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Sounds Like History: Amahubo as Oral Literature Cornerstones of Preserving Eastern Nguni (Zulu)
History Through Sound and Rhythm

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Dedication

For Elsie Nokusa Ntuli

(1937 – 2019)

*It would be quite unimaginable to see the world the way I do today without having your example of
endless, unwavering, and selfless love as my North Star.*

Lala kahle Mbhele, Ndlela Kasompisi, Mphemba Ngabele abanye bephemba ngezinswani!

Ngiyabonga kakhulu ukungifundisa uthando, Gogo!

Abstract

Sounds Like History:

Amahubo as Oral Literature Cornerstones of Preserving

Eastern Nguni (Zulu) History Through Sound and Rhythm

Nkosinathi Gladwin Dlamini

When considering how to delve into the history of a nation that has become mostly synonymous with warfare and violence, as is the case with the Zulu nation. It is quite intriguing to note that the presented history which most come into contact with is mostly stored in the written record. From one view, this is not all too strange – especially in this current age that we are in, where text rules the theatre of history preservation and knowledge transfer. As it stands, any attempt to weave together a collective history of the Zulu people would present at the forefront the ascension of King Shaka Zulu, and the subsequent creation of a unified Eastern Nguni empire. Which till this day still represents the largest cultural group living in the Republic of South Africa. The tales attached to this period, and the characters that have come to shape what we now regard as Zulu life have mostly been focused on the exploits of Kings and their battles. However, tantalising as it might be to root Zulu history on these cornerstones, there is much left on the wayside which has not been giving the due respect it deserves. The reason for this perhaps can be simply surmised by the fact that a large majority of not only Zulu, but Nguni history is stored in the melodic folds and rhythmic nuances of oral traditions. These oral traditions are not to be seen as static and archaic methods which bare no significance in the current paradigm. Though a daring to rediscover and promote their importance within the academic theatre is a worthwhile goal. To the uninitiated, it is important to note that Zulu culture is a rich tapestry of interactions between self, community, and kingdom. Importantly, all of these interactions are rooted to a connection to those who came before, the ancestors who paved the way for those who sit under the shade of the trees they planted many years ago. In order to then understand the Zulu nation fully, and by extension the larger Nguni family – it would be prudent to spend much time in the capturing and analysing of oral traditions that would form a central part of Zulu and Nguni lives.

Regarding the oral traditions to explore, it is no tall order to assume that most have in some sense experienced, sonically, some of the more important oral traditions cemented in Nguni culture. For example, the oral tradition of *isicathamiya* has been popularised and spread worldwide by one of the Zulu nation's most famous musical groups *Ladysmith Black Mambazo*. Through their music, and use of voices sans instrumentation to share stories ranging from love and hope, all the way to descriptions of life under Apartheid and in turn travelling the world and spreading a message of unity. One would dare to say Zulu unity at that. The melodic intricacies of such soundscapes have offered another popular association with Zulu culture. As true of *isicathamiya* being a central melodic device, another truth needs to be uncovered about its predecessor – and a historic device so central to the lives of *amaZulu*

that it is associated with the very beginnings of time when the first humans emerged from the reeds, and in terms of this dissertation – the central focus of this project. In of themselves *amahubo* are quite an exemplary showcase of the richness within Zulu oral traditions, and in the case of *amahubo* - one is to note that they are interwoven with multiple layers of significance that range from not only historic significances, but up to and including spiritual interactions between the present and those that came before. The most intriguing aspect of *amahubo* would be that from an outside view, they could be regarded as performance songs attached to significant events littered throughout Zulu life. Though upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that their requirement of being performed in group settings and needing the buy in of other attendees of an event, or witnesses of an occasion sets them apart to some more well-known Zulu oral traditions such as *izibongo* and *izithakazelo*. The exploration of *amahubo* in this instance is mostly focused on figuring out how reliable are these oral traditions to be regarded in line with the preservation and transfer of history across time, as well as how they come to be created. This project, *Sounds Like History*, will unfold as follows.

To begin, some much needed contextualisation would be in order to bring forward certain understandings concerning Nguni history, and as well as some base introduction to language aspects. This contextualisation would bring to the fore characters such as *Unkulunkulu* and *Umvelinqangi*, which are central to the what the Nguni believe to be the origin of life and ultimately the Nguni people. In this case, one may assign this to an overview of Nguni mythology. In this section, an overview of genealogy ranging from Mnguni I leading up to King Shaka Zulu KaSenzangakhona would also be worked through – this rooting in understanding Nguni history is a great base upon which the deeper exploration into oral traditions such as *amahubo* can be readily based. From this base, some base introductions of some linguistic concepts which would lend much clarity in conversation surrounding Zulu culture and as well as identity, as can be learnt by examining *amahubo* and their origins. Added onto this exploration, a rooting of understanding the position of oral history and traditions within the academic theatre would serve as a fitting rounding off of the sections concerning contextual bases.

Following on from this exploration, the literature review unfolds beginning with a review of the James Stuart Archive which represents one of the most important volumes of literature regarding Zulu oral traditions – though the literature review would not be solely based on the works of this archive as *amahubo* themselves are not at all a focus of the life-long work of James Stuart – which can be mostly categorised in the covering of oral traditions such as *izibongo* and *izithakazelo* respectively. Though, the works of Buthelezi would serve as a launching point into understanding the above-mentioned oral traditions, allowing a seamless segway into understanding of oral traditions within the everyday lives of *amaZulu*. Buthelezi gives valuable insights into how Zulu oral traditions have been preserved, and how they are currently practiced in the present epoch – with an added focus on some failing points of the retelling of Zulu history, as it has been to this point. Specifically highlighting the influence of the Zulu monarchy and their dominant retelling of how the Eastern Nguni came to be the Zulu Nation. In Buthelezi's work, a base is created which allows for a smooth transition to the works of Xulu and their

dissertation on *amahubo* and their re-emergence as song styles within Zulu culture. In investigating the works of Xulu, a deeper understanding of the relevance and high reverence for *amahubo* is attained. The centrality of this oral tradition is made quite clear. Rounding out the literature review would be Liz Gunner who offers an expanded view on the historic significance of oral traditions, not only in the Southern Africa – but in Africa as a whole. Gunner's text allows for an expanded view on how to regard African oral traditions and their abilities to be regarded as faithful methods of history preservation and knowledge transfer from generation to generation.

Following the literature review would be a focus on unpacking the methodologies upon which this research has been founded, and ultimately executed. The question on the use of narrative interviews as a research method are to be covered, alongside an unpacking of the core themes associated with documentary films as a presentation medium for research into oral traditions and presenting oral history. In regard to the *Sounds Like History* project, the dissertation serves as the main exploration of *amahubo* as cornerstones of preserving history. Though seeing as these are oral traditions, it was to be found fitting that an accompanying documentary film would serve as a visual and audio addition to the text presentation. In this part of the thesis, it would be fitting to chart the methodologies behind filming a documentary during a two-month ethnographic in KwaZulu-Natal. The aim for the documentary is to serve as an immersive experience which captures the essence of uncovering the origins of *amahubo* and what they represent to the Zulu people. The ethnographic trip itself is focused upon as well, with a key focus on the reasoning behind choosing the specific region and as well as an overview on the choice of expert interview partners. Following this overview, and introduction to the first round of collaborators for this project. An in-depth analysis of the findings of their interviews would be conducted, given the diversity of the interview partners – the analysis brings forth a variety of valuable insights not only into *amahubo* themselves, but clarifications on history and social relevancies vital to this project. From the combination of the findings of the literature review, and analysis of narrative interviews – the conclusion of this paper will hedge its formation. Throughout this portion, a clarification of the origin story of *amaZulu* would be included, moving through to a focus on the importance of music to Zulu culture and its role in heritage preservation. It is upon these pillars that ultimately the relevance of *amahubo* would be tackled and brought to the fore – in a hope to showcase that this specific oral tradition offers an invaluable trove of knowledge and point of further possible insight into Nguni history. A case for the importance of recording and capturing *amahubo* is made in the final parts of this project, offering a more wholistic definition of this oral tradition – and ending with a peer into future projects which can be explored based of the findings of the research undertaken.

Abstract: German

Wenn man darüber nachdenkt, wie man in die Geschichte einer Nation eintauchen kann, die zum Synonym für Krieg und Gewalt geworden ist, wie es bei der Zulu-Nation der Fall ist. Es ist sehr faszinierend festzustellen, dass die präsentierte Geschichte, mit der die meisten in Berührung kommen, meist in schriftlichen Aufzeichnungen gespeichert ist. Aus einer Sicht ist das nicht allzu verwunderlich – besonders in der heutigen Zeit, in der Text das Theater der Geschichtsbewahrung und des Wissenstransfers beherrscht. So wie es aussieht, würde jeder Versuch, eine kollektive Geschichte des Zulu-Volkes zu verweben, den Aufstieg von König Shaka Zulu und die anschließende Schaffung eines vereinten östlichen Nguni-Reiches in den Vordergrund stellen. Die bis heute die größte Kulturgruppe der Republik Südafrika darstellt. Die Geschichten, die mit dieser Zeit verbunden sind, und die Charaktere, die das Leben der Zulu prägen, konzentrieren sich hauptsächlich auf die Heldentaten der Könige und ihre Schlachten. Doch so verlockend es auch sein mag, die Geschichte der Zulu auf diesen Eckpfeilern zu verwurzeln, es gibt noch vieles, das nicht den gebührenden Respekt entgegengebracht hat, den es verdient. Der Grund dafür kann vielleicht einfach durch die Tatsache vermutet werden, dass ein großer Teil nicht nur der Zulu-, sondern auch der Nguni-Geschichte in den melodischen Falten und rhythmischen Nuancen mündlicher Traditionen gespeichert ist. Diese mündlichen Überlieferungen sind nicht als statische und archaische Methoden zu betrachten, die im gegenwärtigen Paradigma keine Bedeutung haben. Es ist jedoch ein lohnendes Ziel, ihre Bedeutung innerhalb des akademischen Theaters wiederzuentdecken und zu fördern. Für Uneingeweihte ist es wichtig zu beachten, dass die Zulu-Kultur ein reicher Teppich von Interaktionen zwischen Selbst, Gemeinschaft und Königreich ist. Wichtig ist, dass all diese Interaktionen in einer Verbindung zu denen verwurzelt sind, die vor ihnen kamen, den Vorfahren, die den Weg für diejenigen geebnet haben, die im Schatten der Bäume sitzen, die sie vor vielen Jahren gepflanzt haben. Um dann die Zulu-Nation und damit die größere Nguni-Familie vollständig zu verstehen, wäre es ratsam, viel Zeit mit der Erfassung und Analyse mündlicher Überlieferungen zu verbringen, die einen zentralen Teil des Lebens der Zulu und Nguni bilden würden.

In Bezug auf die mündlichen Traditionen, die es zu erforschen gilt, ist es keine große Aufgabe anzunehmen, dass die meisten in gewisser Weise klanglich einige der wichtigeren mündlichen Traditionen erlebt haben, die in der Nguni-Kultur zementiert sind. Zum Beispiel die mündliche Überlieferung von *Isicathamiya* wurde von einer der berühmtesten Musikgruppen der Zulu-Nation populär gemacht und weltweit verbreitet *Ladysmith Schwarzer Mambazo*. Durch ihre Musik und den Einsatz von Stimmen ohne Instrumentierung erzählen sie Geschichten, die von Liebe und Hoffnung bis hin zu Beschreibungen des Lebens unter der Apartheid reichen und wiederum die Welt bereisen und eine Botschaft der Einheit verbreiten. Man würde es wagen, Zulu-Einheit zu sagen. Die melodischen Feinheiten solcher Klanglandschaften haben eine weitere populäre Assoziation mit der Zulu-Kultur geschaffen. Wie bei *Isicathamiya* Da es sich um ein zentrales melodisches Mittel handelt, muss eine andere Wahrheit über seinen Vorgänger aufgedeckt werden – und zwar ein historisches Mittel, das für

das Leben von *amaZulu* dass es mit den Anfängen der Zeit verbunden ist, als die ersten Menschen aus dem Schilf auftauchten, und im Sinne dieser Dissertation – der zentrale Schwerpunkt dieses Projekts. An sich *amahubo* sind ein beispielhaftes Beispiel für den Reichtum der mündlichen Zulu-Traditionen, und im Falle von *amahubo* - Eine davon ist, dass sie mit mehreren Bedeutungsebenen verwoben sind, die nicht nur von historischen Bedeutungen, sondern auch von spirituellen Interaktionen zwischen der Gegenwart und denen davor reichen. Der faszinierendste Aspekt von *amahubo* wäre, dass sie von außen betrachtet als Performance-Lieder betrachtet werden könnten, die mit bedeutenden Ereignissen verbunden sind, die im gesamten Leben der Zulu verstreut sind. Bei näherer Betrachtung wird jedoch klar, dass ihre Anforderung, in Gruppen aufgeführt zu werden und die Zustimmung anderer Teilnehmer einer Veranstaltung oder Zeugen eines Ereignisses zu benötigen, sie von einigen bekannteren mündlichen Zulu-Traditionen unterscheidet, wie z. B. *izibongo* und *izithakazelo*. Die Erforschung von *amahubo* In diesem Fall geht es vor allem darum, herauszufinden, wie zuverlässig diese mündlichen Überlieferungen im Einklang mit der Bewahrung und Weitergabe von Geschichte im Laufe der Zeit zu betrachten sind und wie sie entstehen. Dieses Projekt, *Klingt wie Geschichte*, wird sich wie folgt entwickeln. Zu Beginn wäre eine dringend benötigte Kontextualisierung, um bestimmte Verständnisse über die Geschichte der Nguni sowie eine grundlegende Einführung in sprachliche Aspekte zu fördern. Diese Kontextualisierung würde Charaktere wie *Unkulunkulu* und *Umvelinqangi*, die von zentraler Bedeutung für das sind, was die Nguni für den Ursprung des Lebens und letztendlich des Nguni-Volkes halten. In diesem Fall kann man dies einem Überblick über die Nguni-Mythologie zuordnen. In diesem Abschnitt wird auch ein Überblick über die Genealogie von Mnguni I. bis hin zu König Shaka Zulu KaSenzangakhona erarbeitet – diese Verwurzelung im Verständnis der Nguni-Geschichte ist eine großartige Grundlage, auf der die tiefere Erforschung mündlicher Traditionen wie *amahubo* leicht begründet werden kann. Von dieser Grundlage aus einige grundlegende Einführungen einiger linguistischer Konzepte, die viel Klarheit in der Konversation über die Zulu-Kultur und -Identität verleihen würden, wie man durch die Untersuchung von *amahubo* und ihre Ursprünge. Zusätzlich zu dieser Untersuchung würde eine Verankerung des Verständnisses der Position von Oral History und Traditionen innerhalb des akademischen Theaters als angemessene Abrundung der Abschnitte über kontextuelle Grundlagen dienen. Im Anschluss an diese Erkundung entfaltet sich die Literaturübersicht beginnend mit einer Überprüfung des James-Stuart-Archivs, das einen der wichtigsten Bände der Literatur über mündliche Zulu-Traditionen darstellt – obwohl die Literaturübersicht nicht ausschließlich auf den Werken dieses Archivs basiert, da *amahubo* selbst stehen keineswegs im Mittelpunkt des lebenslangen Schaffens von James Stuart – das sich meist in die Überdeckung mündlicher Überlieferungen wie *izibongo* und *izithakazelo* beziehungsweise. Die Werke von Buthelezi dienten jedoch als Ausgangspunkt für das Verständnis der oben genannten mündlichen Traditionen und ermöglichten einen nahtlosen Einstieg in das Verständnis mündlicher Traditionen im täglichen Leben von *amaZulu*. Buthelezi gibt wertvolle Einblicke in die Art und Weise, wie mündliche Traditionen der Zulu bewahrt wurden und wie sie derzeit in der heutigen Epoche praktiziert werden – mit einem

zusätzlichen Fokus auf einige Schwachstellen der Nacherzählung der Zulu-Geschichte, wie sie bis zu diesem Punkt war. Er hob insbesondere den Einfluss der Zulu-Monarchie und ihre dominante Nacherzählung hervor, wie die östlichen Nguni zur Zulu-Nation wurden. In Buthelezi's Werk wird eine Basis geschaffen, die einen fließenden Übergang zu den Arbeiten von Xulu und ihrer Dissertation über *amahubo* und ihr Wiederauftauchen als Songstile innerhalb der Zulu-Kultur. Bei der Untersuchung der Werke von Xulu wird ein tieferes Verständnis für die Relevanz und hohe Ehrfurcht vor *amahubo* erreicht. Die zentrale Bedeutung dieser mündlichen Überlieferung wird deutlich gemacht. Abgerundet wird die Literaturübersicht durch Liz Gunner, die einen erweiterten Blick auf die historische Bedeutung mündlicher Überlieferungen nicht nur im südlichen Afrika – sondern in ganz Afrika – bietet. Gunners Text ermöglicht eine erweiterte Sichtweise darauf, wie afrikanische mündliche Traditionen und ihre Fähigkeiten als treue Methoden der Geschichtsbewahrung und des Wissenstransfers von Generation zu Generation zu betrachten sind.

Im Anschluss an die Literaturrecherche liegt der Schwerpunkt auf der Entschlüsselung der Methoden, auf denen diese Forschung basiert und schließlich durchgeführt wurde. Die Frage nach dem Einsatz narrativer Interviews als Forschungsmethode soll ebenso behandelt werden wie eine Entschlüsselung der Kernthemen, die mit dem Dokumentarfilm als Präsentationsmedium für die Erforschung mündlicher Überlieferungen und die Präsentation mündlicher Geschichte verbunden sind. In Bezug auf die *Klingt nach Geschichte* Projekt dient die Dissertation als Hauptuntersuchung von *amahubo* als Eckpfeiler der Geschichtsbewahrung. Da es sich um mündliche Überlieferungen handelt, war es angebracht, dass ein begleitender Dokumentarfilm als visuelle und akustische Ergänzung der Textpräsentation dienen sollte. In diesem Teil der Arbeit wäre es passend, die Methoden hinter dem Dreh eines Dokumentarfilms während einer zweimonatigen ethnographischen Untersuchung in KwaZulu-Natal zu skizzieren. Das Ziel des Dokumentarfilms ist es, ein immersives Erlebnis zu bieten, das die Essenz der Aufdeckung der Ursprünge von *amahubo* und was sie für das Zulu-Volk darstellen. Auch die ethnografische Reise selbst wird thematisiert, wobei der Schwerpunkt auf den Gründen für die Auswahl der jeweiligen Region liegt und ein Überblick über die Auswahl der fachkundigen Interviewpartner gegeben wird. Im Folgenden finden Sie diesen Überblick und eine Einführung in die erste Runde der Mitarbeiter für dieses Projekt. Angesichts der Vielfalt der Interviewpartner würde eine eingehende Analyse der Ergebnisse ihrer Interviews durchgeführt werden – die Analyse bringt eine Vielzahl wertvoller Erkenntnisse nicht nur in Bezug auf *amahubo* sondern auch Klarstellungen zur Geschichte und zu sozialen Relevanzen, die für dieses Projekt von entscheidender Bedeutung sind. Aus der Kombination der Ergebnisse der Literaturrecherche und der Analyse von narrativen Interviews wird die Schlussfolgerung dieser Arbeit ihre Bildung absichern. In diesem Teil wird die Entstehungsgeschichte von *amaZulu* einbezogen werden, um sich auf die Bedeutung der Musik für die Zulu-Kultur und ihre Rolle bei der Erhaltung des Kulturerbes zu konzentrieren. Auf diesen Säulen beruht letztlich die Relevanz von *amahubo* in Angriff genommen und in den Vordergrund gerückt werden – in der Hoffnung, zu zeigen, dass diese spezifische mündliche Tradition einen unschätzbaren

Wissensschatz und einen Ausgangspunkt für weitere mögliche Einblicke in die Geschichte der Nguni bietet. Ein Plädoyer für die Bedeutung des Aufzeichnens und Erfassens *amahubo* wird in den letzten Teilen dieses Projekts gemacht und bietet eine ganzheitlichere Definition dieser mündlichen Tradition – und endet mit einem Ausblick auf zukünftige Projekte, die auf der Grundlage der Ergebnisse der durchgeführten Forschung untersucht werden können.

