

MILITARY AESTHETICS AND THE POLITICS OF RECONCILIATION IN ZULU PERFORMANCE

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Zulu ngoma is a men's recreational form that grew out of the system of migrant labor through the 20th century in South Africa. You might know it as the style in which South African rock, folk and Afropop musician Johnny Clegg dances and in part sings, and through whom ngoma has made appearances on the world stage. Or you might have encountered the iconic Zulu warrior figure with which ngoma style intersects. Though a recreational form, it has at times been implicated in factional vendettas (CLEGG, 1982) and in surges of ethnic hostility (MARKS, 1991; ERLMANN, 1991). Indeed, the dancers call themselves *amasosha*, soldiers.

My take on ngoma, which I elaborate below, is that it is in part an artful representation of the possibility for violence. That possibility is produced, and held in check, by the intersection of the art of the voice and of the body. Against a history of violence in South Africa, and intense struggles through apartheid in the area these men call their home, it is a respectable stance of men to champion the capacity for violence, while holding it in check. I offer a close ethnographic analysis of ngoma to consider the entanglement of performance with acts of violence, or, in its broadest framing, of aesthetic with politics. My work in progress is an exploration of this relation.

On the ground, ngoma is performed at homecoming times in rural KwaZulu-Natal, the province in which the majority of Zulus have familial or ancestral ties. It is also performed on Sunday afternoons at working and work-seeking men's hostels in those cities in which Zulu men labor or seek to labor, especially in Johannesburg and Durban (see THOMAS, 1988). Song and dance teams, each composed of men who share their home community, compete against one another. Within the teams individual dancers wage challenges one on one.

Of the three Zulu ngoma styles, I focus here on umzansi ngoma. The core of the umzansi style is a high frontal kick and heavy stamp. Dancers kick as high as they can and stamp as hard as they can. A key part of the artistry lies in the improvised preparation for the kick, and in how a dancer strings together a series of kicks. A sequence ends usually by the dancer falling over backwards, a skillful performance of the fact that he has expended all his

energy. Competing dancers trade sequences, one for one, each responding to his opponents moves and working at upping the ante. This, too, is a keenly watched aspect of the artistry of performing.

The soundtrack comprises drumming and chanting. The team chants the praise name of a solo-ing dancer, matching their phrasing to that dancer's danced patterns. Group singing prepares the team and individual dancers for dancing, and concludes it. The event, then, comprises a virtually uninterrupted sound track of drumming, singing, and chanting, punctuated with whistles, rhythmic clapping, vocal interjections, and women's celebratory ululations.¹

Writing about the ngoma body then, I must also and equally write about the voice. About the swivel of the foot to the percussive click of the tongue. The torso stretching and twisting to song.

I must listen to the body *of* a voice, its weight, its quality, its form. The stridence of the lead singer's throat. The resonant bassy response of his team. The piercing attack of a boastful interjection. Dental whistles. A mother's quivering ululation ringing out. Verbal art as performance (BAUMAN, 84). I must listen to the body of a voice.

I hear the state of the body *in* the voice. Saliva wetting the sound. *Ulaka*, moral anger, said to reside in the throat (BERGLAND, 1976), audible in the vocal qualities of Zulu ngoma singing.

I notice the body *as* a voice. Bongani kick-stamping to the sound of his own praise name. Sipho brushing his hand against his ear in improvised solo display. Do you hear what I'm saying (with my dance)? I notice the body *as* a voice, the way a body "speaks" through its gestures. How might such gestures sometimes stand in for saying something with the actual acoustic voice? Bongani dancing, and nothing is spoken – but I will come to that.

I register that the voice is *of* a body, a body that has personality and biography. Jabu's aged vocal fry. Siyazi Zulu's poetic contemporary lyrics. Sipho's old-style signature head bob. Bongani's mammoth grace. Like Adriana Cavarero (2005), I register the singularity of a voice.

I approach the voice as produced in relation with multiple other voices. The camaraderie of seated team mates who vocally produce the soundtrack that supports and amplifies a dancer's solo. Sipho dancing competitively against Bongani, sequence by

¹ Zulu ngoma is part of an elaborated South and East African ngoma complex in which teams of men compete in song and dance. The performance practice takes its name from the drum, ngoma, in Bantu languages. There are multiple styles and regionally specific performance practices and nomenclatures, variously tied to colonial histories. For example, see Argyle 1991, Gunderson and Barz 2000, Ranger 1975, Tracey 1952.

improvised sequence. Bongani. Siphoh. Bongani. Siphoh. Hear whistles from their team mates, and from men in the crowd. Ululations. Siphoh's mothers, sisters and his wife calling out "he's from our house," as he completes his final improvised sequence. I hear Bakhtin's polyphonic utterances, co-producing the dense aesthetics of the event (1981).

