

It's in the out sides: An investigation into the cosmological contexts of South African jazz

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Declaration

I, *Asher Gamedze* , hereby declare that the work on which this dissertation/thesis is based is my original work (except where acknowledgements indicate otherwise) and that neither the whole work nor any part of it has been, is being, or is to be submitted for another degree in this or any other university.

Since I have no choice, I have to allow the University to use my work for research purposes.

A.Gamedze

Date: 16 February 2018

Abstract

This dissertation is an exploration of some of the philosophical thought and spiritual practices which constitute and are present and represented in and through certain instances of South African jazz. Amilcar Cabral's revolutionary thought on liberation culture, which allows for thinking the radical impulse of cultural production, forms the foundation of the dynamic frame which we use to hear and think through the music's content and the context by which it is composed. Through an engagement with the thought and music of the following artists – the Blue Notes, Miriam Makeba, Malombo, Nduduzo Makhathini, Zim Ngqawana, and a few others – we find ourselves in the presence of a liberatory tradition rooted in the cosmological worlds of Southern African people. Musical and spiritual practices of sangomas, the frequency of the maternal, medicinal relationships with plants and the land, and the communion and communication with ancestors are all channels of South African jazz. And the spirit of liberation that emerges in the music is situated in and dances through an encounter between these practices and aesthetics of the Black radical tradition. I provoke and elaborate on this encounter, considering the ambivalent, sometimes invisible, place of Africa in that tradition. Africa's epistemological absence in much of the Black radical tradition, beyond minor essentialised and, at times, romanticised notions of an irretrievable source, a point of origin, or a site generally relegated to the past, is mirrored by the possibility of a productive synthesis which is improvised through the music. Moving with and for the music, listening to its critique of much of the writing about it and what that writing misses, I make the claim for jazz as a cosmologically-rooted African art form, forming part of a broader liberatory tradition which needs to be heard in relation to the spiritual and philosophical traditions which it extends.

Preface :: Acknowledgements

I am incredibly blessed to work study learn organise teach laugh eat and share life with and between many different nurturing, loving, challenging intellectual communities. This project is as much a product of the discussions I have had in mine and other people's lounges, before and after gigs, over food, during transit and crossing borders on the way to gigs, in workshops and meetings etcetera, as it is a product of the mayhem of my own mind. So I have to give thanks to some of you who are present here, and with me, even if and when you are not named; rock on.

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...

I also want to acknowledge that in this antithesis I am trying to think, speak and write things about which I am no expert and I do not purport to be. In particular, with regards to some of the spiritual and cultural practices and their broader contexts that I engage here, I know very little and I didn't grow up in or around many of the traditions I attempt to improvise through in relation to jazz in this project. For anyone who might read this who does come from some of those traditions, and feels close to them, if you feel I have misrepresented or misunderstood things, I would humbly ask your forgiveness. This project is part of my own journey and process of engaging with practices and cultural contexts that I have been generationally alienated from, it is a form of return to the source which I have insisted my sojourn through the walls of academia must make space for. I see radical potential in the engagement with the practices spoken about in this project, I am trying to get at the knowledge that constitutes those sites and see how they have been, for a long time, understood as roots to the future as part of a broader movement forward to positive, self-determined African futures.

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That's what I'm saying now when I say that marabi thing, you see... my mother's talking in this tradition. So we, or the young officers, or the young black people of this generation they are in the same level of the white man complex: we have to prove to him. There's nothing to prove to him, you know, fuck him. Fuck the Boer. Just tell him. So my mother was talking in terms of this marabi kind of thing.

Johnny Dyani

Introduction¹

Zim Ngqawana said that “[music] isn’t just notes. Every note has a social meaning. I’m singing my mother’s knowledge of the plants that grew around her.”² He also said that “[our] playing should be informed by history. We should not be afraid to say that the revolution is not over, and refining our music is part of that revolution.”³ So, following Bra Zim, there is something in the music that is on the out side of the notes. According to him, those outsides are, or should be, a historically-informed practice of revolution as well as the channeling of the maternal and a relationship to plants and, by implication and association, the land. This project is an investigation into these out sides which constitute the music in/forming the cosmological context of the improvisations. We try to get to cosmology – systems of thought which structure people’s understandings of the/their worlds and what these worlds are composed of – by listening for this in the music and trying to hear it in relation to at some concepts: of people, the world and society, and some of the practices which mediate between people and these concepts – practices which simultaneously reflect and reproduce these conceptions.

To think through these conceptions and their broader contexts, with Cabral, from whom we borrow five theses on culture, we navigate through the colonial dialectic of domination and resistance and consider the concepts of liberation culture and the historical process of returning to the source as part of a revolutionary anti-colonial project. Amilcar suggests that there is radical content in the existence and persistence of African cultural practices, that they are evidence of the uncrushability of a people’s spirit and, as a fugitive space of autonomous meaning-making, they are the expression of the eternal impulse toward freedom. And that the spirit of liberation gives rise to new forms and expressions of culture. From inside these conceptions of culture we move to listen to the music and see where its insides refer us to, trying to hear the ‘social meaning’ of the notes, its metaphysical motive and locate that within the cosmological worlds in which it exists but is not frequently heard in relation to. In speculative motion through Black study with and for Zim Ngqawana, Nduduzo Makhathini, Philip Tabane and Malombo more broadly and the Blue Notes, what becomes audible through the study is that jazz, as a music and range of aesthetic and improvisational sensibilities, is taken up, becomes, and sounds like a space for the expression and sonic manifestation of

¹ Quote from previous page: Johnny Dyani with Aryan Kaganoff, “The forest and the zoo,” *Chimurenga 15: The curriculum is everything*, (Kalakuta Trust: Cape Town, 2010), 19.

² Gwen Ansell, *Soweto blues: Jazz, popular music and politics in South Africa*, (Continuum: New York, 2004), 264.

³ Zim Ngqawana cited by Gwen Ansell, “Gwen Ansell on Zim Ngqawana,” accessed on 30 January 2018, <http://kaganof.com/kagablog/2011/05/25/gwen-ansell-on-zim-ngqawana/>

philosophical and spiritual traditions that predate the arrival of jazz music in Southern Africa. In other words, even as South African jazz contributes to and locates itself in the global jazz tradition, it is simultaneously rooted in, reproductive and reflective of the cosmological worlds of Southern Africa (which we date to the early-mid twentieth century). Various cosmological contexts of South/ern Africa are heard and referred to, in and through the music, and the music extends and elaborates on these. Through the thought embedded in the music, we encounter a number of central concepts which constitute and situate the tradition, which includes jazz, as spiritual practice and spiritual work and communion and dance with ancestors and the audibility of the unseen and the maternal as a frequent channel and music as a space for healing and jazz as a site and form of African philosophy and freedom in and beyond the music and the epistemological assault on the absolutisms of colonial and capitalist logics and the dynamic relationship between the material and immaterial dimensions of the world through and in the music.

Considering that all of these outsides and others emerge in the midst of the music, the music poses a few questions to the writing about it. A number of people have engaged South African jazz and its distinctive harmonic and historical contexts of development; locating it aesthetically in some kind of admixture of African musical forms, (often violent) engagements with Euromodernity through the process of colonisation and, importantly, the church, the southern African process of proletarianisation and urbanisation and, of course, the profound impact of African American cultural forms on Black South Africans. Hotep Galeta and Christopher Ballantine write about how marabi, one of the harmonic foundations of South African jazz, came to be, respectively:

[It] was during the late 1920s that Boet Gashe, an itinerant organist from Queenstown, popularised the three chord forerunner to the Marabi and Mbaqanga styles that were later to be perfected in the shebeen environments of Johannesburg and Marabastadt.⁴

[Marabi is a] style forged principally by unschooled keyboard players who were notoriously part of the buoyant culture and economy of illegal slumyard liquor dens. A rhythmically propulsive music, *marabi* drew its melodic inspiration eclectically from a wide variety of sources, and it rested harmonically – as did the blues – upon an endlessly repeating chord sequence... (The cyclical nature of each, incidentally, reveals roots deep in pre-colonial African musics.).⁵

So while these and other works manage to draw out (some of) the historical development of the music and locate it in some way, aesthetically at least, to African forms, they are generally fairly

⁴ Hotep Idris Galeta, "The development of jazz in South Africa," (2003), accessed on 22 October 2017, <http://www.jazrendezvous.co.za/special/spe2006062701.php>.

⁵ Christopher Ballantine, *Marabi nights: Jazz, 'race' and society in early apartheid South Africa*, (University of KwaZulu Natal Press: Scottsville, 2012, first published in 1993), 7.

short on their suggestions of what the metaphysical meaning and motive force of the music is. Similarly, in many of those works that consider South African jazz in and as politics or resistance, the conceptions of politics seem to be limited epistemologically, the sound missed, or left behind by a lot of what is in the music, such as the dynamic movement between the metaphysical and the material, wherein I suggest its most radical impulse is situated.

The music's critique of some of the ways it has been written about, opens us up to improvising with and for it through some of the philosophical, historical and political terrains and orientations which constitutes its ins and out sides. By checking out the continent's epistemological exclusion from articulations of 'universal' Black projects, we consider South African jazz within the Black radical tradition and the Black Atlantic, listening to what it says back to these diasporan ensembles. As a dance against colonial and capitalist estrangement, which moves through Africa as a liberatory tradition oriented toward the world, and through Marx as a positive expression of the abolition of the present state of things, towards a cosmologically-rooted instantiation of communism, we locate South African jazz as a speculative exponent of the African radical tradition. This not only, moves against and beyond South African exceptionalism by locating it culturally and geographically on the continent through shared similarities in spiritual traditions which move from the Cape to Limpopo, to Zimbabwe and Tanzania but it also contributes to the loosening and destabilising of America as the essential and only centre of jazz, thereby opening jazz discourse toward a trans- or post-nationalist global sensibility rooted in the various contexts in which the music sounds. This is a space opened by scholars like Robin Kelley and Carol Ann Muller, they – Kelley then Carol – write:

[P]erhaps with the growth of trans-Atlantic collaborations and dissemination of culture, we can no longer speak so confidently about jazz as an *American* art form, or render African musicians outside the pale of the music's history.⁶

[T]here is an ethical imperative to strive for greater inclusiveness in the writing of jazz history, to recognise that jazz has come of age in many parts of the world: it is critical that its history be treated as a truly world-wide narrative in the twenty-first century.⁷

My work sits in the space opened by these scholars. By locating South African jazz on the continent through cultural and cosmological phenomena which in/form the tradition, I situate it in the worlds of jazz on its own terms, rather than merely as an imitation or extension of African American music

⁶ Robin Kelley, *Africa speaks, America answers: Modern jazz in revolutionary times*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge and London, 2012), 10.

⁷ Carol Ann Muller and Sathima Bea Benjamin, *Musical echoes: South African women thinking in jazz*, (Duke University Press: Durham, 2011), xviii.

as an imported form. In order to situate it on the continent, we think, with Cabral, through the colonial dialectics of culture in our movement toward liberation.

I. Liberatory: Cabral's five theses on culture

What I'm trying to move toward in this section is a frame that will help us think toward "that notion of politics for which music is a transcendental clue" as Moten puts it in the break.⁸ I want to try to delineate the territory and context in which that, at times, potentially illusory, elusive notion of politics, the motion which the music points us towards, operates. In other words, what we're dealing with is the groundwork which will allow us to engage the question of what constitutes that notion and what it is rooted in. In order to get at this notion in music, in art, or closer towards its elusion, Diagne gives us a clue, suggesting that we (as African people) have art "so that we may not die of the colonial negation."⁹ Importantly, he diagnoses the tendency or impulse in colonialism, a certain notion of politics – less elusive than that in music but, nonetheless, part of the same dialectic – that attempts to negate a people and, further, that this negation and our negation of the negation is a profoundly cultural project. Art, as a product of culture, is then not a question of academic inquiry but, for us (again, as African people at this particular historical juncture), it is always "embedded in the context of colonial negation,"¹⁰ and the art and the writing, which is with and for the art, are, together, concerned with challenging and overcoming the conditions of cultural 'negation' and alienation introduced and reproduced by the dialectic of colonialism.

Considering culture, colonialism and resistance to it, we are in the intellectual territory of Cabral's revolutionary thought and practice, a territory seldom critically traversed through the South African University. Unlike the circular social science arguments concerning culture in the academy, and studies of African culture which are largely conceptually derived or descended from the collusion of colonialism and anthropology, comrade Amilcar can help us navigate the contested terrain of cultural production through the political process of returning to the source in movement toward a project of liberation from colonialism. I identify and extract five theses of Cabral's thought on culture in the historical process of liberation. These theses structure the section: (i) culture is a dialectic, (ii) culture is central to imperialist domination, (iii) culture is the central to the liberation struggle, (iv) the liberation struggle takes place partly through the historical process of 'returning to the source', and (v) the liberation struggle is both a cultural fact and a factor of culture. We move through these theses and extend them in a few directions, to consider the questions of tradition, tribalism, reading,

⁸ Fred Moten, *In the break: The aesthetics of the black radical tradition*, (University of Minneapolis Press: Minnesota, 2003), 97.

⁹ Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *African art as philosophy: Senghor, Bergson and the idea of Negritude*, (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2001), 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 187.

writing, visibility and politics, what we understand to make up the terrain in which the multifarious canon of liberation culture exists.

i. Culture is a dialectic

Amilcar Cabral writes, on culture:

Culture is the dynamic synthesis, at all levels of individual or community consciousness, of the material and spiritual historical reality of a society or a human group, of the relations existing between man and nature as well as among social classes or sectors. Cultural manifestations are the various forms in which this synthesis is expressed.¹¹

It is a social reality and a historical force which “like history, or because it is history, [culture] has as its material base the level of the productive forces and the mode of production.”¹² Cabral’s dialectical materialist conception of culture is a useful antidote to the backwards and fairly abstracted-from-context notions of African culture/s as static and isolated in which colonial social science is rooted and from which many academic studies of culture are derived. The marginality of Cabral’s approach to culture within the academy is linked to the University’s historical development on the continent and in South Africa in its particular assumed exceptionalism and its epistemological isolation from intellectual and political currents from the rest of the continent.

Despite sometimes being a site of struggle waged by workers and students, a site of revolutionary organisation and radical social critique, the African University is tied to the historical process of neo/colonialism, it is a mechanism of capitalist modernity and a weapon of European imperialism.¹³ The neo/colonial higher education system, in Africa has been invested in the production of a class of African people who assimilate to the culture, values and logic of the metropolitan country, thereby alienating them from the rest of the population culturally and materially. Emerging from this contradiction, Cabral’s conception of culture has a particular message for alienated Africans – class suicide through the historical process of returning to the source – which will, when followed through to its logical conclusion, spell danger for the colonial university, and perhaps will spell its end as we know it. His conception of culture as a dialectic links it to projects of domination and liberation, and theorises a potential revolutionary role for the alienated class of Africans (who are found in

¹¹ Amilcar Cabral, *Return to the source: Selected speeches of Amilcar Cabral, edited by Africa Information Service*, (Monthly Review Press: New York and London, 1973), 47.

¹² Amilcar Cabral, *Unity and struggle: Speeches and writings*, (Heinemann: London, 1980), 142.

¹³ Note: I am not speaking here about early African centres of learning such as that established in the ninth century in Fez by Fathima al Firhi, Al-Qarrayin, the first university in the world.

universities) which will take place through culture. Culture is here the means of re-Africanisation, and revolution where the University's goal is alienation and assimilation. The understanding of African culture as a historical force is worlds away from the colonial University's idea that African cultures are something to be studied merely as anthropological phenomena rather than developed and mobilised in struggle.

Archie Mafeje's work in and against anthropology can help us get further in. Trashing British anthropology in Africa as 'witchcraft'¹⁴ and exposing its primary ideological frame, tribalism, to be a construction of European imperialism,¹⁵ he is equally critical of those who "create an epistemological contradiction by treating colonial anthropology in isolation from the metropolitan bourgeois social sciences which are equally functionalist and imperialist."¹⁶ In other words, all the social sciences, not just anthropology who owes its existence most explicitly to colonialism, are partners in imperialism's epistemological project. In the same lane as Mafeje, Bernard Magubane illuminates the 'Illusions of liberal and radical historical debates' in South African historiography, suggesting that neither 'schools' have "fully taken into account the African memory."¹⁷ This comes from his critique of the liberal school that the exclusion of black memory, or its framing by white historians, meant that their frame and ideological position always seemed to take for granted the interests of the white settler population. Of the radical school he said that their fixation on class obscured them from understanding the related importance of nationalism as a historical force, and the dialectics of class and nationalism in the liberation struggle. Hosea Jaffe joins this party, jumping in on the critique of both the 'liberal' and the 'radical' historical schools in South Africa. He suggests that, even the so-called radical historians for the most part, have not been able to grasp the true nature of class formation in Southern Africa and their histories fall victim to these and other related theoretical shortcomings. These pitfalls, Jaffe suggests, are largely rooted in incorrect understandings of the race-class dialectic and how its historical development through colonialism and apartheid, and how those racist systems relate to the world character of imperialism.¹⁸

Many of these shortcomings - scholars' epistemological and cultural distance from nationalism, the reproduction of colonial conceptions of African culture, and the failure to correctly come to terms

¹⁴ Archie Mafeje, "The Witchcraft of British Anthropology in Africa," (Dar es Salaam: Sociology Department, Dar es Salaam University, 1971).

¹⁵ Archie Mafeje, "The ideology of 'Tribalism,'" *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 9:2, (1971), 253-261.

¹⁶ Archie Mafeje, "The problem of anthropology in historical perspective: An inquiry into the growth of the social sciences," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 10:2, (1976), 309.

¹⁷ Bernard Magubane, "Whose memory – whose history? The illusion of liberal and radical historical debates," in Hans-Eric Stolten (ed.) *History making and present day politics: The meaning of collective memory in South Africa*, (Nordic Africa Institute: Uppsala, 2007), 251-280.

¹⁸ Hosea Jaffe, *South African neo-liberal historiography*, (History Department, University of Cape Town, 1992).

with class in an African context – are product of two sides of the same South African coin, the reality of a white settler dominated academy, and the ideological frame of South African exceptionalism. Unexceptionally, we understand culture, dialectically, as the space wherein people make their world and make meaning from the dynamic process of engagement with that world, which is life, culture, history. Culture is thus read as the manifestation and expression of the various syntheses, by people, of the multiple factors which make up a given human environment – historical, natural, social, spiritual, economic, etc. Cabral is useful because he presents and represents a dynamic synthesis of a historical materialist perspective while at the same time, as we will see further, an appreciation of the importance, in a revolutionary sense, of African culture, to the anti-imperial struggle.

ii. Culture is a means of imperialist domination

Cabral on imperialism and history, which is also to say culture:

[It] is not possible to harmonise the economic and political domination of a people, whatever the degree of their social development, with the preservation of their cultural personality.

Thus, and since culture has as its material base, the forces of production:

The principle characteristic, common to every kind of imperialist domination, is the denial of the historical process of the dominated people by the violent usurpation of the freedom of the process of development of the productive forces.¹⁹

A people cannot be considered to be completely dominated if they, or some of them, continue to practice their culture on their own terms. This is why such great lengths have been gone to by colonists to dispossess people of the means for the autonomous reproduction of life, and, if not stamp out indigenous cultural practices and force people to assimilate to the colonists' culture, then to codify and control the terms on which people practice culture. A history of colonialism on the continent in the 20th century would have to tell the story of how culture has been weaponised by the coloniser as a mechanism of control and divide-and-rule through the ideology of tribalism. As Archie Mafeje hinted at previously, it was the collusion of anthropology and colonial authorities which helped to make and invent African tribes as political units. Interestingly, initially and officially, 'culture' was not considered part of the terrain of the 'tribe' until the 1960s²⁰. Although later and in the present, tribe and culture are seen to be very closely entangled and are at times understood to

¹⁹ Cabral, *Unity and struggle*, 141-142.

²⁰ Mafeje, *The ideology of tribalism*, 258.

be the same thing, at the root of it, tribes were constructed as political units. The question of tribalism is actually a question of resources, power and control. It is the colonial (this includes the apartheid) which has weaponised the ideology of tribalism through indirect rule apparatus toward the ends of imperialism.

The codification and invention of the realm of the customary and the mobilisation of that space as one of despotic colonial rule, characterised by the centralisation of powers in male 'chiefs' through a system of ruling by decree,²¹ embedded 'culture' in Africa and other post/colonial contexts with a peculiar iteration of a cultural dialectic. This dialectic and its particular formulation in post/colonial Africa has introduced the ideology of tribalism into the terrain of culture in complex ways; and because of this dialectic's configuration, as Mamdani writes, the question in this context presents us with contradictory political potentialities. He suggests that 'tribal' identity becomes often both the point of mobilisation of/for political movement and struggles, as well as simultaneously being the site of those movements' containment. This means that while people mobilise on the basis of being part of x tribe, the tribe operates as the ceiling which restricts any gains won through struggle to that 'tribe.'²² Linked, Mafeje says that tribalism "over-simplifies, mystifies, and obscures the real nature of economic and power relations between Africans themselves, and between Africa and the capitalist world."²³ As such, when held or clung to by African people (such as the example given above of mobilisation and containment based on tribe), it constitutes a form of false consciousness in the Marxian sense in that, for most people, "it is inconsistent with their materialist base" which plays into their own exploitation, preventing them from ever expanding the horizons of their political imagination beyond this essentially false, or limited, form of affiliation. Whereas, "on the part of the new African elite, it is a ploy or distortion they use to conceal their exploitative role."²⁴ In and through tribalism therefore, any social transformation takes place at the cost of competition or war with other 'tribes', largely maintaining the inequalities *within* and between 'tribes' and, moreover, squandering the possibility of both transforming an internal 'tribal' structure and organising a genuinely progressive movement across, against and beyond tribal affiliation.

However, while the above conversation hints at a totalitarian domination through tribalism, as we acknowledged with Cabral earlier, culture is a dialectic, it is a continuous site of struggle. Domination

²¹ See Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1996), in particular, chapters II, III, and IV for more detailed discussions of the practices, theories and apparatus of indirect rule.

²² Ibid, see chapter VI 'The other face of tribalism: Peasant movements in equatorial Africa', for historical examples of political struggle and the dialectic of tribalism.

²³ Mafeje, *The ideology of tribalism*, 261.

²⁴ Ibid, 259.

or control is never fully imposed on a people without some form of resistance. The hegemonic is never utterly hegemonic. And the question of culture and domination is much broader than that of tribalism. Expanding our frontiers and relating the dialectic more broadly, on the possibilities of domination and resistance within the contested terrain of culture, Sumangala Damodaran:

Structures of power assert and establish hegemonic cultural forms through control and transformation in particular dominant forms, but there also contain elements of identification and recognition of forms that fall outside of the dominant and belong to the popular sphere. In this range, the cultural forms that are observed at any point of time reflect a continuous and uneven struggle by dominant culture to enclose and confine, with continuously emerging points of resistance to the attempts to dominate.²⁵

This opens us up, through the imperial impulse to dominate a people through culture, to Cabral's next thesis on culture which thinks about its persistence and that persistence's relation to liberation. We will consider these "continuously emerging points of resistance", what they are rooted in and how they resonate with a liberatory culture.

iii. Culture and the tradition of liberation

As dynamics both internal and external to a given society shift, such as the violent social forces as colonialism, so then does a people's engagement shift with their changing world. This dialectic of changing social dynamics and emerging new modes of grappling, gives rise to new modes of producing culture and new forms of cultural expression which, importantly, are not delinked from previous forms but are elaborations on them. Okoye digs deeper:

Violent social disruptions, especially those generated from without, can often engender radical shifts away from old cultural systems, especially where they are considered incapable of efficiently managing new realities. These disruptions could come from a forceful imposition of one culture on another. In this case some of the changes are not negotiated and voluntarily imbibed, and often they are practiced superficially because they are neither wholly understood nor appreciated. An instance of this in African cultural history is the experience of European colonisation. In varying degrees African cultures have resisted, superficially accepted, and voluntarily appropriated aspects of European culture.²⁶

Cabral premeditates and extends Okoye's line, suggesting that "African culture, though repressed, persecuted and betrayed by some social categories... survived all the storms, by taking refuge in the

²⁵ Sumangala Damodaran, *The radical impulse: Music in the tradition of the Indian people's theatre association*, (Tulika Books: New Delhi, 2017), 14.

²⁶ Chukwuma Okoye, "Cannibalisation as popular tradition in Igbo masquerade performance," *Research in African Literatures*, 41:2, (2010), 21.

villages, in the forests and in the spirit of generations of victims of colonialism.”²⁷ This persistence, practiced and pursued by people who continue to produce culture under such conditions of violent oppression and repression, is evidence of the uncrushability of a people’s spirit and the eternity of the impulse toward freedom and self-determination. It is resistance to the colonial negation as well as evidence that the colonial negation is never complete: because we have art. It is the defiant cry, the shout that colonialism cannot fully own us, the insistence that we will have ourselves and we will exist for ourselves outside of the negation and this arrives us at the third thesis: that “liberation is necessarily an *act of culture*.”²⁸

We might, move around to extend Cabral through Okoye, to say that liberation is an active, and an act of tradition:

[T]radition and modernity are continuous and indistinguishable processes. Traditional culture has an undeniable evolutionary relationship with the past but is indeed a process in continuous social engineering. It is the “tradition” of constantly searching for ways of coming to terms with the inevitable unsteadiness of culture. Tradition becomes the persistence of an overarching system of cultural behaviour characterised by openness to social and even stylistic movements. Change, or modernity, therefore, is a dynamic of tradition not its antithesis.²⁹

This approach to tradition potentially rescues it from the pitfalls of tribalism and opens it up to a far more dynamic theorisation than what is normatively understood to be ‘traditional culture’ – something fixed, definite and inherited rather than something in motion, in dialectical relationship with internal and external contestation. The understanding that, even as there is a form of continuity over time with regards to the ways that it evolves and adapts, tradition is always unstable, always evolving and always moving and this state of motion has the potential to liberate us from colonialism’s insistence that African cultural practices are essential static isolated separate distinct fixed inferior and unchanging. This motion means that we can confidently engage (with) tradition/s without being fixated on the imperative to preserve or conserve their ‘purity’ or their ‘integrity.’ Indeed, according to Okoye, it is openness to change and the tradition of change that constitutes the very integrity of tradition/s. Through this we can think tradition and culture, not as things to be discarded as we navigate the ‘modern’ world, but, in their inherent modernity and dynamism, we can approach them as the very means of our coping with change, transforming social relations and liberating ourselves. In the process of liberation, as tradition evolves to deal with new social dynamics and political realities, such as colonial domination, it must enact and incorporate a critique

²⁷ Cabral, *Unity and struggle*, 147.

²⁸ Cabral, *Unity and struggle*, 143.

