tabane one can locate all *ntu* paradigms (being and spiritual dimensions, environment, space and time, aesthetic) in dialogue in his practice.

2. Disrupted beginnings and dis-placement

Having studied various musical practices during his childhood, Tabane developed a fondness for multi-instrumentalism. He had learned instruments such as flutes, harmonica, *dipela* (thumb piano), *sentolontolo* (a one string bow-shaped music instrument), various African drums and bass instruments (Sosibo, 2018; Galane, 2010: 5-6, 3-13) which he continued to play throughout his career. Before his teens, Galane and Sosibo place it around it around 1943 (Galane, 2010: 3-10; Sosibo, 2018), he made his first guitar from an oil can and a broomstick on which he also taught himself to improvise (Ansell, 2018). Soon his parents noticed his seriousness and purchased him a guitar, the instrument for which he became best known (Ansell, 2018). His learning was aided by his older siblings (Galane, 2010: 3-10; Sosibo, 2018). For the most part, Tabane was self-taught (with the exception of some help from his brothers and later from his guitar mentor, General Duze), and drew on his early exposure to indigenous music practices to guide his playing (Galane, 2010: 3-9).

Tabane's musical developments were soon disrupted by forced removals in Ga-Ramotshegoa in 1953, following the Group Areas Act (1950) that cemented the segregated landscape of apartheid South Africa (Ansell, 2018; Ledwaba, 2014). The effects of the forced removals were especially acutely felt by the community of Ga-Ramotshegoa, as they were uprooted from their land, which in effect stripped them of their cattle which in those days represented a

'symbol of wealth, their savings, their inheritance' (Ledwaba, 2014). Here it also important to note that cattle slaughtering is part of many ritual ceremonies in rural settings, which therefore means this moment had an impact on ritual enunciations due to both loss and displacement. Consequently, the Tabane family had to relocate to Mamelodi (a township[51] in Pretoria), where they lived in Section M (Galane, 2010: 3-1). Mamelodi is regarded as one of the homes of jazz in South Africa, but despite its musical wealth, Tabane, as someone who came from a rural life, was disturbed by this relocation. A bitterness emerged from a feeling of 'being pushed from the place where his umbilical cord had been buried' (Ledwaba, 2014). The umbilical cord within an African cultural context represents a 'profound symbol of home and rootedness' (Ledwaba, 2014). In various cultures on the African continent the umbilical cord is understood to symbolise spiritual linkages to the child's 'life cycles' (Ohaja and Anyim, 2021: 6). In this sense, the ritual of cutting and burying the umbilical cord signifies a transition from the 'not yet born' (in ancestral dimensions) to the living in a corporal state (Ohaja and Anyim, 2021: 6). For instance, Blacking (1985: 67) notes that birth in a traditional Venda society 'marked a return of an ancestral spirit in human form.' This is another manifestation of continuity in *ntu* cosmology. Thus, as it is also understood in my culture, the land where this ritual takes place becomes a location for connection between the ancestors (and greater spirit dimensions), the community and the environment within which the child is born (Penxa-Matholeni, 2019: 430).

As Ledwaba (2014) narrates, 'in Ga-Ramotshegoa, he [Tabane] lamented, life was good, very peaceful and he loved the serenity and solitude that the veld offered.' This further indicates the deep connection that Tabane had with place, and I suggest that it was due to the aforementioned cultural and ritual practices that such a relationship was forged. At another level, this moment of forced removals, as with slave trade and exile in African histories, could be understood as contributing to a form of cultural alienation, and even more, a discontinuity in a sacred relationship between peoples (*mu-ntu*) and environment (*ki-ntu*) as a marriage invoked in *ntu* cosmologies. By extension, in the case of the township, this would have a profound impact on the carrying out of sacred ritual due to insufficient space and the distant relationship with the cosmos and the natural world. By extension, this would impact

[51] See Philip (2014) on 'A history of townships in South Africa', to get more insight into the constructions of the townships as apartheid systems with multiple agendas.

Tabane's sonics as his journey unfolds. Tabane would later lament and reflect on these moments through a piece like 'Lefatshe' (Ledwaba, 2014).

> The invocation of Tabane's sonic library in the sonic meditation calls on the place in which his umbilical cord was buried, where his initiation to *malombo* practices occurred and as a way of locating Tabane in spirit paradigms. The opening sounds, including the *phalaphala*, percussion effects and the chanting, project a widening space, acoustically transcending the studio environment. This expanded sonic paradigm could be understood as a metaphor for open fields that Tabane had internalised growing up, and that lived in his imagination through displacement. To imply the Tabane's progression into the township (a change of place), I juxtapose (at 3:50), as a sonic citation, Tabane's classic guitar lines found in 'Tlabala' to mark his refusal. Here the sound points towards Tabane's dissent against spiritual displacement. Even though he and his family had been displaced geographically, music provided a sense of freedom.

According to Mpho Given Mphago, singer-percussionist, cultural activist and a later percussionist in Tabane's Malombo, 'Lefatshe' is a song about land and cows and their symbolism in African contexts, but also an appeal to the oppressor (in the context of apartheid in South Africa) to question his conscience (personal communication, 11 December 2019). Mphago also recalls that in several instances, Tabane played 'Lefatshe' as an opening 'prayer' at his concerts, stretching the song for several minutes (personal communication, 11 December 2019). Music, then, became an important tool in addressing this 'dislocation' from Tabane's 'ancestral home'. No longer available as a physical place, it has sublimated into a musical space that became a symbolic home and point of reference/departure. Tabane still felt spiritually connected to his past home and by extension, an invocation of home was a veneration of his ancestors bound in the onto-triadic nature of being.

Reflecting on the removals, Tabane observed: 'it's funny [that] in South Africa, people live in townships but they can't forget their backgrounds. I was like them: living in the township but lost. It's only my parents that brought me there. My spirit remained behind' (Tabane in Galane, 2010: 3-13). This being 'lost' could be understood as an ontological position where what counts as being, is ruptured, thus producing a sense of 'double consciousness.' This term is introduced by W.E.B. du Bois's in his classic text, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). In this study, I use the term to express the dilemma of displacement — living in a place while

possessing a consciousness of another. This dilemma of double consciousness is a thread that runs through most Black musical matrices. It is this notion of displacement (due to forced removals, migrant workers, exile and diaspora) that is often confronted, challenged and reflected upon in music. As we hear in Tabane's 'Lefatshe', it is a 'protest' against cultural alienation as the suggested by the lyrical contents (see Mphango's explanation above). This is to say that while people are moved forcefully to these undesired locations, there is, simultaneously, a refusal to leave behind particular memories of culture, religiosities and the sonic. The blues is perhaps one form of refusal to 'leave behind.' Its traces in the musics of the diaspora and of course in most of Tabane's improvisation, including on 'Lefatshe', could be a understood as a protest against forgetting points of origin. In my listening- sensing-knowing, the similarities between the pentatonic scale widely used in African music and the blues scale on the other side of the Atlantic, express an anchored-ness in the place of origin in Africa. I submit that the additional one note (the blue note as it is often called), that differentiates the two scales (minor pentatonic and blues scales) can be thought of as a code that marks displacement. This is one way to locate the refusal in the sonic matrix of the blues.

'Through 'the spirits of *malombo*', Gamedze (2018: 34) argues, Tabane 'fetch[es] and summon[s] people, move[s] people's souls and remind[s] them of their backgrounds, remind[s] them of home.' In this sense, one could argue that Tabane's artistic practice became a mode of invoking wholeness even when loss prevailed. If we were to believe that sounds are always placed, meaning that sounds are products of being and dialoguing with environment (as it was the case in Tabane's ancestral home before the forced removals) then it is in this ability to 'echo' home, the voice of the ancestors in abandoned lands, that Tabane's artistic practice captures *malombo*.

I hear an example of this echoing of home in 'Dithabeng', a piece about the rural space, the mountains and valleys. It is Tabane's instrumentation that helps to evoke space and place in this track. The piece features *mbira*, percussion Tabane doubling between guitar and flutes, and of course his vocal gestures, notably breaths and 'phonoaesthetics', a term Galane (2010: 4-7) uses to describe spontaneous creation through onomatopoeia and words as features of Tabane's scatting style. Like most of Tabane's songs, there is a fundamental groove that sets up the vibrational depth. In this case, the *mbira* plays an ostinato in unison with percussion throughout the piece with minimal variation, but growth in intensity over time. At times the overtones sound like gentle raindrops, creating a tranquillity. Tabane's guitar meanders

between establishing themes and letting go of them, perhaps reflective of his unresolved feelings about 'home'? Later on, he switches flute, in which, in light of the biographical glimpses offered above, I hear the landscapes, the echo of home. At around 05:15, there is a sense of sadness, an expression of pain and loss that I hear in the use of vibrato. The piece concludes abstract and spontaneous vocal scats.

The invocation of place in Tabane's music could be read as a preservation of memory, a refusal to forget. But it is also a deep meditation with cosmology in which we can locate sounds within particular ways of being. Thus, in drawing the glimpses (echoes) of past memories, a faraway place and time, music creates an opportunity to engage the 'past' as a 'living history' (a term used by Carol Muller, 2006). Muller (2006: 65) describes this as 'a sensibility that continually inserts the spirit of other times, people and places into future representations of the past…'. Muller (2006: 67) concludes that the living history is 'the spirit within you', a 'reference to individual character — the kind of person you are in relation to other people in the present that is formed out of the substance of your individual past from a combination of genetic inheritance and childhood experience.'

What is present here, is once more an invocation of *ntu*, a wholeness of being that emerges of out of a communal situatedness. In Tabane's case it is his connection to pasts that defines his journey ahead. We find in his music a recurring invocation of 'other times, people and places into future representations of the past' (Muller, 2006: 65). As Tabane himself tells us, it is a spirit that remains behind (Tabane in Galane, 2010: 3-13). Here it is evident that Tabane's journey invokes more than the *mu-ntu* and *ki-ntu* dimensions mentioned above; there is also an invocation of time/space (*hu-ntu*) and by extension, this section creates a point of departure for Malombo (*ku-ntu*). In the context of pre-existent essence, Tabane then is ontologically bounded to his place of birth and cultural reference points through rites of passage and ancestral lineage. In this sense, the sounds are heard/read inside of the broader notions of being.

Tabane, as a spirit, now lives in the souls of the ones he walked with, mentored and guided. Mphago now forms part of a movement that locates sounds in deep *malombo* cosmologies as part of that which he inherits by lineages, by following a master. These traditions live deep in the drumming cultures of the BaVenda and BaPedi as legacies inherited by birth, ancestral lineage, socialization and rites of passage. I pay my respects to the *malombo* drums from 4:45.

3. The Malombo Movement

Tabane's response to this loss of place and culture via displacement and cultural alienation resulted in a deep commitment to the work of memory, keeping alive the glimpses of teachings and recollections from his upbringing. Tabane demonstrates this exercise of consciousness in his explorations of the *malombo* cultural concept inside his artistic practice. While *Malombo* is a Venda cultural concept that denotes spirituality, drumming and healing rituals, for Tabane, *malombo* became a philosophy, a name for his various musical groups, style of playing music and later, a movement for artistic thought that many followed.[52] The first record of Tabane's moves in the direction of Malombo is a competition that took place at the Johannesburg City Hall in 1960 (Tribute to Philip Tabane, 2018; Devroop and Walton, 2007: 39). The competition included pianist Dollar Brand (now known as Abdullah Ibrahim), pianist Chris McGregor's Orchestra, saxophonist Christopher Columbus Ngcukana among others.

While it is true that Tabane played jazz (although he refused to use the term), taking guitar (a Western classical instrument) as his main instrument, his approach to this instrument explored the sonic possibilities from his traditional music backgrounds (Ansell 2018). Here it is crucial to remember that Tabane also sang, played pennywhistles, *setolotolo*, *dipela* and *malombo* drums among other African instruments (see Galane, 2010: 5-6). His explorations

[52] See Galane's 'Chapter Five: Twelve phases, faces, paces, and traces of Philip Nchiphi Tabane' from his PhD thesis (2010: 5-1 – 5-14). From this point onwards, I use italics to refer to '*malombo*' as a cultural concept and an adaptation of the concept in Tabane's work while I use, in regular type, 'Malombo' for the name of Tabane's ensembles and other configurations.

resulted in various Malombo configurations, which I think of as movements, that he developed over many years until his passing (see Galane 2010: 5-1 – 5-14). It is through these explorations that he formed an 'Afro-jazz' band, Malombo Jazzmen[53] in the early '60s (Galane, 2010: 5-5). The group consisted of Abbey Cindi on flute, Julian Bahula on African mallet drums (*malombo* drums) and Tabane himself on guitar (Coplan, 2007: 252). In this configuration one can see how Tabane looked beyond a conventional 'jazz' rhythm section that consists of Western instruments such as piano, modern drum kit and double bass. Instead, Tabane's group, via their instrumentation and the *malombo* concept, invoked African sonics, spirituality, traditions and cultures. As Galane notes, Malombo 'is a sociocultural institution that comprises song, dance, dramatic elements of performance, religion and a way of thinking' (Galane, 2010: 3). This suggests Malombo was more than a jazz band/group, but a way of life that invoked cosmological significance. In this manner the breaking into sound became a way of dialoguing with *malombo* spirits.

This marked a pivotal moment for South African jazz, as Malombo Jazzmen challenged even the instrumentation that was popular in those days, such as the big band formats that dominated the jazz scene (Mabandu, 2018; Ansell, 2018). Malombo brought a unique approach that was embedded in traditional music and values, and this earned the group a lot of media presence and visibility (Coplan, 2007: 252; Mabandu, 2018). This period saw Tabane forge 'a musical path that defied boundaries, channeling the voices of his ancestors, the Malombo spirits of Venda, through rich polyrhythmic African beats and alchemic free jazz improvisation' (Chimurenga, 2018). Gamedze (2019: 30) points out that Tabane's conception of his practice operated in a different 'metaphysical space' to that of his peers. For instance, this went beyond the sonic orientation (via instrumentation), but extended to cultivating an image (conveyed through dress style) well beyond the normal look of a jazzmen in those years.

Furthermore, in Gamedze's (2019: 32) terms:

> This resonance was embedded with an enactment of a critique of imperialism in the music industry and mid-twentieth century Black urban South African popular culture, so dependent it was, so often, on Black American forms. This resonance removed the

[53] In 1964, Malombo Jazzmen won first prize at the Cold Castle Festival, which they shared with Early Mabuza's Quartet (Coplan, 2007: 252).

> need to be Black via America, and making it possible to be Black via Africa, or deeper still, African via Africa.

In another instance, Mabandu (2021) reads Tabane's stance as an 'invocation of alternative histories' to the hegemonic narrative of jazz, which posits it as 'only' a North American artform. In other words, through the idiom of jazz Malombo expressed an 'African locality and subjectivities as their open center' (Mabandu, 2021). Paired with Gamedze's notion of 'African via Africa', Tabane's take on jazz built on his own personal experiences in Venda traditional musical practices such as *malombo*, which already possessed aspects of improvisation and spontaneity that predate the arrival of 'American jazz' in South Africa. In this sense, the sonic spoke the language of his ancestors in Ga-Ramotshegoa, their space and time.

The Malombo Jazzmen dispersed in 1965 after conflicts about the directions of the music and differences in political agenda among its members. On the one hand, Cindi and Bahula became interested in 'direct political involvement' under the Black Consciousness Movement. On the other hand, Tabane, despite addressing political issues in his music, was more interested in the spiritual and cultural properties of the music as displayed in the indigenous *malombo* musical practices (Coplan, 2007: 252; Mojapelo, 2008: 258). This led to Bahula and Cindi forming the group Malombo Jazz Makers with Lucky Ranku on guitar, while Tabane formed Malombo with percussionist and dancer Gabriel Thobejane (Coplan, 2007: 253). As a duo, Tabane and Thobejane recorded their first record called *The Indigenous Afro-Jazz Sounds of Philip Tabane and his Malombo Jazzman* (1969), overtly situating their practice in an African paradigm.

In 1970, Malombo travelled to the United States to perform at the Newport Jazz Festival (Tribute to Philip Tabane, 2018) and their appearance was well received; yet the ensemble's instrumentation and sounds presented a novelty. As Jet Magazine reported, 'One of the most pleasurable finds of the Newport Jazz Festival this year was Malombo from South Africa. Malombo create[s] some weird and haunting music on a variety of African instruments' (Ansell, 2018). This passage shows that even though Malombo may have been classified as 'jazz', there were aspects (notably the instrumentation, sound and overall orientation) that were not familiar to jazz critics at the time. I argue that it is exactly these aspects that are

distinctly African, or even more specific, Venda and Pedi, that cannot be understood without a thorough investigation into their cosmological located-ness.

While Malombo gained more popularity internationally and locally, it also inspired an entire movement of creatives, mainly from Ga-Rankuwa. Under the name Malombo Jazz Messengers (later renamed Dashiki), the movement included artists such as Gilbert Mabale, Lefifi Tladi, Rantobeng Mokou and Laurence Moloisi. These musicians and artists embraced the ideas and values that Tabane and Malombo embodied. According to poet, painter and activist Lefifi Tladi:

> I think the important thing about Malombo is that it changed the musical direction of South Africa. When we talk about change it is absolutely important to understand that we are talking about a shifting of consciousness, a change in attitude, a recognition of the self. And that is the thing that made Malombo so important, because it related you with your own origins… (Lefifi Tladi in Gamedze, 2019: 32)

This 'shift in consciousness' was also a way to think through and deal with the social climate in South Africa at the time. It became a way of refusing amnesia, and instead situate cultural memory at the center of artistic practices. Among other musicians, Tabane's Malombo music had become associated and further understood as a response to the then current societal challenges such as the Rivonia trial, 'which decimated organized opposition to an emboldened apartheid regime' (Mabandu, 2018). In the following years, Malombo inspired bands such as Sakhile, Malopoets, and Batsumi among others. These bands became known for their leanings to cultural activism and connections to Biko's Black Consciousness Movement (Mabandu, 2018), which is interesting, considering Tabane's ambivalent position on participating actively in politics. But it shows how deeply political the commitment to indigenous cultural practices were (are), even if they are not announced or intended as political interventions. Part of what was so remarkable about Tabane's music was its ability to transcend apartheid's and international boundaries. As Coplan notes, Tabane, during apartheid in South Africa, was able to bridge the audience gap between races:

> Philip Thabane [sic] has been remarkable for his ability to capture a multi-racial and international audience while still retaining the respect and goodwill of his township community. During the conflict-ridden 1970s and 1980s, Thabane [sic] was among the few prominent black South African musicians who could move freely between the

> townships, white and inner-city theatres and concert halls, and America and Europe (Coplan, 2007: 254).

That the apartheid government did not view him as a threat is perhaps due to Tabane's mode of politics, which was hidden in the poetics of his sound and language. He took an unusual stance in the debates around politics, apartheid and how music was used to fight against it:

> I wouldn't say jazz played any meaningful role in the liberation struggle except for keeping the oppressed masses happy. To me apartheid oppression was nothing more than a chronic itch that was inflicted now and forgotten the next minute (Philip Tabane in Tribute to Philip Tabane, 2018).

This perhaps also explains the 1965 conflicts in Malombo Jazzmen leading to their division as a band (Coplan, 2007: 252; Mojapelo, 2008: 258). As explained earlier, the artists who left Tabane's group, Cindi and Bahula, were seeking more robust and radical artistic responses to apartheid. As a result of political unrests, apartheid's structural oppression and the economic difficulties of being an artist in segregated South Africa, many artists considered (at the least beginning from the 1950s) exile as an alternative and eventually left South Africa. Tabane could have been one of these exiled musicians, and yet he remained in South Africa.

This was not for lack of performance opportunities abroad. In 1976, Tabane toured the US as an opening act for the New Brubeck Quartet led by pianist Dave Brubeck, who became a colleague and friend (Mabandu, 2018). In 1976, he released an album called *Pele Pele* (Atlantic, 1976), which created more international demand for Malombo (Coplan, 2007: 253). Further international presence and opportunities opened when Malombo signed an America-based international record deal with WEA (Warner-Elektra-Atlantic).

1977 saw Tabane going back to the United States with Malombo to perform at the Carnegie Hall (Mabandu, 2018), and on this particular concert tour they were joined by Daniel Msiza on keyboards (Galane, 2010). This tour also included a performance at the Newport Jazz Festival, in New York, which also featured pianist Bheki Mseleku (Coplan, 2007: 253; Mabandu, 2018). Returning from the United States tour, the longtime collaborators Tabane and Thobejane parted ways (Coplan, 2007: 253). Internationally these had been great years for Tabane: between 1971 and 1977, 'the two-some orchestra' (Tabane and Thobejane)

performed in New York, Australia, Holland, France, Washington DC, Japan, San Francisco, London, Botswana, Swaziland, Lesotho and South Africa (Galane (2010: 5-8).

It is therefore interesting that, even though Tabane was well-received internationally and acquired significant exposure compared to some of his peers such a saxophonist Winston Mankunku, he still did not consider exile or moving abroad. The reason might be found in Tabane's connection to his people, the land, traditions and rituals as these collectively informed his practice. Gamedze (2018: 28) speculates that it might have been through his experience of America and its musics that he developed the 'conviction that what he was doing, locating himself in an African tradition, (rather than what he saw primarily as an American tradition), and pushing that forward, was valuable and hip.' I argue that there was also something deeper at stake: staying in South Africa enabled and intensified his connection with an indigenous musical identity through the centrality of the spiritual connection to place in Tabane's music practice, and the fact that his music practice required the sustenance of this deep rootedness.

In 2014, Tabane turned 80 and did one of his rare performances in his later years at the Cape Town International Jazz Festival. Reporting on this performance Mabandu wrote:

> All the famed hallmarks of a Malombo gig were there: The guttural half-sung howl of witty, idiomatic Sepedi lyrics, the gestural guitar slap and strum, and all Tabane's other idiosyncratic antics — he played his Gibson guitar with his mouth, laid it on the floor and played it with his shoes as the audience roared with fascination and nostalgia for the glory days of Malombo's ascent to the pantheon of African musical greats (Mabandu, 2018).

Symbolically speaking, at least within African cosmology, it is believed that all gifts are passed on from an ancestor. Departing from this belief, the above-mentioned performance could also be read as a passing of the gifts to the next generation. In the same way Tabane's mother passed on the gift of healing to him, the concert as a format could arguably be read as a ritual that Tabane used to pass the gifts to his son Thabang, who has since the passing of his father released his debut album. A review on Tabane junior's debut *Matjale* (2018), named after his Tabane's mother whom the reader will recall was a *sangoma*, also speaks to the Malombo connections audible in Thabang's music. The reviewer reads Thabang's debut as

'expanding the parameters of what is essentially an artform patented by his father…' (Mushroom Hour Half Hour, 2018). Mabandu alludes to these connections in his review of the Cape Town International Jazz Festival performance:

> The spectra of Tabane clawing for breath and daring to rise to the occasion was made even more moving by the soft glances he kept exchanging with his son, Thabang, on percussion. The whole thing seemed to signal a new era for Malombo music, beyond the man who gave it global prominence. (Mabandu, 2018)

Thinking through Mabandu's phrase 'exchanging with his son' in the quote, this could be a metaphor for what I argue above: that it is in this contact that gifts are passed on and comes to 'signal a new era for Malombo music.' It is this 'era' that Thabang now represents, and it is important to note that the 2014 concert Mabandu is referring to was also the last one on record by Tabane.

> I always knew my father as a spiritual being and every song he made was [based on] something that he experienced or something that directly impacted him (Thabang Tabane, personal communication, 10 January 2020).

In 2015, Tabane received his second honorary doctorate from the University of KwaZulu Natal. This was followed by his last release, *Modumo Kgole* (Sounds from Afar, 2015) under MMS (Mungroo, 2015). Tabane was admitted to hospital on 18 May 2018 and passed away on the same day (Mabandu, 2018; Sosibo, 2018).

4. Spiritual beliefs and Malombo

It is imperative, when speaking about Tabane's music, to talk about his spirituality. His music and spirituality are deeply entangled and thus in a constant dialogue. This state of connected-ness with spiritual-ness, Tabane likens to an inner child. In an interview Tabane was once quoted saying: '…I am a child with a strong connection with my inner feelings and the ancestors…' (Tabane in Galane 2010: 8-11). He enunciates his sound from this premise of being in touch with his ancestral spirits, and like a child he allows himself to be guided. It is the practice of *malombo* ritual/performance that keep these connections intact. Moreover, Tabane often expressed that his musical inspiration came from the spirits of ancestors

(Spector, 2018) and thus venerated them through his artistic practice. It is known that Tabane's music was inspired by his background in *sangomas'* spirituality and repertoires which led him to a conviction that 'it takes a certain spirituality background to master Malombo jazz' (Philip Tabane in Tribute to Philip Tabane, 2018). Spirituality is an essential aspect of Tabane's music that is widely recognised. Ansell, for instance, asserts that Tabane's 'music was intimately woven into his cosmology and spirituality' and Gamedze (2018: 29) notes that 'it is the spiritual practices of *malombo* which gave the music its purpose and cosmological framework.'

As I have shown earlier, Tabane, from a young age, had absorbed varied South African traditional musics from his surroundings. In his artistic pursuit, he became explicit about the connection between his cultural belief systems and his artistic processes. Evidence of such connections is found in the few interviews he granted, but his music also conveys this through his choice of lyrics, praise text (invocations of his genealogical ancestry), musical and improvisational style, orchestrations, name of his band/group and themes used for his album titles and songs among other factors that I discuss in the coming sections.

Even though Tabane had a diverse cultural background, like most South African artists, he seemed to have found a deeper resonance with the VhaVenda culture in particular. As highlighted earlier, he based his entire concept (and career) on *malombo*, a Venda cultural concept. Lekaba (2018: 1) notes that it is at once a musical idiom and a healing ritual that binds people and spirits together. It is these two aspects (music and ritual) that are of interest here. Thus, to lay a foundation, I will discuss *malombo* at two levels: at a cultural level as practiced in Venda and Pedi traditions, and at the level of Tabane's appropriated version, considering how he transposed the cultural into a personal artistic voice.

In her study *Malombo musical arts in VhaVenda indigenous healing practices* (2016), Davhula (2016: 1-1) asserts that *malombo* ritual is pivotal in channelling healing vibrations that in essence keep the spiritual, physical and cultural aspects of the VhaVenda people intact. Music, dance and performance are central in performing *malombo* as part of a healing ceremony, and are understood as mediums in connecting the physical and spirit worlds (Davhula, 2016: 1-1). In this context, drummers, musicians and healers are understood to be the ones communicating directly with the ancestors in a state of 'altered consciousness' (Davhula, 2016: 1-1). By extension, the ancestors make interventions to channel a healing energy to the sick. Ultimately, music in *malombo* rituals plays the roles of libation, prayer,

worship and thanksgiving, among others, roles that far transcend the stereotype of music as entertainment. In Davhula's (2016: 1-3) words, 'music [in *malombo* ritual] is used as the vehicle to cross the threshold between the earthly and spiritual realms, enabling the living to communicate with their ancestral spirits or forebears.' When a 'psychic connection' (Davhula, 2016: 1-6) is attained between the sick and their ancestors through dance and singing, healing may occur. As Davhula (2016: 1-3) argues, '*malombo* ritual performance is an important ceremony for Vhavenda to honour and venerate their forefathers.'

The above also has a place in Tabane's artistic practice. While he took *malombo* onto the bandstand, and infused *malombo* with the sound of the blues, he did not move away from the key approach of *malombo* as ritual practice that seeks connection with the spirit worlds. I contend that Tabane did not modernize *malombo* in as much has he honored the practice from his culture and by extension, honored his ancestors who were the innovators of the style. In other words, Tabane brought in foreign instruments that suggest their own musical idioms to speak a local dialect and participate in an African ritual. This interpretation has is not new. Chimurenga (2018), for example, notes that *malombo* as presented in Tabane's music, is 'at once ritual and meditation, celebration and lament, prayer and vision.'

'Badimo' expresses the *malombo* spirits through the *bangoma* groove found in most *sangoma* rituals. This up-tempo beat displays sonically what spirit possession might mean within improvisation. Tabane uses these short melodic passages to expound into the prophetic sonic realms. Through a series of variation strategies, Tabane embellishes as a posture of surrender. At 03:44, Tabane resembles the sounds of a *sangoma* possessed with ancestral spirits, a layer of improvisation that we do not yet have a language for.

In the liner notes of his album *Uhn!* (1989), Tabane describes his upbringing: 'most of my family were sangomas ... They used Malombo drums to heal people when they were sick; when I was growing up, I always heard these drums. The drums are the base of my music.' This quotation further anchors the depth of Tabane's artistic practice and its situatedness in the traditional *malombo* rituals described earlier in Davhula (2016: 1-3). In the VhaVenda traditional context, drums have a critical function in the carrying of rituals (Davhula, 2016: 3-39) and the malombo drums were also an integral part of Tabane's configuration throughout his career. As Davhula (2016: 3-41) reminds us, 'drums are healers in the performance; they are the best medicine for psychological pressure and enrich the melodic development of the

performance.' According to Tabane, he used the word *malombo* to illustrate how his music was influenced by a spirit dimension:

> Malombo is a Venda word meaning spirits, as such, my music draws its inspiration from sangoma spirituality. Since all my older brothers were guitar players, I used to watch them with glee and fascination as they played their instruments to back up my mother who was a sangoma, as she sang and chanted her a cappella songs. Although at a time I wasn't yet a musician, the sound of their music spiritually lifted me. That's why in 1958 I formed an a cappella group called Lullaby Landers (Philip Tabane in Tribute to Philip Tabane, 2018).

In the quotation above, it becomes clear that Tabane's quest of becoming a musician was a spiritual path. Thus, it is within such context that this situates his artistic practice, seeking to understand what such a quest imparts to the sonic. It is the coming together of notions of spirituality, healing rituals and improvisation that offers a frame for Tabane's musical articulation.

5. The music of the spirits

Tabane's sonics, via *malombo*, point towards the worldview described above. I am interested in how musical performance could be understood as 'a way of knowing' and sensing (Blacking 1985: 65), and in illustrating how the knowledge of *malombo* creates a 'home' for Tabane's sound. *Malombo*, similar to other Venda possession musics, finds expression through 'symbols which relate it to all aspects of Venda spirit possession — including that music comes from the spirit world' (Blacking, 1985: 70).

Taking Blacking as a point of departure, I propose that, located inside the sound, is an altered state of consciousness or being 'elsewhere', as I proposed in Chapter Three. Thus, the sound-world could be viewed as a paradigm that collapses the borders between body and spirit. I have referred to this collapse of the physical-spiritual duality as the moment of the 'breaking into sound', which is also a break into the spiritual paradigms, and into an altered state or into *malombo* spirit as it is in the case of Tabane. In this section I show how Tabane's music could be read as an invocation of his cosmological situatedness.

Symbolisms (and traces) of spiritual connectedness of Tabane's artistic practices can be found in various registers, ranging from his text, instrumentation, voice, costumes and body animation among others. Each of these aspects requires a deep explanation, but due to the broader focus of this study I will identify the textual themes to demonstrate their spiritual affinity with the sonic. As Somé (1999: 151-152) highlights, ritual space symbolisms, collectively, are a way of 'keeping the psyche focused away from the turbulence of everyday life.' Thus, the symbolisms and traces of spirituality I discuss below are engaged to focus on the functionality on the sonic.

Tabane invokes spiritual-ness in his song/album titles, lyrics and other 'obvious' spheres. These include songs such as 'Badimo' (Tswana word for ancestors) and 'Sangoma' (Zulu word for spirit medium), album titles such as *Malombo* (1988) and lyrics for instance in 'Ngwana wa Kgaetsedi' among others. At a more abstract level, Tabane's verbal iterations in his performances further serve as signifiers of spirituality. In a state of trance, Tabane dissolves language and new words are invented (see Galane, 2010: 10-1 – 10-7). What I identify as a register of text which I describe as 'no text' (or what I regard as prophetic text) is found in Tabane's signature scats that at times synchronized with his guitar line, while at other times created a call and response. Although these can be found in many songs by Tabane, such as 'Unh!', 'Lenyora', 'Kika' and 'Vha Venda' (among many others), in the song 'Badimo' (discussed earlier) they evoke a particular presence (see Galane, 2010: 4-11 – 4-15 for further insight relating to these aspects of Tabane' sonic and some transcriptions). In other songs, such as 'Ngwana o ya Lela' (01:11) and 'Katlhogano' (01:36), Tabane breaks into praise text, which is a form of 'poetic text' passed on from one generation to the next as part of the ancestral praise texts of a given family (Galane, 2010: 4-11). The function of these texts is to invite the presence of the ancestors through what I term sonic citations.[54] Mbiti (1969: 74-81) states that the existence of an ancestor in a spiritual realm relies on the invocations on their names by the living. In this manner, the sonic as a library also performs a role as a site for memory, which keeps it in motion.