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Acknowledgements

There is a saying that has stuck with me for most of my adult life, and perhaps rather fitting to begin my acknowledgements with:

“If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants”

Isaac Newton (1675)

So, rather unsurprisingly the achievement of a milestone such as this can not be wholly ascribed to my own personal effort alone. Alas, the great secret revealed is much of this success is to be attributed to beloved friends, dear family, and supportive colleagues – and a daring supervisor. It is an absolute honour to have been able to have lived out the unfolding of this chapter of my life – and having spent it delving into oral traditions and creating the *Sounds Like History* project has truly been a blessing. As those closest to me might be well aware, I’m very rarely at a loss for words – though in the case of the pleasure of thanking those who played a pivotal role in this achievement, it might seem that the cat has caught my tongue. So, in a rare turn of events – I shall keep it short and sweet. In no particular order:

To my mother and brother, soaring through life with you has been the greatest joy – and even though we are all scattered in our own corners of the world, I’d like to thank you for your prayers and support for the past years. To Tamas, Eddu, Tespa and Will – I’m eternally thankful for your presence in my life and the brotherhood we have nurtured over the years – which in turn has allowed us all to grow into the love and purpose driven men, and once more to Will – thank you for the persistent early morning wake up calls to get writing (I can promise you I won’t miss them, but I will need them again sometime in the future). To the city of Vienna, and by extension the Institute of African Studies, I have never been one to believe in love at first sight – yet here I am years later still bright eyed, and bushy tailed. It is an immensely enjoyable adventure we have embarked on. It goes without saying that the love affair continues, with no real sign of slowing down. To my students – past, present, and future, I’d like to thank you for your dedicated interest into my culture and language – and more specifically your fearless approach to carving out your own paths in this life (even if it takes a few pep talks here and there). To my dear colleague Charly, ngiyakubonga kakhulu! Thank you for being an ever-present sounding board for my ideas, and never pulling any intellectual punches. The eyes are not dala yet, or so to say. I look forward to our continued collaborations both in life and above all – humour. To my supervisor Prof. Rütther, much can be said on the importance of your daring nature and instilling within me more bravery. Above all, thank you for being a radical supporter of progress and excellence. To Curtis and Kibidi, fellow members of the evergreen CSG Accounting firm – my fellow rabblers, corny joke merchants and above all, valued counsel. It is crazy to imagine how far life has taken each of us. It is a pleasure to share life with you, and to march on forward as Matheson soldiers. It is my hope that this work may reflect the magnitude of your impact in my life, and my appreciation for all that you stand for – and inspire within me. For this, I am eternally grateful.

Introduction

What does history sound like? Could it ever be possible that our associations with history and memory might traverse beyond the more accepted and venerated preservation of history - The interaction of ink on paper, scribbles on stone, scars on flesh. For the most part, most interactions with history are centred about reading about the exploits and experiences of brave women and men, even if not fully factual. This would include delving into their exploits and magnificent discoveries of the world, even if the question of how one discovers something that has always been there would be possible. Which is an idea best to be left on the wayside in the case of this thesis. A humorous view on history being “his story” rushes back to mind when considering the prominent voices in the historic record, one dare say – the only voices that matter, in this current paradigm. The written record has long held dominance and prestige over the simpler, perhaps archaic, methods and flows of oral traditions and oral histories. The basis of such assertions mainly come down to how trustworthy is memory, first, and how best is memory preserved. Symbols, shapes, signs, letters ordered in sequence that unleashes access to the minds of history keepers – enabling the passing down of knowledge to remain quite faithfully etched in stone – perhaps even, immovable. Once pen hits paper, it is done – the record stands. A mark was made, and no debate – history that was saved, and now it can be monumentalized. Perhaps at this point and juncture, a raised nosed to the bards of old might not be met with recompense. After all, does history even have a sound? Muffled static sets the scene, the buzz of transistor radios and frantic clamouring to the flashes emanating from television screens. If tension were string, it would be pulled taught as if the weight of the world is waiting of it – 1969, finally a sound. Houston, there is no issue – start the countdown. An assured voice reaches through the fog – “twenty seconds and counting”. t-minus 15 seconds, “guidance is internal”. Twelve, eleven, ten, nine – ignition sequence starts – six, five, four, three, two, one, zero. Lift off!! We have lift off!” – (Apollo 11 launch sequence, NASA 1969). A historical moment for all of humankind, the great adventure into outer space – encapsulated in history and having a unique and undeniably recallable sound. The distinguished rhythm and melody of the Apollo 11 countdown lives on in memory, not as words flickering on a screen, nor jumping out from ink blotched papers – wrestling for a vestige on the history book shelves.

Simply put, history has been stored – and remained unforgettable using sound. In this same light, much of the similar sonic carving into memory that moments such as the launch of Apollo 11 would bring with it. Much of how history is interacted with in Zulu culture would be largely through the medium of sound. One can imagine that this relationship between sound and history brings with it an unimaginable number of avenues for exploration, firstly to uncover the past, and perhaps most fittingly – preserving history and lessons from those that came before. In line with sonically relevant devices, it is then where *amahubo* enter into the fore, and take their place front and centre in terms of the unfolding of this dissertation. Figuring out what *amahubo* are promises to be an adventure unlike many others, necessitating being in tune with not only history, but as well with melody. In the past few years as a language lecturer for isiZulu, knowledge transfer systems have become of particular interest. More specifically, as being a born and raised as *umZulu* – reflecting on the melodic and idiomatic characteristics of one's home language has begged the question: can there be sound associated with history. With this in mind, one has become interested in documenting the existing oral traditions and knowledge transfer systems that are associated with Zulu culture and history with a hope to create an accessible body of work which would inspire further research, and collaboration in regard to oral traditions and their position in the academic theatre. The main issue tackled throughout this research is the position in which oral traditions are ranked in comparison to their written counterparts. The imbalance in relevance between the two is a stark reminder of there still existing remnants of unemancipated thinking when it comes to the human condition and preservation of culture and history. Seeing that most of the combined history of the Nguni people, which comprises of the Swati, Zulu, Ndebele, and Xhosa cultural groups, has been stored and shared from generation to generation via oral tradition. It is then the aim, in light of these facts, of this research to zoom into specific a specific oral tradition and ethno-music style, to show that oral traditions could be considered worthwhile peers into oral traditions. This undertaking, in of itself, is slated to be a multi-year project which would bring together various methodologies in order to capture and preserve Eastern-Nguni history, though in the contexts of the academic theatre, the mediums of text and documentary film would be the main outputs for the *Sounds Like History* project.

The *Sounds Like History* project is an attempt to establish a newfound appreciation for oral history, oral traditions, and the recognition of oral literatures as valuable vestiges of information and preserving human history – across time and space. The central consideration for this undertaking is when research on oral literatures and traditions are completed, how then can these be faithfully shared beyond the academic fraternity – and delivering impactful research outputs. In this first phase, the aim is to unpack large swathes of history connected to the Zulu nation – and investigate the origins and social relevance of oral traditions as a whole, and rather specifically figure out how to view oral traditions such as *amahubo*. Especially as reliable sources for charting Zulu history across different layers, mainly family, regional, and national history. It is this present writer's belief that in investigating this specific oral tradition, a greater knowledge of Zulu history and culture can be gained – and in turn many lessons which could serve present day peoples might be gained through diving into these melodic history devices.

Cultural contextualisation's – Zulu history and language, oral history in academia

As with all great epochs, and journeys that follow the trajectories of heroes and their revolutionary adventures. There is always a beginning, which comes before the very beginning of things. This being said, in order to fully grasp the concepts and discussions throughout *Sounds Like History* – a basic introduction into the myth of origin connected to the Nguni people, and by familial extension *AmaZulu*, is necessary. Following on from this brief exploration of a nation's origins, more contemporary contextualisation would be parsed in an attempt to tool readers with as much knowledge as possible, enabling a so-called same paged-ness throughout this dissertation. In this overview, it should be understood that the following concepts would be engaged with. Firstly, the mythological beginnings of the Nguni – including the relationships between primordial beings such as *Umvelinqangi* and *Unkulunkulu*, and those that emerged from the reeds (Nguni people). Secondly, much needed contextualisation of isiZulu terms would be engaged in – for example, the differences between *Zulu*, *KwaZulu*, *UmZulu*, and *isiZulu* - respectively. A much-needed overview on the changing landscape of south-eastern South Africa during the early 19th century, under the influence of Sigidi KaSenzangakhona, commonly known as King Shaka Zulu, one of the most famous rulers of the region and period, would be engaged with as well. This overview will traverse the contemporary standing of the Kingdom of Zulu as well, and how the present day has been influenced by the political and cultural movements of the mid to late 20th century in South Africa, which have had an undeniable influence on the commonly accepted history regarding then Zulu nation. As for the very beginning of things, David

Leeming (2010), offers a well-rounded summation of origin according to compiled oral histories regarding the Nguni people of South Africa.

In the beginning there was darkness, and earth itself had no life nor light. Though, in the folds of darkness and silence resided the primordial being *Umvelinqangi*. This primeval being had in their possession a voice which could be likened to thunder – and had the ability to engulf the world in earthquakes resulting from their anger. In this dark and gloomy world *Umvelinqangi* decided to plant a single seed, which would be the beginning of all life, and the originator of all life to follow from then on out. When this seed found soil, it sprouted and eventually would emerge in the darkness as a reed – growing tall. From this reed, many more other reeds would spring forth until the north was covered – much like in a swamp like state. This land would come to be known as Uthlanga (Uthlanga meaning reed in isiZulu/Nguni) Importantly, at the end of one of these reeds – emerged a being who would become to be known as *Unkulunkulu* – the first ancestor. *Unkulunkulu* would over time notice that other beings, humans, would grow at the end of other reeds surrounding them in Uthlanga. As the first humans would be emerging from the reeds, the first sounds that would emerge from their lips would be regarded to be *amahubo* (Xulu, 1992). These first humans from Uthlanga would be the ancestors of all nations, as they travelled away from Uthlanga and populated the world. Those that travelled from Uthlanga, south – would be the ancestors of the Zulu as we know them in the present day. *Unkulunkulu* would continue on their journey amongst the reeds in Uthlanga and in them, they would find animals of all kinds emerging at the ends of them. Which in turn, *Unkulunkulu* would pluck them up – and cast them in the lands and seas, for the use of the first humans for their sustenance in the lands that they would inhabit beyond Uthlanga. *Unkulunkulu* would eventually pluck from the reeds, a ball of fire and a radiant stone – which they would toss into the heavens. In turn, becoming the moon and the sun. The Great One (*Unkulunkulu*) would also pluck magical beings from the reeds, which in turn would travel out from Uthlanga as well. Such a being would be the goddess *Mamlambo*, who was an evil entity who was believed to drown inhabitants of the earth and eat their faces. Counter to *Mamlambo*, *Unkulunkulu* would pluck from the reeds the goddess *Mbaba Mwana Waresa* – who according to oral tradition would be the one who created the rain and rainbows and would be the inventor of farming – which would be gifted to the Nguni people at a point in time. The goddess *Mbaba Mwana Waresa* would ultimately share the knowledge on how to make beer, *umqombothi*, to the Nguni people – and for those at least slightly attuned to Nguni traditions, the centrality of *umqombothi* is well to be noted. According to the origin story, *Unkulunkulu* plucked a chameleon from the reeds in Uthlanga – and tasked this animal to relay a message to the humans beyond Uthlanga. The message would be “*Men must not die*”, according to tradition, the chameleon was lazy and slow in the journey of completing this mission. Which in turn drove *Unkulunkulu* to become impatient – to the point where they would pluck a lizard from the reeds and charge them with the same message. However, the lizard was quicker in its mission – though the message delivered to humans beyond the reeds of Uthlanga would end up being “*Men must die* “. In

this instance, it is believed it was from this point onwards that mankind became mortal. It is then believed for this very reason that chameleons came to be able to change colour, in order to be able to hide in shame from the failure of saving humankind from the invention of death.

As we move from the primeval, closer to present day. The continuation of the saga of those emerging from Uthlanga, and eventually finding themselves in Southern Africa would have to begin with a central ancestor in the lineage of the present-day Zulu nation. This ancestor would be Mnguni, from this central forefather – all of the present-day Nguni clans draw their ancestry. In an attempt to untangle this anciently woven tapestry, Mthandeni Patric Mbatha and Mxolisi Bongumusa P. Cebekhulu, from the University of Zululand, offer an intriguing summation of Zulu history staring from this point onwards. Their paper “*Zulu Tribe or Zulu Nation? An Historical Analysis*” (2022) would serve as a faithful North Star in the ever-complex task of summarising the oral traditions associated with dealing with the contemporary origins of the Zulu Nation. Mbatha and Cebekhulu root their summation of Zulu history with a rich introduction into the rich genealogy of the peoples who journeyed south from Uthlanga. The first point of contact in the genealogy would be the introduction to the Ancestor *Ntu* who would in their lifetime father sons, namely: Mnguni, Xhosa, Ndebele, Luzumane and Swazi (Mbatha and Cebekhulu, 2022). To the keen eye, these names would spark a recognition of the present-day divisions of the greater Nguni family which now exists in Southern Africa. From this progeny, Luzumane would be the important son to note in the context of this dissertation. Luzumane, as his brothers, would be the originator of the main lineage of the dominant Nguni dynasties as we know them today. Through Luzumane, an important historical son is born – Malandela (The great follower – in turn leader). The origin of the Zulu nation as it is today would begin in earnest through the history of Malandela, and his two sons Qwabe and Zulu. Though there are many accounts regarding how the succession of Malandela’s estate would play out regarding his two sons. It is important to note that in this point of history in the region, we would be dealing with family dynamics that are rooted in inheritance of an abundance of means for heirs born to a king such as Malandela. Some accounts relay the understanding that the two sons of Malandela were quarrelsome, and by the time of his death – his estate would be left solely to his eldest son Qwabe (Mbatha and Cebekhulu 2022). Though counter to this, some accounts add to the epoch by saying that both sons inherited from their father and subsequently moved on and travelled further into present day Zululand to establish their own separate kingdoms. Hence, to this day the Qwabe and Zulu clans are seen as two separate continuations of the lineage of Mnguni. The question of which historical account is the accurate one, is of little importance in the case of what would become the emergence of the Zulu Empire – brought forward by one of Malandela’s most famous progeny: King Shaka KaSenzangakhona, or more commonly known as King Shaka Zulu in the early 19th century. It would be prudent at this time not to delve too deeply into the grand genealogical tapestry that lands us at the point where the individual family states of the pre-Shaka era would then become formed into the Zulu empire. Though, important to understand in the history of those who hail from Uthlanga –

would be that, at a point in history there was to be born in the line of Zulu, son of Malandela, one who would be known as Sigidi “Shaka” KaSenzangakhona. Mbatha and Cebekhulu highlight that during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the region in which our focus is rooted - was rife with expansionary warfare between clans rooted from Mnguni. At this time, the familial clan of Zulu were a lesser power in relation to the unfolding of that present history. At that moment, the most powerful clans in the region would be the Mthethwa and the Ndwandwe, with the former having subsequently absorbed the Zulu clan under their ranks. This is important to note, since from this clan – their ruler Senzangakhona KaJama would produce a son, Sigidi KaSenzangakhona. The birth of this son would be a historic moment – which would undeniably shift the manner through which Malandela’s progeny would be recognised throughout global history.

According to oral history, and supported by several encyclopaedical accounts, Senzangakhona had a son with Nandi KaBhebe, which was out of wedlock, and this act would enforce a payment of damages – in accordance with Nguni culture. The Zulu and Bhebe clans agreed to this payment, and thus the story of Sigidi KaSenzangakhona begins in earnest. According to oral tradition, at first Senzangakhona had denied the pregnancy of Nandi and had attributed the missed menstruations to the effects caused by a beetle known as *iShaka*. As history would presently record, *iShaka* was ultimately not to be the reason. Nandi would eventually give birth to the first emperor of the Malandela lineage. Rather unsurprisingly, the dramatic nature of the entering of Sigidi into the historic epoch continued in the same vein. Through this birth, it is to believe that the moniker uShaka would follow the young Sigidi, ultimately cementing their historic name to become Shaka KaSenzangakhona – and ultimately more well known, Shaka Zulu. At some point, the union between Senzangakhona, and Nandi would end in what could be understood in modern day terms as a divorce. This moment would result in the ejection of both Nandi and Shaka from the court of Senzangakhona – casting them out into the doldrums of Nguni society and tasked with fending for themselves – outside of the protection of the then Zulu clan. As history would find it fitting, this would only serve as a catalyst for what would be the adolescent origin story of the Great Shaka Zulu. As history would find it fit, Shaka would be incorporated into the Mthethwa clan – which would be one of the more powerful in the region at that time, their conquests would see the incorporation of Senzangakhona KaJama’s Zulu clan under Mthethwa rule between the late 18th and early 19th century (Mbatha and Cebekhulu 2022). As these conquests continued during this period, Shaka would famously rise through the ranks of the Mthethwa army – culminating in their installation as a trusted general in King Dingiswayo’s regiments. In 1816, Shaka KaSenzangakhona would ascend to the throne of the Zulu clan – following the death of Senzangakhona KaJama. This ascension would usher in a new age of empire and military expansion in the region. As Shaka began his rule, they would notably revolutionise the fighting capabilities of their *amabutho* (regiments), and through dominant conquest – the unified Zulu Empire would emerge. Under Shaka Zulu, incorporated clans would retain their familial names – though they would now be known, collectively, as *AmaZulu*.

(Armstrong Ntuli Narrative Interview 2022). It is at this point where it now becomes necessary to clarify some functional aspects related to terms in IsiZulu – which would be utilised throughout the dissertation.

Firstly, it is important to look at the multitude of meanings that can be derived from the linguistic word stem “Zulu”. In relation to the proper noun Zulu. In this form, generally one would be utilising the term in reference to what could be understood as being the overall culture (of the Zulu people) – stemming from the unification of the eastern Nguni clans in 1816. Examples of this would be speaking about Zulu culture, Zulu traditions, and ultimately Zulu people. According to Zulu oral tradition, the origin of the stem Zulu would be first and foremost in reference to heaven and the sky – this would be represented as *iZulu* (the sky), *eZulwini* (in heaven). These distinctions become important, especially when relating to how the *AmaZulu* come to be named. As mentioned earlier – Malandela begot two sons Qwabe and Zulu, and through the later son the Zulu clan would attain its name. In the context of Zulu being the name of a person, it would be represented as *uZulu* with *u-* being the prefix denoting personhood. Therefore, names of people would be written as *uShaka Zulu*, *uZulu Malandela*, *uSenzangakhona KaJama* – and so on and so forth. This means at this juncture we have now differentiated between *iZulu*, *uZulu* one being a common noun and the other being a proper noun. From this understanding, it becomes a bit simpler to understand how the Zulu people are then referred to. As noted, with the unification of the Nguni in 1826 by uShaka KaSenzangakhona, the king folds in their subjects under the clan’s name Zulu, and now all who would be under the reign of uShaka would henceforth be known as *AmaZulu* – meaning quite simply, the Zulus. In this case *ama-* denotes the plural, with the singular for a Zulu person then being *umZulu*. With this being understood, the interchangeable use of the term Zulu, with that of the aforementioned terms would become a tad easier to contextualise and understand the flow of conversation related to these contexts throughout the discourse concerning *amahubo* and oral histories of the *AmaZulu*. In a final contextualization of terms related to the stem Zulu, it would be prudent to note how one would reference the language spoken by *amaZulu*. Quite simply, one would utilise the prefix *isi-* when referring to the language – as in *isiZulu*. This being said, all these terms would also be interchangeable with referencing Zulu as an all-encompassing term whilst contextualising meaning with other terms – for example: *isiZulu* or the Zulu language, *umZulu* or a Zulu person, *uZulu* or Zulu the founder of the Zulu clan, and *amaZulu* or Zulu people.

