REIMAGINING CLICKS FROM ISIZULU AND ISIXHOSA

USING ELECTROACOUSTIC TOOLS

by

NKULULEKO NKANYEZI ZUNGU

(Under the Direction of Emily Koh)

ABSTRACT

Music serves as a powerful tool that shapes societies primarily through entertainment and, more importantly, through communication and the preservation of culture. Identifiers play a crucial role within cultures, influencing composers' perspectives on music. African thought leaders like Ngugi wa Thiong’o urge African writers to view themselves in relation to their identity, rather than through the various colonial experiences faced across the African continent. This recording project investigates the clicks of two South African languages, isiZulu and isiXhosa, aiding me in repositioning myself within cultural identities. Moreover, exploring clicks through modern technologies opens up the potential for creating large works from simple building blocks. African musicians have retained these clicks within the text, ensuring that meaning persists in the language. I produced, recorded, and manipulated the clicks utilized in this project at various stages of the composition process, using electroacoustic tools available in the digital audio workstations, Logic Pro X and Audacity, to explore meanings that extend beyond language. The clicks are categorized in three ways: within text, within expressions, and apart from text. Additional themes

encompass affirmations of identity, declarations of existence, and assertions of independence. The clicks often heard as soundscapes in southern African languages can be contracted and expanded to serve as instrumental textures in a composition. This research underscores the potential for African composers to delve into their cultures and discover the myriad sonic elements available, highlighting what African thought leaders advocate: a need to explore their African identity.
INDEX WORDS: Composition, Clicks, IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, Electroacoustic Tools, African

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DEDICATION

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INTRODUCTION

This document signifies the beginning of a new compositional journey, driven by two primary influential forces: decolonizing one's mind and navigating coloniality in contemporary Africa as a South African Black child like me. The teachings of various African thought leaders directly inspire the first. The latter stems from the unavoidable reality that a South African Black child will inevitably confront after engaging with readings such as *Decolonizing the Mind* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Such readings are rooted in the themes of decolonization. The process of decolonization and the emergence of similar movements are acknowledged through various African scholars like Kofi Agawu, Chinua Achebe, and Gabriel Okara (listed in no specific order). These scholars undertook the difficult task of navigating coloniality, which involves managing the various structures that originated from colonialism, including identity. Thus, this compositional journey is no longer focused solely on musical elements such as melody, harmony, and rhythm but also on other foundational aspects that directly influence these elements, like culture and lived experiences. These factors inform my perspective, shaping my writing and, consequently, the music I create. The music is shared as an Extended Play (hereafter, EP) with seven tracks. Namely, these are: "*Alke," "*I Promise," "I Am Black," "*Sithi Gqi!" "Cha Bo!"* "Give Back My Mind Interlude," and "*Umrhubhe."* There are no breaks between "I Promise" and "I Am Black"; the same can be heard between "*Cha Bo!"* Give back My Mind interlude and "*Umrhubhe."*

Challenging My Frame of Mind

Many social movements in South Africa highlighted the need for decolonization of society and academia during my generation, known as the "born-frees" (those born during the country's liberation in 1994, forming the first generation of free Black children).[1] These movements gained international attention under the hashtags *#Rhodesmustfall* and *#Feesmustfall* around 2015[2]. At the same time, I was completing my undergraduate studies in music at the University of Cape Town. Their global impact underscores their significance. In his book, *#RhodesMustFall: Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa,* Francis B. Nyamnjoh explains that Cecil John Rhodes, the subject in *#Rhodesmustfall* (the protest,) viewed non-white peoples in southern Africa as inherently inferior to the British race, justifying their subjugation under imperial and colonial powers, which had a detrimental impact on Black individuals.[3] In South Africa, non-white people include those of African (Black), Asian (including Chinese, Malaysian, and other Asian demographics but excluding Indian), and Indian descent.[4] This mindset fosters a desire for aspiring to whiteness (essentially, to be classified as white); as Michael Rowlands observes, "[…] the idea of being superior through the opportunities of becoming 'white' sets being 'black' in South Africa in deadly opposition to the identification of being black elsewhere in Africa. (Nyamnjoh, 2016)."[5] In other words, what does it mean to be African for the Black South African in these post-colonial spaces?

[1] Amy Thandeka Crankshaw and Veronica Melody Dwarika, "Exploring Psychologists' Interventions for Transgenerational Trauma in South Africa's Born Free Generation, *Trauma Care,* 3 (2023): 212.
[2] Hashtags are used on social media to archive information shared online. They have become a great tool for focusing attention on one topic, as information is quickly shared online, at a rate that is difficult to track without hashtags.
[3] Francis B. Nyamnjoh, *#RhodesMustFall: Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa* (Langaa Research & Publishing CIG, 2016), *2-3*.
[4] "Census 2022: Statistical Release," StatsSA, accessed January 26, census.statssa.gov.za.
[5] Francis B. Nyamnjoh, *#RhodesMustFall: Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa* (Langaa Research & Publishing CIG, 2016), *vi*.

The student-led movement #RhodesMustFall encouraged critical thinking about identity at the University of Cape Town campus (eventually, nationally across the top tertiary institutions). It was led by questions rooted in belonging (to the land versus to one's nation).[6] Nyamnjoh further discusses the xenophobic environment in which these topics interact because South Africa is home to both Indigenous peoples and peoples from different European and other African lineages who all believe they have a right to the land, further complicating the context. Thus, another question arises, "What does it mean to be South African?"

In *Decolonizing the Mind,* wa Thiong'o discusses how language in African literature encourages the "African child" to recognize the African identity within and the influence of Euro-American identities (hereafter referred to as Western or in the West, where appropriate) on that identity.[7] While his focus is on literature, theater, and fiction, I began to question my music similarly, asking, "In what ways in my composing can I adopt an insider position?" to aid answering the initial question, "What does it mean to be African to the South African?"[8] This connection is what defines me as an "African child," having been born in the land of Africa with a Bantu heritage.[9] However, due to the South African context, as detailed in the next section, one is not solely *Bantu*; the reality is that many South Africans embody their Indigenous identities and are also shaped by their colonial history, a truth underscored by Achebe in his discussions on the subject.[10] Thus, my approach to composing is rooted in this, too (more on this later.)

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[6] Francis B. Nyamnjoh, *#RhodesMustFall: Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa* (Langaa Research & Publishing CIG, 2016), *16*.
[7] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind* (James Currey, 1986), 1-3.
[8] Frank Alvarez-Pereyre and Simha Arom, "Ethnomusicology and the Emic/Etic Issue," *The World Music,* 35, no. 1 (1993): 9.
[9] I use the term insider to position myself as the composer within my Bantu culture, and I hope you, the reader, and the listener understand my music from this position, as much as possible.
[10] Chinua Achebe, "The African Writer and the English Language," in *Things Fall Apart:* A Casebook, ed. by Isidore Okpewho (Oxford University Press, 2003), 58.

The Lived Experience in South Africa

To further understand this desire to decolonize my mind, let me share the context in which I was raised. As a nation, South Africa is home to eleven official languages, namely (in the order most spoken): *isiZulu, isiXhosa, Afrikaans, sePedi,* English, *Setswana, Sesotho, Xitsonga, SiSwati, Tshivenda,* and *isiNdebele.*[11] As you will note, there is a blend of African and Western-derived languages (therefore, a blend of cultures). Most of the African languages belong to the *Bantu* group, unlike the non-*Bantu* groups, comprising groups like the Khoisan African groups.[12] *Bantu* peoples can be found spread across Sub-Saharan Africa. In South Africa, they are divided into the following subgroups: *Nguni, Tsonga, Sotho, Venda*, and *Lemba,* which are discussed further in Chapter 1. As highlighted by W.J. van Warmelo, these showcase the geographical locations of the languages in South Africa.[13] *IsiZulu and isiXhosa* are languages I speak and they belong to the *Nguni* subgroup.[14]

As of this document, I have lived most of my life in Cape Town, one of the three capitals of South Africa. The city was recognized as "Africa's Leading City Destination" by the World Travel Awards in 2024.[15] While the world recognizes the city as a capital for tourism, we locals have experienced it as an extension of Europe or the West in Africa – commonly referred to as "Europe 2.0."[16] The city is largely Westernized, accommodating lifestyles akin to those experienced in Western contexts. To many, this is now normal,

[11] "Census 2022: Statistical Release," StatsSA, accessed January 26, census.statssa.gov.za.
[12] Phillip V. Tobias, 1974, "The Biology of the Southern African Negro," in the Bantu-speaking Peoples of Southern Africa, edited by W.D. Hammond-Tooke, 3.
[13] N.J. van Warmelo, 1974, 'The Classification of Cultural Groups," in the Bantu-speaking Peoples of Southern Africa, edited by W.D. Hammond-Tooke, 56-59.
[14] A pronunciation guide is available in Chapter 1.
[15] "Africa's leading city destination 2024," Winners, World Travel Awards, accessed November 17, 2024, https://www.worldtravelawards.com/award-africas-leading-city-destination-2024.
[16] This is based on my lived experience in the city for over 20 years; Cape Town presents itself as a Westernized African city, as can be noted in the language of trade, the wealthier demographics in the city, and the tourism culture.

possibly confirming what wa Thiong'o states that "[…] it meant the child would now only see the world as seen in the literature of his language of adoption." (wa Thiong'o, 1974, 17). This is evidenced in several aspects of my life where I have been Westernized: I speak English and learned this before I spoke *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa*; I wear Western attire or, more importantly, I never wear the different types of clothing made from animal hides like *ibheshu* – a covering fastened around the waist commonly worn by *isiZulu* men, and many other experiential learnings.[17] Generally, I govern my life as an English-colonized individual, a common experience for most People of Color in the urban life of South Africa. Other aspects of my life, like my musical training, followed this Western approach.