²⁹ Okoye, “Cannabalisation as popular tradition,” 23.

of those dynamics as it simultaneously, intentionally and consciously roots itself in African cultural forms which do not remain static but will interact with various anti-imperialist tendencies to form part of an anticolonial impulse and movement, as well as being an affirmation of a people's history and therefore a seed of the future, the means of a their re-entry into history on their own terms.

iv. Return to the source

One of Cabral's greatest contributions to African, and indeed, global revolutionary thought - the return to the source – emerges here, at the junction of history, tradition, struggle, culture and the future. In short, the idea of returning to the source is: The alienated section of the local/indigenous population within a context of colonialism, those who have assimilated to the ways of living of the coloniser, are embedded in an ontological dilemma. They exist in a sort of limbo, somehow suspended in a liminal space between the coloniser and the rest of the population. Experiencing both the racism of the coloniser and being alienated culturally, spiritually and materially from the people, at a particular point they realise the emptiness and the irreconcilability of their contradictory social position within colonial society. Here, instead of identifying with the coloniser as they have done, they choose to identify with the majority of people who are being exploited, they choose to identify with their struggles because they begin to understand them as their own. This is a form of class suicide, throwing in their lot with those who are in a lower class position, in the broader struggle to overcome foreign domination. There is also a cultural dimension to this process. In an attempt to reverse the process of alienation that has been put in place by colonialism, through close working relationships with people in struggle, the alienated, in their choice to identify with the struggle of their people, (re)learn and (re)acquaint themselves with the language and cultural practices of their people.³⁰

My reading of Cabral's description of the return to the source is as a political process which takes place in part through culture; the cultural and political elements of the return constitute and inform each other, they are not wholly distinguishable processes. He describes the return as a historical necessity "determined by an irreconcilable contradiction between colonised society and colonial power, exploited masses and foreign exploiting class."³¹ The important elements of the process being that through it, the petit bourgeoisie commits class suicide, joins the class struggle on the side of the workers and the peasants and the population unites to fight colonialism, foreign domination

³⁰ Cabral, *Return to the source*.

³¹ *Ibid*, 40.

and imperialism, and through that, a people re-enters history through a reclamation of the forces of production, allowing them to pursue, with full autonomy, their cultural lives. This highlights the importance of culture: the point of struggle is not merely economic - to own the means of production and put them in service of the people. No, the purpose of controlling the means is as a means to producing the social conditions which will allow people to pursue the real end which is the making meaning out of life through the process of producing culture unhindered by exploitation and oppression.

Even as the political and the cultural co-constitute each other in the dialectic of returning to the source and the distinction between the two dimensions is partly false, Cabral's articulation lends itself to a tendency to emphasise the cultural elements of the political process, with the political process understood to constitute the process proper. What I am interested in this broader project is interrogating the political elements of cultural processes and think the return to the source from that vantage point. Before proceeding in that endeavour, perhaps we can complicate and demystify the concept of returning to the source. Some of the most inevitable and obvious questions might ask: what constitutes 'the source' or even 'a source'? The concept of a source or a point of origin is an obscure and complex question for many people in various contexts – on the continent and elsewhere. The assumed notion of a self-evident or obvious cultural source is problematic and does not necessarily exist for everyone. Because of this ambivalence around what and where a source might be, the notion of a return to that elusive source, must equally be an ambiguous concept.

Perhaps the experience and approach of some radical artists from India can help us find one way out of this conundrum. Sumangala Damodaran articulates the radical impulse which, in responding to coloniality, she suggests is, in part, concerned with cultural practices of 'the people' and moving intentionally beyond assumed, essentialised cultural boundaries:

So, from uncovering indigenous traditions, to the sharing of such between different regions in creating a larger geographical imagination, to working with different regional traditions to create hybrids in the course of translocal solidarities, the radical artists sought to 'bring back' the culture of the people.³²

Sumangala's articulation of the radical impulse can be seen as an elaboration on, or an augmentation of Cabral's description of the process of building a 'national culture':

³² Damodaran, *The radical impulse*, 16.

The movement must be able to conserve the positive cultural values of every well-defined social group, of every category, and to achieve the *confluence* of these values into the stream of struggle, giving them a new dimension – the *national dimension*.³³

Importantly here, the radical artists' strategy of 'bringing back the people's culture', and the building of a 'national culture', is not rooted in separatist, colonial/tribal understandings of bounded and distinct groups of people with their own, identifiable, isolated and distinct cultural forms, but in the movement between, through and against them. The strategy is to draw on a collective pool of cultural resources of marginalised people and to build a movement based on the usage, reinterpretation and repurposing of some of these cultural forms as part of, and in service of a collective, radical societal project that was broader than any of the different cultural groups. So the return to the source in which I am interested and am trying to get at is not an attempt to go back to a romanticised 'pure' past and revive older cultural practices for the sake of themselves in fixity. Its orientation is closer to how Jose Munoz describes 'hope' as a "critical methodology... as a backward glance that enacts a future vision."³⁴ Crucially, it is located in, and committed to a much broader movement for liberation. It is a radical praxis situated in the present, predicated on the past, existing for, and focused on the future. It is the imperative reclamation of the impulse to be in motion.

v. Liberation: A factor of culture

As we have already explored through Cabral, liberation is necessarily an act of culture. But beyond that, importantly, "the liberation struggle is not simply a cultural fact, it is a cultural factor, a process giving new forms and content to culture."³⁵ The liberation movement becomes a new site as well as a new context bringing new vibrancy, energy, purpose and content to the processes of people's cultural production. These processes not only accompany organised liberation movement at particular historical moments, but constitute, and potentially substitute for that movement at others, depending on the historical moments' specific conditions. In other words it is cultural products that can carry and reflect the spirit of liberation – sometimes alongside and as part of organised resistance movements, sometimes in their absence. The five theses, and the fifth in

³³ Cabral, *Unity and struggle*, 147.

³⁴ José Munoz, *Cruising utopia: The then and there of queer futurity*, (New York University Press: New York, 2009), 4.

³⁵ Amílcar Cabral, *Guinea Bissau: Toward final victory (Selected speeches and documents from PAIGC)*, (LSM Information Centre: Richmond, 1974), 49.

particular, open up 'politics' to us in generative ways as they enact a critique of foreclosed conceptions of what comprises the political by locating 'politics' in cultural forms.

These new cultural forms, which could be considered to be decolonial aesthetics, comprising the canon of liberation culture in an African context, are produced through a dialectical synthesis between a critique of, and resistance to neo/colonialism and an engagement and embracing of certain African cultural practices outside of, beyond and in opposition to their framing through the ideology of tribalism. Importantly, through the return to the source, this process is always enacted and undertaken with a future vision, as a route to re-enter history on our own terms through the insistence on the impulse to be in motion as a people. The mobilisation of cultural practices constructed as 'backward' and 'tribal' as roots to the future is dangerous shit for the Verwoerdian imperative, and is something that is unknowable, unthinkable, unimaginable and ultimately befuddling to colonial logics. What we move towards in the next section is a discussion of my methods and how they emerge as an attempt to launch an investigation into some of the sonic dimensions of liberation culture in a South/ern African context.

II. Method: Black study

In the last section we moved through Cabral and his, and others', thought on culture. Central to the movement through his ideas is his claim that culture is politically important for African people, and all colonised or previously colonised peoples, because, as the expression of autonomy and the eternal impulse toward freedom, even surviving under the harshest social conditions, it exemplifies and carries the spirit of liberation, and the impulse of liberation gives rise to new cultural forms. In this current section I devise a method to listen to the music in relation to these claims to see what the radical content within them is: what is the political aspect of these cultural forms, what is the liberatory imperative of the music and what is it rooted in?

It feels strange to speak about a method of study when one's approach to knowledge production is not separate from, but is rooted in an everyday existence in, and orientation towards the world. Nonetheless, in the interests of unveiling the conditions and relations of knowledge's production, it has its place. In this section I outline the two dimensions of the 'method' – Black study – which I have used to explore the cosmological bases of South African jazz. Following that I explain how I chose the artists and albums which I engage in this project.

Black study

Fred Moten describes 'study':

When I think about the way we use the term 'study', I think we are committed to the idea that study is what you do with other people. It's talking, walking around with other people, working, dancing, suffering, some irreducible convergence of all three, held under the name of speculative practice... The point of calling it 'study' is to mark that the incessant and irreversible intellectuality of these activities is already present... What's important is to recognise that that has been the case – because that recognition allows you to access a whole, varied, alternative history of thought... If you truly understand what study is, you would know that it is this sort of sociality. That's all that it is.³⁶

This approach to intellectualism, that grounds it, as a form and practice of sociality, in the Black everyday, contextualises and makes sense of my earlier statement about how it is odd to write about a 'method' of inquiry as something distinct from daily life – because daily life and the

³⁶ Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The undercommons: Fugitive planning & Black study*, (Minor Compositions: Wivenhoe, 2013), 110-111.

collective thinking and conversations that constitute it are my method and it cannot be removed from that. A particular orientation to the world is the mode of knowledge production, and that orientation has a history. For Black people, most of our intellectual traditions have developed either in some form of fugitive relation to the University or completely outtasight on the out sides of its orbit. So intellectualism remained connected to these everyday activities rather than being abstracted and disciplined through the University, resulting in a critical and intellectual orientation to the world that permeates the very sociality of life. My project and my method emerges from this Black tradition of 'study' rather than one that the University would insist on – that tends to separate everyday life from academic production.

Unplanned and planned study

The first dimension of my method is unplanned collective study with friends, thinking and speaking together about many things, including the music and listening to it. Study sessions take place in a variety of settings: late at night at my house or a friends' house, in the lounge, on the stoep, at a gig, before or after a gig, at listening sessions, over a meal, after a meeting, on the way to somewhere, on the return etc. These sessions were unplanned in the sense that conversations about jazz and spirituality, struggle and philosophy are part of an inevitable or typical agenda of possible topics we might mull over and interrogate when we get together. With regards to time, this form of inquiry into South African jazz's outsides predates, and undoubtedly will post-date, my registration as a Masters student exploring the questions around.

I have very clear memories of one particular occasion when I was hanging out with friends. Towards the end of 2015. It was getting late, one of my friends had already fallen asleep in his armchair, probably around one or two am. We were at a house I was staying at in Observatory with a number of other people. We were listening to Zim Ngqawana's 'Unamaqhinga na' from *Vadzimu* and one of my friends asked another what the lyrics meant. That was the beginning of a really interesting discussion which started from translating the lyrics (which speak about getting tricked badly by someone) and then went to many places after. Now that I recall it, the trajectory of that discussion which started in/from the music but transcended it and went beyond, reminds me a lot of how Moten and Harney describe texts as social spaces; texts as occasions for (further) study rather than being objects to be *studied*, a text as "a kind of invitation for other people to pick stuff up."³⁷ This conversation, launching from 'Unamaqhinga na', and many others like it, resonate strongly with this

³⁷ Ibid, 108.

idea from the undercommons which is an everyday practice. From unknowingly approaching the music as a text, an invitation and occasion for study, we were referred, from within the music, to the many things outside of it; this gave a sense of the multi-layered complexity by which music is composed.

From these sessions, and once this, my Masters project, started to take shape, I got a sense of the type of musicians I was interested in and which musicians I thought could refer me to the outsides I was interested in to investigate in this project. Given that my intention was to explore the cosmological context of South African jazz, and I intended to look at that through the spiritual and philosophical content of the music, I knew I needed to select musicians and albums which illustrated some of these things explicitly, or if not explicitly, at least in a way that I could, through collective study, get to some of them. I was interested South African musicians whose music represented an engagement and association with jazz as well as with spiritual traditions and cosmological concepts found in Southern Africa. Once I had selected the musicians I went through a more in-depth, planned study of each of them which consisted of listening through each album track-by-track, reading liner notes, translating lyrics where applicable and possible, tracing the themes which the albums engaged, and seeking out other materials on the artists and the practices which the music referenced or was rooted in.

Below I list the musicians I chose to study as well as which material of theirs I studied. All the musicians were chosen for different but related and overlapping reasons – some have been selected primarily because of what their music opens up and reflects, others for their overall conceptualisation of their practice, and some because of how their work has resonated and what it is rooted in. Because of these differences, I engage them differently.

I chose Zim Ngqawana because his music reflects an engagement with African cultural forms such as Xhosa cosmology and spiritual and ceremonial practices on his albums *Vadzimu* and *Zimphonic Suites*. Ngqawana also represents a certain militance and radical social critique in and of ‘the new South Africa’ in the early 2000s, a period largely still hungover from the intoxication of the ‘94 political party, someone who insisted on revolution and healing and plants through music.

Nduduzo Makhathini, as a sangoma and a jazz musician, pursues his practice at the intersection of these two phenomena and, in his articulation of what he does – healing through improvised music – shows the productive relationship between these practices and how they co-constitute each other in various ways through him. This is shown most directly on his most recent album *Ikhambi* which I chose in addition to *Matunda ya kwanza* which is inspired by the dance with ancestors. As a drummer, I have also played quite a lot with Makhathini, in Msaki’s band ‘The Golden Circle’ and

also in his own bands playing his music and in and outside the music, many of the conversations we have had about his own journey in music and the context of the music more broadly have been invaluable to my project.

I also selected 'Malombo Jazz/Jazz Men/Jazz Makers' because of their location in the complex between a southern African spiritual tradition, *malombo*, and the Black musical tradition and aesthetic, jazz. I listen to their music on the 1964 *Castle Lager Jazz* album and consider Malombo in the 1960s context of South African modern jazz in which they were somewhat of a pariah. I also look at the Malombo-pioneer, Philip Tabane's album *Unh!*, the DVD *Spirit of Malombo*, and Dr Edwin Sello Galane's PhD which all illustrate a number of different perspectives on Malombo.

'The Blue Notes' I selected because they represent, if not the most important, then one of the most important exponents of South African free and avant garde jazz, and, importantly, their music and particularly their out sensibilities are often rooted in Xhosa musical and spiritual traditions or abstractions thereof. I listen to their album 'Blue Notes for Mongezi', and Johnny Dyani's album *Witchdoctor's Son* because of their improvisation of various Xhosa rituals in the context of exile. Here I draw on Dr Sazi Dlamini's PhD which also considers that album.

III. On improvisations: What's in it?

In this suite we listen to the music and thought of the musicians identified above in 'Methods' in an attempt to hear what constitutes the South African jazz tradition, beyond but linked to the music. A few motifs thread their way through the different musicians' thinking, linking their music and their orientations. Each part of the suite represents a different meditation on the question of what is in South African jazz beyond the music, each solo deepens and extends the motifs in various ways.

Acknowledgement: Spirits composition

'Malombo' names a number of popular South African bands whose music – derived largely from the drums and the style and rhythms of the drumming – might, more broadly, be considered to constitute a tradition. Malombo music was pioneered and developed by musicians such as Philip Tabane, Julian Bahula, Abbey Cindi and, later, others such as Lucky Ranku, in formations such as Malombo Jazz, Malombo Jazz Makers, Malombo Jazz Men, Jabula and many others. '*Malombo*' (also) is a southERN African spiritual tradition, common in a region cut across by colonial borders. Victor Ralushai writes:

*Malombo is a general term for Ngoma dza Hamutele or Khunwa-khunwa and mapili possession cults which are said to have been adopted from the Kalanga of Zimbabwe by the Vharonga (people of southern Venda) Vhailafuri (people of western Venda), the Mbedzi of eastern Venda and other Venda-speaking clans living on both sides of the Limpopo lowveld.*³⁸

The band, through their name, Malombo Jazz Makers, associates themselves with this originary *malombo* 'cult' as well as with this jazz thing. Despite the easy association in the name, the relationship that Malombo has with jazz is, as we will hear, complex. We are confronted, not just in the name but conceptually also, by a collision between, and a coalescing of a couple of, in some senses, separate but essentially mutually constitutive things, a synthesis between an African-rooted spiritual practice that exists beyond contemporary borders, and jazz – a global, predominantly urban-based, Black art form. In this section we will engage the dialectic of Malombo and jazz, considering both the dissonances and the divergences, as well as the generative harmonic co-constitution in their between as they resonate in the music and how that resonates with people.

³⁸ Victor Ralushai, "The origin and social significance of Malombo," in *Papers presented at the Fifth Symposium on Ethnomusicology, Faculty of Music, University of Cape Town, August 30th to September 1st, 1984*, (International Library of African Music, Rhodes University: Grahamstown, 1985), 2.

We try to hear the origin and social significance of Malombo, an extension of Ralushai's work, as much in the music and the musicians' articulation of their practice as in the ways and frameworks in which their practice is understood and conceptualised.

Tabane and jazz

Philip Tabane, largely recognised as the originator of the Malombo band concept and music was interested in jazz music at a certain stage, and checked it out for a few years, but returned to what he called 'Venda' and 'Ndebele music.' He grew uninterested in jazz, partly because everyone around him was doing it. He also knew his brother could burn Wes Montgomery on guitar so what was all the fuss about. Post his 'jazz' phase, he said: "There is really no difference between Venda and what I play now, but I do use a lot of improvisation. In Venda, only they drums improvise much."³⁹ Despite borrowing a concept or method from jazz – improvisation on instruments other than drums, the guitar in his case – he understood what he was playing to essentially be the Venda and Ndebele music which he grew up around, which form the foundation of Malombo music. Tabane had also had the opportunity to travel to the States which dissolved some of the mist and the mystique surrounding American musicians and their music. The experience of travel perhaps gave him even more conviction in doing the Malombo thing, 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 tradition forward, was valuable and hip. His conviction and his orientation to African musics, Tabane he saw lacking in many of his contemporary South African musicians. When he was in New York in the 1960s he played with Pharoah Sanders, Miles Davis and other great jazz musicians. What he couldn't get, was that on the West side of the Atlantic, cats were trying to sound like musicians from the continent, and cats on the continent were mirroring that thing and trying to play like American musicians. Tabane said that Pharoah was the in thing at the time, in the States, because he was "hard trying to play music from Africa."⁴⁰

Dr Edwin Sello Galane, who played percussion with Tabane in one of the Malombo formations, and also did a PhD on Tabane and Malombo music, presents his own somewhat contradictory views on Tabane and Malombo's relationship with jazz. At one time he says:

³⁹ Philip Tabane and Malombo, *Unh!*, LP, Liner notes compiled by David Bither, (ICON Records: New York, 1989).

⁴⁰ Sello Edwin Galane, *The music of Philip Tabane – An historical analytical study of Malombo music of South Africa*, PhD thesis, (University of Pretoria, 2009), Chapter 7- Page 11.

Tabane made no effort not to play jazz... He never entangled himself in the exhausting and energy drenching exercise of arguing with fellow musicians about what is and what is not. He just set out to do Malombo music.⁴¹

And a few pages later:

Tabane emerged as an original thinker who resolutely distanced himself from being labelled a jazz oriented musician.⁴²

These positions appear on some level to be at odds with each other. To say that Tabane both actively distanced himself from jazz and that he was uninterested in resolutely not playing jazz, somehow sit together in dissonance. However, considering the dissonance, it is possible that Tabane himself was immersed in this contradiction and, at certain points, was unconcerned with how what he was doing related or didn't relate to jazz, and at other times, did distance himself from it. He "enjoyed some of it, but it wasn't in [his] heart, the music that [he] loved." He was more convicted that he wanted to pursue *malombo* than he was convinced that he didn't want to play jazz. He did not want his music to be read or understood just as jazz because that obscured its rooting in Venda and Ndebele music and the spiritual practices of *malombo* which gave the music its purpose and cosmological framework. Perhaps he felt that understanding it strictly and explicitly as 'jazz' reduced and robbed the music, abstracting it from its context.

1964 Castle Lager Jazz Festival

In the context of the 1964 Castle Lager Jazz festival in Orlando, Soweto, at which Malombo eventually won first prize for the best band, they were somewhat of a novelty in that scene in the sense that they came through with their *malombo* drums, a guitar, penny whistles and flutes. Most bands on the scene at the time were playing in some kind of 'modern jazz' configuration – drum kit, double bass, piano and/or guitar, and some horns. In the early '60s South African music scene, a lot of people weren't ready for *malombo*, and even as they still appeared novel or 'out' at the '64 festival, they moved and connected with the people and were awarded the 'best band' award. The festival, and the jazz scene's acceptance and acknowledgement of Malombo through awarding them that accolade was significant. When he first put the band together, Philip Tabane said that people thought he was crazy and they didn't get what they were trying to do let alone appreciate or

⁴¹ Ibid, 7-19.

⁴² Ibid, 7-21.

connect with it. Even Julian Bahula, who is now recognised as the icon of Malombo drums, was sceptical at first. Ntate Tabane recalls:

When I first formed Malombo in 1961, the reaction was really bad, people thought I was kind of crazy.

When we bought the Malombo drums, I told Julian [Bahula], 'These are the kinds of drums I would like you to play.' He didn't want to, but he wouldn't tell me, he was shy about it all.⁴³

So at the time, Tabane's Malombo concept was way ahead of, or at least, in a different metaphysical space to where most people were at in the jazz scene. Visually and sonically, Cindi, Bahula and Tabane represented something quite different to what was passing for regular at the festival.

We see some of these differences visually exacerbated in *Figure 1*, the cover of the album released after the festival with music of the award-winning bands. Drummer, Early Mabuza, on the right, whose quartet's music makes up the B-side, is surrounded by a drum kit and a double bass. This side of the cover, the right, is assumedly representing, in a more normative sense, modern jazz. Bra Mabuza leans in towards Tabane and looks almost tauntingly, challengingly or provocatively at him. Tabane, on the A-side and on the left, accompanied by Malombo's instruments, holding his guitar, leaning casually on the *malombo* drums which are supporting a flute, holds Mabuza's gaze and looks back at him, almost disinterested in the challenge with an air of surety and confidence. He is utterly unconcerned and completely composed. Although the photo is very obviously staged, and is blatantly intended to amplify the aesthetic and other divergences, I do think it captures one important angle on Malombo in their relation to jazz at that particular historical moment.

⁴³ Philip Tabane and Malombo, *Unh!*



Figure 1. Album cover of Castle Lager Jazz Festival 1964 winners.⁴⁴

With another angle, writing on Malombo at that legendary festival, Aggery Klaaste, in a 1964 *The World* article:

The Malombo Jazzmen, winners of the Orlando Jazz Festival this year, believe they may be chasing exciting Spirit. These three bashful men – a veritable silent menace – always cause a furore, wherever they go. The word Malombo is a Venda word meaning something like “Spirit.” The type of thing that moves you. Very appropriate term to choose, for the music these men produced at Orlando Stadium moved thousands of hysterical jazz fans.⁴⁵

As Klaaste’s observations hint at, there was something in Malombo’s performances, in their instruments and in their music and perhaps something else, something that was channelled through the material and sonic things, that connected and resonated, on a deep level, a spiritual level, with

⁴⁴ Flat International: South African Audio Archive, “Various artists: Castle Lager Jazz Festival 1964,” accessed on 27 August 2016, http://www.flatinternational.org/template_volume.php?volume_id=168#.

⁴⁵ Galane, *The music of Philip Tabane*, 4-3.

people and it was this that moved them. Poet, painter, philosopher, all-around intellectual Lefifi Tladi extends and augments Klaaste's line here, putting Malombo in a broader historical context than the festival.

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 instead of relating with yourself via America as we used to do.⁴⁶

Tladi, here, puts himself right in the midst of the dialectic, suggesting that Malombo presented a different way out. He suggests that what Tabane was so insistent on doing, in his convicted pursuit of Malombo music rather than imitating Wes Montgomery, who his brother could burn anyway, was the content of what made the music so relevant; its resonance with southern African people's origins, their spirits and their souls. 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 need to be Black via America, and making it possible to be Black via Africa, or deeper still, African via Africa.

In the context of the '64 festival, Malombo were confident enough in what they were doing to play, and good enough to hold their own, amongst the rest of the best musicians in the country, asserting in their own way that they were part of that category. That they brought their own instruments and music rooted in Venda and Ndebele spiritual traditions to jazz (through association, or perhaps appropriation, in their naming and participating jazz festivals) so confidently suggests that they saw something that was in 'jazz' or, at least saw some latent potentiality in it that was aligned with or augmentative of their musical practice and its transcendental purpose. They saw in jazz something that they recognised in themselves, in what they were channeling through Malombo, as if they said 'we know this 'jazz' thing, we've got it at home. It's called *malombo!*'

Malombo and *malombo*

Galane empirically breaks it down on *malombo*:

⁴⁶ *Spirit of Malombo*, DVD, David Max Brown (dir.), (Maxi-DTV Production: South Africa, 1999).

Indigenous *malombo* music is spontaneous music that uses voice, drumming, and feet rattle idiophones. It is often in fast tempo of four pulse measure. It has antecedent and consequent structure. Like in most music, call and response yield a melodic statement, and so is the case with the indigenous *malombo*. It is played with drums in healing contexts. There is dancing. There are segments without drums and segments of drumming and dancing only.

In *malombo*, the *lelombo/lelopo* or the lead singer and initiate practitioner leads the song and the other initiates or *malombo/malopo* respond. The structure is cyclical with a constant chorus and varied solo sections. The language of indigenous *malombo/malopo* is often the indigenous language of the initiate.⁴⁷

Ralushai adds to Galane's description of the music, explaining more of the spiritual context of *malombo*. On earth, when someone passes away, in fact some time afterwards, maybe few, maybe many years, their spirit returns in order to inhabit and live in one of their descendents, usually, but not always, in a woman. When the spirit of an ancestor wants to enter someone, that person falls ill - with a spiritual rather than a physical illness. They must be assisted, through a musical and healing ritual, in the process of allowing their ancestor's spirit to enter them. The process can take a few hours or a few days and can induce trance, bouts of uncontrolled shaking and collapse from the exhaustion. Ultimately, "the function of *Malombo* is to heal a sick person through possession," and if the spirit enters the person successfully, they should be healed.⁴⁸

Regarding *malombo* and Malombo, and how these spiritual and musical practices became the band's, Tabane's mother was a sangoma. In fact, in his own words: "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."⁴⁹ His formative experiences in music were in the context of the work of his family, sangomas, as healers in his community and he learned to play *malombo* drums in "apprenticeship" with his mother according to Galane.⁵⁰ And as Galane affirms, Tabane's music in Malombo displays strong roots in *malombo* music and healing practices. He describes the similarities in more detail, mentioning the instrumentation, the important role of the drums, the cyclical musical structures, the sections of solo drumming as well as a number of other musical devices present in *malombo* and Malombo.⁵¹

Growing up around the musical practices of sangomas, and then growing up the township, Tabane describes his own feeling of cultural alienation in the urban context, feeling like his reference points

⁴⁷ Galane, *The music of Philip Tabane*, 4-4.

⁴⁸ Ralushai, *The origin and social significance of Malombo*, 6.

⁴⁹ Philip Tabane and Malombo, *Unh!*

⁵⁰ Galane, *The music of Philip Tabane*, 3-13.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 4-3 to 4-12.

were different to the rest of the people he was around. He felt that he was hip to, and spiritually present in another context.