My questions about the quality and instrumentalization of the voice in relation to the body arise from working with a community team of *umzansi* ngoma singer-dancers in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, since 1991. When I read the literature about the voice as an art I tend to find the body absent or ill-defined or consisting only of a throat. When I turn to literature on the body that prompts me to think about is habitus, performativity, and politics, I find scant presence of the art of performing, let alone of the sound of the voice. Yet for ngoma participants, to say you are a dancer is to assume you of course also sing. David Coplan reports likewise that Sotho migrant performers talk of a "song sung with the feet" (COPLAN, 1993, p. 323). A challenge for Africanist music and dance ethnographers is to keep close analysis of sound and movement equally active on the page, without losing the analysis of struggle.

My exploration of song and dance also stems from wondering about "having a voice" as a metaphor for political participation (MALKKI, 1997). In rural Zulu communities migrant men, once apartheid's laborers, have become expendable to the state. They and their families live in an area historically ravaged by violence and struggling with the HIV/AIDS epidemic. State and civic institutions that should sustain life, protect well-being and assure a workable future are under-resourced when they are there at all. What role does ngoma play for its artists and fan in this context? In Africanist terms, how might an analysis of aesthetics fit into discourses about sovereignty and crisis (MBEMBE, 2001, FERGUSON, 2006, PIOT, 2010)?

The ngoma singer-dancer as soldier

Amongst the tropes that dancers narrate, they identify some organizational aspects of ngoma as military ones: For example, in addition to calling themselves *amasosha*, soldiers, they give themselves as rank and file over to the heady authority of a captain, and vice captain, who inspect their ranks and (mock) punish individuals with a whip.

In dancing they co-ordinate the swing of their legs and arms "like the military": the forward swing of the right arm balances the backward swing of the left leg, and so forth.

Some dancers' praisenames, or dance nicknames, reference guns and military rank: Dubul'ushajeni (Shoot the Sergeant), Thu Bullet (as powerful as not just one bullet, but two), Thu Thwalofu (i.e. "Two-twelve", twice as powerful as a .303 gun which loads twelve bullets

in its magazine). These are the names that team mates chant, matching their chanted phrases with the footwork of the dancing soldier (MEINTJES, 2004).

Amongst the songs they compose and perform are lyrics about fighting.

Ushay'i-AK-47"
Kufanele masigoduke siye emakhaya kobaba
Ngoba lelizwe basiphethe kanzima kanje
Sizohamba phezu kwegazi kwegazi
Shwele, omalume!
Kufanele masigoduke siye emakhaya kobaba

You are 'hitting' with an AK-47 (using an AK-47)
 Let us go home, let's go home to our fathers' land
 because there is too much danger in this place
 We are walking over blood, and over more blood
 It's enough, stop it, uncles!²
 Let us go home, let's go home to our fathers' land

This song with its explicit programmatic text was composed and sung in 1991 at a time of terrible local and national violence.

Other aspects of ngoma practice are not specifically identified in military terms, though they contribute to the military aesthetic.

For example, they dance to a marching bass drum. The drum beats a repeated pattern, music for dance-marching, whether a steady stream for the full team's choreographed sections, or whether differentially accented for improvising dancers. Drummers periodically add a "fill" at the end of a phrase, or leading to another section. Hear the idea of marching.

See the idea of the military in the marching bass drum itself. In some contexts ngoma performers substitute the plastic headed drum with a wooden drum considered "traditional". With skin double heads laced in place over its frame with leather thongs, this "traditional" drum is styled like the marching bass and modeled on the drum of the British armies who fought ferociously against the Zulu and later against the Boers in South Africa (KIRBY, 1934/1968).

Teams have a vocal and gestural relationship with their captain which involves repeated calls and brusque choral responses and choreographed saluting.