It is a common misconception that all Africans are trained in the music of their land, i.e., Indigenous music. In my context, that would be the *Isicathamiya* singing style, for instance. Rather, in South Africa, Western practices are placed at the top of a proverbial hierarchy, with music academics emphasizing traditional Western Classical approaches as *the only* approach to creating high art forms. In South Africa, the remnants of the Bantu Education Act of 1953 and the University Education Act of 1959 that were set in place to destroy the progression of the *Bantu* child (i.e., the "African child") allowed this to be successful.[18] These legislations were determined to promote the separate development of cultures based on religion, education, art, and music, to name a few factors- which was only successful for one racial class in the country, white or of European descent. In post-*Apartheid* South Africa, this practice continues. If we look at my experience as a "born-free," we will see that I received my music training through several music examination

[17] Kwa-Zulu Natal University, "Celebrating our Heritage," Vukuzenzele, accessed November 17, 2024, https://www.vukuzenzele.gov.za/celebrating-our-heritage#:~:text=The%20back%20covering%20worn%20by,dress%20is%20called%20%E2%80%9Cihawu%E2%80%9D.
[18] Nampombe Saurombe, "Decolonising higher education curricula in South Africa: factoring in archives through public programming initiatives," *Archival* Science, 18 (2018): 124.

systems located in the West: The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, Trinity College London, and other similar ones in the United Kingdom. These were all prerequisites to further my education in music at a tertiary institution.

The point here is that throughout my training thus far, I had never interacted with African forms of music training; only once I entered tertiary education did I begin to, and even then, it was insignificant (the African music department and thus, the professors, students, and music created, was placed far away from the main music building which housed the opera school and composition, theory, and jazz departments, for instance) - an approach that has steadily changed in recent years with the encouragement of these social movements mentioned earlier. Arguably, having witnessed these two social movements (*#Rhodesmustfall a*nd *#Feesmustfall*) in 2015 and 2016, this is where the reframe began, albeit subconsciously.[19]

Only when I left my home country did music academics and performers become interested in what aspects of my identity were African and, thereby, what parts of my music writing were, too. I began interacting with questions that pointed to my African identity, like, “Can you play the *Mbira?*” “Are you familiar with *Isicathamiya?*” “Do you play the *Djembe?*” and many other questions like “Do you speak *Swahili*?” These questions highlighted an expectation to *be* African since I came from Africa. I found this difficult and still find it difficult to comprehend, possibly because of the tension between the English-colonized individual and the self who stems from Bantu origins (the former having never been taught to or allowed to embrace the latter) or due to the discomfort around African

[19] Nampombe Saurombe, “Decolonising higher education curricula in South Africa: factoring in archives through public programming initiatives,” *Archival Science*, 18 (2018): 121.

essentialisms. These interactions enhanced the need to answer the initial question, “What does it mean to be African in South Africa?”

Wa Thiong’o highlights that the West successfully shamed the “African child’s” use of their mother tongue and forcefully introduced them to the tongues of the West, i.e., the language spoken by Imperial powers like English was often traded in for the mother tongue and these languages of the West eventually became the first language for many African children.[20] The same can be said for culture, and thus, music. Fundamentally, the humiliation of my Indigenous culture has been successful through this experience, hence my questioning around my position (insider’s position.)

In a country like South Africa, where many speak more than two African languages but are expected to speak English (and govern themselves as the English do), it has created interesting, sometimes difficult, navigations within the society for the African child. We are tasked to use that language to move in society, as Chinua Achebe highlighted in his essay “The African Writer and the English Language.” In this essay, Achebe discusses that the English language is a tool that the African writer should use, regardless of how it is shared, as it can still be used to express African ideas.[21] Here, Achebe acknowledges one side of the tension in the African child’s mind. On one end, we have been given a language like English, albeit forced upon us, so we must use it. It is a tool that seemingly allows us to communicate across ethnic groups because of the unifying aspect of being English-colonized (similarly, Dutch-colonized).[22] However, lived experiences for People of Color will show that the opposite is true.

[20] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonizing the Mind* (James Currey, 1986), 17.
[21] Chinua Achebe, “The African Writer and the English Language,” in *Things Fall Apart:* A Casebook, ed. by Isidore Okpewho (Oxford University Press, 2003), 55-56.
[22] Ibid., 58

I would like to apply the same lens to music; we have been given Western thinking about music, so we must (and do) use them. However, as wa Thiong'o reminds us, it is the responsibility of the child to hearken to the languages of his forefathers. There has to be a conscious effort in the African child to move away from using these Imperial languages and use their Indigenous ones to speak directly to the people of the land rather than to their respective colonial rulers because language, like music, is a tool for communicating and carrying culture.[23]

Recording Project, *Evolve in the African State of Mind*

Thus, the nexus of this work is found. My work as a composer now looks to the African languages - consciously looking to my mother's tongue (*isiXhosa)* and father's (*isiZulu)* as building blocks for creation. Drawing on what Okara states,

> As a writer who believes in the utilization of African ideas, African philosophy and African folklore and imagery to the fullest extent possible, I am of the opinion the only way to use them effectively is to translate them almost literally from the African language native to the writer into whatever European language he is using as a medium of expression.[24]

To my understanding, Okara encourages one to play in both fields. So, I am happy to continue using the writing styles given to me (to us) by the West, as I am not uncomfortable with them per se. How can I, having been trained in them for so long? Now, the opportunity arises to incorporate more of what is authentically African in my writing with the languages (and cultural experiences from) *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa*. There are expressions encouraged by and embedded in verbal clicks found within *isiXhosa* and *isiZulu* that I am using as sonic material embedded in these African languages, that

[23] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind* (James Currey, 1986), 12.
[24] Quote found in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind* (James Currey, 1986), 7.

help me to reposition myself from within cultural identities (more on this in Chapter 1). As you will hear in this project, those who allow it will begin to hear African music anew.

I had the privilege of growing up in this nation that houses multiple ethnic and racial groups and witnessed multiple ways of expressing oneself, especially through music. Hearing Indigenous, concert, and commercial music across the landscape was not unusual and did show up in my music. However, in my training, I have primarily written from one perspective. That is to say, my musical expression and justifications thus far have largely been inspired by those rooted in Western thought, which is discussed further in Chapter 2. As discussed, this only acknowledges one aspect of my being. It was time to acknowledge the other aspects of my identity in the music I write, specifically those stemming from the clicks from the *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa* languages spoken about previously, which can be heard in this project.

Many who read this document may be persuaded to expect a work whose resultant sound is aesthetically linked to African essentialisms since I am attempting to decolonize my mind. For instance, for those who may expect a rhythmically complex work, Agawu's contribution with his investigation into the invention of the "African rhythm" is helpful.[25] He acknowledges that music rooted in complex rhythm or that contains rhythmic interests rather than melodic interest is "African" because "Africans" *cannot* compose complex melodies.[26] The notion of "African rhythm" is not incorrect per se, and I am not opposed to writing wonderfully intricate rhythms if need be. Still, the trope becomes false in its ideological construction – the West invented it to denote

[25] Kofi Agawu, "The invention of "African Rhythm"," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 48, No. 3 (Autumn, 1995): 387, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3519832.
[26] Ibid., 383, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3519832.

"African music."[27] It is obvious to state. Nonetheless, I shall state it: African music is more than the essentialisms placed on it; it is why I can write beautiful melodies and rhythmic-based music.

It fills me with joy to share this project as I continue my journey as a performing composer. I am proud of how this project explores identity and creativity. In addition to decolonizing my mind, this project has other primary goals. This work is composed by an African composer using phonemes from an African language and electronic tools in styles commonly practiced in commercially radio-based music (discussed further in Chapter 3). In the following chapters, I will further discuss the verbal clicks from *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa*, the music that incorporates phonemes, the electronic tools available, and how this intersects with the final project. Please note that appendices are provided for your reference, some of which will encourage you to explore additional readings through online sources. However, these are supplementary materials and should not interfere with your reading. The completed project is presented as an Extended Play (hereafter referred to as EP), which you can listen to online via streaming platforms.

[27] Kofi Agawu, "The invention of "African Rhythm"," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 48, No. 3 (Autumn, 1995): 395, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3519832

CHAPTER 1

THE *ISIZULU* AND *ISIXHOSA* CONTEXT

In the introduction to this document, I shared how the *Bantu* people are spread throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. In this chapter, I will discuss the *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa* context further, sharing the geographical locations within South Africa, as well as a brief look at the linguistic properties and the clicks found in both languages.

As noted by D.W. Philipson, *"Bantu"* is a linguistic label given by the German philologist. Wilhelm H.I. Bleek.[28] The name *"Bantu"* is curious as it reminds me of the term *"Abantu,"* which is used in both languages and is best understood in English as "people(s)," therefore, may have origins from these languages (other *Bantu* tribes have similar terminologies within their languages). According to Bleek, the term was made to acknowledge the millions of languages spoken across various tribes that share common characteristics with an assumed singular ancestor. However, locating these languages geographically is not as straightforward as one might assume (at least in the South African context.) The ambiguity surrounding who named the tribes adds to the need for further research. This is not the main focus of this project, but it is an aspect addressed in N.J. van Warmelo's 1935 survey entitled "A Preliminary Survey of the Bantu tribes of South Africa."

[28] D.W. Philipson, "The Spread of the Bantu Language," *Scientific American* 236, no. 4 (1977): 106.

Geographic Locations

In present-day South Africa, *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa* are two of the eleven official languages and are generally heard throughout the nation.[29] Reaching this current context has been challenging due to the many ambiguous boundaries where one language territory begins and another ends, similar to other matters related to cultural identifiers among different tribes. For instance, because characteristics can be observed in their homeland, Lesotho (i.e., outside South Africa), and the Free State (a province in South Africa), where do the linguistic characteristics of a language like *Sesotho* (one of the other *Nguni* languages) begin? Similarly, *isiZulu* can be heard as far north as Zimbabwe (beyond South Africa) and throughout *KwaZulu*-Natal (a province in South Africa).[30] Van Warmelo notes that these similarities appear in word roots, such as "chief," which has similar pronunciations in *isiZulu* and *Sesotho: Nkosi* and *Kgosi,* respectively. Additionally, there is congruence in the possessive singular “I,” which in *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa* are *ngi-* and *ndi-,* respectively. The dash after these terms acknowledges the absence of the word stem that proceeds the possessive as a prefix, as in “*ngi-yafunda”* or *”ndi-yafunda,”(* “I am reading” in English.) Agglutination is the main linguistical phenomenon here, in addition to the noun class systems and the verbal clicks.[31]

The *Bantu* tribes in South Africa are categorized into five major groups: *Nguni, Tonga, Sotho, Venda,* and *Lemba.* The *Nguni* group includes *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa* and

[29] For a pronunciation guide, refer to the section 2.2 of this chapter.
[30] For a map of South Africa, refer to the National Geographics website. To zoom further into the map, follow the URL in this citation. National Geographic, *South Africa Classic Map,* 2014, 1:3,044,000, National Geographic website, accessed January 30, 2024, https://www.natgeomaps.com/re-south-africa-classic.
[31] C. Maria Keet, Langa Khumalo, “Toward a knowledge-to-text controlled natural language of isiZulu,” *Language Resources & Evaluation* 51 (2017): 134.

is further divided into sub-categories: Cape *Nguni*, Later Immigrants, *Zulu*-speaking, *Swaz*i, *Transvaal Ndebele*, and recent *Nguni* offshoots.[32] *AmaZulu* and *amaXhosa* refer to the larger tribal groups that speak *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa,* respectively*;* they are located in the region now known as *KwaZulu*-Natal and the Eastern Cape, with many extending as far south as the Western Cape and north to Gauteng.