Oral history and oral traditions: their place in the academic theatre

Much can be said about oral history, and in the context of this dissertation, the reality is that the medium of oral history currently occupies a lesser position to that of written history. Especially in the realm of the academic theatre. In an attempt to understand why this would be the case, at this moment in time – it would be prudent to delve into investigating oral history in the context of academic applications, which in turn would serve as a handy navigational aid through which one could understand the structure

of the research undertaken in the *Sounds Like History* project. In doing so, a point of departure would be a well-presented article on oral history by Indira Chowdhury (*Speaking of the Past: Perspectives on Oral History* - 2014), which uses the partition of India in 1947 and associated events as showcases of how memory and commemorative history interact, and how the utilisation of oral history can demystify certain aspect of the written record. Chowdhury notes in their introduction that oral history in of itself works counter to the logic of commemorative historical practices – and through this counter movement, oral history makes an attempt to grasp the traces of the environment of memory and in turn analyse these in relation to history. (Chowdhury 2014). A main distinction that would need to be clarified within the paradigm of the unfolding dialogue on oral histories and oral traditions would be much needed clarification between the two terms. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, oral history is: “a recording containing information about the past obtained from in-depth interviews concerning personal experiences, recollections, and reflections”, whereas oral tradition is: “the stories and beliefs that a group of people share by telling stories and talking to each other”. In support of the dictionary definitions, Chowdhury offers their view on the relative terms. Chowdhury centres their definition of oral history on the fact that it is based on interviews and the interactions between how people recount their lived experiences, and in this sense how these lived experiences intersect with historical events is central (Chowdhury 2014). Accordingly, Chowdhury relates oral traditions more to being closer related to celebrations and performances linked to cultural heritage, in of themselves oral traditions would need a deeper form of interpretation in order to utilise them as a resource for historical understanding (Chowdhury 2014). In light of these clarifications, it would be prudent to note that as it stands both of these forms of history retelling should not be automatically placed into the categorisation of being fiction. It is quite clear that both of these methods of history preservation and communication are readily able to add further understanding, and different perspectives of the historic record.

When zooming in on oral history specifically, especially against the backdrop of the academic theatre – the growth of the practice has risen steadily post World War 2. The Merriam-Webster dictionary accounts that the first use of the term would be around 1950. In light of this knowledge, Chowdhury offers a view into oral history as a professional practice. At the centre of the rise in popularity and general acceptance of it in history keeping and academia, would have to be the technological advancements of recording equipment – as well as the evolution of certain disciplines in the human sciences during this period (Chowdhury 2014). The improvement in the ability to record and save audio recordings of the human voice for longer periods of time and with increasing clarity can be seen as to being central to oral history starting to be taken a little more seriously. Though, as technology has advanced even more since that time – landing us in the present moment where the audio-visual medium dominates huge swathes of our attention and time - oral history has not been regarded as a discipline within itself, till this day – which for some seems to be a travesty. As it stands, oral history is far much more considered being a method, though in some corridors it could be seen as an entire field of study.

Whichever way the position of oral history in academia is set as, it is clear that there still remains much work to be done within the field – and most of this work would be in showcasing the value-add of the expanded use of this method.

Relating to *Sounds Like History*, the decision to interact with oral history and recordings of oral traditions is one that is taken with much forethought. It is the belief of the present writer that there exists volumes of knowledge in the retellings of history coming from the men and women who make up our societies. As Chowdhury puts it, one of the major roles that oral history has taken in the last while has been working towards the democratisation of history, this can be seen through how in the early periods of the post war period – memory became to be regarded as a useful resource, and this coupled with the credibility that advancements in audio recordings created a multiplier effect on the acceptance of the practice in the mainstream and academic theatre (Chowdhury 2014). Therefore, it would be hard to argue against the need to delve deeply into recording the lived experiences and personal histories of those closely related to the Nguni oral tradition *Amahubo* – which in of themselves could represent a deeply integrated history keeping method that would contain volumes of untouched historical perspectives and clarifications regarding the Zulu epoch and related histories.

Literature Review

A view on James Stuart and review of the archive

Relating to the literature basis on Zulu oral traditions as a whole, one would find that at the forefront of notoriety in the case of compiling, understanding, and communicating the intricacies of oral traditions – that are almost indistinguishable from the foundations of culture for *amaZulu*, would be the meticulous and intricate works of the James Stuart archive on *amaZulu*, as a departure point for research into contemporary understanding of Zulu oral history. The various volumes encapsulate that which is centrally important to the preservation of history, societal norms, and general balance within Zulu people. It would certainly be quite a miss to not mention the importance of the James Stuart Archive – in terms of framing the journey of “*Sounds like History*”, the recording of Zulu history – and opening up an expanded view for how oral literature and traditions might be able to be placed closer in respect and relevance – in comparison to written history, is admittedly the most logical way to begin the literature analysis and contextualisation – as the basis for the ethnographic undertaking of the work presented. To cement the foundation of the paper, through this review – a simple progression through the multiple layers of Zulu oral traditions would be the endeavour presently explored.

Starting off with a view on the James Stuart Archive. As brief contextual history, the James Stuart Archive is rooted in the work of its name’s sake James Stuart – which in of itself, would be a story that could fill multiple volumes – dedicated solely to the story and journey of the man himself. In an enlightening paper titled “*Making the James Stuart Archive*” (1996) John wright provides a clarifying road map that helps to make sense of the volumes, that are now central starting points to understating

the history connected to Zulu life and culture. Noting in particular that Wright would form part of the academic team based in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa – at the University of Natal, who would compile, and bring to publication the current volumes of the James Stuart Archive.

James Stuart enters the folds of history in 1868, born in Pietermaritzburg in then Natal, South Africa – a colonial capital under British administration (Wright 1996 p334). This places Stuart in an interesting light to begin with, as this showcases the geographical connection with *amaZulu* and the future publications that would emerge from an older James Stuart, and subsequently published posthumously in the editing and compositional efforts of Colin Webb and John Wright between 1976 and 1986 (Wright, 1996 p333). Stuart's motivation, or inspiration that sparks the start of such a monumental undertaking that compiles interviews of Zulu people – numbering close to 200, is said to be his own concern surrounding how the increased interaction between the native "traditional" African Society was being influenced by the overarching influence of the "civilised" colonist administration of the time – (Wright, 1996 p335). This concern would, from the present writer's opinion – reflect the balance of how Stuart was brought up – having a father who was a part of the British colonial machinery that was imposing a shift towards civilizing the Native Africans (read *amaZulu*) – this concern, which in turn gave Stuart a differing perspective on the world and the interaction between colonists and the colonized. Interestingly it is quite evident through a brief overview of the life of Stuart, that the personal motivations for the embarking on such a monumental task – recording native oral history, would mostly be rooted in Stuart's own idea that the colonial powers in Natal would gain much from learning from the histories, customs, and world views of those inhabiting the region at that moment (Wright, 1996 p336). Stuart in 1902 notes that: he would like to collect and compile the recordings of native customs and become an authority in the field – with a further aim to be able to compare these findings with existing legislation (seeing as at this point of his life, Stuart was employed by the Natal Colonial government as a judge). Therefore, the understanding of the customs and Zulu culture would enable Stuart to serve the colony and those under its rule a bit better (Wright, 1996 p336). Furthermore in 1902, Stuart comments that the European world would need to be educated in regard to Zulu affairs and then from understanding them, Europeans would be able to arrive at firmer and more correct policies regarding them (the Zulus). (Wright, 1996 p336) The backdrop of this concern for Stuart can be summarized as such:

“The Sufferings of the Zulu people lie too deep for words; they feel, but cannot tell what they feel “–
James Stuart, 1902 (Introduction to Stuart Archive)

Once understood and placed within context - The Stuart Archive is invariably a large source of knowledge and opens up a well-set view on Zulu history – though even self-admittedly by the editors and compilers of the Stuart Archive – the volumes themselves are not to be viewed as complete texts,

and there still remains much work to be done with the raw data still contained in the original text recording of Stuarts life-long works.

Much more significant was our omission of the praises which Stuart recorded in many of his interviews. These were often full of historical information, and understandably we have been criticized by some reviewers for omitting them.

(Wright, 1996 p341)

One major critique of the Stuart archive – which the editing team has freely admitted after review and conversation with colleagues is that – the non-inclusion of the original isiZulu terms and phrases within the work – have a limiting factor on those who understand isiZulu and would gain more information given that translation from the native to the colonial language would of course leave somewhat of a gap. (Wright 342). Other issues with the compiled archive would be that the underpinned notions of colonial history and views on Native subjects under British rule are at times re-entrenched or reverberate the misnomers of earlier seminal works covering the region. (Wright, 1996 p334)

The James Stuart archive – or the papers that were to be edited and ended up becoming the archive, have a wealth of knowledge connected to keeping well recorded the Zulu language in the early 19th century – this can be seen as well as a wealth of knowledge for linguists that are interested in looking closely at the transformations of isiZulu across the past and present moment. In this record, it would be the present writers view that the work on the Stuart papers would need to be continued as there still remains much to be unlocked in the untangling of oral histories and praises from the Rural Zulu hinterland. As could be hoped, the importance of the James Stuart Archive should be well noted and established – right at the beginning of the review of literature that forms part of the much necessary task of understanding the length and breadth of Oral literatures and traditions of the Eastern Nguni peoples. In closing off the introduction of James Stuart, and the foundation that has been set through the existence and completion of his life project: it would be these present writers hope that further dedicated work utilising the data from interviews and reflections by James Stuart might continue on – in full force over the next few years, and generations to come – sufficiently and effectively.

Mbongiseni Buthelezi – *Sifuna Umlando Wethu* (We Want our history)

In a rather intriguing dissertation, Mbongiseni Buthelezi offers an overarchingly stimulating review on the intricacies of Zulu oral traditions and commentary on how each form of history preservation is seen both as individual linguistic and cultural phenomena, and as well as collectively through the interactions of these oral traditions as they are utilized in the everyday lives of *amaZulu*. From the outset of the dissertation “the foundation is set and made clear to be an analysis of three main types of oral traditions practiced by *amaZulu*, namely *Izibongo* (personal praises), *ihubo lesizwe* (national hymn), and

izithakazelo (praise names). (Buthelezi, 2012 p4)

On top of this foundation, it is made quite clear by Buthelezi that the discussions to take place throughout the paper include counter arguments and revelations related to the currently accepted popularized history of *amaZulu* – this friction namely relates to the dominance of Shaka Zulu in public discourse, whereas other prominent historical figures and families fall to the wayside in relevance and retellings of Zulu history, both orally and textually. The centralization of Shaka Zulu in the lore of *amaZulu* is a long accepted and prevalent practice, seeing as the current identifying collective name for the eastern Nguni family groups united under the Zulu family banner – still remains as Zulu. Buthelezi in his review of oral traditions does so with a clear desire to bring the foreground the importance of a balanced retelling of Zulu history, while at the same time being critical of the current dominance of Shaka Zulu in the public record when reviewing history of the Eastern Nguni (Buthelezi 4). To begin to understand the importance of oral history, and oral literature in Zulu culture – Buthelezi gives a grounded introduction to how oral literatures have permeated the fabric of culture and time, showcased by how the most utilized forms of *Izibongo*, *izithakazelo*, and *amahubo wesizwe* have effectively influenced the current perceptions and generally accepted views on the history of *amaZulu*.

The dominance of Shaka KaSenzangakhona (commonly referred to as Shaka Zulu) in the epoch of *amaZulu* is one facet to be well noted and viewed within in more detail in Buthelezi's writings – the veneration of Shaka Zulu can be noted even in recent history by viewing the generated works of prominent Zulu artists – such as: Grammy Awarded music group Ladysmith Black Mambazo with their seminal work *Ilembe: Our Tribute to King Shaka* released in 2007 (Buthelezi 2012), which is a work dedicated to celebrating and solidifying the legacy of Shaka Zulu and his role in unifying the scattered Eastern Nguni into what is now the Zulu Nation. Projects such as these are of course not isolated instances – but more rather a continuation of the use of oral traditions to solidify the remembrance of the exploits of *amaZulu* that have come before. In the example of Ladysmith Black Mambazo – the use of *Izibongo* have long been a vibrant form of history keeping – even noted in the early 19th century in writings by missionary's in the region such as Rev. George Champion (Buthelezi 2012), where the uses of *izibongo* were observed during the reign of Shaka Zulu's half-brother, assassinator, and successor: Dingane KaSenzangakhona. The integrated nature of the use of oral artistic forms becomes more apparent when analysing normal interactions amongst *amaZulu* in local settings – these integrations traverse generations while moulding and evolving to the needs and rhythm of those who inherit the use of these forms of history keeping – whilst continuing to maintain links with past forms (Buthelezi 2012). This would culminate with the modern-day utilization of *izithakazelo* as an honorific manner of greeting, instead of one's given name – one would be greeted with the name of an ancestor. A popular modern example would be how former President of South Africa Jacob Zuma is commonly referred to as *Nxamalala* or *Msholosi*, by *amaZulu* – both being clan names attached to his family history and which would form part of his *izithakazelo*.

This practice of integrating oral traditions into everyday life continues on with the normalized singing of *amahubo* (hymns) during occasions where larger family groups are gathered (Xulu 1992). Buthelezi confirms the reproduction of Zulu oral traditions during everyday life is more common place than one would think (Buthelezi 2012) , given how the Zulu Language itself has a customary insertion of repeating oral artistic forms in everyday speech – as seen through the use of *izithakazelo* as signs of respect - one might argue that the interconnection between the linguistic folding in of oral tradition spans across to music and popular culture, such as in the case of Ladysmith Black Mambazo’s tribute mentioned earlier - further solidifying the need for deeper research on oral traditions in the context of *amaZulu* . The review of these patterns, found in modern *isiZulu*, would lend quite a great hand into fully understanding the complexities of Zulu Society and having a peer into the combined histories of perhaps even the greater Nguni nation, with some hope of unlocking a more balanced tapestry of history representing the region. In the cases of the oral literatures introduced by Buthelezi – a poignant argument is made regarding the need to expand research on oral literatures – since the interconnection between *amahubo*, *izibongo* and *izithakazelo* remains evident (Buthelezi 2012 p6) , and often it is required to analyse these oral literatures together in order to gain a fuller picture of the lived experiences of the peoples who utilise them to store their history, and transfer knowledge – both historic and customary.(Buthelezi 2012 p2) Buthelezi delivers an impactful summation of the oral literature in the context of *amaZulu* and its positionality in the grander scheme of history keeping, as well as nation building.

As part of the revelations brought up by Buthelezi – a view into the crafting of a national Zulu identity can be seen even during the reign of Apartheid, where the utilisation of oral literatures such as *Izibongo* – by the Inkatha Freedom Party, was widespread in Bantu Education curriculums of schools that were under the jurisdiction of the KwaZulu-Natal homeland (Buthelezi 2012 p56). It is clear that sticking to these oral literatures was a form of reaching for the past, which was mostly can be seen as a remedy for the ills that have taken place in southern Africa over the past 200 or so years. It is pertinent then that the reconstructing and analysis of oral history should move forward in quite the objective and unbiased manner - perhaps even if it means upsetting the status quo of the current Zulu Monarchy’s retelling of Eastern Nguni history. Which Buthelezi consistently calls into focus – whilst delivering a balanced walk through of Zulu oral literatures. As seen from the first part of this review, James Stuart and their significant contributions to the literature connected to Zulu oral history can only be applauded wholeheartedly (Buthelezi 2012 p13). Though in the case of balancing out the views of scholars, Buthelezi offers an added layer of understanding the limitations of Stuart’s works – especially when considering the volumes deal mostly with recording ethnographic information on the Zulu monarchy. (Buthelezi 2012 p13). This trend would perhaps dominate the research area of Zulu oral literature up until present day, as often noted by Buthelezi throughout his dissertation. Included within this analysis

of the status quo of oral literature research, it is difficult to confirm how the landscape surrounding the everyday utilisation of oral traditions before 1820 looked and sounded like. (Buthelezi 2012 p13)

It is abundantly clear, especially when taking in to account the framing Buthelezi gives surrounding Zulu history. The dominant record, for the majority of those interested in Nguni history, is chalked full of the celebration of the triumphs of Shaka KaSenzangakhona, and this domination persists to present day – not because of the increasing number of written texts confirming this. Though rather, this is identified through analysing the multiple oral literatures that are weaved into the everyday lives of *amaZulu*. The confirmation biases that would as equally affect scholars of written history, and the consistency of repeating the “victors’ history “are as abundant in the weaves of *izithakazelo*, *Izibongo*, and perhaps too in *amahubo*. It is then off the motivation gained from Buthelezi’s writing where the deeper dive into understanding Zulu oral literatures is carried out, the ethnographic nature of the “Sounds Like History “project would then make more sense – when combined with the launchpad provided by the lifetime work of James Stuart, though now moved forward to a modern age.

Professor Xulu – An introduction to Amahubo, oral literature embedded in sound and rhythm.

As can be seen by the works provided by Stuart and Buthelezi respectively, the field of Zulu oral literatures is quite neatly fragmented into specific groupings – each with their own specific necessities and additions to the tapestry that is the storing and sharing of history amongst *amaZulu*. The three main strands of *Izibongo*, *Izithakazelo*, and *Amahubo* capture the bulk of the history and lived experiences of Nguni culture. Through Stuart a deeper understanding into *Izibongo* and their genealogical linking of past and present had been brought to the forefront, through Buthelezi – *izithakazelo* showcase that there exists the more integrated use of the practice as well in the everyday lives of *amaZulu*. The remaining in this triad of oral literature proposes quite the intriguing combination of language, sound, and rhythm: *Amahubo* - from this writer’s view, are an immensely dense and concentrated representation of Zulu culture and bastions of storing Zulu and Nguni history as a whole. It is based off this richness of knowledge stored within these sonic history preservers – that this thesis is born out of.

As mentioned earlier, *amahubo* as oral literature devices are not too dissimilar to the others highlighted by Stuart and Buthelezi respectively, though there rings true quite a melodic addition to their structure. Described by Xulu in their 1992 thesis *The Re-Emergence of Amahubo Song Styles and Ideas in Some Modern Zulu Music Styles*, the setting in which *amahubo* are to be readily found and experienced would be throughout major traditional ceremonies held by *amaZulu*. These ranging from weddings, funerals, national events (often regarding the Zulu monarchy), the birth of children and as well as during rites of passage – especially during puberty for young *amaZulu*. (Xulu 1992). An interesting expansion upon the understanding of *amahubo* is gleaned from the response of interview partners during Xulu’s ethnographic research period – where the oral literatures are referred to as well as *amagama ababala* (songs of the old people) and *amagama amadlozi* (songs of the ancestors). In of

themselves, *amahubo* are never used as a method of speech – more rather they are only ever utilised as melodic oral literature, in the form of song. Xulu succinctly describes their tonal make up by breaking down the etymology of *amahubo*, which in the singular form would be *ihubo* – derived from the term *ukuhuba*. Which means to sing with a deep roaring sound resembling that of a river that is flooding, a roaring lion in the savannah, or that of a raging thunderstorm across the African sky (Xulu 1992). Furthermore, the placement of this oral literature within the context of Zulu life is often within the setting of ceremony and performed as part of ritual events, though a bit unlike *izithakazelo* and *Izibongo* – they are performed at regional and family levels, with no necessity to be connected to the Zulu monarchy (Xulu 1992 p22).

The most intriguing aspect, or at least for this present writer, is that *amahubo* are clearly associated with the very beginning of time – and clearly can be categorised as being part of the preservers of the pre-Shakan era within Nguni history. Descriptors of them being archaic by researchers such as David Rycroft (Xulu 1992), showcase that their position within the milieu of Zulu oral literatures should be viewed with deep interest for the possible secrets that they hold – weaved in throughout their melodic structures. In reviewing their complexity, it is important to note that *amahubo* are always – without exception, performed by a group of people. Not in any way like one might imagine a stage performance at an opera house or live music concert – but more alike the communal harmonisation and melodic expressions occurring during the singing of a hymn during a Sunday church service. In keeping with the image of Sunday and church, *amahubo* distinct in of themselves as well – since their very use is associated with connecting to the metaphysical (Mbuso Khoza Narrative Interview 2022) and the aim is to invite the involvement of ancestors in the progression of events on the occasion. (Xulu 1992). Much of this connection can be further showcased within the interview with Mbuso Khoza in the Sounds Like History documentary. This being the case, categorising *amahubo* as religious music would not be a misnomer – though in the view of this present writer, this categorisation might pigeonhole this oral literature form into somewhat of a lesser degree of respect. Since the mere practice itself clearly transcends across multiple tiers of Zulu life – since each family have passed down their own unique *ihubo*, which Xulu notes as the family's connection between themselves and their ancestors – one might also read, history. (Xulu 1992). The ancestral and historic connectivity showcased in this oral literature device, becomes even more complex and layered when taking into account the Zulu myth of origin. *Amahubo* are believed to be the first sounds that *AmaZulu* made after *UNkulunkulu* (God) or *uMabonga-kutuk-izizwe-zonke* (He who roars so that all nations are struck with terror), breathed into a bed of reeds (*imihlanga*), and then out came *amaZulu* – who emerged singing *amahubo*. (Xulu 1992 p3). Furthermore, even Shaka KaSenzangakhona famously assigned specific *ihubo* to his different regiments, further solidifying the centrality of them to the Zulu way of life (Xulu 1992). David Rycroft confirms the centrality of *amahubo* and their participatory nature when noting that their meaningfulness is based on their demand for the involvement of many people – this is amplified when analysing the

call and response structure of *amahubo* (see Rycroft 1982, Xulu 1992). Xulu confirms this assertion by Rycroft by reminding that the very nature of the practice also includes the reinforcement of a group's solidarity (Xulu 1992). This is an important assertion when one becomes of the overriding importance of gathering together for *amaZulu* – since the commonly held belief is that the gathering and performance of ritual gatherings is a strengthener of bonds between the living *amaZulu* and the departed *amadlozi*. (Xulu 1992 p11).