Other some songs use a combination of onomatopoeia (sonic presence to nature, an invocation of *ntu*) and what Galane (2010: 4-7) refers to as 'phoneaesthetics' as part of his

[54] An important concept in this study that I develop more fully in subsequent chapters, particularly as a tool to connect the text (via the interlocutors) with the meditations that I improvise in dialogue with the sonic (via performances).

unique 'guitar scatting.' A classic example of this is found on 'vhaVhenda' (entirely based on phoneaesthetics), arguably one of Tabane's most popular songs (Galane, 2010: 4-7). Mphago recalls that Tabane's thinking was that 'language is not enough to carry or to deal with what we are dealing with, so he would throw in expressions that completely paralyze language' (Personal communication with Mpho Azah Mphago, 20 December 2019). An example of this breaking down of language is the album title *Unh!*, which references this 'no text' kind of enunciation. I want to argue that to 'paralyze language' is to surrender, to be in a trance and possessed by the ancestors; thus the expressions become new languages, vocalizing the message of an ancestor. As Galane (2010: 4-9) also notes, Tabane uses the scatting sounds 'to echo the sound of his guitar' during his 'evocation of the *malombo* spirit.'

At 1:00, Mphago breaks into vocalization that goes beyond words but meanders between ululating and speaking. These sounds could be understood as 'languages' of elsewhere, a letting go in order for something much higher than one's knowledge to manifest. Here we move towards the release of *ntu* potency.

The collapse of language signals the moving to the unknown that is accompanied by body animation. It has been noted, for instance, that Tabane would play his guitar with his feet, chin and elbow (Galane, 2010: 4-12). Unusual body gestures and movements are usual features in *malombo* ritual and has to do with aspects of spirit possession. This suggests that the collapse of language extends to a collapse of an instrumental language and syntax of movements as well. Galane (2010: 4-13) reminds us that Tabane 'could attain a state of altered consciousness while performing on stage.' The bandstand, for Tabane, is 'a sacred space', a place of surrender and dialoguing with his ancestors through the spirit of *malombo* (Galane, 2010: 4-12). This further connects with Somé's idea of a ritual setting as a place/space 'where the spirit occurs.' The occurrence of the spirit is an invocation of wholeness of being inside an onto-triadic state.

It is this spirit presence that governed the music of Malombo, and anchored it in a collectivity. Perhaps as a way of maintaining connections with place, spirits and people against displacement, the expanded notions of community (via the onto-triad) became central in Tabane's ensemble matrix. But the onto-triad also provided the band members with a synchronicity and a surrendering into oneness. This shared readiness and musical alignment

became evident in Tabane's various ensembles. Galane writes that as a band member in Tabane's band, one had to be 'in tune with the spontaneity that marks the style of Malombo music', and that this included a range of dynamics and 'unpredictable stops' that expressed his feelings (Galane, 2010: 4-12). This can be heard in a song such 'Tlabala' (00:54) live which I also invoke in the sonic meditation.

It is in the context of Tabane's spirit invocations that we are challenged to rethink improvisation as ritual property that allows a flow of communication to and from a metaphysical plane. This is what Muvhunga (2014: 23) terms 'guided mobility', i.e. the visible and invisible forming a collective entity. It is here where the transcendental quality of ritual becomes relevant: that it goes beyond the known, and exceeds the reach of words/existing expressions. Improvisation in *malombo*, then, enters a mystical dimension of liminality.

6. Mato and Tabane's improvisational style

Most improvisation, in the musics discussed here, stem/develop out of an initial theme (or a call) that is embellished. Through embellishments, and hopefully an invitation of the spirits into a 'primal togetherness' (to borrow Agawu's term 2007:2), new musical ideas may emerge. One could assign the possibility of the newness, in the sonic, to the presence of the spirits. This is the case in my own experience, but it is also the general outlook in many traditional African music styles, specifically in ritual contexts where the healer/musician performs under 'spirit possession.' Tabane's take on improvisation is a transposition (or an adaptation) of Venda drumming and singing styles that utilizes improvisation and 'spontaneous drumming and chanting' as modes of healing through rituals (Tabane in *Uhn!*,1989; Galane 2009: 4-4). In this sense, improvisation is not entirely based on the intelligence, musical rigor and the technical abilities of the performer but understood as a call and a citation from 'elsewhere' inside a ritual context. This suggests that to improvise, one must be in touch with a spirit world and have the willingness to surrender to its guidance.

The thematic material begins at 3:55. This could be referred to as the known, a sonic citation from Tabane's known vocabularies. Through embellishments and variations, underpinned by this unfolding, thematic materials begin to subside into this liminal phase, the unknown (06:05). At 06:35 Mphago breaks into a spontaneous chant, channeling Tabane's spirit in a way similar to what Tabane does on 'Lenyora' (from 02:10). One can hear Tabane speak through Mphago, it is a breaking into a heightened relationship to time and space. Eventually, we return to the thematic material (the known) at 8:58. This time Mphago chants (09:12) the name of Tabane as a libation.

This is the general posture and orientation in ritual as discussed in Chapter Two. In *malombo* traditions and, in this case, Tabane's performance practice, this may be understood as *mato*, which is a central indicator that informs the creative process in the performance of *malombo* amongst the VhaVenda people (Davhula, 2016: 4-2). *Mato* is 'a Vhavenda concept that denotes creative agency by the performer, which in turn informs the composition's outcome and the musical content of a song' (Davhula, 2016: 4-1). In other words, once the vibrational depth is set via 'evocations and perceptions' (Davhula, 2016: 4-2) of a given ritual performance, a call for ancestral presence is initiated. Given the discussion in Chapter Two regarding wholeness and continuity inside *ntu*, the invocation of this togetherness between the performer, place, audience and the spirit worlds in *mato* connects *malombo* ritual to broader (South) African cosmology.

Mato, then, is what informs Tabane's improvisational style. It is 'a gradual metamorphosis away from the original song text' (Davhula, 2016: 4-1) inside a vibrational intensity of a given ritual. In other words, *mato* could be read as a 'constant unfolding' of newness. This process towards the unknown (liminality) is also found in the ritual stages I have referred to in Chapter Two as a process of embellishment, a becoming. Such an improvisation strategies, as discussed in Chapter Three, progress from known, unknown and new knowing. In this sense, what Tabane initiates as the theme or melodic motif, is in essence a potential field towards the unknown music through the process of *mato*. Eventually, the music returns to what is known, but this time, with a new knowing having gone through a liminal phase. Although most of Tabane's music can be situated within these structures, I hold that he introduces other sub-stages particular to his practice. Tabane's approach to structure, as I

demonstrate below, invokes the ritual stages that Somé (1999: 151-157) identifies as preparation, invocation, healing and the closing.

For instance, in 'Mpedi' (1989) Tabane begins with preparation, follows with theme and ends in embellishment. The preparation stage (00:00 – 01:18) is a kind of introduction that in the Zulu traditions is known as *izihlabo* but here could also be understood as libations and a way of locating place, an invitation to the ancestors. From 01:18 – 02:39 it is the known which is the main theme and groove of the song; this could be understood as invocation, a space of agreement. The music then proceeds to embellishments led by the *malombo* drums at 02:40 – 03:20. This section could be read as the unknown or the liminal phase, as it breaks away from the thematic frame but into multiplicity of being. It is citing from elsewhere. Referring to *malombo* drumming elsewhere, Mabandu (2021) notes that the beat opens 'portals to other realms.' In other words, this section surrenders to the wholeness of *ntu*; living in the physical and spiritual worlds simultaneously. I view this stage as a healing stage, a moment of ancestral intervention. At 03:21 the original theme re-emerges for what I regard as the closing, but this time introducing new elements that, as they progress, step outside of conventional language and using 'sonic gestures' (04:03 till the end) that Davhula (2016: 4-1), in the context of *mato*, refers to as 'metamorphosis', or a moving away from original sonic text. Here, I propose, lies the divining power of Tabane's improvisation. In this liminal phase resides the *malombo* prophetic text, that collapses the language of humans but gives way to that of the spirit. *Malombo* in this context, is an invocation of *ntu* as spirit essence, and wholeness.

The prophetic text is located from 11:08 to the end. All the music in this period was created spontaneously through the process of *mato* and guided mobility.

Chapter Five: Busi Mhlongo and Thwasa

Second sonic meditation – Thwasa: Conversations with the Unseen

Available: https://vimeo.com/africaopen/download/758219264/7fc916e46c
https://vimeo.com/758205991
Password: @VisserClari9105

This sonic meditation focuses on locating Mhlongo in indigenous Zulu music and poetics, as a manifestation of maskanda music, but also through sonic citation as an invocation of Mhlongo's voice and spirit. To set the vibrational depth we focus on chanting her clan names (00:20 – 01:06) as an effective sound technology utilizing *izibongo* used by our early ancestors to invite spirit networks and divinities. Using this technique, the elders in a given household would approach *umsamu* to invoke ancestral presence via a family tree. In this meditation we invite Mhlongo as a spirit guide.

This chapter explores the enunciations of African spirituality in Busi Mhlongo's artistic practice. These enunciations introduce an expanded understanding of spirituality in sonic practices that goes beyond a narrow understanding of music as such; it branches out into the domains of personal philosophy and dance. Mhlongo's practice confronts us with the issue of hybridity: for instance, she was brought up in the Methodist Church by her family, after which she moved to the Shembe church, and was later initiated as a *sangoma*. Following the sonics and Mhlongo's artistic practice, this chapter focuses on Mhlongo's journey of *ukuthwasa* and *ubungoma* through music, as invoked in dance and singing, alongside some elements of the maskanda matrix and the Shembe-Nazareth congregational experience that originate from Zulu spirituality.

Mhlongo invokes many elements of *ngoma* as wholeness. While she was a singer, she was also a healer, played drums and danced (Lusk, 2010). This chapter seeks to consider each of these elements and show how they all project from a place of deep spiritual awareness. By extension, I will also show how Mhlongo's pan-artistic expressions invoke affinities with *ntu* dimensions. All these aspects come together in Mhlongo's artistic practice, which functions in the realm of ritual with a strong invocation of 'embellishments' as a core improvisational method. Mhlongo's approach to improvisation operates outside of the current discourses of improvisation in jazz, where improvisation is understood as a mode of articulating spontaneous combinations of internalised vocabularies based on the jazz canon. Instead, Mhlongo's music is based on how the known reveals the unknown inside the process of *ukuthwasa* (becoming).

I focus on particular aspects of Mhlongo's life in this chapter. The first is the influence of Shembe on Mhlongo's early life, which forms a cornerstone for artistic practices, especially later in her life. The second is a reflection on the turn Mhlongo's career took in the 1980s, as she pivoted from performance – mainly in the idiom of jazz in contexts of musical theatre and entertainment, singing covers or working with bands whose musical directions she shaped only nominally – to a performer leading her own band and whose practice shifted in response to a calling to become a healer. This shift is signified by the name of her band, Twasa, which means possession. The third aspect is a consideration of the particular modes of performance she incorporates in her later, spiritually-rooted artistic practice: the idiom in which she performs (maskanda), and a characteristic element of her as performer, namely dancing. These aspects will be addressed in the following sections.

1. Early musical influences and affinities to the Shembe Movement

Busisiwe Victoria Mhlongo, popularly known as Busi Mhlongo was born on 28 October 1947 in Inanda in the heart of Kwa-Zulu Natal (Hlogwane, 2010; Mojapelo, 2008: 287; Coplan, 2007: 316). She came from a musical family with her mother, who was a singer, and her father, who was a guitarist (Thale, 2014; Personal communication with Susan Barry, 5 January 2020). Given such exposure, Mhlongo, from a young age, was encouraged to sing and play drums (Lusk, 2010). The musicality in the Mhlongo family was also shared with both her brothers Jabulani and Trevor Mhlongo, both of whom were musicians (Personal communication with Neil Comfort,[55] 16 August 2019). This relationship to the music was also anchored in the church. The Mhlongo family attended the Methodist Church, but due to Mhlongo's passion for African music and her keen interest in African spirituality, she became drawn to the Shembe-Nazareth congregation in Kwa-Zulu Natal (Madondo, 2010; Thale, 2014; *Melt Music*). This is where some of Mhlongo's early musical influences can be located.

Bongani Madondo (2010), who penned the only extensive reflection on Mhlongo's life and works, observes that this is where Mhlongo in her childhood 'first heeded the calling to step up [onto the stage], and performed for locals, knowing she had an unrehearsed African mass choir, neighbourly girls, at the ready for back up.' In another instance, Thale (2014) asserts that it is an upbringing in the Shembe community that 'makes [her] music come out the way it does.' While Thale does not describe the way Mhlongo's music 'comes out', this section will venture towards a description of what I hear in her music that stems from Shembe. Most importantly in my view, Mhlongo's music enunciated from her cosmological situatedness. These assertions suggests that while Mhlongo had various reference points in her artistic practice, an important marker in her sound and her journey is her relationship with the Shembe school of thought. Much of her performance practice invokes a liturgical, ritualistic and compositional approach that can be traced to the Shembe church.

Shembe combines elements of Zulu cosmology with Christianity, and is 'a nativistic movement in which a conscious attempt has been made to revive or perpetuate selected

[55] Comfort was Busi Mhlongo's manager and a close friend. He also owns The Rainbow, a popular jazz club in Pinetown, Durban.

aspects of the Zulu culture' in Christian religious practices (Oosthuizen, 1968: 1).[56] Muller points out that the founder of the Shembe 'appropriated aspects of Nguni custom and cosmology and Western mission Christianity and reinvented them as the building blocks of his religious empire' (1999: xviii). Like other Zionist churches in South Africa, Shembe-Nazareth simultaneously practiced Christianity alongside Zulu ancient beliefs in God (*Umvelinqangi*) and ancestral (*idlozi)* veneration.

The Shembe-Nazareth church (popularly known as Shembe or Ekuphakameni) was founded by Prophet Isaiah Shembe who was steeped in both Zulu cosmology and biblical text. He received visions and heard voices that led him to inventing a new faith that created room for ~~precolonial~~ forms of Zulu spirituality (see Vilakazi 2017). The Shembe church formed part of a broader struggle of 'the African to assert his [her] significance as a human being' and for the African church not to be a mere 'offshoot' of the white church, but to be founded in African (Zulu) spirituality, with which it interacts (Vilakazi, 2017: 17). In this sense, the Shembe church, as Vilakazi (2017: 17) notes, formed of a part of the 'Separatist Church' movement as they found 'the teachings of the Mission Church unacceptable to them' (2017: 20), and likewise the Mission Church was dismissive of their earlier religious practices. In today's language, this would form part of the ~~decolonial~~ discourse discussed in Chapter One. As such, Shembe stood for a form of refusal, delinking from 'conventional' church narratives in (South) Africa regarding salvation, which meant leaving behind 'who you are.' For instance, the Shembe church maintains connections with ancestors, divination, guided-ness via dreams, a strong Zulu sonic accent and polygamist marriage among other ~~pre-colonial~~ Zulu cultural practices (Vilakazi, 2017: 14, 15 and 20). These very aspects were discouraged by the missionaries and yet some of them (ancestral linkages, guided-ness through dreams and divination) are significant for the broader arguments/themes put forward in this study as elements stemming from the onto-triadic notion of being. The concepts mentioned here is what Mhlongo takes forward in her work.

Vilakazi (2017: 17) notes that most of the Shembe followers did not come to the church for salvation but primarily for healing and restoration of African value systems that had been

[56] Here I want to highlight that I am aware of Vilakazi's criticism of Oosthuizen's scholarship on Shembe (see Vilakazi, 2017, particularly the chapter 'Attitudes and Reactions of White Christians on Shembe'). The quote from Oosthuizen was, however, carefully selected because it succinctly articulates what I already know as a Zulu cultural insider with an understanding of the Shembe church.

erased by the missionaries. This suggests that Shembe incorporates elements of Christianity on its own terms (i.e., not a wholesale adoption of the dogma). This refusal is an important aspect in discussing Mhlongo's artistic practice and worldview as she brings Zulu identities, via Shembe, into the South African jazz discourse. It is the aspects relating to Zulu cultural practices in the Shembe movement (of course, with music and dance being at the forefront) that this section is interested in, which are particularly evident in Mhlongo's practice and broader worldview.

Some aspects that contribute to what might be considered an intertextual relationship between Shembe and Mhlongo's artistic practice, are the conceptions of space (in connection to Zulu cultures), sound, text and movement/dance as spiritual paradigms underpinned by sacredness. In seeking to define sacred properties of Shembe, Muller (1999: 57) posits that it is 'what imbues individuals with authority. [It] is located in the religious imagination and given form in reports of the intervention of cosmological figures in individual lives…'. She concludes that 'both song performance and dream experience mediate between the living and the dead' (Muller, 1999: 57). In other words, it is an invocation of cosmology (or *ntu*) and a proclamation of union between humans and the spirit worlds. For the Shembe church the sacred is attributed to one's contact with the supreme being (Muller, 1999: 57). In Zulu thought sacredness 'is a living concept' (Vilakazi, 2017: 26) that finds expression in all ritual ceremonies. Rituals themselves are understood to be spiritual, thus residing in the paradigm of sacred acts (Vilakazi, 2017: 37). Hence the aspect of preparation via cleansing of space is central in Zulu rituals. Mhlongo demonstrates this through an extended chant in 'Wahazulwa', where she talks to aspects of cleansing and purification of being through the words 'mangigezwe, mangihlanjuluwe' (listen from 04:43). Of course, this highlights linkages to her faith and the registers of sacredness.

The notion of space is closely related to sacredness (see Ngobese, 2018). Later in the chapter this is discussed with regard to Mhlongo's view of the bandstand as a sacred space. Shembe was also explicit about the sacredness of *Ekuphakameni* (the higher place), referring to the heavens (Muller, 1999: 66) or a place of transcendence. Muller (Muller, 1999: 66) argues that:

> …the notion of 'heaven' constitutes a Nazarite formulation of alterity — of Otherness — through the demarcation of ritual purity in terms of space, a daily attitude of 'holiness' embodied in the traditional [Zulu] ethic of [*uku*]*hlonipha* or 'respect.'

The invocation of *ukuhlonipha* is evident in 'Baba Wethu' (our father), a Mhlongo composition based on a prayer borrowed from a biblical scripture. Here she references heaven and the sacredness of the god's name, conclusively chanting 'sifun'inhlonipho' (we are seeking respect). In other words, Mhlongo seeks respect as a way of invoking sacredness. In this sense, the very utterance of sound through her singing becomes a ritual state, transcending corporeality and approaching the metaphysical space.

Mhlongo reaches these divine states through her presence in sound and movement. As Mthembu (2016) observes, the sacred manifested in Mhlongo's 'divine spirit'. In this way, experiencing Mhlongo 'demand[ed] total devotion, almost a negotiated surrender from her fans' (Madondo, 2010). What Vilakazi, Mthembu and Madondo seem to agree on, is that through her music, Mhlongo released potency that connected to spirit dimensions. Thus, one can argue that for both Shembe and Mhlongo the sacredness is embodied in the cosmological outlook that invokes the spirits in a ritual performance. As Muller (1999: 57) reminds us, the sacredness is also that moment of erupting wholeness. In the context of this study this could be thought of as harmonising the *ntu* dimensions of spirit/being, environment, time/space and aesthetic. Central to this invocation is song, and through song, the break into elsewhere.

In the context of sacred space then, music could be understood as the voice of this sacredness that enunciates from the position of agreement with wholeness. This agreement is found in Zulu traditional musics understood as 'call and response,' with the lead singer initiating a call and the congregation making a response understood as *ukuvuma,* to agree (Vilakazi, 2017: 142). Shembe's 'spontaneous' compositional style could be understood in three registers:

- Tunes written from pre-existing Western hymns while using Shembe's words;
- Tunes derived from Zulu indigenous singing (*amahubo*);
- Tunes that are in the 'Shembe style', based on Shembe's original poetry and melodies (Vilakazi, 2017: 140).

Although Mhlongo interacted with the first of these registers (as is evident in her album *Amakholwa* (2009) on songs such as 'Amagugu' and 'Wahazulwa'), the greater part of her

compositional style can be traced in the last two registers. By extension, the latter two styles included 'religious dances' such *ukusini* and *isigekle* (Vilakazi, 2017: 141), which are also found in *ubungoma* rituals and in Mhlongo's practice. *Ukusina* is a Zulu word for dance and *isgekle* was a later manifestation in the repertoire that introduced dance as a form of worship. The traces of this genre can be found in the Shembe hymn book, for example hymns 158, 172, 173, 175 and 176, among others (Vilakazi, 2017: 145). Some of the characteristics of *isigekle*, as outlined by Vilakazi (2017: 145), are one-stanza texts, cyclical form and a focus on a functional role, which is dance. This music is for the most part based on a pentatonic scale but also possesses occasional 'semitones and microtones' (Vilakazi, 2017: 145) as found in Zulu folk music such as *amahubo*. In the final sonic meditation I perform an adaptation of these artforms (*isgekle* and *amahubo*) with a jazz ensemble.

Throughout Mhlongo's recording career, the characteristics mentioned above, among others that I will discuss later, provided a framework for her artistic practice and by extension, compositional style. For instance, most of Mhlongo's songs use one repeated stanza that over time develops through call and response while she develops her lead through embellishments. Some of the songs that include these approaches are 'Yehlisan'umoya Ma Africa', 'Tingi – Tingi' and 'Uganga Nge Ngane', among many others. Most of Mhlongo's melodic ideas also invoke pentatonic scales, including 'Yapheli'mali Yami' and 'We Baba Omncane', both built on a D flat pentatonic scale. During a live performance, Mhlongo adds a layer of dance which points towards some meditative aspects.[57]

[57] See video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55d0vqKsePM

We invoke elements of 'Tingi Tingi' (3:10), focusing on a single phrase 'ubungibekela' as a thematic material that we develop into a newness through a call and response, understood as agreement (*ukuvuma*) with the spirit worlds. This call and response is between the piano and voice, while gradually launching into elsewhere. Later in the piece, after an open improvisation section, the voice establishes another sonic citation from 'Tingi Tingi'; at 05:50 Omagugu sings 'yaphel'imali yami ngibhalela wena soka lami', also found in Mhlongo's lyrics (from 'Yapheli'mali Yami'), which translates as 'I am going into bankruptcy writing to you with no response, why don't you respond'. The invocation of this text, in the context of this sonic meditation, is a way of launching into agreement with elsewhere seeking spirit acknowledgement.

Another aspect of Mhlongo's artistic practice relevant to the broader context of spirituality that is invoked here, is that while most of her music possesses a liturgical posture, there are no explicit religious references in her lyrics, at least until her last album. In *Amokholwa* (2009), which is a Zulu word for believers, Mhlongo engages some hymnal texts. In the album notes, she writes: 'my heart reaches out to… Shembe, the Methodists, Catholics, Sangomas, Hindus, Buddhists and the Zionists for their prayers.' Indeed, at a sonic level, there are traces of the Methodists, Shembe and Zionists on songs such as 'Baba Wethu', 'No Yana', 'Amagugu' and 'Wahazulwa', which all form part of the black South African church repertoire, and these songs are therefore explicitly religious. But her work prior to this moment reflected on societal issues, love and loss (Tolsi, 2020). This connection between religion and politics has a connection in Zulu thought and, by extension, in the Shembe movement. In fact, Vilakazi (2017: 134) argues that 'in Zulu thought, politics is religion and religion is politics.' Shembe sought to produce a social order in which 'religious and political elements would be closely interwoven' (Vilakazi, 2017: 39). This makes sense of why, in Shembe hymns, one song might be dedicated to God, while the next to a Zulu regime or a king. It also fits in with a worldview that seeks union (or wholeness) in all things, as discussed in Chapter Two. In this sense, Mhlongo's pursuit of spirituality, in her music and text, is in the very alignment of beings in society that invoke *ntu* wholeness. Beyond musical syntax, Mhlongo reaches this wholeness in her performance style steeped in ritual strategies.

This expression of wholeness, both in Mhlongo and the Shembe church, is often animated (in the sense of bringing to life) in dance as a moment of being in tune with the spirits. This is

also an invocation of *ngoma*, which sees no separation between dance, song, prophetic word and divination. Shembe uses one word, *isgekle* for dance, chanting and singing derived from IsiZulu artforms (Vilakazi, 2017: 144). It is common that songs for worship, in Zulu contexts, are accompanied by dance movements, and Shembe draws from these cultural practices. In the case of Mhlongo, she goes beyond the concept of 'accompaniment', that is to say an approach in which one artform takes priority, but embodies both singing and dancing as a singular expression occurring in time and space.

Given the silences in literature about Mhlongo's dance, it is worth touching on her adaptations of *ingoma* and *isgekle* that were indicated earlier in this section, to consider the use of dance as a spiritual practice in Mhlongo's work. Mhlongo's performances have inspired mystical descriptions. In Gisele Turner's description, 'when Busi walks on stage in a trance, her body dressed in beads and various modern fashionable Afro-items, her spine a little bent, her shaman staff in hand - she makes the air go still' (2008). Mhlongo's trance state is suggested in her performances through her incorporations of the *sangoma* and *isgekle* dance moves in between her singing, for instance in her 1997 performance of 'Yehlisan'umoya ma-Africa' at Fin-de-Siecle Festival in Nantes, France.[58] In another description of a performance by Mhlongo, Madondo tellingly comments:

> [Mhlongo's] repertoire and choreography, halted only with occasional, teary announcements – was of an initiate performing an abangoma ritual, a passage into the world of healers and marabouts. The audience was there but not aware of her: she belonged to some other time.

While these remarks may seem easy to dismiss as hype, there is perhaps more to them when they are read within a framework of Mhlongo's practice understood within Zulu and Shembe cosmological frames. *Ngoma*, discussed earlier as a dialoguing between practices including healing, dance, singing and divination inside of an onto-triad, qualifies the fervent and mystical attributions towards Mhlongo's artistic practices.

Taking into consideration the description of Isaiah Shembe as a Messiah who received prophetic messages from God to lead the nation to its liberation (Vilakazi, 2017: 29),

[58] Available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55d0vqKsePM).

Turner's description of Mhlongo, a disciple of the movement, as 'a goddess, with a divine voice', is not as outlandish as it may seem at first glance. Nor is the idea that 'a session with her is a cure, a spiritual awakening, a blessing' (Turner, 2008). Will Mowatt, the producer of *Urban Zulu*, commented in an interview that 'recording Busi was definitely being in the presence of God' (Thale, 2014). Like Shembe rituals that seek a transcendence through trance, Mhlongo seeks in her music the disappearance of the individual into a higher collectivity with the audience. As Madondo (2010) asserts: 'Mhlongo doesn't record music; she conducts a "service."' Similarly, 'she doesn't perform music, she carries out "libation"' Madondo (2010). In these statements there is a strong Shembe echo of 'being in service of (and with) others', while singing in libation the teachings of your foremothers/fathers. Mhlongo's approaches to sound, movement, text and space, perform work towards keeping the Zulu worldview unbroken.

2. *Urban Zulu* and maskanda

Mhlongo's musical influences derive not only from Shembe and Zulu indigenous styles, but also from gospel to jazz. What she really became known for as an artist is her adaptations of maskanda music inside 'jazz' sensibilities (Collins, 2006: 23). Mhlongo worked with a standard jazz rhythm section (bass, drums and keys), but added maskanda guitar, some concertina and Zulu vocal styles. The maskanda influences also found expression in her messaging, melodies, vocal texture and arrangement style. The strong maskanda accent in Mhlongo's work is evident in some of her seminal albums such as *Babhemu* (1993), *Urban Zulu* (1998) and *Amakholwa* (2009) among others. These influences in Mhlongo's music have been observed by various authors. Turner (2008) refers to Mhlongo as 'being true to "maskandi" tradition, a spoke[s]person and philosopher, an exponent of the Zulu blues, offering advice and timeous warnings.' For Coplan (2007: 316), Mhlongo was a 'maskanda diva.' Of course, here it is important to note that, at the time in the early '90s, Mhlongo was one of the very few female maskanda musicians in what was initially a male dominated genre, making singers such as Tu Nokwe and herself very rare exceptions in the genre (Coplan, 2007: 316).

In the 1920s, maskanda music emerged as an acoustic music mainly based on singing and guitar playing — sometimes with concertina or violin (Coplan, 2007: 238; Collins, 2006 :1). Over many years the instrumentation has evolved, although the instruments mentioned here,

especially the guitar, remain central to the genre. The music was the result of the early engagements of Zulu musicians with Western classical instruments such as the guitar. These musicians were migrant workers moving from rural Zululand, moving to bigger cities such as Johannesburg and Durban to find work (Collins, 2006 :1). As migrants, these musicians/workers suffered the abandonment of tradition from their indigenous instruments (Coplan, 2007: 238), but the music remained deeply rooted in Zulu indigenous musical systems such as those found in bow music (Davies, 1994:125). Bow music of the *ugubhu* was popularized by one of its exponents, Princess Constance Magogo kaDinuzulu (Collins, 2006 :1), who was also fond of Busi Mhlongo and her music. As Davies (1994:121) notes, when maskanda musicians encountered Western musical instruments, they did not imitate Western music, but instead made these instruments adopt to the musical vocabularies of indigenous bow and flute musics.

As a result of this connectedness with indigenous musics, maskanda also kept a strong sense of community. One of the manifestations of this is the 'call and response' between a singer and his (her) guitar, lead musician and the ensemble, the band and the audience. But as Titus (2013: 298) posits, the idea of call and response expanded beyond the sonic into a significant tool for maskanda musicians as 'those who perform, debate, and scrutinize this music and provide it with a strong connotative… power with respect to the "deep Zulu culture."' As a response, maskanda music's values stemmed from Zulu belief systems and customs, thus maintaining deep spiritual attachment origin (Davies, 1994:124). This maintenance of connection with home could be viewed as a response to displacement and a refusal entirely to disconnect with an upbringing. Titus (2013: 289) notes that this artform emerged in the moment of in-between-ness as Africans, ~~under apartheid~~, were not entirely allowed to settle in the urban areas. Consequently they moved between the 'village and town' (Titus, 2013: 289) and they sang about their experiences and views of what was happening. The music then became characterised by social commentary, praise songs and dance (Coplan, 2007: 238).

Similar to many early maskanda musicians, it was the bow music of *amahubo* that served as a bridge for Mhlongo into maskanda. For instance, on her song 'Nomkhubulwane' (Zulu rain goddess) there is an audible trace of praise singer Princess Magogo who was steeped in *amahubo*. Barry (Personal communication, 5 January 2020) recounts that the younger Mhlongo had a regular hotel jazz gig with pianist Bheki Mseleku and bassist Steve Nil at the Inanda Hotel, and that this became a meeting place for Magogo and Mhlongo. According to

Barry's (Personal communication, 5 January 2020) account, Magogo had become so fond of Mhlongo's singing and performance style that she once gave Mhlongo a large collection of cassette tapes of her (Magogo's) music. Mhlongo kept a strong connection with *amahubo,* as is evident even in her last album *Amakholwa* (2009), and the song 'Kutheni' (Madondo, 2010).

In the meditation, *amahubo* are harnessed through *umrhubhe* and Omagugu's citation of Magogo phrases that she brings into dialogue with Mhlongo's maskanda falsetto approach. (01:15 – 02:04). This section represents a strategy to challenge notions of time and tap into ~~precolonial~~ sensibilities through invocations of *amahubo* as sites for Zulu sacred knowledge.