² Z. Makhanye is the composer of the song; field recording 25 December 1991. "Uncles" refers here to the amaBhaca, who were the last of the Zulu to migrate, settling in the Eastern Cape just south of the KwaZulu-Natal province. Hence the reference to relatives. In areas of KwaZulu-Natal that were Inkatha Freedom Party strongholds, amaBhaca were taken to be aligned with the African National Congress.

Dancers' fashionable backpacks (rave bags shaped as animals), or recently, stuffed soft toy monkeys, substitute for what once were canvass satchels. These are signs of militarism: field satchels, soldiers' gear as dancers' uniform.

These ngoma gestures taken from state spectacle and knowledge of the army are appropriations for aesthetic purposes of the modern power these symbols represent.³ Furthermore, ngoma dancers seamlessly blend state gestures with forms that many soldiers understand as a continuation of historical Zulu warrior practice. Just as individual Zulu warriors break out of the ranks to perform frenzied preparedness for battle – whether during political rallies or historically in Zulu army formations, so do they for ngoma competition. Just as they wear decorative soldiers satchels, so to they wear skin headdresses or leather armbands or skin aprons and carry fighting sticks.

The umzansi ngoma kick and styles of dancing and singing are specifically identifiable. But men's singing and dance styles and displays of rivalry at ceremonial occasions and parties have broad similarities with ngoma. For example, some of ngoma's movements with sticks derive from *ingoma yenduku*, “dance of the stick, where in a way you are actually showing your ability to handle a weapon; you're dancing the stick, you're not dancing yourself.” (CLEGG, 1984). *Ingoma yenduku* in turn relates to stick fighting displays at weddings, and – in its most organized form, at the interdistrict ceremony called *umgangela*. Such displays, while articulated as men's “play” (CLEGG, 1979), can result in serious injury, or erupt into dedicated fighting (CARTON, 2001, 2012).⁴

Historically, there is also stylistic continuity in song and dance styles. The raised front leg stamping, the choreographed line dancing, the overlap with the martial art of stick fighting, the choral singing, and warrior dress carry traces of past styles and performance practices. Most traceable due to the history of documentation practices and the preservation possibilities of materials, is the stylistic continuation of the dress of the warrior figure, captured through graphic illustration and then photography over the centuries.⁵ Early Zulu anthropology describes warrior dances that are wild, flamboyant, ferocious, and that include frenzy and kicking, and singing or chanting. While these accounts are too general to get a sense of the formal details of song and dance styles, they do suggest that there has been some

³ This is by no means unique. See Argenti (2007) in Cameroon, Ranger (1975) on the Beni ngoma, Jean Comaroff (1985) in Tswana religious performance.

⁴ Umgangela continue to occur in northern KwaZulu, though the performance is no longer widespread through the province. For a discussion of umgangela, see Clegg, J. (1979). Similarities to aspects of ngoma are recognizable in discussions of other music and dance styles. See Joseph (1983), Pewa (1995), Rycroft (1957), Xulu (1992).

⁵ Amongst many examples, see Knight (1994), Lock (2003), Webb (1992).

continuation of an aesthetic treatment of warriorhood.⁶ Past documentation of ngoma itself as well as analyses of historical records show continuities in the style.⁷

This ngoma warrior image borrows its authority not only from an imperial Zulu history, but from contemporary uses of those symbols by officials in positions of power -- the Zulu monarchy, the ethnic nationalist Inkatha Freedom Party, and now President Zuma -- even while the dancers consider their artform separated from party politics. Post-apartheid, the cache of “heritage” in the cultural tourism market further affirms the image. The image of the ngoma dancer as soldier, then, is multi-layered and saturated with history. It is filtered through the global media and edged – “excited” – by its intersections with state and struggle politics.

The blend of military styles marks the soldiers’ performance of violence as performance. Ngoma singer-dancers enact soldiering while they identify as soldiers. They creatively employ a designer selection of warrior-soldier components for dramatic effect. In some contexts, the layering and juxtaposition intensifies the seriousness of the expression. For example, at one event, I witnessed a danced wager between Siphho and Bongani who was said to have been implicated in a murder twelve years earlier. Siphho’s dance against him is a refusal to forget a violent past, while it plays on the drama of the past event for aesthetic effect. (Before that moment, Bongani had not danced publicly in the district since the fateful assassination.) Yet in other moments *amasosha* treat their art with playful whimsy. When dancers perform a comedy routine showering surprise candy from their animal backpacks, they momentarily call into doubt the proposition that ngoma is an expression of the competitive threat of violence. Likewise, when dancers narrate Bongani’s re-entry into the public arena, they downplay its significance. When I tell Siphho that I am surprised he danced against Bongani, he simply says “We are brothers.” When I remark to another dancer on the momentous happening, he says, yes, they danced. When I ask who won, everyone says there were no judges.⁸