I grew up in the townships but I wasn't born there. I am from the homelands, my heart, my soul, everything of mine always reflects the homelands, where I came from. Even as I grew up with my friends from the townships, their lifestyle, their music, all this... I felt that I wasn't really involved with them. It's funny 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.⁵²

Through Malombo, then, perhaps it is the spectral metaphysics of the 'homelands' that compose some of the urban's exiled cultural matrix. The spirits of *malombo* fetch and summon people, move people's souls and remind them of their backgrounds, remind them of home. And although Tabane doesn't mention 'exile' explicitly, the similarities are uncanny between his description of the estrangement associated with his physical existence being in the townships and his spirit in the homelands, and the conditions of spiritual and geographical alienation which are common to many people's descriptions of exile. Perhaps it speaks to a form of internal exile – internal in the spiritual sense, but also in the geographic sense, of being internal to the country but alienated from home. The concept of home and exile as lived and experienced through the dialectic of the township and the homeland is wherein the apparent contradiction between jazz and *malombo* also exists, the contradiction that Galane, mobilising Tabane, hinted at, that was visually represented on the album cover. In this conversation, but refusing the contradiction and suggesting an alternate resolution, Vusi Mahlasela speaks about Malombo, its origins, jazz and sangoma music:

Malombo, jazz, you know, emerging from the spiritual drums and beats of the sangoma. The simultaneous beating of the legs and all this – jazz rhythms. So jazz is not just music, it's something which really transcends and go deep inside.⁵³

One wonders, via bra Vusi, to what extent this conversation is an exercise in tautology. It becomes clearer and clearer how entangled the complex ensemble of jazz and Malombo is. It gets more and more difficult to see where one begins and where the other one transcends. Mahlasela insists that both Malombo and jazz are rooted in the drums and rhythms of the sangoma. That jazz rhythms come from sangoma grooves and the related full body percussive practices. That it goes deep inside. That "jazz is not just music." That there is something in jazz that is not in the music but is beyond or transcendent of it. That the music, jazz, cannot contain itself. That it exceeds the music, spilling over its sonic and aesthetic boundaries moving in a metaphysical field. That there is jazz the music and

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ *Spirit of Malombo*, DVD, David Max Brown (dir.), (Maxi-DTV Production: South Africa).

jazz, the other thing that is in it, but beyond it or channelled through it? One wonders if we have arrived at the quite absurd and obscure distinction between jazz and *jazz* through the transposition of the contra-distinction between the dialectical tautology of Malombo and *malombo*? In the musicians' case are we talking about Malombo (the) jazz (band); Malombo (the band, rooted in and channeling) *jazz*; *malombo* (spirits, channeled through) jazz (music); or *malombo* (spirits as exponents of) *jazz*?

Refusing to resolve the question, contributing to another dimension, Walter Kokotsi joins the study.

Jazz is very spiritual, jazz kind of takes you back to your roots. Philip Tabane, really sends you back to the rural areas of the Northern Province where you would listen to the old ladies playing *molopo*... whereas Abbey Cindi tends to diffuse a little bit of modern jazz and the African way of doing things.⁵⁴

Kokotsi insists that jazz is in the same pot stewing with the roots and the spirits. That it is not only not opposed to roots and the rural, but it is the very route back to them. That it is a mode of connecting, through the spirit, to them. That Tabane channels land and that the homelands of the Northern Province/Northern Transvaal/Limpopo sing through the *malombo* spirits that he also channels that also invoke and are invoked by the old ladies playing *Molopo*.⁵⁵ We recall Ralushai who says that in the *malombo* tradition "it is important to note that the majority of people who are possessed are women."⁵⁶ We also recall Tabane whose mother was a sangoma, from whom he learnt about the *malombo* drums. These women and sangomas are the channels of origin and of the tradition's transferral, a tradition that exists in the exiled dance between the township and the homeland, jazz and *malombo*.

Resolution: To be song-like

Our investigations into the cosmological framework of South African jazz lead us now, through the *malombo*-jazz dialectic, one of whose sites of origin is the sangoma, channelled and transferred through the maternal, toward someone who is doing the work of a sangoma in and through

⁵⁴ *Spirit of Malombo*, DVD, David Max Brown (dir.), (Maxi-DTV Production: South Africa).

⁵⁵ From Ralushai... "*Malopo* is the lowveld Northern Sotho variant of the Venda term *Malombo*," (p.6).

"[A] middle-aged informant strongly argued that the Lowveld Northern Sotho *Malopo* had nothing to do with *Malombo* of the Venda and yet *Malopo* is etymologically derived from the Venda term '*Malombo*'. Note that Hamulima, despite the mass removals and settlement of the people on ethnic lines in the late 1960s is still predominantly a mixed area. In fact, it is generally believed that the N.Sotho-speaking people of Hamulima and the neighbouring area adopted *Malopo* from the Venda but adapted it to their own social and ritual requirements," (p.3).

⁵⁶ Ralushai, *The origin and social significance of Malombo*, 3.

improvised music. My first recollections of seeing Nduduzo Makhathini, or, 'big brother', was when he was playing in the mid-2000s at jam sessions in Braamfontein, Johannesburg, when I was in late high school. The sessions happened at a spot called 44 Stanley, and before they got shut down they were weekly, I think on Thursday nights. I remember seeing cats like Marcus Wyatt, Carlo Mombelli, Ayanda Sikade, Herbie Tsoaeli, Sydney Mnisi, Clement Benny, many others who I didn't know, as well as a young Mandla Mlangeni who I first met at those sessions. I have such vivid memories of Nduduzo playing a keyboard on a shifty stand, really low, sitting on a restaurant chair, totally surrendered, totally indebted to the music, playing the hippest shit. He was always my favourite player at those sessions.

Fast forward a few years to January 2015 and I met Nduduzo (re-met if you consider my first groupie engagements with him at 44 Stanley as meetings!) in East London at the studio sessions for recording Msaki's album, *Zaneliza*,⁵⁷ which he produced, and on which he played piano and keyboards and I played drums and percussion. The magic of those sessions and the community that was built through the music but exceeded it, instigated by Msaki and assisted by many others, led to many beautiful ongoing relationships, one of those was my relationship with big brother Makhathini. Since those sessions we have spent quite a lot of time together in and pushing the out sides of Msaki's music at various festivals and gigs across South Africa. I have also played with him in an iteration of his band, 'The Cure Collective'. In April 2017 we played a series of gigs in and around Cape Town.⁵⁸ Our relationship has led to much broader (than music) collaborations and I have facilitated and organised workshops with and for some of his students at Fort Hare music department, East London campus, where he is currently the HoD.⁵⁹ These experiences - listening to

⁵⁷ *Zaneliza* was released in 2016 and nominated for a SAMA (South African Music Award) in the 'Adult Contemporary' category which bra Hugh Masekela eventually won with his album *No Borders*.

⁵⁸ For a recording of one of these performances, see Nduduzo Makhathini and the Cure Collective, *Stories about music in Africa presents Ikhambi*, Online video, (Pan African Space Station: Cape Town, 2017), URL: <https://panafricanspacestation.org.za/stories-about-music-in-africa-presents-ikhambi-with-nduduzo-makhathini-the-cure-collective/>

⁵⁹ When I was in East London in April 2017, the week after we had played together in Cape Town, Nduduzo asked me to come and give a workshop at the music department which I did. The session was on 19 April 2017, and was titled *swing.in'afrika: jazz (,) futures and history; a collective knowledge process on music and/in our context*. The abstract: "This workshop will present and engage some conceptual and practical, social and political as well as some historical ideas relating to jazz, and music more broadly, in an African context. We will collectively explore ideas of swing and approaches to swing and use the drum kit to show relationships between various African rhythms and swing. We will also look at the radical role that music has sometimes played in society, and we will think about why that is important for us now and the future and what that means for us as cultural workers." After the workshop myself and Nduduzo went out with some of the students and continued the discussion, and opened up new discussions quite late into the night. The other workshop that I did at the Fort Hare music department was on 25 September 2017 titled *Publica[c]tion pop-off*, "Publica[c]tion is a Black student-driven publication process. It consists of contributions in various forms, from across South African universities. The process has been collaborative and experimental from its inception. The pop-off is our way of creating a space to launch this collective work and share it with a

Nduduzo, playing with him, laughing with him, eating with him, thinking with him, studying with him - constitute the broader context for this present engagement with his music and what informs it.

In a conversation we had over dinner just before we played our last gig of the 2016 Grahamstown Jazz festival, as members of Msaki's band 'The golden circle', Makhathini shared with me some stories from his own journeys in improvised music and healing.⁶⁰ He told me about his calling to thwasa and become a sangoma – a path which he has completed and is currently walking. He told me about how the calling came, the dreams and the illness (inthwaso), visits to an older sangoma through the guidance of an older relative against the wishes of most of his Christian family, the later loss of his eyesight due to ignoring the calling of his ancestors, dreams of piano keys and the subsequent return of his eyesight following his positive response to the call. In amongst the anecdotes was his understanding and his own particular articulation of the cosmological links between music and healing in Southern Africa through an analysis of the words 'sangoma' and 'ubungoma.' He said that the prefix san- is similar to ubu- which means to be, or to be like. Renowned African philosopher Mogobe Ramose says that "ubu- evokes the idea of be-ing in general."⁶¹ And 'ngoma' means song. So together they could be *be-ing song*. Makhathini put it like this: 'to be song-like.' He said that is what it means to be a sangoma; to be like song, or to strive or aspire to be song-like. Within this framework we see an indivisibility of the social work of the sangoma, as a member of a community, as a healer, and as diviner, and the metaphysical nature of the sangoma as song-like or aspiring to be song-like. This points to a foundational relationship between healing and music within most Southern African spiritual traditions; song is almost always an integral, even a central, part of any healing process. Nduduzo represents pursues embodies deepens pushes dances and sits in this pursuit to be song-like in between music and healing practice within the idiom of jazz. So here, with him, we dig these relationships as they inform, manifest and materialise in the improvisations of, in and on and beyond the material of two of his albums – *Matunda ya kwanza*, and *Ikhambi*. We look and listen for the themes and frameworks which both situate the music and in which this pursuit takes place. On *Matunda ya kwanza* we encounter the ancestors in the ancient dance and the dream, and on *Ikhambi*, we hear that the music's motive force is the healing impulse of the divine role of isangoma.

broader public. Join us for creative conversation and engagement as we continue to experiment with how publication becomes publica[c]tion."

⁶⁰ Discussion with Nduduzo Makhathini, 9 July 2016, Grahamstown, South Africa.

⁶¹ Mogobe Ramose, "The philosophy of *Ubuntu* and *Ubuntu* as philosophy," in *The development of thought in pan Africanism*, Boatamo Mosupyoe and Mogobe Ramose (eds.), (Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company: Dubuque, 2007), 159.

Matunda ya kwanza

Nduduzo's second album of 2015, after the iconic double-cd *Listening to the ground*, was *Matunda ya Kwanza, vol.1*. This album, recorded by a trio album with Claude Cozens doing duty on the drums, Magne Thormodsæter on double bass, and obviously big brother on the ivories, came out in the middle of a particularly prolific period of creative production for Makhathini. He is still within this purple patch, a space which has coincided with his resolution and acceptance and ownership of his calling, and a deepening walk in his journey of becoming, as a sangoma, a musician and a person. In his own words, Makhathini explains the opening tune, entitled 'Ancient dance,' which situates and contextualises the album:

'Ancient Dance' this particular song came in a dream recently when I was visited by my ancestors, this melody you are about to hear was sung by a familiar voice that sounded like Mam'uBusi Mhlongo but I never saw her face, there was also a huge backing vocal response done by the rest of the tribe, then I saw dancers of all kinds dressed in African costumes dancing moves I had not seen before and all this was well orchestrated. When I woke up I felt, since we are going into the festive season maybe my ancestors are indicating that they want to be part of the celebration so I went in studio to record this album to keep them dancing in our dreams.

As I was busy trying to think about how I would contextualize such work, I came across this Swahili phrase 'Matunda Ya Kwanza' which deeply resonated with me. Here I am offering my first fruits of the season to my ancestors through songs.⁶²

In the liner notes, Dr Patricia Achieng Opondo says the following about the work in these excerpts:

We get an opportunity to dance with the ancestors and spirits in light jovial celebration. The melodies suggest a playful twirling and in one's mind we see the spirits dance acknowledging this important recognition through Matunda ya Kwanza dedication, happy to be honoured in this way. You feel them in the descending light passages, and when they meet the ground they dance in unity with all elements, providing us with a beautiful alignment of spirituality and creativity. As the last song on the album Tyner's Visit ends, you feel this is a homecoming after a long sojourn on earth and in the galaxies, a nod to say it is well...

You listen to Matunda ya Kwanza and indeed, through all the tracks feel this beautiful unity with amadlozi, it is that familiar and comforting spiritual pull that both anchors us on earth while moving us through pensive reflection and beautiful introspection. Then magically, one finds oneself in a celebratory dance and listening to Ancient Dance over again, just one more time... closing one's eyes this time, dreaming and

⁶² Nduduzo Makhathini, *Matunda ya kwanza*, CD, Liner notes by Dr Patricia Achieng Opondo, (Gundu Entertainment: Johannesburg, 2015).

channelling even deeper thoughts, knowing that we are blessed with this awesome spiritual alignment, which means that all is well in the universe, and the ancestors continue to celebrate with us through the Ancient Dance.⁶³

The themes of the dream, and the dance with amadlozi emerge most strongly from, and ground this body of work in a metaphysical context which forms and informs its content. I want to dig the dream, and the dance with amadlozi a bit deeper.

The dream

The dream occupies a very significant role in communication and communion with ancestors. It is often in the dream, as Makhathini's story above testifies, that we are visited by the living-dead. This is the realm and space that they communicate messages, instructions – sometimes coded, sometimes explicit – give visions or perhaps just come to hang. In ukuthwasa (“a word that refers to the calling that an individual has to become an initiate or novice “*umkhwetha*” and train to become a traditional healer called “*igqirha*” in Xhosa”⁶⁴), for a thwasa to progress along the journey, to move through the various phases of training, they have to have different ceremonies at particular points, marking their growth and movement in their response to their calling. These ceremonies often entail the sacrifice of a particular animal – for example, a chicken, goat, sheep or cow – and, sometimes, the thwasa must be shown the animal and be given other instructions pertaining to the ceremony by their ancestors through a dream before they can have the ceremony. Beyond dreams relating specifically to ceremonies, as a period of heightened awakening, sensitivity and openness, thwasas generally dream intensively throughout their training, which is a healing process. Wreford, a *gqirha*, writes:

The *thwasa* expects to dream actively throughout the training, (and even when not gifted with dreams the activity of the spirits renders many nights almost sleepless).

And that:

To *sangoma*, dreams... are seen as messages from the ancestors, and give the *sangoma* the information they need regarding ancestral requirements for resolution of a profound distress, whether their own, or of a client.⁶⁵

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ziyanda Claire Xaso, *The meaning of Ukuthwasa: Urban youth perspectives on social change and the persistence of tradition in the Eastern Cape*, MA Thesis, (University of Fort Hare, 2015), 18.

⁶⁵ Jo Thobeka Wreford, *Ukusebenza nethongo (Working with spirit): The role of sangoma in contemporary South Africa*, PhD thesis, (University of Cape Town, 2005), 116.

This orientation to the dream and understanding of the dream – as a space of instruction and information from ancestors – is not only specific to thwasa and sangoma but is located much more broadly in a world-sense common to many African people. Specifically about Xhosa people, Booi writes:

Dreams are seen by the Xhosa people as serving different functions namely: giving direction, informing, advising, empowering, requesting, raising awareness and giving warnings. Dreams that have a message are called *amathongo*. The ancestors are the people who send *amathongo*, because they communicate clearly in dreams.⁶⁶

As a space of receiving instruction, advice, empowering, and raising awareness, we can understand the dream as a site of study with *amadlozi*, an inter-generational process of learning and knowing. And as we recall from Moten and Harney, study is a mode of sociality, a way of being, thinking and communing together, a mode grounded in the intellectualism of the everyday. So we might think, through Makhathini's ensemble on *Matunda ya kwanza*, as a communion of collective study with and for the ancestors. *Matunda ya Kwanza* operates, as a whole, within this framework of the dream as communion and study with ancestors. The dream and one's orientation toward it, including one's openness and response to it, exist together in a dynamic relationship which, in *Matunda*, takes place through improvised music but, for Makhathini as a sangoma, is more broadly part of an engagement with one's reality, how one conceives of it and the work one does in it.

The dance

Like the dream, dance is an important channel central to *Matunda ya Kwanza* and the broader fields and frameworks in which it moves. The sixth track is titled 'Okhalweni' which can be translated to mean 'at or from the waist.' My speculation is that this track signifies *umxhentso*, or *xhentsa* - a spiritual and musical practice which involves drumming, clapping, singing and, of course, dancing. Speaking about *amagqirha* at an *intlombe*, performing *umxhentso*, Booi says that "during the dance, the altered state of consciousness is induced and they are able to see things and divine."⁶⁷ Physically, it is a repetitive dance performed with the upper body fairly still, perhaps excepting the arms, with the lower body ('Okhalweni' – from the waist), the feet and legs working hard as the engine of the triplet-time step. Metaphysically *xhentsa* is, like the dream, a space of connection and communication with the dancer's ancestors, a practice of entering the realm of *amadlozi*. A sangoma once described to me the dance of *xhentsa* in the context of a collective gathering, such as an

⁶⁶ Beauty Ntombizanele Booi, *Three perspectives on ukuthwasa: The view from traditional beliefs, western psychiatry and transpersonal psychology*, MA thesis, (Rhodes University: 2004), 53.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 50.

intlombe.⁶⁸ He said that the energy and the connection between everyone in the room is central. It is important that no one leaves the room while someone, a thwasa or a sangoma, is dancing. He explained that the person dancing is connected to everyone who is in the room, through the music, the singing and the clapping and the drumming. The dancer uses that energy of connection, the repetitive rhythm of the drummer's beat and their synergy with them and everyone in the music, through their steps to connect with their ancestors through transcendental dance. While someone dances, no one can leave the space. If someone leaves, or the drummer stops playing, mid-dance, the connection to, and the communion with ancestors is disrupted. So, in umxhentso, it is through a grounded, collective connection that the possibilities of ancestral communication and transcendence of the material context is achieved. We recall Dr Opondo's liner notes which seem to locate Nduduzo's offering within this sacred dance, or something akin to it. She wrote about the music taking place in unity with the dancing living-dead through the committed improvisations of the ensemble which summon them through their "descending light passages, and when they meet the ground they dance in unity with all elements." Makhathini's dance with amadlozi is an ancient one which, on *Matunda*, takes place through improvisations on the form on tunes like 'Ancient dance', 'Okhalweni', 'Imagine' and 'Ehlobo' (in summer).

Amadlozi

As we understand this album to be situated in the communion with the ancestors, it seems necessary to see who is sitting around the fire. With regards to the living-dead with whom the dream and the dance are with, or are at least oriented towards, Makhathini makes reference, in different ways, to four people who have passed on from the world of the living in a way that opens up ancestry beyond normative understandings derived from sharing bloodlines. Mam'uBusi Mhlongo is invoked initially in his dream, although he didn't see her, the voice that he heard sounded like hers which he mentions in the liner notes. It is easy to see why Mhlongo, as a modern musician and a sangoma, an *Urban Zulu*, is someone who Nduduzo is visited by, with whom he shares a connection (and a calling?). Through *Matunda ya Kwanza* he is locating himself within a tradition in which she and others such as Miriam Makeba, played pioneering roles. Miriam Makeba is, not incidentally I think, also referenced indirectly, as is Mackay Davashe. Davashe composed the South African jazz standard 'Lakutshon'ilanga', the iconic version of which was initially performed by Makeba as the lead voice. Makhathini does a trio version of it on the album which we can hear as, not only a tribute to them but an acknowledgement of their presence in his journey, that they are

⁶⁸ Discussion with anonymous sangoma, September 2016, Tsolo, South Africa.

with him. Finally, *Matunda ya Kwanza* references and pays tribute to McCoy Tyner, one of the leading lights of modal and free jazz piano, whose presence in Makhathini's playing, is palpable. Is 'Tyner's visit', the last track on the album, his spirit's visit to earth in the bodily form of McCoy, does he appear when Makhathini plays, or did Tyner visit Makhathini in a dream?

Matunda ya Kwanza and the tradition/s of which it forms a part, through Makhathini, Mackay, McCoy, amadlozi, Miriam, others and Mhlongo, is in the cosmological framework of the dream and the dance as channels of ancestral communication and celebration. Not as some abstract, far out, supposedly deep spiritual ritual, but as an everyday practice, understanding reality as constituted and populated by those who are not here physically as well as those who are. An understanding that they can be called upon through the music to join us and dance with us here, on the ground. Importantly, as a sangoma, accompanied by amadlozi, the relationship with ancestors and the pedagogical space of the communion with them, is central to their work as diviners and healers. So, for Makhathini, like others before him, the music is that space of work in and on the material world. One of those who came before him, Miriam Makeba, a healer channelling the maternal, was spoken about by Abigail Kubeka, one of Makeba's fellow singers of her early days in The Skylarks:

Miriam's mom, she taught us many of the songs that we recorded with the Skylarks. Especially those songs that she sang when they were doing their traditional dancing, because she was a traditional healer, she was a singer, I think Miriam got it from her.

And:

You know, they sometimes say you don't have to be, you become a healer and do something else, but healing people. So Miriam was a healer through her music, not through her herbs like her mother. Her mother do it through herbs, she do it through her music.⁶⁹

At the one of the first gigs I played with Nduduzo, at the Obrit in December 2015, we played 'Lakutshon'ilanga', a very similar arrangement to the one on the album. At another gig we played together in Cape Town in April 2017 we played it as well in a similar arrangement but as more of a traditional ballad, without the 6/8 groove on the bridge. In preparation for both of the gigs Makhathini spoke to the band about the need to listen to, and really hear the song and to let it sing through us. We did not have to play a lot, the magic of the song is there in the notes. We needed only summon the spirit of Miriam to join us, and she does, through the melody. And when she joins, it is through the healing imperative, the healing energy to which Kubeka makes reference, which Makhathini also channels.

⁶⁹ *Mama Africa*, DVD, Mika Kaurismäki (dir.), (Matchbox Films: United Kingdom, 2012).

Ikhambi

iKhambi is Makhathini's most recent release (2017) and, outside of live performances, where a healing energy is sonically projected through the improvising ensemble's music, it is probably the most vivid material manifestation of his coming more deeply, consciously and confidently into this dual calling, which is to be a healer and an improviser, which is actually one calling: healing through improvised music. The healing impulse frames the album and locates the music's motive as it is the expression of the resolution of the ancestral summons to pursue the work of the sangoma.

Ikhambi's framing and purpose is somewhat predated and perhaps premeditated by an album made by Miriam Makeba, one of the ancestors channelled on *Matunda ya Kwanza*, in 1988, *Sangoma*. In her introductory notes to that album, Makeba writes about the multi-functional role of song and music in South African communities, situating song as a means of history and education amongst other things

But of these, my favourites are the songs that celebrate the mysteries of our spiritual lives. I know many of these because my mother was a *Sangoma*, which is the name given to a person possessed by the spirits of our ancestors. These spirits give the *Sangoma* the powers that make them respected diviners and healers in the community. They cure the sick, and they can predict the future. But more important, our people depend on our *Sangomas* to act as mediums between us and the ancestors who guide our lives.⁷⁰

And indeed it is the spiritual figure and the social function of the sangoma that grounds Makeba's album in a context that is constituted in the communion and communication between the sangoma and their ancestors, and the relation of that divine connection to their role as a healers in the community. *Ikhambi* is also here. Even as *iKhambi* represents Makhathini's own journey, it is part of both a broader decolonial contemporary movement in which Black people are (re)engaging various African cultural practices as roots to a different future, and it is located in a much older imperative that finds expression, in part, in southern African so-called popular, modern and traditional musics.

Healing, the frame

In the liner notes Nduduzo outlines and articulates five interconnected and overlapping senses in which he pursues, extends and understands *iKhambi* in the relation to the music and more broadly. From this frame of healing through improvised music, we witness the movement from and between the channels of the land to the plants to the cure and the remedy to healing through the music from African knowledges to Black love and consciousness toward a new universalism. The first of these

⁷⁰ Miriam Makeba, *Sangoma*, LP, Liner notes by Miriam Makeba, (Warner Brothers: Burbank, 1988).

senses is the root and sets the context for the others which are extensions from and beyond this one:

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.'⁷¹

The land, via iKhambi, the land's importance, its centrality even to African people, through the deep relationship with plants and herbal healing is channelled through the music. The understanding of people as not separate from the land but rather in relationship with it, in a mutually-constitutive communion, as part of the land and the land as part of us, is the imagination of the world in which iKhambi is therefore rooted and to which it aspires, (to return) as a possibility, or a more urgent necessity. Here, the return is proposed and projected through the music, understood as, not only a metaphor, but an actually existing extension of the healing impulse of the herbal remedy, through the sonic.

The second sense which he invokes and channels iKhambi deals with the overwhelming need for healing in Black communities. In response to this need, *iKhambi* seeks to re-imagine and re-package healing and how and where it takes place. It seeks to extend access to healing experiences to people by breaking down various barriers, such as social stigma and stereotypes that potentially stand between healing and people. He does this by "bring[ing] it closer to the people" and simultaneously insisting on the importance of artists as, not only spiritual workers, but as holders and transmitters of knowledge and as cultural workers. Thirdly,

iKhambi aims at situating improvised music in an African context; whereby a performance is carried as a ritual and carries some symbolic significance. iKhambi further wants to reimagine music performances in alternative spaces that encourages the exchange and flow of energies across the listeners and performers during a creative process. In this way the project also wants to remember and restore the functional purpose of music in ancient African traditions as a key component in the carrying of important rituals such as ukuthwasa, various types of initiation ceremonies and religious ceremonies.⁷²

The equation or comparison, of the functional import at least, of traditions such as ukuthwasa with jazz as a healing ritual proposes a vision of African cultures as unfinished, capable of growth and continuously cannibalising influences in the interests of best serving African people. Jazz is approached here as a site where the purpose of various 'ancient African traditions' can manifest or be expressed. Nduduzo's impulse here is not to return to 'ancient traditions' and resurrect them as

⁷¹ Nduduzo Makhathini, *iKhambi*, CD, Liner notes by Nduduzo Makhathini, (Universal Music: South Africa, 2017).

⁷² Ibid.

they were in a long-gone past. My sense is that, while there might be an element of romanticised nostalgia in longing for what is long gone (while in fact the long gone never left us), his broader intention is to understand what is or was useful in certain traditions and take that and apply it to his own practice. The aspect of music performing a specific function in social life – whether healing or symbolically representing growth through ceremony etc. - is what he sees as productive in ‘ancient African traditions’ and something that could be used to focus and enhance the work of improvised music as healing.

iKhambi in Nduduzo’s fourth articulation links to the other senses in that it concerns itself with the questions of history and cultural memory in the context of a contemporary decolonial movement. Linked to the third sense, while there is a perhaps questionable, perhaps ahistorical impulse to “remember the pure state of our people, their dance, songs and religious practices in their pre-colonial state” – an impulse which I understand to be partly produced by the colonial violence of reducing African history to fixity, staticness, and ahistoricity and reacting to that epistemic violence – the concern of the historical engagement is, again, for and with positive Black futures and the world. It is concerned with “a new look towards African knowledge systems and how they can contribute in the processes of decolonisation today and ultimately how Africa as a continent contributes to a universal consciousness.” It is Africa, in the first instance, for ourselves, but always oriented toward the future and being with and for the world. And:

Finally, *iKhambi* stands to be a passageway for healing and an accessible medium to other planes of consciousness that would help all humans to remember their original state of being further leading us to a new mode of humanism that allows freedom within and freedom without.⁷³

While bra Nduduzo doesn’t give any clues or hints as to what humans’ “original state” might be, other than existing on other planes of consciousness, we may speculate that he refers to the spirits that inhabit the human form: The immaterial souls materialised in sound, through soul, who are free in the sense of not being implicated in, subordinated to, or dependent on the material aspects of the reproduction of life, struggles over which largely determine dimensions of earthly freedom.

iKhambi’s frame, then, moves through plants, land, healing, music, consciousness and humanism toward a particular dialectic of freedom: within and without. Thereby insisting on the importance of the co-constitution of spiritual freedom and material freedom but also raising the question: if the originary form of the human is immaterial, a spirit, what might be a true form of freedom and how is the dialectic of its relationship with freedom in the material constituted? Unfortunately Makhathini

⁷³ Ibid.

does not answer this directly for us but his songs of the unseen suggest his own improvised response to the question.