Maskanda music occupies an integral place in Mhlongo's artistic practice. It is possible that her use of maskanda arose out of her exile experiences; being physically and geographically removed from her family, land and culture. For it was not until Mhlongo's exile years in the late 1980s in the Netherlands that she was inspired to look back to her Zulu musical identity. Before this time, she had focused on the performance of jazz, an American-derived artform, and mainly performed in contexts where music fulfilled the function of entertainment. Her turning point towards maskanda, mirroring early maskanda musicians, was a way of activating a memory of home and a response to a form of displacement. One could also argue that with memory comes an invocation of sound within a worldview whence that particular music is derived. Mhlongo was particularly inspired by other African musicians in Europe who connected with and forged strong African cultural identities through their sound (Thale, 2014). The manifestation of this memory is evident in Mhlongo's adaptations of maskanda into jazz. In this same move, she contributed to the expansions of the jazz imagination and its sonic reach in South Africa. Sosibo (2020) asserts that with Mhlongo's contributions to the genre, maskanda 'was no longer a raw, guitar and concertina-based folk music first associated with rural Zulu male migrant workers on the mines and in big cities'; I argue that it became a way to think about 'jazz' while opening space for a kind of folksiness, and identities in the sound.

Most of Mhlongo's music, especially in *Urban Zulu* (1999), is dominated by maskanda guitar lines and concertina riffs which are often preceded by a maskanda guitar introduction known

as *izihlabo,* a key characteristic in maskanda tradition. *Izihlabo* is 'an unmetred instrumental introduction serving to display the technical brilliance of the performer' (Collins, 2006: 4). *Izihlabo* could also be understood as a way of locating origin. This is the case in a number of songs, including 'Tingi -Tingi', 'Babhemu', 'Ujantshi', 'Yehlisan'umoya Ma Africa', 'Yapheli'mali Yami', 'Ukuthula', 'Awukho Umuzi Ongena Kukhuluma', Zithin'izizwe', 'We Baba Omncane', 'Uganga Nge Ngane' and 'Khula Tshitshi Lami'. Other signifiers of maskanda music in Mhlongo's artistic practice are her classic falsetto vocal lines (and backing vocals), for an example in the introduction of 'Yehlisan'umoya Ma Africa'. While these connections are related to musical style, it is equally significant to highlight that maskanda is most evident in the content of Mhlongo's lyrics. Maskandi, especially the earlier exponents, are known for 'offering advice and timeous warnings' (Turner 2008). This might offer one explanation of why some refer to this genre as the 'Zulu blues' (Titus, 2013: 286). The blues in an American sense is a music 'born out of heartache' often 'rising from the crowded streets of big town' (Hughes, 1941: 143), and like maskanda it is an evocative music. All Mhlongo's songs provide a level of 'advice' and 'warning' in the lyrics. The song 'Umentshisi', for instance, speaks about the arrival of the white man ('we'mlungu') and how they brought weapons of destruction; 'Yehlisan'umoya Ma Africa' is a plea to Africans to stop black on black violence; 'Awukho Umuzi Ongena Ongenakukhuluma Kwayo' is a message of peace and unity among people that every person should contribute in creating. It is important to note here that, in the case of Mhlongo (and other maskandi) the role of the maskanda musician, as I will expand later, is also that of a prophet, a barometer of social issues, a giver of advice and warnings. This corresponds to the role of the healer in some way acting as the conscience (and conscientizers) of the community.

While Mhlongo kept some of the key signifiers of maskanda music and was grounded in her text as social commentary,[59] she also made unique stylistic contributions to the genre. These included the use of synthesisers, the addition of alternative chord changes and use of B sometimes C and D sections in her arrangements. These expansions can be heard on songs such as 'Mfaz', 'Onga Phezeya' and 'Ntandane'. Among other unusual additions, drawing from West African music, Mhlongo adds a kora to a song such as 'Yise Wabant'a Bami',

[59] These are some of the songs that express social commentary: 'Ukuthula', 'Awukho Umuzi Ongena Kukhuluma' and 'Zithin'izizwe', among many others.

which also features Lokua Kanza's Congolese guitars and vocals. Another notable contribution is the use of marimbas on 'Yapheli'mali Yami' and 'Nguyelo'.

Another Mhlongo contribution to maskanda is her ability to improvise, which was cultivated through working with musicians in many genres. But, as Barry (Personal communication, 5 January 2020) points out, Mhlongo's dimension of improvisation should be understood as 'organic' as it borrows from various musical traditions. For instance, Mhlongo 'was a powerful jazz singer in her own right and was a great interpreter of jazz standards. She was working with master improvisers' (Personal communication with Barry, 5 January 2020). Based on Mhlongo's recordings, I suggest that her perspective of improvisation leaned towards Zulu folk music approaches, that is to say, her improvisation emerges out of variation and embellishment. In other words, it stemmed from her ability to develop spontaneous melodies and texts guided by spirit worlds as opposed to an approach that places emphasis on 'chord changes', as often happens in jazz. As Barry asserts: 'it's not scatting [at least not in a jazz sense] but something else' (Personal communication with Susan Barry, 5 January 2020). Mhlongo's focus involves a deep awareness of the space and energy that inform her vocal texture, timbre and even her dance moves. I regard this aspect of her practice to be operating at a spirit level as a mode for healing and prophetic practices inherent in her gift of *ubungoma*.

Elements of this spontaneous melodic variating, through embellishments, can be found in this sonic meditation (05:06 – 05:20). This is a strategy that Mhlongo used to reach a heightened state where text and message became prophecies beyond that which is premeditated and can be rehearsed. This approach enunciate from the vulnerabilities of being an improviser. Sound becomes a way of making available our being for *ntu* alignment which orient purpose (*ubizo*).

3. A meditation on orientation

It is clear at this point that Mhlongo's major influences were Shembe and maskanda music. As both these styles are deeply rooted in indigenous Zulu music genres and philosophical thought, there are naturally some similarities between them. Both styles are based on some form of displacement (culturally or geographical), and a refusal to forget one's origins. It is

not incidental, then, that call and response is a recurring idea in Shembe and maskanda music. In Shembe, call and response is found in the communal teachings of Shembe that articulates a connection with environment, which informs the sonic. In maskanda, call and response is not only a stylistic attribute of the music, but also involves a reflexivity or a dialogue with societal issues. In Mhlongo's music, these attributes manifest in her approach to ensemble playing and her engagement with space and the audience as a constant call and response. I hold that there is another layer of call and response in Mhlongo's artistic practice, namely between her and the spirits. As many writers (Turner, 2008; Madondo, 2007 and Thale) have noted, Mhlongo's later work was driven by her ancestral calling (*ukuthwasa*). In Turner's words, Mhlongo's craft was guided by 'the voices of her ancestors and fired by the need to speak for her people' (2008). While Mhlongo's music became a mouth piece of society, as I have shown in previous sections, she also became a medium for connecting audiences to spirit dimensions of the ancestors.

Madondo's poetic writing invites us to contemplate the overlaps between artist and healer, person of the world and spiritual medium and diviner.

> Busi Mhlongo the wailer gave way to the balladeer, the artist gave way to the healer, the healer beckoned he priest, who led us to a brothel, where body and soul merges, even if it's for a five-minute duration of the rhythmic snake dance, back to the stage where the tame Zulu woman about to celebrate her 60th birthday, gave way to a rock-star chic, an Afro alien-Funk Goddess on a futuristic mission to convert the non-believers (2007).

What Madondo brings into focus here is a deep connection between Mhlongo's practice and its otherworldly aspects where healing resides. This orientation in Mhlongo's sound, artistic practice and broader worldview was further informed by her practice as a *sangoma* (healer), as she had been through the processes of *ukuthwasa* (initiation). *Ubungoma* could be understood as a type of call and response that occurs between the living and the living dead that activates a passageway for communication, whether through songs, divination and dreams among other forms. In 1981 Mhlongo was initiated as a *sangoma* via a rite of passage known as *ukuthwasa* (Mojapelo, 2008: 288). The word *thwasa* means to emerge as new; by extension, *ukuthwasa* is to take on new duties and responsibilities as a 'spirit worker', known as *isangoma*. The process of *ukuthwasa* is often preceded by misfortune and sickness, which

are common signs of the spirit calling (Janzen, 1995: 146), as I have also experienced. Perhaps this is a result of disobedience towards the voice of the ancestors or, at other times, a lack of knowledge resulting in a disconnection with the spirit worlds. Thus, in the processes of training to be *ithwasa*, one learns to hear and interpret the messages of the ancestor, whether through a dream, songs and/or divination. As a result, processes of *ukuthwasa*,[60] which of course vary according to unique training that differs from person to person/culture to culture (see Bakow and Low, 2018; Ogana, 2015), become moments of breaking into a new being that is sensitive to the voice of the divine. Given the context provided here, it is symbolic that Mhlongo named the group that recorded her debut, *Babhemu* (1993), Twasa. This could be read as signaling her commitment to her calling and her conscious connecting of the gift of healing with her developing artistic practice.

Someone with a calling in IsiZulu is regarded as having *ubizo* (a calling). *Ubizo* is a calling from the ancestors that results in one being possessed by a spirit of an older ancestor who possessed similar giftings. The moment of accepting the gift is called *ukuvuma*, which means 'to agree' (or respond). Once one has responded, one undergoes *ukuthwasa*. After this training one become a *sangoma*, which is a transformative state that alters one's awareness of the world. One has now opened the eye of the spirit and henceforth mediated messages can pass between the physical and spirit realms. For this to occur, one needs a tool or an outlet. Herbs, divination and music are among these channels. Sosibo (2020: 2) writes that Mhlongo had a calling and that 'music to her was a spiritual obligation and a form of divination.' I hold that Mhlongo incorporated her gift into her music. As her daughter Mpumi recalls (in Sosibo, 2020), Mhlongo 'used to meditate…' and her songs 'were like a download during meditation.' I maintain that it is Mhlongo's in-tune-ness that allowed her to receive messages (songs) from the spirit realms. Furthermore, Mhlongo's background in the Shembe Nazarite Church, where communication with God is understood as being 'fostered through expressive domains of song, dance, dreams and miracles of healing' (Muller, 1999 :3), helps us to locate Mhlongo's outlook on composition.

Supporting the idea of Mhlongo's connection to a metaphysical paradigm, Madondo asserts that Mhlongo's conceptual approach to composition is that 'she dreams in surreal sonic layers' (Madondo, 2010). That is to say, 'instead of strict codes of control accompanying

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composition, she lets go. She doesn't make a song. She gives birth to countless musical off-springs, all shaped by sound she and whatever band, producer or creative midwife have been working together' (Madondo, 2010). Although Madondo writes poetically and as to be read as such, his words point towards the importance of dreams as a living site for knowledge production and *ukuvuma*, through surrender and letting go, as a posture on which such a practice projects.

Such language makes sense when Mhlongo's practice is understood as *ubungoma*. She entered a form of call and response between the ones who is granted her gift (*amadlozi*) and herself. In this sense, it is *ukuvuma* that foregrounds the relationship between *idlozi* and her artistic practice. *Ukuvuma* is a form of surrender, denoting reaching a point of liminality where one's knowledge collapses into the greater knowing of wholeness. This is the essence of Mhlongo's artistic approach and improvisation style as she moves from the known to the unknown to a new knowing. Mhlongo demonstrates this progression in 'Ntandane', a song that laments Mhlongo's 'lost' father who she adored, but who abandoned her and her mother. The piece is reminiscent to the gospel music sung in black South African churches: a particular three-part harmonization practice, and the long-drawn-out syllables (almost chanting) over the drum beat that ramps up the emotive content. The song starts off with a repeating vocal chorus that features a call from Mhlongo, which is later doubled by a choir's response. This could be described as the main theme (known) of the piece, while it is also a point of agreement with the choir and the ensemble. At 04:21 Mhlongo breaks into spontaneous embellishment (improvisation) of the melody in which the text eventually disappears, reaching a state of liminality, a gradual build up towards a climax, an ecstatic moment. I understand this section as the moment of surrender when the voice of spirit enters. At 06:20 the song arrives at a coda of the opening material, this time played over a double time groove (almost the climax of the song). This can be understood as 'the new knowing.'

It is worth noting that a similar outlook is found in *ngoma* divination practices where everything is anchored by the agreement and where, through surrender, meanings are revealed. For instance, when a healer throws the bones, after listening to the issue at hand (the known) she/he would chant, 'vumani bo' (we are seeking agreement) and the sufferer would respond 'siyavuma' (meaning we agree) and it is through this agreement that the healer will enter the prophetic word (liminal phase). Eventually, the healer interprets what the ancestors are saying, and enters into the realm of the 'new knowing.'

I posit that it is in that agreement that the healing energy is released, both in the case of a *sangoma* and when Mhlongo is on the bandstand. Thus, *ukuvuma* could also be understood as an invocation of wholeness (*ntu*) that produces a 'vital force' responsible for healing. This is the core function of *ngoma* practices. Notice the similarities in Janzen's (1991: 291) description of *ngoma*:

> *Ngoma* in a ritual therapeutic setting opens with a declarative statement, prayer, or utterance, then moves to song begun by the one who makes the statement: as the call and song is developed, the surrounding individuals respond with clapping and soon singing begins en masse, and then the instruments enter in.

This sequence or unfolding of the performance, or what amounts to an invocation of the spirits, is arguably at the heart of Mhlongo's performances. It is one that entrances audiences, giving rise to the kinds of mystical descriptions of Mhlongo's music encountered in the writings of Turner, Madondo and others. Madondo (2006: 10) recalls being in one of Mhlongo's performances and witnessing 'a man evidently lost in a charged-up atmosphere like that of religious surrender… being in communion with the artist on the stage.' This experience could be read as a moment of synchronicity with *ntu* (wholeness). In other words, Mhlongo's call was met with a response from the ancestors, that extended to the audience and her bandmates as an invocation of wholeness.

4. Ingoma yakwaNtu

It is clear at this point that to think and write about Mhlongo, one has to be receptive to a plethora of ideas surrounding 'being' in a broad sense. Mhlongo's approach to her artistic practice invokes many aspects of *ngoma*, Shembe ideologies and Zulu cosmology among others. She invokes the sonic, movement, healing and divination. I argue that Mhlongo's approaches to wholeness is productively understood in her strong beliefs in *ubuntu*, which forms part of the *ntu* manifestations discussed in Chapter Two.

Mhlongo's approach to the bandstand is a case in point. Her music always emerged from a collective space of gathering; a space of *ubuntu* (a collective humanity). I recall Mhlongo's warm presence when I worked with her during the recording of *Amakholwa* (2022) and other

times when she came for a rehearsal at Technikon Natal while I was a student there. As Mhlongo's daughter, Mpumi Mabuza (in Sosibo, 2020) recalls, her mother 'allowed everyone to express their creativity in putting it [the music] together. She didn't work alone…'. In Mhlongo's own words, music is 'a communal thing… with music and in music, we are always in the church long before we went to church' (Busi Mhlongo in Madondo, 2010). Mhlongo's reference to 'church' could be pointing towards modes of gathering and worship that predates the Western organisation and arrival of the church in Africa ('long before we went to church'); hence her attraction to Shembe, a church that maintained elements of what 'church' meant before the arrival of the missionaries. What she terms as 'a communal thing' can be understood at a deeper level than just a collective music-making that involves both artists and audience; it could be understood as *ubuntu*, which forms an important principle of African cosmology. 'Always in the church' suggests a constant awareness of music as spiritual practice, of a connection to a higher power, an overlap between the seen and unseen. For Mhlongo it all developed from the unseeing act of hearing:

> Listening, you see, happens naturally or unnaturally while hearing is a choice. Hearing has nothing to do with the physical, it has everything to do with the deeper state of alertness: active, open, willing and ready' (Busi Mhlongo in Madondo, 2010).

The above quote strike resonances with Ramose's notion of the 'onto-triadic structure of being' (Ramose, 2005: 45), which understands the physical and the metaphysical planes as closely related in a parallel existence that he escribes as 'the universe as a musical harmony' (Ramose, 2005: 43). It is worth remembering that one word for hearing in iSiZulu is *ukuzwa*, which means both hearing and sensing. This connects back to *ubungoma*, the 'choice' to surrender and emerging as a new being steeped in deeper forms of listening, alertness and readiness to interpreting the voice of an ancestor. Mhlongo was always oriented to a space of communion with the spirit worlds.

Given this frame of reference, I argue that Mhlongo had always understood her practice within a cultural and communal sense situated in a Zulu cosmology. This is perhaps most apparent in an interview where Mhlongo explains her conception of music and herself as a musician:

> For me music is sacred. When I sing I feel something moving inside of me. When it comes to music, the person 'Busi' disappears. It is us – me together with the audience. Some people say they sing for themselves but I sing for the people. I find no satisfaction in singing for myself. Think of how beautiful it is to sing for a child. When you sing to please yourself, you sing until you un-please yourself (Busi Mhlongo quoted in Leeto, 2014).

Mhlongo's outlook points to both the notions of *ngoma* (an understanding of her artistic practice as a manifestation of spirituality) and those of *ubuntu* (with a focus on the collective good rather than the individual). The fervour of the collective, entranced involvement associated with ritual is notable in the reception of Mhlongo's performances. Turner (2008), for instance, remarks that Mhlongo on stage 'demands total devotions, almost a negotiated surrender from her fans'. This dissolving into a greater collective could also be thought of as a deeper submission to the calling, a response to the call of *ntu*.

In my experiences of working with Mhlongo, her performances were always characterized by a trance-like feeling, both for the audience and the band. In this regard, it is not irrelevant that Mhlongo was a *sangoma*, following a calling by her ancestors (Mojapelo, 2008: 288). Informed by this background, it is not a stretch to argue that Mhlongo's approach to performance was also her chosen mode for exercising her gift of healing. It is the connection to the two worlds of Shembe and that of *ubungoma* that constructed her spiritualism, which became imbued in trance-like performance style.

Ultimately, Mhlongo challenges and expands definitions of what it means to be an artist inside jazz practices in South Africa and points us towards a kind of totality that one needs to consider in dealing with her work. It is a totality that resides within *ntu* cosmologies. Alertness as harnessed in Mhlongo's outlook, being 'active, open, willing and ready', are key characteristics in understanding the connections in African rituals and improvisation in South African jazz.

After a liminal phase steeped in open improvisations (04:41 – 05:01), towards the end, this sonic meditation returns to libations as a way of giving thanks to Mhlongo's ancestral lineage (from 06:41 to the end). This is also a way of acknowledging the continuity and endlessness in the realm of spirits where our ancestors dance. Thus, the sounds performed are a result of a continued search to harmonise *ntu* wholeness.

Chapter Six: Bheki Mseleku and the concept of cycles

We were in this place where lots of people gathered, some sat on the floors right against the bandstand, in intimate space. It felt as if the place was charged with energy from past events and ritual; there was a spirit presence.

I walked on to the bandstand. The room was very quiet. Filled with inspiration, I broke into an open solo piano improvisation, and soon the rhythm section joined. We played a new song. It was harmonious and meditative, taking us to an unknown place. I sang with no effort. As the vibrational depth deepened, a tenor saxophonist came in as though he was driven by the spirits. He developed the melody I had been singing. There was a joyfulness in the room.

I then raised my eyes and saw uMthombeni standing right at the back of the room. He smiled, then closed his eyes. It had been a while since I last saw him. I then began to chant in honour of him, invoking his ancestral linage. Everyone began singing along.

Mseleku lifted both his hands right to the top and nodded his head twice. He made his way towards the bandstand. As he approached, every musician offered their instruments to him to play. He walked past everyone, towards the piano.

As he came closer, I naturally stood up from the piano chair and he started playing. The music developed to a new level.

I then woke up; I woke up singing his song.

Third sonic meditation – Cycles: The Shrine

Available: https://vimeo.com/africaopen/download/758237389/8586e9a2e5
https://vimeo.com/758205991
Password: @VisserClari9105

This sonic meditation is a continuation of various sound strategies, explorations and interventions towards re-membering Mseleku and his body of work as ritual, part of a process of keeping his spirit alive. I focus on his concept of cycles as displayed in his piece 'Violet Flame', and my piece 'Umsunduzi'. I embrace Mseleku's ideas of endlessness and afterlife, and how the sonic deals with these constructs, in cycles, as conceptual apparatus in improvisation. I am engaged in the sounds of endlessness through the concept of cycles.

This chapter builds on my Master's thesis, *Encountering Bheki Mseleku: A Biographical-Analytical Consideration of his Life and Music* (2017), where I wrote extensively about Mseleku, constructing his biography and considering his exile, spirituality and his album *Meditations* (1992) in particular. Here I pursue the complex matter of spirituality further than the scope of my Master's thesis permitted. Mseleku's biography is covered in the first chapter of my Masters' thesis, which also appeared as an article (Makhathini, 2019: 172-197). Here I provide a brief overview of his biography to anchor my discussions of the spiritual aspects of his practice. I therefore write what follows with the specific aim to explore the openings where spirituality may be read and further probed in Mseleku's artistic practice.

The previous chapters explored the location of cosmologies in the sounds of Tabane and Mhlongo, relating them to South African socio-cosmological practices in their biographies where resonances to *malombo,* Shembe and *ngoma* became apparent. The case of Mseleku presents a mode of spirituality that is difficult to pin down, at least as a singular religious practice. For instance, in his work (particularly in liner notes, as I will show later) there are traces of various religious influences such a Buddhism, Christianity, Zen mysticism and Islam. In interviews and some song titles, Mseleku pointed to some elements of Zulu belief systems which formed part of his upbringing. Within this ensemble of religious practices, Mseleku did not show a specific preference for a singular one. Instead, he espoused a kind of religious 'universalism', understood as 'the union of all religions in the world' (*The South Bank Show*, 1994). While all of Mseleku's multiple religious reference points, within his universal belief system, are important in understanding his artistic practice and will be discussed, the study argues for (South) African perspectives as the core focus of this project. That is to say, the influences of Eastern belief systems, among others, in Mseleku's artistic practice will be discussed in conversations with African ones that take center stage in this research. Unlike the two previous encounters with Tabane and Mhlongo that read 'easily' inside (South) African cosmologies, in approaching Mseleku, I am making an argument that there is a broad osmosis in how spiritualities (can) move in and through *ntu* cosmology that resists seeing the latter as a closed, 'pure' worldview and practice. In the case of Mseleku, his artistic practice and philosophical thought show that the Eastern mysticism which he (also) embraced have traces in *ntu* cosmology. This chapter therefore proposes and further positions *ntu* cosmology as a relational cosmology, and demonstrates how such relationalities inhere in Mseleku's practice.

Mseleku's notions of 're-incarnation', as understood within Eastern mysticism and in connection to his compositional approach using 'cycles', strike deep resonances with the notions of wholeness and continuity as found in *ntu*. Similarly, Mseleku's practice of meditation (through music) aimed at achieving 'self-realization', as understood in Zen, could be explored within *ngoma* and the process of *ukuthwasa* as a gradual becoming. Consequently, I make an argument that even though Mseleku borrowed concepts from various religions and philosophies to make sense of his practice as an artist steeped in universal spiritual modes, his understanding of music and how it dialogues with his philosophical thoughts, resonates deeply with the (South) African cosmologies discussed in this study. In this sense, I argue that a perspective of Mseleku, through a (South) African lens, could be both a liberating exercise and a call towards an important direction for jazz studies in South Africa.

To bring out what would count as a Nguni reading of Mseleku's artistic practice, I map out this chapter in four main sections: first a discussion of some biographical details; second, spirituality and the counterpoint of various religious influences; third, composition styles underpinned by some cosmological concepts; and fourth a brief discussion that locates Mseleku's practice within *ngoma* sensibilities.

1. A Point of Departure

Pianist and multi-instrumentalist Bheki Hyacinth Mseleku was born in Lamontville in Durban, South Africa on 3 March 1955. He was raised in a religious and musical family, his mother and father were both musicians, and they passed on the legacy to their children. Mseleku's father, William Mseleku, graduated from the University of Cambridge in England.[61] Two of Mseleku's siblings, Pinkie Mseleku and Langa Mseleku (who was Mseleku's first piano teacher) were musicians and composers: Pinkie a singer and Langa a keyboard player and composer (Lusk, 2000).

There was a piano at his childhood home, and Mseleku naturally gravitated towards to the instrument (Fordham, 2008). His early influences included an array of music ranging from

[61] His musical contributions, together with those of his wife Alvira Mseleku, are documented on Erlmann's book *African Stars: Studies in Black South African Performance* (1991, 92-4; also see Coplan 2007, 159; Ballantine 2012, 72).

church music, Zulu traditional music, Indian classical music and later on RnB and jazz (Sinker, 1987). At a young age, Mseleku was involved in a go-kart accident in which he lost the first joint of both his right fourth and fifth fingers (Willgress 1994; Lusk 2008; *Talkin Jazz* 1994; *The South Bank Show* 1994). The loss of his joints, as Mseleku reflected later in his life, was partly due to the lack of decent medical support for black people during apartheid (*The South Bank Show*, 1994). Mseleku adds that some of his cut joints were 'buried' at his home, while the rest was cut in hospital (*The South Bank Show*, 1994). Here I want suggest that the use of the word 'buried' in Mseleku's language points to a connection with an ancestral world, or at least some ritual concept practiced in his family, perhaps similar to Tabane and his connection to land. Later in his career, Mseleku acknowledged that this accident affected his fingering and 'technical abilities' when playing piano (*Talkin Jazz*, 1994), but as became evident later, this 'limitation' forced him to connect with a higher dimension that transcended physicality and afforded him a distinct sound as a pianist. Reflecting later, Mseleku himself accepted these technical 'limitations', but argued that he was 'moved by something deeper' in himself: 'the spiritual side of the music has nothing to do much with technique though technique can help…' (*The South Bank Show*, 1994).

While Mseleku had been playing from a young age, it was only at the age of seventeen that he 'discovered' that he had a talent to play and improvise, which he credits to his upbringing (Bheki Mseleku in *The South Bank Show*, 1994). Mseleku recalls that 'when I started playing I discovered that I could play effortlessly... I must have heard a lot of music when I was young and I guess it has to do with that plus South Africa is a very musical environment...' (Bheki Mseleku in *The South Bank Show*, 1994). Here Mseleku attributes his musicality to the people of South Africa, a place to which he will, sonically, return later in his life. This musicality of a place is perhaps also a way of listening to the broader surrounding environment, which denotes *kintu*. This suggests that Mseleku had a strong relation to place, which could be extended to include a connection to the cosmology of place. In other instances, Mseleku referenced reincarnation and dreams as part of his sources for inspiration and musical influence (Ansell, 1999). This is confirmed by the fact that Mseleku was mainly self-taught, and thus he claimed that his musical abilities were recollections from past lives (Ansell, 1999). As he once put it, 'there are cycles of reincarnation. You can forget who you are and spend a whole lifetime trying to remember…' (Ansell 1999). From this it is evident how Mseleku interweaves the physical (in the case of land and people) with the metaphysical (dreams and reincarnation) in articulating his artistic practice.

The idea of remembering his musical abilities from his previous lives is a theme to which Mseleku would return in various interviews (see Bheki Mseleku in *The South Bank Show*, 1994; Ansell, 1999). Perhaps this is believable if one considers that beyond his early informal piano lessons received from his brother Langa (Lusk, 2008), there are no records in literature and elsewhere showing any further systematic or formal learning that shaped Mseleku's artistic voice. Reflecting on his childhood, Mseleku asserts that 'in my growing up, I didn't have any formal training in music, it was by accident that I played music anyway' (Bheki Mseleku in *The South Bank Show* 1994). This amplifies Mseleku's idea of how spirit dimensions operated in his practice, as I will discuss later.

I have discussed elsewhere (Makhathini, 2017; 2019) that Mseleku developed his musical style in various bands, beginning in 1975, between Durban and Johannesburg. His first international tour took place in 1977 with Philip Tabane's Malombo and Spirits Rejoice, both steeped in spiritual practices, as also suggested in both band names (Sinker 1987; Fordham 2008). These groups performed as part of the Newport Jazz Festival in New York, where Mseleku met two pianists who he held in high regard: McCoy Tyner and Alice Coltrane. Alice Coltrane gifted Mseleku her husband John Coltrane's mouthpiece that he used during the recording of *A Love Supreme* (Fordham 2008). When I met Mseleku many years later, he spoke about this encounter as highly symbolic, a gesture to which Mseleku attached great significance (although in later years Coltrane's mouthpiece was stolen from Mseleku's apartment in Durban).

As the political climate worsened in South Africa, in 1980 Mseleku, together with his friend, poet and percussionist Eugene Skeef, went into exile in London (Sinker 1987; Makhathini, 2019). Mseleku's exile became an important chapter in his spiritual life, especially in his development of the notion of 'home' as 'a spiritual construct' beyond geographic boundaries (see Makhathini 2017: 41- 42). It was at the historic Ronnie Scott's that Mseleku launched his solo career, and where he met drummer Marvin 'Smitty' Smith, who later featured on the albums *Celebration* (1992) and *Timelessness* (1994, see Johnson, 1992; Fordham, 2008).

Later, Mseleku joined the Amandla Cultural Group, the cultural arm of Umkhonto weSizwe (the military wing of the African National Congress) under the leadership of Jonas Gwangwa in Angola in 1989. While many musicians during this period explicitly framed their music as a mode of protest, Mseleku, in his work, was more concerned with attaining spiritual

freedom. It is worth noting that Mseleku's involvement in the Amandla Cultural Group does signal a sense of solidarity with the works of various artists active in the struggle movements. This socio-political context is closely attached to jazz music in South Africa, at least in as far as this artform is documented in current literature. It is worth adding that this positioning of artists (in political context) as a 'default framing', overlooking their situated-ness in spirituality, became a crucial one in post-1994 South Africa.

Mseleku released his first album, *Celebration*, in 1991. This album was steeped in American jazz sensibilities, as were the others that swiftly followed. This includes his 1994 release of *Timelessness* (Verve 1994), featuring a star-studded list of African American musicians including Abbey Lincoln, Elvin Jones, Joe Henderson and Pharaoh Sanders. This album was a success even financially; it afforded Mseleku his first piano (Johnson 1994). It is worth noting, however, that the early influences of Zulu indigenous music, Indian classical music and broader South African jazz are evident in the *Meditations* (1992) solo album (recorded live at the Bath International Music Festival) on Samadhi records, and also in *Home at Last* (2003) and *Beyond the Stars* (2021). On the album *Meditations* (1992), Mseleku seems to reflect on his childhood musical influences in KwaZulu Natal, interspersed with Indian classical music linkages. As I have noted elsewhere about the album *Meditations*:

> On the one hand, it presents a sonic demonstration of how references to South African music practices pervade his music, a reference of home significant in the context of exile. On the other hand, Mseleku's search for spiritual awakening is evident in the notion of meditation invoked in the title itself and in the structure of the track 'Meera-Ma' (Makhathini, 2017: 58).

Keeping in mind that Mseleku recorded this album in his exile years in London, it seems plausible to suggest that he utilised the sonic as a tool to stay connected to his place of origin, and to his cultural sonic dimensions using the principles of 'call and response'. Metaphorically, this call and response became a way of invoking (or 'calling') home which finds response in the sounds associated with home. Viewed from the perspective of *ubizo* (see the previous chapter on Mhlongo), one could argue that this was Mseleku's way of invoking ancestry and responding to their call(ing). Simultaneously, the sonic (consider the song 'Meera-Ma', for example) also points towards Mseleku's new spiritual awakening in Eastern

mysticism that finds resonance in Coltrane, but also to how he keeps multiple spiritual modalities in dialogue through incorporating eastern and South African musical influences.

In 1994, along with many exiled artists including Hugh Masekela, Letta Mbulu, Caiphus Semenya, Abdullah Ibrahim, Sathima Bea Benjamin, Hotep Galeta and Jonas Gwangwa, Mseleku returned to South Africa (Okapi, 2016; Coplan 2007, 340). The celebrations of South Africa's first steps to democracy included a three-month residency of the London Philharmonic Orchestra in South Africa as part of the significantly named Ngoma project, directed by Eugene Skeef (Ngidi, 1994). The project featured Bheki Mseleku, Pops Mohammed, Busi Mhlongo, Vusi Mchunu, Thebe Lipere, Madala Kunene and Sibongile Khumalo, who performed with the orchestra and presented workshops. It is significant that a project of this kind, launched at the advent of formal democracy in South Africa, was called *ngoma*. It signals something of the diagnosis of the state of the nation as ill or wounded, and the programme of the project (and implicitly its participants) aimed at healing, as opposed to the more generally expressed celebratory mood felt and conveyed elsewhere.