Understanding the tribes as *amaZulu* and *amaXhosa* is enough for the understanding to which I am repositioning myself. However, these tribes hold within nuanced classifications that are rooted in lineages. I will briefly share some of the names below, therefore, this list is not exhaustive. Tribe names are at times, ways to acknowledge the ancestral histories (and stories) through praise poetry as exemplified in my clan name, "*wena owaphuma ngenoni emgodini"* and at times, are linked to a family name, like my clan name "*Geda."* Family name clan names are listed below (Notably, these tribe names derive from the chief's family name; *Zulu* originated from Shaka Zulu.)[33] Each has its praises that identify them, too, which are not mentioned.

A*maZulu* are commonly identified by their clan names, listed here from the southern to the northern districts, and include *Nyuswa, Dumisa, Cele, Khuze, Dlamini, Nxamalala, Mabaso, Msinga, Bomvini, Cunu, Qanyini, Ngwane, Ngwe, Umbombo, and* Ingwavuma. From east to west, the clans include*: Mkhize, Mafunze, Gcumisa, Zondi, Mkhanya, Ximba, Thulini, Qadini, Khabeleni, Ntuli, Buthelezi, Qwabe, Mphukunyoni, Sithole, Thenjini, Thembu, Hlutshini Hlubi, Nkosi, Khumalo, Mbatheni, Ntombela, Gazini, Mthethwa,* and *Zulu.*[34]

[32] N.J. van Warmelo, 1974, 'The Classification of Cultural Groups," in the Bantu-speaking Peoples of Southern Africa, edited by W.D. Hammond-Tooke, 62-64.
[33] Ibid., 63.
[34] Ibid., 63-65.

AmaXhosa are found in the southernmost regions of the Cape.[35] These tribes include the *Gcaleka* of Willowvale, the *Ngqika* of the Ciskei, *Ndlambe, Dushane, Qhayi, Ntinde,* and *Gqunukhwebe—several of* which display in their names the interactions with Khoisan tribes, evidenced by the presence of clicks that are discussed later in this chapter.[36] Meanwhile, others are located further northeast of the Cape region and are closely related to tribes found in the Natal region, such as the *isiZulu* tribes. These tribes include *Thembu, Hala, Jumba, Ndungwana, Bomvana, Qwathi, Nqabe,* and *Mpondomise.*

The importance here is the understanding that tribal connections broaden the grouping of members of each tribe. Generally, the understanding is that names group people as "the people of (insert appropriate clan name)." Thus, I may be related to someone who does not share the same family name but shares the same clan name; this group may have someone with the last name *Zungu* (my last name) or another last name.

Linguistic Properties in *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa*

As I have done so far, I will consistently refer to the languages in the order of *isiZulu* first and *isiXhosa* second, reflecting the order of most spoken languages in the country. Generally, the terms in these languages are read phonetically (i.e., as you would sound out each syllable), including the names of the languages. Thus, *isiZulu* is pronounced as "ee-see-zoo-loo," emphasizing the third syllable. In contrast, *isiXhosa* is pronounced as

[35] "*AmaZulu"* and *"AmaXhosa"* henceforth is understood as "The Zulus" and "The Xhosas."
[36] N.J. van Warmelo, 1974, 'The Classification of Cultural Groups," in the Bantu-speaking Peoples of Southern Africa, edited by W.D. Hammond-Tooke, 62-64.

“ee-see-kho-sah,” noting that the third syllable contains a click phoneme, represented in International Phonetic Alphabet as: “/iːsiˈkʰoʊsa/.”[37]

Without getting into the weeds about the complex nature of the languages, *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa* have several fundamental linguistic properties: lexical tone, agglutination, and phonemes. Lexical tone determines the pronunciation and understanding of words, while agglutination refers to the flexibility of internal boundaries between words; phonemes are the verbal clicks present in the languages.

Lexical tone differences can be observed in the word “*ukunqaba.”*[38] In one pronunciation, the tone markings appear as úkùnqábà, which translates to English as “to become scarce,” while in another, it is pronounced as úkùnqàbà, meaning “to crunch bones.”[39] The marks going up, “ú” denotes the rising of a tone, while the marks going down represent when the tone falls. Agglutination involves distinct elements recognized within a sentence that serve specific meanings and functions (morphemes) that can be recombined to create new words.[40] This process uses two or more morphemes: a root and affixes.[41] For instance, in the word “*u-ya-hamba*,” the root is “*–hamba,”* meaning “to go” in English, and the changeable parts are the singular subject, *“u”* and the verb connected by the present-tense morpheme “-ya-“ (this sentence translates to English as “He/She is going.”) When combined with new elements, it can be transformed as follows: *ba-ya-hamba* (They are going), ni-ya-hamba (You (plural) are going), ba-be-hamba (They

[37] The International Phonetic Association, *Handbook of the International Phonetic Association: A Guide to the Use of the International Phonetic Alphabet* (United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 1999), 20-21.
[38] *The Greater Dictionary of IsiXhosa,* ed. S.L. Tshabe, volume 1 (Fort Hare, South Africa: University of Fort Hare, 2006), s.v. “Tone marking.”
[39] *The Greater Dictionary of IsiXhosa,* ed. S.L. Tshabe, volume 1 (Fort Hare, South Africa: University of Fort Hare, 2006), s.v. “Tone marking.”
[40] Farayi Kambarami, Kudakwashe Dube, et. Al, “Computational Modeling of Agglutinative Languages: The Challenge for Southern Bantu Languages,” *Arusha Working Papers in African Linguistics* 3, No.1 (2021): 53.
[41] Ibid., 56.

were going), respectively.[42] Agglutination is compared with other morphological typologies, specifically isolating and fusional.[43] Chinese exemplifies isolating morphology, while Indo-European languages illustrate a fusional morphology.[44]

IsiZulu and *isiXhosa* are rich in various verbal sounds, commonly called clicks in English.[45] *AmaXhosa* have no term for clicks, while *amaZulu* refers to them as "*ongwaqabathwa,"* understood in English as "consonants with sound." Therefore, understanding clicks as phonemes in the language may help. Both cultural groups have historically preserved these clicks aurally through generations and maintain a strong presence in South Africa today.[46] As recorded in the 2022 South African census, these languages survive, with 40.7 percent of the country's population speaking them in households, which has remained the stable majority since 1996.[47]

In 1823, the first written *isiXhosa* text emerged.[48] While the first published text for *isiZulu* appeared in 1837.[49] Later, in 1930, Professor C.M. Doke and Dr. W.G. Bennie used phonetic symbols that typically involve non-Roman characters, e.g., ʃ (used for "sh" sounds) to provide structural order to *isiXhosa*.[50] However, after 1954, a decision was made to use the Latin alphabet to represent the various clicks to avoid the complications

[42] These examples are not exhaustive. There are many more like "si-zo-hamba" – we will go., and many others.
[43] Farayi Kambarami, Kudakwashe Dube, et. Al, "Computational Modeling of Agglutinative Languages: The Challenge for Southern Bantu Languages," *Arusha Working Papers in African Linguistics* 3, No.1 (2021): 55.
[44] Alfréd Tóth, *Are all agglutinative languages related to one another?* (Mikes International, 2007), 1.
[45] *The Greater Dictionary of IsiXhosa,* ed. S.L. Tshabe, volume 1 (Fort Hare, South Africa: University of Fort Hare, 2006), s.v. "Tone marking."
[46] F.M. Shoba, ed., *The Greater Dictionary of IsiXhosa,* volume 3 (Fort Hare, South Africa: University of Fort Hare, 2006), s.v. "Xhosa as a dynamic developing language."
[47] "Census 2022: Statistical Release," StatsSA, accessed October 7, census.statssa.gov.za.
[48] F.M. Shoba, ed., *The Greater Dictionary of IsiXhosa,* volume 3 (Fort Hare, South Africa: University of Fort Hare, 2006), s.v. "Xhosa as a dynamic developing language," xxxii.
[49] C. Maria Keet, Langa Khumalo, "Toward a knowledge-to-text controlled natural language of isiZulu," *Language Resources & Evaluation* 51 (2017): 134.
[50] F.M. Shoba, ed., *The Greater Dictionary of IsiXhosa,* volume 3 (Fort Hare, South Africa: University of Fort Hare, 2006), s.v. "Xhosa orthography," xxxiv.

of earlier practices, a practice observed in all languages of South Africa.[51] Today, that conversation continues with the development of the writing system named "*Ditema Tsa Dinoko,"* developed by Indigenous speakers of various *Nguni* languages.[52] For my project, I adhered to the commonly used writing system for these languages—the Latin alphabet. Thus, of the 26 letters in this writing system, several are selected to represent each click: *C, Q,* and *X* (also true for the lowercase letters), each of which has variations that combine with other letters to express them.

To further understand the presence of prefixes such as *isi-* of "*isi-Zulu"* or *ama-* of "*ama-Zulu,"* as many may know these languages as "Zulu" and "Xhosa," several noun class systems help. Both languages have noun classes that determine where every singular and plural noun belongs. Every sentence with a subject, verb, and object must consistently relate to one another.[53] The following sentence, for example, "A human drinks water" is translated as "***Umu****ntu* ***u****sela amanzi"* (in *isiZulu*) and *"**Um**ntu **u**sela amanzi"* (in *isiXhosa).* The noun class is determined by the subject in the sentence, e.g., ***"umu-" / "um-,"*** deriving from the subject "***umu****ntu"/"**um**ntu,"* which influences the verb "***u****sela"* ("drinks").