Songs of the unseen

All of *Ikhambi's* tunes are accompanied by a short anecdote, story or tale. These stories provide a textual reference point for the cosmological context in which the music is situated, the context to which the music gives sonic expression. One of the strongest themes that emerges from the collection, perhaps one of its foundations, is how music functions as the space of materialisation of the unseen. How, through the sonic, that which is unseen is manifested in and through the material. How the living-dead are encountered, learned from, communicated with, welcomed and shown back home by the living.

'Amathambo' (bones) opens the album. This track, I think, is at least partly autobiographical; the anecdote accompanying it in the liner notes bears a strong resemblance to Nduduzo's own journey, part of which is captured by his introductory note in his 2015 album, *Listening to the ground*. First 'Amathambo,' then *Listening*:

A troubled man whose hopes have turned to ash, at the height of perilous times, visits a sangoma and discovers a new method of divination through improvised music that suddenly connects him to the unseen realm of his ancestors that he has been seeking for decades, soon after the ritual his troubles are stilled.⁷⁴

'Listening To The Ground' this project marks a very symbolical period of my life as a healer and improviser. It seeks to connect that which we see in our dreams and that which we experience in our daily lives. That which is seen and that which is unseen...

[It] is a story of a young man, who once in a dream was given bones (amathambo wokwebhula) and lost them. Now he seeks to find them in real life, he goes out to the wilderness to look but does not succeed, to later find them in black and white of the piano keys (the ivories) to which he was led to by his ancestors. Now he seeks ancestral codes to use the ivories for healing. How do you connect and communicate with the unseen? Sound is the answer.⁷⁵

In these excerpts from the different albums we see Nduduzo's own journey which links amathambo wokwebhuhla with piano keys, another connection between his calling as a sangoma and as a jazz musician. As the bones are a method of divining, communication with ancestors, the piano emerges as a parallel method to connect with the unseen.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Nduduzo Makhathini, *Listening to the ground*, CD, Liner notes by Nduduzo Makhathini, (Gundu Entertainment: Johannesburg, 2015).

In the three movements of 'Impande' (root) a young man on a quest, perhaps also partly autobiographical, is driven by the question of origin. On his quest he searches out his ancestors and is told to make a drum in order to communicate with them. He makes a drum and as he begins to play it, "mystical beings emerge from the clouds carrying massive drums big enough to carry God's intentions." In what follows he is taught "ancient songs" through the time spent with his ancestors, and he then goes back to his people to spread the word of what happened and he chants and sings until all the people have heard the message. The music is situated here in the cosmological understanding of the world as described by Nene:

Divination is the work of God with the help of ancestors who act as mediators between God and human kind and in turn, ancestors appoint people to represent them here on earth to carry the word of God (Mcetywa, 2001: 79). Furthermore, according to Mkhize, Kiguwa and Collins (2004: 40) there are different levels or hierarchy of living, in which human beings are living in the intermediate world and they can communicate directly or indirectly with God.⁷⁶

This understanding of reality links to the next one which locates a number of Makhathini's other songs of the unseen:

There are two types of ancestors; the integrated and the recently deceased. The recently deceased ancestors form part of the recently dead world. They remain in this world until a ritual has been done for them. This is done in order for them to be able to move to the world of ancestor-hood.⁷⁷

'Umlahlankosi' and 'Innocent child' deal with lost spirits of loved ones who have passed away, they are concerned with the need to perform a ritual such as that mentioned above by Nene. A ritual to welcome them or bring their spirits home, or as Nene says, usher or integrate them into the 'world of ancestor-hood.' 'Umlahlankosi', a beautiful AAB ballad-esque tune with an undertone of a lazy backbeat groove, proposes to be a sonic "medium for the recollecting of their lost spirits and showing them a way back home in a similar fashion that our forefathers used the branch of umlahlankosi, the sacred tree." As we have heard with *Ikhambi* as a whole – the album channeling the healing impulse of a herbal concoction, and by implication a deep connection to the land – this song, for the unseen, channels, umlahlankosi, in fact it proposes to be another form of it – the sacred tree which will show those who have passed on, the way home. 'Innocent child' works in a similar terrain, it is framed by a story of a child, who dies in a miscarriage, coming to visit her parents in a dream in order to retrieve her names as she cannot be integrated until a particular ceremony

⁷⁶ Jabulani Owen Nene, *IsiZulu traditional healers' perspective of ukhlonipha in context*, MA thesis, (University of South Africa, 2013), 44.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

has been performed. So “the elders are to later conduct a ceremony to name her and welcome her pure soul home.”

The closing song, opens a discussion of one of the dynamics operating throughout *Ikhambi* – Christianity in an African context. ‘Umakhelwane’ (neighbour) is a revisiting of the most important of the ten commandments; it is about loving ones neighbour. Nduduzo locates this supposedly Christian imperative within an African context by suggesting that the imperative of loving one’s neighbour is, in actual fact, foundational to the philosophy of Ubuntu. Christian symbols and stories in *Ikhambi* always appear as if they are embedded in an African cosmology by which they have been cannibalised. So as much as there is, for example, reference to the ten commandments and a tune called ‘Holy, holy’, it is figures such as “uMvelinqangi the ancient, genderless, formless and uncreated God”, “the rain Goddess Nomkhubulwane”, processes such as ‘ukuthwasa’, and songs such as ‘Amathambo’, ‘Umlahlankosi’ and ‘Umthakathi’ which seem to locate *ikhambi* within a cosmological world associated with the word’s Zulu origins. When Christian or western symbols appear, it is because they are part of Nduduzo’s journey and his world, he and his music have absorbed them to better develop and articulate his message.

The impact of this work, through Makhathini, which is also to say through Makeba, Mhlongo, and others, is the insistence of the essential, or potential, togetherness of the work of a sangoma and a jazz musician, The insistence on their co-constitution and the productive elements of that combination, is that this widens and pushes forward both the field of sangomas and the field of the jazz musician, opening up space to define each in the other’s terms, bringing a whole set of aesthetics and cosmological knowledges to bear on the traditions, to effectively enact their possible co-existence as a single tradition. Jazz in South Africa is not the normative or originary context of the spiritual and healing practices that we are referred to through Makhathini’s music. Despite this, it has been resolutely pursued as such and has been mobilised as one potential space of communion with ancestors situated in the cosmological world of the sangoma. We turn now to someone who Makhathini learnt a great deal from, through playing in his bands in the mid-late 2000s...

Pursuance: Speculative and imperative motion

Midweek in early May 2011. Tagore’s in Observatory, Cape Town, is packed. It doesn’t take much to pack Tagore’s out, twenty people feels full. But there must be more like fifty in there that night. Perhaps people knew that this would be his last gig and that’s why we all came out. I figured the cat on the right side of the stage, playing soprano and flutes, channeling something deep, some heavy

sounds, and generally looking hip, clad in full black leather – top and trousers – must be Zim. It was my first (and obviously my last time) seeing him perform. I'd heard of him but didn't know any of his music or didn't really have any sense of who he was as a musician, or a philosopher. I was late on the train to Zim in that sense so this gig came as a blessing in a number of ways, blessed to see him before he transcended. The gig was a performance by Akoustik Knot – Mark Fransman's avant garde project – featuring Zim Ngqawana. I remember Jonno Sweetman, and Brydon Bolton doing drum and bass duty respectively, Mark playing accordion, bass clarinet, and saxophones, and perhaps one other horn player, maybe a trombonist, who I can't quite remember. Anyway, the gig was fire. A lot of it went way over my head and Zim was playing way out most of the night. Nearly blew the roof right off. It remains one of the best gigs I have ever seen - Zim's performance in particular. Two or three days later, in Johannesburg, he passed away. Suddenly.

That gig was my beginning of my still-ongoing, ever-deepening fascination with Zim. This fascination manifests here, in this project, as a study of two of his albums – *Zimphonic Suites* (2001), and *Vadzimu* (2003). Zim's music is remarkable for the level and layers of thought embedded in it, the remarkable number of things one is referred to from the material. From studying Zim's music and all the outsides that its insides refer you to, I came to approach his suites somewhat as essays, his songs something like paragraphs. In this study I engage the following essays: 'Satire', 'Liberation Suite', and 'Nocturnes' from *Vadzimu*, and 'Ingoma ya Kwantu', 'Intlombe Variations', and 'Abaphantsi (Ancestry Suite)', on *Zimphonic Suites*.

Quoting him again, from the introduction, Zim situates our study with him: "Our playing should be informed by history. We should not be afraid to say that the revolution is not over, and refining our music is part of that revolution."⁷⁸

Ingoma Ya Kwantu

The suite – 'Ingoma ya kwantu', and the whole *Zimphonic* album, by virtue of 'Ingoma' being the opening suite – is introduced by (an) 'Invocation.' This is important because the invocation provides the metaphysical context for the content of the rest of the album. Since the album is understood as a suite - one story constituted by a number of different anecdotes or fragments in which, even as the fragments can be understood as single works in themselves, each fragment finds its full meaning as part of a broader collection - whose collective meaning transcends some of its parts. Hearing

⁷⁸ Zim Ngqawana cited in Gwen Ansell, "Gwen Ansell on Zim Ngqawana," accessed on 30 January 2018, <http://kaganof.com/kagablog/2011/05/25/gwen-ansell-on-zim-ngqawana/>

‘Invocation’ and its impulse, as part of the whole, and therefore situating the rest of the suite, is imperative.

Aesthetically, one cannot help but draw similarities to the African-American spiritual jazz tradition. The divine introduction to John Coltrane’s *Love Supreme*, ‘Acknowledgement’ is an obvious parallel. ‘Resolution’ – the third track on *Love Supreme* and the third track (different song, not a cover of Coltrane’s ‘Resolution’) on *Zimphonic Suite* – is an even clearer, more explicit reference to that album and a deeper resonance with, and reverence for Coltrane as a figure and his journey in music through spirituality, in spirituality through music, and that journey as a response to a particular calling. On ‘Invocation’, Zim’s ‘flute floats over the swelling rhythm section as they move in free time, embellishing and punctuating Zim’s lines with walls of sound and fleeting runs around chords. The ensemble invokes. It summons the spirits of those who, physically, are not there but are with them, or those they would like to be with them. Perhaps one of these is Coltrane? Through this ritual they ask the spirits to join them in the music. It is this act, this practice of invocation that locates the performance of this album as a communion of spirits.

Kevin Gibson, the drummer on the album, with mallets, making the drum kit sing, sets up the groove and the feeling and the headspace and the mood on the second track, ‘Royal drumming’ which, following ‘Invocation’, serves as an interlude and introduction to ‘Resolution.’ ‘Royal Drumming’ performs a similar role to Jimmy Garrison’s iconic *Love Supreme* bassline which sets the foundation for ‘Acknowledgement,’ a moment of gathering oneself or preparing ourselves before the difficult task of grappling towards the possibility of resolve. Here, in the metaphysical context of a communion with spirits, ‘Royal Drumming’ might be heard as Zim’s nod to the foundational role of drums in spiritual practices such as umxhentso which we explored with Makhathini, and *malomobo* which we explored with Malombo, and the centrality and importance of drums as channels of ancestral communication. After the groove foundation is laid, bassist Herbie Tsoaeli joins with his simple but hypnotic line that, along with Zim’s melody, which he plays on flute, are the skeleton of ‘Resolution.’ Andile Yenana dances all over the ivories, giving the tune an aesthetic and emotional dimension of ethereality, scarcely locking in with the rhythm section in any perceptible groove like McCoy might, rather Yenana is perhaps suggesting and insisting on the elusive nature of resolution. Tsoaeli’s line grounds the improvising ensemble’s movements as Zim moves through a number of moods – to a transcendent mania, back down to a sparse and open space of regrouping before ascending again towards an almost exhausted repetitive restatement of the theme to close the meditation.

That is the end of the first suite, 'Ingoma ya Kwantu.' 'Ingoma' meaning song, 'kwantu' could mean a person or a place of gathering, or perhaps both. Later on in the album Zim names a tune 'www.kwantunent.com (AKA the Afrikan continent)' so we can see how both the idea of a person and a place of or for people gathering might be invoked here. 'Ingoma ya Kwantu': song of the people or the place where people (the living and the living-dead?) gather.

Satire

'Satire' is the first suite on *Vadzimu*. It opens with 'Umthakathi', the word connotes something like a witch or witchdoctor, a being with some mystical powers with evil intentions, someone who might put a curse on you. The track opens with an unaccompanied percussion ensemble playing a groove which is later joined by an ensemble of vocalists singing/chanting in call and response. And then we hear a number of lines said/shouted back and forth, such as: "Kunjani mkhulu'wami? Kunjengezulu kuyachisa kuti-be!" (How is it my brother? It is as hot as the heavens!). In our speculations, which will become clearer as we look at the rest of 'Satire' and rest of the album, the 'umthakathi' being inferred here is the white man or colonialism more broadly who has made it desperately hot here on earth.

The second track, which is the one which I have probably listened to the most on this album, largely through spending time with it practicing my groove, is 'Kubi.' After the swinging 6/8 intro with the rhythm section – drums, congas, bass, piano – playing as one, committed and surrendered to the collective project of the groove and the mood, with minor embellishments from the harp, Zim initiates a call and response conversation between himself and a chorus:

Zim: Ayoyoyo madoda kwenzenjani? (Men, what must happen?)

Chorus: Sawubona ekuseni ukuti kwenzenjani. (We will see in the morning what must happen.)

Chorus: Kubi madoda, kubi! (It's bad times men, bad times!)

Zim: Madoda ndibolekeni ibatjie, ndiya godola. (Men, lend me a jacket, I am cold.)

Chorus: Kubi madodeni, kubi. (It is bad where the men are, very bad.)

Zim: Madoda ndibolekeni ihempi, ihempi emdaka. (Men, lend me a shirt, even a dirty shirt.)

Chorus: Kubi madodeni, kubi. (It is bad where the men are, very bad.)

Zim: Madoda ndibolekeni ibroekwe, eyam ikrazukile. (Men, lend me some pants, mine are torn.)

Chorus: Kubi madodeni, kubi! (It is bad where the men are, very bad!)

And, later, after Zim's harrowing yet transcendently beautiful soprano solo, his horn-line resolves into a repetitive melodic phrase and the chorus comes in to sing possibly the most deeply saddening, gut-wrenching, hopeless and homeless hook:

Chorus: Sithwele ubunzima ngoba asihlali apha. (We are carrying a weight/burden/heaviness because we do not live here.)

Through this, we hear 'Kubi' as a meditation on the bad times, the dire material conditions of men who are migrant labourers in the city from various parts of Southern Africa. It is about the coldness, not just physical, but also the spiritual alienation of the abject poverty of urban Black life and being away from home. It is about the burden that migrants, specifically men in this case, carry – the material responsibility to those back home and the weight of exile. Importantly though, in and through this, Zim projects a vision of community not based in colonial and apartheid identities, but rather in shared material conditions and the common experience of not being from the city. Thereby uniting not only the struggle of different South African 'tribes' but also the struggle of others who have come, through the system of migrancy, from 'other countries' – such as Lesotho, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi and 'Mozambique' which is, not incidentally, the name of one of the other tracks on the album. The rest of 'Satire' helps contextualise this alternate vision of community. 'Gumboot dance', 'Interlude,' and 'Amagoduka part 3', respectively the third, fourth and fifth tracks, deepen and extend the analysis which we have begun here.

Gumboot dancing as a practice and as a tradition emerges out of and references the experience of male migrancy most particularly in the industry of mining. As a cultural practice one can read and understand it as something that navigates the dialectic of migrancy, being away from home but constructing cultural continuity between the new space, the city, and home. David Coplan anthropologises gumboot dancing as part of a tradition of "new urban-influenced rural dances," providing a fairly square but useful description of it:

One such dance, *is'cathulo* ('shoe') was adopted by students in Durban; from there it spread to dock workers who produced spectacular rhythmic effects by slapping and pounding their rubber Wellington boots in performance. All this rhythm made it popular with mine and municipal labourers elsewhere, especially Johannesburg.⁷⁹

Given this historical context which embeds the practice in Black people's improvisations through the violent development of colonial capitalism in Southern Africa, 'Gumboot dance' opens with someone

⁷⁹ David B. Coplan, *In township tonight! South Africa's Black city music and theatre*, (Longman: London, 1985, 78.

(Zim?) improvising on some kind of mouth instrument, not quite a kazoo but not far off, over an ensemble of gumboot dancers and a guitar player strumming a muted rhythm. A voice then shouts calls to the dancers who all respond with some choreographed dance pattern. The dancing and the guitar continue throughout the track towards the end of which a different voice (possibly an older onlooker?) warns:

Pasop man, ey man, hey! (Watch out man, hey!)

Umlungu akayifuni lento! (The white person doesn't want this!)

Ugxosha umlungu! (You're chasing away the white person)

Umlungu akayifuni lento uyenzayo! (The white person doesn't want this thing you are doing!)

The tone one gets from this man's shouts is one partly of warning but also potentially, hesitant approval, reluctant endorsement and encouragement. This old man knows the danger that the persistence of culture poses to a system of oppression and exploitation; but he also knows the violence of colonialism and apartheid. He recognises that the gumboot dancers are flirting with danger, he knows what they are doing is dangerous, but he is also with and for them, tacitly approving of their cultural challenge to the white man.

The fourth track 'Interlude' is a short fourteen second djembe piece reminiscent of West African percussion ensembles such as the one led and recorded by Famoudou Konaté on the album *Songs and rhythms from Guinea*. 'Interlude' recalls the call-and-response introduction of a tune like 'Lolo' which opens Konaté's album. While short, Zim's 'Interlude' can be read as a nod to a connection – whether political, cultural, personal or otherwise – to West Africa and an extension of the pan-African solidarity and cultural consciousness.

'Amagoduka part 3 (Migrant Workers)' ends off 'Satire.' 'Amagoduka' means those who go back home. The lyrics are as follows:

Ngeke ulale weDlamini ngekulale. (You, Dlamini, will never sleep, never will you sleep)

Ngeke ulale namhlanje ngekulale. (You will never sleep today, never will you sleep)

Ngeke ulale nomKapa ngekulale. (You, person in Cape Town, will never sleep, never will you sleep)

As we recall from Booi and others, sleep is a very important space where, through dreams, ancestors connect, advise and send messages through amathongo. To not be able to sleep means that this important channel is closed or blocked, alienating someone from their ancestors. And, relatedly, home is an important site which grounds a people's spiritual, social and cultural life. Many ceremonies can only be performed at home. So the song refers us to a sense of discomfort, an

overwhelming sense of unease at the alienation of being away from home; this unease being both symbolised by, and manifesting itself in the impossibility of sleep within one's current circumstances – being away from home. Whether one needs to go home to attend to familial and ancestral matters, for a particular ceremony, or one is being threatened in the city, 'Amagoduka' speaks of a deep need to go and connect with home.

We can see how the narrative and analysis of the suite, 'Satire', begins to fit together. White people representing colonialism and capitalism are the source of Black people's bad times, articulated in 'Kubi.' 'Umthakathi' is a (satirical?) accusation of white people as witchdoctors, the source of Black misery. The curse of Black people. They, representing colonial capitalism, are the reason we are migrant workers, alienated from home, the reason we can't sleep and the reason we need to go home, to connect with our ancestors because they cannot reach us in the sleepless city. We, as African people, sharing in these conditions of alienation from home and the resultant spiritual and material deprivation, need to continually involve ourselves in cultural practices such as those in 'Interlude' and 'Gumboot dance', because they, and our solidarity, will be the sources of our resistance to, and final triumph over colonialism.

Intlombe Variations

On sangoma gatherings and ceremonies, Intlombe, Booi says:

Intlombe involves singing, clapping of hands, beating of drums and dancing (*ukuxhentsa*) by *amagqira* wearing their full regalia. During the dance, the altered state of consciousness is induced and they are able to see things and divine. The *intlombe* serves as a group therapy, as it results in the dancers coming out feeling physically, emotionally and psychologically healed.⁸⁰

'Intlombe variations' opens with a recording of such a gathering, of *amagqirha* singing and clapping, this is 'Diviner's ceremony.' As the track fades in the ensemble is singing "Kumnandi ebhofolo indawo yamageza" (it is nice in Buffalo, the place where people are crazy). After singing they perform the practice of *ukuNgqula* which is the recitation, by a *gqirha*, of her lineage and people who she has trained with in the process of becoming a healer, a diviner. As one person is reciting and referencing, the rest respond and affirm with "camagu" which is

⁸⁰ Booi, *Three perspectives on ukuthwasa*, 50-51.

[A] Xhosa term that is used in all the activities that are associated with ancestors. Camagu broadly means, “Be honored”, “Thank you”, “Let it be so”, “I have heard”, “I promise”, “Give respect, dignity and spirituality in the African context”.⁸¹

After they have observed ukuNgqula they sing the same song again and the track fades out. The next track is ‘Ebhofolo (This Madness)’ which opens with bra Andile setting up the groove that carries the song; a beautiful swinging vamp in 9/8 of which he plays four measures before the rest of the band joins him. After the groove is sitting correct Zim sings/chants:

Kukude ebhofolo indawo yamageza. (It’s far to Buffalo where the people are crazy)

Kumnandi kulomama indawo yamageza. (It’s nice at my mother’s place where the people are crazy)

Ndicinga ebhofolo indawo yamageza. (I am thinking of Buffalo where the people are crazy)

Kukude Emnxukweni indawo yamageza. (It’s far to Emnxukweni where the people are crazy)

After this vocal section he improvises with his vocals while the ensemble keeps the groove locked down. He then plays on harmonica which carries through to the end of the track along with his shouts which are still punctuating and galvanising the groove. More and more sounds come into the mix, whistles, some kind of horn, and then Zim enters on soprano saxophone over and in the midst of this cacophony which seems to really channel and capture madness and the spirit of the crazy. After his saxophone improvisations an ensemble begins a rhythmic clap and along with the clapping comes the singing/chanting of “kwela mageza” (place of crazy) and the busy track fades out in this quite manic state.

In this suite, Zim improvises his way through intlombe, madness, his mother’s house and spirituality. He highlights a definite continuity between ‘Diviner’s ceremony’ and ‘Ebhofolo’, between spiritual practices of amagqirha and his own music. The song that the amagqirha sing (‘kumnandi ebhofolo...’) in ‘Diviner’s ceremony’ becomes adopted and altered by Zim as it appears in ‘Ebhofolo’ as the main vocal line. This is a fairly blatant statement about the continuity between these two spaces – intlombe and jazz. Perhaps jazz, through ‘Intlombe variations’, is a variation of an intlombe as the suite’s title might suggest? This orientation toward intlombe points to a dynamic relation with tradition, suggesting that tradition, in this case the tradition of intlombe, is already and has always been a varied practice, and is still open to be varied with.

⁸¹ Icamagu Institute, “Hello world,” accessed on 26 October 2017, <http://www.icamaguinstitute.co.za/2017/04/21/hello-world/>

Further, what connects the two songs and situates them together is their invocation of, or engagement with *mageza* – this madness. There is often widespread social stigma around both healers and artists/creatives as crazy. This is partly seen in how many of both these (not separate) groups of people end up in, or move through psychiatric hospitals, and how many of these would-be geniuses are thrown away by society, often due to an incorrect diagnosis founded in the limitations of western medicine dealing with matters of ancestry and spiritual illness such as *inthewaso*, as well as the severe pressures of living in a capitalist society, especially for people who do not fit neatly into it. *Mageza*, meaning crazy, generally has a negative connotation and is often used as a derogatory description of people who are mentally ill. This was clear recently when Gwede Mantashe got publicly criticised for using the word to describe the people who died in the Life Esidemeni Massacre.⁸² So while the word has negative, even derogatory connotations, my sense is that Zim is not necessarily evoking it in that sense but is trying to complicate it and potentially even associate with, or appropriate it.

In ‘*Ebhofolo*’, and in ‘*Diviner’s ceremony*,’ *mageza* is invoked in relation to buffalo, nice-ness, Zim’s mother’s place, a thought, and being far away. So the crazy and this madness are far away yet simultaneously still close or familiar, since his mother’s place was an association, and it was nice to be at her place where the people are crazy. In *Soweto blues*, we recall that Zim was quoted to say: “Music isn’t just notes. Every note has a social meaning. I’m singing my mother’s knowledge of the plants that grew around her,”⁸³ From this excerpt, it would be reasonable to assume that Zim’s mother was a healer or a herbalist of some sort. In many southern African traditions, and indeed further afield, knowledge of plants is commonly associated with healing. Whether Zim’s mother was initiated into a particular healing tradition or not I am unsure, but the connection between the music, madness and healing are present in ‘*Ebhofolo*’ in some way, we need only to dig a bit more.

On the relationship between going mad and spirituality, Feya Faku, a close friend, former classmate and housemate, and musical collaborator of Zim has this to say:

⁸² “During his speech at the ANC Gauteng provincial policy conference on Friday, in isiXhosa, Mantashe referred to the 94 mentally ill patients who died after they were moved from Life Esidimeni Health Care Centre as “*mageza*”. Though the word does describe a mentally ill person, some on Twitter said it was an offensive word and his tone was “insensitive”. Even former Radio 702 presenter Redi Tlhabi took to Twitter to ask if Mantashe was right in using the word. “Xhosa-speaking SAfricans, I’ve only ever heard ‘*Ligeza*’ spoken negatively. Can it also be literal term to refer to mentally ill patients?” she asked. Responding to her question, most said the word existed but was not appropriate,” (<https://citizen.co.za/news/south-africa/1551511/watch-mantashe-slated-for-calling-mentally-ill-patients-mageza/> accessed on 26 October 2017).

⁸³ Gwen Ansell, *Soweto blues: Jazz, popular music and politics in South Africa*, (Continuum: New York, 2004), 264.

When it gets to spirituality you need guidance otherwise you go mad. You need someone to guide you. That is why other people go mad because there is no guidance. It is scary this spiritual thing. From people, I know, you need guidance.⁸⁴

Through 'Ebhofolo,' Zim is drawing a relationship between healers/diviners – through his mother who has a relationship with, and knowledge of plants, and through 'Diviner's ceremony' – and madness or craziness. He is also challenging the derogatory connotation of mageza through this because he says it is nice at his mother's place which is also the place of this madness. Are healers/diviners the crazy? Or perhaps, through Feya Faku, are those potential diviners, latent healers, those without guidance, the crazy? Zim is not afraid of engaging this mageza thing, I think he embraces it. This comes through best in the singing of "kwela mageza" as the song fades out. The place of madness. The place of crazy. This is the place of madness? We are (in) this madness?