In the following year, Mseleku recorded his fourth album, *Star Seeding* (Verve 1995) in California. This was followed by another release under Verve titled *Beauty of Sunrise* (1997). Although aspects of Mseleku as an arranger and composer are rarely mentioned due to his unmatched virtuosity as a pianist, these aspects show up in significant ways in his well thought-out horn arrangements and his advanced modern jazz compositional styles in *Beauty of Sunrise*.

Available literature is silent about activities in Mseleku's career in 1998. It is possible that he had retreated to a temple at this point as he did in London when he 'spent periods in spiritual retreat in the Shyama Ashram Radha Krishna Temple' (Eugene Skeef in Makhathini 2017: 36). Mseleku re-emerged in 1999 with his appearance on the Arts Alive programme in South Africa, held at Mega Music on 17 September (Ansell 1999). During this period Mseleku was contemplating the idea of recording an album for the first time in South Africa, but in an interview with Gwen Ansell, he confessed his challenges with finding a decent piano in South Africa (for which he blamed the South African government, see Ansell 1999). From my personal encounters with Mseleku, I am also aware that he experienced challenges with the level of 'discipline and general musicianship in South Africa.'

During Mseleku's stay in South Africa he spent most of his time, at least between 1999 and 2003, in Durban moving between teaching (informally) at Technikon Natal and spending time meditating at a Buddhist temple in Berea (Fordham 2008). It was in this period that I met Mseleku in 2001, spending most of our time at Technikon Natal listening to him play or at his home in South Beach or Thursdays at the Buddhist Temple. Mseleku had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder in addition to suffering from diabetes, and his health was deteriorating. He was in and out of hospital in those years; I visited him a couple of times when he was admitted at Fort Napier Hospital in Pietermaritzburg (my hometown) around 2002.

These health challenges also meant Mseleku could not sustain himself financially. He generally lacked performance opportunities and sufficient recognition (Okapi 2006). As a result, in my years of knowing Mseleku in South Africa, the only concert of his I had attended was his performance at the 2002 Standard Bank Awesome Africa Music Festival.

In 2003, Mseleku signed to Sheer Sound, and recorded and release *Home at Last* (2003). This is the only record Mseleku recorded in South Africa, featuring local musicians including the likes of as Winston Mankunku (tenor saxophone), Ezra Ngcukana (tenor saxophone), Feya Faku (trumpet and flugelhorn), Enoch Mthalane (guitar), Herbie Tsoaeli (bass), Tlale Makhene (percussion), Philip Meintjies and Morabo Morojele (drums). In this record Mseleku embraces South African jazz articulations in more explicit ways by incorporating elements of township grooves and various other influences from his upbringing in South Africa. This is expressed through songs such as 'Monwabisi, 'Nants', 'Inkululeko' and 'Imbizo', in which Mseleku projects strong connections with marabi and mbhaqanga.[62] In songs such as 'Sandile' and 'Dance with Me Tonight', Mseleku hints at some of his funk and RnB influences from his years with Expressions in the 1970s (Lusk, 2008).

The record, through its title, also points to Mseleku's hope finally to settle in the country of his birth, hopes that were destroyed by Mseleku's lack of job opportunities and recognition in South Africa (Okapi, 2006). Referring to *Home at Last*, some have accused Mseleku of succumbing to commercial imperatives. Ian Carr (et al., 2004), however, notes that *Home at Last* should be thought of as a concept album that, as I also note elsewhere, Mseleku utilized

[62] See Ballantine's *Marabi Night: Jazz, 'race' and Society in Early Apartheid in South Africa* (2012) for historical background of these genres.

to address and confront the paradox of home. This paradox could be described as the tension between a home that provided the warmth of musical inspiration on the one hand, and on the other a place that rejected Mseleku through insufficient recognition and support. It is possible that this lack of recognition might have been due to his limited interest in politics compared to his contemporaries who had been in exile. In many ways Mseleku projects these tensions sonically in *Home at Last*, weaving between South African jazz vocabularies and those from across the Atlantic, including influences by Bud Powell and Thelonious Monk.[63]
Finally, Mseleku returned to London in 2006 and worked closely with flutist (and student at the time) Gareth Lockrane. Like his predecessors and fellow exiles, Mseleku influenced the British jazz scene through his records, engagements and performances (Gedye, 2016, 6; Davis, 2011; Eato, 2011). His last musical engagement on record is 'Bheki Mseleku – The Last Rehearsal' posted by Rodd Youngs, date unavailable.[64] The rehearsal was in preparation for a performance at the Royal Festival Hall, and it took place weeks before Mseleku's passing.

In keeping with Mseleku's idea of reincarnation, it seems appropriate to say that he transitioned to higher dimensions of consciousness on 9 September 2008 after suffering with diabetes (Fordham 2008). His 'afterlife' is evident in the form of 'Eugene Skeef's Memory projects, both Gareth Lockrane and Afrika Mkhize's arrangements of Mseleku's work for big band configurations performed at various concerts that in the United Kingdom and South Africa, Andrew Lilley's transcriptions of Mseleku piano works in his book *The Artistry of Bheki Mseleku* (2020) and my own performances of what I call 'musical letters to Mseleku' (Makhathini, 2017: 38) in my master's thesis project and beyond.

On the recent, posthumous release *Beyond the Stars* (2021), Mseleku's use of South African music styles is evident, as is his indebtedness to strong *amahubo* and maskanda inflections in songs such as 'Izanusi' and 'Ekhaya', with particular reference to tonality, melodic motifs and groove orientation. These musical genres form a strong DNA for South African and Zulu musical vocabularies, and also an integral part of South African jazz as shown to by authors

[63] Previously, Mseleku had exposed these connections both in his music and explicitly in the song titles such as 'Sulyman Saud', which is a tribute to Tyner through his Islamic name Sulieman Saud, 'Monk's Move' and 'Monk the Priest' dedicated to Monk, and 'The Messenger' dedicated to Powell.
[64] Available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tk-fHr5_0HI. Something in Mseleku's playing and the entire mood of the music, coupled with the addition of strings that have not been heard on Mseleku's recordings before, evokes, in my hearing/sensing, a sombreness. When I experienced this footage for the first time, it could not but be read/felt against Mseleku's departure.

such as Christopher Ballantine (2012) and David Coplan (2008) among others. Mseleku's final releases demonstrated a deep commitment to South African sounds and, by extension, the environments and cultures that produce these sounds. In other words, in Mseleku's artistic practice music became a metonym for place. We should not be limited, however, to thinking of place in Mseleku in the physical sense. It also points to 'elsewhere', as I suggest in the liner notes to *Beyond the Stars* (2021):

> Though Mseleku had previously recorded a lot of composed and arranged music, on this record it feels as though he is deliberately modulating between what exists in the present, and future possibilities. In that dichotomy, Mseleku also explores what lives in the liminal space – that which is divorced from the realm of the known past, but has not yet reached the present. It is this part that exists 'beyond the stars', where Mseleku has finally found his home.

2. Mseleku's spiritual modes

Throughout his life, Mseleku forged deep spiritual connections through his practice, bringing notions of meditation and afterlife (among others) to his composition style and approach to improvisation. In my Masters' thesis, I wrote on Mseleku's spirituality with a special focus on his solo album *Meditations* (1992):

> On the one hand, it presents a sonic demonstration of how references to South African music practices pervade his music, a reference of home significant in the context of exile. On the other hand, Mseleku's search for spiritual awakening is evident in the notion of meditation invoked in the title itself and in the structure of the track 'Meera-Ma' (Makhathini, 2017: 58).

I exposed the manifestations and symbolisms of spirituality inherent in the sonics of this recording, as metaphorical layers of the various manifestations of relationalities in exile, and dialogues with multiple spiritual co-ordinates. The present section is a continuation of that line of thought, looking into broader dimensions of Mseleku's spirituality. Mseleku (Sinker, 1987: 40) himself commented that his reason for 'doing music … is a spiritual one'. The centrality of spirituality for understanding Mseleku's artistic practice is also asserted by Chris Philips in the liner notes of Mseleku's *Celebration*: 'spirit is an important word when talking

of Bheki' (*Celebration*, 1991). It is in agreement with these statements that this section aims to outline a reading of Mseleku's artistic practice within the frames of spirituality.

From the beginning of his solo career with the album *Celebration* (1991), Mseleku explicitly referenced spirituality via track titles like 'The Age of The Inner Knowing', 'Supreme Love', and 'Closer to the Source' (Makhathini 2017: 55). Other examples of his spiritual leanings are found in album titles such as *Meditations* (1992) and also in liner notes and interviews. Collectively, these sources signal affinities between Mseleku's work as an improviser, and someone steeped in spirituality. Although it is difficult to locate these references within one religious leaning (or group), I argue for the complexity of Mseleku's spirituality while making strong connections with how this spirituality is enmeshed in African cosmological worlds.

Mseleku's outlook was based on the union of all the spiritual teachings and the people in the world (*South Bank Show*, 1994). In this sense, Mseleku's spiritual world is broad and complex:

> I live my life by being more aware of the spiritual world; I am attracted for instance to the spiritual masters; the teachings of Jesus, the teachings of Buddha, the teachings of Krishna, the teachings of Guru Nanak, the prophet Mohammed [and] of all different religions. I am completely open and I am for the union of all religions, and also the union of all the people on earth. So because I feel like that, I think that I attract a universal consciousness (Bheki Mseleku in Talkin Jazz, 1994).

In the quotation above, Mseleku invokes Eastern religious leanings (Buddhism, Hinduism) as well as Christianity and Islam. He regards these as not mutually exclusive; indeed, Mseleku refers to broad spiritual practice(s) as 'the union of all religions.' Evidence of his belief in this union can be found in Mseleku's acknowledgments in the liner notes of his albums *Celebration* (1992), *Timelessness* (1994) and *Star Seeding* (1995). In the 'special thanks' section in *Celebration* (1992), for instance, Mseleku acknowledged 'the Great Beloved father, Mother, God and all the Masters of spiritual enlightenment – Mataji Shyama, Muktannda Baba, Paramahans Yogananda and the great Avatars – Sri Lord Krishna, Beloved Jesus the Christ, Beloved Gautama Buddha and to Archangel Michael the Divine Protector.' Similar notes appear with *Timelessness* (1994) and *Star Seeding* (1995). From these texts it

would seem that Mseleku was less interested in religious dogmas, but instead followed spirituality as pursued by the great teachers, with whom he wanted to align his own pursuits/journey. It is this all-encompassing frame that I want to link to a 'universal consciousness', before proceeding to consider its resonances to *ntu* cosmology and other leanings in Nguni life views.

The universalistic outlook on life, spirituality, music and philosophy Mseleku embraced is not the same as the 'notion of political universality associated with Enlightenment philosophy' (Berkman, 2007: 56). Berkman points out that while the Enlightenment philosophy 'eradicates difference for the sake of formal equality', universalism as spiritual philosophy 'welcomes, accepts, and even produces plurality' (Berkman, 2007: 56). Thus, the universalist quest for spirituality can be understood 'as a counter-narrative to both notions of universality associated with Enlightenment thought and the exclusivity of monotheistic religious traditions' (Berkman, 2007: 56), besides serving as a personal mode of self-realisation.

Of course, Mseleku is not the first jazz musician to engage the concepts discussed in this section; he forms part of a lineage of artists that emerged in the 1960s in America during the Civil Rights era. For instance, Mseleku spoke explicitly about the spiritual depth of John Coltrane, Alice Coltrane and Pharaoh Sanders and how it impacted on their artistic concepts (Fordham, 2008; Bheki Mseleku, The Southbank Show, 1994) and he looked for similar connections in his artistic practice. The musicians mentioned here, at various moments of their careers, looked at spirituality as a significant tool in expressing the particular functions of their artistic practices, often as a mode for healing. Thus, Mseleku's choice of personnel (Elvin Jones, Pharoah Sanders and later Ravi Coltrane among other artists connected to Coltrane) as seen on *Timelessness* (1994) and *Beauty of Sunrise* (1997) could also be read as a deliberate means of forming part of a specific lineage of a particular era within jazz histories that associated with modalities of spiritualism.

Resonances of modal music influences such as those of John and Alice Coltrane and Pharoah Sanders sound out (04:18 – 05:16). The invocation of meditative states and a feeling of suspended time resulting in spontaneous chanting form part of Mseleku's signatures. (also Listen to 'Vukani', 'Yanini' and 'Sulyman Salud'). Mseleku creates a distancing effect, musically and, perhaps, technically, in post-production stages of his albums. This spatial nuance plays between the ensemble (often approached in a modal African-American sensibility) and his spontaneous Nguni influenced chants. I incorporated this technique in the sonic meditation to signal Mseleku's many sound universes. At a metaphoric level this represents a meeting place underpinned by the waters and the bloodshed on the Atlantic, the souls that are exiled from either side of the ocean of the spirit. Mseleku's connection with home across the Atlantic.

The Civil Rights movement in America, whose efforts several artists aligned themselves with during the 1960s, becomes a default position to read the artistic practices within jazz in this time-period as a counter-hegemonic movement that formed a political response against oppression. However, Berkman suggests that reading the '60s work of jazz artists (the free jazz movement) entirely as articulating a politically charged message of oppression is limiting (2007: 41). I have argued that this position in current jazz literatures in South Africa is equally limited (see Chapter One). A close reading of album and song titles, commentaries in interviews and liner notes of artists in the 1960s movement in America suggests that a many of them were also venturing into spiritual pathways. Some examples are John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* (1964), Albert Ayler's *Spiritual Unity* (1965) and Pharoah Sanders's *Karma* (1969). Berkman notes that 'the role of religion and the presence of religious leaders in the struggle for civil rights brought a new urgency to the issue of black spirituality' (2007: 47). Musicians sought a 'non-sectarian view of god'. In the case of Coltrane, who was Mseleku's biggest influence, the search was for an alternative in 'Zen, Zoroastrianism, the writings of Yogananda and Krishnamurti, and a commitment to daily meditation' within which Coltrane looked for a kind of 'universality' (Berkman, 2007: 44). Mseleku had a particular relationship to the music of John Coltrane in which a sonic-spiritual intertextuality is already expressed. Joe Henderson (Bheki Mseleku in Talkin Jazz, 2014) observes that Mseleku sounds like he 'should have been part of the '60s in America… his writing reminds me of the writing that went on in New York City…'. From an idiomatic perspective, Mseleku was indeed steeped in the modal music of the 1960s in America and the

post-bebop playing of which Coltrane became one of the exponents. But while Coltrane and others were looking to the east, they were simultaneously looking at Africa to map out new concepts both in their music and their philosophical thought.

The above suggests that the American jazz scene that Mseleku arrives into, and draws inspiration from, was itself grappling with its own desires to locate itself in a world/cosmology outside of the white supremacist imperialist American one. It can of course be argued that the idea of seeking the self is a natural yearning in a moment of displacement, whether in the diasporas across the Atlantic, in exile or even in local displacements (as was shown in the case of Tabane). The bebop, modal and jazz milieu is an embattled zone of breaking out of the mould of white America and its limits of legibility, with artists searching for a more spacious, capacious, and free form, and in so doing looking to Africa and Asia. It is here where Mseleku could situate himself, in a place not yet formed but in formation through relation. From these engagements he could riff with what was unfolding in their search, inserting his own search that carried the traces of Zulu sonic (cosmo)logics that entered into dialogue with Eastern mysticism.

This pursuit via the African American search for spiritual freedoms also stretched into Mseleku's imagination of the sonic. Some of the key influences in Mseleku's pianism were absorbed from American pianists, and included the percussiveness and use of pentatonic scales in McCoy Tyner, the use of dissonant sounds and clusters inherent in Thelonious Monk and the lyricism and syncopation of Bud Powell. But as African American saxophonist Salim Washington notes, although Mseleku absorbed the vocabularies of these three seminal pianists, he still came out as himself (Washington in Sosibo, 2016: 5). In my view, the Tyner-like playing takes priority in Mseleku's playing, serving two functions: it became a way for Mseleku to locate Coltrane and spirituality, while it also formed a passageway for musical memories that are found in Zulu traditional musics located in modal tonalities. Examples are songs such as 'Vukani Madoda', 'Meditation Suite' and 'Thula Mntwana', among others. For example, the use of pentatonic scales and sixteenth notes in Tyner's playing is also evident in Zulu musics such as maskanda in the use of *izihlabo* (listen to the first movement (00:00 – 08:00) of 'Meditation Suite') and *izibongo* as key characteristics. Mseleku once noted that what assisted him to understand the music of Coltrane (and by extension Tyner) is 'the musics [he] was born amongst', of which a greater part was Zulu music (Ansell, 1999). This

suggests that Mseleku's detour in African American movements in sounds and spiritual freedom was a way to come to terms with what was close to him as a mode of self-realisation.

> The resemblances of McCoy Tyner, in Mseleku, in the form of modal playing (bass ostinatos, strong quartal harmony, sixteenth notes, pentatonic driven improvisational passages) are evident in this sonic meditation, as sounds I also absorb by lineage as a jazz pianist. But these sonic strategies are also inherent in maskanda music via *izihlabo* and other indigenous Nguni musical styles. In this sense, as in Mseleku's case, these meditations are then bridges that lead back to self. This self is engulfed by the cosmology that the sound reaches through performance as a meditation state (04:36)

Thus, self-realisation, here, is understood as the search for internal freedom that transcends the confines of religion (Segady, 2009: 187). One could argue that this was at the core Mseleku search within a universalist outlook. In Eastern philosophies the idea of self-realisation is underscored by Paramahansa Yogananda's thought, who claimed that it is the realisation of god or bliss (as opposed to a particular dogma or doctrine) that forms his/her religion (Segady, 2009: 188). It is also interesting to look at the seemingly paradoxical idea of 'self-realisation' as a manifestation of being inside a 'universalism.' Such an outlook mirrors *ubuntu* (as a manifestation of *ntu* cosmology) discussed in Chapter Two, which situates the existence of an individuality as a result of being with others (*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*), or 'to be a human be-ing is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others and, on which basis, [one can] establish humane relations with them' (Ramose, 2005: 37). Mseleku uses the phrase 'harmonious vibration' to refer to the universality ('union of all things') that provides context for self-realisation as a moment of collapsing into the whole.

In Eastern mysticism, towards which Mseleku leaned, a common tool for self-realisation is the practice of meditation (see Chow, 2021). As Yogananda (Segady, 2009: 188) suggests, meditation is informed by three paths: devotion, knowledge and karma. By extension, these are understood as commitments to living a meaningful life. In the early 1990s Mseleku spent time in Buddhist temples in London and Durban, meditating and playing religious music using various instruments such as the harmonium, saxophone, flute and others. In this period Mseleku was given his devotional name, Kishoridas, by guru Mataji Shyma (Fordham 2008;

Personal communication with Eugene Skeef, 27 July 2017; Guru Dass interview with Eugene Skeef, 2017). An important facet of Buddhism is 'cultivating good karma' (De Rooij, 2015; Zsoka, 2015) through meditation, which Mseleku maintained strongly in his practice as an artist. Another facet of Buddhism that is evident in interviews with Mseleku is the idea of reincarnation, rebirth or afterlife (Ansell, 1999; Sinker, 1987). As De Rooij (2015) writes, 'Buddhists believe in samsara, the continual repetitive cycle of birth and death that is affected by the ignorance and the suffering experienced in life.' The practice of meditation is hence coupled with a belief that someday one will reach a state of Nirvana (absolute bliss) or in the context of this study, a state of *ntu* and wholeness. This conviction informs Mseleku's critique of the Bible and the church:

> There's a lot of things that are not up to date in the Bible which had been changed to suit certain people – people that are in control. Like for instance reincarnation has been taken away. It used to be there before. And this is the most important part, to show the continuity of the soul, of incarnation – that we are coming here to learn and if we have not learned the lesson we have to incarnate again until we learn the lesson. So we don't come back any more – we get to higher levels of expression and consciousness. This was taken out. This way the church managed to be able to put people in fear so they can control them… (Mseleku in Sinker, 1987: 40)

Mseleku's idea of 'continuity of the soul', that the spirit continues to live beyond the 'death' of the corporeal body, speaks to the ideas of wholeness and continuity discussed in Chapter Two. I wish to suggest that a close reading of Mseleku's ideas provide striking resonances with the *ntu* cosmology discussed in Chapter Two. That is to say, while Mseleku didn't use the 'language' that this study proposes inside African cosmology, *ntu* cosmology provides us with appropriate vocabularies to engage the concepts that Mseleku embraced, including meditation, reincarnation and cycles, among others. I hold that part of the search in Eastern mysticism, for both African Americans and South African artists, was the result of the catastrophes and erasures discussed in Chapter One, paired with the limited availability of literature on African cosmologies, particularly by the practitioners of these cosmologies themselves. In other words, Eastern mysticism became one of the major portals, pointed to by Mseleku's predecessors in America, which was well documented and available as an option for artists to delink from the hegemony of the global north and form part of the global south solidarity. This did not mean, however, that an artist like Mseleku delinked from his African

cosmological beliefs. On the contrary, I argue that his Eastern mysticism allowed him to express *ntu* continuity and wholeness from another entry point.

Mseleku's spiritual journey consisted of constructing his own belief system, combining elements of various belief systems. Besides Eastern spiritual practices, Mseleku expressed an interest in Egyptology and the beliefs of the Dogon people of Mali (Ansell, 1999). Considering the resonances of his spiritualty African cosmological beliefs, the concept of reincarnation speaks to the onto-triad, and that of meditation to ritual. Reincarnation speaks of continuity of the soul, while the onto-triad is based on the immortality of spirit. Closer to home, in a Zulu cultural context (according to which Mseleku was raised), Mankanyezi spells out reincarnation/onto-triad in this way: when one dies the soul departs back to the ancestors *Esilweni* (Place of Beasts); after a period the soul transitions to 'a place of rest' where it awaits a dream that gives it purpose on earth again. This is followed by a process of rebirth (Mankanyezi in Bowen, 1993: 2). Similarly, there are strong connections between Mseleku's idea of meditation and that of *ngoma* ritual discussed in Chapter Two. While meditation is understood as a tool for self-realization and maintaining connection to essence, *ngoma* ritual is understood as a mode of keeping aligned with *ntu* cosmology.

These connections suggest that the self-realisation that Mseleku was seeking was also a way of locating himself in a place of origin. In this sense, Eastern conceptions of the continuity of life and other ideas would not have been completely foreign to Mseleku, coming from a background and familiarity with Zulu cosmologies. Nguni cosmologies tie the individual to a place by the buried umbilical cord (as discussed in Tabane). I have shown in earlier sections how Mseleku acknowledged his connection to his place of origin. He furthermore said that 'sometimes things can best be expressed in silence and attaining the state of I-am-ness' (Ansell, 1999). It is my argument that silences in the literature linking Mseleku to Nguni cosmologies do not contradict the existence of such connections, but are actually confirmed by Mseleku's presentist and non-explicatory silence on such connections; his 'I-am-ness', in other words. In the same vein, his 'I-am-ness' could be thought of as a form of emptiness, a 'letting go' and detachment from religious dogma towards self-realisation. In the context of this project, detachment is also a mode of surrender (*ukuvuma*), stepping out of a limited notion of individuality to that of wholeness, an in-tune-ness with all and an invocation of *ntu*. This connects with Mseleku's statement: 'I am African [and Zulu], if African means universal' (Sinker, 1987). But Mseleku also problematises these very notions, denouncing

being African, Zulu or any form of identity on a human plane (Ansell, 1999; Sinker, 1987). Again, while this may seem contradictory, it might also be registered as an emphatic embrace of *ntu* as wholeness, thus confirming the cultural identity Mseleku seemingly wanted to leave behind.

Mseleku was suspicious of words, cautioning against their literal use because 'the truth is paradox' (Ansell, 1999). Elsewhere, Mseleku argued that 'words are new. They are not as old as music, because music is the language of the soul' (Sinker, 1987). Thus, it is the silences and conflicts in Mseleku's ideologies which I explore with an ear trained to listen for echoes of African cosmologies. The next section sounds out Mseleku's key musical concepts, evident in an artistic practice that, I argue, points to African cosmology as a worldview.

3. Cycles, Wholeness and Continuity

Mseleku also suggested deep connections to African cosmological concepts through his music and his approach to composition and improvisation. Although he drew from various religious reference points, my concern is to locate his idea of cycles, afterlife and ritual in the context of *ntu*. Cycles, as musical device and symbol, is a constant theme in Mseleku's artistic practice, serving both as structural principle in his compositional/improvisational approaches and frame for Mseleku's notion of being, understood as a continuous circle of birth and rebirth. Indeed, these two applications of 'cycle' (as sonic and existential principles) could be understood best as manifestations of *ntu* cosmology discussed in Chapter Two. As Akombo, Gray, Griffin and Katembo (2020: 215 - 227) note, 'the cyclic nature of music' is a result of inherent Afrocentric organisational concepts that underpin cosmological settings where life happens.

Throughout his recording career, Mseleku developed a method for composition and improvisation that moved in a cyclical manner, meaning music that 'systematically' cycled back to a starting tonality, a continuity that moves from a tonal origin and a tonal place of return. This approach is evident in 'Aja', 'Cycle' 'Violet Flame', 'Monwabisi', 'Yanini', 'Melancholy in Cologne' and 'The Age of the Divine Mother.' All these compositions utilise tonal systems that divide the octave into equal parts, with recurring melodic themes that follow on each other sequentially, accompanied by chord progressions that modulate through all keys, thus producing a sense of 'endlessness' (Bheki Mseleku, *The South Bank Show*,

1994). The discussion of *Meditation Suite* in my masters' thesis provides an analysis of one example of cyclical organisation in Mseleku's music (see Makhathini, 2017: 66 - 78). Mseleku was particularly fond of the diminished and augmented axis. Of course, both these tonal systems, in jazz composition, are also found in Coltrane's 'Giant Steps' and 'Central Park West', among other songs. As already mentioned in previous sections, Mseleku drew from Coltrane both musically and from the thought processes that gave birth to such musics. Mseleku believed that these musical systems took him 'out of time' (referencing the notion of suspended time as I discussed in Chapter Two) in the context of ritual. Suspended time in this context signals an entering into a liminal space. Through repetition inside cyclical music structures, similar to other indigenous African music styles (Kubik, 2010: 41), Mseleku was able to create a trance-state that opens a dialoguing between localised time in the physical realm and other time-concepts (suspended time) in spirit dimensions.

I utilized a similar strategy, through a cyclical progression (over an augmented axis), to get into a trance state that dissolves the beginning and end dichotomies. It is a way of reaching spirit dimensions, producing a sense of endlessness and equality through equal systematic time duration in each tonal centre. This musical orientation towards balance is a way of invoking *ntu* as wholeness that releases a healing vibration, as Mseleku always believed.

Mseleku (*The South Bank Show*, 1994) noted that a song such as Coltrane's 'Giant Steps', which is regarded as a major 'test piece' in jazz, was simple when viewed through a spiritual lens. He further asserted that Coltrane 'was a loving person', and that he thought 'in the same way that I'm thinking… about love'. This, he held to be 'the most simplest way but it's the most difficult thing only when you analyse it' (*The South Bank Show*, 1994). Flutist and friend of Mseleku, Eddie Parker, reminds us: 'his music sounds simple and singable and danceable, but there is a huge amount of craft concealed behind the simplicity' (Gedye, 2016). Mseleku believed that sound was 'a mystical thing' that transcended tools of analysis (*The South Bank Show*, 1994). The simplicity is what imparted to Mseleku's music the tranquillity of flow into spirit dimensions.

Mseleku (*The South Bank Show*, 1994) described the flow within his compositions as a 'harmonious' energy field with no 'definite knowledge of where it would end, it seems like it

could go forever'. Read alongside Ramose (2005: 43), who argues within the context of *ubuntu* that 'Africans are persistently in search of harmony in all spheres of life', Mseleku's sonic practice may be understood as a mechanism through which this search for harmony (and its attainment) takes place, and the endlessness of the musical structure as enabling and forming part of the ritual of keeping *ntu* intact. Through sound, this search fosters both an ontological and epistemological imperative as found in *ubuntu* (Ramose, 2005: 35).

As someone who has studied and played Mseleku's music, I have experienced the feeling of endlessness in the music. Due to the systematic interlocking modulations between different keys it becomes difficult to keep track of the beginning or end. This sense of repetition functions like a mantra: a repeating statement that assists/induces the state of liminality. In this dissolution of time is where spiritual guided-ness finds expression in Mseleku's artistic practice, allowing for a mediation between spiritual and physical dimensions. As Muller (1999: 84) notes in the context of Shembe music, it is 'connecting the ordinary and the extraordinary' that produces euphoria in the sense of time. In the context of this study, the cyclicity in Mseleku music breaks into the multiplicity of being, simultaneously here and elsewhere, invoking wholeness as outlined in all four *ntu* categories.

By extension, this endlessness and 'timelessness' also finds expression in Mseleku's belief in afterlife. Mseleku claimed that he was not 'on earth for the first time' (Mseleku in Sinker, 1987: 40) but to have been through 'cycles of reincarnation', using music as a tool to recall previous existences. It is these cycles of reincarnation that resonate with Ramose's notion (2005: 45-46) of an onto-triadic structure that entails continuity, endless-ness and immortal-ness in African being. Mseleku's claim to have been reincarnated has a different ring when one situates him within the (South) African cosmology proposed by this study. While reincarnation is a concept most readily associated with Eastern spiritualities and belief systems, it also resonates with the notions of continuity and wholeness fundamental to African cosmologies I have set out in Chapter Two.

Several statements demonstrate the centrality of reincarnation — the connections between life, afterlife and rebirth — to Mseleku's thought in general, and more specifically in his artistic practice. His quick mastery of the piano and saxophone, for example, was something he ascribed to past lives. Mseleku furthermore believed that he had been a musician is his past life and that the reason for his return was to 'change the vibration', similar to Charlie Parker and John Coltrane before him (Mseleku in Sinker, 1987: 40). The need to recollect, to

reconnect with a past life as a reason for being in the present life (which one might view as seeking some sort of wholeness that was ruptured by death as a passing from one state of being to the next) inheres in Mseleku statement that if one forgets parts of one's past lives, it takes 'a whole lifetime trying to remember' (Mseleku in Ansell, 1999), and hence we keep coming back to the world. The very notion of knowledge is owed to what is carried over from past lives. In Mseleku's words: 'I use a lot of theories, my own theories … That knowledge comes from my past life … Life never started, life always was' (Sinker, 1987). Understood in this context, Mseleku's compositional style and use of musical structures becomes a symbolic rehearsal/manifestation of the cyclicity he saw in other aspects of his life and philosophy.

In Chapter Two I considered the various manifestations of *ntu* and the fact that *ntu* is the spiritual essence from which life emerges (Etim, 2013: 15). I also posited that (South) African cosmology is characterised by both continuity and wholeness. For Mseleku, composition and being were ways to seek wholeness that he understood as 'universal consciousness', or the union of all beings and things (Bheki Mseleku in Talkin Jazz, 1994). His harmonic idiom could be understood as searching for 'agreement' between voices, but also a way to create a harmonious vibration in the universe. Mseleku (*The South Bank Show*, 1994) asserted that 'nature could seem very unorganised sometimes' by 'producing earthquakes and winds that might disturb many people'. Due to his deep awareness of environment, time, being and aesthetic, he claimed to produce harmonious sounds (Bheki Mseleku, *The South Bank Show*, 1994) speaking to *ntu* paradigms and notions of *ubuntu* that 'affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others' (Ramose, 2005: 37). Mseleku believed that humans are 'part of one Being' (Sinker, 1987), a concept we find in the notion of *muntu*, and the idea in Zulu belief systems that all humans broke off from the reeds and are connected to *Umvelinqangi* (the one who appeared first). This speaks to the notion of one point of origin which breaks into multiplicity and endlessness.

This clearly resonates with Mbiti's analogy of the African being as endless (Mbiti, 1975: 34), or of life is a continuous cycle: humans are born, they die and return as spirits through an infinite cyclical life experience. In all of these life stages, including death of the body, *ntu* as vital force lives as the immortal, enduring component of being in the spirit (Ramose, 2005: 50) or *itongo* (Bhengu, 2015). In this sense, one could argue that wholeness is a manifestation of continuity. It is in understanding ourselves, as Mseleku reminds us, that we become part of everything and our being finds expression in both the visible and the invisible spheres of life.