In the case of how oral literatures can then be associated with the storing of history and transfer of knowledge from generation to generation – it is clear that *amahubo* can be seen as agents of ritualised history keeping - further adding to the power and impact of their performance aspects - further deepening their ability to transfer knowledge between family and communities. In addition, the prevalence of symbology in the dissemination of *amahubo* during the ritualistic gatherings showcase that they are more than just songs – the proximity of an individual to the collective history of the particular region and family might affect the amount of coded knowledge one might attain during the performance of *ihubo* (Xulu 1992). It is clear then that in order to fully appreciate the performance of *amahubo* in their rightful contexts – participants would need to be well informed about their history and understanding of what the symbols embedded within represent (Xulu 1992 p15). From a linguistic point of view - analysis of *amahubo* would yield much more knowledge on how language perhaps has evolved over time - a basis for forensic analysis. At a later point, an expanded view on this point would be engaged with. A central point at which Xulu returns to when analysing *amahubo*, could be rightly surmised as the attaining of power, whether real or symbolic, through the unified and often spiritual connection and participation of many people – who are fully aware and understand the contexts of history, symbolism and locality embedded in *ihubo* that would be sung. (Xulu 1992)

A singing group of Zulu warriors attains power to face its enemy and a singing clan in a wedding attains power to carry out the task of getting one of its members married, which in turn bestows power on that individual to carry on with his/her daily activities within the newly attained role

(Xulu 1992 p20)

Rather interestingly, when taking into consideration the three sides of Zulu oral literature – Xulu highlights that the practice of *ukuhuba* is not a rite that one would need to qualify oneself for or be specially chosen (Xulu 1992 p22). Much like in the Zulu origin myth, a unified Zulu voice emerges – singing as one, reverberating and returning back that which was imparted through the breath of *UNkulunkulu* - it is clear that every *umZulu* has a right to participate in *ukuhuba* from the dawn of time till the end of time (Xulu 1992). This being the case, it is clear that once *umZulu* is able understand the symbols, language, and embedded history in *amahubo* – the strides needed to fully connect with oneself and position with life, would become more understandable. Then, through this oral literature device, the continued preservation of Zulu history and culture would become a

transitionally smooth process. The most prominent point to highlight perhaps from reading Xulu, would be the importance of Amahubo needs to be placed at the forefront for Zulu consciousness - part of decolonial thought and decolonized history preservation.

It is logical, therefore, for amahubo to be used in the maintenance of a Zulu ethnic consciousness within contemporary South Africa, characterized by a polarized political situation.

(Xulu 1992 p23)

It is then no surprise that the present writer, motivated by the vivid analysis Xulu provided on musical oral literatures – that capturing these in sound and colour became the focus of one’s life for the preceding years, culminating in this thesis, and the accompanying documentary film. It is abundantly clear that there still remains much to be learnt about the *amaZulu* – and it is with great motivation and excitement that one embarks on perhaps a lifelong mission to record, store, and share the oral literatures of the Eastern Nguni.

Liz Gunner, ecologies of orality

In an attempt to avoid verbosity, though in slight contrast to the old adage. “All good things come in threes” – in compiling an efficient, and hopefully captivating review of literature concerning the oral literatures of *amaZulu*. Introducing Liz Gunner, and their paper on the Ecologies of Orality – would be a fitting way to add a proverbial bow to the review. Gunner begins the enthralling deep dive into orality in the following manner:

Orality is often seen as existing outside the confines of world literature, excluded largely because the heavy weight of print pushes it aside: words spoken, sung, or performed as aesthetic events are considered to be external to the domain of print, and thus to the modes of circulation conventionally associated with the term ‘world literature’.

(Gunner, n.d., p116)

It is made clear by Gunner that in the hierarchy of knowledge transfer systems – the written record is far more supported and centralised as the main method of preserving and disseminating knowledge. Gunner in the onset of the paper pulls into focus, how the placement of orality into a “soft” categorisation within literature is an idea that should be challenged (Gunner p116). Which brings forward an intriguing thought on how one could ever balance the view of literature not only being written works – but also including oral traditions and literature beside it. Gunner argues that the complexity that is stored with the transference, performance and creation of oral works is enough to consider orality to deserve its own place within world literature (Gunner p116). Though, from this present writer’s own view – the most moving phase of Gunner’s introduction would be when they compare the non-inclusion of orality in world literature to be akin to self-mutilation (Gunner p116). It

is this combination of points to consider, that showcase how well Gunner might sum up the position the *Sounds Like History* project. This would fit within the milieu of historic literature – and perhaps help avoid acts of self-mutilating history occurring.

A key argument put forward by Gunner, in favour of a more wholistic landscape would be the importance of decentralising the influence of the Western literature – in particular in the academic spheres. (Gunner p117). Then, from this point – once one takes into account Africa and its multiple dynasties of oral literature – it is clear that in order to effectively build a wholistic picture of Africa, its people, and their histories – intertwined or not, the Western images of Africa would need to be cast aside; and most particularly the idea of Africa: home of the strange and exotic. This refocus is of much importance. It is then at this point where Gunner and their relevance comes into full focus, in *Ecologies of Orality* – Gunner reviews African epics, from across the continent – and at a point lands upon an overview on praise poetry (Gunner p117) this would particularly fitting – seeing the above reviews and insights into *izithakazelo*, *Izibongo*, and of course – the central point of this present writer's research, *amahubo*. Gunner offers particular care in carving out a place for orality in world literature – which is often centred around their critique of the heightened importance of the novels within the Western literature landscape (Gunner p117). Thankfully, Gunner does well to not make this the centre of their own literature – pushing and pulling quite gracefully between the two sides of the literature coin, written and oral: pulling a reader to understand the connection between the two. Through Gunner's words, one becomes cognisant of the fact that oral literatures are still a big part of our present day lives – and not as living relics either (Gunner p117). Orality is very much part of the present unfolding epoch of humanity, much like the novel remains a cornerstone of Western literature, and this being so – it can and should never be considered as an outdated no longer functioning relic that should be discarded and relegated to the musty forgotten corners of humanities memory (Gunner p118).

One of the central questions of the present writer's research would be that of: how oral traditions store and share knowledge across time and space do – much of these finding would be addressed in more detail in later segments of this thesis – and accompanied with visual and audio devices within the accompanying film. Though, for this point, referring back to Gunner would be a sufficient whetting of the appetite concerning this question. Gunner begins to answer this question by introducing their main focus being the area of praise poetry, which then is compared to the verbal art form of an epic (Gunner p118). In relation to the form of an epic, the epic of *Sunjata* is introduced – this epic is a rich tapestry of history, which is an oral literature that has incorporated various songs, praise names; similar to *Izibongo*), and intermingled historical narratives (Gunner p119). In short, this epic deals with the story of Sunjata Keita, the first king of the Kingdom of Mali – and their heroic battle against the then ruling magician king *Sumanguru* (Gunner p119). The most intriguing point, which this writer understood, is that the epic of *Sunjata* has rather faithfully been kept alive and well in the West-African region till this day; with many versions of the epic being stored in oral traditions and retellings by rather famous praise poets – as well as their existing versions of it across digital media and reverberations across analogue

radio waves. Interestingly, unlike *Amahubo* – the performance of the *Sunjata* epic is mainly entrusted to individuals known as *Jali* – who in of themselves would have differing performance versions of the epic, which is mainly differentiated according to the talents and skills of the present *Jali* and the audience which it is performed to. Which would showcase how it would become possible for multiple versions and strands of the epic being present, both in oral literature and recorded forms.

It is quite clear that in the relation to the oral literature form of epics, that these predate the prevalence of script, though in the present moment the position that they occupy would be closer to that of being art and entertainment – rather than a faithful historic record. We do have to note that oral literatures do contain variations - even when concerning the same historic points - this could be a part of how history does have a sound. The question about whether this is consistent or not, is a different case altogether. One point that is made abundantly clear in Gunner's paper is: collecting various oral histories and compiling them seems to be the best way to find a balanced historic record. Though when compared to *Amahubo* - could it be argued that the fact that the oral tradition and its need for participation might help it remain a tad more objective and truer to events? perhaps an advantage? the transitional capabilities of epics and oral literatures into the everyday lives of people is a great feat to behold. perhaps an advantage of orality is that - the transitional capabilities are quite astounding, their sound, rhythm and compositions can become the pulse of a culture and interwoven into everyday lives seamlessly. Yes, perhaps the true meanings and understanding of the epics might be lesser apparent - as they become more part of ritual, see parroted soundscapes, rather than conscious interactions and points for listeners and reciters. Though it is great that the epics still remain, till this day - which gives a great window into how they are preserved - and a space for researchers to analyse oral history.

Reverting back to praise poetry, Gunner's definition gives a healthy rounding off of the oral form – “it is a mode of poetic communication which profiles defines and in this broad sense praises through the spotlight on an individual, his/her personality, and social or historical being, with great clarity and force.” (Gunner p122). Gunner continues to round out the definition by pointing out that in some praise poetry traditions the individual is often times accompanied by those who would hold an at least basic understanding of the rules and style characteristics of the mentioned praise poetry. (Gunner p122). This of course, is a synchronized revelation when one revisits the structure of *amahubo* and their performance contexts – as reviewed earlier through Xulu's works. Gunner does go on to confirm the position of Zulu orality, in *Izibongo*, to be mostly considered related to the royal house of Zulu – much like what could be attained from the published works of James Stuart. The most intriguing though, in the finalization of the main literature that this work is based on – is Gunner's pointing out that the praise poetry of *amaZulu* can be seen to be integrated into the everyday lives of “common” peoples – much like the Zulu folk music genre *Maskanda*, where the inclusion of individual *Izibongo* in the songs of popular artists of this genre have become the norm – perhaps even transferring the relevance of such oral forms from the vestige of royals, back down to the people, solidifying perhaps the intention of these

oral forms. To be the bastions of a peoples' history, and a scroll of a nation (Armstrong Ntuli Narrative interview 2022)

Data Collection and Methodology

Interviews as a research method

The chosen methodologies for conducting the research and formulation of outputs attached to the *Sounds Like History* project and this thesis were admittedly, and perhaps thankfully, developed over a longer period of time. It was quite apparent at the onset of this project, for this present writer, that the undertaking of zooming into *amahubo* and the oral literature of *amaZulu* could be a potential tangled web – therefore considerations of methodology should be traversed with great care. Through this revelation, the first months of what would now be a 3-year process – would be mostly spent in deep conversation and intellectual debates with colleagues, family, and peers about ideas on orality – oral traditions and generally what they thought about how we keep our history through sound, almost at all times punctuated with a humourful reminder that we are, for the most part, highly evolved apes hurtling through time and space aboard a giant rock. It is this humour that would be ever present in the formulation of the ideas one would like to challenge within the scope of how oral traditions are to be seen within the academic theatre.

Early on within the process, Spring 2021, of developing the final ideas of which phenomena the present writer would like to have researched, almost by chance – a trip to Graz (Austria) during a summer break, yielded a surprising conversation with Dr. Windberger-Heidenkummer and their earlier research on *microtoponymy*, particularly their doctoral thesis covered exploring the naming conventions of hills, farms, and forests in a particular region of lower-Steiermark (Austria). The interest though of this brief, yet fortuitous conversation would be the expansion on how they carried out this research in the early 1990s. It came to light that they would conduct interviews in the region and utilise tape recordings to record said interviews – which of course then would be transcribed, analysed, and utilised for their final project. It would be amiss to not mention this conversation and rank it as a foundation for how one's own research would unfold along the following years. By the time Professor Xulu's 1992 doctoral thesis had come into view – it had become abundantly clear that the way forward for gathering information would then be conducting a series of expert interviews on the subject. This revelation felt quite affirming, as this present writer was a radio presenter in a past life, so to say – before the proverbial academic siren call brought one to the present moment. The idea of conducting interviews brought much peace to the unfolding process, though still much needed to be figured out in the upcoming months. Within these key considerations would be of course the question would be, which type of research would be the main focus and output determiner? Would the subject matter be better suited for qualitative or quantitative methods? The considerations within which path to take would be realised through taking a step back from personal ideas on what the final outcome of one's research would be, and rather

formulating ideas on what would better serve the larger linguistic and history community attached to the study of isiZulu firstly as a language, and a view on *amaZulu and* their cultural practices as a people. Answers to these central questions would only be answered further along the research process for “*Sounds Like History* “.

Abundantly clear, by the end of one’s first semester of master’s courses would be that the undertaking of *Sounds like history* would be best done through the use of qualitative methods of research – specifically the use of Narrative interviews as the main method of gathering data on the subject of oral traditions of the Eastern-Nguni, and an expanded focus on *amahubo*. The final decision on utilising the form narrative interviews as a main data collection tool for the project, could be summarised through the evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of this interview method – and thus compared in relation to the data gathering goals of the *Sounds like History* project. As a start, narrative interview methods do well in centralising the interviewee and their replies in the narrative – this would be of particular importance considering the information one would be looking for – would be stored in orality, hence the unrestricting platform that narrative interviews provide - would be best suited in gathering a mass of available recorded material – which after rigorous analysis, is most likely to yield valuable nuggets of knowledge.

The value of the data outputs from narrative interviews could also be appreciated when one considers that, during the interview process the interviewees perspective is prioritised, rather than there being an imposed agenda (Anderson and Kirkpatrick, 2016 p631). In the case of the formulated questions for the *Sounds Like History* narrative interviews, rather than asking an interview partner about specifics about Amahubo, a more layered narrative interview question was asked, followed by a given period of time, approximately 25 minutes – where the interview partner would be able to formulate their responses, and expand upon points related to the question which they personally would find important to mention. It was quite apparent that this method of interviewing was perfectly suited for the work that lay ahead for *Sounds Like History*.

Some added complexity was added for how the narrative interviews would be captured, as the interviews themselves would be recorded on video – for later use within the accompanying documentary film, therefore preparing interview partners for both audio and video recordings was of utmost importance. Thankfully with all three main interview partners, and conversation captured during the research period in *eNqutshini, KwaZulu-Natal* (South Africa) the presence of a camera and recording devices was quite naturally overlooked – with participants almost reverting to a state which made it seem as if none of the apparatus was present. Perhaps much might be said about this phenomenon, and that this would only be possible through the hyper-digitalisation and spread of camera phones and viral video recordings over the past decade or two.

Documentary film as a presentation medium

In the case of a chosen presentation medium for the compiled data and findings from the ethnographic trip, and additional literature revelations – it came to be that the choice to utilise a more encapsulating medium, such as that of a documentary film came to be. This idea, in its original form came during a rather informal conversation with the present writer's supervisor – and almost as spontaneously as the conversation had begun to veer in the direction of the current research and the question on how one would present such a rich tapestry of oral literatures in text format, without alienating the vast majority of readers who in the most likely case would not have a rudimentary grasp of *isiZulu* and have an ability to formulate the rhythm of the language – when confronted with text descriptions of the performances of *amahubo*. Seemingly, the simplest answer to all of these considerations would be the most illuminating one. A dual medium presented thesis becomes the clear choice – and perhaps an even better utilisation of compiled footage and interviews from a planned ethnographic trip. Seeing as, in any case – the narrative interview qualitative method has been singled out as the most suitable data collection method. The ideation of the utilisation of the method of a documentary film in combination would only increase the desired impact and connection with subject matter for present and future interested parties in the oral traditions of *amaZulu* and connected soundscapes. The medium would further centre the narratives presented and captured and keeping the focus on the findings of the time spent in the field by the present writer, with an added benefit of being able to create academic outputs that would connect as well with the currently screen focused world – further increasing one's reach and accessibility to the presented research area and findings. In the case of committing to creating a documentary film as an accompanying visual and audio medium, one would have to admit that the idea itself – brilliant, though the application of the given idea would require quite some research, preparation and generally a heap of beginner's luck – so to say. As this would be an initial attempt for the present writer at filming a documentary.

As was the case in which data collection methods would be used for the project, a deep dive into the world of documentaries would be the logical next step – before one would be able to formulate ideas on which ethnographic trip methods one would follow, choices in interview partners and as well choices on which regions to centre research in. This of course would be clarified in time. In terms of documentaries themselves as devices of knowledge transfer and media – evidently, there exists quite a clear set of differentiations, sub-sets and methodologies attached to different type of documentary (film) styles. Mostly centred around the role of the director, read researcher, and their relation to the subject. This of course creates a simpler lattice to navigate during the pre-production period, creating space for further clarification in relation to the subject – and as well as personal aspects for the director. This balance of duty and ethics are best described by an early documentarian of the 1920's Robert Flaherty – who filmed *Moana*, which is described as a recreation of the daily life of a Polynesian boy (Castells, 2010, p55). Flaherty says the following:

“The purpose of the documentary, as I understand it, is to represent life in a way in which it is lived. This by no means implies what some people might think; namely, that the task of the documentary's director is to film, without making any selection [...] The task of selection is performed on the documentary material, with the aim of telling the truth in the most appropriate way”

(Romaquera and Alsina, 1989 p152)

In relation to the documentary film undertaking and utilising the views of Flaherty in the regard to the duties and responsibilities of a documentarian – the selection of a mode of documentary becomes a more straightforward undertaking. The choices to be made in this regard would be informed by the expert opinions of well noted documentarians such as Flaherty, Michael Renov and Bill Nichols – with the latter pair giving two well rounded models that help shape a clearer methodology for the present undertaking.

Through Michael Renov, one is introduced to four main considerations regarding the composition, function, and effect of documentaries – or more rather works of non-fiction (Castells 2010 p62). Documentaries would be framed along these lines and considerations:

1. To record, reveal or preserve.
2. To persuade or promote
3. To analyse or interrogate
4. To express

These four categorisations do well in clarifying the intentions of a film undertaking, understanding these categorisations help refine the process of documentary. In relation to *Sounds Like History*, the application and integration of the above categories would be a film undertaking that is centred on the recording of expert interviews on the subject of Zulu oral traditions and oral literature in Southern Africa, with an aim to reveal the interactions between orality and the everyday lives of *amaZulu*. The undertaking would aim to promote further interest in the study of *amahubo* – much like the previously discussed interest showcased by projects such as The James Stuart archive – centred mostly around *izibongo*. The long-term goals of the film undertaking would be the making available of film and audio recordings which would enable further analysis of not only musical performances but including the untangling of linguistic phenomena found within *isiZulu* – including how *amahubo* have been able to preserve specific dialects of *isiZulu*, which in the current epoch would be lost – had it not been for such oral literature forms (Mbuso Khoza narrative interview 2022). Finally, the documentary would then aim to express an aesthetic and auditory juxtaposition in relation to the commonly held ideas related to African cultural practices, and the dominant media imagery attached to the everyday lives of the inhabitants of the region of study. This final point is of particular importance to the present writer, especially in regard to how the peoples of Zululand have been portrayed in dominant media – and perhaps anchoring further on Liz Gunner's comment on the severing of Africa being seen as the home

of the strange and exotic – this would be a major aesthetic and functional goal of the accompanying documentary film.