Ngoma’s resonances across other local Zulu styles and performance practices makes it possible to further generalize ngoma simply as another play with warriorhood. For example, other versions of military garb are appropriate for ceremonial parties especially weddings and girls’ engagement parties. Aspects of song and movement are also shared across styles. This

⁶ See for example Binns (1974), Bleeker (1971), Bryant (1949/1967), Gluckman (1940), Kirk (1951), Krige (1936), Smith (2005).

⁷ See Clegg (1982), Erlmann (1991), Thomas (1988), Tracey (1952).

⁸ While ngoma is competitive, it is only on rare occasions that it is staged in front of a judge.

kind of intertextuality is also a means by which the diffuseness of ngoma's interpretation is maintained. While ngoma is an artful representation of the possibility for violence, the invitation to question ngoma's relationship to material acts of injury is always present. Ngoma is "just styling".

The aporia of ngoma performance is crucial to its political efficacy (ARGENTI, 2007). When Siphon and Bongani danced, the air was electric: strong dancers were competing. When Siphon and Bongani danced, the air was electric: it was politically portentous. Is the electricity a recognition of the entertaining artistry? Or is it electric because the spectators know the biographies of the dancers? Or because there is potential for the moment to spill out of control? This potential is best revealed against the background of the political tensions that were part of ngoma dancers' everyday. I describe these below.

The management of danger

While ngoma is not real violence, it is by force of circumstance implicated in processes of violence. Indeed, Siphon and Bongani, childhood friends, had landed up on opposing sides of a deadly local vendetta, in which Bongani had been singled out as a culprit. And he was not just any culprit: it is said that he was implicated in the murder of a prized dancer from Siphon's ward (or district within a chiefdom).

In 1991 and 1992 a faction fight erupted between the two wards on opposite sides of a river. While skirmishes had occurred in the area intermittently, no-one had seen as devastating an altercation as this since the late 1950s.

The course the altercation took was shaped by practices of migrancy as well as by national political factors, local histories of internecine struggle, and possibly by personal grudges. Because men lived in both the city – Johannesburg – and the rural homestead, and traveled frequently between the two places, so did the fighting. While both wards were identified with the ethnic nationalist Inkatha Freedom Party [IFP], as was the chiefdom as a whole, the national conflict between the African National Congress [ANC] and the IFP could be exploited for local purposes.

These were the transition years from the release of Mandela and the unbanning of the ANC and other wings of the liberation movement (1990) through to the first democratic elections (1994). Away from the negotiating tables, South Africans engaged in passionate debate and struggle, some of which erupted into violence. Violence that had largely been contained in pockets of KwaZulu-Natal in the later 1980s spread across wider regions, and into the cities. By 1992, Johannesburg and its surrounding townships and informal settlements

were riddled with it. As violence spilled out onto the city's streets, it also circulated back into rural areas where it exacerbated tensions and animated longstanding practices for dealing with conflict.

Death, injury, escape from injury, management of danger, and weapons were a component of the everyday especially in the early 1990s for ngoma dancers and their friends; the threat of violence, fear and bravado are "ordinary affects" (STEWART, 2007) woven from the threads of everyday life in zones of conflict (DAS, KLEINMAN et al. 2000). These "ordinary affects" are voiced in song and dance. "*Hey you maggots eating are fathers' sons, your heads will be cut off* [if you dare to come out of the ground]", composes Siyazi Zulu. "*The earth is not growing fat [and healthy] with our fathers' sons,*" his refrain pronounces.⁹ He records this song, "Mhlaba", on an ngoma CD in the aftermath of the struggles round the national political transition and the local faction fight and as HIV/AIDS begins to hit the team (Umzansi 1998).

"*Hey you maggots eating are fathers' sons, your heads will be cut off*" sings an ngoma team as they enter the dance arena, after their fellow dancer Vusi had been jumped in Johannesburg and killed, and Themba had died of AIDS, and Bheki was still missing after his taxi was hijacked. "*The earth is not growing fat [and healthy] with our fathers' sons.*"

The reach, degree, spread, integration, and mobility of violence, as well as the multiplicity of its sources, networks, and forms, leave the state incapacitated. When official institutions designed to control violence are insufficient, citizens necessarily develop practices of danger management through alternative institutions and communal organization. Citizens implicated in violence manage the threat to their sense of moral order among other ways through song and dance.