This totality of being (in flesh and in spirit) is what Mseleku refers to as 'multi-dimensional beings' which he considers to be the essence of 'who we really are…', a part that he claims has been forgotten by humanity (Ansell, 1999). In the context of this study, 'who we really are' is the invocation of *ntu* as essence that lives in all things.

4. Umngoma, a spirit medium

While Mseleku was not explicit about African philosophical connections in his works, the sections above have shown what I believe to be compelling resonances between his artistic practice and African philosophical thought. These connections pertain to the concepts that informed his worldview and manifested in his sound, both in his composition and improvisation styles. I hold that, in addition to these connections, there are also traces of *ubungoma* in Mseleku's artistic practice and underpinning thoughts. Unlike Mhlongo, Mseleku was not trained in traditional ways as a *sangoma*; nevertheless, several aspects of his life and practice do suggest deep resonances with *ngoma*. For Mseleku, I argue, what mattered was not to be initiated as a *sangoma* in a traditional sense, but how sound became nucleic to the *ntu* cosmological world and socio-cosmologies, for the initiated and 'uninitiated.' That is to say, while *ukuthwasa* is reserved as 'the basis of entrance into an ngoma cell and network', Mseleku's artistic practice suggests other entry points into the *ngoma* complex, proposing that artistic practices could be a way of making sense of the spirit world.

The most explicit way that Mseleku aligned himself with *ngoma* networks, was in referring to himself as *umngoma* (a spirit medium) through which healing, via sound, could be produced (*South Bank Show*, 1994). Through the title of the piece 'Izanusi', meaning the healers or shamans, Mseleku points towards an awareness, or at least, an acknowledgment of the *ngoma* network of ancestors, practitioners and divinities. In this song Mseleku channels the spirit of *amahubo* as modality that holds the entire piece. In Mseleku's terms, music was a tool for self-purification, and he understood his role as that of a medium responsible for channelling a healing vibration through sound (*The South Bank Show*, 1994). He regarded himself as a messenger for peace, love and unity (Willgress, 1994: 29). Mseleku believed that his artistic practice performed these functions and thus, 'music should be experienced all the time [and] all the day[s] of [one's] life' as a 'ritual' (*The South Bank Show*, 1994). Ritual, for Mseleku, signalled a higher level of awareness that transcended the physical plane which he deemed

troubled by turmoil (*The South Bank Show*, 1994). In this sense, the fundamental position in Mseleku's practice was to play music as a way of channelling healing vibrations for himself and his surroundings as a mode for purification (*The South Bank Show*, 1994). These ideas are typical of the *ngoma* practices discussed in Chapter Two. In isiZulu the word *ukugula* (to be ill) stems out of the word *gula* (to carry). In fact, we refer to a claypot as (*i*)*gula* to indicate its function as storage equipment. In this sense, purification is a way of emptying that relieves one from the 'heaviness' of carry-ing, which has links with Mseleku's idea of meditation as a practice of letting go.

In this regard it is worth remembering Mseleku's own health difficulties (Makhathini, 2018), and how he attempted to address these via meditation that formed part of his artistic practice. In Nguni contexts, the calling (*ubizo*) to the journey of *ubungoma*, or the work of healing, is often pre-empted by disease and illness visited on the one who is supposed to take on tasks from the ancestors. Janzen reminds us that 'twasa expresses the concept of "being called" into ngoma, of one's sickness, misfortune and affliction being the sign and symptom of ancestral or spirit calling' (Janzen, 1995: 146). Thus, *ngoma* is an act of harmonising 'the disparate elements of an individual's life threats', weaving them 'into a meaningful fabric' (Janzen, 1991: 291). Having known Mseleku during the years of his mental instability, and witnessing how he reverted to sound to reorganise and generate new inspiration through songs, I am convinced that Mseleku used *ngoma* techniques to heal himself.

In *ngoma* ritual this phenomenon is understood as spirit possession; what I regard as elsewhere or an invocation of another world that Mseleku regarded as 'still' and pure and not disrupted by the troubles in the world (*The South Bank Show*, 1994). It correlates with the notion of suspended time in the context of *hantu* that governs the concept of time and space in *ntu* cosmology. In Mseleku's artistic practice, suspended time is a way of transcending the limitation of physical space and collapsing time through what I term 'knowing – unknowing – new knowing'. He uses his cyclical composition to enter 'elsewhere', similar to how *isangoma* uses repetitive music to enter into a state of trance. It is in these dimensions that music finds its spiritual meaning as a voice to the spirits. This explains why Mseleku would call himself *umngoma*: someone who is a conduit to the voice of the spirit.

This argument is strengthened by Mseleku's unusual practicing hours. He often played throughout the night, thus extending his being inside a particular sound state. Significantly, the practice of *ingoma* in Nguni culture 'may last all night', during which 'shorter units of

song: self presented, and response' are performed (Janzen, 1991: 291-292). This practice takes place in various contexts, 'purification celebration for established healers, or celebrative points in the initiatory course of novices' (Janzen, 1991: 292). Purification and healing are also themes that Mseleku invoked regularly when referring to the function of his artistic practice and by extension, his musical compositions (*The South Bank Show,* 1994).

It is important to note that unlike other musicians steeped in African American jazz, Mseleku did not put that much value on writing music on a chart in his compositional process. He believed in a telepathic means of engaging sound (Wilgress, 1994: 30). Although Mseleku composed material, he was constantly seeking to move to 'spontaneity'; at times playing a completely spontaneous improvisation (*The South Bank Show,* 1994). Through improvisation he implied and suggested directions that soon became 'fully formed piece[s]' (Wilgress,1994: 30). Mseleku referred to this spontaneity as the 'vibe' or the magic of inspiration (Wilgress, 1994: 30). I read this as a form of guided mobility, in much the same way that a *sangoma* relies on the voice of the ancestor to divine. In this sense, even though Mseleku composed musical structures, he allowed room for spontaneous creation, which I attribute to spirit interventions that emerge out of the expanded forms of gatherings and rituals where ancestors commune with the living.

There is a deep alertness for sounds that are in the moment and guided by the spirit of Mseleku. While the music follows a systematic harmonic progression, there is simultaneously a break into the unknown sounds that emerge spontaneously. (Listen to 02:28-02:32, 04:56-05: 10 and 07:22-07:40). Inside a ritual sound strategy, potentiality representing the mystical nature of the sonic, a surrender to that which is not readily known. 'Liminality', a state of the unfolding, not yet known.

Mseleku claimed that he had a gift of dreams from where he drew some of his compositions (*The South Bank Show,* 1994). He (Bheki Mseleku in Willgress, 1994: 29) noted that the 'music is already there, we are not creators by channelers, we only have to be receptive.' It is within this context that Mseleku understood dreams as a living space. One example of citing from dreams is the track 'Through the Years' on *Timelessness* (1994), which features singer Abbey Lincoln. Mseleku averred that it 'came in a dream… like most of my songs… I've dreamt a lot of songs and some of that I've forgotten when I wake up… [but] I managed to capture this one' (Bheki Mseleku, *The South Bank Show,* 1994). In *ngoma* practices it is said

that a novice nurtures his/her 'story' through 'the evocation of dreams' (Janzen, 1995: 146). Through multiple *ngoma* ceremonies one cultivates a 'song-story'. The telling of the supernatural stories in dreams and altered states of consciousness emerge through 'highly embellished songs' (Janzen, 1995: 147). For instance, in *ubungoma* practices it is common for *ithwasa* to present a song received from the ancestors (Janzen, 1991: 291), often received through a dream. This is regarded as an important feature of one's becoming in the *ngoma* world (Janzen, 1995: 147). In a similar way, in our conversations Mseleku often reminded us that his music come from a deep place within, a spiritual source.

This closely approximates my own practice, that involves the entire paradigm of dreams (also beyond music) as a knowledge site where ancestors are constantly generating messages. Within *ntu* cosmology, dreams form an important bridge between man and his ancestors as a manifestation of both wholeness and continuity. Through dreams (among other channels) 'the function of the diviners is simply to act as the mouthpiece of the spirits, as intermediaries between the living and the dead' (Bryant, 1917: 141) and the ones not-yet-born understood inside an onto-triad. The alignment of the spirit world and the physical realm in Mseleku's practice is thus evident through the reception of songs through dreams. As he reflected: 'when you are in deep sleep at night, you go to your real pure state… if we can do it deliberately' (Wilgress, 1994: 30). He concluded that dreaming as a practice cannot be removed from his art (Wilgress, 1994: 30). Elsewhere, Janzen (1991: 303) writes that 'in ngoma there is knowledge of the spirits as found in dreams, above all', and he concludes that in order to relay the message of the spirit, 'it is necessary to let the sufferer talk (or sing).' In Mseleku's case, his compositions, found in dreams, became an enunciation of the spirit worlds and voices.

The enunciation of the spirit voices often exists in the moments of surrender and letting go of our own limited knowledge of what music should be, governed by musical concepts. A step into the unknown (07:37-08:18). Although not often, Mseleku also tapped into the 'abstract' sound dimension as a way of going 'out of time', or what he refers to as 'elemental sounds' (Listen to *The South Bank Show*, 1994 between 20:42-21:00). Mseleku attributed these sounds to natural cosmic disturbances within-which he argues '….otherwise there would be no necessity for them [sounds]' (The Southbank Show, 1994).

A closer reading of Mseleku's influences reveals that there is a deep relationship between Mseleku's understanding of music and that of spirituality. These influences, in Mseleku's artistic work, range from church music, Zulu traditional music, Indian classical music and jazz (Sinker, 1987), all of which have their foundation in cultural and spiritual concepts. In this chapter, I have shown how Mseleku mirrors the work of a *sangoma* in his approach and his broader philosophical thought. I argue that to understand the frequent invocation of spirituality and healing in his practice as an improviser, we have to take seriously paradigms of music, spiritualism, and healing.

Mseleku utilised the sonic as a tool to stay connected to essence. While (American) jazz was evident for the most part of Mseleku's artistic journey, his Zulu musical influences were inherent in his playing, and pointed to modes of spiritualism connected to his cultural home. His music became a way of staying connected with his origin, a pre-existent force located in *ntu*.

Chapter Seven: Zim Ngqawana and the Zimology Institute

Fourth sonic meditation – Zimology: Ingoma

Available: https://vimeo.com/africaopen/download/758239529/cff8c68ad4
https://vimeo.com/758205991
Password: @VisserClari9105

The opening sound (00:01) on this meditation is borrowed from Ngqawana's classic intro which he adopted in his sets during our many years of touring together (listen to 'Zimfree live'). Ngqawana believed that this particular sound strategy, saxophone singing and ringing through the piano strings, was a way of 'cleansing the space' ahead of a 'meditation'. Here we invoked this sonic citation in a sense of a libation, inviting Ngqawana's spirit to guide the rituals of performance and writing. It is a way to allow his spirit to whisper into our consciousness.

Zimology is a concept that Ngqawana constructed as a pathway towards 'self-realization'. Referring to 'the study of the self', Zimology incorporates aspects of existing spiritualities and belief systems, mainly those of the East (such as Zen mysticism) paired with *ngoma* from the Nguni (and Bantu) cultures, to formulate this knowledge of self. Ngqawana invoked Zen mysticism in his vocabulary via concepts such as (but not limited to) 'becoming a mystic', 'moving towards nothingness', 'totality' and 'silence'; phrases and words he often repeated in interviews and during rehearsals. *Ngoma* also never escaped Ngqawana's language, and was often invoked as a way to define his practice as an improviser engaged in an intertextual practice of music, healing and prophetic knowledge. This chapter further explores the relational aspect of *ntu* cosmology through a different matrix of influences than the previous chapter. Here, Ngqawana's practice and philosophy lead us to reflect on the intersections between *ngoma*, Zen, Sufism and *ntu* cosmology.

Ngqawana utilized these ideas as a way of coming to sound (or breaking into sound, as Chapter Three proposes). Thus, Ngqawana's sonics play a crucial role in trying to locate his cosmological world and vice versa. Some of his musical concepts are explicitly derived from his Xhosa cultural background, some from the 'church' and others from a broader jazz canon. Yet Ngqawana's practice also to transcends confines of genre, de-composing towards a spiritual path of 'nothingness' and 'emptiness.'

This chapter starts with Ngqawana's biography, which situates my considerations of his practice in the sections that follow: the musical influences of his Xhosa cultural background and the philo-praxis of John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Archie Shepp and Yusuf Lateef; the manifestations of *ntu* and *ngoma* in Ngqawana's practice; the role of improvisation in 'going beyond' and effecting healing; and the legacies of Zimology, which explores the dynamics of master-discipleship via Zen.

1. Introducing Ngqawana's and his spiritual connections

Most jazz biographies of Zimasile (Zim) Ngqawana (25 December 1959 to 11 May 2011) note the significance of the fact that he hailed from New Brighton, an important hub of jazz practice in the Eastern Cape (Zimasile Ngqawana, [n.d.]; Ansell, 2005). Steeped in a big band tradition, New Brighton was a formative space for many of Ngqawana's contemporaries, such trumpeter Feya Faku, drummer Lulu Gontsana and bassist Lex Futshane who were

mentored by bands such as the Soul Jazzmen (see Thram, 2018: 86-77). Yet a spiritual biography would start elsewhere. It would consider the fact that Ngqawana was brought up in a Christian family who attended the Presbyterian Church (Mathe, 2011), something one can hear in the hymn-like harmonies of tracks like 'Mayenzeke' and 'Emnqamlezweni.' It would also need to pay attention to his participation in traditional Xhosa ceremonies, a practice that was alive in this space (Zimasile Ngqawana, [n.d.]). These ceremonies constituted the bedrock of some of Ngqawana's important works, like his popular tracks 'Qula' and 'Ebhofolo', and as evident in the documentary *The Exhibition of Vandalizim* (2014).[65] As the youngest of five children, Ngqawana grew up around his grandparents who exposed him to various Xhosa indigenous sounds. In such contexts he demonstrated his aptitude as a singer and dancer (Zimasile Ngqawana, [n.d.]). Later in his life, Ngqawana embraced Xhosa culture and its musicality as a key signifier in his artistic practice (Mathe, 2011), but also extended his spiritual points of reference to Islam and Zen mysticism.

Commenting on the spiritual space that New Brighton was for Zim Ngqawana, his close friend and organizer/administrator of the Zimology Institute Zaide Harneker observes that 'there was no poverty of hope and there was no poverty of spirit' (Personal communication with Zaide Harneker, 5 January 2020). In other words, while artists in townships suffered socio-economic and infrastructure problems, their dreams partly existed in an intangible realm, a spirit realm which was very important to Ngqawana. Considering his proximity to his grandparents, it is plausible to propose that, for Ngqawana, some cultural Xhosa practices were still intact during the time when he was raised in the township.

While Ngqawana's education can be located in these early beginnings, he also received 'formal' training at a number of institutions. In 1987, Ngqawana entered Rhodes University' jazz program (Mathe, 2011), and a year later, in 1988, Ngqawana enrolled for his Diploma in jazz studies at the University of Natal (as it was known then) under the supervision of Darius Brubeck (Mathe, 2011; Ngidi, 2011; also see Makhathini, 2021). This was an important period for Ngqawana, as he would launch his career via his extended relationships with the school. As a student, Ngqawana attended the International Association of Jazz Educators in Detroit, Michigan as part of the Jazzanians, a student band lead by Brubeck in 1988 (Mathe,

[65] Watch here: https://vimeo.com/108982799

2011; Ngidi, 2011). Ngqawana's appearance at the IAJE earned him his initial international exposure. In 1989, he was awarded an international scholarship to study in the United States, and this opportunity allowed Ngqawana to study with the jazz greats such as drummer Max Roach and trumpeter Wynton Marsalis (Tesser, 1997; Ngidi, 2011). At the University of Massachusetts, Ngqawana was taught by Archie Shepp and Yusef Lateef (Tesser, 1997; Ngidi, 2011), formerly colleagues of John Coltrane. In anchoring their artistic practices in modes of spiritual awareness, their work, like Ngqawana's, followed in the footsteps of Coltrane. These teachers and mentors left significant traces in Ngqawana's artistic practice and philosophy.

Upon his return to South Africa in 1990, Ngqawana played with many upcoming jazz musicians in jam sessions around Johannesburg, which earned him opportunities to work with established jazz artists such as Hugh Masekela and Abdullah Ibrahim (Zimasile Ngqawana, [n.d.]; Ngidi, 2011). In 1993, while working with Ibrahim, Ngqawana converted to Islam (Mathe, 2011),[66] following in the footsteps of Ibrahim and many African American artists during the 1960s. It is worth mentioning that Abdullah Ibrahim was also surrounded by the Muslim community where he grew up and lived in Cape Town. He did not (only) come to Islam through American jazz; it was also part of his frame of reference at home (Vos, 2016: 169). These shifts have been read in terms of their counter-hegemonic socio-political commitments (Berkman, 2007: 45; Monson, 2007: 145-7), associating Christianity with Western hegemony (or in Mignolo's terms, the colonial matrix of power) and African and Eastern spiritualities (including Islam) with its refusal. It is important to add that these alternative spiritual orientations offered deeply inward-looking practices centred on meditation and exploring inner worlds.

Commenting on his conversion, Ngqawana stated that 'after years of soul-searching I think I have finally found a spiritual home in Islam… Islam was a matter of common sense. Islam is more than a religion; it is, like music, the very essence of life' (Ngqawana in Mathe, 2010). More specifically, Ngqawana studied the teachings of Sufi master and musician, Hazrat Inayat Khan (Personal communication with Zaide Harneker, 5 January 2020). While in Islam dancing, drumming and singing (or 'ghina') is prohibited (haram) (Bhimji, [n.d.]), these

[66] People who were close to him attest that Ngqawana had studied the Quran and practiced Islam in the years he was close to Ibrahim. When Ngqawana passed away he was buried within the laws of the Islamic tradition (Personal communication with Zaide Harneker, 5 January 2020).

artforms are inherent in Sufism (see Lewisohn, 1997). There are several connections between *ngoma*/*malombo* and Sufism, particularly around sound as a mode for meditation/divination, which I'll explore later in the chapter.

In 1993, Ngqawana performed in the Netherlands at the Tilburg Festival alongside Paul van Kemenade and in 1994 he was commissioned to direct a 100-piece drum ensemble as part of the Peace Orchestra at the inauguration of President Nelson Mandela (Zimasile Ngqawana, [n.d.]). This moment positioned Ngqawana as someone who represented a post-apartheid voice in jazz, who stood for peace and was concerned with music as a portal for healing.

Ngqawana inscribed a connection with spirituality in all his works/concerts. He situated himself through album titles such as *Zimology* (giving expression to the notion of Zimology as 'the study of the self'), *Ingoma* (music understood within African cosmology), or referring to both himself and African cosmology in an album like *Vadzimu* (the Shona word for ancestral spirits). Ngqawana toured Europe and the US in 1995 with his group (Zimasile Ngqawana, [n.d.]) in a project that explored the concept of *ingoma*, an exploration of healing properties within sound dimensions. This laid an important foundation for his consequent work and understanding of his role as an improviser. In the following year he released his debut studio album called *San Song* (1996), which was a collaboration with the Norwegian musicians Bjorn Ole Solberg (alto and tenor saxophone), Ingebrit Haker Flaten (bass), Paal Nilssen-Love (drums), and the South African Andile Yenana (piano). It is through this project that that Ngqawana's recording career took off (Ngidi, 2011).

The *ingoma* concept took further root in 1997, when Ngqawana toured the US with his South African group evocatively called the Ingoma Septet. During this tour, Ngqawana was also joined by his mentor Max Roach for performances in Chicago (Tesser, 1997). Ngqawana recorded *Zimology* in 1998, which was again the fruits of a collaboration based in Norway (Van Wyk, 2011). His Norwegian connection carries into his follow up project *Ingoma* (1999) with the same rhythm section featured on *San Song* (1996), this time with Lefifi Tladi contributing poetry and paintings and Dumakude Msuthwana on trumpet (Zimasile Ngqawana, [n.d.]). In 2000, Ngqawana appeared at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown as part of the Eastern Cape All Stars big band that was conducted by pianist Hotep Galeta (Muller, 2000). The following year, 2001, Ngqawana founded the Zimology

Institute, an alternative space for learning/thinking/doing improvisation, on a farm that he had bought in Johannesburg (Thomas, 2010).

Ngqawana visited the United States again in 2003, where he was a guest lecturer at the University of Tennessee for six months (Ansell, 2005: 319-320) and visited New Orleans with jazz veteran and founder of the Joy of Jazz festival, Peter Tladi (Coplan, 2007: 345). When he returned to South Africa, Ngqawana recorded *Vadzimu*, featuring pianist Andile Yenana, drummers Lulu Gontsana and Kesivan Naidoo, double-bass player Herbie Tsoaeli and trumpeter Marcus Wyatt (Ngidi, 2011). This recording, furthering the connections drawn between song and healing invoked by *ingoma*, points to Ngqawana's search for deeper connection with his African ancestral connections through its title. *Vadzimu* and *Ngoma* in particular open a space that is deeper and older than the ~~colonial~~ nation state; a revolutionary musical act that insisted on existing beyond the borders of the nation state. In 2004 Ngqawana and his former lecturer, Darius Brubeck, collaborated on producing an orchestral piece 'Let Freedom Swing: A celebration of Human Rights and Social Justice'. The piece was performed by the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra in New York (Ngidi, 2011). In the same year, Ngqawana's *Vadzimu* (2004) was released under Sheer Sounds label and won 'Best Male Artist Award' at the South African Music Awards (Coplan, 2007: 344). This moment earned Ngqawana considerable media attention, which expanded his audiences beyond the numbers usually associated with jazz, particularly in those years.

Around 2005, drummer Ayanda Sikade, saxophonist Leon Sharnick, myself as a pianist and Ngqawana's son Lucky Ngqawana (also known as Zim Ngqawana Junior) were invited to be the first intake of students in the Zimology Institute. Among these early students, both Sikade and I toured extensively and recorded four albums with Ngqawana between 2005 and 2009, while I made contributions as composer ('Waltz for Trane') and arranger ('Afro Blue'). Other musicians who were involved with Zimology teachings (whether at the institute or playing in performances) were Sakhile Moleshe, Mthunzi Mvubu, Shane Cooper, Omagugu Makhathini, Siya Makuzeni, Karabo Mohlala, Vuyo Manyike, Kyle Sheperd, Mark Fransman and Kesivan Naidoo, among others.

Ngqawana's school of thought (Zimology) placed importance on the idea of discipleship. In a Nguni context this could be understood as the idea that in order to know something one has to consult with those who came before. Master-disciple relations are not unusual in Nguni

cultures, since they are embedded in the languages and proverbs. In isiXhosa, for example, there is a proverb that says 'inyantu ibuzwa kwabaphambili,' which means that in order to find a path one has to consult with the elders ahead of him/her. This suggests that to become a leader, one has to be a good follower. Hence the opportunity to be in Ngqawana's band for many years became an exercise of passing on/receiving cultural memory.

In 2005 Ngqawana collaborated once more with poet and painter Lefifi Tladi in a duet performance/film titled 'Giant Steps' (recalling the title of one of John Coltrane's most popular tracks of 1960), filmed and directed by Geoff Mphakati and Aryan Kaganof (Zimasile Ngqawana, [n.d.]; Van Wyk, 2011). Commenting on a live performance of the Zimology Quartet in Basel, Switzerland two years later (a performance that was recorded and subsequently released as the album *Zimology Quartet - Live at Bird's Eye Switzerland*, 2007), the author Lewis Nkosi wrote in a review:

> As South African jazz-lovers probably know, Ngqawana is so multi-talented, a man of so many parts, that trying to pin him down to one single role, is nearly futile. But he is encouraged in his irrepressible mischief by a trio of extremely talented musicians, from bass-player Herbie Tsoaeli and Ayanda Sikade on drums, to the back scratching collusion of his pianist Nduduzo Makhathini, one of the most bracing, if not abrasive, jazz pianists to emerge from South Africa in the 1990s. Nduduzo has already been here before, scaring the daylights out of the Swiss with clusters of chords and runs on the keyboard that can evoke at will Monk or Abdullah Ibrahim, not to mention all his other American jazz mentors (Nkosi in Harries, 2015: 87).

Ngqawana increasingly moved towards free improvisation at this point of his career, a turn reflected in the release of live recordings that convey something of the immediacy of being in a particular time and place, instead of studio-recorded albums that connote more deliberately planned and produced material. The *Zimology Quartet - Live at Bird's Eye* album was followed by a Sheer Sound release of a double disc titled *Zimology In Concert (USA)* in 2008. This record featured the University of Tennessee Faculty Ensemble with pianist Donald Brown, guitarist Marc Boling, drummer Keith Brown and bassist Rusty Holloway. Although it is unclear when this recording took place, it possible that it happened during Ngqawana's residency at the University of Tennessee in 2003. Ngqawana performed at the Cape Town International Jazz Festival with his Zimology Quartet in 2008, featuring myself

on piano, Shane Cooper on bass and Ayanda Sikade on drums. This performance was later released under Sheer Sound on both CD and DVD titled *Live at the Cape Town International Jazz Festival* (2013). Ngqawana recorded a live DVD recording of a performance in celebration of his 50th birthday at the Linder Auditorium in Johannesburg in 2009 (Van Wyk, 2011). This performance featured bassist Ernest Mothle, myself on piano and drummer Ayanda Sikade. In the same year, 2009, Ngqawana also released a live performance in a double disc titled *Anthology of Zimology* (2009). This was recorded on his 2008 tour with his Zimology Quartet in Heidelberg, Germany, which featured the same band except for Shane Cooper on bass instead of Mothle. The record features an original 'Waltz for Trane' I had composed as a tribute to John Coltrane, which again points towards deep connections to modal music.

The momentum Ngqawana's practice had gained in the first decade of the new millennium was disrupted when the Zimology Institute was vandalised in 2010. His response to this event was documented in a film by Aryan Kaganof, featuring Ngqawana and pianist Kyle Shepherd (a former student of Zimology). The performance and film navigates in a poetic way both the notions of physical vandalism, and the vandalism of the soul and the mind. In the performance/film, Ngqawana performs a healing ritual, which Thomas (2010) describes as follows:

> Moving shaman-like around the dancing flames of a ceremonial bonfire, Zim Ngqawana wards off the flames with the power of his horn. This introduction to Vandalizim is a powerful analogy for how the teacher has channeled his rage at the actions of those who broke into his beloved Institute. What follows is a healing ceremony of improvisation.

Ngqawana argued that the act of vandalism at the Zimology Institute was a result of other forms of vandalism that people suffered, casting it as ~~a legacy of the traumas of apartheid,~~ a symptom of what Ngqawana referred to as a 'psycho-spiritual malaise in contemporary South Africa' (*Mail and Guardian*, 2010: 17). He argued that 'the souls of these people [the vandals] have been vandalized' (*Mail and Guardian*, 2010: 17) and that music, in the register of improvisation, was necessary to provide a counter-narrative to the pain exernalised in the act of vandalism. In this way, Ngqawana proposed improvisation as a form of ritual, creating a healing space for addressing and mending broken-ness (Vos, 2019). As I highlighted in

Chapter Two and elsewhere in this thesis, the function of music as ritual is evident in many African cultures. One method of healing that uses sound is *ubungoma/ngoma*, which Ngqawana engaged with deeply in his work, as his album titles and his view of his artistic practice conveys.

On 10 May 2010 Ngqawana passed away, and was buried that same day according to Islamic customs. The day before Ngqawana's passing, he had been rehearsing for a performance when he suffered a stroke, after which he was admitted to hospital (Burbidge, 2010).

A few years before Ngqawana's passing, when I was part of the Zimology Quartet, Ngqawana would speak fearlessly about what he called 'the art of dying.' He told many stories about how his out of body experiences offered him opportunities to 'taste death.' Although Ngqawana's thoughts were often abstract and filled with humor, I want to suggest that Ngqawana anticipated and prepared for his transition from this life to what lies beyond. I recall driving with him after the Zimology Institute had been vandalised, when he kept saying 'I'm ready to leave, Makhathini, I'm tired, I'm tired!' Thus, there is a particular way in which Ngqawana's separation from the musicians he loved and worked with, combined with the vandalism of his 'temple' or 'chapel'[67] the Zimology Institute, led to this 'tired-ness' and his untimely departure.

In an interview with Fred Khumalo, Ngqawana refused to be called a master, reiterating: 'I have to die first… If you say I am a master now, that's half-truth. You are dealing with one side, [that is] my life while I'm alive. It's not complete, you have to understand my death too, then it becomes complete' (Old Mutual Success Stories, 2007: 22:33-23:26). This completion is an invocation of *ntu* through wholeness and continuity, but also links with the African immortal-ness via the onto-triadic nature of being.

2. Musical Influences

For the majority of jazz musicians in South Africa, at least among Ngqawana's peers and their predecessors, the ways in which musicians learned to play were mainly 'informal'. Generally speaking, for musicians from townships, this remained the dominant way of

[67] In the language of this study, this could also be thought of as *umsamu*.

learning even when the first jazz curriculums at tertiary institutions were introduced in the 1980s (I discuss this subject elsewhere, see Makhathini, 2021). On the one hand, there is 'formal' education based on designed curriculum found in universities, while on the other, there are other forms of knowledge production taking place in the townships and villages, knowledge problematically regarded as 'informal.' The latter form of learning seems to be more prevalent for improvisers from the townships, and this was certainly a modality of knowing and learning Ngqawana was exposed to and valued. Reflecting on his early days as a musician, Ngqawana (Zim Ngqawana in Ansell, 2011) observed:

> Port Elizabeth musicians had a philosophy that they had to organise themselves and create music without it being commercialised… They had a very significant way of teaching us. They would give you a nickname: mine was Ornette. I didn't know who Ornette Coleman was, so I had to go and find out… meaning you had to go and research and teach yourself.

Indeed, the American influence, especially that of free jazz led by Ornette Coleman, is evident in Ngqawana's musical practice in general and especially in the later live recordings that he produced, which were based on more spontaneous approaches to improvisation. These influences can be traced in Ngqawana's albums such as *Anthology of Zimology* (2009) and *The 50th Celebration: Zimology Live at the Linder Auditorium* (2010). But the Africa/America dyad is not mutually exclusive. Ngqawana himself spoke about how he was influenced by Coleman's concept of harmolodics. According to Coleman, harmolodics were concerned with 'transposing any sound whatsoever into your own playing, without having to give up your own identity in the process' (Wilson, 1999: 87). In many ways, this was how Ngqawana studied his teachers and masters in order to cultivate, and eventually, to find his own artistic voice, in which influences could be traced and heard without overshadowing personal musical identities. A typical example of how Ngqawana held on to his sound identity is found in his frequent invocation of 'traditional' Xhosa repertoires, even once he had been inculcated in the formal jazz curriculum, exposed to American standards and learned from masters such as Abdullah Ibrahim. Traces of Ngqawana's cultural identity could be found on songs such as 'Qula Kwedini'[68] and 'Ebhofolo', sung as part of various Xhosa ritual ceremonies and rites of passage. Furthermore, Ngqawana believed in human instinct,

[68] This song forms part of an important repertoire for Xhosa men that is sung during initiation to manhood (*Mail and Guardian*, 1998).

which is another important attribute of harmolodics. As Ornette Coleman asserted, 'the greatest freedom in harmolodics is human instinct' (Ornette Coleman in the sleeve notes of *Skies of America*, 1972). The human instinct in the context of this study includes spirit guided-ness (earlier discussed as guided mobility), grounded in *ntu* cosmology and invocations of ancestral dimensions, which Ngqawana also turned to via his understanding of *ngoma*.

> Suggestions of the harmolodics between 00:00 – 02:27 (this section of the music was entirely spontaneous). Ngqawana regarded this approach as a confrontation of nothingness (or sonically 'starting from nothing') as a meditation state of total submission to the music. It is also the dropping of the mind (as practised in Zen) and stepping back from the knowledge of sound in technical and analytical ways, trusting intuition.