"Umu-" / "um-" belongs to the noun class for a singular person (Noun Class 1), for which the plural is "***aba-"*** (Noun Class 2). This transforms the previous sentence to *"**Aba**ntu **ba**sela amanzi."*[54] Thus, *ama-* of *amaZulu* and *isi-* of *isiZulu,* belong to a Noun Class, specifically Noun Classes 6 and 7, referring to natural phenomena and inanimate

[51] F.M. Shoba, ed., *The Greater Dictionary of IsiXhosa,* volume 3 (Fort Hare, South Africa: University of Fort Hare, 2006), s.v. "Xhosa orthography," xxxiv.
[52] "Ditema Tsa Dinoko," Isibheqe Sohlamvu, accessed February 6, isibheqe.org.za.
[53] C. Maria Keet, Langa Khumalo, "Toward a knowledge-to-text controlled natural language of isiZulu," *Language Resources & Evaluation* 51 (2017): 134.
[54] Ibid.,135-136.

objects, respectively.[55][56] Commonly, these languages are identified by their root, for example, "-*Xhosa."* However, omitting the prefix here Anglicizes the name. Keeping in mind the theme of decolonizing my mind, I will reference them with their linguistic characteristics, as they are more fitting.

In recent decades, new vocabulary has been adopted to accommodate scientific and modern technological terms.[57] This includes borrowed terms from English, Afrikaans, and other Western-derived languages. For example, "*ifoni"* or *"ifowuni" refers* to the telephone, a word borrowed from Afrikaans "foon," and "ikhompyutha" or "ikhompyuther" is derived from the English word "computer." In these cases, the root term often remains phonetically similar to the borrowed term. The most fascinating adoption of the language, and the focus of this project, stems from the clicks that developed through transcultural interactions between the Khoisan Indigenous people of South Africa and the *Bantu* tribes.[58]

Pronunciation of the Clicks

All clicks originate in the mouth. As illustrated in Figure 2, the mouth's anatomy is defined according to my illustration, which is inspired by those created by Kenneth L. Pike in his book, *Phonemics: A Technique for Reducing Languages to Writing.* The following acronyms apply: AV for Alveolar Ridge, MB for Molar Backside, IB for Incisor Backside, TFT for Tongue Front Tip, and TS for Tongue Side. As you read on, I will italicize the clicks, as I did before, to indicate how they sound when read; instead of "C" as

[55] C. Maria Keet, Langa Khumalo, "Toward a knowledge-to-text controlled natural language of isiZulu," *Language Resources & Evaluation* 51 (2017): 136.
[56]For a more extensive look into noun classes, refer to Meinhoff's classification of Bantu languages.
[57] F.M. Shoba, ed., *The Greater Dictionary of IsiXhosa,* volume 3 (Fort Hare, South Africa: University of Fort Hare, 2006), s.v. "Xhosa as a dynamic developing language," xxxii.
[58] *Ibid*.

pronounced in the alphabet as "see," you will sound them as guided by the explanations for each click.

The *C* click is described as a voiceless ejective click.[59] To produce this click, tension is created through suction between the tongue's front tip and the backside of the incisors'. The release of this tension will create the desired ejective aspect of the action, i.e., the sound of the click (the voiceless aspect is discussed further later).[60] This sound can also be thought of as the expressive sound created in the mouth to display disinterest in an offensive remark or to scold young children.

The *Q* click is described as the voiceless ejective palatal click.[61] This is achieved by pushing the ball tip of the tongue (the same front tip as the one used for the *C* click) against the alveolar ridge with suction to create tension. The release of this tension will sound the click.[62] The sound produced here is similar to a popping noise created when unscrewing a cork top in a wine bottle or bursting a bubble on a bubble wrap used to protect fragile items. Both produce different-sounding pops, but the pop is essentially the same.

[59] F.M. Shoba, ed., *The Greater Dictionary of IsiXhosa,* volume 3 (Fort Hare, South Africa: University of Fort Hare, 2006), s.v. "The Speech Sounds and Sound Combinations of Xhosa," xlvii
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.

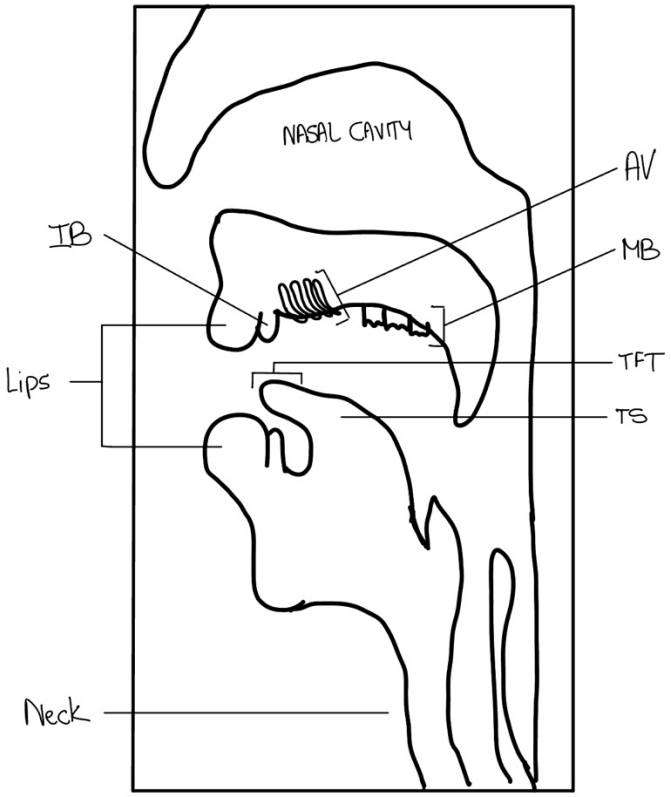

Figure 1. Anatomy of the Mouth

And finally, the *X* click is described as the voiceless alveo-lateral click. This is achieved by pushing the tongue's right side against the molars' backside to create tension through suction. The slow release of this tension will sound the click.[63] In reality, the creation and release of tension are simultaneous. The sound produced is commonly used to call animals, such as dogs, horses, cattle, etc., but can also be heard to display frustration.

Variations for each click provide more sonic properties that can be heard through aspects like the added breath and the other tonal qualities described below. The variant speech sounds and sound combinations for the *C* click are represented in the following

[63] F.M. Shoba, ed., *The Greater Dictionary of IsiXhosa,* volume 3 (Fort Hare, South Africa: University of Fort Hare, 2006), s.v. "The Speech Sounds and Sound Combinations of Xhosa," xlvii

combinations of letters*: ch, cw*, and *chw*. H denotes the added breath in these expressed sounds, creating the aspirated voiced sounds.[64] Similarly, *Q* and *X* have variations represented in the following combinations of letters: *qh, qhw, qw, xh, xhw, and xw*. These also provide various aspirations and alveo-lateral clicks and consonant clusters.[65] Other variations are less consistent but apply further meaning if the letters are present: n, ng, and g. For example, the word –"*gcina*," which in English translates to "to go last," adds a *bassy* or lower tone to the *C* click, which can also be observed with the *Q* click, like in the word "i*gqirha*," which translates to English as "a doctor" and the *X* click in the word "*ngxama"* – "hurry up."

IsiXhosa is recognized as a more prominent click language in the *Nguni* family*,* as demonstrated by the following sentence: "Do not get used to me," which translates to *isiXhosa* as "*sukundiqhela."* In contrast, the same sentence translates to *isiZulu* as "*sukundijwayela*" and *Sesotho* as "*Se ntlwaetse*." Note that the click sound, *Q,* is used only in *isiXhosa*. There are many other examples of such occurrences. Nevertheless, because they belong to the *Nguni* family and are so similar, communication between the two tribes is possible, but this only extends to this family of languages. While words can be similar in other *Bantu* tribes in Sub-Saharan Africa, communication between them is more challenging.

At this point in your understanding of the clicks, you might wonder what sets these clicks apart from simple sound effects made with the mouth. I believe the answer lies in semiotics. In Chapter 3, I explain further that these clicks, which are rooted in

[64] F.M. Shoba, ed., *The Greater Dictionary of IsiXhosa,* volume 3 (Fort Hare, South Africa: University of Fort Hare, 2006), s.v. "The Speech Sounds and Sound Combinations of Xhosa," xlvii
[65] Ibid.

various meanings, enable me to leverage their musical abilities. This fascination is not something I have observed only within myself as I speak the clicks. I have seen many who speak the languages indigenously, even non-natives, who, after learning the language, adopt a new sense of creativity influenced by the expression of the clicks. In other words, while the *X* click can be understood as the sound made to call an animal, it can also be used to form words (e.g., *sizoxoxa xa sinexesha)* and express frustration, enjoyment, and other new expressions. Thus, language and sonic expression derive two meanings.

My interests lie in these meanings and new ones explored through modern technologies. In Chapters 2 and 3, I will discuss how other composers have utilized these clicks in various musical contexts, including my project, *Evolve in the African State of Mind.*

CHAPTER 2
MUSIC IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa is diverse, offering a variety of musical experiences in one location. During my master's program, I noticed how these experiences influenced the music I created. It was not uncommon for me to work on a piece resembling a piano sonata while composing a pop-inspired song. Initially, I attributed this to my enjoyment of different styles and genres. Still, upon further reflection, I realized it stems from being shaped by my environment, which fundamentally affects my writing. There are countless opportunities to experience various music, ranging from Classical concert performances in traditional venues to popular genres heard on the radio and live performances in urban settings to Indigenous music primarily heard in rural tribal communities. However, a disconnect still remains, as these experiences do not align with my formal music training. Thus, in this chapter I will discuss the various contexts further, focusing on music that uses phonemes.