Fighting-dancing-dancing-fighting

For ten years (1992-1999) after the assassination of the prized dancer, who was also a flower of the community and a friend of many, the teams don't dance together.

In the eleventh year (2003), after much diplomacy and negotiation, the teams stage another collective dance. Eleven years after the altercation and the prize dancer's

⁹ *Bathi ngengane zobaba*
We ntuthwane ezodla thina,
Mhlaba kawunoni ngengane zobaba mhlaba kawunoni
Zonqunwa amakhanda we ntuthwane ezodla thina
 "Mhlaba" composed by Siyazi Zulu (Umzansi 1998).

assassination, Christmas time, 2003, on his home turf, Bongani joins in and steps out to dance.

After eleven years of absence, when Bongani steps out to dance, staged pandemonium breaks out around him. As quick as lightening, dancers from the opposing team break out of the ranks and pose, signaling they want to compete against him. Siphos wipes his chest in a gesture marking he's hot as a dancer. He's made his point and he retreats.

Bongani holds his pose staunchly in front of the team while captain Jabu zigzags from side to side pushing the dancers back into the mass of the team, blasting directives on his whistle, pointing "no" to dancers out of his reach. Voices are calling for Siphos who then mock begins a sequence, withholding the kick, artfully taunting.

Bongani steps out when his own team's captain is in charge. Of all those posturing to dance against Bongani, Jabu lets Siphos dance. In other words, Jabu gives the floor to the captain of the team to which the murdered dancer had belonged. Jabu holds the space open for Bongani and Siphos to dance. It is a good match. Furthermore, as Clegg has said, a good leader is "attuned to local ... politics, he can use this to advantage..., he can push the dancers to the utmost extremes before they'll actually fight each other; [a good leader] will bait them." (Clegg 1984).

First, the two dancers posture, each on their own side. They dance a sequence. A cheeky lightfooted youth shoots out from the back of the team to take to the floor. Dancers shout at him to get out of the way. Jabu holds his hand up, "stop" he's ordering those who want to take to the floor. His vice-captain assists him on the left flank, where men are bristling to break in.

For his second sequence, Siphos starts by cocking his head, holding his ear, "do you hear what I'm saying (with my dance)?" Kneeling, he stamps the ground. He stands. He kicks. He falls. Quickly he gets up to move away. It's a fake. Like he flash he turns and slices the air with a final off-beat kick. A cascading fall. A brilliant surprising move.

Bongani delays not a moment. He kicks with the power of thunder, pitting his power against Siphos's cunning. Note that both teams are providing the soundtrack to which the dancers dance. The murdered dancer's friends and former team mates chant the pariah Bongani's praisename to solicit a better performance from him, just as they do for Siphos.

Again, dancers try to charge in. The vice-captain struggles to control them. Meanwhile, Siphos poses in front of the team to hold his place in the competition. When the way is clear, with the focus of an eagle, he swoops into the center for his third sequence.

Then Bongani, a rumbling bulldozer, kicks. He saunters back to join his team mates.

Jabu whistles long calls to draw the dancers' attention. The team is noisy. The crowd is noisy. In a strident voice, Jabu begins a song to end the set.

Sipho's encounter with Bongani is a responsible act of manhood as understood in local terms. To dance against Bongani with singing for him is in part an act of regularizing social relationships. "Bongani got lucky." He escaped injury or incarceration. It was simply "not his time". He remains a member of the community at large. Dancing against Bongani re-integrates him into the dance and thereby into the fabric of the larger community. "Well," says Sipho to me three years later at my probing, "as captain, I must make him welcome", so they danced. In the midst of struggle, life must go on (DAS AND KLEINMAN, 2001).

The seeming nonchalance of recognizing that "Bongani got lucky" – and now we will dance with him and sing for him – is not a redemptive move in which his former opponents leave their anger behind, and forget an injurious event. This would be another romantic analysis of truth and reconciliation processes. It would also be an analysis *only* of the body standing in *for* the voice. I argue that the body *of* the voice, the body *in* the voice and the body *as* a voice work polyphonically to produce the drama of ngoma, realizing violence as a possibility while holding it at bay.