Accompanying the above considerations concerning making a documentary film, one would need to in the same breath make an informed decision on which form the documentary film would fall under. Within these considerations, Castells in their thesis “*The Interactive Multimedia Documentary: A proposed analysis model*” (2010) notes the dominant seven categorisations in which most documentary films would fall under. Beginning with the most known: The *Expository* documentary, which represents what would come to mind for most as what a classic documentary would look like. In the *expository* documentary, most of the foundation is based on rhetoric rather than the aesthetic (Castells 2010) with the use of text prompts superimposed over images, used to guide a viewer through the film, being a popular mode of production. This form of documentary is based on emphasizing logical argument as well as an idea of objectivity (Castells 2010 p64). This mode is of course most popular with socio-ethnographic expeditions. The *Poetic* mode of documentary has quite the contrast to that of the *expository*, as the main aim of the mode is closely attached to that of avant-garde movements – which combine elements of surrealism and subjective impressions. (Castells 2010). The mode aims as well to create within a viewer a certain mood and follow a tone, and it is not as concerned in information transfer. Following on from this mode, a third mode set out by Bill Nichols – the founder of the contemporary study of documentary, is the *Reflexive* documentary. This documentary type tends to have more concern on the process through which the filmmaker made the documentary – such as in a “The Making-of” type film. This mode differs from the above types of documentary as well through the fact that the filmmaker themselves appear quite centrally in the film itself – with the film placing heavy emphasis on the filmmaker’s journey, rather than the actual subject of the film (Castells 2010). In stark contrast, the *Observational* mode of documentary takes a fly-on-the-wall approach to documentary, with the filmmaker choosing to capture what is occurring in the chosen subject environment from a position which would ensure a minimal disturbance of events unfolding in the natural environment. This mode is interestingly born out of a filmmaking movement in France coined as *Cinema Verite* (Truth Cinema) – as a counter to the moralizing aims of the *expository* mode of filming (Castells 2010). The *participatory* mode of documentary filmmaking is yet another mode which is mostly utilised in ethnographic endeavours and social theories of participatory investigation (Castells 2010). In this mode, the main highlight would be the relationship between the filmmaker and the chosen research subject, though unlike the *reflexive* mode – the filmmaker is more treated as an investigator and their journey through untangling the webs presented as they enter unknown territory would be the main driver of the film narrative. The filmmaker then interacts with the environment and chosen subjects of interests in a manner which allows a viewer to walk in their perspective and learn as the filmmaker learns. This mode has elements of reflection given by the filmmaker interspersed throughout

the final film, which helps to round out the information and experiences gained by the investigator for the viewer.

Rounding out the six main distinctions of documentary films, Nichols presents the *Performance* mode of filmmaking, this form is seen to be the most recent amongst the developed modes utilised by documentary filmmakers. This mode is seen mainly as an experimental mix of earlier styles – with a focus more on the poetic, expressive and rhetorical (Castells 2010). Nichols notes that this mode is seen as an answer to the shortcomings of previous modes of documentation – this style also allows a filmmaker to weave in personal accounts and juxtapose them with larger historic and politic issues in the current moment of the film production. This style has been coined as the Michael Moore style (Castells 2010 p66) – with the example of the documentary film “*Won’t You Be My Neighbour*” (2018) being a successful depiction of the life of educational television host Mr Rodgers -which showcases how the documentary film style can evolve beyond that of only having a choice of being purely ethnographic or purely poetic and attached closer to the avant-garde. This mode has quite the appeal, when one considers the growing positive receptions of educational-entertainment style films and series which are becoming ever present upon the video-on-demand landscape of the present day.

In terms of the final selection of a filmmaking mode, it became abundantly clear for the present writer that the presentation of *Sounds Like History* would be seated on a two-pronged approach in accordance to chosen target markets. The project is mainly focused on capturing the attentions of the general public, outside of the academic theatre and fraternity – as utilising media to push forward research interests can be seen as new frontier for researchers and their research outcomes. Engaging not only within what could become an academic echo chamber is paramount to the nature of such research endeavours. It might seem a no-brainer to select documentary modes which fully suit the social ethnographic field within which this research resides, though upon further reflection – a hybrid of the *poetic* and *participatory* filmmaking processes have been selected. One might believe that the *performance* would suit the research as well – though the juxtaposition of the two selected modes felt more in line with the visual, audio, and educational goals for *Sounds Like History*. The *poetic* serves the filmmaking process the most starting from the choice of camera lens which has captured all of the footage from the ethnographic trip, starting as well from pre-production up until the current post-production of the film.

The decision to film *Sounds Like History* through a 50mm f/1.8 1.33 anamorphic lens – which is a specific aperture of camera lens which unlike its traditional counterpart, the spherical lens, distorts the raw image/footage – which in post-production would be compressed back into a suitable format that then gives the image a more cinematic look and feel – which includes differences in how light interacts with the camera, giving off a dreamier and art-nouveau feel. Some of the most intriguing reactions to light can be seen in the accompanying film. The documentary film has also been combined with an underlying musical score, which is aimed at creating further immersion and emotional sentiment –

highlighting the journey through the visual and audio soundscapes of *Sounds like History*. The progression of the documentary film has been rooted on the use of the *participatory* mode of filmmaking, as the present writer is placed in the position of the main investigator – as well as utilising narration that helps to guide a viewer through revelations, and situations encountered throughout the fact-finding mission of the ethnographic undertaking presented both in text and visual mediums. #

Ethnographic trip as a fact-finding exercise

As can be gleaned from the methodological decisions discussed above, in terms of a choice on which methodological framework to utilise to best capture data on the subject of interest, as well as expansive considerations on which presentation mediums would best suit the undertaking of the *Sounds Like History project* – it seemed to be quite apparent that a decision on whether or not to undertake a research trip to South Africa needed to be made. In short, the pull towards committing to an ethnographic undertaking become overrulingly clear – especially when one considers that the sonic and visual importance of the performance of *amahubo* had not been intensely documented at a research level as of yet. Combined with the committing to a documentary film as a presentation medium – a trip to *Zululand* (KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa) began to come to fruition in late 2022 – with the final trip settled to take place between 5 December 2022 till 5 February 2023. The main objectives for the eight-week trip would mainly be a) interviewing all 3 main interview partners, b) engaging with the local community in eNqutshini, KwaZulu Natal – where a majority of the ethnographic trip would be spent, c) capture sufficient visual and sonic footage to be converted into the final documentary film. This eight-week period would represent only a portion of the total work needed for the completion of the documentary and thesis project – with the period following the time spent in the field being seen as the more important post-production period, where footage would be organised and sifted through in preparation for the start of editing. In regard to this process, time in the field would have little to no actual film editing, as remaining in the present moment is of more importance – as well as aiming to guard against imposing one's own stylistic and visual ideas on what would be captured in the field. In connection to these considerations, following an ethnographic trip formula based on participant observation can be clearly highlighted throughout the documentary work. From the beginning of the trip, the aim would be to blend in as much as possible and experience the time in the field much like the community within which one would be filming and recording during this period. Much importance was placed in the beginning of the ethnographic trip relating to where one would stay, including the manner in which our filming team would dress while in the region – with hopes that after some time our presence would not disturb the unfolding of events in the region. Thankfully, as can be noted through the accompanying documentary film – our team found that our integration into the day-to-day of our chosen region took place in quite a smooth manner. Within the first 24 hours of the arrival of the present writer and videographer in the field, news of the filming project had spread across the community. Instead of the filming efforts being inundated with performative situations and clear unnatural reactions on film – our

presence was more greeted with collaborative interactions and spontaneous invitations to events across the community where we would be able to perhaps find the elusive performances of *amahubo* which would be central to our trip.

Selection of interview partners

A great consideration and important undertaking for the data collection initiative of the Sounds like History project could be centralised along the consideration of whom would be the combination of interview partners for the project. The choice of interview partners in this case were made fairly simple given the narrow scope of what the final interest area of oral literatures would be – namely *amahubo*. In this case the choice of interview partners would be a simple choice in the regard. The selection would in the end be the following three experts in their respective fields as well as in relation to oral literatures and *amahubo* specifically. Initially three interview partners would be selected, namely Armstrong Ntuli, Professor Musa Xulu, and Mbuso Khoza, respectively. In the end, an additional interview partner in Desmond Latham would be added to the list towards the end of the ethnographic trip. The selected interview partners would act as an anchoring device and backdrop against which analysis of other interactions in the field would be measured against, as with the nature of the research undertaking – many conversations regarding oral traditions would be had, with a plethora of revelations being either confirmed or countered during this period – and subsequent analysis of interviews during the postproduction period of the documentary film. The selection of each expert interview would be reasoned as follows:

Armstrong Ntuli, who is a Senior-Education Specialist in the Gauteng Educational District, would be selected as a main interview partner based on two main points – which would serve as both luminary for the project. As an individual, Ntuli has a specific connection to the selected ethnographic region selected for the filming and data collection for *Sounds Like History*. Ntuli, has deep rooted connections with the region – having been raised there, and having a larger network of friends and family in *eNqutshini*, which would serve as a great springboard for creating spaces for fruitful interactions and social connection for this present writer and accompanying videographer during the research period. It became apparent that in order to be able to conduct research freely and safely in the heart of Zululand – a strong connection to the region would be needed with certain cultural permissions to stay on ancestral land being needed to be granted. In the *eNqutshini* region, Armstrong Ntuli is the main patriarch for a branch of the *Ntuli* family who have been in the region for decades – as well as being branched off from a historically significant Eastern-Nguni family – with semi-frequent mentions in the James Stuart archive. Showcasing that their familial knowledge and stature within the region would go a long way in opening up the proverbial door to easier community acceptance during the period of undertaking research in the region. It is clear from the period following the filming in *eNqutshini* that having the support and permission of Ntuli went a long way in opening up genuine invitations to participate in community events, as well as capturing and experiencing how the everyday

lives of the community would actually look like in a normal non-performative context. Added to this, Ntuli's position as an educational expert with a deep interest in cultural heritage, family history, and ethnomusicology would be a positive addition to the interests of the project. The value of interacting frequently with Ntuli can be seen clearer within the upcoming interview analysis of interview partners in the upcoming section of this dissertation.

The choice of including Musa Xulu within the list of expert interview partners can be seen as an overriding clear choice – as their 1992 Doctoral thesis can be regarded as a central literature pillar upon which the inception of the *Sounds Like History* project would be based upon. Through the interaction with the literature of Professor Xulu, many clarifications on the subject matter of Zulu oral literature had been gained. As can be seen throughout the above literature review of Xulu's work, the level of value that could be gleaned from an in person narrative interview would be quite immense. In terms of criteria, one would put forward in argument of a better suited interview partner – one would be hard pressed to find a more suitable candidate. The present writer having added Xulu into the priority list of interview partners would however not materialise an in-person interview during the ethnographic trip in South Africa, meaning that within the final documentary film – and within the present thesis, Professor Xulu's impact and opinions on *amahubo* would be confined to those found within their literary works and ethnomusicological research initiatives. It is a hope that in further research projects and documentary filming initiatives that there would be more space for collaboration and knowledge exchange within the area of Zulu oral traditions.

Rounding off the top 3 list of planned interview partners would be cultural practitioner, musician, actor, and educator Mbuso Khoza. Mr Mbuso Khoza's inclusion within the list of expert interview partners becomes clearer – especially after an overview on their continuous work within the preservation initiatives for Zulu culture – as well as educational initiatives mainly aimed towards the youth of South Africa – and most specifically Zulu youth living across the nation. Khoza has a particularly larger than life presence within the realm of Nguni heritage preservation, and perhaps one might not stutter at using the moniker “a living legend” when referring to the importance of Khoza. The initial crossing of paths with Khoza and their work would rather interestingly take place during the global pandemic period of Covid-19. Where almost by chance, yet again – or perhaps kindness of algorithms, this present writer happened across Khoza's enthralling lecture series on the Battle of Isandlwana (a major battle that the Zulu nation won against a colonial British Army circa 1969) – which included performances of Zulu song and traditional music. The coupling of Khoza's practical and public preservation of Zulu history and artistic culture, and Xulu's deep ethnomusicological analysis of *Amahubo* and the related oral literatures of the Eastern-Nguni became a beacon of clarity in the moving forward on the present writer's research project. At this point, the initial three interview partners represented a well spread representation of knowledge bearers of Zulu oral literatures.

Rather fittingly, one would be amiss to underplay the impact of encountering and ultimately being able to pick at the brains of the final interview partner – Desmond Latham. The work of Desmond Latham comes into view in a rather roundabout manner, particularly as a recommendation by a fellow Vienna based expat to listen to Latham’s South African history focused podcast. At perhaps the midway point of the ethnographic research trip, the present writer and accompanying videographer began to listen intermittently to the *History of South Africa with Des Latham* podcast - culminating in an almost inseparable companionship between our journey in research and travelling across Zululand. The Latham podcast showcases an immense attention to detail in the retelling of the complex and intertwined history of South Africa – beginning with pre-history of the region, and through each episode Latham brings enlightenment to the regions changes and challenges across time. By the time the present writer had consumed over 2 dozen episodes of the podcast, it became abundantly clear that Latham would in fact be a valuable final piece in weaving together the importance of oral literatures in not only Zululand, but as well in Southern Africa. As will be seen in the upcoming of the interview analysis, this final expert inclusion provided a fitting conclusion to the ethnographic undertaking of the *Sounds Like History* project.

Analysis of narrative interviews

Upon completion of the specific narrative interviews conducted with the aforementioned interview partners, the following section would represent the outcomes of each interview with inclusion of main take aways from the sessions as well as needed contextualisation of the information put forward by the interview partners. In terms of the main narrative question provided at the beginning of each interview. The question was as follows:

“From your understanding – what is the story of origin for amaZulu (Zulu people), and from this basis could you share your thoughts on the importance of music to Zulu culture – and the relevance of Amahubo”

(Narrative interview question – Sounds Like History)

As can be noted in this narrative interview question, the aim of the compound nature of the question would be to allow each interview partner to navigate the answering of the main considerations in their own time. As well as not needing further prompts throughout the progression of the interview. The only caveat which would be enforced within the answering of the question would be a soft time limit of 45 minutes, which would include time for immanent questions arising from the interview partners replies based off the narrative question – and where necessary exmanent questions would be posed towards the end of the interview, where it would be seen, as necessary. The interest focus of the interviews would naturally be around a) understanding a basic history of *amaZulu*, b) understanding the relationship between oral traditions and *AmaZulu*, and c) understanding what the relevance of amahubo to the everyday lives of AmaZulu is.

Each interview would be conducted in a location chosen by the relevant interview partner – which in most cases would be at their private residences respectively, though for Mbuso Khoza the interview would take place backstage in a theatre dressing room as they were preparing to go on stage to perform a musical piece – which fittingly had to do with *amahubo*. The general progression of each interview would begin in earnest with a general conversation and so-called breaking of the ice – which in turn allowed the setting up of filming and audio recording equipment to take place during this time. In terms of the interviews held with Armstrong Ntuli and Desmond Latham, these pre-discussions did end up surpassing 20 minutes of general conversation. Some sections of these general discussions would be inadvertently captured on film, as well as post interview discussions which tended to go on for long periods of time as well – much like in the case of Mbuso Khoza. In light of the recordings of these conversations, data permissions and related use for academic and documentary film purposes had been requested from interview partners – with no exception. As can be seen in the accompanying documentary film, each individual interview partner did well in going into full flow during their answering sections – with little to no hesitations in expanding on stored knowledge and individual expertise. It is the present writer’s opinion that having created a comfortable and welcoming interview environment enabled interview partners to fully commit to sharing their viewpoints, expertise and own reflections on matters relating to *amahubo*, and their positionality on the topics of oral literatures and preservation of history through these devices.

Interview partner 1: Armstrong Ntuli
Emerging themes:

- Shaka Zulu
- Music
- *Amabutho*
- Zulu Nation vs Clans
- Monarchy vs Common people
- Power
- Psychology and spirituality

Summary/overview:

In relation to the narrative interview question, Ntuli begins with a centring of knowledge regarding Zulu history to be focused upon the founder and perhaps most well known Eastern-Nguni historical figure. Shaka KaSenzangakhona – more commonly known as Shaka Zulu. Who would become the first unified ruler over the Eastern-Nguni, which Ntuli describes as having been achieved through war and conquest initially under Shaka’s support from another Nguni clan – which had much power in the region at the time, the Mthetwa clan! Ntuli in the outset of the interview makes it abundantly clear that the distinction

of being Zulu has more to do with an all-encompassing national identity – rather than a change in naming conventions for families and clans in the region who would come under the rule of Shaka Zulu:

“In the history that we read, that we heard from the elders, was you can’t speak about the Zulu nation without mentioning the founder – King Shaka.... As you would understand we had different tribes... Funny enough, Shaka Zulu was trained up by the AmaMthetwa (Mthethwa clan/family), who groomed him to become what he became, conquered all the other clans – incorporated them into the “Zulu clan”, and named them all as: “You are now all the Zulus”. Yes, you would still retain your surname, as I am a Ntuli, but you would now be a part of a larger identity of being Zulu! “

(Armstrong Ntuli, Narrative interview 09:22-10:45)

Here in then, one becomes illuminated to the multiple layers that would accompany that of individuals and family groups who identify as Zulu. There is then to be recognised a duality of reverence for both family and national heritage in matters concerning the everyday lives of *amaZulu*. Further on from this point, Ntuli continues to clarify the meta level details concerning the formation of the Zulu empire, as some historians would refer to, specifically related to how powerful King Shaka was during this unification period. Ntuli notes that during the unification period, early 18th century, King Shaka spared no acts of violence and power to bring the region under their control. Interestingly from this understanding of power, Ntuli brings forward an important foundation that underlays this power during this time.

“During that period, music was very important! First of all, it was important for the amabutho, meaning the regiments. “

(Armstrong Ntuli, Narrative interview 12:12 – 12:21)

Music and its use within the regiments, *amabutho*, would further be highlighted by Ntuli during the course of the narrative interview. It is at this point where one is initially introduced to a central phenomenon on how Zulu society would be structured and coordinated during this time. *Amabutho*, according to popular oral traditions and supported by literature accounts such as The James Stuart Archive, were customary groupings of adolescents – both male and female, into age groups to form a sort of regiment – intended to socialise and raise Nguni adolescents in the cultural ways. Through service of their customary leaders and ultimately the king. (Ditsong.org, Wright 1996 p344). These regimental units, specifically the male units, would then later be transformed under the reign of Shaka to become central to how the military advancement of the Zulu nation.

It is at this point where Ntuli unpacks the far-reaching influence of *Amahubo*, as not only oral literature devices, but also showcasing how the performance of them would serve as both unifying moments for the Zulu regiments, creating a clear fortifying characteristic specifically related to bravery. Which was clearly a necessity in the Shakan-era of military expansion, and the importance of bravery would be a major overarching caveat – which one could clearly identify within the progression of the Zulu Empire in the decades following.

Ntuli continues on quite methodically in the interview with enlightening the present writer on *amahubo*, by the end of the interview there would be three clearly defined strata at which one could rather faithfully categorise the social applications, and performance occurrences of them. Ntuli notes that the importance of *amahubo* to the military regiments of the pre, and post- Shakan-era would include many facets. Utilising the example of perhaps the most widely known and celebrated *amabutho* faction: *Usuthu*, Ntuli shares with the present writer the oral history shared pertaining to the regiment. *Usuthu* would be seen as the strongest, and fiercest *ibutho* specifically during the ascension and reign of a later Zulu king Cetshwayo KaMpande – who would ultimately be the leader of this specific *ibutho*. The noting of the *Usuthu* regiment lays a foundation upon which the phenomena of *amahubo* can be understood, both as vestiges of psychological preparation and spiritual instruments utilised by military wings of the Zulu Empire. (Armstrong Ntuli 2022). Within regiments such as *Usuthu*, the utilisation of *amahubo* would be focused on preparing the regiments warriors for battle situations. Ntuli notes that first and foremost, the types of *amahubo* practiced by *Usuthu* would serve as songs that would remind the members of the regiment about why they would be fighting certain battles – with Ntuli specifically noting that the reminder of duty amongst the *amabutho*, the use of *amahubo* would serve as a galvanising charge – to keep combatants motivated to move forward with the achievement of the set-out goals of the King and Zulu Nation (Armstrong Ntuli 2022). Chants such as “*Hhebe Usuthu*” (praise *Usuthu*) would serve as a reminder of the great achievements of the militant group and instilling an idea of power and dominion over the upcoming enemy. *Amahubo*, in the context of the *amabutho* would also traverse to the spiritual preparation of the regiment’s members in matters of upcoming battles, allegiances to the crown – and psychological preparation for the possibility of death as one of the possible final outcomes. In these contexts, traditional healers, such as *izinyanga* would accompany the

chanting of regiments with the utilisation of herbs and certain natural medicines that would help place warriors in a state of fearlessness and amplifying overflowing understating of their duty, to nation and crown. This showcases what had been pointed out earlier by Musa Xulu during the literature review, which showcases that *amahubo* include the interaction with the spiritual. (Xulu 1992).