Styles of Music: Vocal Music in South Africa

Many people in South Africa cherish the voice as a musical instrument, likely because of the country's diverse communal singing styles, which come from numerous cultures.[66] In a sense, singing is South African music. In Indigenous communities, this has been sustained by the passing down of folk songs at various ceremonies and the contemporary practice of *amagwijo,* or the more traditional, *Isicathamiya*, where singing

[66] Nicol Hammond, "Singing South Africanness: the construction of identity among South African youth choirs," *Journal of the Musical Arts in Africa* 1 No. 1 (2004): 107.

forms a crucial part of any ceremony's proceedings.[67] These styles are rooted in community where music serves as a way to unite tribes, expressing stories that can be sorrowful, humorous, or joyful and are sung in languages derived from the tribe where the ceremony is taking place or neighboring tribes. In other contexts, music is private and intimate, as is heard on the instrument, *umrhubhe* (more on this instrument in chapter 3). The songs sung here are created directly from the instrument and are much more intimate than the communal practice mentioned before.

Beyond this, most vocal music is rooted in Western styles, with pieces akin to Schumann, Mozart, and Handel, in that art songs, operas, and choral pieces are commonly written and performed in every church, schools of music, and traditional concert venues. In these, the emphasis is on how melody and harmony can be used to expand or emphasize a text. In contrast, African singing styles like *isicathamiya* are seen as Indigenous and thus are not as easily heard; they will only be heard when music attempts to evoke Africa (more on this later).

One would expect that composers in the nation would use the traditional singing styles heard in the country to inform their compositions. In some contexts, this is true, as can be heard in the music of Indigenous composers like Mzilikazi Khumalo. However, the use of Indigenous identities is commonly reserved to language alone. The use of language can be controversial, as some composers use Indigenous languages to evoke an Africa tied to essentialist ideals, while others do so as part of their Indigenous

[67] *Amagwijo* are songs created on the spot and can be rooted in any topic, depending on the context it serves. For instance, a *gwijo* may be created to honor a good friend at a birthday party or a mother at a wedding or funeral. These songs are generally unknown to everybody, as they are made on the spot, but are created in a way so that anybody can immediately join. These are rarely heard nationwide as the contexts are too specific (you must be there to be familiar with them).

identity.[68] In other words, when a composer who does not have Indigenous heritage writes vocal music using Indigenous languages, such as *isiZulu,* they may do so to be "African," as noted in many choral arrangements of popular songs like "*Thula Baba, Thula Sana"* or *"Ndikhokhele Bawo,"* and in radio-based songs like "Kota" by Goodluck and Black Motion (they may not be able to speak the language and/or do not live the Indigenous experience they are drawing from, per se.)[69]

The point here is that to be "African" is something many non-natives can adopt to be commercially successful when the appropriate context arises and benefit from this, while others who are Indigenous cannot. Regardless of these tensions, the voice within each inspires me, whether spoken, sung, or rapped. I believe the voice is one of the most beautiful instruments and is seldom experienced in other forms of expression in Western Classical styles. We commonly experience the voice largely as a tool for speaking and singing, but the idea of extended techniques for the voice is still shied away. This is why it is the one instrument that influenced *Evolve in the African State of Mind*- more on this in Chapter 3.

Fundamentally, the use of Indigenous languages across the styles above stems from the resistance to societal oppression. Performers and musicians have embraced their African identities to mark their deliberate political and cultural opposition to regimes such as *Apartheid.* The black-versus-white history (Indigenous South Africa and European-influenced South Africa) is a legacy that continues today. Although it is not unusual to hear an Afrikaans people singing along to an *isiZulu* song like "*Nomvula" by*

[68] Allyss Angela Haecker, "Post-Apartheid South African Choral Music: An Analysis of Integrated Musical Styles with Specific Examples by Contemporary South African Composers," PhD dissertation, University of Iowa, 2012, 111.
[69] In "Kota" they use multiple languages to evoke Africa, including colloquialisms like "jiva," a term used to encourage dancing from South African township culture.

Zolani Mohala or an *amaXhosa* singing along to an Afrikaans singer like Kurt Darren with the song "*Kaptein (Span Die Seile),"* not fully understanding the lyrics to the songs in both cases. This shows that from operatic to jazz, tribal to pop singing styles, it unites us as a nation, regardless of our heritage.

This was highly exemplified in choral music at the turn of the century.[70] Choral music is also where the divide begins to be consciously blurred, and an attempt to oneness is made (This has extended into commercially successful radio-based music.)[71] In choral music, communal singing can be identified as the justification for the style where cultural differences can be observed under one unifier - in the same way, that a national identity unifies us and, thus, a national anthem too.[72]

Vocal Music That Uses Phonemes

Focusing on the origins of Indigenous language in music, musicians like Miriam Makeba, Busi Mhlongo, Hugh Masekela, and many others popularized using their African languages (and, at times, other cultural identifiers like clothing) in the music they wrote and performed; they put into practice what wa Thiong'o emphasized, viewing themselves from inside an African identity. One song that highlights this is *Qongqothwane* (*isiXhosa* for knocking beetle), made famous by Makeba and is also where this approach becomes globalized. As you will hear, the *Q* click appears at least 6 times, while its variant *Gq* appears 8 times in a four-line stanza, so many recognize the song as simply "The Click Song."[73] Or, as Makeba states, "Because they cannot say

[70] Allyss Angela Haecker, "Post-Apartheid South African Choral Music: An Analysis of Integrated Musical Styles with Specific Examples by Contemporary South African Composers," PhD dissertation, University of Iowa, 2012, 11.
[71] Nicol Hammond, "Singing South Africanness: the construction of identity among South African youth choirs," *Journal of the Musical Arts in Africa* 1 No. 1 (2004): 105.
[72] Ibid., 107.
[73] Mokgale Makgopa, Madimabe Mapaya,and Tsoaledi Thobejane, "Infusion of Folklore into the South African jazz: an analysis," *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies* 22, No. 2 (2012): 119-128.

Qongqothwane."[74] This click defines the insect and sonically imitates the sound this species of beetle makes to attract mates.[75] While the click is being used as an onomatopoeia, it is still housed within a word (***Q**on**gq**othowane)*, providing meanings through text and sonically through the instances in which the click is pronounced (the emboldened letters). These distinctive features present here, the click and its variant, are contrastive in nature, making it possible to recognize their function at any given point, enabling the sonic description of the beetle's motion.[76] When you listen to the song, it becomes more apparent that a beetle is moving and jumping within the song, even more so when one performs the piece. In addition, other elements, like the use of leaps in the musical contour, benefit this (see Figure 2.)

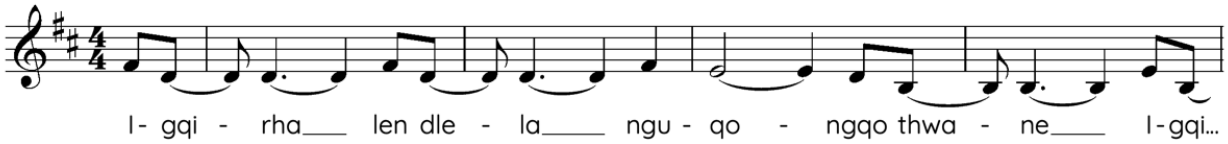

Figure 2. *IsiXhosa* Traditional Song, *Qongqothwane*, 0:20-0:27.[77]

The use of clicks spoken of in *Qongqothwane* is rare, at least in the more successful works (other folk songs that are not as commercially successful do the same). It is common to see clicks used in text – not necessarily linked to onomatopoeia. Here, there is no apparent capitalization of musical events; text is used in music as commonly used in language through poetry and lyrics to songs or vocal concert works. You can see this in the vocal concert work *"Uyephi Na"* by Princess Magogo, arranged

[74] Bob Bollard, cond., *Qongqothwane,* IsiXhosa Traditional Song, Miriam Makeba, streaming audio, accessed January 23, 2025, YouTube
[75] Quintina Carter-Enyi & Aaron Carter-Enyi, "Decolonizing the Mind Through Song," *Performance Research*, 24, no. 1 (2019): 60.
[76] Frank Alvarez-Pereyre and Simha Arom, "Ethnomusicology and the Emic/Etic Issue," *The World Music,* 35, no. 1 (1993): 19.
[77] Bob Bollard, cond., *Qongqothwane,* IsiXhosa Traditional Song, Miriam Makeba, streaming audio, accessed January 23, 2025, YouTube.

by Mzilikazi Khumalo and Peter Klatzow.[78] I chose this example because of the presence of composers from all of the identity markers sonically mentioned prior – Indigenous (Magogo), Colonized (Khumalo-*isiZulu*), and Western-Derived (Klatzow). In this piece, they have arranged the folk melodies of Magogo's music into a Western classical concert work for voice and piano (see Figures 3 and 4 for snippets). Note the presence of the *C* click in the text *"Ngowa le ndod' ema**c**ebe**c**ebana,"* and the presence of the *Q* click in "*Engasa**q**onywa nj'uyephi na?"* In this text, we are introduced to a female singer who sings about a prospectus male lover who has suddenly left her, and she is wondering to herself, *"Engenantombi nj'uyephi na?"* which is understood in English as, "But he has no lover, so where did he go?"

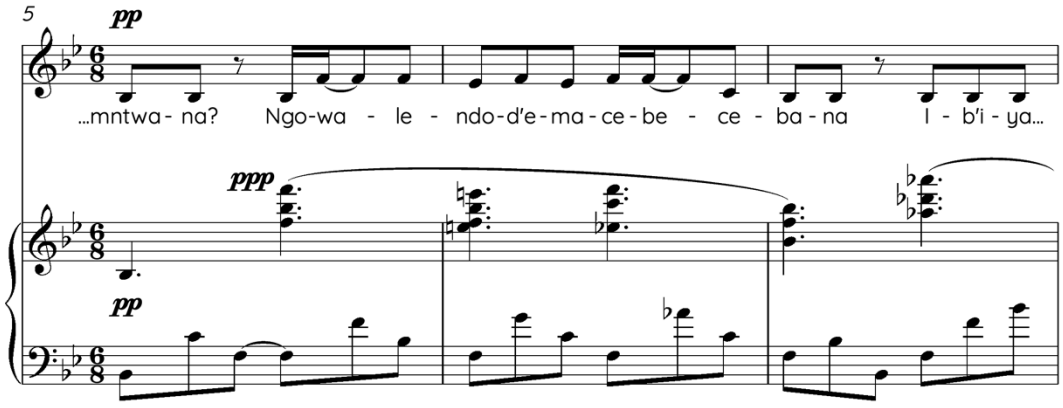

Figure 3. Princess Magogo, arr. Mzilikazi Khumalo and Peter Klatzow, *Uyephi Na?*, mm. 5-7[79]

[78] Princess Magogo, *Uyephi Na?,* arranged by Mzilikazi Khumalo and Peter Klatzow, (South Africa: SAMRO Foundation, 1999), https://www.samroscores.org.za/work/uyephi-na/.
[79] Ibid.