The body of the voice and the body in the voice

Ngoma singer-dancers place high value in an aesthetic experience of being in control at the edge. To be in control at the edge in ngoma is a way to express the demand and passion of moral anger, *ulaka*, said to reside in the throat.

When Sipho sings, leading his team as chorus and directing their dancing, the resonance and clarity of his voice coupled with the register in which he sings produces a sound with sustained audibility. He talks of the importance of having a "high" voice. Because his voice is "high" it has power, he says. To sound powerful as a solo singer in this acoustic environment is challenging. Outdoors, the sound dissipates. The audience encircles the dance grounds at some distance to facilitate visibility for all. Sipho's singing voice is very high in pitch, which makes it distinct over the bassy chorus. It is also "high" in its timbral quality, colored by the strong presence of higher harmonics. The resulting voice is bright rather than dark, adding further contrast to the chorus and greater audibility in the performance context. These pitch and timbral qualities result in part from his singing technique, for his voice placement is "high" in two ways. First, placed forward, it utilizes the resonance of the chest and especially the mouth area. Second, while the chorus sings fully in their chest, he sings

right at the top of his chest or modal register, and mostly in the zone between the two bridge points in a male voice.

At this pitch level in a male voice in a pulled-up chest register, every semi-tone sung higher makes an enormous difference to the level of stress on the vocal cords. Siphho could release from his modal register into his head register. He doesn't, even though it would ease the tension. Instead he pulls his chest register up high, broadening his vowels, and thereby straining his vocal chords. In other words, he places his most significant and sustained singing in a pitch area in which it is physically difficult to produce a resonant and powerful tone. To maintain a consistent sound here requires refined technical control.

Siphho's singing style, like that of other team captains, requires vocal stamina. It is an aesthetic in which you hear (and feel) that the internal body is intensely at work. Sustained, strident, penetrating, and heard as fully committed to the moment of the utterance, this voice is the effort of the body made audible. It is a voice that is pushed to the edge, but for which the singer is in utmost control of its production.

A leader must sustain his hold over the sound. His voice, located in the throat, artfully sounded, and representing the body, is a source of his authority.

How is men's authority associated with *ulaka*? A man who possesses *ulaka* is respected as formidable. In contrast to being described as *udiniwe* or *ucasukile* -- upset or frustrated without any specification of the depth of the feeling, when a man possesses *ulaka* his anger registers the potential to be violent. *Ulaka* is considered a deep and positive emotive state, in contrast to the kind of anger that breeds jealousy, and which can lead to evil action (BERGLUND, A.I. (1976/1989). Its positive valence is also gendered: when women are accorded *ulaka*, they are being criticized as belligerent. *Ulaka*, being angry almost to the point of being violent, can of course turn under some circumstances. This possibility is an aspect of its potency.¹⁰

In presenting this view, I am not supporting the Jamesian theory of emotions in which emotion is an unarticulated "force within us", that builds up and erupts and in which emotion is an inner feeling separable from its interpretation. I follow Robert Solomon's position that an "emotion is a system of concepts, beliefs, attitudes, and desires, virtually all of which are context-bound, historically developed, and culture-specific." (SOLOMON, 1984: 249, emphasis in original). It is Zulu men themselves who conceive of a responsible form of anger that has the capacity to turn.

¹⁰ Mthokozisi Mazibuko, personal communication, 20 May 2008, Durham, NC.

At its best, Siphó's voice expresses the dignity of men's anger, present, productive, able to be provoked, on the brink of eruption but held just-in-control.

The voice in motion

The idea behind the sound of the lead voice is reproduced in ways of dancing. That is to say, the values that are sounded in the vocal style are also expressed in aspects of the dancing style. The dancing body is the voice in motion.

Extensive effort is required to dance in a style built around bursts of highly concentrated energy. That effort and its drive towards an edge are visible in the immense physicality of the moves and in their escalation in complexity sequence upon sequence. The competitive practice of trying to outdo your dance opponent in alternating rounds of dance sequences is similarly expressive. A dancer pushes his opponent progressively to his edge as he raises the stakes in his own dancing, building on the sequences he has introduced and challenging his opponent to beat him at it. This series of provocations enhances the dancers' productive anger.