As was the case with Mseleku, it is also important to mention John Coltrane's influence in Ngqawana's music and philosophy. Ngqawana once remarked: 'I got touched by John Coltrane… Coltrane helped me to enter… So, I say, Trane is to me what Jesus is to the Christians…' (Old Mutual Success Stories, 2007). Ngqawana's comment evokes the principle of discipleship, following as a way of knowing discussed earlier: while Ngqawana himself became a master-figure for a younger generation of musicians who worked with him, he was, in turn, a disciple (if in a more indirect way) of Coltrane and Coleman amongst other masters in the artform. Ngqawana further recalled that Coltrane 'made [jazz] much more accessible to an African, as a listener and as a practitioner', most particularly in Coltrane's post-bebop classic *A Love Supreme* (Jacobson, 2010). I have already mentioned how Coltrane and his generation in the '60s were seeking Africa and opening up to what I refer to as collective memory. In my view, considering historical transatlantic connections, shared sonic 'instincts' are invoked on either side (Africa/diasporas) of the Atlantic. A typical manifestation is the usage of the pentatonic scale and the blues scale in both African and African American music as one signifier of a commonality. Of course, collective memory is not limited to sounds, but extends to cultures and histories as suggested in Chapter One. While these two modalities of jazz (African and African American), for Ngqawana, are both critical axes of practice, it is worth mentioning that Ngqawana did not see separation, but rather continuities and connections: 'the American masters belong to my people…', and 'I have to connect with all the people in the Diaspora who do the same thing as me, who

practise the same form of expression, based on the same social conditions' (Ngqawana in Cessou, 20001).

Musically, the traces of Coltrane's influences in Ngqawana are the modal and open approaches to improvisation, a deep relationship with the root-note and beat one as points of agreement (*ukuvuma*) from which one is launched into the possibilities of improvisation as a mode of guided-ness. This period in Coltrane is marked by his epiphany leading up to *A Love Supreme*. His music and philosophy from this period was building on African and Eastern modes, both based on meditative approaches, and the later periods expanded these systems while also seeking to go beyond form, or what I regard as prophetic dimensions of sound or divination. The characteristics discussed here are also evident in Ngqawana's songs 'Transformation', 'Biological Warfare' and 'Kubi', and how Ngqawana approached these pieces in various recordings. During many of our conversations in rehearsals or on tour, when Ngqawana was grappling with how to define this modality of playing he would use terms such as 'meditation' or 'metaphysics', but ultimately he would say 'ingoma' (it is *ngoma*).

Perhaps this explains Ngqawana's deep engagement with South African jazz (in addition to American jazz), which was central in Ngqawana's artistic practice and sound sensibilities. In some of his albums such as *Zimology* (1997), *Zimphonic Suites* (2001) and *Vadzimu* (2003) Ngqawana included reimaginations of South African jazz classics such as 'Chisa' (originally by Abdullah Ibrahim), 'You think you Know me' (Mongezi Feza, also recorded by Ezra Ngcukana among other South African artists) and 'Tafelberg Samba' (Abdullah Ibrahim) among others. This created a strong framework for Ngqawana's compositional style, which was clearly steeped in South African jazz traditions. This also could be read as another invocation of master-disciple relations, studying a master's music as a way of walking in their footsteps as a way of finding one's voice.

Aside from jazz influences, it is important to acknowledge the influence of church music in the works of the musicians mentioned above and in Ngqawana's practice. These influences are specifically evident in the use of some chord progressions such as the perfect cadence found in a lot of hymnal music. For instance, in the track 'Mayenzeke' (on *Zimology* 1997) and 'Emnqamlezweni' (on *Ingoma*, 2000) Ngqawana invokes these connections. As highlighted earlier, these tracks musically register a kind of double consciousness (see

Chapter One). A good example of this sonic 'duality' is the work of Abdullah Ibrahim,[69] who was a great influence on Ngqawana.

> Traces of hymnal vocabularies. While this was not planned in preparing for this meditation, engaged in the spirit of Ngqawana, it did emerge (08:08) spontaneously as part of a sonic citation. After five cycles, this movement developed into a *marabi* groove which is closer to home, but also forms part of Ngqawana's vocabulary and that of many jazz musicians in the townships. In this manner, this meditation does not only honor Ngqawana but also his linage and various locations that produced this music.

Being in Zimology for many years, I recall how Ngqawana would often disrupt hymnal constructs through open improvisations. Ngqawana also spoke explicitly about the ways in which he sought to detach from the Western musical systems. Ngqawana's extreme approach to improvisation style — what he referred to as moving towards the unknown (most notably in his later years) — could be regarded as a form of ~~decolonial~~ praxis, resisting the dominance of the composition as fixed, authoritative idea that conditions the performance. In other words, while Western sound modalities (particularly hymnals) function within a systematic approach, yearning amen (an end) as presented in a perfect cadence — Ngqawana was seeking endlessness in suspended realities. Thus, as a response, Ngqawana looked into various cultural concepts in Nguni modes (and elsewhere) to create alternatives for thinking in/through his practice as an improviser located in spiritual paradigms.

Where Ngqawana really developed his own unique voice was in bringing all these sound worlds of African American jazz (modal music), church music (hymnals) and South African jazz (marabi, ghoema and maskanda) together into an underpinning sensibility while he allowed the Xhosa folk sounds and cultural concepts to create a framework for his music. In Ngqawana's own words,

> Of course [,] I respect the cultural context of [music], in terms of the rituals that I grew up with, the ceremonies… be it death, life, weddings, child, earth, or other

[69] . Ibrahim found his voice within/in-between the conflicts of the Christian church (inextricable from ~~coloniality~~) and his indigenous San and BaSotho cultural lineages.

> ceremonies. So [,] I bring that into context and try to deal with it as a totality. (Zim Ngqawana interview with Jacobson, 2011)

The totality that Ngqawana mentions here is the totality embodied in *ngoma* practices as I invoke below. As I have already mentioned, pieces such as a 'Ebhofolo', 'Qula Kwedini' and 'Unamaqhinga na?' are some expressions of Ngqawana's connections with ritual musics drawn from his upbringing. The situatedness of Ngqawana's practice in 'rituals and ceremonies' is significant for this study. It is this 'totality' — music as part of all dimensions of life — that informed Ngqawana's practice. To a certain extent Ngqawana refused to be situated, entirely, 'in a paradigm created and contextualized by the history of [American] jazz discourse', instead 'allow[ing] the audience to see and hear this music as an African phenomenon' (Ngqawana in Kaganof, 2007). In this statements we can see the overlap in his incorporation of the *ingoma*[70] concept and that of harmolodics. Ngqawana argued that in Nguni traditions, music carried a broader functionality that included healing and divination among other spiritual linkages (Ngqawana in Eato, 2009). Perhaps this also explains Ngqawana's aversion to institutionalized knowledge in that it seeks compartmentalize knowledge, especially within western epistemological confines that often lack the holism (the 'totality') found in African practices such *ngoma*. Ngqawana found this wholeness in other Nguni styles too, such as *amahubo* and maskanda (Zulu-derived practices) which he explored on tunes such as 'Ode to Princess Magogo' and 'Amagoduka', among others.

An invocation of Ngqawana's Xhosa repertoire as a modality that points towards his cultural located-ness can be heard from 02:28. This section of the meditation draws particular connections with 'Ebhofolo' (a location in the Eastern Cape) in relation to its mood and chord progression. The progression here is also found in indigenous Xhosa bow music style (listen to 'uSomagwaza' by the The Ngqoko Women Women's Ensemble). At 03:26 I cite Ngqawana's saxophone from 'Ebhofolo' that we explore as an 'energy field' towards unknown sonic fields.

3. Ntu and Ngoma Manifestations

[70] I explore this theme further in the next section.

Beyond the musical influences that Ngqawana retained from his upbringing in a Xhosa cultural framework, his notions of being and humanity could also be located within this worldview. Ngqawana's ontological outlook could be traced in his Xhosa upbringing where he was initiated into manhood (Jacobson, 2011). This is a chapter in Ngqawana's life that he honours in his various re-imaginations of 'Qula Kwedini' (*Mail and Guardian,* 1998). In Nguni cultures, initiation rites end with a re-incorporation phase where one is brought back to the village and celebrates a new function and identity in society, having gone through a given ritual. Ngqawana's conceptions of *ubuntu* could arguably be discerned in these communal rituals. As Ngqawana (Jacobson, 2011) points out, *ubuntu* is 'something that you understand better when you've lived it, when you've experienced it from family, friends, and people in general… that's how we were raised by our families, parents, our communities….' Like Ramose (2005: 41) who describes *ubuntu* as 'the preservation of be-ing as whole-ness', Ngqawana (in Jacobson, 2001) considers this concept as intimately linked with notions like 'compassion,' 'wisdom,' 'peace,' and 'love'. It is these facets that allow 'humankind to live in harmony with nature' (Ngqawana in Jacobson, 2001). In this sense, Ngqawana's understanding of *ubuntu* is not limited to humans but expands to the *ntu* categories of humanity, environment, spirits and aesthetic.

This is the context in which Ngqawana articulated his sound. For Ngqawana, the concept of *ubuntu* is closely related to that of (*i)ngoma* as suggested in his three-movement suite, Ingoma Ya Kwantu on the album *Zimphonic Suites* (2001). As Ngqawana explains, 'Ingoma Ya Kwantu' means 'the music of the continent.' 'Kwantu', he explains, 'comes from Ubuntu ("humanity") …[and] Umntu means "creation"' (Ngqawana in Jacobson, 2011). Music, place and origin come together in this quote, which suggests that the music could be understood as an expression of being in the world. In the context of *ntu* cosmology, this way of being in the world is characterized by continuity and wholeness. Both these principles of *ntu* inhere in Ngqawana's philosophical thought and musical approaches. From my conversations with Ngqawana it was clear that he sees a connection between music, meditation, a way of being and healing, which come together in his notion of totality/wholeness. Similarly, we can understand Ngqawana's commitment to this 'totality' through his espousal of *ngoma,* which acts as a ritual of keeping his worldview intact.

Ngoma (or *ingoma*)[71] is a theme that finds expression in Ngqawana's practice and vocabulary almost throughout his entire career, as is evident in his liner notes, song titles, album titles and interviews. Album titles like *Ingoma* (2000), song titles like 'Sangoma' and 'Ingoma', and various interviews where he made reference to the 'totality' inherent to the *ingoma* concept confirm this (Jacobson, 2011). In the liner notes Ngqawana likens his artistic practice to the work of a healer (*isangoma*) that seeks 'his ancestor's bones' (*Ingoma*, 2000). Ngqawana (in Eato, 2009) understood *ngoma* as a concept that brought about wholeness, restoration and healing. As Ngqawana (in Jacobson, 2001) notes, 'the whole concept of Ingoma means healing. And that is the true purpose of music.' It is this backdrop that informed Ngqawana's practice, to the extent that he would refuse to call his music jazz, preferring the term *ingoma*. This is a shift that prioritizes an African understanding of his practice over American or even Eastern conceptions of his sound's ontology and epistemology. Aryan Kaganof puts this well when he writes that 'although his [Ngqawana's] vernacular is deeply infused with the African-American "jazz" tradition, it brings that tradition home so to speak, and this homecoming, this voyage of spiritual regeneration, cannot be appellated in a foreign tongue' (Kaganof, 2007). *Ingoma* opens a lexicon for Ngqawana, and by extension this study, to engage with what this homecoming entails. The context of the practice, bringing the tradition home, is of seminal importance to Ngqawana. This is something he retains from a background in Xhosa music practices, as he expressed in an interview:

> I told you in the beginning that music with us was never out of context. There's a music for childbirth, and there's a ceremony that goes with it when you name that child after certain things. That's why you have to see the whole thing in context: you have to see the drummers, the dancers, and the song. Then you understand that we're dealing with totality (Ngqawana in Jacobson, 2011).

It is these teachings that contributes to Ngqawana's unique articulation of 'jazz'. Percy Zvomuya's description of Ngqawana's music suggests how this seeps into the sounds:

[71] These terms are interchangeable, the '*i*' in *ingoma* is the definite article. Thus, *ingoma* could also read as 'the ng

> At his best, as on the albums *San Song* (1996), *Zimology* (1998), *Ingoma* (2000) and *Vadzimu* (2004), one sees a rootedness to traditional folk music and an ability to meld this organically with his formal jazz training and avant-garde inclinations. In a song he's able to weld sighs and furious blows into the flute; studied blasts into the saxophone and unrehearsed shamanistic ritual chanting; a light brush of the drum kit and frenetic drum beats (Zvomuya, 2011).

Ngqawana found ways of creating deeper spiritual and cultural contexts within his practice through his belief in what he referred to as 'totality' (Ngqawana in Jacobson, 2011) found in *ngoma* practices. *Ngoma* as a healing practice performs the restoration of wholeness that is disrupted by illness. It is important to understand that illness is not limited to physical illness, but refers to any form of misalignment or imbalance. One example is what Ngqawana referred to as the 'psycho-spiritual malaise' that resulted from ~~apartheid~~ and its legacies (*Mail and Guardian*, 2010: 17), to which Ngqawana responds by performing an improvisation to effect healing. In this sense, *ngoma* rituals in both Ngqawana's and traditional contexts are aimed at igniting (or restoring) a 'state of perfect balance' (Kaganof, 2007; Janzen, 1991: 290). Thus, healing in the context of this study is a result of having found balance in *ntu* paradigms. For Ngqawana, this balance could be attained when 'music is functioning as a conduit between this material world and the world of the spirits, the world of ancestors, whose presence becomes foregrounded and heightened by the vibrational energy of the individual who is in trance' (Ngqawana in Kaganof, 2007). This is a view that sits within notions of African cosmology and ritual outlined in Chapters Two and Three.

The connection between the material and the spiritual is at the core of the onto-triadic structure of being, which includes the living (humans), 'the living dead'(ancestors) and the 'yet-to-be-born' (Ramose, 2005: 45). Since the latter two dimensions of being belongs to the realm of invisible/unknown, and they are therefore only knowable through belief and invoked by ritual. Ngqawana's practice of improvisation as (*i*)*ngoma* could thus be understood as a ritual overlapping these time-space concepts. In this sense, Ngqawana's tapping into the 'unknown' through improvisation/meditation is the moment of suspended time. Here, in Ngqawana's view, he operates as a 'mystic' (Ngqawana in Eato, 2009). By extension, the work of the spirit workers, such as *sangomas* among Nguni cultures, is performing the bridging and the communication between the living and the living dead. Concurring with these notions, Kaganof (2011) wrote:

> Zim was a man whose immense quality of spiritual being simply altered the lives of all those who came into contact with him. He was an alchemist, a transformer of energies and, most importantly and in the deepest sense of the word, a spiritual healer.

In transforming energies and effecting (restoring) healing, Ngqawana's work mirrors that of a *sangoma*. As Khumalo (2011) asserts, Ngqawana 'wasn't just making music for art's sake. His music became a vehicle for his quest into the spiritual world.' Among other aspects of *ngoma*, Ngqawana invokes the phenomenon of divination (also known as 'the throwing of the bones') which is central to *ngoma* rituals and believed to be a key tool in igniting this 'state of perfect balance' (Janzen, 1991: 290; Kaganof, 2007). Against such an understanding of Ngqawana's practice, Titlestad's (2004: 214) description of Ngqawana has particular resonance: 'Ngqawana's vision is of the creative artist as a "kultur warrior", as the "healer" […] looking for his ancestor's bones.' Titlestad (2004: 214) reads the 'bones' (or 'the throwing of the bones') in two ways. In the first instance, it points to 'a sense of reclaiming memory and articulating historical silences', and in the second instance it implies 'divination and prophesy' (Titlestad, 2004: 214). In *ubungoma* divination is concerned with reading or 'moving into the unknown'. In my experience of working with Ngqawana, his practice of improvisation was always orientated towards searching and finding revelation or prophecy, similar to the throwing of the bones. Ultimately, Ngqawana referred to *ingoma* as 'a practice of art within mystical dimensions' (Ngqawana in Eato, 2009). It is in these mystical dimensions that improvisation happen for Ngqawana.

The sonic meditation outlines mystical sound dimensions as unfolding prophecies and revelations. From the known musical materials, it pushes towards the unknown as a way of acknowledging the spirit presence and guidance by Ngqawana as a musical ancestor. This breaking into elsewhere comes into fruition at 03:48 to 05:12 through a collective improvisation. Collective improvisation was a significant paradigm under which Ngqawana operated as an improviser. He deemed this to be a way of invoking equality and humanness, something he deemed as a lack in society and believed that improvisation could generate.

4. The art of improvisation

Central to Ngqawana's expression of *ingoma* and *ntu* concepts described above was his ability to improvise through and beyond sound. Ngqawana considered improvisation within jazz as an 'experience of total freedom' (Kaganof 2011). This freedom focused on 'going beyond' into the 'unknown' that, in Ngqawana's terms, requires 'inspiration and spontaneity' and 'no fear' (Ngqawana in Kaganof 2011). By extension, this approach to improvisation 'comes from that centre of humility, and a willingness to go beyond yourself and to selflessness' (Ngqawana in Kaganof 2011). Selflessness in this sense functions as a form of emptying and allowing something else (wholeness) to enter or possess one. Ngqawana expressed this selflessness in his approach to the bandstand, particularly in how he shared the music with us as 'fellow travellers' (as he often called us). He advocated for a democratic outlook to the bandstand, where we all (ensemble as well as the audience members) came to the space as equals. This is also found in *ngoma* and *malombo* traditions discussed earlier, where the borders between audience and performer are blurred. In the context of this study this speaks to spirit dimensions and space (environment) of *ntu*.

Ngqawana's improvisation connects with the idea of *ngoma* as ritual in several ways. In improvisation, Ngqawana looked for 'the state of trance', achieved through improvisation as a form of 'meditation' (Ngqawana in Eato, 2009). Meditation (like improvisation) has to do with being in the moment and moving towards the unknown (*Mail and Guardian*, 2010:17). I recall many times during rehearsals when Ngqawana would remind us of moving from the known (rehearsed materials and composition) to the unknown, which he accorded an otherworldly description in through his phrase for this, 'music of the spheres' – thus invoking an elsewhere. These stages (known to unknown) resemble those of ritual discussed in Chapter Two. Here, I understand the unknown as a liminal phase requiring of the improviser to enter a space of vulnerability.

Submissions of 'total freedom', the 'unknown', 'trance state' and liminality all come together at 07:38 to 08:17. There is a total escape from thematic material pushing towards the leaving behind of known musical systems. This symbolizes a deep sense of surrender to the spirit worlds. In Ngqawana's terms, an opening up to 'total submission'.

Ngqawana used ‘composition’ as an ‘energy field’ to create ‘chemistry’ with band members that served as a foundation for the possibility of collectively ‘creating spontaneously’ (Ngqawana in Eato, 2009). Sounds, in Ngqawana’s thought, were streams of ‘energy fields’ that were stored in his written compositions, which he regarded as representations of his life experiences (Ngqawana in Eato, 2009). For instance, in many concerts Ngqawana would cite from what he called ‘the book’, which comprised his popular tunes such as ‘Amagoduka’, ‘Qula’ and ‘Ebhofolo’, among others. Especially in the later period of his life, Ngqawana moved towards spontaneous improvisation. He would often say, ‘let’s play from nothing’ (Ngqawana in Eato, 2009), which again references the concept of nothingness or emptying. At a sonic level this would mean ‘no meter, no time, [no chords] nothing [and] everybody is equal’ (Ngqawana in Eato, 2009).

This thinking informed the way Ngqawana would organize his sets. He would stretch each theme as long as possible, going against all harmonic and rhythmic protocols, until a new theme or a melodic motif emerged. This mirrors, for instance, how *ukuthwasa* in *ubungoma* becomes a stepping out of the liminal phase with a new identity (or new knowing). It is through these approaches that Ngqawana hoped to reach transformation and transcendence, striving towards ‘oneness’ and becoming an ‘entity’ where healing resides, similar to possession during traditional *ngoma* rituals. It is within this ‘mystical dimension of sound’ that Ngqawana believed ‘you don’t really function as a musician, [but] you function as a mystic […] you are not limited’ (Ngqawana in Eato, 2009). This is what Ngqawana then refers to as *ngoma*, a practice of art within mystical dimensions. In seeking to understand Ngqawana’s practice, many have likened him to a shaman. As Zvomuya (2011) notes, ‘[Zim Ngqawana] was more of a jazz shaman than a jazz showman. His concerts were as much about his music as they were expositions of his transcendental, self-knowing philosophy, known as Zimology.’ Indeed, Ngqawana’s engagement with the sound, through improvisation, situated him ‘in shamanistic process and in the re-enactment of myth during ceremonial dances’ (Kaganof, 2007). This is how Ngqawana invoked *ngoma*.

5. Zimology’s legacy (via Zen)

The Zimology Institute is a movement that Ngqawana established in 2001 to encourage artistic freedom(s) at the interface of music and cosmology (Muller, 2011). The overall model

of the institute could be traced in that of the AACM (Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians) founded in the mid-'60s in the United States (Ngqawana in Eato, 2009).[72] The AACM developed in Chicago from informal meetings between musicians that became a space to discuss the challenges black musicians faced (Roelstraete, 2014: 113). The movement rallied against the 'implicit hierarchies attached to the very language of jazz, with its customary association with standardised "light" entertainment' (Roelstraete, 2014: 114). Building on this idea, Zimology was created as a space where alternative methods of learning could be implemented as a countervail to rigid curriculums for jazz in South Africa that bypasses local histories and communities of jazz in favour of adopting American curricula (see Makhathini, 2021). It addressed the frustrations that Ngqawana encountered within university jazz programmes, in particular that of the University of KwaZulu Natal, where Ngqawana studied and where he taught briefly in the early 2000s when I was a student.

The influences of the AACM were already evident in Zimology around this time. The Zimology ensemble lived in a commune and embraced Zimology as a philopraxis. In the Zimology Institute, Ngqawana had set up an alternative to the formal curriculum found in conventional institutions; he thought of the Zimology Institute as 'a place of not doing [where] you will listen to yourself' (Ngqawana in Eato, 2009). It is this listening to the self and others that is of interest here.

Parallel to the Art Ensemble of Chicago and Sun Ra Arkestra's schools of thought, the Zimology Institute was founded as an apprenticeship and mentorship program. Ngqawana himself regarded his musical development as a product of being an apprentice with great masters of the artform. It is a 'tradition of understanding masters', which according to Ngqawana 'the kids of today don't know' as they now 'learn from the university' (Ngqawana in Eato, 2009). This implies that the knowledge that Ngqawana values is that of musical *praxis* rooted in the everyday rather than theoretical or institutionalised knowledge. In this sense, Ngqawana also thought of Zimology as a space of realignment with the (South) African teachings and traditions that he came from (Ngqawana in Eato, 2009). Ngqawana's friend, filmmaker Aryan Kaganof (2007) referred to the Zimology Institute as an African 'ancient mystery school' where secret knowledge and histories are 'handed in down from

[72] See George Lewis's *A Power Stronger than Itself: The A.A.C.M. and American Experimental Music* (2008). The movement gave rise to radical creative music sensibilities, notably resulting in the formation of bands such as the Art Ensemble of Chicago and Sun Ra Arkestra among others (Roelstraete, 2014: 115 – 117).

generation to generation', from master to disciple. From the time that I spent at the Zimology Institute, I recall that Ngqawana frequently invoked the idea of total submission to the master and to the sound itself, which was an invitation that he also extended to audiences who attended concerts.

Such teachings are also found in Zen, another Eastern spiritual practice that Ngqawana followed. Zen is also based on master-disciple relationships that informed the way that Ngqawana conceived of the relationship between the bandleader and the band in the context of improvised music. For instance, he used the teachings of Jesus Christ and his disciples as an analogy to explain how he thought about being part of a band/ensemble (Ngqawana in Eato, 2009). As Ngqawana himself noted, he 'studied all religions so [he] could transpose' them into his own context and practice in jazz (Ngqawana in Eato, 2009). The close connections between the musical practice, organizational structure of the ensemble's relationships, philosophical outlook, knowledge/praxis and transmission of ideas that conjoins in this endeavour are encapsulated in Ngqawana's statement at the time: 'instead of calling it [Zimology] a quartet, I call it an institute' (Ngqawana in Eato, 2009). An institute, Ngqawana contended, unlike a quartet, 'has no beginning [and] no end' and is thus passed on as a legacy from master to disciple (Ngqawana in Eato, 2009). While a quartet refers to a number of people involved in music making collaborative and creative decisions, an institute on the other hand, refers to an organization with a specific function, philosophy and institutional culture that lives on beyond the lives of its creators.

Two principles in Zen find particular resonance within Zimology: the first is that 'Zen is the spirit of a man [sic]', and the second, which follows from the first, is that Zen 'insists on an inner spiritual experience' (Suzuki, 1991). The first principle ontologically conceives of humans as spiritual beings; the second posits the acknowledgement of inner spiritual experience, and by extension the cultivation of such experience, as fundamental to Zen. The second principle follows on, or flows from, the first. Ngqawana's notion of Zimology as 'the knowledge of the self', resonates with the first principle of Zen as acknowledgement of human's spiritual nature. Ngqawana (Old Mutual Success Stories, 2007) advocated for 'looking into your own being' through practices such as meditation and improvisation as a step towards self-realization. This speaks to the 'inner spiritual experience' advanced by Zen.

These themes also intersect with other practices such *ngoma*, *malombo*, guided mobility discussed in this study. In this sense, I discuss Zen in conversation with these African concepts central in this study, which extend the individually focused principles of Zen (as expressed as the 'inner' experience of spirituality) I have outlined so far. For instance, Zen's acknowledgement of the spiritual nature of humans and Ngqawana's 'knowledge of the self' could be considered next to the Xhosa word *ukubanguwe* (being yourself), which puts it into dialogue with the natural world and community more broadly. The etymological nuance of this word could be poetically understood in the following manner:

> "U" first sound as in breath, humanity (has no gender), "Ku" or from, this has soul/spiritual/human connotations, "Ba" or soul, "Ngu" meaning connected to earth, nature, source, life, "We" to be harmonious whether with nature or fellow human beings.[73]

Bringing this explication closer to the cosmological outlook described in Chapter Two, we can see how wholeness is invoked through the connection of life with soul, earth, nature and fellow humans, and continuity through breath, sound and the immortality of the soul. Ngqawana said that the 'knowledge of the self [and] love for the self… is based on a holistic approach to existence, a oneness, a completeness' (Old Mutual Success Stories, 2007) that is evident here.

Zen seeks to find the 'inner workings of our being without resorting to anything external or superadded' (Suzuki, 1991: 44). This idea could be understood in *ntu* as vital force, a kind of 'inner working'. The inner being is responsible for the transformation of one's relationship with the world hence Zen emphasizes spiritual enlightenment (Suzuki, 1991: 34). Paired with this inner transformation, Zen teachings stresses personal experience as key in attaining an understanding of being (Suzuki, 1991: 34). Zen teachings are based on verbal and conceptual scaffolding from the experiences of previous masters (Suzuki, 1991: 34). This further connects with two ideas that are shared across Nguni communities (among others in Africa) found in proverbs. There is a Zulu saying, *ukuhamba ukubona* (we know by walking and by experience). There is also another proverb that says *indlela ibuzwa kwabaphambili* (the part

[73] This definition of *ukubanguwe* derives from a blogpost on Zim Ngqawana I read on the *kagablog*, curated by Aryan Kaganof, which no longer exists online. I kept this definition in my personal notes because it struck me as powerful in framing Ngqawana's practice, but no longer have access to the original blogpost to ascertain who wrote it, or to give bibliographic details for those reading in my footsteps.

can only be known by the ones that have walked before and thus to know, one must consult the elders). These proverbs paired with Zen teachings bring to focus Ngqawana's approach to Zimology.

Other themes that I remember Ngqawana invoked in my encounters with him, were those of emptiness and silence, also found in Zen. Ngqawana believed that 'in silence you can communicate much more accurately and honestly, whereas with sound you have to find ways of transcending' (Ngqawana in Eato, 2009). Zen links spiritual awakening to 'vast emptiness' (or silence). In Zimology, I find this emptiness invoked in Ngqawana's ideal of finding (or entering) 'the place of not doing'. The intention was always to focus on an inner way, a meditation. Similarly, Suzuki (1991: 38) asserts that 'Zen has nothing to teach us in the way of intellectual analysis; nor has it any set doctrines which are imposed on its followers for acceptance.' The openness of Zimology as a concept that entails the study of the self, and not Ngqawana's self (despite its name), reflects a similar non-doctrinal approach. Ngawana's term Zimology, of course, performs this inscription of the self as the subject of study. There is a curious tension between the teachings of an approach that centres around the study of the self, and the transmission of such an approach to others. Thus, both in both Zimology and Zen, transcendence 'is only attained only when "self-intoxication" [the pollution of the self] is abandoned' (Suzuki, 1991: 44). Ngqawana expressed this principle through the phrase 'dropping the mind', which he used to explain his notion of total submission. In this sense one could argue that 'whatever teachings there are in Zen, they come out of one's own mind' through meditation (Suzuki, 1991: 38). The role of a master is to point the way, but the experience of being on a path is a disciple's responsibility.

In Zimology the teaching method was based on experience, being in the music. Music, in this sense, operates as a way to experience, a way to be in meditation. Ngqawana often referred to music as meditation, and held that 'once it reaches the point of it now becoming a meditation, you cannot talk about it', thus leading back to silence (Ngqawana in Eato, 2009). What Ngqawana shows us here could be understood as both a way of being in life and the music simultaneously whereby the master points towards a direction but the lessons themselves emerge out of experience. As someone who went through Zimology myself, some of the most profound teachings were on the bandstand, and in themselves these teachings often happened through silence. Mngxitama (2011) reminds us that 'there are two ways to celebrate a master. To either reject the master completely or to re-read the master in new

ways.' In this chapter and the fourth sonic meditation, I re-read Ngqawana and Zimology towards a constructing of my own philosophical world that I will explore in the last chapter.

> Deeper readings of Zimology are displayed in the meditation as a realm of the unspeakable where Ngqawana now resides.

I argued that writing and performance could be thought of as kinds of rituals that amplify and immortalize the voices of my musical ancestors. In African cosmology, Mbiti asserts that an ancestor (living dead) can only live for as long as the ones alive recite his/her name (Mbiti, 1969: 74-81) and thus rituals (performance) act as a hinge that connect the two realms. The invocation of an ancestor cannot be limited to the performance of their music or in 'reflective' chapters on their works, but should include an invocation of their worldviews and how those informed very particular enunciations through/in sound. In response to this wholistic approach, I utilise both the sonics and the cosmologies of my musical ancestors to create dialogues with their existences in spirit dimensions. What Ngqawana teaches us is that the sonics should not just be understood as sound. Ngqawana's religiosity could be found in nothingness, in 'the space between the notes', 'the last note' and in becoming the silence.

The departure: 10 May 2011

The trio, myself, a fellow disciple and our master modulated to another realm of consciousness, where, perhaps death isn't possible. We had found a different relationship to gravity, with grace we floated. As we strangely walked on the sky, unexpectedly mountains appeared. Caves gaped from the mountains, and all kinds of things associated with life on the ground began to emerge.

It seemed as though we were not bothered by these rather puzzling happenings, for, in these moments, time did not exist. We ventured into conversations about the art-of-dying, metaphysics, improvising our way out of this world, the importance of community elsewhere, future sounds/no sounds and other interesting topics that were familiar to us on the other side of life when the master still walked on the earth.

Suddenly a heavy storm approached, carried by strong winds, there was dust all around, we saw flying objects that we had not seen before and eventually we lost sight of the master. The wind blew even harder, we tried to climb up to the mountain top, holding onto tree branches, but we got blown away. Stones were rolling from all sides accompanied by heavy sounds of thunder, it also become very dark and one could not see.

In no time I was left alone, I was exhausted, tired of fighting nature's forces. I fell into deep sleep to wake up years later in a different place. I was in a dry dessert, very still and filled with vast emptiness. As I looked above my head, an uncommonly tall man stood as if he had been there for a while, waiting for me to awaken to this new world. Feeling very thirsty, I asked him for water and thoughtfully he responded: 'there shall be no need to drink anymore, you have become the very waters of eternity and like a stream you flow'.

Then I woke up.