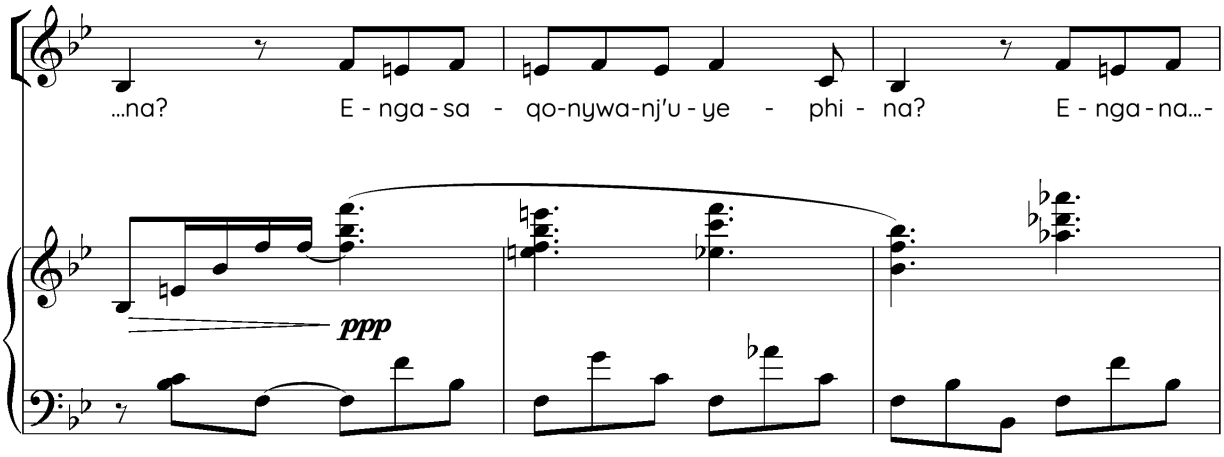

Figure 4. Princess Magogo, arr. Mzilikazi Khumalo and Peter Klatzow, *Uyephi Na?*, mm. 37-39[80]

So far, I have shared two approaches to using clicks- to form text in poetry and lyrics (i.e., as language) and as individual sonic events embedded in that text (i.e., an onomatopoeic device). These approaches can also be observed in the larger South African commercial music industries. The use of clicks as individual sonic events has been more successful in rhythm-based styles that capitalize on the "African rhythm" trope. Namely, these are *Gqom, Amapiano*, and Afrobeats (hereafter, all recognized as Afrobeats). To acknowledge the obvious tension here- this musical trope is, as Agawu highlights, the one used for essentialist ideals that Africans are complex rhythmic people with low melodic sophistication—an ideal Western and African scholars have upheld, as encouraged by the Western hierarchy of knowledge.[81] In the previous two examples, one can note that this ideal is not true. Nonetheless, some of the songs found in the rhythmic genres here use clicks in ways that interest me.

[80] Princess Magogo, *Uyephi Na?,* arr. Mzilikazi Khumalo and Peter Klatzow (South Africa: SAMRO, 1999).
[81] Kofi Agawu, "The invention of "African Rhythm"," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 48, No. 3 (Autumn, 1995):383, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3519832 .

I initially became conscious of how clicks could be used as sonic material away from language when I heard words taken from *isiZulu* performed differently from how one would speak the same word. There is a conscious placement of a word like "*gobisiqolo*," translated to English as "Bend your back" (an instruction to dance), where the *Q* click heard in this word is emphasized and highlighted to create a brilliant interaction with the drum track, providing the overall rhythmic element to the song. *Gobisiqolo* by Bhizer featuring Busiswa shows this interaction (see Figure 5); while this is the song I have chosen to mention in this document, there are many others like *Ameni* by Miss Pru Dj featuring Emtee, Saudi, Sjava, Fifi Cooper, A-Reece, and B3nchmarQ.[82] Their understanding of the musical nature of the click within the word encourages them to perform the word effectively, sometimes manipulating the emphasis derived from the lexical tones mentioned in Chapter 2, choosing rather to emphasize the embedded rhythmic elements that, once again, interact with the overall rhythm of the song. In this example, you will hear "*tsin-tsin-tsin,"* another element of musical idioms derived from the language through the phoneme *"ts"*, which is not a click so I will not be discussing these further.

This relationship between clicks and the rhythmical elements of a song can also be noted in the music performed by artists who do not necessarily have the same understanding of these clicks as natives do. Such can be heard in Snoop Dogg and Pharrell Williams' song, *Drop It Like It's Hot.* Dogg acknowledges in an interview with Broadcast Music Incorporation (the popular music performing rights organization commonly known as BMI) that Williams' click heard in the song was performed by

[82] In this instance, the click found in the word "*Sesibaqedile,"* isiZulu for "We have finished them," stating how they desire to mesmerize the listeners of the song, interacts with the drum tracks to create an engaging rhythmic quality to the song.

chance, i.e., no conscious linking to the linguistic elements mentioned before, as observed in the previous songs.[83] Although the resultant effect in all three songs (*Gobisqolo, Amen*i, and *Drop It Like It's Hot*) is similar.

How Williams pronounced the voiceless ejective palatal click, i.e., the *Q* click, is not the same way as I, or most natives, do. His pronunciation of the click is less pointed, producing a flatter sound. This is common among non-native speakers; they use the full tongue to pronounce the *Q* instead of just using the TFT discussed in Chapter 1. The resultant sound is a *Q* click that sounds unfocused rather than sharp and pointed. These sharp and pointed clicks are those that will be heard in the EP.

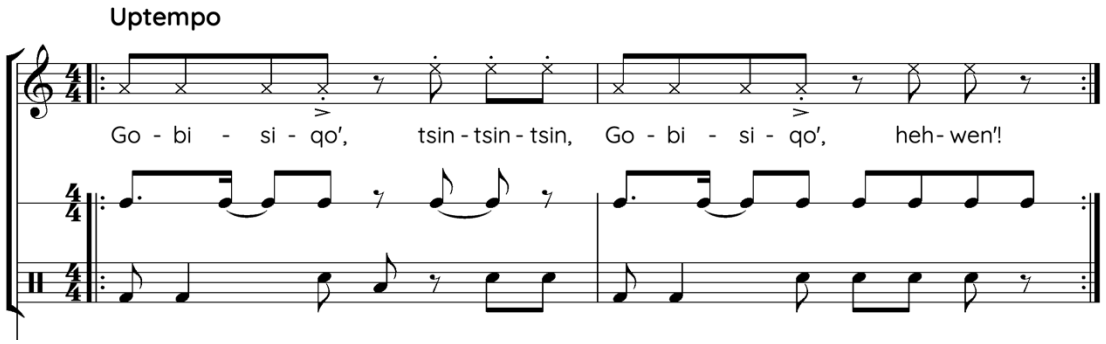

Figure 5. Bhizer, Busiswa, S.C. Gorna, Trigger Bhepepe, Gobisiqolo, 0:04-0:07[84]

Milton Babbitt's music and mine are sonically worlds apart. However, they both derive from the one compositional root, electronic tools and language. This can be heard in his work *Phonemena* for Soprano and Synthesized Tape, A reimagining of the original work with the same title for soprano and piano on an RCA Mark II Synthesizer.[85] At its core, this work expands upon Schoenberg's combinatorial serial practice.[86]

[83] BMI, "Drop It Like It's Hot," Snoop Dogg and Pharrell, September 19, 2024, Interview of Snoop Dogg and Pharrell on BMI's YouTube page, https://youtu.be/14bHX_2_jpI?si=6--SeBw32iYdqwqB.
[84] Arnold Nkombose Madlala, prod., *Gobisiqolo,* Bhizer, Busiswa, S.C. Gorna, Trigger Bhepepe, streaming audio, accessed January 23, 2025, YouTube.
[85] Mikel Kuehn, "The Phenomena of Phonemena: Structure and Realization in Milton Babbitt's Work for Soprano and Synthesized Tape," PhD dissertation, University of Rochester, 1995, 3.
[86] Ibid., 1.

However, his use of phonemes and electronic tools interests me, albeit separately.[87] Babbitt uses a combination of consonants and vowel sounds to project a new language where the realized text holds no coherent meaning.[88] He has paired similar vowel sounds together that can be observed in the following pronunciations: beat and bit, bait and bet, pat and pot, bought and boat, put and boot, but and burn.[89] He combines the vowel sounds with the consonants that begin the following list of words: pin, bin, tin, din, chain, jane, kale, gale, fail, veil, thigh, thy, seal, zeal, shale, azure, mail, nail, lane, rang, rain, your, wail, and hail.[90] Thus, he created a database of 12 vowel-based sounds and 24 consonant consonants with which he composed his own text.[91] For instance, the text taken from the first four measures is "DĒ SHĒ JĒ TĒ SHA LE RA ZHUH ĀNG SŌ THAW VE THĀ Ē VI SU FO VU VU."[92] The vowels communicate pitch organization, while the consonants emphasize rhythmic structures.[93] While Babbitt completely removes meaning derived from known text to create incoherent text, where I only at times do, I incorporate improvising consonant sounds -the clicks as phonemes, with randomized vowel combinations like "*qha qho qhe qho,"* – more in Chapter 4.