Abaphantsi (Ancestry Suite)

The third suite on *Zimphonic*, 'Abaphantsi (ancestry suite)', is made up by 'Sād Afrika (A Country Without a Name),' 'Ode to Princess Magogo (Classical...),' 'Old Blues (Early Harmonic Devices),' 'Compassion (Ubuntu),' and 'www.kwantunent.com (AKA The Afrikan Continent). Abaphantsi are amadlozi, the ancestors. literally translated, abaphantsi means "those who are on the ground."⁸⁵ 'Abaphantsi (ancestry suite),' locates the music, simultaneously, in a cosmology that values and places importance on ancestors in everyday spiritual practices and, as we will see through what emerges from the music, as a progressive site of Black solidarity within South Africa and between South Africa and the rest of the continent in its relation to the world.

'Sād Afrika,' Afrique du Sud. Zuid-Afrika. Sudafrica. Südafrika. European names for a construct of Euro-modernity: The nation-state territory commonly thought to be South Africa, the country without a name, only named by its geographical position on the continent cut up by the Europeans, only given an identity by the historical process of pillage: A sad African reality. The tune itself, short with no solos, is a meditation on a melodic theme, sounds as a lament. Rhythmically and in the feeling it is somewhere between a slow, sorrowful ghoema and a ballad- reminiscent of a lot of Abdullah Ibrahim's longing for, imagining, invoking and reaching out to home through music from

⁸⁴ Struan Douglas, "Feya Faku's living legacy," accessed on 26 October 2017, <http://www.afribeat.com/sajazz/jazzmusicians/feafaku.htm>

⁸⁵ Personal correspondence with Julie Nxadi, 30 October 2017.

exile. In the context of the rest of the suite, I hear this track as a critique of nationalism and the very, sad, foundations of South Africa, in itself and in the context of the continent.

The second suite tune, a beautiful, short solo piano piece, is 'Ode to Princess Magogo (Classical...).' Magogo Sibilile Mantithi Ngangezinye kaDinizulu was a woman strongly affiliated with performance and study of Zulu musical traditions. A sophisticated player of ugubhu and isithonholo and a pronounced composer, she was the daughter of "Paramount Chief Dinizulu (1868-1913, son of King Cestshwayo, son of Mpande, son of Senzangakhona and brother of Shaka and Dingane)."⁸⁶ She was also a singer, a poet and was deeply knowledgeable of Zulu history. Zim's appraisal of Magogo is a clear extension of respect and a paying of tribute to a person who did a lot to develop and keep alive African musics. It can also be heard as a claiming of African traditional musics as 'the' or 'a' form of classical music. There is also an act of refusal of apartheid-defined separate identities internal to his appraisal of Magogo. The association with Zulu-ness from a place of Xhosa-ness,⁸⁷ within the framework of 'Abaphantsi (Ancestry Suite), is an act of solidarity, is an extension of cultural and ancestral horizons as well as a critique of the ideology of tribalism.

Next, 'Old Blues (Early Harmonic Devices)', homophonically recalling Miles' 'All Blues', is a sixteen bar form which Zim and Andile solo over, swinging hard. The tune and its name suggest and claim the African roots of blues music and, insist, in a similar way to the borrowing of the title 'Resolution' from Coltrane, that there is an African counterpart to the African-American modern jazz tradition. And, further, that the two are, and have always been, related and are in conversation. The continent's harmonic concepts historically form the basis of the blues, the Black music of part of the diaspora, through shared, although violently interrupted ancestry. This shared cultural connection extends solidarity, through the prism of ancestry, to the African American musical traditions and of course the people who made the tradition. 'Compassion (Ubuntu),' the following tune is a fairly dark, foreboding solo piano piece which betrays itself by allowing beauty, hope and joy to slip through the cracks every now and again, underlies the extension of solidarity to the diaspora.

'www.kwantunent.com (AKA the Afrikan continent)' is the last track of 'Abaphantsi' and it situates South Africa within in its continental context. I read this, as an extension of "Sād Afrika" and largely as a conclusion or a way forward out of the mire that sad Africa identifies. It is an insurgent critique of the limits of nationalism and the need to think of collectivity and belonging and community, not in

⁸⁶ David K. Rycroft, "The Zulu bow songs of Princess Magogo," *African Music*, 5:4, (1975/1976), 41-42.

⁸⁷ Zim had a complex, critical relationship with being Xhosa and understandings of associated culture and traditions. Although he later rejected Xhosa as a label, category and identity, he acknowledged that he grew up within a Xhosa context.

terms of national identity, but beyond it. In an age of globalisation, it is a push to understand ourselves as part of a bigger whole, a broader community that is comprised by Africa and then the world. But perhaps also to remind us not to allow the continent to be reduced to a URL. Kwantu-
 nent designates a place where people come to gather, what might be lost of that in a cyber-age?

Altogether, 'Abaphantsi (Ancestry Suite)' critiques South Africa and its historical basis, in its internal relationships between people as well as in its relation to the rest of the continent, the diaspora, and the whole world in an era of 'gobbleisation' as he refers to it. But beyond critiquing the situation he points to ancestry as an alternative way of locating ourselves in the world. He extends ancestry beyond familial lineage to people like Princess Magogo and shows how, through the blues, we share ancestry with African-Americans, and the whole African continent in a global world. All this locates 'Abaphantsi' as a piece of revisionist cultural history performed for the future. It is an investigation into, and a reclamation of African histories that can serve as correctives or remedies to the miserable circumstances of 'Säd Afrika.' Importantly, it is all situated in an orientation to the world that places a lot of importance on ancestors and their role in guiding us.

Zim raps:

[The] African transformation that we need... We are not scared to say that the revolution is not over. We still need to work and refine our music, education, economics, everything. It's in the interest of some people to perpetuate what is already in place... to go forward in blindness, we have to hide in ignorance. Ignorance and arrogance, that's a bad combination! That's one of the problems with this 'African' nonsense: African Renaissance – what does it mean? It means nothing... The system is no longer about South Africa. It's about controlling the whole world. We are being gobbled up in a global village.⁸⁸

Liberation Suite

'Liberation Suite' is the third, penultimate suite on *Vadzimu*. 'Tafelberg/carnival samba' introduces the bitter-sweet liberation. The song opens with the pianist setting up the atmosphere, moving in slow, loose time, then the horns – two saxophones – lazily join with a statement of the theme before the pianist, solo again, sets up the groove which the rest of the band joins and then they all play through the head. It is rooted in a ghoema/samba feel and is an obvious reference to the historical parallels and multiple relationships between the Brazilian carnival and samba, and the Cape carnival, the Kaapse Klopse and the ghoema tradition. Both traditions were developed by people, many of whom descended from slaves, who were shipped from various parts of the world to other places. In

⁸⁸ Zim Ngqawana cited in Gwen Ansell, *Soweto blues*, 264.

the case of samba, Africans from, mostly, but not exclusively the west coast of the continent, to Brazil. And regarding ghoema, people from Indonesia, India, Malaysia, Madagascar, Mozambique and elsewhere, ended up in the Cape. While the music of both of these traditions, particularly in their carnival costumes, is generally associated with joy and celebration, the historical circumstances leading to their development is a less joyous occasion. Perhaps for that reason the song comes across as if it is putting on a smile but doesn't really feel like smiling, as if there is something deeply sinister behind the music that appears jovial and joyful. Zim plays a tearing solo over the form, channeling joy, celebration and the hard realities of history.

'Unamaqhinga na', the next tune in the suite is a song about getting tricked by a skelm. Compared with the previous song, it seems more reconciled with its lack of joy and comes across as introspective in the introduction, with someone reflecting on a relationship. Zim asks:

Unamaqhinga na? (Do you not have tricks?)

Hayi undigqibile thixo! (He got me, God!)

Undigqibile madoda, ndiyahamba mna. (He got me, men, now I am leaving)

Beyond the translation of these lyrics and the sorrow and disappointment of the overall mood of the tune, I think it only really finds its meaning in the suite as a whole. Immediately after 'Unamaqhinga Na' fades out you hear the bassist and drummer enter with force, swinging free at furious pace. After the rhythm cats have laid it down for a few measures the horns enter with the melody of 'Nkosi sikeleli' played in open, free time much slower than the swinging tempo. They repeat the melody twice before the horns take frantic solos and the tune ends with an upbeat, grooving, almost ridiculous section based on an interpretation of the melodic phrase from 'sechaba sa heso, sechaba sa South Afrika.' This is 'Anthem' and it concludes 'Liberation suite' with probably the most deconstructed tweaked out intense furious delirious version of the national anthem that's ever been played. The effect of this de- and re-construction of the sonic element of the rainbow nation project, is perhaps the suggestion that we need to reinvent this liberation thing in the same way that Zim's ensemble reimagined the national anthem.

My reading of 'Liberation Suite' is assisted by the idea of 'satire' which, as we recall, is the title of the first suite on this album. I understand it as a satirical critique of the carnival-like mania and euphoria of South Africa's 'independence' and so-called post-apartheid society more broadly. 'Unamaqhinga Na' points to the trickery of the 'transition moment', trickery that was carried out behind closed

doors by the ANC and the Boere.⁸⁹ Trickery that was hidden away by the illusive joy of the dawn of democracy, the carnival-like euphoria, trickery's mask which led to the to the continuation of Black people's woes under the new rubric of sweet liberation.

Nocturnes

The last suite on *Vadzimu* is a trio of solo piano pieces. As if despondent and frustrated by the illusions of liberation that characterised the 1994 moment and everything after it, in 'Nocturnes' it is as if Zim proposes the night as a different space from which to imagine ourselves. It might be some sort of lullaby for a broken and torn nation but also, the night is the space in the shadows and the time after work where Black spaces, jazz spaces, make light. The first tune is 'Umoya' which means breath, air or spirit and it starts in the dark with prominent bass tones dominating the frequencies before moving through more upsetting, at times, dreadful moods with tiny glimmers of light. Is the song a reminder to breathe even in the dark? A reminder that, as bad as times get, we still have our spirits and our breath, which can be the basis of being together? A reminder of the spiritual practices which will continue to ground us in the political mire of the present? On the importance of breath and its relation to improvised music, Ngqawana says the following:

[It's] all about breath...So, it's not about music as I said, it's about locking in through breath, locking in to looking at each other. That can help. The music is secondary. Improvisation is very broad, as I said, it's about freedom.⁹⁰

Breathing is a way to get together, to connect to one another on a deeper level, a mode of study perhaps or a way into it. Music is the manifestation of that togetherness, but breath is the condition of being together, the basis of freedom which allows music to be expressed.

'Vadzimu' is the next track, a terribly free sounding, highly dissonant, discordant and incoherent piano piece making use of many of the piano's sonic possibilities beyond the normative striking of the keys although the player also does that. Victor Ralushai provides some context on the song and the album's title:

⁸⁹ For a discussion of some of the economic aspects of this trickery, see Naomi Klein's chapter "A democracy born in chains", in *The shock doctrine: The rise of disaster capitalism*, (Random House of Canada: Toronto, 2007).

⁹⁰ *The legacy*, Online film, Aryan Kaganoff (dir.), (African Noise Foundation: South Africa, 2014), <https://vimeo.com/108933925/>

‘Ngoma dza Vhadzimu’ (lit. drums of the ancestor-spirits). But note that *Ngoma dze midzimu (vhadzimu)* and *Ngoma dza Malombo* generally mean the same thing in Venda. Many informants describe *Malombo* as a sacred dance performed by possessed people.⁹¹

Following this excerpt, the piece can be understood more deeply. One can easily imagine ‘Vadzimu’ being recorded by someone possessed. Understood in the night, this tune might also hint at, not only jazz as a nocturnal pursuit, but also the spirits which visit people in their sleep and their dreams and how, recalling Feya and the madness of latent healers, that can drive you crazy if you do not have the correct guidance.

‘Nocturnes’ ends with ‘Thula Sizwe’, a beautiful, slow-moving, calming, soothing, slightly hopeful tune in the framework of unmistakable mzansi sounds. The title of the song is a combination of ‘Thina Sizwe’ and ‘Thula Baba.’ ‘Thina Sizwe’ is about we, the Black nation, crying for our land which was stolen from us by the Boers and, depending which version of the many you prefer, let us beat them so they give it back to us. ‘Thula Baba’ is a lullaby that a parent would sing to a child to stop them crying. We can assume that ‘Thula Sizwe’s message is somewhere between these two tracks.

Taken as a whole, then, ‘Nocturnes’, I listen to as a message for South Africa who has been tricked into a false consciousness through the illusion captured in ‘Liberation Suite.’ The night time emerges through Zim as the place in the shadows, away from the euphoria, the mania, and the brokenness of the false liberation. It emerges as a place where we can get together, breathe together, be together in an authentic way, and have that condition of collectivity be and become the basis of a true freedom. The hints toward what that freedom might be, are in ‘Vadzimu’ which engages a spiritual tradition rooted in Venda from Zim, a Xhosa, an understanding of ourselves beyond ethnic/tribal identities, breathing together. This is his message as ‘Thula Sizwe’ gently calms us, the Black nation as we cry, telling us that, although shit is fucked, it will be alright.

...

What bra Zim presents us with is a mode of very open and dynamic relation between what is in the music and what is outside of it. In the between of the content and the context, musical and social worlds, we see these two things constitute each other. In various ways they are in continuous conversation and dialogue such that the spectre of distinction is fleeting, elusive and fluid. The broad and specific context of the music shapes, forms and informs the content. What is inside the music is simultaneously outside of it whilst still present in its out sides. In the between of the sides it is freedom that mediates, connects and co-creates spirituality, community, politics, history, ritual,

⁹¹ Ralushai, *The origin and social significance of Malombo*, 2.

tradition and breath such that the soul spirit present past umoya and the mind are gathered in holy communion in collective study resulting in a worldly orientation refusing estrangement. The between are a politics of anti-alienation: A refusal of the separation of spirituality and politics. A denial of the distinction between history and ancestry. A refusal of the alienation of freedom from tradition. Refusal of the abstraction of avant garde music from community, and eating and breathing together.

You see, ours is not a profession, it's not a job. I would never look at my life, at my music, as a career, as a profession, as a business, I could never reduce it to that. This is existence. There are no boundaries in existence.

It's not a performance or a do, it's just like being at home in the community, sharing something, celebrating. You know. It's not contrived, it's not far out. As a performance, I would actually you know, like to look at it like a mediation, you cannot tell people how to meditate, you just go into your own meditation, go into whatever tactic is easy for you.

We never rehearsed at home, traditional music, and I used to say now that it's strange that we have to rehearse hours on end. I never rehearsed with my family for a prayer meeting or a funeral, for a traditional ceremony. So I always wanted to go back to that where I could just do things naturally. And I've arrived at it. We play without rehearsal, we meet thirty minutes before the gig and that's it. And the music that we create is amazing, you know, the chemistry that we have. It helps me transcend. You know, it's beautiful.

You see free music to us, is not music as in [points to ears], it's about freedom... it's political. This is the only place where people of colour are masters, they can be studied, they can be written about. In music. They don't even worry about wealthy black people, at the end of the day, but musicians who represent freedom. Who are free by nature. Because freedom means that you refuse to go to work. I was not brought into this world to work for somebody, I'm not going to do that, I'm going to play this music, that is freedom. I don't believe in no government, I don't believe in no king, no queen, you know, I'm my own man. That's what it means... play the music, it's a different expression which addresses that. I'm not born into this world to work, no. I am born into this world to celebrate. I celebrate myself, that's what it means.⁹²

The transcendence of the song, and the transcendence of the material conditions – the outsides referenced inside the song – achieved through freedom in and beyond the music, the material, the transcendence of Zim and his accomplice and co-conspiratorial horn, is a spiritual politics. This link between the oppression of the material conditions and the metaphysical and spiritual transcendence in, beyond, and of the music which is underscored by Zim's refusal to work and his surrender to breath, is mediated by freedom. This freedom, which is in the music, but also

⁹² *The Legacy*, Aryan Kaganoff (dir.).

necessarily, by definition, beyond it because freedom within something necessitates being free from it or of it and therefore freedom in something suggests and implies an existence outside or beyond that thing or context, is the dynamic movement between the inside and the outside of the music, the music's content and its context, the space where these two things blur each other.

Through the music Zim blurs the traditional and the avant garde and challenges their opposition, suggesting that the latter is not far out because of its cosmological rooting in, and familiarity with the former. Playing free music is an extension and improvisation of the traditional's being in community, at home and sharing and celebrating. Without rehearsal, it is a permanent state of readiness, the spontaneity of performance which isn't a performance but rather a sonic elaboration, a celebration of being together, and eating together, a meditation on breathing together – the basis of funeral gatherings, prayer meetings and other ceremonies which require preparation and organisation but not practice or rehearsal. Through improvisation's insistence, through Zim, on being existence, it configures itself as boundary-less and prepares for the possibilities of rupturing realms. When the communion sounds, the communion that is the music that is also existence which has no boundaries, when did it start? (When and where) does it stop? At what point does the music keep its insides in, and its outsides, out?

Psalm: Ritual, prayer and abstraction

By way of avoiding conclusions we are moved furthest out to study with the Blue Notes whose legacy precedes them as it also premeditates some of the moves we've explored with Zim and Makhathini, and moves parallel, through and away from some of those danced through by Malombo. We are assisted here greatly by Dr Sazi Dlamini's PhD thesis on the Blue Notes as well as the 1975 album *Blue Notes for Mongezi*.

A story helps us get into the study.

During their time in exile a rift developed between bassist Johnny Dyani and drummer Louis Moholo over a question of musical direction and the ideological dimensions and interpretations thereof. Both playing in Chris McGregor's big band, Brotherhood of Breath, at the time, Johnny came to Chris telling him that he couldn't stand to play with Louis anymore because their individual approaches to music had so widely diverged. Bra Johnny felt that South African musicians in exile were "in danger

of losing their own musical language” due to the influence of the American avant garde tradition.⁹³ Louis Moholo was totally into the free thing;

Free music is it man, it’s so beautiful. The word ‘free’ makes sense to me. I know what I want; freedom, let my people go... and that’s interlinking with politics, they embrace each other. It’s a cry from the inside, no inhibitions.⁹⁴

This (apparent) contradiction, the question of roots, source and influence in South African jazz, is one that plays itself out seemingly without resolve in both the music and writing on the music. On this particular occasion it fell, however ironically, to the white cat, Chris Macgregor, or Magweza as he was known in the band, to solve the contradiction as it was in the context of his band that the unity of opposites required a new resolution. Bra Johnny was resolved – ‘he goes or I go.’ Magweza had to choose. He chose Moholo.

...

The Magweza affair and the broader contradictions in which it was embedded set the context for ‘Psalm’ which is intended, through the Blue Notes and then beyond them, to (re)introduce the motif of exile into the conversation. As a meditation, a prayer, a ritualised abstraction, this section takes another form to the preceding improvisations. It seeks to relate the Blue Notes to the other exponents of the tradition we have already heard through exile and a particular response to it which, however ironically, is the route that will return us to the source. To get there, we start in the depths of exile, London in ‘75 following Mongz’s tragic and sudden passing from pneumonia.

Blue Notes for Mongezi

Back together, in a studio in London 1975, The Blue Notes were reconciled after a few years since playing together, they’d been scattered across Europe. Now, except for Bra Nik Moyake, who went back home shortly after they all left for Europe and sadly passed on soon after returning, and the recently deceased young blood Mongezi Feza, the ensemble gathered to mourn Bra Mongz’s passing. They recorded their grieving which was released that same year as *Blue Notes For Mongezi* which was initially performed as a furious, free, unhinged, raw, open, vulnerable, honest, at times abstract three-hour continuous improvisation which was later cut into four movements.

Sazi Dlamini writes about how, in exile, the alienation from the communal spaces where various rituals are practiced and observed back home, music became a space for the Blue Notes to perform

⁹³ Maxine McGregor, *Chris McGregor and the Brotherhood of Breath: My life with a South African jazz pioneer*, (Rhodes University: Grahamstown, 2013, 2nd edition), 102.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

and improvise certain rituals together. He reads *Blue Notes for Mongezi* as a ritual of improvised mourning. On exile, Dlamini writes:

In the marginal solitariness of exile it is impossible to fulfil all the roles that native practice assigns – as part of the death ritual – according to the age-old understanding and responsibilities of age, gender and family, and social categories of cultural subjectivity.⁹⁵

Given this context of exile, alienation from home and the impossibility of replicating rituals that they knew from home to be associated with mourning, meant that the Blue Notes, needing and wanting deeply to mourn for their fallen comrade, and send him off, had to approximate those rituals and make do with what and who they could draw on, which was each other and their music. Dlamini goes on to describe sections of the mourning for Mongezi. He describes how improvised music, in its avant garde Blue Notes variety, rooted in mbaqanga and post-bop sensibilities, becomes also the site of improvised ritual.

[Johnny Dyani] begins singing by calling out the deceased's name in a ritualised Nguni manner of address of calling forth to peers and to those younger than oneself... [He] praises and conveys a testimony to the moral worthiness of the deceased's character... these statements establish and evaluate the nature of the deceased's social relations. In Dyani's performance, the words are spoken directly to Mongezi as if he could hear:

Uziphathe kakuhle (You lived life with dignity and respect)

Hamba kakuhle (Farewell)

...

In a final vocalised improvisation of mourning, Johnny Dyani confronts the strained nature of personal relationships that exile had engendered between himself and the estranged Blue Notes, in statements that approximate the traditional Nguni practice of *ukuthethela*.

...

Dyani continues with his vocal performance, now remarkable for the spoken rhythms of the ritualised igqirha calls and the choric exchange of the indigenous Xhosa diviner's ceremony... When Dyani demands a ritual response – as of a chorus to an igqirha's exhortations during a séance or a divination – it is Louis Moholo who responds in the place of an absent chorus.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Sazi Stephen Dlamini, *The South African Blue Notes: Bebop, mbaqanga, apartheid and the exiling of a musical imagination*, PhD thesis, (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2009), 327.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 327-338.

How ironic that, in this musical context which bears the indelible marks of marabi-based harmony and the abstractions of free jazz, in a musical context constituted in between these influences and many others, in the absence of a chorus, it is Moholo who responds to Dyani. The very same cats who were involved in the dispute over roots and influences which led to Bra Johnny parting ways with Bra Louis. The two cats, together in the music, both grieving for their lost friend, are reconciled in that moment which suggests that mourning for their friend is more important than any assumed stylistic or ideological differences. The approach of the 'South Africanist' and the 'avant gardist' converge and cooperate to abstract a ritual from its normative context to perform and extemporise it.

The music is an extension of the grief which the Blue Notes felt and the 'ritual' was merely their expression of grief based on certain practices, familiar to them, that they associated with mourning a lost loved one. Their mourning constituted both the inside and the outside of the music as it was present in both, the reason for the performance but not contained by it. The mourning becomes the emotional content, taking the form of an improvisation through the familiar in a context which is estranged from that where the familiar ritual comes from, home. So the cats make do with what they have at their disposal. Playing with and for the recently deceased Mongezi (see how he is invoked and spoken to as if he is present with them although he has passed from his body) is more important than performing and observing particular rituals in fixity, which, in their situation of exile, would be an impossibility. Further out, the fluidity that is the improvised ritual hints at the dynamism of traditional culture and the collusion and simultaneity of that with and in avant garde jazz. Dlamini suggests that, in the Blue Notes, it is their very geographical and spiritual alienation, and distance of exile from the original contexts of various, what he calls, indigenous traditions, that led or allowed them to deconstruct and reconstruct and abstract the content of those traditions to the extent that they were largely unrecognisable in their new sonic setting – avant garde jazz which, as we can see from *Blue Notes For Mongezi*, is at least partly constituted by or based in the tradition/al.

Exile, tradition and abstraction

Glimpsed in the Blue Notes notably, there is something in, or something about the experience of exile that can produce a certain orientation toward 'tradition' that opens it up to abstraction and motion in a way that is perhaps different to a relation of proximity to a given tradition's normative context, or the condition of being not being away from home. Of the Blue Notes' process of repurposing of "traditional Xhosa repertoires," and the deconstruction of those repertoires to the extent that their original form is sometimes unrecognisable, Dlamini says that:

As an abstraction of melodic, rhythmic and textual musical elements from their popular understanding within an indigenous musical context, this process acknowledges a level of cultural alienation among its practitioners.⁹⁷

The separation, engendered by exile, from community, home, land, family, a person's geographical and cultural milieu, opens cultural practices up, in a radically unstable way, to change. In other words, cultural practices are likely to change faster and more radically when the contexts of those practices change. Exile highlights that tradition and culture are always improvisations of themselves. What if traditions and rituals are just ways of trying to get at something? What if they are just ways of trying to express something, methods of mourning and grieving, ways of celebrating, ways to help us get through life, methods to mark it and give its processes meaning? Exile, as an ontological relation to the concept and context of home and all things associated with home, asks the question of how you are going to make life in a new context. Since you are away from home and the original context of any of your traditions' development, any practicing of them in the new context is by definition a form of abstraction (from their context).

And, as Dlamini says, "the isolation of individuals as an essence of exile... presents a challenge to the concept of culture as a shared practice."⁹⁸ Confronted with this challenge of being abstracted from home and a community to share life with, one has to improvise tradition, make it work in a different setting, make do with what and who is there. If we recall from Okoye that the essence of traditional culture is the "tradition" of constantly searching for ways of coming to terms with the inevitable unsteadiness of culture" and that "change, or modernity, therefore, is a dynamic of tradition not its antithesis"⁹⁹ due to the instability of the social world, then exile is merely one condition of many that exaggerates and exacerbates tradition's essence. Other conditions could relate to various other social disruptions or upheavals such as those which took place under colonialism. While it doesn't equate them, this relates the experience of those in exile, outside of the country, such as the Blue Notes, with the many Black people who stayed in the country who, through processes of migrant labour, war, dispossession, and the search for work, were forced to leave their homes and live in new, 'foreign' places. We recall Zim's lyrics in 'Kubi' about the migrant labourers who are carrying a heavy burden because they do not live there: In exile: Inxile.

Of course being in London as an African person is not the same as being in Johannesburg when you are from Pondoland, they are different experiences in many ways. But there is a similarity in the experience of abstraction from a cultural context that runs across and connects both. A form of exile

⁹⁷ Ibid, 295.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 304.

⁹⁹ Okoye, "Cannabalisation as popular tradition," 23.

or cultural abstraction is also a common feature of all the musicians we have studied with. Philip Tabane, the Malombo progenitor, spoke about how, no matter how long he lived in the townships, he always felt that his spirit and his true home was in the 'homelands' and he felt alienated from the urban youth culture he was surrounded by in the city. Makhathini, we recall, grew up in a Christian family, in a sense, exiled from the practices and traditions which he now, after returning to the source, roots himself in through his spiritual and healing practice as a sangoma working in and through improvised music. On culture and tradition and his family, Zimasile Ngqawana says: "I didn't agree with my family on many things based on culture and traditions, they kicked me out. I accepted it, it was the biggest gift they gave me. So I'm not a Xhosa, I'm not an African." This is a form of exile and alienation from the very concepts of culture and tradition, 'Xhosa' and 'African' which positioned Zim to those things in such a way that he was able to engage them on his own terms in his music.