Chapter Eight: Enunciating a new framework

Fifth sonic meditation – Umgidi

Available: https://vimeo.com/africaopen/download/758696190/4c4bb3aa19
https://vimeo.com/758205991
Password: @VisserClari9105

At the core of this sonic ritual/meditation, I demonstrate the importance of community (in the form of a large ensemble with an audience) in music-making as a collective process. Here I work inside the concepts of *ngoma* and *ntu* as invocations of wholeness. This performance forms part of locating my own approaches in improvisation, which I call *ingoma-sbhulo* (a divining sound-field that facilitates a transport to elsewhere). Part of what this meditation does, is to (re)contextualize the piano in a *ngoma* context, both within South African music practices/repertoire and as a ritual technology. Parallel to that, I seek in this event to juxtapose the idea of multiple-voices to that of 'the throwing of the bones' during divination. In this sense, improvisation enters the realm of prophetic knowledge via a meditation sequence: known-unkown-newknowing. Ultimately, this performance is a thanksgiving ritual to pay gratitude to the spirit guides that collaborated with me in creating this work.

1. Reflection

The previous chapters have outlined the cosmological paradigm within which this project is based and through the interlocutors, I have shown some interactions with such a world via artistic practices and philosophical concepts. From these interactions certain themes have emerged that resound with my own practice, and my varied relationships with/to these interlocutors. *Ntu* cosmology offered a space for thinking about sound production, but also a location for the sounds. I have argued that through *ntu* the context of sound expands beyond the sonic into notions of being: the sonic as an ontological articulation. In my engagement with the lives and artistic practices of Philip Tabane, Busi Mhlongo, Bheki Mseleku and Zim Ngqawana I have shown various possibilities of how, through sound engagement, these improvisers came to cultural, spiritual and socio-cosmological knowledges underpinned by *ntu*. Collectively, and in their unique ways, they reach *ntu* cosmology by ancestry, birth, socialization and initiation.

In *malombo*, Tabane's sound interacts with notions of rituals in Venda cultures with which he was raised and that resulted in complex relationships with space and land. By extension, in this *malombo* cosmology, he finds approaches to his guitar and improvisation styles based on spontaneous creation (*mato*) anchored in healing practices through some form of possession and dialogue with *malombo* spirits. Tabane attributed his entire career to this tradition, and this informed his various bands that became enmeshed in *malombo* concepts. In this sense, Tabane, through his practice and deep understanding of *malombo* cosmology, kept strong ties with his ancestors who had passed the gift to him.

Mhlongo engages the spirit world via *ubungoma* located in her calling (*ubizo*) as a healer. She also creates overlaps with some liturgical systems of the Shembe movement where songs and dance are understood as sacred texts. Mhlongo invokes all these knowledge paradigms as ways of framing her sound, extending an invitation to her Zulu divinities, such as uNomkhubulwane, whom she invokes in her music. Through her understanding of *ukuthwasa* as a process of becoming/unfolding, Mhlongo developed an approach to improvisation as a way of moving towards spirit fields through elaborating from set musical motifs towards unknown music materials. This was based on embellishments as tools of reaching the unknown.

Engaged in a complex itinerary, Mseleku problematizes the idea of religion as a plurality but moves towards a 'universal consciousness' where he locates multiple spiritual coordinates and that informs his artistic approach. Drawing on his Zulu upbringing, Mseleku acknowledged his artistry as an expression of mediumship (*umngoma*), seeing himself as a messenger translating spiritual texts to sonic ones. He also understood this role as part of his purpose to embody and express the many overlapping lives which he understood within his eastern mysticism influences as reincarnation or afterlife. Mediumship and an understanding of life as a continuous, never-ending cycle, became a modality for Mseleku's compositional and improvisational approaches, understood as 'cycles' that acknowledged no beginning, and ceded no end. A greater part of Mseleku's songbook used musical systems that demonstrate his commitment to life as an unending pilgrimage.

Ngqawana follows similar pursuits of locating spirituality in the practice of improvisation through an array of religious devices. He drew from Xhosa and Nguni systems, Islam and Zen mysticisms. Ngqawana was interested in self-realization, which he termed 'Zimology', or a study of self. In this regard he understood himself as a shaman and a mystic operating in the realm of unknown spirit worlds. He used his Xhosa repertoire, absorbed from cultural rituals in his upbringing, as 'energy' fields from which to launch towards 'the beyond' and to return to silence. Ngqawana incorporated the idea of 'totality' into the *ngoma* complex while he was also grappling with Zen mysticism. In this way he came to improvisation as a mode of surrender and self-realization.

I come to this music making similar connections. I maintain close relationships between my cultural orientation in ntu cosmology from my live Nguni experience. This anchored-ness finds expression in my artistic practice. But also overlaps in my work as a practitioner in jazz who has designed and continues to teach the curriculum in a university program (see Makhathini, 2021) located in a music department (at the University of Fort Hare) which I head up. Moreover, I was brought up in Zulu traditional ceremonies that view sound/song as sacred text and a healing medium that, through ritual strategies, allows one to travel to other worlds. This relationship was fixed in my consciousness from a young age, and it was further deepened by the gift of healing bestowed upon me and later realized through *ukwethwasa*. When I came into 'jazz' at the age of seventeen, I was looking for ways to maintain these spiritual connections to sound. But this desire was inhibited by a curriculum closed to cosmological considerations or any spiritual connections to the study of music. The four

figures who I discuss in this thesis have been seminal in showing the possibilities for a spiritually engaged jazz practice and contributing to/shaping the ways I have come to develop this artistic identity over the course of my training and career. In their artistic expressions, Tabane, Mhlongo, Mseleku and Ngqawana maintained strong connections between their various cosmologies and their practice as improvisers. They continue to do so now as guides forming a greater network of divinities elsewhere, revealing themselves to me in a dynamic I regard as guided mobility.

In this chapter I reflect on the ritual of writing and the artistic practice that has sparked this writing, but I also think ahead to imagine futures for jazz and improvised musics in South Africa. I gather the propositions discussed in this study and present them as options for thinking about improvisation in (South) Africa. In a way, this chapter is a meditation of listening and sensing (*ukuzwa*), a way of honoring my musical ancestors and *ntu* as a paradigm for enunciation. The artistic work that I am engaged in (windows on which are presented with this research), is grounded in listening as an expression of entanglement with the worldview within which I function. In this final chapter, I therefore focus on particular aspects of *ntu* cosmology that pertain to my own practice. In doing this, I wish to make this artistic led research sing through being; both as a way of looking at the self and the ontological entanglements of being in the *ntu* world. The sounds (through the Sonic Meditations) and words (through the dissertation) desire a much deeper understanding of the world that produces it. As an index of my desire, I propose new vocabularies for the practice of improvisation towards a lexicon that future scholars and practitioners can deploy in thinking about/through/with jazz improvisation in (South) Africa.

2. Leaving behind autoethnography: towards an expanded notion of self

Sound occurs as a manifestation being: being with others and being in the world and with spirits. Music, as I understand it, emanates from a situatedness in *ntu* cosmology. It is this being that leads to the breaking into sound, as an alignment with *ntu*, understood as the invocation of wholeness where concepts of being (*muntu*), environment (*kintu*), space and time (*hantu*) and aesthetic (*kuntu*) function as one. What I outline here problematizes the idea of autoethnography (a way of looking at the self) within this complex of *ntu* cosmology, with what I believe to be significant methodological implications. That is to say that autoethnography, as a framework, presents limitations in dealing with the notion of self as

outlined in this study. In this sense, this chapter leaves this concept behind towards a construction of an alternative form of reflection theory on the self.

I was born in rural KwaZulu Natal in the 1980s, into a family (and community) that connected with multiple spiritual points of reference. The community invoked spirituality in everyday life through various ritual practices, and with a sense of 'surrounding guided-ness' infusing daily itineraries into the wilderness to collect wood or fetch water in the river. In retrospect, I realize that this was partly to seek protection from the existence of dangerous creatures or poisonous plants in the wilderness. In return, this produced a deep sense of alertness, resulting in a particular *muntu* and *kintu* fellowship. Timing was also a tool and an artform to navigate space, thus bringing in *hantu* and *kuntu*. Sometimes all these connections would be held together through reflective melodies of solo playing/singing that attuned being with *ntu* wholeness. This was one form of spiritual intuitiveness in the wilderness. Then, in the village, some of my family members held important positions in the Christian church, while some were healers steeped in healing practices of *ubungoma* and African medicinal knowledge. Many of my family members practiced both Christianity and ancestral veneration ('ukuhlonipha umoya' as my grandmother would say) in the Zionist church.

There was always a counterpoint of worship musics happening simultaneously, and in all these cultural practices sound played an integral role, invoking sacredness. While one could not escape the 'invasive' pipe organ sounds from the Roman Catholic Church that engulfed the village every Sunday, one could also not miss the majestic drumming from the Zulu traditional healing ceremonies and rituals surrounding our home. Some days one would hear the infinite sounds of *amahubo* of the Shembe church. Collectively, in all these settings, music functioned as an aural signification for spirituality, and medium for manifesting and maintaining spiritual connections. At the age of nine I had a dream of becoming a healer, from which my whole artistic practice eventually found expression. In this sense, I approach improvisation as a way of communicating with the unseen, the ones that have given me the gift. Like Tabane, Mhlongo, Mseleku and Ngqawana before me — artists who sought to connect with ancestors' worlds, move towards self-realization, follow the calling and considered a journey afterlife — I come to sound for a spiritual purpose. Thus, my engagement of the self considers my connection to community (living and living-dead) and all spirit worlds, the environment, time and space concepts and sound inside *ntu* paradigm as a network that governs the functioning of a whole. It is this sense of abundance, I suggest,

that troubles the notion of autoethnography, in that the self, also, represents a communal whole.

I come this writing and the sonic meditations presented as part of this project as someone who is ontologically linked to a broader cosmology of *ntu* – through ancestry, birth, socialization, and initiation — that proposes being as the ability to see (*ukubona*) through song towards being with others (living, living dead and not-yet-born) and environment inside of time and space relationships. Engaged in a practice-led project, I am presenting the results of two approaches: looking at the self and interlocutors. The studies of Tabane, Mhlongo, Mseleku and Ngqawana function as pathways for reaching and locating the self through an understanding of being bounded in a cosmological lineage enshrined in Nguni cultural concepts. I trace my own practice as an improviser engaged in spiritual practices through these interlocutors of the lives and artistic contributions of my teachers. In this dissertation, I expand the often simplistically wielded notion of *ubuntu* ('I am because you are'), to encompass the formulation '"a person is a person through the existence of: others, environment, all living things and spirits, time, space and spirit'". In this manner, the self is inextricable from a communal body of *ntu* that is characterized by wholeness and continuity. And so, the reflection on the practice of the self goes beyond from documenting my own practice and reflecting on my practice,[74] to include the dialogues with the ancestors (among whom are Tabane, Mhlongo, Mseleku and Ngqawana).

This, to my mind, challenges the notion of autoethnography beyond the current definitions in existing scholarship. If the self is multiple, the cultural writing of the self is attended by multiplicity and is multiphonal, being is the transcription of the multitudinous noise of the whole and the continuous. Located in practice and creative realms and thus inviting of sounds and improvisation as self-medium, this inward extension of the term is developed further by what could be likened to 'evocative autoethnography' (see Mara and Thomson, 2022: 378-380). In this sense, sounds in this project are a way of locating the self, an expression of both human-ness and humility (*ubuntu*). If *ntu* were the wilderness, then singing these songs/sounds would be a way of making the self-visible (be-ing) and identifiable through the voice, fellowshipping with wholeness. Singing, then, is a form of ontological in-tune-ness, it is a way of being, a dance in coexistence.

[74] This is largely understood in current academic discourses as autoethnography.

One can explain this in another way too. Autoethnography, as a methodology, is based on the self: personal narratives, rooted in personal life or practice, serve as the phenomena that are studied (Ellis; Adams; Bochner, 2011: 279). If the self is understood through the lens of (or as) *ntu* (and *ubuntu*), the dividing lines between the self and community (environment, time and space) are blurred. Life experiences are shared with the humans and spirit communities and the spaces they occupy in given time-periods. This community includes my musical ancestors and guides that now live in spirit worlds. This approach is therefore a multi-author one, in which different authors (my stories and sounds, and those of Tabane, Mhlongo, Mseleku and Ngqawana) take a collaborative approach to present shared experiences that contribute to explicating cultural meaning as manifested in various contexts (Ellis; Adams; Bochner 2011: 279). In a very particular way, this approach dissolves the 'self-other' dichotomy, destabilizing the field of self-writing in the Humanities and Social Sciences. In the ~~decolonial~~ context from which I write, this has important implications in shifting the discursive engagement from the academic literature, to the elders and environment and ancestors and unborn in the community. I should like to believe that it also destabilizes notions of authorship and the primacy of the author as authority, as the author, in this approach, becomes the medium through which a community and environment is voiced.

Engaging with my musical ancestors in writing and improvisation (sonic meditations) is therefore better described as a strategy (rather than a methodology) towards writing with others, in mind and in spirit. In the spirit of the cosmology and ontology that this study builds on, it is crucial that the 'self' is understood as part of a greater collective, a lineage. I therefore use the interlocutors to 'walk in/with the footsteps of my ancestors', and the ones that came before. It is a way of following the call of the ancestors, the sound of the path, as in the Zulu proverb that says: 'indlela ibuzwa kwabaphambili' (the ones ahead already know the path). Listening to the musical ancestors, also in my writing, becomes an expression of *ntu*: a way of being with spirit and physical surrounding simultaneously, an articulation of wholeness and continuity. This opens a way of thinking with/about the past, the present and preserving the teachings for tomorrow, thus collapsing time-space limits. It becomes a way of being that is bounded together with all, a totality, inside *ntu* cosmology. I use literature, stories, what I remember and songs to trace the worldviews of a collective with an aim of explicating commonalities shared by proponents of *ntu* in relation to their musical and spiritual engagements. The aim of the collective approach is to demonstrate in an explorative,

explanatory, descriptive and interpretative manner what an understanding of my interlocutors can contribute towards thinking about improvised musics and jazz and spirituality in (South) Africa. This is where I locate the core contributions of this project.

It has been my intention to work out an approach that shows 'new perspectives – finding and filling' the gaps in existing narratives (Ellis; Adams; Bochner, 2011: 277). But I am also concerned to expose the silenced stories, which are never told or only ever seen as subplots because of the limited engagement with cosmology in current jazz studies in South Africa. In my literature review, I critically considered the outsider's perspectives of Ansell (2004) and Coplan (2007), among others, and their treatment of spirituality as a backdrop of jazz in in South Africa. This is a legacy that can be traced to the treatment of early South African jazz by Ballantine (2012), who priorities sociopolitical aspects of the music and glosses over spirituality as an integral cultural element of South African jazz. This study anchors material and puts accents in different places: it draws attention to jazz and artists' embeddedness in culture, spirituality and rituals. It does this by thinking with Tabane, Mhlongo, Mseleku and Ngqawana, and singing/playing/thinking with them as a culturally embedded and spiritually connected artist-researcher.

3. Breaking into sound: Theorizing the sonic

To make sense of what sound is as a manifestation of cosmological situatedness, I return to the Zulu creation story as a way of making a concrete relationship between sound and the work of improvisation in Nguni (and *ntu*) cosmology. This is an overdue attempt to theorize sounds from an indigenous paradigm rooted in African knowledge. In the creation story, we are told that humans and all creation broke off from a 'pre-existent spirit being', which is eternal (also see Callaway, 1970: 2). Our ancestors of the Zulu lineage locate this pre-existent in the story of the reeds as they say 'singabantu, sadabuka ohlangeni…', meaning that we broke off the reeds as a result of our spirit essence, an unseen dimension that gives birth to all things. Here, *ukudabuka* (to emerge) is understood as the process of 'springing off', while *uhlanga* (the reed) represents that which is capable of 'throwing out offsets' (Callaway, 1970: 2). While this touches on the aspects of creation as a form of birth, it is not clear what preceded this process, as the story speaks of the reeds and the break but not of the roots (in other words, a fixed point of origin). In this sense, the reeds have always-already been continuous. Metaphorically speaking, the hidden depths of the roots in the mud points to the

mystical dimension of this creation story: the unseen spirit essence. Humans and all things have an intimate relationship with this spirit essence, which is eternal, and understood in this study as 'vital force', or *ntu*. This creation narrative overrides western notions of human origins as the beginning of history. Instead, it foregrounds emergence as opposed to beginnings.

This is how I understand sound, in improvisation, as a manifestation of the pre-existent spirit field. To 'break into' sound is to enter and access the eternal parts of being, a collapse between the physical and the metaphysical spheres of being. Dealing with sound at this level can be understood as an expression of the eternal self (*ntu*) inside ritual states, what Ngqawana would often refer to as 'total submission'. The American saxophonist and scholar Anthony Braxton (1985) speaks of this eternal sound state in terms of 'long sounds', which he defines as an engagement of sounds in a meditative state over long hours resulting in a feeling of suspended time. This suspension of time, as Braxton (1985) writes, is based on the given ritual's vibrational depth resulting in the production of 'meta-reality' outside 'local time'. The meta-reality, I argue, is where sounds live in a state of potentiality that creates a possibility for and within the break. This sound dimension is where the 'unknown' parts of improvisation occur; unknown to the improviser, but in motion and constantly known in the eternal spirit fields. That is to say, there is an eternal continuity in the spirit worlds which improvisation, in ritual context, is able to invoke or tap into.

These ideas are already known within the world of ritual, which underpins my own cultural experiences and those of Tabane, Mhlongo, Mseleku and Ngqawana. Mseleku's notion of cycles and endlessness could be thought of as this yearning for eternity that is within, an expression of the 'pre-existent spirit being'. Mseleku also spoke about this as going 'out of time' (*The South Bank Show* 1994) or having a different experience with the surroundings. In the same vein, Tabane, Mhlongo and Ngqawana's relationship with rituals also point towards a state of suspended time and infinite wholeness. In *ngoma* and *malombo* there is a constant invocation of the spirit worlds, a launching into a different time-space dimension that, at times, animates the body in particular ways. I have already discussed how each of my (ancestral) musical interlocutors entered an altered state of consciousness in unique ways during their performances. While notions of altered states or spirit possession have received scholarly attention within the realms of African indigenous music (see Blacking, 1985 and Jansen, 1991 among others), this study invokes these themes as particularly important to

considerations of jazz and improvisation through what I term 'the breaking into sound'. As demonstrated in Chapters 4 to 7, the suspension of time could be understood as a break into other worlds, infinite sounds of the whole, what I refer to as elsewhere.

I want to suggest that the breaking into sound is breaking into unseen/mystical worlds of ongoing music inside of being. It is a deep engagement with one's spirit essence, a place of departure. Mseleku and Ngqawana also pursued this relationship with the inner worlds through what they regarded as 'self-realization' or 'the study of self' in the case of Zimology. This informed their understanding of performance as meditation. Likewise, I have noted that in improvisation, the function of ritual is to keep human relations with spirits, time and space intact. Breaking into sound functions as a passageway to this level of wholeness (*ntu*). It is a collapsing of conventional time-space concepts; being here and elsewhere simultaneously, as Ramose invokes in his onto-triadic concept. It is the coming together of *muntu, kintu, hantu* and *kuntu*. Breaking into sound in these *ntu* terms, then, is to be in unison with the totality of being an in-tune-ness with all.

From a musical perspective, the breaking into sound opens past, present and future sonic possibilities. This could be understood in the context of repertoires and sound vocabularies that an improviser invokes during a piece of improvisation. I name this register as 'sonic citations' as I have explored in the all sonic meditations. Through sonic citations, the improvisation that unfolds as a kind of ongoing music, encompasses past engagements with the music inside one's memory, memory that exceeds the living's lifetime or life experiences, which I consider a form of consciousness. This kind of breaking into sound relies on what I want to call the 'internal sonic library' (ISL) based on what an artist has heard or practice in the past. In this sense, this musical material is not in 'motion', a moving past, but exists in a realm of potentiality realized by an improviser's intention to draw on the ISL. This process could be understood as a moment of recollection, past vocabularies. But as I proposed in Chapter Two, breaking into sound could also mean that, in a given moment one launches into a different relationship with one's surroundings; an altered state as engaged by my interlocutors in various ways, through *ngoma, malombo*, cycles and meditation.

All these sound strategies point towards a realm of suspended time, an elsewhere that deals with the now and future sounds. While the ISL recalls ideas from memory, these sound strategies (*ngoma, malombo*, cycles and meditation) go beyond memory, and escape into

higher/super consciousness where music in not static as an idea but alive as an energy field that is ongoing. It is worth mentioning that collectively, the sound strategies above pivot on repetition as a way of exiting to unknown sound fields. As I have outlined in Chapter Three, through repetition, embellishment forms an organic process of dissolving the original music materials using time strategy towards the musics of elsewhere. The VhaVenda, as we find in Tabane, understand this process as mato; 'a gradual metamorphosis away from the original song text' (Davhula, 2016: 4-1). But I argue that unlike in improvisation, at least within jazz practices, there is no set time for the beginning of the unknown of improvisation; the focus is internal towards an awakening of the spirit essence. In this state wholeness is realized as a fellowship of being with preexistent spirit essence (*ntu*).

I explore this strategy at 55:33 in a movement titled 'Isgekle' (a spiritual dance), an actualization of this dance begins at 55:55 (see dancer). This piece is based on a continuous bass ostinato that represents an agreement with the collective, a shared pulse and rootedness. While this part of the music is set, there is an unfolding that happens spontaneously with the text and melodic ideas from the vocal line, weaving singing and spoken word. At the culmination of this 'walking together' of the bass ostinato, dance and singing-spoken word, at 59:51 the piano breaks into a divination mode moving between tonal and atonal musical material. Here there are occasional points of agreement through the invocation of the bass ostinato on the left hand (01:00:19). As the piano solo progresses, there are reminisces and memories of the spontaneous hymnal material that happened earlier (01:00:48). At (01:01:05) the saxophone breaks into open improvisation, followed by a return to the agreement (01:03:00) that builds into an invitation, accepted by the audience (01:03:19).

Mhlongo, approaches this through her practice of *ubungoma*, as this constant unfolding of being. She interprets this via the notion of *ukuthwasa* which she invokes in the name of her group Twasa that was born after her graduation as a *sangoma*. It marks a significant transition in her life but also in her sound. In this sense, it is not only the music that is becoming through embellishing but also the being. There is then a much more intrinsic relationship between the person and the artform, the latter is shaped by the former. This, rejoicing of the being and the practice as a way to break into sounds is a potent contribution that Mhlongo offers us here, to improvise as a response to the calling (*ubizo*). As explained in

Chapter Five, this deep commitment to what is known and a mode of surrender through repetition leads to the unknown as an opening of another world, a breaking into sound.

Mnguni's ethnographic study (2015) of the San people of Southern Africa speaks about medicine songs, that is, songs and dances believed to carry potency. Named *n|om*, these songs and dances are described by the San people as 'spirit of the Big God'. These particular songs and dances are believed to be capable of releasing and activating *n|om*, which further allows the performer to enter the spirit dimension (Mnguni, 2015). It is within this spirit dimension that healing potency is released. This is an example of 'now sounds' that open an energy field for healing by aligning frequencies of being with that of the whole, towards equilibrium. It is in this posture of surrender, a ritual state, that one becomes present. In Zimology, I have discussed this state as meditation, a total submission to now. Ngqawana asserts that 'once it reaches the point of it now becoming a meditation, you cannot talk about it' (Makhathini, 2022: 108). What Ngqawana suggests is that within that sound dimension one is unable to witness what goes on at the level of physicality, this is what is meant by suspended time. It is a mode of surrender (*ukucwila*) or the ability to dissolve within a given sound field and breaking to other worlds.

Breaking into sound, then, is a breaking into an awareness of an active and mystical sonic paradigm, a realm where singing never stops. Following on from this, to improvise is not to compose melodies spontaneously (as most people think), but to 'compose' our very being into a heightened state, returning to our pre-existent spirit essence. This is the purpose of ritual strategies in this study: It is a way of making sense of our heightened state as a tool for accessing infinite sound paradigms. Within this state it becomes possible to access the music of the gods (*n|om*), an eternal sound world that is always alive. Improvisation in ritual states can therefore be understood as a way of aligning our ontological senses in a total way and tapping into pre-existent spirit essence.

In preparing for the 'Thanksgiving Ritual: Umgidi', I went up to the mountains to connect with the sacred cosmic fields, where I came across a lake. Singer and cultural worker Mbuso Khoza joined me in libation, seeking guidance from the spirits ahead of the sonic meditation. We were also there to fetch *impepho* that we used in *umgidi* towards intensifying the vibrational depth of this sonic ritual. Among other things, we used *isitolotolo* to invoke *umlozi* as a technology to open spirit worlds. This was joined by singing, at one point, while the sounds of flowing water shifted the tonality to be in unison with our song. This, for us, was a sign that the ancestors had accepted the invitation to the presentation that would unfold in a few days.

The moment of breaking into sound is about a particular posture of surrender into the spirit worlds where sounds originate. It is to break from our limited human state to a god-state, a complete *ntu* alignment. Paired with the notion of *ukuthwasa* (to emerge as new), an improviser is someone who is engaged in a deep meditation with the spirit world. Through their willingness and surrender to a constant becoming, such improvisers find access to the infinite music of the spirit. Hence people refer to their experiences in sound states as 'ukuvukwa ingoma' (an awakening of a song within), or 'ukufikelwa ingoma' (to be visited by song). These references point towards song as an eternal field to which one finds access in a given moment of spirit alignment. Breaking into sound opens a field of discovery and endlessness. Mseleku (The South Bank Show, 1994) spoke in terms of the 'forever' sonic fields and entering the music without a preconceived idea of 'where it should end'. Subsequently, improvisation, as an unfolding pilgrimage, in the breaking into infinity.

Throughout this sonic meditation there are places of discovery and realising that which steps outside of the compositional materials but focuses on the letting go into places of divination. One such field is at 28:15 where the music opens to a kind of celestial dimension that moves even further away from human musical vocabularies such as licks, scales and phrases but rather towards the sounds of the cosmos such as the sound of raindrops or the sounds of the birds. I regard this as the composition of self into the music of the spheres, a total surrender.

4. Invitations: Bandstand theory

As a space, the bandstand can be read in several ways: a space for trust, a democratic space and even a space for meaning/knowledge making. In Chapter Three, I have offered a prelude to some concepts that locate the bandstand inside spiritual practices. I focused, in particular, on the bandstand as ritual space, or a space that opens an invitation to spirit presence. My own reading of the bandstand stems from my relationship with music and space as cultivated in an upbringing that featured music in ritual and ceremonial contexts. I am steeped in the cosmologies I described in Chapter Two, and informed by my discussion of my musical ancestor interlocutors (Tabane, Mhlongo, Mseleku and Ngqawana), who have been seminal in shaping my practice, and have dealt in their own distinctive ways with the bandstand.

Mhlongo highlights the notion of the sacredness on the bandstand that came from her years in the Shembe movement and Ekuphakameni as a sacred space. She also invoked *ngoma* practices in her stage presentation through her dance and scatting beyond human language, which implies the presence of the spirits. This presence can be understood as sacred, a presence also invoked in Tabane's *malombo*. Mseleku and Ngqawana went even further by bringing sacred objects to the bandstand, such as sacred texts, images of prophets, bells and singing bowls, among other objects which I witness many times at their concerts. Although these often reflected the Eastern spiritual practices that they (Mseleku and Ngqawana) had studied, they nonetheless imbued the bandstand with an aura of sacredness. I have also witnessed, at different times, all four musicians burning various types of incense on the bandstand as a symbol of the purification of space, transforming the bandstand to a place of invitation that includes spirit worlds. All of these things signal a spiritual intention for the sonic. But these are also practiced within cultural dimensions under the practice of *umsamu*.

An invocation of this level of intentionality in performance space is evident in the sonic meditation. Although this meditation took place in a university auditorium, a space built with specific musical ideas, instrumentations, sonic tastes and acoustic behaviors in mind, the choreography I display through the meditation channels a different vibrational depth. Through the projection of *umsamu* at the center of the stage, as a place of libation to the ancestors, I intended on invoking *ngoma* ritual. This expanded to the use of *impepho* (the burning of *impepho* – a traditional Sub-Saharan African incense – that is believed to launch communication with the spirits), candles, *umqombothi* (served in traditional Nguni clay pots that were created from scratch for the event) and the ensemble forming a half moon shape around *umsamu*, symbolizing continuity. The idea was to project all the energy towards a center, including that of the audience. This center thus represented a place of agreement with wholeness.

Growing up in rural KwaZulu Natal, I already understood music and its function in a place of ritual to facilitate a coming together of spirits and people. There was no gathering without the music; similarly, there was no music without a meeting of people. These were all communal practices. The places where the music/gathering happened, presented sites for communal meaning-making where knowledge (songs, prophetic word and poetry) was produced by the collective, and as Mavhunga (2014: 28) reminds us, 'even the collective is incomplete without the ancestral spirits.' Gathering, then, transcended the meeting of humans among themselves, and included spaces and spirits. In my upbringing, I came to understand songs as mediums for enacting these connections. In later years as a jazz improviser, I transposed this understanding to the jazz bandstand, which became a space that invites fellow band members, the audience, and the spirits to enter. I sought to locate the sacredness in the performance as the point of departure into spirit dimensions.

In my meditation I included sound, spoken word, *umsamu*, dance and community towards aligning *ntu* paradigms via an exploration of the multi-layered-ness of *ngoma*. In this sense, this ritual opened an invitation of the spirit worlds via the elements outlined. Throughout the meditation, there are these gestures from the audience that eventually lead to a chanting together (65:27) that continues after the band's departure from the stage, becoming a continuous rejoicing with the spirits.

The manifestation of the above understanding could be traced in how an invitation of the spirits is launched as the initial stage of a given ritual. This is referred to as *ukuphahla*, which could be understood as the calling or invitation of the spirits. Somé (1997: 77) reminds us that the initial stage of ritual is the invocation of the spirit world, which launches into a different condition that brings witness of the spirits. In other words, here one experiences an expanded notion of presence that includes spirit beings. He concludes that 'to meet as a group without invoking the spirits means that you are on your own' (Somé, 1997: 77). He argues that the sacredness of a given space is determined by the presence of the spirit world (Somé, 1997: 76).

These elements informed the first movement of the sonic meditation, that included *inyosi* invoking Zulu genealogy (03.06), accompanied by the burning *impepho*, the drinking of *umqombothi*. This was followed by a prayer hymn (*ihubo*) 'Zul'eliPhezulu' (09:40) that opened an invitation of *Umvelinqangi* (God). Then a departure into 'Amathongo'(19:56) that launched an open dialogue with the divinities. In the video, the audience also joins in chanting 'siyavuma', which means 'we agree and surrender'.

In terms of *ntu* cosmology, humans are bound to one another and to the spirit, time and space. Here I suggest that such an understanding informs a very specific way of coming to sound, since each person comes as part of a whole seeking completeness, a fulfillment of the calling (*ubizo*). Mhlongo (in Leeto, 2014) argues that on the bandstand 'the person 'Busi' disappears. It is us…' The bandstand as a space of gathering is also a space of enunciating wholeness as a collective. It is a space of invitation, a ritual space, a sacred place. If ritual finds its meaning through the presence of the spirit, I suggest that the bandstand is a call to surrender (*ukuvuma*) to our spirit essence. It envisions a coming together of artistic pursuits and the purpose of being through a calling. It is worth noting that to be call-driven is also the essence of mediumship (*ubungoma*) through the processes of becoming (*ukuthwasa*), to be call-driven. In this regard, three aspects are important: Space, collective playing and the invocation of the spirits.