[87] Babbit continued to explore this instrument more in other works like *Philomel,* which displays the use of electronics to transform the voice and create another performer alongside the soloist – the digitized voice. To learn more on this, read: Richard Kostelanetz, "Notes on Milton Babbitt as Text-Sound Artist," *Perspectives of New Music* 25, no. 1/2 (1987): 281, http://www.jstor.org/stable/833101.
[88] Mikel Kuehn, "The Phenomena of Phonemena: Structure and Realization in Milton Babbitt's Work for Soprano and Synthesized Tape," PhD dissertation, University of Rochester, 1995, 1.
[89] Ibid.,17.
[90] Milton Babbitt, *Phonemena,* C.F. Peters Corporation: New York. 1979.
[91] Richard Kostelanetz, "Notes on Milton Babbitt as Text-Sound Artist," *Perspectives of New Music* 25, no. 1/2 (1987): 282, http://www.jstor.org/stable/833101.
[92] Milton Babbitt, *Phonemena,* C.F. Peters Corporation: New York. 1979.
[93] Richard Kostelanetz, "Notes on Milton Babbitt as Text-Sound Artist," *Perspectives of New Music* 25, no. 1/2 (1987): 283, http://www.jstor.org/stable/833101.

Available Electronic Tools in Digital Audio Workstations

The resultant tape part in *Phonemena* was performed on the Radio Corporation of America Electronic Music Synthesizer (hereafter RCA Synthesizer), which later developed into the Mark II Synthesizer (hereafter Mark II) by the same company.[94] Babbitt used this instrument because of its ability to perform the music "well." In other words, these synthesizers, and synthesizers in general – are instruments that can take musical properties like pitch, loudness, attack, sustain, decay, duration, portamento, timbre, and vibrato to reproduce other musical tones as well as simulate the voice and other existing instruments – thus, can perform difficult compositions like ones created by Babbitt.[95]

These properties, pitch, loudness, etc., are all stored as information on the coded paper roll containing various punched holes denoting these previously stated properties.[96] The holes are made through the keyboard system at the front of the instrument, which is color and number-coded to select various groups of note-selecting, the octave, timbre, attack, sustain and decay, and volume control.[97] These holes interact with a brush that transfers the information through cables to the appropriate filter and resonator chains to create the resultant sound guided by the holes.[98] The resultant sound, or the performance of the composition, is then recorded onto magnetic tape. However, due to the instrument's ability to produce only single tones, two tones at most, if the final composition required two tones to sound simultaneously, separate recordings would be made that later are combined.[99] Babbit's world is analog and these

[94] Barry Schrader, Schrader, Barry. *Introduction to Electro-Acoustic Music.* Prentice-Hall Incorporated, 1982, 123.
[95] H.F. Olsen and H. Belar, "Electronic Music Synthesizer," *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 32, no. 3 (1960): 595 - 608.
[96] Ibid., 599.
[97] Ibid., 606.
[98] Ibid., 607.
[99] Ibid.

analog principles continue in the digital realm. Here is where all the previously mentioned songs were created. They were created in a Digital Audio Workstation (hereafter referred to as DAW(s)), meaning that much of the audio is processed digitally through several digital signal processing tools like reverberation, equalization, compression, etc. These tools are the same tools that I use in my composition.

To Babbitt, the need for electronic ways of creation is to allow one to listen differently. The immediacy was beneficial - to which Babbit states, "…to get back to the essence of why we went back to electronic music, there was the rhythmic aspects, temporal aspects […], but there was the practical aspects, we could walk into that studio with the composition in our head and walk out with the performance on tape and in hand."[100] This said tape allowed one to listen immediately to the performance and not rely on a (human) performer to master any technique to perform a work. So, it mattered more how one listened to the work, not how one observed the performer. This philosophy continues in the electronic music world and is one that guides my thinking, too. This immediacy thrives in profit and time-based industries, such as commercial radio-based music. It is the fundamental reason my entire work is digitally produced as an Extended Play- I can immediately work on material, assess it, and make decisions based on the performance. This worked best for my workflow because I am my music's primary performer (more on this in the next chapter.) In the next chapter, I discuss how the aspects discussed in this chapter, like clicks as sonic events or electronic tools, appear in my body of work, *Evolve in the African State of Mind.*

[100] Robert, Hilferty, dir., *Milton Babbitt: Portrait of a Serial Composer* (2011; NPR Music, 2011), Streaming, https://www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2011/04/10/133372983/npr-exclusive-new-documentary-on-the-late-composer-milton-babbitt.

CHAPTER 3

THE CLICKS AND ELECTROACOUSTIC TOOLS IN *EVOLVE IN THE AFRICAN STATE OF MIND* EP

Music holds meaning, or as Jean-Jacques Nattiez stated, “Music is a symbolic activity. It is articulated by means of reference…”[101] In other words, the rationales presented in music theories don’t always enhance the understanding of a given piece of music; this suggests that one may look beyond the notes on the page (beyond what you hear in this EP) and possibly turn to cultural understandings to perceive the music. As discussed earlier, the clicks are not merely soundscapes but cultural artifacts; therefore, much of how I composed the work is *poietic* and a*esthetic* in its foundations (the former being music creation while the latter pertains to its reception).[102]

The *poetic* foundations are built using material found in lived experiences. The meaning embedded in the text, verbal expressions, and, at times, isolated clicks are all rooted in the *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa* cultures. Thus, my voice is this work's main object and subject as I produce these isolated clicks and perform several cultural artifacts as an embodied work. Meaning is found within the culture linked to what the sound of a click expresses. These are either completely embedded in the text from the language or expressed as singular sonic events; how you hear these, excluding the original, unmanipulated sounds, is all transformed using electronic tools, i.e., the *esthetic*

[101] Quote found in Jonathan Dunsby, “Music and Semiotics: The Nattiez Phase,” *The Musical Quarterly,* 69, no. 1 (1983): 33.
[102] Jonathan Dunsby, “Music and Semiotics: The Nattiez Phase,” *The Musical Quarterly,* 69, no. 1 (1983): 30.

foundation is achieved through the resultant blend of digital signal processors (hereafter, DSPs), such as time delays, pitch shifters, and synthesizers and these expressions discussed before.

Capturing these clicks is possible through several modern technologies, specifically by employing electroacoustic transducers (microphones and loudspeakers) at various stages of the composition process. The evolution of the digital audio landscape, with digital audio workstations (hereafter, DAW(s)) becoming increasingly sophisticated, has significantly enhanced the appeal of immediate performances. I adhere to the tradition of Babbitt and many other contemporary electronic music composers who prefer this method, such as Pamela Z, Imogen Heap, Sevdaliza, and FKA Twigs (my contemporaries), who all compose music of different styles and genres in digital audio landscapes. My process followed three main steps: collecting a database of click sounds, sampling click sounds, and manipulating click sounds (more on this later). All original, unaltered clicks are produced by me and recorded into a DAW using an RØDE NT1 5th Generation microphone.[103] I chose this microphone for its high-quality sound capture, a characteristic typical of condenser microphones, which is essential for fieldwork recordings. Additionally, every variation of clicks discussed in Chapter 1 is included in these recordings.

The musical environment in which *Evolve in the African State of Mind* was created follows commonly practiced models within commercially successful radio-based genres of music. The music here largely uses electronically synthesized instruments, especially genres in which this work is rooted, namely *Kwaito,* Hip-hop, Dance, and

[103] Depending on when you are reading this document, this microphone may no longer be in production, thus any condenser microphone can work.

Electronic. *Kwaito* (similarly, Dance and Electronic) is a genre of music that allows one to express newfound freedoms or, as Xavier Livermon states in his book *Kwaito Bodies,* "to the outside listener, *Kwaito* may seem apolitical, unengaged, reactionary or even regressive, the music and its culture stand as an important site of politics […]"[104] This genre is rooted in many styles of music ranging from Black American-based hip-hop styles and South African-based traditional styles like *Mbaqanga* and *Kwela* and more popular styles like Afropop.[105] In addition, the environment employs practices found within *musique concrète* in that any naturally occurring sounds heard are samples taken from the database mentioned before that have been manipulated using various electro-acoustic tools. Using *musique concrète* elements in a work had become common since 1948 when Pierre Schaeffer first explored these methods.[106] Essentially, the clicks I produce from my mouth only begin to sound different based on altering specific sound parameters within DAWs—more on this later.[107]

As technology progresses, composing music completely digitally while incorporating analog principles has become increasingly possible—this is electronic music. Composing in such an environment is also important due to contemporary practices. In a digital environment, electronic music involves recreating sound materials using voltage-controlled oscillators, similar to synthesizers (like the RCA Synthesizer mentioned in Chapter 2).[108] In my session, I use the following electronic synthesized instruments: Black Diamond synthesizer, Future Strings synthesizer, Glass Marimba, African Kit, Deep Bass House Drums, Electronic Pop Drums, Trap Door Drums,

[104] Xavier Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies: Remastering Space and Subjectivity in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Duke University Press, 2020), 4.
[105] Ibid., 195-204.
[106] Barry Schrader, Schrader, Barry. *Introduction to Electro-Acoustic Music.* Prentice-Hall Incorporated, 1982, 2.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.

Rhythmic Drums, 808 Flex Drums, Chopped Piano synthesizer, Steinway Grand Piano, Emergeance Synthesizer, and Liverpool Bass. These instruments were chosen based on my enjoyment of the sound and how well they blended, as well as how well they can situate themselves in commercially successful radio-based genres. Thus, everything heard in the EP consists of pre-recorded materials, including the database of clicks or sounds recorded during the composing process. Nevertheless, this work has also been crafted with live performance in mind, allowing certain elements to be performed in live performance settings, such as each song's stanzas or improvised clicks.

Over the past five years, I have observed that the practice of EPs has evolved in the commercial radio-based music industry. Before, EPs were opportunities to add more music not present in the Long Play version (hereafter, LP) of a body of work. These EPs featured remixes or new collaborations on songs from the LP, or entirely new songs within the same sound environment. In today's streaming culture, EPs serve as a platform for aspiring artists to present shorter bodies of work, compared to an album (the Long Play), where they can share their music and the sound world they are exploring. This is where I position my EP. However, unlike most EPs that consist solely of songs, I present a blend of songs and pieces. I have composed it with the intention that a listener will experience it without interruptions while having the option to select individual items to listen to ad hoc. Thus, pieces and songs interweave as you listen through this work.

Use of Language

I am the author of the text in this work.[109] These songs include spoken, sung, or rapped lyrics featured in "I Promise," "I Am Black," *"Sithi Gqi!," "Cha Bo!,"* and "Give My Mind Back (interlude)." Some songs, *"Sithi Gqi!"* and *"Cha Bo!," are* performed in *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa,* while others are performed in English as can be seen in the example below.