Exile, then, in some form, emerges as a particularly generative cultural condition in which (these instances) of jazz is played. Dlamini affirms this, suggesting that:

In South Africa, jazz resonated with the sensibilities of generations of Africans who were alienated from indigeneous cultural practice, largely as a ramification of colonialism and other processes of a haphazard modernity. In this view, a symbolic distancing – from an ideological homogeneity of indigenous performance – of jazz-influenced urban black practices such as mbaqanga may be understood as an exiling of a form of cultural practice.¹⁰⁰

Dr Dlamini insists, then, that beyond being a generative condition, jazz in South Africa can be understood as a product of exile, a product of 'culturally alienated Africans.' Within a historical context, or, more as an orientation toward a particular historical process, we might consider jazz as the autonomous improvisation through the particular form of proletarianisation in southern Africa. The dialectic of the township and the homeland, most blatantly encapsulated in the social condition of migrancy, the responsible party for Black South Africa's often liminal and interstitial urbanity which links the two spaces, through Tabane and others, constitutes the cultural basis for the improvisations on and through historical and social context which is jazz.

Coda: On resonance

On jazz, exile, location, tradition, ontology and culture, there are a number of schisms, historical and otherwise, that separate the continent and the diaspora, and others that resonate in the breaks between them. In the conversation of jazz and the improvisation on and through history, it is the

¹⁰⁰ Dlamini, *The South African Blue Notes*, 183.

cultural condition of exile that links how Dlamini locates jazz in South Africa and how Sylvia Wynter in the diaspora, channeling Lamming, situates colonial relations more broadly:

To be a colonial, says Lamming, is to be a [man] in a certain relation. A suburban is a [man] without a being of his own; a [man] in a dependent cultural relation with the metropolis. To be in that relation is an example of exile.¹⁰¹

While exile might be the relation that colonialism attempts to impose, jazz is perhaps a refusal of that imposition, the refusal to be culturally dependent on the metropolis, the refusal to be ‘a colonial’. The music puts itself here, at the aesthetic and political junction of this refusal.

Regarding its resonance historically, at a time when, politically, in an above-ground, organised sense, the landscape was fairly barren, white-liberal-dominated and repressive,¹⁰² Black South Africans like Winston Mankunku Ngozi heard, felt and were moved by the sounds of long-term African exile channelled through cats like John Coltrane and Wayne Shorter. “Back in the 60s. Trane used to really oh my God [inaudible]. They all killed me, because Trane always used to make me cry...really mess me up, you know. Really mess me up.”¹⁰³ Something struck a chord. Something resonated. What was that resonance? Although it might be part of the answer, the suggestion that it was because Black South Africans heard and saw something in African Americans – an exponent of Black modernity – is surely insufficient as an explanation for the type of relationship Coltrane had with Bra Winston and African musics, and by extension, African cosmologies.

You know, it’s the funniest thing. You know, I dream like... I was always with Trane in my dreams. And sometimes it comes in like [inaudible], you know. Old people they come in a different form. And they say [inaudible]. I don’t know what they are talking about. But the old people they always come back to me. I kept this to myself... then one day I told people because I was scared. I was practicing at home and I felt him. This is true. I am being honest with you. I was alone in the house practicing and I heard a person. I felt... I felt some presence. You know a [inaudible]. And that scared me. I left the horn. I told people, but they didn’t come back to me then. [Inaudible]. They relaxed after a long time. They didn’t come back to me. I really love him. I really love him...

Wow! (begins clapping) it’s like (sings music a la Coltrane)... it’s like African music. (sings the type of call and response patterns that Coltrane utilized in his mature phase. Coltrane would play a phrase in one register

¹⁰¹ Sylvia Wynter, “We must learn to sit down together and talk about a Little Culture: Reflection son West Indian writing and criticism,” *Jamaica Journal*, 2:4, (1968), 23.

¹⁰² Martin Legassick and Christopher Saunders, *Above-ground activity in the 1960’s*, (Department of History and Institute for Historical Research, UWC: Belville, 2003).

¹⁰³ Salim Washington with Winston Mankunku Ngozi, “1.5 Inaudible I,” *Chimurenga 15: The curriculum is everything*, (Kalakuta Trust: Cape Town, 2010), 111.

and then answer it in another register, going back and forth as though two people were creating the lines.) This is African! Where did he hear this, man? You know. It's like Xhosa music, man.¹⁰⁴

Coltrane, and others with and before him, had crafted a language of struggle towards itself. A language of spirits, spirits suffering, in turmoil and in struggle, but also, spirits rejoicing. Liberated souls, against all odds, living and creating in a dark context of white supremacy. African Americans, whose origin in America is rooted in the historical experience of slavery, developed a music tradition from within, on the out sides, and as resistance to that experience of oppression and exploitation. For South Africans in 1960s apartheid then, the music resonated on a spiritual, intellectual, political, and an ontological level. Not just because it was Black people being modern or not just because of US imperialism in the music industry, but because it was phonography of spirit's transcendence of slavery, AND it was rooted in exiled African cultural forms and spiritual practices many times abstracted but nonetheless not only audible in the music but also felt in it. The 'slave sublime,' which is translated in the "elusive undertone"¹⁰⁵ of African American musics, gives sound to resistance to slavery and racial terror (a historical similarity to which might be found in southern African slavery and colonial violence). So it's perhaps in the resonance of resistance to the terror of colonial violence and the cosmological orientation toward ancestry that Makhathini and Ngqawana point to, a shared but disrupted ancestry, that makes sense of Coltrane's spirit as a visitor in Mankunku's dreams and as a presence in his practice. As cross-ocean and trans-temporal co-conspirators, inheritors, divergers, elaborators, extenders, (re)Africanisers, and re-contextualisers of Coltrane's impulse, Black South Africans' journey through music, in jazz, as the improvisation on, of and through an oppressive history towards an autonomous framework, sits somewhere in amongst the thought of Albert Ayler, one of Coltrane's contemporaries:

The music we play is one long prayer, a message coming from god... Like Coltrane, I'm playing about the beauty that is to come after all the tensions and anxieties. This is about post-war cries; I mean the cries of love that are already in the young and that will emerge as people seeking freedom come to spiritual freedom.¹⁰⁶

From Ayler and Coltrane's impulse which is a metaphysical manifestation, through sound, of an imagined and anticipated future historical moment which is beyond the normative conditions of violence and war which characterise capitalist modernity, we hear a spiritual politics whose improvisation is through a particular condition of exile. In the South African jazz musicians who

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 111-112.

¹⁰⁵ James Johnson cited in Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1993), 131.

¹⁰⁶ John Litweiler, *The freedom impulse: Jazz after 1958*, (Da Capo Press: New York, 1984), 165.

resonated with that co-constitution of spirituality and radical political imagination and commitment which is aestheticized and given sound across the ocean, we hear the abstraction of ritual from context and the embedding of that alienated practice into a music that, not only challenges the very notion of tradition as fixity, but gets toward an understanding of culture itself as an improvised movement against alienation.

IV. Against alienation: Africa and the Black radical tradition

Considering all of the above that emerges in and from the music, all the practices and cosmologies that inform it and in which it is based, we now return, to consider the music and what it opens us to, in relation to some of Cabral's thought on culture. Amilcar insisted that culture is a dialectic, that it is the space of expression and product of a people's grappling with their context in all its complexity; as such it is historical force, moving a people toward new resolutions of the dominant social, economic, environmental and political contradictions of their context, it is history itself. As the means and space of a people's autonomy, it is central to social projects of domination. A people can never be completely dominated if a section of them continue to practice their culture on their own terms. The persistence of cultural forms is testament to the undying spirit of a people, their impulse toward themselves and to freedom. Therefore, as well as being central to an oppressive regime's strategy, culture is also central to a project of liberation from domination. The seeds of liberation are embedded in a people's culture and these seeds form the basis of a liberatory movement which is not only rooted in existing cultural forms and practices, but gives rise to new ones. Cultural practices can carry the spirit of liberation alongside, parallel to, or in absence of organised political resistance in a more normative sense. These cultural forms, produced by the spirits of liberation, and their elusive notions and practices of politics, have been the space of inquiry of this project.

From listening to the music through the Cabralian synthesiser, we move to consider 'writing': How jazz in South Africa has been written *about*, how the music itself has to a large extent resisted, evaded or eluded that imperative, and how that is related to the marginalisation of radical thought on African culture in the academy. Through listening to the music, engaging some of the writing 'about' the music and extending some of the critiques we made earlier of the academy in a settler colonial context, the music seems to imply or suggest a different ontological relation to it, a relation which moves with and is moved by it – an orientation to and through the writing that hides and seeks the secret and seeks to join and extend the music's project. This search seeks to situate the music within the contradictions of the conversations that it sonically and symbolically represents and puts itself in the middle of – conversations that it has been largely alienated from through the writing about it. South African jazz presents a myriad of different navigations through the dialectic of Africa in its ambivalent relationship to the Black radical tradition, and 'global' Black thought generally which is primarily dominated by Black intellectuals closer to the North. We look at how some people have conceptualised and articulated the relationship between the continent and radical thought and practice, and within this we consider some of the musical exponents that we

have explored in this conversation. Through this we locate the music as an exponent of African liberation culture.

‘About’ jazz

While there is fairly extensive research on musicians’ stories and perspectives in South African jazz¹⁰⁷, as well as discussions of the development of various musical styles,¹⁰⁸ some work on how jazz is connected to various African musics which predate its arrival in South Africa, and research on Black cultural production in historical/political context,¹⁰⁹ the majority of major published works on music and jazz in South Africa seem to me, to miss most, if not all, of the cosmological aspects that we have heard in our study with Malombo, Ngqawana, Makhathini and the Blue Notes. Although some of these are excellent pieces of scholarship and are invaluable to the study of the music in our context, they reveal a certain alienation from the spiritual and cosmological context in which the music is located. I do not try to recount this canon here. I focus, briefly, on some works which attempt to engage the relationships between South African jazz and politics because that is the space I move through to situate my work and the music in conversations concerning Africa and the Black radical tradition. My critique of the writing ‘about’ joins and extends the earlier line I started which, through Jaffe, Magubane, Cabral and Mafeje, suggested that the settler colonial ideological roots of the University and social science academics in South Africa have warped and undermined their capacity for understanding African culture, society and revolutionary processes on their own terms.

Writing from the vantage point of the Northern University, Helen Kivnick, in her extensive study of South African music and struggle details the existence and development of a number of different music styles such as certain choral traditions as well as struggle songs and various urban popular music forms including marabi and mbaqanga. Kivnick has two pages in the introductory section which, fairly superficially, relates the imperative of singing together to a deeper imperative of being together as people which is, according to her, is deeply rooted in ‘African social philosophy.’ Through this, this she attempts, to locate song within a broader orientation toward the world and each other,

¹⁰⁷ Carol Ann Muller and Sathima Bea Benjamin, *Musical echoes: South African women thinking in jazz*, (Duke University Press: Durham, 2011); Chatardari Devroop and Chris Walton (eds.), *Unsung: South African jazz musicians under apartheid*, (Sun Press: Stellenbosch, 2007); Maxine McGregor, *Chris McGregor and the Brotherhood of Breath*; Struan Douglas, *The story of South African jazz: Volume one*, (Afribeat: Durban, 2013).

¹⁰⁸ Christopher Ballantine, *Marabi nights: Jazz, ‘race’ and society in early apartheid South Africa*, (University of KwaZulu Natal Press: Scottsville, 2012, first published in 1993); David B Coplan, *In township tonight!*

¹⁰⁹ Helen De Jager, “Music and change in black urban culture during the first half of the 1960s,” *Class, community and conflict: Local perspectives*, (University of Witwatersrand, History Workshop: Johannesburg, 1984); Ian Bruce Huntley, *Keeping time, 1964-1974: The photographs and Cape Town jazz recordings of Ian Bruce Huntley*, (Chris Albertyn and Associates, in partnership with Electric Jive: Durban, 2013).

however, her engagement with that, beyond the vague and superficial two pages, on any deeper level throughout the rest of the book, and how it is present and informs the jazz tradition is substantially absent. The relation of song to struggle and politics, as it appears in this work and others, is generally centered around music being ‘political’ because of the material context in which it is sung, or the lyrical content of the song.

Gwen Ansell, in her masterpiece *Soweto Blues*, pushes further out, looking more specifically, but not exclusively, at jazz in its various relationships to politics. The space she gives to excerpts from interviews with musicians, allowing them to articulate their practice and thoughts themselves, somewhat makes up for the ways in which she is left behind by the music. But despite this, jazz, in its relation to politics, seems too often to be framed by ‘music in, and as struggle, and the struggle for the music.’ While it is restricted and restrictive, this framing does open the work up to some of the liberatory imperatives of music and the impulse to create spaces away from, and in defiance of colonial apartheid tyranny. Titlestad’s remarkable book, moves in a similar field. *Making the changes*, while its explicit intention is to consider jazz’s representations rather than the music itself, does important work in developing the conceptualisation of jazz as politics, suggesting that:

Jazz, since it is essentially black *urban* music, provides a sound basis for navigating urbanity and devising tactics along the route between the rural (historical) experience and the modern metropolis... [And that]...it carries the legacy of making meaning beneath the threshold of the ‘master’s’ vision. It is potentially an inherited tactical history of survival.¹¹⁰

Beyond this, Titlestad gets towards understanding the music as a fugitive space, outtasight of the surveillance state and gets the importance of that political imperative – the creation of alternative spaces. But his framing tends to always read it in relation to the colonial apartheid state, and this fixation, while central, fails to see it, that space of “meaning making”, on its own terms as something, yes existing in that colonial dialectic of surveillance, oppression and control, but also as a tradition rooted in (and an extension of) practices and philosophies which fall outside the realm of the comprehensible for that state, perhaps also for him.

A recent book by journalist Percy Mabandu, entitled *Yakhal’inkomo: Portrait of a jazz classic*, considers that album and Bra Winston himself within the historical context in which they emerged. While the book is quite theoretically incongruous, and all over the place in many ways, Mabandu makes one very important intervention in the narration of jazz in South Africa’s relationship with politics. He shows how the image, symbol and iconography of cattle is central to understanding

¹¹⁰ Michael Titlestad, *Making the changes: Jazz in South African literature and reportage*, (University of South Africa Press: Pretoria, 2004), 64.

Mankunku. Legend, according to Feya Faku, has it that “Pat Matshikiza who heard Mankunku blowing his tenor and he said: ‘Oh, here you sound like iNkomo being slaughtered.’”¹¹¹ Mabandu locates the cow, dually, in the collective cry of Black people suffering under apartheid, and in the cultural importance of the cow in many Bantu cosmologies. Although he does not elaborate on this much, the intervention is an important theoretical move in the context of the literature – the insistence that the music cannot only be understood within its immediate political context but has to be understood, also, within and as an extension of understandings of the world in which its context is rooted. Outside of Dlamini’s, and to an extent, Galane’s, pioneering works which we engaged in the ‘On improvisations’ section, the music and its radical imperative have generally not been understood in relation to cosmological phenomena and the liberatory impulse of the persistence of cultural practices. Jazz is largely written ‘about’ abstracted from earlier African cultural forms and cosmologies and practices.

Within the literature, the concepts of struggle, politics and resistance, and jazz’s relationships to those things, tend to fall back on, or be restricted to notions of politics that privilege, or is only able to see, hear or conceptualise the material. Kelley, refusing the academic alienation from that which he writes about, raises this problematic in another way in another (but related) context. Bra Robin, first, quoting Robinson:

The focus of black revolt “was always on the structures of the mind. Its epistemology granted supremacy to metaphysics not the material.”¹¹²

The music... captures the magical transformative quality of the erotic – something even the best scholarship on the blues rarely addresses because critical frameworks seem unable to move beyond social realism.”¹¹³

Like bra Robin, but while my explicit interest is not the blues nor ‘the erotic’ here, and indeed I don’t have the necessary critical frameworks to engage that, I think there’s some other shit going on in the music on epistemological levels which is rooted in modes of knowledge that represent both an alternative and a significant challenge to coloniality.

¹¹¹ Percy Mabandu, *Yakhal’inkomo: Portrait of a jazz classic*, (DASH-Art Media: Ga-Rankuwa, 2016), 26.

¹¹² Robin Kelley, *Freedom dreams: The black radical imagination*, (Beacon Press: Boston, 2002), 192. I would definitely push against, and challenge the absolutism of this claim, the assertion that black revolt has always been concerned *primarily* with metaphysics over the material. And I think even in some of Robinson’s own work, particularly some of the historical examples of black revolt in *Black Marxism*, would provide a different perspective. However, this is a useful perspective here where we are considering music primarily. While the music or the musicians themselves have not only been concerned with metaphysics to the exclusion of material concerns, I think that the field of most radical work of music is the realms of epistemology.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 164.

What we heard channelled through Zim, Nduduzo, Miriam, Malombo, Moholo and Dyani are improvisations as, within and toward autonomous frameworks through cosmologies which are beyond, outtasight, as well as uncapturable, unco-optable, and undisciplineable for coloniality and its academic outposts. It is here, through Cabral's understanding of the connections and continuities within persistent cultural forms, and their radical potential, where we realise that, in the South African jazz tradition, we are in the presence of, not a departure from, but, an elaboration on, and an extension of musical and spiritual traditions which predate jazz's arrival in southern Africa.

Why is it that all of this, or at least a lot of it, is missed by the writing? Central to any answer to this question has to be the role of knowledge production in a colonial context. Given that, most of the major works on South African jazz have been done by people who are academics by profession, affiliation or association, the University and its social relations to its wider context in South Africa is an important phenomenon to consider. The University (European model, not the earlier North African Islamic model) arrived on the continent through colonialism and exists, today, as a reflection, product and a reproducer of colonial relations. Academic studies of African people and African cultural practices were/are rooted in colonial anthropology and more broadly, metropolitan social sciences, which, as we recall from Mafeje, have deeply collusive relationships with the colonial state and its policies. Moreover, the combination and mutual constitution of the ontological position of a University in a settler colony, and South African exceptionalism that frames much South African academic production, isolates and alienates the academy from African cultural practices which exist both within and beyond the borders of the national state. And since academic knowledge was/is generally used to 'do neo/colonialism or neoliberalism better', the political orientation of the knowledge production process, insisted on a certain relationship between researcher and the researched, with very loaded and asymmetrical power relations set up between the two.

Researchers studied African people. Researchers did not study *with* African people. Researchers wrote *about* African people, for the colonial project, for their own careers, for their own curiosities, for the empire.

This colonial orientation, and the intellectual limitations and restrictions of the academy are related to the reasons why Cabral, even as one of the greatest intellectuals of the twentieth century, has a marginal position within its tall, dull walls. African culture, in the academy, is to be studied, and written 'about.' Through Cabral, African culture is to be mobilised, towards the ends of a revolutionary social project. As we will recall from Amilcar, the process of liberation in an African context will take place, at least in part, through cultural forms and it is their persistence through periods of social violence such as colonialism, which makes the liberation struggle possible. The writings we have considered in this section seem to have missed most of the non-sonic and beyond-

material African elements of South African jazz. Even those writing about its relation to politics, have largely failed to understand the music in the Cabralian revolutionary dialectic within its particular continental cultural context. These limitations of the academy are mirrored by the historical fact that radical traditions have, while they might have been theorised within it, almost always developed on the out sides of the academy.

Writing as the dance with ideas

As an insurgent and fugitive intellectual tradition which has largely developed in the undercommons with an historically ambivalent relationship to the University or altogether outtasight of the academy, jazz appears squeezed, sometimes square, and somewhat less than itself when it features in academic texts. And it is here that we arrive at the political question to which the previous writers were ill-equipped or wrongly located to positively respond: “whether the discourse surrounding the music gets to the liberatory space that the music opens”?¹¹⁴ Where does one locate their allegiance when they choose to excavate and engage the spaces between writing (and) jazz? And what might that allegiance presuppose, imply and suggest beyond aesthetics?

I wanted to figure out a way to write (about) these performances, to record them, without killing them or capturing them. I also wanted to think about performances as modes of inquiry and modes of writing to see how a kind of recording was already embedded in them.¹¹⁵

Parallel to Moten, who I think is grappling with the question of joining the music, joining the performance, or extending the writing of the embedded recording which was in the performances, Mogobe Ramose writes in “The Philosophy of Ubuntu and Ubuntu as Philosophy” that music is the “dance of be-ing”. ‘Be-ing’ here being the incessant motion of becoming which is foundational to human experience and existence. “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.”¹¹⁶ Music presents us with a choice: do we join, and participate in the dance toward our pursuit of humanity or do we instead, spectate – distance ourselves and observe? Ramose suggests that the act of passive spectating, and distancing oneself from the music is an act of fragmentation of be-ing. And he writes further:

¹¹⁴ Fred Moten, *In the break*, 129.

¹¹⁵ Charles H. Rowell, Fred Moten, ““Words don’t go there”: An interview with Fred Moten,” *Callaloo*, 27:4, (Fall 2004), 957.

¹¹⁶ Mogobe Ramose, *The philosophy of Ubuntu*, 163.

Indeed in Northern Sotho, for example, one of the Bantu-speaking languages, there is a saying that *Kosa ga e theeletswe o e duletse* (you don't listen to music seated). This underlines the African attitude and reaction towards the dance of be-ing as an ontological and epistemological imperative to be in tune. To dance along with be-ing is to be attuned to be-ing.¹¹⁷

My reading of this is that to 'dance' is not restricted to the physical act of 'dancing' but it is extended further as a metaphor and relates more closely to an ontological notion of 'dancing' – allowing oneself to be moved by and immersed in the music. In this way, anyone can participate in the music regardless of whether or not they are physically able to get down. It is a broader question and metaphor about one's openness to the world and to other people. If one is closed to being affected and moved emotionally and intellectually by other people, by specific types of people, that is indicative of and fragmentative of be-ing, one's humanness.

Stepping further out, with Fred, the question about getting to the liberatory space of the music asks us: how does the writing go beyond the attempt to merely or necessarily resemble or mimic the music or the performance to join the dance of being to? How does it join and extend the music's project?¹¹⁸ Through Ubuntu, this question about be-ing, with and for the music, for me, is therefore not merely about the aesthetics of my writing, but it concerns my humanity. It's a political question about how to respond to the academy's intention to alienate people from their creative and intellectual production. My writing is an improvised refusal of that alienation. It is my return to the source. It's a refusal of the distinction and distance between Subject/object (I, the Black writer) and subject/Object (jazz, the written about). It's an insistence on the quintessential togetherness of those categories, or, better still, on their irruption. It's a refusal of the fragmentation of be-ing and separation of self from the world. It is an act in and on, with and for, and oriented toward the world.

The music's project is given meaning and is composed, in part, through Amilcar's description of the process of return to the source as a refusal of Lamming through Wynter's description of exile, the dance against colonial cultural dependency and beyond estrangement. The writing, my writing, through its orientation, must also insist on that return and dance with the music even as it must circumnavigate and bypass the academy in the movement toward collective study. To write and reach out, to search and return to the source and to strive and to act *with and for*, through Ubuntu

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Moten grapples with this question in his own practice of writing, his grappling has influenced mine greatly and in that sense I owe him a great, unpayable debt. He writes about the secret: "I think this secret that I'm talking about is both in the maker and the maker's subject. I listen to some music that I love and it inspires me to write a poem. My poem is not going to be that music. And if my poem only attempts to imitate that music, it's not going to be worth a lot. But if it's an attempt to get at what is essential to that music, perhaps it will approach the secret of the music, but only by way of that secret's poetic reproduction." Charles H. Rowell and Fred Moten, ""Words don't go there"" , 961.

implies and insists on a collective project. The act of be-ing with and for is, itself, a conscious decision to commit oneself to, and invest in a project broader than oneself. It is the dance of be-ing and writing is the dance with ideas. To be with and for the music is to be moved by it and to move with it through all the modes of knowledge on its out sides that we are referred to. The imperative is to acknowledge that this thing is taking place in multiple ways across time and space. Jazz is a collective project, academic production – Writing – is generally not, at least in any radical way. As Moten and Harney say: “the conditions under which academic labourers labour actually preclude or prevent study, make study difficult if not impossible.”¹¹⁹ From within the parameters of academic production there are ways to write *about* jazz, we have read that in the literature. But I’m not interested in that *about* because of how it insists on a distinction between me and what I am writing about. I’m invested in the struggle towards language, the movement that is moved by and in motion with the music, against the fragmentation of be-ing in the eternal impulse toward be-ing becoming. When we are open to this movement, the dance with ideas which is the writing, which is implied and instantiated in the music, and when our humanity also depends on our work and our orientation towards it, we are forced open to traditions that locate South Africa firmly on the continent, and in conversation with Black thought from other parts of the world. We opened to other liberatory traditions that the music refers us to. South African jazz dances the relationship between certain African cultural practices and Black radical sensibilities. Moving with the music, I try, now, to join this movement and consider the relations and spaces between Africa and this tradition.

The Impossible return and presence in absence

Having considered how the South African jazz tradition is based simultaneously in various practices which are rooted in conceptions of the world found in southern Africa, as well as in improvisations on and through the history of colonial capitalism’s development in the region, we now look at parallels across the Atlantic, the context from which jazz, the music, initially arrived. Cedric Robinson, in theorising the basis of the Black radical tradition, extends Cabral’s insights on culture (that cultural forms form the foundation of a revolutionary practice) across the Atlantic. Cabral said that it is the persistence of African practices, through surviving colonialism “by taking refuge in the villages, in the forests and in the spirit of generations of victims of colonialism,”¹²⁰ that form the basis of the liberation movement on the continent. Robinson writes about how, in the New World, it was African people’s cultural practices as well as the forms of community implied by some of their cosmological beliefs, the immaterial possessions of the dispossessed, that formed the basis of the

¹¹⁹ Harney and Moten, *The undercommons*, 113.

¹²⁰ Cabral, *Unity and struggle*, 147.

tradition of revolt “whose dialectical matrix we believe was capitalist slavery and imperialism.”¹²¹ It was that historical fact that invaginated Marx, giving rise to a revolutionary tradition Marx couldn’t imagine. Robinson writes:

Marx had not realised fully that the cargoes of labourers also contained African cultures, critical mixes and admixtures of language and thought, of cosmology and metaphysics, of habits, beliefs and morality. These were the actual terms of their humanity... African labour brought the past with it, a past that had produced it and settled on it the first elements of consciousness and comprehension.

This was the embryo of the demon that would be visited on the whole enterprise of primitive accumulation. It would be through the historical and social consciousness of these Africans that the trade in slaves and the system of slave labour was infected with its contradiction.¹²²

While it is easy to see the productive parallels between how we are thinking about South African jazz in its relation to culture and capitalism, and the black radical tradition as theorised by Robinson, it also becomes easy to see some of the schisms. At first glance it appears simply obvious to locate South African jazz within the black radical tradition and the aesthetics thereof. But on a closer look, one grounded in the particular historical experience and modernity of the continent is confronted by a definite and uncomfortable absence in places where Africa might otherwise be.