The bandstand understood as ritual space entails a shift in the state of awareness, a widening in the invitation beyond bandmates, extending beyond the audience and space to include the spirit worlds. It is a dialogue between here and elsewhere that makes space for call and

response/agreement between multiple 'worlds' (the spirit world and the physical). At first it is a dialogue between musicians that extends to sound dialogues, but then expands to the environment: The audience and the acoustics in the guidance and conversations with the spirit worlds. In ritual context, Malidoma (1997: 81) calls this the 'dialogical' stage, i.e. a 'solemn dialogue' between humans and none-humans (the spirits). In the case of Busi Mhlongo, I have shown how the call is understood as an integral part of being initiated into the spirit network. This phenomenon is called *ubizo*; it is the calling that brings us to the bandstand and a calling that makes us seek the spirit. This is my orientation to the bandstand: I enter the space to open my senses as an expression of humility and surrender to the spirit that has called me to the world to do what I do. Thus, a call to the bandstand is a call by the spirit worlds to fulfil our/their purpose in the world. Purpose in the context of *ntu* cosmology is understood as the initial call, as we are born through a call via the onto-triad matrix. Hence Mseleku's argument about cycles and afterlife, the continued pursuance of purpose. In this sense, the bandstand can be understood as a place renewing our covenant with being, our essence as spirit beings, as a way of invoking wholeness and continuity.

As a response to the call, the tradition in which I grew up invokes agreement (*ukuvuma*: a concept used to express agreement, surrender and singing in isiZulu). I am singing (or playing an instrument) on the bandstand as a moment of surrender to a form of existence that overexceeds the corporeal state; a totality, a pre-existent spirit being-ness. This totality is an invocation of *ntu*: A manifestation of wholeness that brings body and spirit, environment, time-space concepts and aesthetic together. I therefore make an argument that the four *ntu* categories proposed by Kagame (*muntu*, *kintu*, *hantu*, and *kuntu*) are conceptual contributions to articulate a bandstand theory. In this conception of the bandstand, improvisation is a way of being with others, sounds, spaces and spirits; a way of surrender (*ukucwila*), to be submerged into a zone of wholeness.

In essence, the invitation to the bandstand is an invitation to dance with the spirits and wholeness. Ramose (2005: 43) regards this invitation as indeclinable, as it is an ontological obligation: 'to dance along with being is to attune to be-ing', and by extension to attune to wholeness. Read in this light, I suggest that being engaged in improvisation on the bandstand, in the contexts explored in this study, is a way of finding in-tune-ness with the totally of being governed by the call to being.

5. The throwing of the bones and guided mobility: Towards 'Ingomasbhulo'

Throughout this project, I have argued and shown that we are ontologically bounded with the spirit worlds. I have expressed this idea in terms of the onto-triad in *ntu* cosmology. More specifically within Zulu cultures, we are told that we come into this world already being possessed by the spirits of those who came before us, our gods and ancestors, expressed in the phrase: 'we came into being possessed of them [*amathongo*]' (Callaway, 1970: 130), with 'them' denoting pre-existent spirit essence. One can also argue that we are sent to the world via *ubizo*, a vital force. The purpose of song, within such a complex, is to awaken the spirit within. In ritual states, it is the spirit essence that animates the body in what has been called a 'trance state.' Hence the elders in my village would say 'uvukwe umoya/ithongo' (his/her spirit essence has awakened), referring to one possessed by the spirits.[75]

The awakening of spirits may manifest in several ways that sometimes lead to prophetic messages. One of the key technologies of the Nguni peoples, practiced by *sangomas*, expresses this ontological connection of being here and elsewhere (spirit dimensions) simultaneously through divination in the throwing of the bones (*ukwebhula*). This is a material object technology that uses various types of bones: ivories, shells and other animal skeletal pieces/fragments to divine metaphysical impulses and translate them in physical contexts. In other words, when bones are thrown, the healer reads the geomantic formation in order to read/hear the message of the ancestors. The purpose of this practice is to diagnose where misalignment could have occurred that may have resulted in misfortune. The diviner makes recommendations of ritual pathways that could be followed to re-align life into its harmonic vibration (*ntu*). This is the context for healing as understood in this project. Croucamp (2013: 2) outlines divination method in three stages; selection of symbolic objects, formulation of ('random') patterns and interpretation of objects with a formed pattern.

[75] Here it is important to note the different registers of understanding of notions of possession. From a historical anthropological perspective there is a constant invocation of vocabularies such as 'trance' and 'spirit possession', while from the cultural insider's perspective, as I have noted, this is regarded as the awakening of spirit essence what I also refer to as an 'elsewhere'.

During the sonic meditation, various unforeseen musical offerings emerged. Of course, this was expected to happen as per the ritual strategy and its relationship with the unknown, the breaking into elsewhere. One such moment is the breaking into hymnal musical passages (50:00), a spontaneous improvisation that was followed by an intuitive chorus from the audience. As though this sound dimension was 'refusing to be known', it soon broke into a dissonant and atonal solo piano section (53:00) that some members of the audience continued to sing along to, particularly where resemblances of choral memory manifested. In retrospect, this could have been a stepping in of the space memory – an articulation of the space's agency – what the venue has heard over many years of Western classical music performances in the venue against this 'unfamiliar' present to (South) African indigenous sounds. Perhaps, this could also be a prophetic poetic revealing the conflicts of the ~~post-colonial~~ sound library, how as the '~~once-colonized~~', we could not entirely escape the church influences?

The ritual of *ngoma* is thus a 'knowledge practice' or technology of bringing multiple worlds together into a discourse. In view of African knowledge systems as forms of technologies, Muvhunga (2014:16) notes that in Africa the forest can be perceived as a form of a ~~precolonial~~ laboratory 'where knowledge is made and turned into practical outcomes…'. This can also be argued with *umsamu* as a space that denotes physical, spiritual and auditory presence where knowledge that gets revealed in the process of its divination, is understood as a technology of reading and interpreting spiritual messages subsequent to which practical recommendations can be made. Thus, divination, in *ngoma*, can also be understood as a technology invented by our ancestors to make sense of being as symbiotically linked to spirits worlds, and here divination functions as a mode of communication with the ancestors. Within this mode one attains a non-linear relationship to time, but also an expanded notion of space as here and elsewhere, that leads to prophetic messages. This view shifts the throwing of the bones from a realm of superstition and magic to that of information/ritual technology: 'a kind of information technology that accesses and organizes [and interprets] information' (Croucamp, 2013: 2). In other words, in this state one gets to hear the voice of the spirits and the opportunity to interpret what the spirit says.

As a healer and an improviser in the contemporary moment, I have always been interested in alternative methods (a transposition) to approach the work of mediumship within artistic

realms (see my TEDx Talks, 2017). Divination, as a form of ritual technology, emerged as one of the ways I could engage both improvisation and the spirit worlds in jazz as a practicing *sangoma*. Technology here is defined as 'a way of doing' — 'a site of creativity and work' (Mavhunga, 2014: 17). I engage improvisation, at the piano, as a way of divining and opening a window into a heightened mode of seeing. The one who divines in Zulu contexts is deemed 'umuntu ubonayo', the one who sees. This way of seeing becomes a tool to make sense of the ontologies engaged in this study that challenge the borders between the physical and the metaphysical. In this register, improvising as a mode of revealing elsewhere is better understood as a form of guided mobility, interpreted as 'technology in the realm of spirituality' (Mavhunga, 2014: 20).

Playing the piano as medium complicates my efforts. Some elders, such an African American pianist Randy Weston, have argued that while the piano is a European invention, its formation can be traced to the mbira (thumb piano) of Zimbabwe and African harp such as the kora in West Africa. In this sense, the piano is simply a combination of ideas that has long existed in Africa, reconfigured in Europe through a technology:

> So when I go to the piano, I approach it as an African instrument. It just traveled north and some other things were done to it. And inside it is a harp, an African harp. So you took that harp and you laid it down, and you put the hammers and whatnot in it. That's why I was saying the origin of things is so important for me. So when I go to the piano, spiritually, it becomes an African instrument. Because I'm going all the way back to the beginning when I touch that piano. The Moors brought their music up through Spain, so it was coming from Africa, you know. (Randy Weston in Oteri, 2018)

I formulate my position from a more symbolic perspective concerned with divination. Some of the advanced methods of divination in Southern Africa use ivories as objects. Ivory (and anything related to an elephant) are held in high regard in Zulu cultures. If someone wishes to express the highest form of respect in the Zulu culture, for example, they will say 'Wena weNdlovu', meaning 'you of the elephants.' The elders tell us that this is due to the power the elephant possesses in the animal kingdom.

I come to the piano with the above in mind. In my world, it is not a coincidence that the piano keys are made of ivory and that this is the tool I use for divination. In this sense, I come to

improvisation as a practice of revealing the unknown, which is a fundamental purpose of divination. African divination 'is based on the belief that the universe is not predictable, that there is a fundamental unknowability, but enormous opportunity in the "space of the possible" to participate in the process of creation' (Croucamp 2013: 4). This view of African divination strikes strong resonances with improvisation in jazz as understood within the concept of liminality. In this sense, I approach and use the piano as a ritual object that uses sounds to read and interpret the unknown, what Devisch (in Bongmba, 2012: 80) calls the unspeakable.

The unspeakable, in this sense, is vital force existing in a state of potentiality. This potential is realized when there is alignment between the physical and the metaphysical engaged in a ritual state. Improvisation, in this context, is a way of coming to revelation and seeing beyond physical space. This understanding leads to what I term '*ingoma-sbhulo'*, which is a hyphened word that brings together the notion of song and divination. *Ingoma-sbhulo*, then, is a concept neologism that I propose to capture the essence of my practice: engaging improvisation as a musical process that operates inside a ritual state as a mode of knowing. This paradigm of knowing reveals elsewhere as a spirit space upon which the messages of the ancestors are revealed, cited, interpreted, engaged and responded to via spontaneous sonic means. In other words, through *ingoma-sbhulo*, I come to improvisation as an outlet to restore essence or *ntu*; it is the act of keeping *ntu* cosmology intact and harmonious. The maintaining of harmony in *ntu* relations is what this project understands as the work of healing. It is the fundamental purpose of this project to re-link improvised musics to already known ritual practices that have operated as outlets for healing practices in indegionous South African cultures.

6. Past invocations

The concepts I have discussed above and in this project more broadly, already find expression in some of my past sonic interventions (based on my list of recordings) and their conceptual underpinnings (theorized in the sound, outlined in liner notes and interviews). I have recorded a total of ten albums under my name, many others with my peers and some with my teachers. I have recorded a total of ten albums under my name, many others with my peers and some with my teachers. These creative projects connect in various ways with those of the artists discussed in this study as cosmology-based artistic projects.

In my previous artistic projects, I have touched on issues of genealogy in the context of Zulu history (listen to 'Imvunge' in *Stetches of Tomorrow* 2014), language against the possibility of linguicide (*Mother Tongue* 2014), shared rituals and meditations of African peoples on either side of the Atlantic (*Matunda Ya Kwanza,* 2015 and *Inner Dimensions* 2016) and notions of peace through reflections on cultural and collective memory (*Icilongo*: *The African Piece Suite* 2016 and *Reflections* 2017). Here I focus briefly on *Listening to the Ground* (2015), *Ikhambi* (2017), *Modes of Communication*: *Letters from the Underworlds* (2020) and *In the Spirit of Ntu* (2022), to show how the concepts discussed in this chapter have been implemented in my work.

Listening to the Ground

After so many years of refusing the gift of healing due to my upbringing in a Christian home, around 2012 the ancestors brought misfortune in my life, occasionally distracting my sight and causing temporary blindness. It is noted in Callaway (1970: 171) that 'the Itongo for the most part when it reveals itself enters a village through some individual living there, and seizes on some part of his body, and so he is ill…'. In the beginning I did not make the connection between my misfortunes and the gift of healing that I had not accepted from many years ago. After unsuccessfully seeking assistance from medical institutions, I reached out to a relative who is a healer and he guided me on a three-night alignment ritual with the ancestors that would reveal a solution through a dream.

Listening to the Ground (2015) came while I was involved in this ritual. On the last night I had a dream in which I saw the ancestors dancing and singing and when I woke up, I was completely healed. As I was going through *ukwethwasa* I was given many songs through dreams, and some I would hear in deep meditations. These songs also became a mode of guidance as they carried messages of the ancestors in my process of emerging as a new being. Pieces such as 'Thokoza' and 'Supreme Light', among others, are invocations of ancestral spirits through libations of seeking intervention, 'light' and guided-ness.

This album marked an important moment for me as a healer, and how I was cultivating a way of listening to the voice of an ancestor and grappling with ways of interpreting the unspeakable in sonic means. It marks a new relationship between listening and orientation,

and became a tool to open a pathway between my ancestors (*abaphansi* – the ones that live in the underworlds) and myself through a mode of listening as sensing (*ukuzwa*).

This listening meant many things. I remember being guided in a vision by the ancestor to use water for healing of the body, and subsequently asked people to bring water bottles to my concert with a belief that the energy in the music would infuse the water with healing properties. I received many testimonies of how people were getting healed, and objections that the practice endorsed cult spirituality. I view these objections as a continued disregard for practices that are still common in most Nguni traditional healing systems.

Ikhambi

As a follow-up project, *Ikhambi* (2017) was an attempt to conceive of this healing potency in a more intentional context, and entirely in the sound. I looked in particular at healing our 'shared memory' ~~that had been disrupted by the colonial erasure~~ (see interview with Seton Hawkins on *All About Jazz*, 2018). After accepting the gift of *ubungoma* I had to find a more direct way of linking repertoire and the work of this form of healing. It was also a time of great wonder and dealing with what healing meant in sonic ways. In the album notes I commented:

> *iKhambi* is a Zulu word for the cure, a solution or a remedy. Traditional herbalists when referring to herbal concoctions often employ the term. This project proposes or rather presents a different context to the word that considers *iKhambi* as 'a projection of a healing energy through a sonic experience'.

This objective pertained to the actual songs, the title and their attached 'anecdotes', which I included in the album cover. The opening track 'Amathambo' (the bones) explores improvisation as the throwing of the bones, particularly in a case of someone 'at the height of perilous times' (*Ikhambi*, 2017) and in need of spiritual guidance. 'Umlahlankosi' (buffalo thorn tree) explores how sound could be utilized to direct the spirits of those who die in unnatural ways. Traditionally, within Zulu cultures, a branch of *umlahlankosi* is regarded as sacred and capable of redirecting 'lost spirits' back to their homes where their umbilical cords were buried. 'Impande' (the root) deals with our anchored-ness in mystical dimensions and our co-existence with the underworlds (ancestral/spirit dimensions) as our point of origin.

This offering also expresses my connection with my ancestors through my umbilical cord buried on the ground as a symbol of my rootedness.

In *Ikhambi* I explored songs as energy fields that open spiritual portals within which the people experiencing the music could access their own healing powers.

Modes of Communication: Letters from the Underworlds

In this project I explored the healing potency through what I regard as 'ritual technology': an exploration of sounds as a technology to make sense of the messages sent from the spirit dimensions. In a way, this album is a response to (or continuation of) *Listening to the Ground* (2015), and is concerned with notions of language in connection with the spirit worlds. The letter is used as a metaphor to discuss the metaphysical impulses between the physical and spirit worlds. In the liner notes, saxophonist Shabaka Hutchings writes:

> Nduduzo Makhathini uses the metaphor of a sonic letter being sent from the 'underworld' of ancestral spirits through the ages. Sound as language containing encoded layers of meaning speaking truth cast as a reflection of the infinite being. Intuited historicity and diasporic memory propelling messages and meanings beyond our semantic based comprehension through time and space.

The above is what composes the ritual state in which this album is anchored. It is not surprising that the opening track 'Yehlisan'uMoya' recorded in 2018 (pre Covid-19) was already speaking about the coming of sickness that would need spirit intervention. This is one example of how improvisation in ritual strategies enter the dimension of time in an unconventional way, views into the past and future while the body functions in the now. Other songs such as 'Beneath the Earth' speak about the lack of language between people and spirits as a form of exile, and as such, pushes the idea of re-imagining language. This piece enters the poetics of ancient Africa when walking was a mode of citing stories from beneath our feet. This is expressed in a Zulu proverb that says 'ukuhamba ukubona', we know by walking and experience. In this sense, walking is a form of knowledge making. Thus, the disturbances and the eventual collapse of these technologies used by our ancestors accelerates the urgency for a 'mode of communication' and in this record I position sound in ritual context as an intervention.

In the Spirit of Ntu

My latest work *In the Spirit of Ntu* (2022) speaks directly to this research project. It is a meditation on *ntu* cosmology and how sounds are part of being and experiencing. This project was born in between my meditations, writing and thinking about this research project during troubled times in the world and South African socio-politics, and a pervading feeling of dismay that I felt was pushing humanity towards realignment, an urgency to reconnect to our essence (*ntu*). In the foreword I write:

> Our ancestors understood the world as being in a manifestation of this force. In this sense, the spirit informs the physical. Thus, beings (aBa-Ntu) broke off from a greater being uMvelinqangi. In my native tongue they say 'sadabuka ohlangane' meaning that we broke of the reeds.

It is this very memory that this album 'sings out' as a way of being connected with our spirit essence. The connection with the spirit is an intervention against the broken systems of South African politics that became exposed in the moment of a pandemic (see interview with Phuti Sepuru for *The Conversation*, 2022). On 'Emlilweni' I speak about the persistence to think of improvised music not only as a backdrop, a soundtrack that marks time of the burning fires in South Africa, but instead, to think of sounds as emerging from the very burning fires until spiritual networks make interventions.

'Mama' (co-written with Omagugu) is an invocation of the mother and the moment of the break from the physical, back to our spirit essence as part of the continuity and wholeness of *ntu* cosmology.

7. Some Future Directions in Scholarship

This project has demonstrated the possibilities of emphasizing the unfamiliar in a study of jazz in South Africa. I have attempted to map out how an understanding of *ntu* cosmology creates 'new' relationships to improvisation in South African jazz paradigms. Hearing and playing music directed by such concepts, explicate (South) African spirituality in enriching ways for future scholarship. I position music in this study as 'a way of knowing' and a way of

sensing and being in the world. In this sense improvisation is a form of embodied knowledge. This forms part of what Thornton (2017: 54) refers to as 'trance knowledge', acquired in a ritual state (improvisation), 'through dreams' and 'through being taught by teachers.' What is at stake is a spiritual practice.

Through my interlocutors and my own artistic practice, I have shown how some artists have already mapped out alternative pathways in (South) African cultural and spiritual knowledge. Although these pathways, as invoked in this project, are different within themselves thus producing some internal conceptual/languaging inconsistencies, they collectively build an integrated knowledge system. For instance, what Tabane may regard as *mato*, Mhlongo may understand as embellishments, Mseleku speaks of it in terms of 'going out of time' and Ngqawana interprets as 'a meditation' — collectively, all these concepts point towards approaches in improvisation which I term *ingoma-sbhulo*. The study did not aim to iron or smooth over these different articulations of these concepts to produce an abstract uniformity, but each idea, through its language, was engaged to express a specific relationship with concepts that are already known. The advantage of difference in articulation/language is that in each register a different 'revelation' emerges. In this sense, what is presented in this project is knowledge that inspires new enquiries as opposed to looking for concrete and static conclusions.

Africa-centric theorisation, then, produces its own variations deduced from the multiple practices, mythologies, and cosmologies of our own place and time. This is the benefit of theorising from this underexplored African indigenous paradigm. In this study I have used multiple local cosmologies underpinned by *ntu* as a point of departure — the advantages of these cosmologies are the relationship they create between the writer and the written, a possibility to write from the self and thus 'be written', thereby producing distinctive knowledge. Here the self is understood in the context outlined in section two of this chapter, as an 'expanded notion of self'. In the case of *ntu* understood as wholeness, this writing involves a method that pays attention to surrounding environments, spirits, time and space and notions of aesthetic in that moment of writing. I have harnessed these connections through ritual strategies such as *malombo* and *ngoma* among others.

Although there is already an understanding of these concepts in (South) African knowledges practices, the approaches advocated for in this dissertation forge new understandings of these

impressions. For instance, while Mhlongo already proposes the notion of *twasa* and how it dialogues with her artistic practice, South African jazz scholarship does not already provide a place for such pairing. Thus, this study provides an option to voice out an inherent relationship between artist and spirituality while also pushing the limits of our understanding of cosmology (African spirituality) in traditional spheres. In this sense, these concepts feature in the study in explorative manners. The mode therefore is that of divining these frameworks, which means that each time the knowledges are consulted, there is an opportunity to reach a different destination. Or the knowledge itself could be in a liminal phase where it continues to create itself anew and thus not be preoccupied with an 'end result' or conclusion, but instead continues producing different postures in viewing knowledge.

From a decentering point of view, the positioning of the study as an artistic-led study constitutes an epistemological intervention, making it possible to argue from a musical practice rather than a vocabulary. By advancing, through artistic practice as a primary means of knowing, the importance of the spiritual (rather than ineffable, or transcendent, or sublime), means that one approaches the issue of musical meaning or importance through affective registers. This constitutes a recuperation of a dimension of human existence that has been difficult to sustain in a secularized humanities and arts discourses in Western institutions (and African institutions that function as proxies for Western institutions). Of course, throughout the study, these moves were energised by an anchoring in South African vernaculars. This alternative way of knowing happened through the fielding of Zulu, Sotho, Xhosa, Pedi and Venda words and their etymologies, as well as proverbs as sources of generational wisdom. These portals into knowing through language are arguments in themselves. They suggest that English homogenizes not only communication, but thinking, and in so doing closes off the possibilities of radical alterity. In this study I have opened new lexicons that liberate ways of thinking about jazz and improvised musics in South Africa inside *ntu* cosmology. This was proposed in the following conceptual contributions: viewing breaking into sound as a ritual practice into *ntu* continuity and wholeness, the bandstand as a ritualistic relational space of call and response, and of divination as a model for thinking about improvisation among others.

At the beginning of this study, I indicated that the mode of writing (and that of improvisation via sonic meditations) constitutes what I call 'writing as ritual'. This I understand as a mode of listening-writing with spirit worlds, meandering between the here-plane and elsewhere.

Thus, both writing and sonic meditations are regarded as states that require a deep sense of alertness in which messages flow between realms towards a production of knowledge. I view the thoughts and sounds in this project as a constant dialogue between the self, available literature in primary and secondary forms, and elsewhere. The construct of elsewhere brings together the messages of the spirits through my musical ancestors, who now form a greater network of divinities, and our musical ancestors, their philo-praxis and conceptual voices using quotes. Similarly, the sonic meditations appeased and engaged the spirits of my musical ancestors through sonic citations, as an invocation of their living sound worlds. I regard all of these concepts as modes of spirit guided-ness (or guided mobility). In this sense, ritual becomes a connection between the practice of writing (and sonic meditations) and the cosmological underpinning in *ntu* that views being as wholeness. I have written this project with the spirits engaged in a long ritual state.

While the study has managed to position this spiritual domain through what I am presenting as 'ritual theory', I do want to raise concerns about the limitations presented by current academic conventions not fully allowing my worldview to speak. I have written about/with/to-and-from the spirit worlds only at the level of inspiration. That is to say, I can write about the things that I hear and sense from the spirits as my own thoughts or at least, my own interpretations of what they say, but I find it difficult to relay messages at the level of visitations and dreams through the actual words of the spirits. In Chapter One, I raised a concern that, while there have been various attempts to study dreams and their meaning, not much work has been done in understanding dreams as part of life that happens elsewhere and, as such, as a paradigm for citation of knowledge.

Given the ontological regime under which I chose to position this study, dreams have deep significance. Bantu peoples take dreams seriously as a place of 'the star gods' or the ancestors, and the messages they receive from dreams, in ritual, are implemented as the spirit suggest. Muller (1999: 84) also reminds us that, in the context of the Shembe Nazarites, experiences in visions and dreams carry equal significance to those in 'real life'. Thus, the failure to comply with messages from these dimensions results in illnesses, as it is the case in *ubungoma*. Like divination, dreams separate between the things that we know and the things that are revealed to us. Some medicine men are guided in dreams to go to the wilderness to dig for particular medicines that would heal certain diseases. Such work is then attributed to

amathongo as an intervention in the spirit world. A healer does not take credit of such work, but instead, takes the position of a messenger.

Dreams, then, form an integral part in passing messages of the spirit worlds to the living, but they are also connectors in the wholeness of *ntu* cosmology, epistemology and ontology. As Mutwa (2003: 173) asserts, dreams are a way of being one with our spirit essence (*amathongo*). This forms yet another layer of the expanded form of ontology in *ntu* cosmology. The fact that there is no current citation system to cite from dreams as a valid source of knowledge, while people living in (South) Africa continue to take seriously that which is revealed in dreams, is telling of the current academic regime and the failure to enter a pluriverse. The ability for academic writing to begin citing from spiritual sources as valid knowledge cites, is one that I want to pursue beyond this project. This study has attempted to show how such a paradigm functions and has further put that knowledge into practice. For instance, I have introduced elements of dreams in a register of writing that operates from 'reflectionality', thus speaking from the margins of what is traditionally accepted as academic writing. Here I want to suggest that there is an urgent need to create another layer of literature that can count as 'terrestrial or celestial literature', and that will allow scholars writing in this paradigm to incorporate the direct words of an ancestor from a dream. This would lead to different conversations surrounding examination or peer review in scholarship; conversations that could employ divination as a peer review method or a *sangoma* as a reader or examiner of a dissertation.

These are the echoes of what this study explicates with regard to the faults of the current academic value chain, and what shifts in ~~decolonial~~ scholarship could look like. Part of responding to ~~decolonial~~ problems is not only to point at difficulties of writing in former ~~colonial~~ zones, but also to produce Africa-centred itineraries in African studies.

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Addendum A: Responding to the limits and problems of ethics surrounding ritual slaughter

Project number: MUS-2020-13074

Project title: Spirituality in Improvisation as Articulated in Philip Tabane, Busi Mhlongo, Bheki Mseleku and Zim Ngwawana's Approaches to Jazz in South Africa

To whom it may concern,

RE: Response to comment 4 of the REC: SBER's letter of 9 March 2020

This letter responds to the reviewers' fourth comment concerning the possibility of animal slaughter mentioned in my initial SBER ethics application. The table below outlines the changes made in the ethics application itself pertaining to this comment. In consultation with my supervisor, I have decided to change the scope of the study to no longer include the possibility of ritual animal slaughter, and the changes below reflect this decision. The other themes addressed in the study are substantial enough that this exclusion would not compromise the research project, while also keeping in mind that from inception, animal slaughtering was included as a 'possibility'. I would, however briefly, like to give feedback on my personal encounter with animal ethics clearance form from the perspective of this study.

It was highly problematic to complete the Animal Ethics application form, since there is no room for specifying the cultural paradigm in which the study's human-animal interaction is situated. It was clear from the Animal Ethics form that there are particular cultural assumptions about human-animal relationships that undergird the application form, and the drop-down menu options, tick-boxes and questions immediately channel the applicant into that paradigm. Animals are presented as research subjects upon which experiments are carried out, typically in controlled environments like laboratories or agricultural settings. The assumption is that the researcher is trained in an academic environment (to the extent that certain certifications are earned) to work with animals, and this work typically entails carrying out tests and conducting experiments. This is very different from the cultural perspective in which I stand, and my study derives.

My PhD research speaks from and about African cosmology and advances an Africa-centred approach to spirituality, ritual and performance, which I was born in. That is to say, it stems from my cultural background in which domesticated animals are part of everyday lives and homesteads, and the slaughter of animals are taught at a young age as part of one's role and duties in the family and in the broader community. As a sangoma, one's training involves further training in this regard. One of the key differences between the African view of animal slaughter in the context of ritual and that described in the animal ethics application form, is the symbolism attached to animals in this practice. If one empties ritual slaughter of its symbolism and its cosmological situatedness, one reduces it to a practice incommensurable with what it culturally signifies. In short, whereas the application speaks of killing an animal, an African worldview understands the animal as being requested by the Gods, divinities and ancestors to sacrifice itself as a medium for an important message to reach the underworlds. In other words, an animal is asked to serve as intermediary between the physical and the non-physical world as part of the ritual in which the animal is slaughtered. This act cannot be reduced to (just) the killing of an animal.

Addendum B: Umgidi publicity materials (Fifth Meditation)

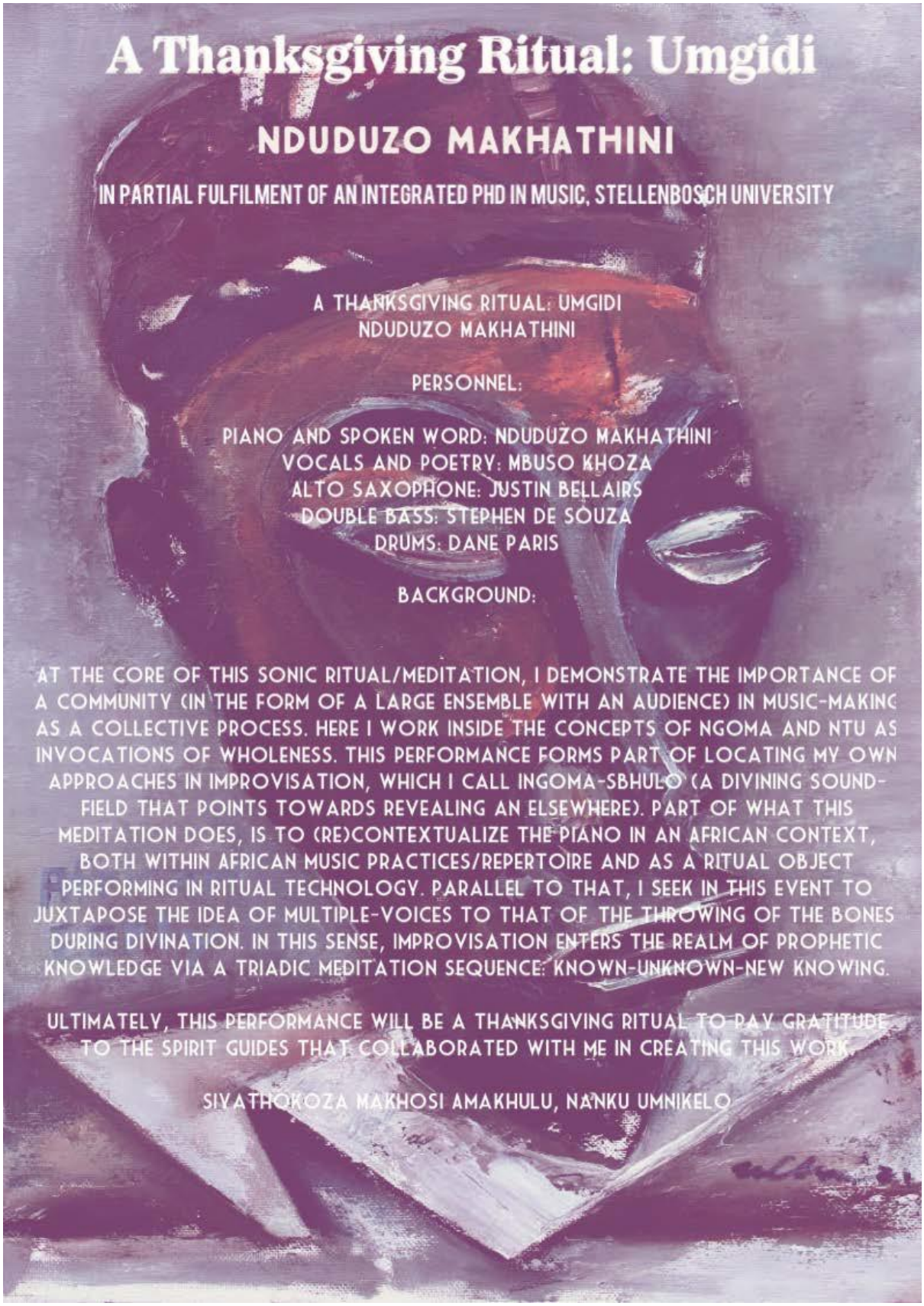
A THANKSGIVING RITUAL: UMGIDI

NDUDUZO MAKHATHINI

In partial fulfilment of an Integrated PhD in Music, Stellenbosch University

Feat: Mbuso Khoza, Justin Bellairs, Dane Paris and Stephen De Souza

DATE: 16 SEPTEMBER 2022
TIME: 20:00
PLACE: FISMER HALL, KONSERVATORIUM, STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY



Introduction

Libations: Inyosi Mncwango

Part One
Acknowledgements: Ukwephahla
'Zul'eliphezulu'
'Amathongo'

Part Two
Liminal Field: Ukwebhula
'Emlilweni'

Part Three
The Calling: Ubizo
'Ithemba'

Part Four
Prophetic Word: Izwi
'Unonkanyamba'

Part Five
Returning: Twasa
'Isgekle'