In addition to the body being an iconic expression of the voice, the voice also offers impetus to dance. The collective voice of the team prompts the solo dance, even while it is the dancer that shapes his own sound track by the way he improvises his sequence. The team chants his praisename, matching their repetitions to his improvised dance sequences, and inserting percussive vocables to accent his kick-stamps.

The praisename chanting – likewise distorted, chesty, and strained – facilitates the cultivation of the feeling of *ulaka*, made singular by the sound of your own praisename (Meintjes 2004).

Ngoma's lead voice sounds out *ulaka* in stylized form. This is a voice that commands attention. It is appreciated aesthetically, it demands response and it calls forth action. Crucial to the politics of the voice, *ulaka* is developed further in the kinetics of the dance. Sounded in the voice and experienced in the body, it is made public in performance while it is cultivated as a feeling. It is put to work not so much as an "'inner' phenomenon", but as "a way of being-in-the-world, a [distinctive] relationship between oneself and one's situation" (Solomon *ibid.*). It is put to work politically in the collective practice of the dance team.

A way of being-in-the-world, a relationship between oneself and one's situation

To live at the edge is not to live on the surface, but to push to the edge of awareness through deep and skilled performance. At this edge, where strategic performance, sensuous

experience, and value are momentarily fused, belief in the throat is realized. The eloquent expression of anger renders that anger accurate and appropriate. *Ulaka* maintains its positive valence because it is kept in control by the requirement that it also be eloquent. By submitting its deeply emotive force to the order of an art form, that force is kept as potential. As understood in local terms, it is held in check against the trajectory of erupting into violence. At the same time, by having to work at the skill of expressing *ulaka*, by having to mold *ulaka* into a new form each performance, *ulaka* remains a temporary and contingent source of power gathered in artistry. It is the work of a soldier to activate that anger, to act upon it, but to keep it just in control.

In a militaristic dance in which aesthetically strong performance draws from the dancer's reservoir of anger, dancing with Bongani ignites something of a past feeling. In so doing, the dancers do unnamed, unspoken memory work. Siphó's dance memorializes his friend within the safe confines of a competitive aesthetic practice that is about warrior-soldiering but in which there is no apparent judging and no public declaration that this is in part a performance about the past. The performance activates the tensions of the past, enhancing the moment aesthetically while making it possible to live with a person who some felt had done them wrong.

When the scale of violence reaches a level within which the law cannot (or does not) always take its full course and order is not necessarily equitably maintained, men on the ground use their own forms of authority to sustain their community: everyday life must proceed with as much normality as possible in conditions of violence and struggle. The dance leadership allows the Bongani-Siphó competition to happen and they facilitate and control its process, drawing on the principles of dance organization.

Is this a process of reconciliation by means of the arts or a moment of simply good aesthetics? In the end, one can't be sure, at least not for everyone participating in the moment. And this is part of the point. That which appears to be a problem analytically is in fact the point politically. Memory hovers in the present, animated but unnamed. The moment is kept in balance as an aesthetic moment, always with the potential for spinning out of control as a social moment. Siphó's is a responsible act of manhood for he memorializes his teammate and it is also a daring move because he refuses to forget. The risk of imbalance and the potential for ethical masculine anger to turn heighten the drama of the event. Yet the uncertain interpretation of these dualities – is it not just a dance? is it necessarily memorialization? Is it really in control? – makes it possible to act at all. With the capacity of the dance to be always at once variously interpreted, it can fulfill the role of re-integrating Bongani into the

ngoma community. To reintegrate him in a context where there could only be a singular interpretation of the moment would ask too much compromise of his opponents or friends. To narrate that this is an act of reintegration, for example, by framing it with public rhetoric or in fact with discussion at all, would likely disable the process. The significance of the moment must remain up for grabs by being presented seamlessly – as if slipped into the flow of things, worked into the groove of communal life, by no-one in particular.

Ngoma's military aesthetic enables performers to negotiate local histories and the legacy of apartheid in a way that maintains the possibility of a better future. Soldiers, once labor to the state, work against their own expenditure through ngoma song and dance. The dynamic relationship between the body and voice is a means of mediating these politics. In conclusion, I reiterate that I do not champion aesthetics as a counterforce to politics, or as a stabilizing endeavor to violent action. Rather, I wish to attentively analyze the dynamic relation between aesthetics and politics and to recognize their equivalence and the provisionality of the balance between them.

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