In Robinson we hear, at times, a mutual substitution of ‘black’ for ‘African’ in a way that obscures both the sense in which these terms are invoked and the histories, presents and geographies to which they don’t refer. There is a marked and noticeable absence of sustained and critical engagement with the continent in Robinson’s historical formulation of the black radical tradition. The historical experiences of African/black (the distinction is unclear) people in the Americas, primarily North America and the Caribbean, constitute the vast majority of theoretical terrain that Cedric considers and incorporates. Within this formulation the historical trauma of being enslaved and shipped appear as foundational and the continent features as a figure of vague point of origin and departure, a site necessitating citation rather than a site of knowledge or another site of forging the radical tradition. References to Africa and Africans on the continent appear tokenist, superficial and thin in *Black Marxism*.

In the chapter entitled ‘The historical archaeology of the Black radical tradition’ Robinson recounts some history of imperialism and slavery as well as Black resistance (resistance he understands to be

¹²¹ Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The making of the Black radical tradition*, (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 2000, initially published in 1983), 167.

¹²² *Ibid*, 122.

the basis of the tradition) to those processes almost exclusively within the New World context. Only the last two pages of the forty-five page chapter are interested in 'Africa: Revolt at the source,' an add-on to an already established theoretical-historical frame.¹²³

It is fairly clear from these and other notable African absences that the historical processes of slavery and imperialism as they developed and were resisted on the continent are not considered central, but rather as appendages or incidental add-ons to the Black radical tradition as formulated by Robinson. All these schisms and shortcomings would be palatable if it was posited by Robinson as a formulation of a west-Atlantic, primarily North American and Caribbean tradition with vague links to the continent as a site of origin or departure, not as a site contributing to the forging of the tradition. But, it's the claims to blackness as universally forged in Atlantic slavery which call for interrogation, because he is claiming to speak about all who have a relation to Blackness and African-ness. We see this in highly ambitious claims such as: "The peoples of Africa and the African diaspora had endured an integrating experience that left them not only with a common task but a shared vision."¹²⁴ This problem – the epistemic absence of the historical experiences of continent and the assumptions of a universal collective based on an ambivalent articulation of the Black/African dialectic – is reflective and reproductive of the violence of the historical process of Atlantic slavery. For the vast majority of African people arriving in the Americas, even those who were born and raised on the continent before being abducted, people who carried the culture and cosmologies, the continent became memorialised as an imagined and remembered site of origin framed by the impossibility of return.

¹²³ Ibid, 164-166. In 'Africa: Revolt at the source' the short, two-page section on resistance to colonial imperialism on the continent Robinson briefly cites the "Xhosa's hundred year war (1779-1880)", the "Cattle Killing of 1856-1857", and mentions other wars African people fought against colonists in the late 19th century in present-day Angola, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, and a few others. While the section is just over two pages in length, less than a single page is devoted to engaging with any historical experience of African resistance and what is there reads like a list. The rest of the two pages is concerned with the challenge of usable sources and some questions around religion and resistance. Beyond the brief engagement with the continent's history in 'Africa: Revolt at the source', elsewhere his engagement with the continent is largely reduced to briefly quoting or making passing reference to African intellectuals like Amilcar Cabral, Bernard Magubane, Amos Tutuola and Wole Soyinka.

Robinson does mention that there is a major challenge concerning a lack of historical source material that records Black anti-colonial resistance prior to the twentieth century on the continent, and, with George Padmore and CLR James, that, before the mid-19th century, "it is unlikely that more than one tenth of Africa was in European hands." However, despite admitting this, by way of Walter Rodney, he also acknowledges the devastating impact of the slave trade on the continent. As a process beginning in the 15th century, the effect of slavery was "the degradation of these African peoples and their social institutions ... and the underdevelopment of Africa's economies." This devastation of African social and economic life was the concomitant to expanded capitalist growth in Europe. There is an inconsistency here. At one time Robinson admits the devastating effect of the slave trade on African societies, and at another time he mobilises the fact that very little of the continent was officially colonised by the 19th century to avoid having to engage and incorporate the historical experiences of the continent in his formulations in any substantial way.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 166.

Relatedly, speaking about Amiri Baraka's piece 'BLACK DADA NIHILISMUS' and the notion of tragedy as it figures in Baraka's work and the Black radical tradition, Fred Moten is hip to this conversation even as he inherits some of its epistemic foreclosures and exclusions:

The tragic in any tradition, especially the black radical tradition, is never wholly abstract. It is always in relation to quite particular and material loss. This is what "BLACK DADA NIHILISMUS" is about: the absence, the irrecoverability of a return to an African, the impossibility of an arrival at an American, home. "BLACK DADA NIHILISMUS" is a response to political homelessness and this is the sense in which it is tragic; and this is also why Baraka, between 1962 and 1966, became America's great tragic poet by way of an improvisation through the opposition of the existential and the political, which improves, say, the formulations of "Sartre, a white man."¹²⁵

On the dynamics of Africa in relation to the aesthetics of the black radical tradition, Bra Fred, shows Baraka's usage of 'black' as relating to both an ontological position or an existential condition, as well as to a political identity or project, as well as, crucially, the tragedy of homelessness which is, in part, product of the irrecoverability of an African home. As much as I am indebted to Fred, I must ask: does the tragedy of the tradition and irrecoverability of an African home necessitate the absence of the continent in African American thought? Did the historical process of shipping, the traumatic conversion of Africans into black commodities necessarily mean that the continent could only feature as a long-gone, departed past? An irrecoverable home? Could it not also be a dynamic present, an imaginer of futures also concerned with and producing knowledge on the questions you raise? Did it necessarily mean that Sartre, Derrida, Heidegger, Marx, Guittarri, Lacan and Freud could bring more knowledge to bear on black arts and aesthetics of the black radical tradition than intellectuals from the continent such as Diagne, Ramose, Oyewumi, Cabral, Nyerere, Mosupyoe, Masola, Mama and Gqola? While it saddens and frustrates me that there are no references to artists or intellectuals from the continent in Moten's *In the break*, my critique of him is less severe than that of Robinson. Even as Moten's understanding of blackness is confined to America, he never claims that his project anything more than that. *Black Marxism's* major flaw, the unbelievable achievement that it is notwithstanding, is in its claim toward a universal blackness based almost exclusively on the historical experience of one part of the African diaspora.

Because of this absence, it has become important to think and question the black radical tradition from the vantage point of the site of irrecoverability, origin and departure on some of its own terms. And the music, jazz in particular, is a good place to start because it is, as Robin Kelley has pointed out, it is product of influences – cultural, political, musical and spiritual – flowing in all directions

¹²⁵ Fred Moten, *In the break*, 94.

between the diaspora and the continent.¹²⁶ These ongoing conversations are audible within it and it is a space where destabilising the hegemony of black experience in imperialist centres posturing as universal becomes possible. Triple consciousness enters here as a productive conceptual tool to help us move past the impasse. Sazi Dlamini develops the idea of triple consciousness by way of an engagement with the Blue Note's avant garde practice through Masilela's critique of Gilroy's elaboration on Du Bois's concept of double consciousness.

Masilela's critique of Gilroy's work is that it disregards the roles and participation of both South America and Africa in the conversations and constructions of a Black Atlantic culture, politics and intellectual community. The work, Gilroy's, theorises the Black Atlantic based on the Black populations of Europe and North America, effectively excluding the historical experiences of the majority of the Black Atlantic world – people on the continents of Africa and South America. Moreover, beyond mentioning it, Gilroy fails to engage the fact that many of the people he was writing about, such as Richard Wright and WEB Du Bois, were themselves deeply immersed and invested in conversations with intellectuals from the continent, that their own modernities were a product of dynamic exchange with contemporary African thought and were therefore central to his own project which was self-admittedly concerned with "blacks in the West."¹²⁷ Masilela cuts to it: "By decentering Africa from its preoccupations about the "Black Atlantic", the *Black Atlantic* achieves the paradoxical effect of diminishing its own historical sensibility while theorising historical matters."¹²⁸

So it is the same epistemic absence that we can't see in Robinson and Gilroy in their political and cultural versions of Blackness. Sazi Dlamini inversely mirrors this absence through theorising a productive presence, another cultural layer which he suggests (some) people on the continent navigate: "the lived traditions of indigeneity." He theorises triple consciousness as "a participatory consciousness of indigeneity, hybridity and cultural Europeanism."¹²⁹ In how it augments or moves through double consciousness, he says:

¹²⁶ Robin Kelley, *Africa speaks, America answers*; and _____, "Dig they freedom: Meditations on history and the Black avant garde," *Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interarts Inquiry*, 3, (1997), 13-27.

¹²⁷ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1993), 1.

¹²⁸ Ntongela Masilela, "The "Black Atlantic" and African modernity in South Africa," *Research in African Literatures*, 27:4, (Winter 1996), 90.

¹²⁹ Sazi Dlamini, *The South African Blue Notes*, 23.

[W]hile ‘double-consciousness’ and hybridity in the sense of the Black Atlantic historically stand alienated, and not necessarily by choice, from lived traditions of indigeneity, ‘triple-consciousness’ stands reconciled to popular practices which affirm a cultural homogeneity of its pre-colonial heritage.¹³⁰

I do have a few reservations about ‘triple-consciousness’, the primary one being the associated assumption that Black people in the diaspora are necessarily culturally dislocated “from lived traditions of indigeneity” to a greater extent than people living on the continent. I would not immediately assume that this is ubiquitously the case. As Robinson and others have said, culture was something African people carried with them, and, those who were shipped developed traditions which were partly transmuted from their previous contexts on the continent, but were partly new, developed within a particular context and developed through an amalgamation of different people’s traditions. African-derived religions like Santeria and Vodun could be considered to have ‘indigenous’ aspects. Moreover, given that culture is constantly evolving and African people on the continent, historically, on their own terms and on others’, have been on the move, the very notion of ‘indigeneity’, its nature and locational identity is constituted by motion rather than fixity and is open to contestation. ‘Indigeneity’ is not a self-evident concept even for people living on the continent. Cabral reminds us that culture has a class character and, as such, is unevenly reflected across any given society:

In fact, from the villages to the towns, from one ethnic group to another, from the peasant to the artisan or to the more or less assimilated indigenous intellectual, from social class to another, and even, as we have said, from individual to individual within the same social category, there are significant variations in the quantitative and qualitative level of culture.¹³¹

Beyond this unevenness within and between African peoples, even the primary examples which Dlamini uses to develop the concept of triple-consciousness, the Blue Notes, are alienated or abstracted from their ‘indigenous’ context yet still create music which is rooted in their ‘indigenous’ traditions. One of Dlamini’s own ideas captured in his sub-chapter ‘African-American jazz as the music of African exile’, captures the complexity and fluidity of ‘indigeneity’:

In South Africa, jazz resonated with the sensibilities of generations of Africans who were alienated from indigenous cultural practice, largely as a ramification of colonialism and other processes of a haphazard modernity. In this view, a symbolic distancing – from an ideological homogeneity of indigenous performance – of jazz-influenced urban black practices such as *mbaqanga* may be understood as an exiling of a form of cultural practice.¹³²

¹³⁰ Ibid, 24.

¹³¹ Cabral, *Unity and struggle*, 144.

¹³² Dlamini, *The South African Blue Notes*, 183.

African American jazz, as a rebellious descendent of African music (in exile), bears, then, a great similarity to the Blue Notes and other exponents of South African jazz we have investigated who partly base their improvisations on 'indigenous traditions' abstracted or dislocated from their normative contexts. Obviously one great difference is the aspect of time and space and the length of time from which people's musical traditions have been severed from the spaces of originary inspiration. Salim Washington and Sazi Dlamini, in a separate conversation, study the question:

SW: Well, I sometimes think that maybe this is something that there are great areas of commonality between black South Africans and black Americans in how long they have been urban and under segregation... and under economic oppression and all of that. And there is something about, well you can't really say South African blacks are detribalised to the extent that American blacks are. We don't have our languages and so forth. But there is some type of, there's industrialisation, Christianity...

SD: There is. They share a lot of that... you know, deculturative, you know, experience. Except as you say here people still have you know, recourse to tradition. They may choose to ignore tradition or to ignore those links. But they are there. Can be ignored, but they are there. They're not like they are absent. You know?

Triple-consciousness gestures to the possibility, for people based on the continent, of engaging traditions within or close to their historical context of development. Robinson famously asserted that the black radical tradition cannot be understood within the context of its development¹³³ (which we know, from his historical archaeology, to be the New World). Part of the reason for this assertion goes back to his other assertion that African cultures and cosmologies (practices and modes of thinking rooted on the African continent) form the basis of the tradition. So, following Bra Sazi and the musicians we engaged in this study, perhaps 'triple consciousness' allows us to understand the development of the African radical tradition within the context of its development? Because its basis is here on the continent even though some of its aesthetics are borrowed from folks with whom we share ancestry but not contemporary domicile.

The difficulties around this tricky terrain, which we hear in the stop-starts in Washington and Dlamini's conversation above, are partly due to the unclear distinctions and dynamics between the overlaps, confluences and historical divergences of 'Black' and 'African' as ideas, projects and identities linked but not confined to imaginations and theorisations of the revolutionary subject. Next we consider the return to the source and the dialectics of 'Black' and 'African' as revolutionary concepts.

¹³³ Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism*.

Black to Africa

From a context of severe colonial repression and alienation, one of the most potent articulations of what it means to be Black emerges from the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in South Africa. The BCM gained momentum in the late 1960s initially as a student-based movement through SASO (South African Students Organisation) and later growing into a political and community movement through organs like BPC (Black People's Convention) and BCP (Black Community Programmes). Here 'Black' is imagined and mobilised as a political identity, a positive affirmation of all people racialised as 'non-white' under apartheid-colonialism. A broad assault on the racialising logic of white supremacy, the antithesis of 'divide-and-rule;' unite-and-build-your-own-shit. As much as Blackness through BC is framed as a political identity, it has profound cultural dimensions and implications. Indeed the particular relationships between culture and politics are BC's core as it is also where one relationship between 'Black' and 'Africa' emerges. In the chapter entitled 'Some African cultural concepts' Biko says that:

I am against the belief that African culture is time-bound, the notion that with the conquest of the African all his culture was obliterated. I am also against the belief that when one talks of African culture one is necessarily talking of the pre-Van Riebeeck culture. Obviously the African culture has had to sustain severe blows and may have been battered nearly out of shape by the belligerent cultures it collided with, yet in essence even today one can easily find the fundamental aspects of the pure African culture in the present day African. Hence in taking a look at African culture I am going to refer as well to what I have termed the modern African culture.¹³⁴

Biko is very clear in this piece regarding what he considers to be some fundamental aspects of African culture –a [man]-centred society, community, communication, and communalism, music, an openness to natural and supernatural features of reality, worship and religion. What is unclear though, is the relationship between Black and African. Is 'African' invoked as in 'Bantu', the same category constructed and mobilised by Verwoerd? A category that excludes many indigenous African people such as the Khoi and the San who, as Thiven Reddy shows, are at different historical moments variously absorbed into the category of 'Coloured' or considered 'native' along with those classified as 'African'? ¹³⁵ Are 'African', 'Coloured' and 'Indian' people who are united by a political identity of Blackness, expected to 'develop along their own cultural lines' or build a collective, Cabral might say 'national', revolutionary culture based only on African cultural forms? Is Biko's usage and

¹³⁴ Steve Biko, *I write what I like*, (Picador Africa: Northlands, 2004, initially published in 1978), 44.

¹³⁵ Thiven Reddy, "The politics of naming: The constitution of coloured subjects in South Africa," in *Coloured by history, shaped by place: New perspectives on Coloured identities in Cape Town*, (Kwela Books and SA History Online: Cape Town).

mobilisation of African culture a challenge to the logic of apartheid racialization? Or is it oddly, in some ways, aligned with it, as a form of cultural nationalism? How does this form of African culture relate to the Black political community?

Lefifi Tladi, who was so hip to the particular dialectic of the continent and Black America that I have to quote him again, contextualised Malombo in their historical moment:

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 instead of relating with yourself via America as we used to do.¹³⁶

If we consider Tladi in relation to Biko's project in the chapter on 'Some African cultural concepts' - a paper initially given in 1971, a "sincere attempt" to "[emphasise] the authentic cultural aspects of the African people by African people themselves" within the broader revolutionary agenda¹³⁷ - we hear them move together, in concert united by the same imperative to "relate you with your own origins." But Malombo premeditates BCM. In fact, Tabane reckons that people only got hip to Malombo, only began to appreciate and get what they were doing "when they began to get politically minded in South Africa, the 'we are the blacks' feeling. At that time, people finally got excited about this music."¹³⁸ Tabane says that when he first put the band together people thought he was crazy and they didn't get what they were trying to do. Even Julian Bahula, later, the icon of Malombo drums, was sceptical at first.

When I first formed Malombo in 1961, the reaction was really bad, people thought I was kind of crazy.

When we bought the Malombo drums, I told Julian [Bahula], 'These are the kinds of drums I would like you to play.' He didn't want to, but he wouldn't tell me, he was shy about it all.¹³⁹

At the time, in the early 1960s, Malombo was way out in relation to their context. They were operating and creating, as a lived condition not as a grand political gesture, from a place of deep rooting in *malombo* spiritual and musical practices, implying a legitimacy of African cultural forms to contemporary cultural production, a scene steeped in American references. And it was only,

¹³⁶ *Spirit of Malombo*, DVD, David Max Brown (dir.), (Maxi-DTV Production: South Africa).

¹³⁷ Steve Biko, *I write what I like*, 44. On the gathering that the paper was delivered at, the editor added that "This conference proved to be a staging post on the way to the formation of the Black People's Convention in Johannesburg in December of that year."

¹³⁸ Philip Tabane and Malombo, *Unh!*

¹³⁹ Unh! liner notes

according to Tabane, through the ideas and political sensibilities which were later theorised as Black Consciousness that people were able to dig Malombo.

Pulling us back to the roots of Malombo's practice, Ralushai reminds us that "[It] is also important to note that *Malombo* knows no ethnic boundaries or tribes"¹⁴⁰ and that it is

[Said] to have been adopted from the Kalanga of Zimbabwe by the Vharonga (people of southern Venda) Vhailafuri (people of western Venda), the Mbedzi of eastern Venda and other Venda-speaking clans living on both sides of the Limpopo lowveld.¹⁴¹

Beyond more borders, locating the spiritual practice of Malombo, or at least its impulse and some cosmological similarities, further afield on the continent, Nambela, a *pepo* healer based in Tanzania speaks about traditional healers in the late 1950s:

In those days such people [traditional healers] were called *watu wa mizimu* (spirit people or people who know about spirits). It was generally supposed that this kind of illness was due to attacks by deceased spirits called *mizimu* (singular *mzimu*, literally meaning 'shadow').¹⁴²

Pepo recalls *Malombo* as described by Ralushai, and, in particular, the linguistic and spiritual synergies of *mizimu* and *Vhadzimu*, both referring to ancestor spirits, point to deep, shared cosmological and cultural phenomena amongst people on the continent, particularly amongst language groups. And as Erdsteick writes, the *pepo* songs are in mixtures of Bantu languages, reflecting the movement and practice of the tradition across the Tanzania, Zambia and Malawi borders.

Changing channel, on Radio Cabral we can hear both BCM and Malombo as instantiations of the return to the source. In SASO's case, students, the class of people in colonised society with the most opportunities for upward social mobility, realise the limitations of that position within a racist society. They realise that they will always be 'black' and regardless of how well they do at school, society is still going to be racist. So instead of choosing careers in junior positions within the colonial economy, they choose not to further their self-interests, but choose consciously to be 'Black', thereby identifying positively with all oppressed people, to overthrow the internal and external mechanisms that make them black. In the process, through Biko's ideas, perhaps Black is imagined as a route to Africa, a movement against the isolation and alienation of South from Africa, a connection to the continent. Similarly, for Bahula, although hesitant and tentative at first, the

¹⁴⁰ Victor Ralushai, "The origin and social significance of Malombo," 6.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 2.

¹⁴² Jessica Erdsteick, *Pepo as an inner healing force: Practices of a female spiritual healer in Tanzania*, (Royal Tropical Institute, KIT and Dar es Salaam University Press: Amsterdam and Dar es Salaam, 1997), 14.

embracing of Malombo drums was an embedding of himself on the continent. And for Tabane, after his sojourns in jazz, what he thought of as American music, he came back to the music of the sangomas in his family, the *malombo* music of Ndebele and Venda, the music of his beloved homelands. His grounding in African music resonated with (South African) people at the moment when they understood themselves as Black. So, through Malombo via Tladi via Black, then, against the alienation of exceptionalism, we are able to locate South Africa and its jazz tradition in Africa in ways that the major works on the music that we considered earlier (Ballantine, Ansell, Prof Settler, Coplan, Muller, etc.) are incapable of doing because they are generally products and producers of the alienation of the country from the continent; a condition Cabral thinks against.

African radical tradition/s

‘Black’ and ‘African’ – while they are invoked in multiple senses and understandings for them proliferate, and there is something generative in these proliferations – both are, at different moments, reduced to various essentialised understandings of race to support a variety of political visions and claims. In the South African context, as a legacy of BCM which we explored briefly above, ‘Black’ is, more often than ‘Africa’ or ‘African,’ understood to be socially constructed and have revolutionary implications. ‘Africa’ is more generally assumed to signify something definite, something immediately identifiable, to refer to a stable historical fact with very fixed cultural and racial dimensions, rather than being something undergoing constant change, fluid and constructed, a site of and for struggle. Here we join the proliferate understandings and consider some iterations of ‘Africa’ as a radical tradition and how the music sounds within and between them.

Firoze Manji, channeling Mudimbe and Mazrui, counts us off:

The term ‘African’ was not a self-proclaimed identity of the people inhabiting that part of the world. Rather, it was a term used by *others* to refer to those that lived in a limited part of a region south of the Mediterranean sea... It was a term conceived by Europe which came to prominence in the period of establishment of enslavement, the Atlantic slave trade, and the condemnation of large sections of humanity to chattel slavery.¹⁴³

But importantly, as Manji further points out when ‘Africa’ was adopted, by those who lived on the continent or felt connected to it in some way either through historical process or revolutionary commitment, it was adopted as part of an emancipatory project.

¹⁴³ Firoze Manji, “Emancipation, freedom or taxonomy? What does it mean to be ‘African’?”, *Unpublished draft chapter*, 2016, 6-7.

In the struggles for national liberation, the term African had become intimately associated with the concept of freedom and emancipation. The very definition of African came to be viewed in *political*, not racial or ethnic terms.¹⁴⁴

To concretely and historically illustrate its mobilisation for liberation, Faisal Garba pointed to the first All Africa People's Conference which was held in Accra in 1958.¹⁴⁵ The conference reached a number of resolutions to continue fight for Pan-African liberation by assisting colonised African countries to achieve independence. Among the attendees, which included African states, liberation movements and various public organisations, was the United Arab Republic. Obviously the United Arab Republic wasn't present as a country on the African continent, because it isn't, but their presence at the gathering, under the banner of "All African People" speaks to how Africa was imagined, as a political project of liberation of the people of the continent under colonial rule, but also beyond that as others struggling against imperialism and committed to the broader task of liberation.

Parallel and related to thinking about Africa as a political identity and a project of emancipation, is a deep intellectual tradition thinking Africa philosophically and through culture as a way to a liberatory politics. Ramose introduces Ubuntu:

Ubuntu is the root of African philosophy. The be-ing of an African in the universe is inseparably anchored through Ubuntu. Similarly, the African tree of knowledge stems from Ubuntu which is connected indivisibly. Ubuntu then is the wellspring flowing with African ontology and epistemology.

He delineates and constructs 'Africa':

In terms of geographic demarcations we agree partially with the delimitation of De Tejada. Thus the Ubuntu philosophy we are about to discuss "goes from the Nubian desert to the Cape of Good Hope and from Senegal to Zanzibar." However, this delimitation is questionable since the Sahara desert is not the indelible birthmark of Africa. For this reason the meaning and import of human interaction before the birth of the Sahara desert must be taken into account.¹⁴⁶

While I find Ramose's work invaluable and it constitutes an important philosophical pillar of my own work, I find some of the claims in the above excerpts questionable and problematic. The claim that Ubuntu is *the* rather than *a* root of African philosophy, one root of a potential many, is questionable and reductive to say the least. It is matched by the questionable delimitation of Africa to a specific,

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 14.

¹⁴⁵ Faisal Garba, "Africa Liberation Day Reflections", University of Cape Town, 1 May 2016.

¹⁴⁶ Mogobe Bernard Ramose, "The philosophy of *Ubuntu* and *Ubuntu* as a philosophy," in Boatamo Mosupyo and Mogobe Ramose (eds.) *The development of thought in pan africanism*, (Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company: Dubuque, 2007), 159.

portion of the continent which, while it roughly but not exactly, designates the region of the Niger-Congo language group, worryingly, bears a deep resemblance to the category of 'Sub-Saharan' Africa. This category is often used as a proxy for speaking about 'Black Africa,' a category based most specifically on a phenotypical understanding of who and what an 'African' is and what they look like. This separation, Manji suggests, "divides Africa according to white ideas of race."¹⁴⁷ The effects of this delineation (wittingly or unwittingly) functions to undermine and erase the forms of pan-African solidarity which have moved multi-directionally across the Sahara, in the 1950s and 1960s in particular. Moreover it tends to ignore the centuries of history which suggest that the Sahara is a place of dynamism, fluidity, movement and linkage, rather than a geographical mark of separation. Connected to this odd delineation, the basis of Ramose's argument for this chapter on Ubuntu as philosophy is primarily made through language. In particular, it focuses on the philosophic thought embedded in some Bantu languages spoken in southern Africa. The problematic severance and geographical delineation of Africa, coupled with the claim that Ubuntu is *the* basis of that entire portion of the continent's philosophy, and the fact that the claim is based on a language group that not all the people within Ramose's delineation of Africa historically speak, reveals a few theoretical inconsistencies.

Despite these critiques of certain theoretical/geographic/political bases of Ramose's work, I still find it incredibly useful and I believe that it holds deep liberatory potential. In the last section of the chapter Ramose considers the implications of Ubuntu on and in the world.

Religion, politics and law must be anchored upon the understanding of the cosmos as the continual strife for harmony. It is such anchorage which gives them authenticity and legitimacy. And this is the basis for consensus as the distinctive feature of Ubuntu philopraxis. Peace through the concrete realisation of justice is the fundamental law of Ubuntu philosophy. Justice without peace is the negation of the strife towards cosmic harmony.¹⁴⁸

Even as Ramose starts from Africa as a severed portion of the continent and a community of philosophy through language, his articulation of Ubuntu's orientation as the pursuit of "peace through the concrete realisation of justice" locates Ubuntu, and by association, his concept of Africa, within a liberatory tradition informed by that philosophy. Joining this, but through a different route, Olapido Olusegun, critical of the claim of a "distinctive African mode of thought or form of rationality," suggesting that the claim to a unified or particular 'African' mindset is rooted in the historical process of colonialism and reactions to it. Olusegun insists that "[A]n authentic African philosophy has to be a philosophy of action. It certainly cannot be a combative phenomenological

¹⁴⁷ Manji, "Emancipation, freedom or taxonomy?," 11-12.

¹⁴⁸ Mogobe Ramose, *The philosophy of Ubuntu*, 165.

sketch of the African world outlook.”¹⁴⁹ In other words, African philosophy, and philosophers, need not study ‘African thought’ in order to merely describe and outline its particularities, to distinguish it from other traditions of thought. We need to transcend that tendency and go beyond it to develop relevant and useful African thoughts - find answers to the difficult questions facing African people in miserable situations in which we find ourselves.