Upon completion of the unravelling of the interaction of *amahubo* with the *amabutho* Ntuli continues to contextualise the use cases and applications of *amahubo* within the realm of the common people or more rather, the family and community structures of *amaZulu*. As established thus far, *amahubo* are clearly a device which are able to clarify why one should commit to certain choices and actions, in relation to service to the Zulu monarchy – though centred on one's personal cultural duty to the Zulu way of life. Upon this understanding, once Ntuli shifts focus to the use cases of the common people – one begins to understand how *amahubo* come to created, and spread across not only families, but along community and national levels as well. Ntuli notes that the creation of *amahubo* begins at a smaller scale, especially within family settings. As mentioned in the interview, Ntuli clarifies that the norm would be that most families would contain at least one dedicated composer who would often be tasked with the creation and teaching of *amahubo* to the greater family. These created *amahubo* would be made for specific cultural events that would be important occasions. All the way from welcoming a new-born baby to the family unit, weddings, and celebrations of life – all the way to final rites and the funeral process and passing of family members. It becomes clear that the songs are not only devices utilised to motivate and galvanise cultural buy in, but also reliable and replicable history storing devices – spanning all social layers of Zulu society. The intriguing settings of the use of *amahubo*, showcase how deeply rooted this oral literature device within the everyday lives of *amaZulu* is.

At this point for this present writer, after the interview and revelations garnered through the impactful interview with Armstrong Ntuli, much clarification and foundation growing understanding were formed through our interview interaction, The understanding of which paradigm of cultural and societal relevance *amahubo* hold, became so abundantly clear. The present writer at the moment of the unfolding interview with Ntuli, had a clear understanding that *amahubo* were vestiges of storing not only Zulu national history, but ultimately – *amahubo* should be regarded as humanic devices through which family members could recall their own connection to history, in its recalling and as well as

clarification in what one's own forefathers have stored through rhythm and sound, for those that understand – to be understood and unlocked.

During the exmanent question segment, following the uninterrupted narrative interview with Ntuli – further clarifications on certain revelations during the interview would be necessary. The first of these requested clarifications would be an expansion on the topic concerning how *amahubo*, especially on a family level, would come to be. In this regard, Ntuli provided a well measured response which included real world events in his own family, showcasing the creation of a specific *ihubo* relating to matters concerning the Ntuli clan. Ntuli begins once more to note, that in the creation of *amahubo* – the process begins with a composer, as mentioned before, though at this present moment it is clarified that the role of the composer is not to be seen as a static role which is only occupied by one member in a family. Though more rather, the role of a composer is a combination of musical talent, or propensity towards musical creativity; and secondly, the composer is a member of the family who is so moved by events affecting the greater family, that they would compose *ihubo* to address a matter. In the case of the Ntuli clan, Armstrong Ntuli gives the following example:

“... As I said, amahubo as being central parts of the amaZulu livelihood, people are gifted in different ways – in a family, I can talk about my family. There were two composers in my family...

In 1966, when my father got married, just to take you through the process of the composers and how these amahubo come about, she (Ntuli's aunt - a family composer) had to compose a song that was relevant to the wedding that was about to take place. She was worried about the marriages in the family that were not lasting long enough, between the newly-weds in those days (within the Ntuli clan, and as well in the greater community region). She had (felt necessary) to compose a song saying

“Sikhatele izindaba zabamoshada babuyele ekhaya “(

we are tired of stories of newly- weds (continuously) returning home) ...

“Armstrong Ntuli interview”

This example showcases how *amahubo* are able to reveal much family history, as noted by Ntuli. Once a composer would be identified within a family, they would be called upon to compose songs relating to family history – as well as at times creating family commentary for that period, which would be closely related to connecting to a family’s ancestors, as well as methods of pushing forward ideological shifts – which would be seen as important in relation to the positive evolving of a family’s values and return to a central respect of Zulu family life.

At this juncture, it would be prudent to note once-more that as *amahubo* are being composed and sung within families and communities – their utilisation is also composed of a deeply spiritual aspect as well - as noted in the literature review from Xulu’s dissertation. The purpose of community, family, and nation unification through the performance aspects of *amahubo*, should at all times be understood through the lens of their grander connective duty to the ancestors. This being understood, Ntuli makes it clear that once a composer is found within a family – they are duly given a stage within the ceremonial and ritual moments of family life. These songs are then folded into the common knowledge of the family and would be duly reutilised for similar occasions – perhaps moulding and morphing with more family history aspects as time passes. Interestingly, Ntuli relates back to the *amabutho* – in this case, the understanding of these regiments as age mate groups, utilised within Zulu society to socialise children in the ways of Zulu culture. The *amabutho*, would then serve as a perfect arena to comb through the initiates of a region under one *induna* (Chief / regional leader) and to figure out which of the members would be adept at the roles of composing *amahubo*. These regiments, in of themselves would utilise their own set of composers who would help groom initiates into adults, armed with the understanding of their culture and motivating the initiates to live life in accordance with the ideology of the dominant moment. As with the earlier mentioned fighting regiments – *amahubo* in this case would work as motivating aspects as well, though in this present revealed case – they are now distilled into to the unfolding moments of family and community life.

“Composers would be embedded in the family, and – if not in the family, in a village... where we would know each other’s households (and histories).

...when the youth – is being grouped to form the part of the amabutho’. They are grouped under, the song – the culture of the songs. So, as they come together, there would be composers right there (where initiation takes place, vis a vis barracks) that would be leading those boys, or those that would be leading maybe that particular regiment. To train them, in terms of uniting them and motivating them - to that particular group. So, composers would be found in such particular groupings. “

(Armstrong Ntuli 2020)

At this impasse of understanding, it had become abundantly clear for the present writer that the utilisation of *amahubo* should be viewed from a top-down growth method, in relation to the preservation of history – and then as well with the combined understating that *amahubo* are vestiges that are

constantly crafted and rectified through the necessity of community buy in and participation. In regard to their creation, it becomes clear that within family and community performance aspects – *amahubo* are brought forward through the recognition of family and community composer’s abilities to transform family and community history, into melodic and rhythmic snapshots of events and periods that are experienced by the greater whole of not only national, but as well as family experiences. As Ntuli moved forward to highlight within the exmanent question period of the narrative interview: *amahubo* are the reflection of the relationship between the present unfolding of human life. Then furthermore, they as oral literature devices are balances of both the desire of change – or fortification of present actions and choices that are expressed by members of the not only the greater Zulu Nation, but as well as the smaller nucleases that make up the members of family and community. In a deepening of these mentioning of their characteristics, it becomes clearer that *amahubo* are clearly not only static history storing devices – they are clearly become a deeper community bought in method through which *amaZulu* trust as a faithful method through which they would be able to connect to their spiritual connection to the past – as clarified as a communicative connection to one’s ancestors.

Ntuli, in of themselves – and their expertise in family and cultural history, showcased to this present writer that the matter concerning *amahubo* would be a multi-layered undertaking, and specifically when one would like to understand why *amahubo* not only are, but remain as central to the social and religious lives of *amaZulu*. As necessary personal commentary on this narrative interview with Ntuli – it would be prudent to note the achievements of Armstrong Ntuli, in the greater sphere of our current cultural paradigm. As an individual, Armstrong Ntuli as the first-born son of their family clan – and in relation to have growing up within the throngs of Apartheid South Africa. Ntuli has showcased not only to this present writer, but as well to his greater community that they – in of themselves, known or not known that they represent a tangible storehouse of historic and cultural knowledge, which when viewed through the prism of how Nguni culture has aimed to raise its peoples in the delicate knowledge of what it means to be vestiges of culture, family history – and ultimately the transferers of knowledge in the ways of *Nguni* history – and what it means to be *umZulu*.

Interview partner 2: Mbuso Khoza

Emerging themes:

- Nguni people (*abaNguni*)
- Amahubo
- The metaphysical
- Nature and Environment
- Language preservation

Khoza begins the narrative interview with a clarification of certain genealogical relativities that are central to understanding the history of *abaNguni* (Nguni people) and attached upon this understanding it becomes clear that *amahubo* traverse more than just geographical boundaries – more rather – these oral literatures are to be regarded as historical vestiges for the cultural clans of the greater *Nguni* family. A basic history of the Nguni clan would be explained as follows by Khoza:

“When you talk about the story of amahubo, that is the music of abaNguni – who at some point called Abantu, later called AbaNguni – because of Mnguni the First (Mnguni I), who is the farther to amaXhosa and other few tribes, like amaSwati etc.

However, on the Zulu dynasty, there is a man who is the son of Mnguni I who is called Ulufeni. Who is the father to uGumede, Gumede being the father to Mnguni II – and Mnguni II the father to Luzumana! Luzumana then being the father to Malandela. Now uMalandela is the father to Qwabe and Zulu, so that is now how the Zulu dynasty began – and this is why there is something called Zululand.”

(Mbuso Khoza 2022)

At this moment within the narrative interview with Khoza, the clarifications of the genealogy of *amaZulu* and the understanding of it, sets a solid bass foundation for how to view *amahubo* as a whole. There within the recollection of genealogy, one is able to understand the linguistic differences between the utilisation of the term “Zulu”, and in related fashion its applications across cultural meaning for Zulu people. Through the narrative of Khoza, clarifications between the Zulu clan, Zulu – the son of King Qwabe, and *amaZulu* as in the greater unified Eastern-Nguni empire is made clearer.

Khoza brings into focus that the oral literature device that is *amahubo* belongs to the greater clan of *abaNguni* which would include the *Xhosa*, *Ndebele*, and *Swati* people. Who would all be descended from the common ancestor in *Mnguni* I.? When contextualised in this manner, one would be able to gain a clearer understanding in relation to how central *amahubo* are to the lives of *Nguni* people as a whole, prompting perhaps future research into phenomena such as *amahubo* across other Nguni language families, as well as perhaps seeing whether other Southern African language groups would have similar history keeping oral literatures, that span sound and the spiritual planes of these communities. Especially when coupled with the fact that the practice of *ukuhuba* is connected to the very beginning of time, and as well as methods of connecting with the Nguni ancestors, or perhaps – all of human ancestry.

According to Khoza’s account on oral literatures, the term *amahubo* and *ukuhuba* have their basis in linguistically onomatopoeic phenomena observed in nature.

“Sometimes we experience heavy rains until the rivers are full, so that interaction with the wind and the dried grass (zuwheeeeeee! ^{*1}). There is a harmony that comes out inspires someone that is just walking, in the metaphysics sphere it is always recorded. Then later you are seeing (haaaaaa!) the rain on top of the branches and leaves, it produces a syllable (haaaaaa!) and then later when the rivers are full that syllable changes to (hooooo!) – that’s how *ukuhuba* comes from. Even in isiZulu they say, rivers are singing, *imfula iyahuba – iyaholoba!* “

(Mbuso Khoza 2022)

As can be seen from Khoza’s explanation on the closeness of *amahubo*, and the natural surroundings *amaZulu* found themselves in. The sounds which occur in the environment, which after phases of seasons and even with nomadic migrations – which would be common during the earlier periods of Nguni occupation of southern-east South Africa, could be seen as well reliable and replicable sound devices which would store knowledge of the changes of environment – and which season the early Nguni peoples would be within – in the KwaZulu-Natal region. It is quite a piece of intrigue to gain a view of the ancient when thinking about *amahubo* – especially when this present writer was in the presence of Khoza during this interview, which opens up how deeply ingrained the practice of *amahubo* is to the Nguni.

At this point within the interview with Khoza, it was abundantly clear to the present writer that Khoza had found their flow in understating what would be most efficient to share in the short space of time we had in this interview. Through taking us, myself, and my videographer, back to nature and the metaphysical first – a clearer idea of the ancientness of *amahubo* was introduced. As can be seen in the next pivotal moment within the interview, Khoza introduces yet another moment to chew on for this present writer.

“Ukuhuba became a scroll (of history) of that particular village, or family – when there were occurrences, the first thing they would do – they would break into song, even if there is a wedding – normally at a wedding food would take longer (to arrive to guests) – people begin to complain: “Like take that food to that side! “– there would be no direction. Then you would hear someone say “hheyi ngoba kukhuluma noma ubani, ngekesadla (now that even any -random – person is instructing, we probably wouldn’t end up eating).

~

¹ Sounds made during interview with Khoza, as they represent the sounds in nature, in an attempt to clarify the etymology of *-huba*, the stem for the term *ihubo*. Which of course extends in the plural to *amahubo*, and in the infinite *ukuhuba* (to *-huba*).

*** Singing ensues from Khoza ***

♪ *Nom'ngembali kuyakhulunywa - Nom'ngembali kuyakhulunywa* ♪

♪ *Nom'ngembali kuyakhulunywa - Nom'ngembali kuyakhulunywa* ♪

(Anyone now is leading the talking (instruction))

~

That song if we were to ask – who is the owner. It would be no one. It would belong to the community, because when you start a song from a conversation – anyone could become attuned. “

(Mbuso Khoza 2022)

As brought forward in the earlier interview with Ntuli, it has become clear that the nature of the formation and starting point of *amahubo* would be created in relation to events within family and community. In the case of the above excerpt from Khoza, a deepening of the understanding of the creation mechanics is played out clearer. The shared experiences of attendants of a gathering, more commonly known as *umcimbi* in isiZulu, would also be commented upon by a lone composer – who feels that this moment deserves a deeper recognition, with accompaniment of song. The commentary in of itself can be seen as serving as creating a collective recognition of the goings on within the current moment, that is necessary to be called to attention. Perhaps, the quite base utilisation of *ukhuba* to highlight the necessity of food within social gatherings, and improved communication by the hosts towards their guests – culminating in the joining in of more voices singing the composers song – in a call and response method, showcases how *ihubo* would then act as a storer of events and their contexts at social gatherings. Khoza continues on to confirm that once a composer begins their *ihubo*, the joining in of voices fortifies the shared experience and commits the event to memory.

Rather interestingly, Ntuli in their interview notes that *amahubo* – especially at weddings, would act as humour devices of event commentary. Which at later events within a community could be recalled. An example of which would be, the mentioned song about delayed sharing of food at a wedding put forth by Khoza, could be utilised again at later events where similar occurrences would happen – and at this point, history recall would be solidified – since the singing participants of the *ihubo* would succinctly understand the origin, and deeper meaning of the words sung. In relation to the spiritual aspect which is entrenched as well within the performance of *amahubo*, songs such as these could be seen as well as a sonic prayer to the community's ancestors to intercede on the situation – and perhaps, a solution could

be found. This revelation adds yet another layer to how multi-faceted the real-world utilisations of *amahubo* would be in the social lives of Nguni people. The utilisation of sound and rhythm in these contexts should be best understood as a creation of a relatively rememberable scroll of history – which as noted earlier in the interview with Khoza, has the ability to store specific dialects of isiZulu, which at this present moment have become rarer and rarer within the more urbanised life of the typical *umZulu*.

“Ukuhuba become again the prayer of the nation... he who sings is having a double prayer, Ohubayo ukhulekha Kabili. Ungakhuleka ukhuluma, uthebeleza, “bo baba mkhulu siyakhuleka “(You can pray, or postulate and say: “our forefathers we pray”). but as soon as you say (Khoza begins to sing)

~

♪ “Umukhulu mmmm!” ♪

~

The lyrics are working, and the melodies are working – so you are having a double prayer, whilst (you) uhuba. So now beyond ihubo being a prayer and a scroll of the nation – it becomes a recorder of events and also a safe guarder of the dialects that we are no longer using today such as yiyeza dialect, (from) when you go north of KZN (KwaZulu- Natal) wasakamthwethwa – what we call Richards Bay today. Those people would replace L with Y (when speaking isiZulu). Instead of saying Woza lapha (come here) -they would say, woza yapha mfana wami, uyangiswa (come here my son, you hear me?). Even when noma basehlabelela, uzoba bethi (even when they would be praying you would hear them say)

~

Khoza breaks into song

♪ Ezabamthethwa sinomyando omkhulu! ♪

~

Instead of umlando omkhulu, they say umyando omkhulu – so do you realise that ihubo has already safeguarded that particular dialect that was inspired by traveling – language never developed by ethnicity, it was developed by people traveling.

(Mbuso Khoza 2022)

During what one might describe as the middle point of the flow state Khoza would be in, deepening one’s understanding on *amahubo*. It became increasingly clear that there exists an unimaginably deep spiritual aspect to not only the creation of these oral literatures, but also extending to their performances within community settings and family gatherings. Khoza rings back to the metaphysical, and states quite clearly that the mere act of *ukuhuba* is a strengthening of the communicative aspect of prayer.

One who engages in the *ihubo* is no longer only communicating in a linear fashion with the spiritual, but rather has doubled-up – so to say – and utilised the melodic to magnify the message being shared through *ihubo*. Faced with this revelation, the present writer became to wonder whether the combination of the spoken word with a melodic aspect, superimposed upon a setting which requires group participation, would be a significant factor within how effective *amahubo* are at storing history.

In light of contextualisation by Khoza, *amahubo* move from being vestiges of only family and regional history. They can now be seen to being tools that revert the human psyche back to a deeper recognition, and appreciation of nature. Which makes sense since they ultimately began as observations by earlier Nguni of their surroundings and the movements of nature, which would be circulated in the same group settings as would be seen in the present day. Through this, the knowledge transfer capabilities of *amahubo* are brought into light, and it has become clear that they can be viewed as a well utilised method for storing and sharing knowledge of nature, family, and national events. Added to this, their ability to safeguard the original dialects through which the *ihubo* would be created becomes a remarkably intriguing path one could focus on in upcoming research paradigms on these oral literatures.

“There are different kinds of amahubo, there is ihubo as a prayer of a family that is used on a wedding day when a girl is being taken to the groom’s home, that is a prayer. There is another ihubo that is being composed by a woman – more like a poem. Talking about the imaginations about where she is going – is it a good family, and will they have a good relationship. So, they begin to compose words, to sing later.

Amahubo really indicate, or symbolised the times where amaAfrica – Africans, were in control of their destinies. Meaning where, they were told by nature what to do. This is why when it is raining, there are songs for the rain. I’m not talking about rain songs exactly like in other cultures. I’m talking about in the Zulu perspective, where when it is raining now – you would go to the young children give thanks to the nature, and tell them uhabanyane, that was the culture. Amahubo really serve as an Apollo star, because a thought vibration for me- because when your forefathers compose a song for you in the 18th century or 16th century composes a song, that person is gifting you a wealth of knowledge – so amahubo, they really are that tune to us. “

(Mbuso Khoza 2022)

Admittedly, from the present writer’s perspective before the interaction with Khoza, one would admit that the idea on what *amahubo* would be in their overall ideation had been pigeon-holed into more public performative aspect which only focused on the ceremonial and grandiose displays of culture and history. Thankfully, illuminating dialogue within this interview showcased how this was of course a misnomer. The final segments of the narrative by Khoza, opened up a deeper understanding of the multiple layers of the human condition that *amahubo* traverse. The understanding of the moments and contexts where an *ihubo* would be created are now expanded upon, showcasing that a composer would

be able to ideate *ihubo* from deeply personal considerations and emotions – as in the example of the anxious bride-to-be in Khoza’s interview. Though, it is also clear that – even though *ihubo* is able to be created within the solitude of a composer’s own company, and imprinted with personal experiences – dreams, hopes, and fears. The finalisation of *ihubo* lies within its performance, within a group setting. This makes sense, especially when viewed against the base description of *ukuhuba* provided by Xulu.

“To sing with a deep roaring sound resembling that of a river that is flooding, a roaring lion in the savannah, or that of a raging thunderstorm across the African sky “

(Xulu 1992)

In of themselves, *amahubo* gain their ratification through them being performed in group contexts. The need for participation from other members of the family, and/or community becomes a point where much interest gravitates towards. One could begin to investigate whether this phenomenon would indicate how facts would be maintained within the composition of these oral literatures, perhaps as a community safeguard against misinformation and the addition of material which would be resoundingly untrue and has no place within the *ihubo* and greater scroll of family, community, and national history of the Nguni. In the closing moments of the time spent engaged with Khoza on this topic, a rounding off conclusion became to form: *Amahubo* represent a certain way of life and navigating of situations and events – across numerous planes. The physical, the spiritual and the historic.