For Cabral too, there is a historical and revolutionary importance in ‘Africa’ and being ‘Africans’ which goes beyond ourselves and the continent. Connected to the need to liberate Africa for ourselves, deeper still, is to think and understand Africa with and as part of the world. “We talk a lot about Africa, but we in our party must remember that before being Africans we are men, human beings, who belong to the whole world.”¹⁵⁰ We are not only Africans for ourselves and our struggle is not just for ourselves but it is for all of humanity. Our struggles for freedom have resonance and importance for people struggling against imperialism all over the world, just as their struggles influence, inspire and teach ours. Cabral suggests that we are with and for the world before, being Africans. Africa is just a moment or a site of struggle in a much broader, universal revolutionary and emancipatory programme.

With, but also, in some senses, beyond or on the out sides of Cabral, Zimasile Ngqawana considers the question of Africa, his own relationships to Africa, Xhosa culture and the universal:

I don’t consider myself an African, I’m not interested in that, it didn’t help me. I cannot define, what is Africa, what is an African? I asked a scholar who was giving a lecture on African Renaissance... I said what is Africa, who gave us this name? To my surprise he said it was a Greek explorer, Africanus. I said if a Greek explorer gave you this name, and you cling to it, and it hasn’t transformed you, what good is it then? If it’s going to help me, if it is going to transform, if it’s going to make me a better person, I will cling to it but up to now it has not helped. Why cling to it? So I dropped it. I have no identity, I am not interested in identity. Because I think it’s false, its society again. Personality and all of those things. I am working from the self, knowledge is about that, the knowledge of the self. Towards selflessness because the self too is false, it has to be dropped too. That’s a good starting point to restore what brother was talking about, dignity, intelligence, and above all love.... I didn’t agree with my family on many things based on culture and traditions, they kicked me out. I accepted it, it was the biggest gift they gave me. So I’m not a Xhosa, I’m not an African.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Olapido Olusegun, “Towards a philosophical study of African culture: A critique of traditionalism,” in Boatamo Mosupyo and Mogobe Ramose (eds.) *The development of thought in pan africanism*, (Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company: Dubuque, 2007), 154.

¹⁵⁰ Cabral cited in Manji, “Emancipation, freedom, or taxonomy?,” 3.

¹⁵¹ *The Legacy*, Aryan Kaganoff (dir.).

Speaking about songs such as 'Qula kwedini' and others which are rooted in rituals and practiced commonly observed amongst Xhosa-speaking people, Zim says further:

I did that music because I felt that I was born into a culture, a group of people from Eastern Cape, a Xhosa group of people, society, so I had to pay my dues, I had to pay my respects and acknowledge that I've come from somewhere. But that's no longer my interest anymore. I've done that. I'm not that committed to the culture, tradition. You know. People ask this question, are you [inaudible] African music, I'm not really interested in that. I'm more committed to universal consciousness. The music that I play now reflects that.¹⁵²

Through Zim then, Africa is not inevitable. Africa is not essential. It is a tool or a strategy and must be assessed on the same basis that we would assess a tool, is it useful? Is it helping us? If not, we must drop it and move on, past the self, past any form of nationalism toward universal consciousness. Zim is in conversation with Amilcar here although their modes of action are (in) different (historical contexts). For Cabral, African cultural forms are of central import to the revolutionary programme, but the revolutionary programme is bigger than us. The African revolution is not only for ourselves, it is for the world. For Ngqawana, Xhosa-ness and African-ness are unimportant, they cannot help him, he is after a universal consciousness and those identities or concepts might inhibit or hinder that pursuit. But, importantly, 'Xhosa' and 'Africa' were also his routes to the universal, he had to engage them, create out of them, and move through them to get to where he got to in his pursuit of the universe.

Joining Bra Zim, and contributing to and constituting the African radical tradition through the sonic and the impulse of the sangoma, Makhathini, also chases the universe and a higher plane of knowing. We, again, read together from his liner notes to *iKhambi*:

Through song this project wants to restore black pride and promote self-love. iKhambi believes that this a crucial step concerning our healing and the emancipation of our people through a new look towards African knowledge systems and how they can contribute in the processes of decolonisation and ultimately how Africa as a continent contributes to a universal consciousness.¹⁵³

The sangoma, through the song and in the quest to be song-like, revitalises and opens up the revolutionary project to a spiritual imperative and the healing impulse. African knowledge and cultural practice is conceived of as a root to Black (consciousness) which concerns the soul and, moving with Zim, is concerned, in the epistemological realms of emancipation, with their potentiality as routes to the universal. The sangoma highlights and re-emphasises the epistemological and

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Nduduzo Makhathini, *iKhambi*, 2017.

spiritual dimensions of the project of liberation through the improvisation along the boundaries between the material and the immaterial, making the unseen seen and heard and act on the world through communion with the ancestors. On this communion, Ramose further articulates Ubuntu, which we understand now as a revolutionary philosophy, concerned with peace through the concrete realisation of historical justice. Here he emphasises its centrality to the well-being of the community at large:

In Ubuntu philosophy a human being in the world of the living must be umuntu in order to give a response to the challenge of the fundamental instability of be-ing. Umuntu cannot attain Ubuntu without the intervention of the living-dead. The living-dead are important to the upkeep and protection of the family of the living. This is also true for the community at large. For this reason, it is imperative that the leader of the community together with the elders of the community must have good relations with their living-dead. This speaks to the Ubuntu understanding of cosmic harmony.¹⁵⁴

Because we understand the human relations implied and embodied in Ubuntu as radical (the reliance of my humanity on yours and the ongoing pursuit of peace through the actual realisation of justice), we understand the philosophy to have revolutionary implications in terms of both the movement it calls us to in the present and the forms of society it implies and into which it can crystallise in the future. And because of the centrality of the relationships amongst the living and the living-dead, we must understand the revolutionary role of the living-dead acting in assemblage with the living. The proliferate African radical tradition is, in one instance, constituted by a philosophy of action based on the ensemble of the living and the living-dead acting in and on the world, an exponent of which is the work of the sangoma singing healing through the music. It enacts a radical shift, through the cosmological togetherness of the metaphysical and the material, of a manifestation and invocation of freedom and liberation which is rooted in a particular dance and movements through histories and realities of colonialism and capitalism, a dances which groove through exile and against alienation.

Forward motion: Dancing celebration against estrangement

As Cabral represents a productive tension, a productive togetherness of a Marxist dialectical materialism and a deep appreciation for African culture in a revolutionary programme. He understands that it is culture that deepens, grounds and necessarily situates the practice and theory of revolution in an African colonial context. He says that the goal of revolution is to liberate the forces of production from foreign domination so that people can choose for themselves which mode

¹⁵⁴Mogobe Ramose, "The philosophy of Ubuntu," 165.

of production is most appropriate for the state of their society. This reminds us that the forces of production are meant to serve the people, which is to say, allow the people to progress, to pursue their cultural lives on their own terms, to re-enter history.¹⁵⁵ In other words, the point of the liberation struggle is to work to establish the social conditions that will allow people to, unhindered, practice and develop their culture, to right their own histories. In a different proliferation but on the same channel, somewhat inverting the assumed revolutionary teleology, and jumping the proverbial gun, on a different revolutionary clock, getting down on the one and dancing around Cabral, Bra Zim swings freedom:

You see free music to us, is not music as in [points to head/ears], it's about freedom... its political. This is the only place where people of colour are masters, they can be studied, they can be written about. In music, they don't even worry about wealthy black people, at the end of the day, but musicians who represent freedom. Who are free by nature. Because freedom means that you refuse to go to work. I was not brought into this world to work for somebody, I'm not going to do that, I'm going to play this music, that is freedom. I don't believe in no government, I don't believe in no king, no queen, you know, I'm my own man. That's what it means... play the music, it's a different expression which addresses that. I'm not born into this world to work, no. I am born into this world to celebrate.¹⁵⁶

Ngqawana opens us up here to the dynamic between freedom in the music and freedom in the outside of the music. The music cannot fully contain freedom due to the spirit's celebration and its continual striving and its refusal of containment: Free in the music but also free of and beyond the music. This is how it spills over into the material and how it refuses the social conditions of unfreedom in the material world. This is a profound rejection of the estrangement and alienation engendered by capitalist work, a rejection which is foundational to communism. Because of normative conceptions and practices of self-identifying communist organisations, its historical association with racist white people,¹⁵⁷ and the associated imaginations of political change centred

¹⁵⁵ Cabral, *Unity and struggle*, 143.

¹⁵⁶ *The Legacy*, Aryan Kaganoff (dir.).

¹⁵⁷ Despite a long and rich history of Black people's involvement in communism, in South Africa, it is often thought of as a white racist political tradition which it frequently has been. One recalls the all-white South African delegation to the Communist International meeting in Moscow at the Sixth Congress of the Communist International in 1928. The white communists were frightened of Black people and refused to support the CI's official position of the Native Republic as they were concerned about what would happen to the white settler population. Mgxashe, quoting Harry Haywood, an African American communist, wrote that the question on one of the delegate's minds was "of the position of the white minority in a Native South African Republic. She came right to the point: 'What will guarantee equality for the whites in an independent Native Republic? Their slogan, as you know, is: Drive the whites to the sea.'" Mxolisi "Bra Ace" Mgxashe, *Are you with us? The story of a PAC activist*, (Mafube and Tafelberg: Houghton and Cape Town, 2006), 95; See also Steve Biko's critique of the white left in *I write what I like*.

on big events, the state, and revolution as a moment, Zim would generally be seen in/as a separate tradition altogether, to communism.

What I am not getting at here is that Zim was necessarily a 'communist' or that he conceived of his music and his refusal to 'work' as rooted in or informed by communism. Rather, I am insisting on reading his refusal of work and his insistence on celebration within, and as a response to, the historical development of colonial capitalism. War, slavery, the violent dispossession of people, the introduction of colonial taxes and the passing and implementation of legislation forcing people into wage labour on farms or in cities, all of this formed the basis for the relations of work for Black people in Southern Africa. Owning nothing of the means of production, under capitalism, Black people have only their own labour to sell which they are forced to sell under alienating conditions not of their making. But of course, the basis of the third thesis on culture – that culture and its persistence is the basis and the possibility of liberation – the development of colonialism and capitalism could not completely alienate people from their cultural practices and their conceptions of the world, although it attempted it to through missionary education and other means. These not-fully-destroyed cultural practices formed the basis of people like Zim's improvisation through that historical process, situating him in the third thesis.

We also recall Tabane's liner notes from *Unh!* where he speaks about moving to the city but feeling like he was still spiritually rooted in the 'homelands', feeling somewhat disconnected from the township youth he was surrounded by. And it was this rooting in the *malombo* tradition that he formed the basis of the Malombo tradition. The bantustans or, as Tabane terms them, the homelands, were not romantic or uncomplicated spaces. The historical processes of their establishment as labour reserves, weaponised to dispossess African people of citizenship in South Africa was unquestionably fucked up, and the spaces themselves, were more often than not dire zones of social and material death and material deprivation. Notwithstanding this, they were also possible sites of linkage to land and various associated cultural practices, the type of connections that Sazi Dlamini theorises as the indigenous presence in triple consciousness. So through Tabane and the institution of migrancy in Southern African history, the dialectic of the Bantustan and the township might be one of the central contradictions in the historical development of colonial capitalism, embedding the unfinished process of proletarianisation with the tools of anti-colonial resistance (culture). The possibility of a space of relative autonomy meant that those who travelled between the rural and the urban maintained a connection to traditions and practices which were not always present in the urban, or were present in a different form. That movement, which makes the fourth thesis, the return to the source, a historical potentiality, formed (and still today, forms) the social matrix of an African radical tradition,

Zim, who was raised in proximity to Xhosa cultural and spiritual traditions, refuses THE imposed position of Black people under capitalism. He refuses to be reduced to a worker, to a commodity, to labour. He refuses centuries of colonial history and the alienation of waged labour for a capitalist. He refuses this estrangement and instead lives by his own terms and swings through a new tune for communism, “the doctrine of the conditions of liberation of the proletariat,”¹⁵⁸ offering us a productive engagement with it through African culture refusing exile.

Following on from, locating and improvising on Zim’s refusal, Marx writes:

Communism [is] the *positive* transcendence of private property as human self-estrangement, and therefore as the real *appropriation* of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a *social* (ie. human) being.¹⁵⁹

And that:

Communism is the necessary form and the dynamic principle of the immediate future, but communism as such is not the goal of human development, the form of human society.¹⁶⁰

Communizim, the dynamic and open movement of and toward the future, puts the importance of Black conditions of estrangement on the table and raises the questions of the soul, and the spirit and their corruption under capitalism as it improvises responses to them through the sonic and the material such that the return of people to themselves, as social beings, becomes a possibility. Beyond the refusal of alienating work on the level of the individual, the social and political practice of refusal is simultaneously a positive insistence on joy and celebration, and an inscription of a mode of value beyond and outside of capitalism’s tyrannical imagination. This spectral refusal of the logic of capitalism and the “irruption into the sciences of value,”¹⁶¹ and as the music of the dead, played on record or channelled by the living, the sonic record of the spirits’ ongoing search for materiality, the music enacts an abolition of the epistemological possibility of a present as a definable, distinct temporal phenomenon separate from the past and the future. Through the invocation of and invitation to ancestors to come and dance with us, to commune with us and, through *umxhentso*, *Matunda ya kwanza*, *malombo*, and *Vhadzimu*, to give instruction in the earthly task of healing people in the community, the immaterial, unseen spirits bear on the present as seen and material through the actions of sangomas and musicians who summon, channel and are guided by them, we are in the presence of a significant challenge to the logic that holds the sharp distinctions between,

¹⁵⁸ Friedrich Engels, *Principles of communism*, (Workers Party of America: Chicago, 1925, initially published in 1847).

¹⁵⁹ Karl Marx, *Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844*, (Progress Publishers: Moscow, 1959), 43.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 49.

¹⁶¹ Moten, *In the break*, 263.

not only, living and dead, but also, material and immaterial in place. It is in the cosmological world that the sangoma exists, and to which she gives expression, that the immaterial acts on and in the world as a material force through her. She is the embodied possibility of the materialisation of the immaterial, the living accompanied by the living-dead, destroyer of the distinction between the past and the present.

Controlling conceptions of time and space are central to the imperialist project of ongoing capital accumulation. Mphutlane wa Bofelo says that the “weapon of the oppressed is the rebellion against the reason of the oppressor.”¹⁶² Sylvia Wynter says that the act of “*reinterpretation* of this reality is to commit oneself to a constant revolutionary assault against it.”¹⁶³ This is what the music represents. And it doesn’t only represent a rebellion or an assault against the organising and disciplining tendencies of capitalist modernity, but it embodies and enacts an alternative temporal and cosmological paradigm. A person accompanied by their ancestors is an enactment of a reinterpretation of reality and an embodiment of an assault on the temporal logic of linearity and of the epistemological separation of living and dead. And this fact, that the living-dead act on and have impact on the material world represents an understanding of reality structured by the onto-triadic structure of be-ing in Ubuntu that Ramose elucidates, which consists of three levels of human existence: the living, the living-dead, and the yet-to-be-born;

Since two of the levels pertain to beings which are either unknown or unseen, we may refer to it as an ontology of invisible beings. The ontology of invisible beings is the discourse about the unknown from the standpoint of the living. The unknown remains unknowable on the side of the living. Yet it is believable, and because of this belief it has a direct influence on the life of the living. In this sense, the belief in the unknowable is metaphysics. It is a claim, based on belief, to knowledge about beings outside the domain of the world of the living. The ontology of invisible beings is thus the basis of Ubuntu metaphysics.¹⁶⁴

Partially out of breath and slightly taken aback by the epistemic rug being pulled from under their feet, struggling to keep up and admitting that they could not have imagined these philosophical possibilities Marx and Engels are excited by the challenge to Euromodernity’s capitalistic conceptions of time, rooted in African philosophy which constitutes the basis of living practice of communism. They reaffirm their open and dynamic understanding of the movement:

¹⁶² Mphutlane wa Bofelo, “Steve Biko Seminar,” Durban University of Technology, 21 September 2017.

¹⁶³ Sylvia Wynter, “We must learn to sit down together,” 22.

¹⁶⁴ Mogobe Ramose, *Ubuntu as African philosophy*, 165.

Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the now existing premise.¹⁶⁵

Although Marx and Engels are not the ultimate authorities on communism, it is good to remember that communism wasn't always imagined and practiced as foreclosed, dogmatic and rigid as it often is in the contemporary. Their perspectives are useful in allowing and encouraging us to think communism dynamically as a broad movement concerned with, not just the destruction of the material conditions of misery, which are made and remade largely through the relations of private property and the associated social schisms that hold them in place, but also the positive expression of that movement in the creation of alternatives. Abolition is not merely the destruction of one thing, but it is (in) the dynamic relationship between the destruction of one thing that oppresses us with the creation of an alternative, something we love.¹⁶⁶ In the spirit of openness encouraged by Marx and Engels, communism might be thought, through South African jazz, as the abolition of the epistemic possibility of a present and the manifestation of an alternate time-space reality rooted in the onto-triadic structure of be-ing. We might hear this materialised in the music wherein communion with ancestors, the refusal of alienation, the owning of one's soul, the frequency of the maternal channel, and the insistence on celebration and moving with and for the music, and the improvised sonic interpretation of healing energy of plants is what Marx and Engels wished they could dream of. Although Marx couldn't imagine it, he opened the epistemic possibility for the practices of South African jazz to be understood as the assault on the values and logic of capital. Through communism we are taking off into the space which Marx opens up, a space that Moten sits in:

The epistemological shift that Marx allows, wherein practices are thought as if for the first time, as if in eclipse of objects, can itself be thought as an irruption into the sciences of value. The black avant-garde is an anticipatory manifestation of that shift/irruption.¹⁶⁷

Still lingering with Amiri, we are with and for Fred as he hears Baraka in the phase of his movement between black nationalism and Marxist-Leninism as one of these "anticipatory manifestation[s] of that shift/irruption":

Baraka's lingering in the broken rhythms of the field where blackness and black radicalism are given in and as black (musical) performance, in and as the improvisation of ensemble, amounts to a massive

¹⁶⁵ Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, (Progress Publishers: Moscow, 1932), 10.

¹⁶⁶ Ruthie Gilmore, "Anti-carceral feminisms conference," Constitution Hill, 24 October 2016.

¹⁶⁷ Fred Moten, *In the break*, 263.

intervention in and contribution to the prophetic description – a kind of anticipatory rewriting or phonography – of communism that is, as Cedric Robinson has written the essence of black radicalism.¹⁶⁸

From our critical journeys through writing, Robinson, Gilroy, the exile of Wynter, and the critique of absence, how obscure that we have arrived, again, with the black radical tradition. The resonance, beyond critique, is profound. The music is an affirmation of Cabral's insistence on the importance and implications of culture in an African revolutionary context. His assertion that it is cultural forms which carry the spirit of liberation and that the spirit of liberation gives rise to new cultural forms is audible in the music and in the musicians, they are evidence of, and testament to it. The persistence of African forms such as the functionality of music as ceremony, in the healing practices of isangoma and the drums of *malombo*, the cosmological context of the dream and the dance, and the importance of the maternal and the channeling of plants, is the historical fact that Black South African people have been and are still struggling against racial capitalism, still chasing freedom, still pursuing and crafting liberatory culture. The music is an instantiation of the fifth thesis, the new cultural forms, the decolonial aesthesis, the Black avant garde, whose motive force is the future, the spirit of liberation grounded and contextualised in African cultural practices of autonomy and fugitivity. South African jazz, whose movement is against alienation and estrangement, is a product and an arena of the return, to the human self as a social being, through the source, to the continent, to the homelands, against exile, across the Atlantic toward the sounds of spirits transcending. And its refusal to work is a return to history, to an autonomous celebratory cultural life which is simultaneously an anticipatory enactment of communism, an improvisation on the imposed position of blackness in colonial capitalism based in invoked ancestry and free music.

¹⁶⁸ Fred Moten, *In the break*, 86.

Conclusions

Through Black study moving with and for Zimasile Ngqawana, Miriam Makeba through Nduduzo Makhathini, The Blue Notes, and Malombo Jazz, we have heard things in the music that refer us to the context outside of it. Its many out sides have insisted on the music being understood in the between of the development of racial capitalism in its specific, not exceptional, character in southern Africa, and various African cultural practices and cosmologies. It has also insisted that the music is constituted by the autonomous Black practice of improvisation through, against and in transcendence of that history and that it represents a materialisation of a time-space reality that subverts and exists beyond colonial capitalist logics. Many published scholarly studies of the music, due to the authors' distance from the cultural context and the academy's ontological position of 'about' in relation to studying African culture, have been missed by some of these things. These things situate the South African jazz tradition as a cosmologically-rooted African cultural practice, and a revolutionary philosophical tradition of action. The music, which, itself, in its anti-disciplinary sensibilities seems to resist being written 'about', invites us, instead, to dance with it in its improvisation through African philosophies and the Black radical tradition, inviting us to join the search and the eternal struggle toward wholeness, against the fragmentation of be-ing, against the colonial imperative and against exile. The music becomes a site wherein the metaphysical motives of divine communion with ancestors, and the healing impulse of the sangoma manifest. Through umxhentso and the dream and *malombo* drums, it is the manifestation, in the material, on the sonic and the maternal channels, of the ontology of invisible beings, a materialisation of immaterial beings, the living-dead, who, through the onto-triadic structure of reality, we understand to be with, not separate from us, the living.

Thinking the return to the source and the refusal of the ontological condition of exile, with Cabral we understand the existence and the persistence of these cultural practices and ways of thinking and knowing the world to be the content of a dynamic liberatory anti-colonial politics, as well as evidence that the alienation of colonialism is never complete. A people's culture cannot be utterly obliterated, its existence itself, on the people's own terms, not those of tribalism, is an instantiation of resistance to domination as well as its own autonomous framework. The movement against colonial estrangement, of which the music is an instance, situates the music in a much broader liberatory tradition. We, as African people, Diagne asserts, have and need art so that we don't "die of the colonial negation," and through Marx, we have communism as the negation of the negation, which is the alienation of self from self and self from labour and what it produces and self from

society that the present mode of production enacts. “Communism is the necessary form and the dynamic principle of the immediate future, but communism as such is not the goal of human development, the form of human society,”¹⁶⁹ it is the real movement toward the future which is revitalised by the music which moves spirits as well as shifts notions of time.

The movement that the practice of South African jazz performs through racial capitalism’s history in Southern Africa and its resonance with Marx and Engels’ open communist imagination and the impulse to move against estrangement toward a return of humans’ to themselves as social and spiritual beings locates it as a living and dynamic anticipatory manifestation of the future through communizim. And, through resonance with players such as John Coltrane – who, not only sound out the slave sublime, the phonography of the spirit’s dialectical struggle toward a sonic language of transcendence from the social context of white supremacy, but who are also the positive expression of the response to a divine calling which falls not far too from inthwaso, the ancestral calling to thwasa, to become a healer, of self and others – South African jazz gets up to dance with the Black radical tradition. The dance is simultaneously synergistic, beautiful and slightly out, something is missed in the steps. As Robinson describes the Black radical tradition, it is resistance to slavery and imperialism based on cultural practices and cosmologies from the African continent, which enslaved humans took with them across the middle passage. The theoretical/historical territory which *Black Marxism* delineates, is that of the New World, with the continent featuring primarily as a lost point of origin, an ambiguous cultural source. These profound epistemological exclusions move us to consider South African jazz, which is based in motion through the historical development of imperialism on the continent and is situated in the cultural presence in triple consciousness, as an exponent of an African radical tradition. While it still dances, and moves with and for Robinson, it steps further out for a smoke with Tladi via Malombo who, through study, are concerned to relate us with our own origins instead of via America.

This work, while it tries to extend the impulse of Malombo and others to decentre or destabilise America in the cultural history of South Africans, it does so also in the broader context of ‘global’ jazz discourse which is stubbornly US-centric and ‘local’ jazz discourse which is largely epistemologically restricted in its engagements with African cultural practices. From this destabilization, and the African cosmological basis of the music, which constitutes jazz’s ins and out sides, which operates to subvert some epistemological underpinnings of Euromodernity which are also the bases of the University, an investigation into the content and pedagogy of tertiary jazz education programmes as well as the broader social sciences studying African culture in South Africa is very urgent. If the

¹⁶⁹ Marx, *Economic and philosophic manuscripts*, 49.

dream and the dance in the communion with ancestors which we sense in Makhathini's journey and the quest to be song-like, are understood as some of the bases of the tradition, are our institutions equipped, and oriented in such a way that they can study – teach and be taught – with students about that which the music frequently channels, the metaphysical impulse of the sangoma's social work? Are they able to situate Zim's meditations on madness, firstly within the curriculum proper, and secondly, within the historical and contemporary cultural contexts that it moves through, extends and transcends in his movement through 'Xhosa' and 'Africa' in his speculative motion toward the universal? More work needs to be done to interrogate and situate South African jazz, as an African cultural form performed through the dialectic of colonialism, not only in its relation to African American music but also in relation to other African musics produced out of contexts of struggle – such as the Gnawa music of Morocco, made by Africans enslaved by Arab traders, Sega music of Reunion Islands rooted in slaves' Malagasy songs, and Chimurenga music of Zimbabwe which was produced in the context of the anti-colonial struggle against the Rhodesians. And, further, more work needs to be done to situate South Africa and Black cultural production within histories of the Indian Ocean world which, not only predate the movements across the Atlantic Ocean by hundreds of years, but open it to other musical sensibilities and histories of movement, dynamism and fluidity. A productive line of research could attempt to put the black radical tradition in conversation with cultural traditions and slave rebellions from the Indian Ocean world.¹⁷⁰ More funds will be needed to pursue any of these research topics through a PhD project, topics which the music points us to.

In/conclusively South African jazz which is to say an exponent of African culture which is to say a set of aesthetic principles and bases of freedom which are in through on of and beyond the music which moves through history and which is oriented toward positive Black futures and anticipations of that freedom in and in the out sides of the music which insists that the necessary resistance and response to racial capitalism is not and cannot just be material but it is located in the co-constitution of the metaphysical and the material and co-dependence of the spiritual and the political and is "held close

¹⁷⁰ One wonders what the incorporation of the historical experiences of slave revolts on the continent, for example, such as the 1808 revolt in the Cape which was led by Louis who was from Mauritius and modelled himself on his hero Toussaint L'Overture, into the historical terrain of the black radical tradition would have done to it theoretically and as a revolutionary weapon. For one thing, it would open the conversation to the experiences and cultural resources of those who were shipped *to* Africa, rather than just being a conversation amongst those who were shipped *from* Africa. This would immediately bring the Indian Ocean world into the picture and forces us to think the nomenclature and other bases of the Black radical tradition differently, and ultimately would widen the revolutionary imagination and the revolutionary project.

in the open song of the ones who are supposed to be silent”¹⁷¹ which is swung and enacted in the persistence of African cultural forms as the dance against colonial and capitalist estrangement.

¹⁷¹ Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The undercommons*, 51.

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