Preceding the analysis of the final narrative interview with Desmond Latham, it would be prudent to note that the period between the first two narrative interviews would be within the span of 2 weeks of each other – towards the beginning of the ethnographic trip. Though, by the time one had secured an opportunity to interview Latham, the ethnographic trip had effectively come to a close – with the most energy at that present moment being focused on combing through footage captured over the preceding eight weeks - and as well as connecting with business facing connections in anticipation for the media roll out of the Sounds like history project in Winter 2024 and beyond. The timing of the interview, as will be seen through the analysis below, perhaps showcases the well-fitting inclusion of Latham as an expert interview partner – and a fitting rounding off of delving into oral literature and oral traditions as a whole. Including their place within the paradigm of African history, and associated knowledge transfer systems. In light of this, the narrative interview question posed to Latham had been modified – in comparison to the original question posed to both Khoza and Ntuli. The narrative question would be as follows:

“From your point of view, and in relation to your expert opinion. What is the importance of understanding oral histories, and how important are audio (oral) methods of knowledge transfer?”

(Narrative interview question – Desmond Latham)

Attached to the narrative interview, further questions were posed to Latham – related more to the South African experience, and the continued development of the “Rainbow Nation²” ideals which would be a foundation upon which, post-Apartheid South Africa would be built upon. This context would inform as well the primary exmanent questions as well, related to a greater idea of African agency regarding history.

~

Question 1

“How is storytelling an important method of nation building “

~

Question 2

“What do you feel is the importance of Africans, innately understanding African history – in gaining agency and motivation for the path forward (building out the goals of Africa) “

(Exmanent Questions – Desmond Latham)

~

Well to be noted as well is the amount of time spent in deep conversation with Latham. The pre-interview conversation lasted more than an hour – with a sharing of one’s findings over the past seven and a half weeks. Our conversations were also littered with much intellectual merry-go-rounding taking place – in the context of a mutual appreciation of the importance of oral history.

The post-interview conversation would be just as long, with the subject matter turning to scintillating Nguni literature and many recommendations from Latham on what to read up on – relating to Zululand and the history of the Nguni’s as a whole. Latham has cemented themselves as a juggernaut of understanding South African history, with paying much attention to deep research and cross referencing of historical accounts – many of which would come in the forms of oral history. For this present writer, the culmination of the ethnographic trip with an interview of this depth of richness was a pure pleasure.

Interview partner 3: Desmond Latham

Emerging themes

- Memory
- Sound versus Image
- History being experienced through feeling
- Oral history as indicators of shared origin

² The rainbow nation as entrenched by the transitional government of the democratic republic of South Africa – popularized namely the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Rolihlahla Nelson Mandela.

- Language and rhythm

Rather fittingly, after an extended pre-interview conversation, Latham moves into unpacking the world of oral literature by highlighting the central role language plays in its dissemination in our current paradigm. Instead of moving into an extended narrative about linguistics and the intriguing facets that make up language – it would be quite refreshing to note how the base utilisation of rhythm in language would be the first point of focus.

“Language is a rhythm; all languages has pattern and rhythms. Secondly, they form such visceral concepts. So, the sounds, and audio – are much more visceral than video. Where you conjure up things from sounds, so stories that you hear at your mother or grandmother’s side – are much more potent than just the pictures that they can show you. When they tell the story of what they did in (during) that time – you remember it better. So, oral history has this intrinsic value inside culture to pass on inalienable truths, sometimes embellishments – but the point is that you are soaking up the way in which people spoke, the manner in which they spoke to each other, the rhythm of that language”

(Desmond Latham 2022)

At this point, zooming out of looking at specific oral histories would become apparent. More rather, looking at how the written historic record and the spoken record exist currently – and from this point zooming in on particular idiosyncrasies that belong to not only the creation of oral histories, but also including the effect that is brought forward when shared in their natural settings. In this moment, the premise of sound versus images comes to the forefront. Latham makes quite a point in showcasing how impactful sound has on the knowledge transfer experience. This related to how Khoza notes that the combination of words and a melody seems to amplify the impact of performed oral literatures – and even deepening connections with the metaphysical. In Latham’s case, the overarching idea of memory comes to the fore. Memory in this case, related to the ease of recall of transmitted information – is utilised to showcase the strengths that oral history possess. The idea of “feel” jumped out as a central distinguishing factor during this conversation. It had not been apparent to the present writer that there could be an idea such as: “feeling history”. In relation to written history, Latham does well to maintain that the history storing, and knowledge transfer mediums do and should exist in tandem with each other. One being a companion of the other, and when available – being tools that would create a balanced approach in correlating written and spoken history. The strength of the spoken record to store not only stories and words – but emotions and rhythm, becomes an increasingly interesting revelation.

“The diverse stories we have in Southern Africa, and in Africa generally – though particularly in South Africa is vast... Not just the languages we have, the eleven³ official languages, though (also) within each of the cultures that combine and are part of the landscape. There are storylines. So, inside the isiZulu storyline, there are multiple strands about the same event which are different – so being able to hear part of those stories and then to assimilate and to understand them. Is a pride exercise⁴.

These stories are vast, they are epic – they are epic stories, they deal with empires; powerful woman, and powerful men – who are honourable and have dignity. And I think that message is really important – in an urbanised society, where people are made separate from that which is their origin.”

(Desmond Latham 2022)

Latham does well to open up the scope which the present writer had during the ethnographic trip and showcasing that oral history and the associated oral literature devices such as *amahubo* should not be viewed as wholly unique to only one specific strand of culture, or one cultural group. Though rather as expressions which could be found in multiple language clusters and families across the region – especially in Africa. On this point, a shift towards how one should approach the task of interacting with and compiling historical records from oral history comes to the fore. Latham, had in an earlier conversation gone into depth on how they go about researching, compiling, and producing their South African history podcast. The question of pride becomes important when confronted with both oral history and written history, especially when the researcher has some form of relation to the subject matter – either through cultural affiliation or regional proximity. The existence of internal bias remains important to keep in check, particularly during the research period. In the case of Zulu history, it is abundantly clear that there are commonly accepted beliefs of history. In the earlier literature review, this is brought forward by Buthelezi⁵, the formation of the Zulu Empire would be followed as well by a curated version of history related to the Eastern-Nguni. The dominant culture, or in this case family group does have an ability to magnify certain aspects of history – while simultaneously decreasing the relevance of other aspects. Therefore, Latham’s assertion that the exercise of untangling oral history is also a practice in checking one’s pride is quite fitting.

³ at the time of this interview with Desmond Latham, 6 February 2023, South Africa had not yet added Sign Language to the official languages list. Though in July 2024, President Cyril Ramaphosa would add sign language to the official language list.

⁴ In this context, Latham is continuing on an earlier conversation where a discussion on how historians need to leave their egos at the proverbial door when dealing with historical accounts – and then compiling histories. Especially when dealing with one’s own cultural history – summarised by the phrase “facts don’t care about your feelings”

⁵ Author of: *Sifuna Umlando Wethu*. “(We are Looking for our history): Oral Literature and the Meanings of the Past in Post-Apartheid South Africa “(2012)

“The story about the flood that took place in 1832, is quite similar when you actually look at it – whether it is in Sotho, or in isiZulu, or in Afrikaans or Dutch. You have the same experience. It is those phenomenal events that we can transfer to each other and recall – at times “my grandmother said”, “oh I remember, back in the day”. I think it is important to have that strand because we all have these strands. Some people use them to differentiate themselves on our landscape, and others use them to try harmonise, but in essence we all know of them. The story of Shaka for example, Mzilikazi⁶, Dingaan was well known – but not as well-known as Barend Barends⁷ Conraad de Buys, and these stories as they emerge – and are rebuilt into society / and refiltered into our lives (these stories) that happened 300 years ago. Suddenly you realise wow: they are quite similar to my experience in life – when you take out electricity and modern city. The human relationship type of thing, that is quite a similar thing that happened to me – as this person from 1792. “

(Desmond Latham 2022)

In the continuation of the revealing narrative Latham has shared, at this juncture – one starts to formulate a deeper understanding on how oral history serves as a connective tether to the antiquated, as well as allowing hearers of these accounts to be able to perhaps feel an alignment in experience, with those who came before us.

Interestingly, with bringing up the story of a great flood which took place in 1832 in South Africa – Latham asserts that the corroboration of this event can be faithfully recalled across multiple cultural and language groups – of course as oral histories. Taking a further back vantage point in viewing oral literatures as intrinsically human devices of knowledge transfer and preservation solidifies the importance in the need for further investigation of them. The utilisation of oral history presents in tandem a key consideration, how are the lessons and understandings gained from them utilised in relation to the shared environment within which they would be composed – harking back to the compositional nature of *amahubo*. It is clear that both extremes exist quite succinctly – some when handed knowledge would utilise it for creating distance with the environment and its people. Others would use said knowledge to create a closer-knit human connection with environment and others – in the name of harmony. Oral histories do offer an overarching grounding effect for present day listeners, much like the written accounts of history that most of present century readers would find through reading historical texts. Though, in support of Latham’s assertion, this present writer genuinely believes that oral history creates a deeper connection in the recognition of the fellow human, and the experiences of those who had come before us in this life – we are much closer perhaps, through the notion that in

⁶ Mzilikazi was a lieutenant in Shaka KaSenzangakhona’s army, who later would go on to found the Kingdom of Ndebele – which is now in modern day Zimbabwe.

⁷ Barends is noted as one of the founders, alongside Adam Kok II, of the Griqua – a mixed-race peoples found in central to west South Africa. (Griqua People of South Africa and Namibia". Alkebulan Movement. 8 October 2017)

sharing oral literatures we unlock an ability to “feel” history as well. All through the faithful rhythmic medium of language.

It begs then the question, what level of impact do oral literatures such as *amahubo* – which are composed in tandem with melody – have on the human psyche, and knowledge retention when it comes to storing not only a nation’s history, but up to; and including, family and personal history?

“Well, I have discovered, I don’t look African, but I feel it (I feel African⁸). So, let us just put that on the table - which is quite a bizarre thing say, and I’m not co-opting anybody else’s culture by saying that. And if you don’t like it (my assertion of being an African) just live with it. Sorry, that is just the way I feel ... When I say that I am born and raised in Africa, that is just the way I feel. Nothing is going to change that; it is a fact. So, starting from there. The stories that we hear prove that we are (come) from the same place⁹, but often they are used to reinforce our differences. In African cultures, and I regard parts of the Afrikaaner culture as African, and the Griqua culture as African, and the San culture. Part of that is the story of how we intersect – and being able to recognise our similarities as humans first. We all have deity and believe in ancestors in whatever of whatever level – and we all believe in the dark forces around us – and how we intersperse our lives with the actions we take, and ritualised actions we take around us. So as humans anthropologically, we are all similar”

(Desmond Latham 2022)

In the final stages of the narrative interview, Latham brings up an important point on how history can and has been used as tool for separating communities and cultural groups. This can be seen quite clearly in the context of South Africa, especially when taking into account the most prevalent recent history of the region – dominated mostly by policies of separate development and revisionist history which would build walls between racial and cultural communities. Interestingly, throughout Latham’s well researched podcast on South African history, a vast amount of the history most South Africans would be taught in schools, and through familial connections, seems to continue the reproduction of incomplete and error filled retellings of the regions’ history. It would be quite clear how the omission of certain historic facts, and connections between cultural groups would serve the incumbent ruling politicians of the past epoch of South Africa. As Latham highlights, hearing about the stories of our (South African) past would go a long way in showcasing that the populous has shared origins that are rooted in long in the past. At this point within conversation, a few concerns on how fragmented history of a region can become over time – through the influence of the dominant cultures of a certain time. It seems to be the case, that over time – our shared connectedness as humans would suffer much, as the

⁸Desmond Latham, in the context of race categorizations – points out that they are seen as Caucasian person only – and the categorization of being African as well is often a contentious issue.

⁹ Desmond Latham veers into conversation which discusses what it means to be African, culminating in pointing out that – as commonly accepted, Africa is the birthplace of civilisation, meaning in some way we are all African.

stories we are told drift further away from unified truths concerning our past. This past including the connection with our spiritual connections, our interactions with nature, and the proverbial human interaction between darkness and light. There of course could be much philosophical discussion on the potential path humans would lead themselves down, as the level of understanding and knowledge of one's history seems to dwindle over time. In a humour filled interaction during the ethnographic trip, a conversation about recipes being historical artefacts would be brought up – and the fear of losing recipes, as urbanisation ramps up into full scale globalisation started to make sense. “We are losing recipes” no longer sounds like a whacky statement which is centred on the conservative – but rather, an honest commentary on how through recipes we have a connection with our past – and perhaps adding on to Latham's assertion on feeling history. A loss of historical artefacts creates a space where we lose our taste of the past.

“The storyline of who we are is naturally rooted in the home of the World's humans, here (Africa). All of our stories, for me, are embellishments of that story: It is biblical, it is Qur'anic, it is ancient! All the oral stories. The stories that bind us together, and seem to separate us – in South Africa, and in Africa in general are to be pursued... They prove something. There are seven main storylines that you can write, fiction writers know that – and all of those are part of our oral traditions in Africa, from the earliest days.

So, you can't speak too highly of an oral movement. People who can sew together home-language words, create poetry and the art form that it is. (they) Put you in a wave, a wave of consciousness, very hard to explain. Your endorphins improve, happiness in life. When you hear someone speaking a language which is your home language, and then more so they are describing massive and epochic events that are mysterious – they are so ancient. They put us on a plateau mentally which is so positive. That is what I think is the root of oral history for me, and the African experience. It is naturally dignifying, and it is naturally poetic, and it is naturally advanced. It is automatically an honour code for ourselves and our ancestors, not because we have to remember all the words phonetically – exactly like this. The stories of the ancient people from whatever ancient clans we come from, sets us free from the contemporary – and that's after all is what we are seeking, since the contemporary is fleeting. What we are living in this moment will change, what won't change is the idea of how and why we got here. “

It starts to become abundantly clear that when considering oral history, the association with the primordial and ancientness of human civilisation would be a point which would garner much conversational attention. Latham brings forward yet again the magnitude of the importance of oral history to human beings – as if the act of storytelling and the utilisation of language to store events and share insights of environment can never be separated from the human condition. Our need to share stories and utilises the rhythmic qualities of language cannot be seen as separate from the human need

for sustenance. Rather importantly, Latham puts forward a more eerie and jarring revelation on the utility of oral history. There of course exists a corrupted way through which oral histories and their utilisations in community contexts can be found. The idea of separation, and especially in the context of South Africa, is one that showcases how powerful stories can be when related to how affective their dissemination is in social and cultural contexts. The existence of negative applications of oral histories, which are focused on creating rifts between different cultural groups – and so-called othering, perhaps solidifies the idea on how influential and impactful oral literature can be. It is through revisiting recent history and looking at the corrupted messages of propaganda levelled against various groups around the globe – that a taste of the true power of sound and language can be garnered.

Interestingly, Latham introduces an idea which reveals itself as a seemingly stoic stopgap for the preservation of the integrity of oral histories in the long term. The idea of an honour code existing between present sharers of history, and the lived experiences of the ancestors is quite the intriguing one in the grander context of oral history. When viewed in the context of *amahubo*, Latham's honour code idea shows that there is a certain level of honesty and integrity that would need to be followed when sharing stories of the past. Individuals are more than capable of reforming history into versions that would serve personal agendas and be used as tools of control and subjugation. Though, when properly utilised in transparent and honour bound community practice – the community ratified retellings of oral history could also become faithful pillars of the preservation of history, transferring knowledge from generation to generation in a manner which is beneficial to the greater good of humanity as a whole.

“So, I think there is always a play between people who are traditionally using oral history to force those in the community to accept that they are not like anybody else – and therefore it is a negative impulse, Versus the who incorporate various strands of oral history into the telling of their own. That is the happy place for historically looking at this. “

(Desmond Latham 2022)

In closing, much can be said on the richness of Latham's understanding and view on oral history being a pillar for human life. Latham during the interview does well to expand the present writer's understanding of how human beings have always had a deep connection to recalling history through sound and using connectedness to environment and self as the foundations upon which the great epochs of our civilisation can be understood. The clarifications gained throughout the points brought up, showcase that in order to be able to fully understand how *amahubo* are central to the cultural and social lives of Zulu people – one needs to take a step back, and view oral history as a human tool which has been utilised since the beginning of time. It is clear as well that the relationship between oral history and written history is not one that is rooted in opposition – but more rather, their dual existence is to be seen as a balanced preservation of human experience. In this light, it is abundantly clear that the preservation of oral history is much needed – especially in regions where the contexts of retelling of

oral history have dwindled somewhat significantly. Especially in the face of the current digitalised age, no longer are fire-side conversations and storytelling at the centre of human society. This in turn has begun a worrying trend where many societies are at risk of losing volumes of history as older history keepers and community storytellers age and unfortunately pass on. The need to preserve the oral histories which are still existing in the heart and minds of elder community members becomes abundantly clear. In the context of South Africa, and its history – and as well as Latham having grounded much of their narrative on the nation's history – as major transitions come to the fore, some thirty years after the end of Apartheid. The importance of recording more balanced accounts of the past would work a long way in moving towards a more connected and unified country. There of course would exist much pressure upon various leaders and communities to tell their versions of history and adding to personal epochs – in turn solidifying claims of either dominance or subjugation. Unfortunately, not serving the greater needs of the nation, though more rather serving as wedges reinforcing the skewed notion of major differences existing between the nation's people. As was the case for a great portion of South African history. Oral history is now, at least for this present writer, no longer to be viewed as a primitive history keeping device, which for many had been rendered redundant by writing – and the eventual rise of the printing press and digital age. The words of human beings, have much to do with how the present world we live in has come to be – the stories we tell and are told, are much like air underneath a bird's wings, enabling us to soar to heights unimagined. Though, conversely – the misutilisation of oral literature and oral history can become heavy stones which weigh down the boat of human consciousness and sink us to the doldrums of ignorance, and perhaps closer to times where ignorance and unattunedness would be the flavours of the day. Dooming us to darkness.

Conclusion

Where does one even begin in bringing to a close such an undertaking delving into the intricate and almost mysterious tapestry which is that of the Zulu people and their history? Perhaps reverting back to the very beginning of this process would be the most prudent. Rather unsurprisingly, the unfolding of this research process has about with it a multitude of moments that make it clear that the deepness with which *amaZulu* regard not only oral traditions, such as *izibongo* and *izithakazelo*, is an important cultural note. To truly have a chance at understanding the history of the nation, an enlightened look, or perhaps better yet: ear, should be lent to the sounds that melodically carry the history of *amaZulu*. Generation to generation since time immemorial. Unfortunately, in the reality in which we exist in at the present moment, is summed up by this point: there is a rapid decrease in the passing down of the oral traditions. Given realities such as continued urbanisation and movement away from cultural centres by young *amaZulu*, which in turn presents a physical distance between the sounds of history embedded in the minds and hearts of the elders. Rather morosely, with each passing day – there is a greater chance of whole swathes of family, community, and national history being lost to the silence of eternity. This reality is amplified by the reality of the impending death of elders who hold these truths which would

enable us to actually be able to interact with history. It is in the face of this sad reality, that the basis of the *Sounds Like History* project is centred. Preserving the sounds of history available to us today, in the hope that future generations will be able to inherit a democratic and humane recounting of history.

At the beginning of this research, there would be quite an extensive uncertainty into what actually to look into when trying to piece together the history of the Zulu Nation – especially history that is not only strictly aligned with the ascension of Shaka KaSenzangakhona (King Shaka Zulu) to the position of becoming the ultimate ruler, and much heralded forefather of the *amaZulu* as we know them today. History of the common women and men that make up this nation's history seemed quite clearly missing from the written accounts of the Zulu epoch – which presents quite an unfairly weighted version of history, which casts aside the undeniably important contributions of those whose story is left out of recorded history. The Zulu epoch, for the most part can feel more like *Shakan history* rather than a faithful retelling of the expansion of the Nguni into Southern Africa and a retelling of how our early ancestors would traverse these new lands, ultimately making them home. In this regard, engaging with oral history clearly becomes the best way forward – in attempt to figure out a more democratic recollection of history and a united narrative. It would be quite beneficial to understand that the history of Zulu people has been at times co-opted and morphed in certain cases, in a manner meant to serve political and nationalist narrative. Instead of serving as a preservation of culture and identity for the greater population. As Desmond Latham mentions during their narrative interview, the utilisation of history to separate and distinguish one group from another – counter to creating community, is an occurrence which is not all too unfamiliar: especially in South Africa, given the history of the region in the 20th century. (Apartheid and colonial South Africa from the late 1600s onwards)

What is the story of origin for AmaZulu (Zulu people)?

and from this basis could you share your thoughts on the importance of music to Zulu culture – and the relevance of Amahubo

(Narrative interview question – *Sounds Like History*)

Throughout the research process for this project, there have been a multitude of assertions birthed from a myriad of sources – attempting to become a dominant voice in answering the question concerning the origin of Zulu people. In response to this and guided by principles gleaned from the literary works utilised in this paper. A democratic and balanced summation of Nguni and Zulu history seems a fitting entry point into to the final phases of this dissertation.

Primarily, what seems to be the most critical point to understand regarding Zulu history is: *amaZulu* are not a monolith. The sounds and experiences that have come to shape the nation to this day are an expression of the histories of those that came before – and the connection to those experiences have paved the way for the eventual unification of a regions people under one common name. Though this

too is to be understood through a balanced state of mind, as brought forward earlier in Buthelezi's writings on Zulu and Nguni history. Anchoring this would be understanding the emergence of the first humans from the bed of reeds in *Uthlanga*, having life breathed into them from *Umvelinqangi*, and from these reeds the first peoples would emerge with thunderous sound, singing in unison – joined together in *ukuhuba*. From this *Uthlanga*, the expansion out into the world, as we know it today, would ensue – with the eventual population of what we now have come to know as KwaZulu-Natal would come to be birthed. With these nuggets of Zulu mythology, it should be clear that the Nguni peoples are not native to South Africa but came to the region closer to the present epoch – with archaeological sites and evaluations placing some of the earliest migrations into the region being as early as 270 AD, and the KwaZulu-Natal coast, the ancestral home of *amaZulu*, would be covered by iron age sites by 600 AD (Schoeman 1987, p.193). This expanded understanding of the time spent in the region by possibly the earliest ancestor families of modern-day Zulu peoples helps to refocus attention on increasing the understanding of genealogical information that has been readily stored in Zulu oral traditions such as *izithakazelo*, which in of themselves are a faithful vestige of dynastic history. In mentioning this, in their attempt in giving a well-balanced introduction to the origins of *amaZulu*, and a well-balanced understanding of genealogy and power shifts in the early Nguni epoch, Mbuso Khoza clearly showcases that his knowledge is stored in the folds of Nguni oral traditions spanning from *izibongo*, all the way to a deep grounding in *amahubo* – and in no uncertain terms showcasing their fortification on the importance on a connection to the meta-physical.

Rather important is to understand the centrality of King and kingdom to the epoch of the Nguni and *amaZulu* – especially when attempting to demystify Zulu history. It is impossible to underplay the importance of events that took place in the early 19th century where Shaka KaSenzangakhona (Shaka Zulu) unified the Eastern-Nguni families under the Zulu clan and ushered in the Shakan Era of the Nguni epoch – this central occurrence deserves in of itself its own retelling, drawing from Zulu oral traditions and correlated by the formulations brought by methodologies such as compiling oral history, informed by present day methodologies of compiling such histories. It is abundantly clear to this present writer that nations such as those of the Zulu peoples are rarely able to exist without King and kingdom being central tenants of their existence. The interactions between individual, community, and kingdom – be it the theological or physical, being subjects to a higher ideal has always been interwoven into the very fabric of what it means to be *umZulu*. It is then in this reverence that oral traditions such as *amahubo* are revered to such an extent that they are able to become the scroll of a nation -and what they ultimately represent. They represent history, not etched in stone nor stained on paper - Zulu history stamps itself into eternity through sound and rhythm. At their very core, *amahubo* display this, in their most elevated form. This in part is rooted in how important music is to the Zulu way of life.

The importance of music to Zulu culture, and heritage preservation

The importance of music to the Zulu people should rarely be a point that is overlooked, especially if one is aiming for a deeper understanding of the culture and its peoples' history. As *umZulu* as this present writer identifies themselves, I could hardly describe any pivotal moment in life that has not been accompanied by sound and melody – throughout all phases of life, music has been central to one's own personal identity, and it has been a companion in navigating the world and its rapid unfolding of the present epoch. Perhaps one of the primary characteristics associated with Zulu culture would be the nation's association with being a mostly violent and overtly dominant culture – which in some retellings of regional history, one would summarise the *amaZulu nation* with the term: savages. Notions such as these are understandable, especially against the backdrop of how the unification of the Eastern Nguni came about, under the rule of King Shaka KaSenzangakhona. The dominance of these exploits should not render to the periphery the importance of music, and especially singing to Zulu society, and above all history.

One of the central observations that became known during the unfolding of this research, would be a heightened understanding of how sound and melody would be utilised in the everyday lives of *amaZulu*. It becomes clear that it is interwoven seamlessly throughout all levels of society, and interpersonal interactions. To this enlightenment, a fitting extended interview with the late Princess Magogo KaDinuzulu – a well celebrated Zulu musician and daughter to King Dinuzulu KaCetshwayo who reigned over the Zulu nation from 1884 till 1914. In this interview, later to be published by David Rycroft in 1975 (*A Royal Account of Music in Zulu Life with Translation, Annotation, and Musical Transcription.*). Princess Magogo lays out quite clearly how evolution of life – for an individual growing up in the “Zulu manner” – would be accompanied by song and melody (Rycroft 1975, p352). HRH Princess Magogo tells a story of a young Zulu maiden, to highlight this assertion. In this story, the maiden is shown how to interact with their peers both from the same sex and opposite sex through cautionary songs that children would be taught at an immature age – imparting knowledge of impending changes that would affect their bodies at a later stage, beginning to render such interactions no longer appropriate (Rycroft p.352). The Princess makes it clear that as the passage of time is experienced by children growing up in this manner – the songs themselves are also transformed into not only cautionary melodic devices, but as well as methods of self-companionship in the new experiences one would be experiencing during this time. The interview itself continues to view the centrality of music in the cultural context of *amaZulu* as an important part of life – one that cannot be separated from the so-called spirit of the culture. By this point, and after this present writer's interacting with the words of Princess Magogo – on top of the other list of experts on Nguni oral history. It is abundantly clear that music is central to the socialisation of children raised under Zulu Cultural norms. So then what does this reflect on the greater communal and social sense for *amaZulu* as a whole. Peer groups, encompassed by children playing with each other – the songs

that they would sing as part of this accepted humanic cultural whole would be interspersed with nuggets of wisdom, and be these lessons, brought about through song, would be etched into their young minds in order to be, hopefully, applied to life as they mature and understand these lessons, and in their greatest form be a sort of guiding light – for the life that is yet to come. Such as the cautionary songs mentioned by Princess Magogo related to young boys and girls playing together the closer they got to adolescence, these songs would represent melodic lighthouses to how to hold one's self in interactions through the complex maturing process. From these enlightenments, it should be quite clear that music, and more specifically singing, is not rooted in entertainment and enjoyment for *amaZulu*. Songs and singing are utilised as an extension of communication, and as a tried and tested knowledge transfer system within the culture of “Zulu-ness” and to be transferred across generations.

As can be noted from interviews with Armstong Ntuli and Mbuso Khoza, on an individual level, singing is a manifestation or, for most, a continuation of a personal interaction with nature. Mbuso Khoza makes this connection abundantly clear in their narrative interview, surmised by an observation that rings true for almost all of those born from a Nguni lineage, which is as follows: When one is pondering and processing thoughts, it is not uncommon to hear a Zulu person break into song – in a manner to unburden their heart and process that which is on their mind. In a communal setting, singing becomes an inexplicable method of connection and confirmation of being united in the reverence of the shared moment. At this moment, it is quite intriguing to note how song is utilised as a method of storing knowledge, recording history and especially when composed in communal settings. Songs in the cultural context of *amaZulu* serve as the faithful storehouses of knowledge – ranging from individual moments, all the way up to the preservation national, family, and kingdom histories. Music - and especially singing, both individually and in personal contexts is undeniably one of the pillars of Zulu culture and identity. From this viewpoint, one could, perhaps, make quite the fitting argument that the Zulu people innately speak two languages: *isiZulu* and *ukucula* (to sing), which is rooted in the foundations of their Zulu-ness. Zulu culture and singing are inseparable. A plethora of people might assume that the spirit of *amaZulu* is rooted in their thirst for violence and bloodshed – which is encompassed the dominant retelling of history surrounding the Shakan-era. In my view, this can be contextualised by the time spent on this research. It is clear that sound and melody are the most central and vital cornerstones of Zulu culture. Second only perhaps to the reverence of King and Kingdom.

What is the relevance of amahubo – in relation to Zulu culture and the historic record

In order to understand the relevance of *amahubo*, one needs to firstly pull together a final definition of what *amahubo* are, especially against the backdrop of the extensive research conducted concerning their origins. In finally answering the question of, “what are *amahubo*?” – it is important to note the foundation question definition of this research is.

“The etymology of amahubo, which in the singular form would be ihubo – derived from the term ukuhuba. Which means to sing with a deep roaring sound resembling that of a river that is flooding, a roaring lion in the savannah, or that of a raging thunderstorm across the African sky (Xulu 2). “

At this point in time, re-viewing this definition. It becomes a more wholistic consideration to place this explanation of *amahubo* into the column of a description rather than that of a fitting definition – especially to those uninitiated to the field of Nguni oral traditions. During this time, till now, we have traversed introductions to some of the main oral traditions that are integrated into Zulu culture such as: *izithakazelo* and *izibongo*. When revisiting the building blocks of each of these oral traditions one is quite readily able to figure out that there exists a difference in their categorisations in comparison to *amahubo*. *Amahubo* fit into their own categorisation within the oral tradition tapestry, this is firstly achieved through their utilisation of singing. Important to note however is to acknowledge that *amahubo* are bound to a specific performance aspect, which is not a place experienced by the likes of *izibongo* and *izithakazelo*. The main requirement of *amahubo* is of course the necessity for there to be being more than one voice in the showcasing and performing of *amahubo*. Unlike the other oral traditions, they in of themselves are strictly confined to being a group interaction, and ultimately an expansive expression of shared truths and history. Viewing *amahubo* in this regard is quite poetic, especially against the backdrop of them being associated with the very beginning of time – when the first humans emerged from the reeds in Uthlanga and their first sounds being those *amahubo* being sung in unison. To this day, this is the only way that this specific oral tradition can ever be expressed: by a group of voices participating together in sound. At this point we have now formulated a part of our final definition of *amahubo* – beginning with: “*Amahubo are oral traditions that are expressed through communal singing, in such a manner to resemble a roaring river*”

Now set against the backdrop of the centrality of music to Zulu culture and the unfolding of everyday life. *Amahubo* need to be once more recognised on par with the other more prominent oral traditions that are more visible in the frame of Zulu life – at least to the greater community outside of Zululand. As mentioned earlier, *izithakazelo* and *izibongo* strongly showcase the meticulousness of how Zulu history is kept and transferred from generation to generation. As can be learnt from the interview with Armstrong Ntuli, *amahubo* are created at some of the most humble and simple levels of Zulu society. Often a composer would compose the words to a song whilst embedding messages and lessons to be headed by upcoming generations – with an overture which can never be ignored: *amahubo* are deeply spiritual oral traditions. As explained by the main interview partners and collaborators throughout this process – *amahubo* can never be separated from their goal of inviting participation from the ancestors into the present day unfolding of life in the current moment – experienced by their living progeny. This fact, concerning *amahubo*, goes a long way to showcase the multi-faceted roots of *amaZulu* and their deep spiritual connection to those who came before. It is in this vein that this present writer would, admittedly, struggle to place *amahubo* in an overtly performative or entertainment centric

category. It has been mentioned a multitude of times that *amahubo* serve, in part, as a scroll of the nation – in regard to this assertion, their existence serves as well as an amplified prayer of the Zulu nation and a continuation of a deep connection between the past and the present. *Amahubo* are therefore inseparable from the spiritual, they are to be seen as an extension of belief and in most cases - a melodic prayer, extended on the breath of everyday *amaZulu*, to hopefully fall on the ears of those that came before and trusting in the deepest sense, a guiding in the sometimes-chaotic present moment. In terms of expanding the definition of *amahubo*, it is not difficult to note that they function as platforms through which a spiritual connection between past and present is readily fostered. More specifically, the participation in the unfolding events of the presents by the those that came before, and who are the ancestors and revered ancestors of the *amaZulu* is requested – and this request is rooted in an ever endearing and respectful manner. So then, in a finalisation of the pillars which represent *amahubo* history of course needs to be acknowledged as one of the central tenants of this cultural practice. As mentioned throughout this dissertation – *amahubo* should not be viewed through the scope of entertainment devices, but of a method of deep and reverent historic preservation and connection beyond the physical realm.

If it has not been made clear by this present moment in time, the sum of all Nguni history since the primordial is stored and transferred through oral traditions. There is no so-called library of Alexandria which can be pointed towards as the central home of this specific nation's history – instead, known, and unbeknownst to *amaZulu*, is that each and every Zulu individual is a representation of the multitude of books which make up the scroll of the nation.

This introduction of the concept of a “Scroll of the Nation” as first encountered in the narrative interview with Armstrong Ntuli – showcases an important facet in the overall understanding of what *amahubo* are. *Amahubo* as communal historic devices are well set in preserving large swathes of history connected to *amaZulu*. It is most importantly in the manner through which they are created and spread that gives them an elevated position in the preservation of Zulu history. Firstly, their creation is rooted in individual action. The role of the composer of *amahubo* as far as this present writer understands, is not a role which one is specifically tasked with nor can be seen as a burden to be taken on, no matter the association. Their creation is to be seen as an extension of the centrality of music to Zulu culture. Furthermore, the composition of *amahubo* can be seen as reactionary to that which has taken place in the present moment. Relating to the interview had with Mbuso Khoza, their creation (*amahubo*) is born out of a reaction to occurrences in the physical and from that point their finalisation can be regarded as being guided with an interaction with the meta-physical. Again, this spiritual connection is called upon – not to complete the process of recording history, but to request the presence of the ancestors to be participants in the expression of what came after experiencing history.

Simply put, *amahubo* connect a core group of cultural pillars which are central to Zulu life, and society – in turn they churn out expressions of history, which are only able to be ratified in participatory

contexts. The expressions of a composer, rooted in their history informed musical compositions, and their own individual takes on history – can only start to journey across the passage of time when they are accepted, and ratified by the melodic voices which choose to support the claims set forward as truth. It is this very characteristic of *amahubo* that has brought the greatest level of intrigue for this present writer. Mostly because, the greatest opponent to considering oral traditions as faithful expressions of the past – has been the absolutely true assessment which challenges and highlights the fallibility of human memory. In light of these considerations, and especially considering all the collected views throughout this research – it is a particular pleasure to witness that in *amahubo* themselves, exist a so-called fail-safe guarding against the weakness of individual memory. Which in the context of history, is one to always be wary of! In *amahubo*, one is introduced to an eye-opening fact of how Zulu culture has formed *amahubo* into the preservation tool that they are today. In *amahubo*, we are introduced to community-based memory keeping, through sound and rhythm. Much like the words to a popular song, Queens: “Bohemian Rhapsody” – there is a particular moment of magic that happens when the sounds of such a composition enter themselves into the physical world through sound and cornered on a shared gasping of excitement in singing along to the Freddy Mercury masterpiece. If one has had the pleasure of witnessing the choir that erupts – out of nowhere when this song plays. Perhaps you would be a tad closer to understanding – in the experience sense how a Zulu person would experience the onset of both a familiar and even at times, unfamiliar *ihubo*. When *Bohemian Rhapsody* plays over speakers in most locations, there is this undeniable energy shift which is seemingly inexplicable – though as this conclusion aims to showcase, one might understand quite simply the familiarity of such an experience. When such a melody begins, each word and each pause – there begins a dramatic change in atmosphere of said location – the words of the song that ring out are met by a hearty volume change and folding into the intricacies of syncopated oratory – and then, after a brief time pandemonium ensues. All of the above is experienced and elevated by the social context and ratified by the deep communal experience – which is rooted by the shared appreciation and reverence for the message of the song.

It is through this example of a mostly popular song, which is rooted in an almost out of this world experience which *amahubo* could best be expressed – this present writer’s adamant distancing of *amahubo* from the entertainment context is important, not in the sense that these oral traditions are to be regarded as stale melodic devices, but more rather that they are all of what has been explained – and much more, historically, and spiritually. In the example given through *Bohemian Rhapsody* we can quite simply see that history expressed through song and rooted in a communal context is able to more often than not, stand the test of time. So, in the most welcoming sense – wrapping up on what *amahubo* are, can be put forward as this analogy.

They are as a whole represented in the understanding of what we know nowadays as a top 40 hits which represents the sonic moment – they are a collection of top hits much like those in the all-time greatest charts such as the Billboard Top 40 or Rolling Stone Magazine’s “Greatest Songs” charts. Importantly,

there are of course central differences in what has been offered up at this point as moments of reflection. Firstly, *amahubo* have this one stark difference – they, at their core, do not belong to one artist – which now places the relevance of an original composer in a different light, compared to what we would like to accept for musical pieces. They, in of themselves, are an undeniable representation of the sums of their history, cultural relevance, and their deeply centred stance in the reverence of Zulu spirituality. Secondly, *amahubo* are crafted and kept in such a manner that insures – as closes as possible, a connection and a reflection of historical truth. Their position as oral traditions of an African nation could open them up to comparisons of that of an epic. Though this is a slight to their significance, more respectfully, they can be in some part be compared to a grand concerto which would ring loudly through sound and time – though in this comparison, one should note that their grandness of sound and emotion is for certain not an overriding force that lives above factual consistency. *Amahubo*, are to be seen as a sonically peer reviewed preservations of Zulu and, by respectful inclusion, Nguni history. In an attempt to finalise this journey deep into the heart of *amahubo*. The following definition would serve to be a final take on describing the oral tradition.

Defining Amahubo

Amahubo are specific songs that are central to the lives of Zulu people, they are performed across all stages of life. From birth to death. Marriages and celebrations of coming of age. They are specifically bound to a communal performance context and within their words there is intended knowledge, which is to be transferred, embedded by their composers – and often this knowledge is relevant to the event in question. A central pillar for them is that they are deeply connected to the spiritual aspect of Zulu culture, and they serve as invitation to ancestors and forefathers to participate in the unfolding events of the current moment, and finally through their performance and continued communal participation – they act as a history storing device.

In terms of understanding what governs their accuracy, the main paradigm through which accuracy is achieved would be the irrevocable necessity for them to be performed in a group setting. It is this interaction that seems to be a great proof for trusting the accuracy of their historical preservation capabilities. It is therefore through this lens that one would dare to venture into further research into *amahubo*.

Possibilities for further research and final remarks

At this point it is quite satisfying to conclude the discourse concerning *amahubo*, and in part the introductory adventure into their origins. It is now more clearly understood on what *amahubo* are and how they store and transfer the history of Zulu people. With this being understood, the refocus for the *Sounds Like History* project becomes clear to this present writer. At this moment in time, there exists no contemporary archive that has stored the oral traditions of the Zulu people in a manner fitting the

size of their nation and significance to the present epoch. It is this fact which serves as the motivation for the next chapter in the journey of preserving oral traditions. The intended continuation of this research would be the creation of a digital and eventually physical archive of oral traditions for the Zulu nation – which aims to compile as many oral traditions spanning from *izithakazelo*, and of course including *amahubo*. This endeavour is geared towards preserving stored in these primordial practices. In order to have any hope in achieving objectives connected with this endeavour, the main aim would be to work closely with community leaders and cultural practitioners so that these traditions can be stored, analysed, and contextualised – with a final aim being an accessible interaction with oral traditions for those interested. In many ways, this outlay of work would serve as a continuation of the work done through the James Stuart Archive. It is abundantly clear that such an undertaking would be closer to being a “life’s work” – much like for James Stuart. This being understood, this undertaking is the most fitting next step for this present writer. The creation of such an archive would in turn allow a more democratised and accessible summation of Zulu history – given that with growing urbanisation, and the departure of *amaZulu* from ancestral centres. It is vital to store the oral traditions that are still accessible to us in this present epoch. In doing so, it is a hope to have continued collaboration with people much like Mbuso Khoza, Desmond Latham, and Armstrong Ntuli in order for such an undertaking to be guided along in a manner fitting to the sacredness of *amahubo* as a whole. In closing, it is a core belief of this present writer that having access to one’s history is an invaluable asset in helping in the unfolding of life. History represents a rooting in personal understanding, and for most knowing about what came before has a calming effect on one’s heart and mind. Which in turn can lead to a less frantic approach to the present and the upcoming future. As *umZulu* myself, it is of utmost importance that oral traditions such as *amahubo* are not only preserved – but they continue to be utilised as a connection between ourselves and those that came before. There is much yet to be learned in terms of *amahubo*, in this regard: the path ahead lays waiting, waiting to be explored.

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