> But it's plain to see that you don't realize it
> You forced it all upon us, never disguised it
> Hidden in plain sight in front of my eyes
> I am no longer available for these lies.[110]

Referring back to what was discussed in the introduction, South Africa continues to grapple with institutionalized forms of oppression rooted in legacies that perpetuate issues such as racism and sexism, contributing to the silencing or erasure of Indigenous culture—this is the "it" mentioned in the quoted stanza. Consequently, at times, this text addresses the proverbial "colonizer." The "you" referred to in the previous text pertains to those who choose to perpetuate these harmful practices—the "colonizer." This is where "I Promise" is situated, the "African child" speaking to the "colonizer." When I say, "I promise I will not tell any more of these lies," I commit to consciously strive to be anti-racist and anti-sexist—essentially, against any forms of oppression present in society. The lies embedded in society represent those forms of oppression, like the trivialization of Indigenous knowledge. This aspect is important for a composer as writing is not a siloed event. I believe this decision was not made solely by me but by those who paved the way for our generation to exist—as the American poet Maya

[109] Refer to Appendix A for the full text.
[110] "I Promise," track 2 on Nkululeko Zungu's, *Evolve in the African State of Mind*, Independent, 2025.

Angelou acknowledged in her poem “Our Grandmothers": “I go forth alone and stand as ten thousand.”[111]

The idea is that I am shaped by the struggles and efforts made by my ancestral heritage. Therefore, while listening to the stanza that precedes the one mentioned above, you will hear interjections performed to display this, to mimic one person interrupting another’s speech. The interruptions are the words written in parentheses as though a correction of my singular approach (i.e., individualism) is taking place and making room for the plural—the ten thousand with whom I walk. Sonically, these interruptions are achieved by employing digital signal processes: looping and warping. Combining these two helps achieve the glitching effect heard during this performance. This text sets the stage for the rest of the EP, featuring affirmations of identity in the statement, “I Am Black,” declarations of existence in “*Sithi Gqi!”* and assertions of independence articulated in “*Cha Bo!”*

> I promise…I promise I will not tell any more of these lies.
> This choice… this choice was made for me before I was (they were)
> Now, (are), let it be… breathe in me…
> Dreams that were (are) meant to be lived by those before me, roaming the world now lost.[112]

Before the final piece is played, an interlude titled “Give Back My Mind” features English text. This text is introspective and speaks indirectly to the “colonizer.” The final question the “colonizer” must answer is, “How do we win?"—where “we” refers to Indigenous people.

[111] Gloria Wade-Gayles, “Our Grandmothers, Maya Angelou [poem]” in *My Soul Is A Witness: African-American Women’s Spirituality,* edited by Gloria Wade-Gayles, 13-17. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.
[112] “I Promise,” track 2 on Nkululeko Zungu’s, *Evolve in the African State of Mind*, Independent, 2025.

Tiers of Click Sounds

Clicks have been explored in three ways: text, verbal expressions, and electronically manipulated textures (see Table 1). Each use progresses from clicks in language to clicks as sonic textures away from language, representing tiers 1, 2, and 3. There is a progression in exploration as one moves away from language, no longer bound by the meanings derived from it. The first tier is founded on Makeba, utilizing *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa* as the text for the various stanzas in the songs. These languages already carry meaning that resonates with Indigenous communities. In the second tier, I employ verbal expressions from these languages, allowing me to perform the clicks expressively. This is a step away from the text, utilizing verbal sounds that sometimes convey no meaning beyond the expression itself, like "*Gqi,"* and at times improvising clicks such as "*qha qha, qho qho."* As a listener, you will recognize the clicks in these two tiers, as they can be audibly heard. However, in the third tier, as manipulated textures, the clicks may not always be recognizable, as they begin to sound different depending on the click quality and the sonic parameters that have been manipulated.

Table 1. A Summary of the Tiered System of Clicks Usage

Tiers	**Use**	**Example**	**Resultant Effect**
3	Manipulated sonic textures	Granular Synthesized *Q* click	Meaning through sonic textures
2	Verbal Expressions	*"Gqi," "Qha qha, qho qho"*	Meaning through expression
1	Text	*"Safika sathi gqi!"*	Meaning through language

Tier 1 – As Text

The overarching idea in the *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa* texts is to communicate ideas about the political struggle in South Africa (even post-*Apartheid)* so that I could speak directly to Indigenous communities who experience these struggles. This sees me incorporating rhetoric commonly used in struggle songs that either acknowledge the

pain of the struggle or encourage those oppressed to stand up and fight, as seen in the following texts: "…*Safa saphel' insizwe somunt' omnyama…"* and *"…Masibheke lent' ethafileni sixoxa ezi 'ngxaki zaseMzantsi..."* (These translate to English as "The black nation has died" and "Let us lay the problems of South Africa on the table and discuss them.")[113] It is common to hear *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa* spoken interchangeably because of the similarity between the two languages and other aspects, like the closeness in proximity. Other *Nguni* languages share a similar experience as one may hear an individual speak *Sesotho* and *isiZulu* in one city (refer to Chapter 1). You will see me do the same in my writing to acknowledge the presence of this duality, as seen in the following text: *"Kodwa unyawo alinamphumulo" (isiZulu),* which is heard after several lines of *isiXhosa.* At times, I have used a specific word from *isiXhosa* because of the presence of the click as seen in the text, *"Ezi 'ngxaki, zibheke phantsi."* The same text in *isiZulu* would be "*Izinkinga lezi, zibheke phansi."* In this example, the *gx* click variant appears in the word "*ingxaki,"* which translates to English as "a problem"- the entire sentence loosely translates to "Put these problems to rest."[114]

Tier 2 – As Verbal Expressions

"*Sithi Gqi!"* and "*Cha Bo!"* are two phrases from the languages. Other examples include *"unqabile"* or "*uthe nqa"* ("You are scarce" and "He was surprised," respectively*.)* These types of expressions that bridge tiers 1 and 3, incorporate text from both languages and verbal expressions that use clicks. What do I mean by expressions that use clicks? These expressions have clicks embedded in them in contrast to those that

[113] "*Sithi Gqi!"* track 2 on Nkululeko Zungu's, *Evolve in the African State of Mind*, Independent, 2025.
[114] Refer to Appendix A for the full text and translations.

do not like *“Umntu ngumntu ngabantu”* or “Akulahlwa umbeleko ngakufelwa.”[115] “*Sithi Gqi!”* (other morphologies include *“**U**thi gqi!”* for singular and *“**Ni**thi gqi!”* for plural) is an *isiXhosa* expression indicating that someone or some people have suddenly appeared. Here, you can hear the *gq* click variant; *“gqi”* has no meaning beyond its role in the expression to signify a sudden appearance through the sonic event of “*gqi”*. Similarly, “*Cha Bo!”* contains the *ch* variant click. However, “*Cha*” translates from *isiZulu* to English as “no,” and in this context, it is used colloquially in *isiZulu* as an emphatic “no,” similar to the phrase “heck no!” in English and the presence of “*bo”* (pronounced “boh”) is the emphasis.

As *“Sithi Gqi!”* begins, you will hear a *Q* click bouncing around the stereo field, interacting with the expression “*gqi”* and the *gq* click. At this moment, the interaction between clicks and DSPs is effectively heard. Tape delays and reverberation further enhance the panning between the left and right channels of the stereo field. Many are familiar with this phenomenon in sound acoustics as an echo, which can be replicated in the digital environment using various methods. One approach is the straight-line delay, a process in which an input signal is fed into a memory bank for later recall, depending on the time delay parameters selected, such as the delay time.[116] In Logic Pro X, it is possible to use various audio delay processors that have a time delay linked to musical note durations, such as half notes, quarter notes, eighth notes, and sixteenth notes (these can also be adjusted to seconds). Another method is feedback delay. This process allows the delayed signal from the output to be routed back into the input,

[115] These are *isiXhosa* proverbs. The first is linked to *Ubuntu*, a relational idea that humans need each other. The second phrase refers to the concept that one should never give up because something has seemingly ended like a human life in death.
[116] Reuben Raban, “Effects 101: Delays Explained,” Splice, accessed November 17, 2024, https://splice.com/blog/effects-101-delays-explained/.

forming a loop (i.e., feedback loop).[117] The sound generated by a feedback loop creates a continuous echo that changes depending on the desired feedback percentage. This can be easily adjusted within a DAW using the feedback parameter dial or knob (see Figure 6 for the tape delay used in this section).

For each *"Gqi"* instance, I allow the sound to ring in the reverberation DSP, configured with a long reverb curve with a 3-second decay. This is how reverberation is used throughout the work. I allow many other musical aspects to ring with the same reverberation configuration in parallel and, at times, to have unique reverberation configurations applied to singular tracks (i.e., in-series for singular moments in the music.) After allowing "Gqi" to ring, I automate the turning off of the DSP almost immediately to ensure the *Q* click is distinctly heard. Additionally, I perform the *Q* click as a rhythmic ostinato by simply articulating the click on beats 2, 3, and 4. Overall, the effect is rhythmic and acts as the refrain for this song, similar to those heard in *Gobisiqolo.* However, where Bhizer used the click embedded in the text, I used both the click embedded in *"Gqi"* and the processed Q click sounds.

[117] Reuben Raban, "Effects 101: Delays Explained," Splice, accessed November 17, 2024, https://splice.com/blog/effects-101-delays-explained/.

Figure 6. Nkululeko Zungu, *“Sithi Gqi!”*, screenshot of the tape delay

At the end of this song, an improvised performance of more expressions are heard. At this moment, I perform a phrase, *“qha, qho,”* a verbal expression that can be understood as the common African American Vernacular English phrase, “*periodt!”* The text *“qha”* is a verbal expression that denotes completeness or that something is finished. However, when used in certain contexts, it can mean several other things like “exactly,” “enough,” “*periodt!”* for example. These are not to be mistaken as the improvised clicks heard at the end of “*Alke,”* the first piece of this work.

Tier 3 – As Manipulated Textures

All three clicks have been manipulated away from the natural sound. I will discuss the clicks in the order they appear in the alphabet (*C, Q, X).* Due to the quick attack of the sound and its resonance, the *C* click is an example of a click whose timbral quality lends itself well to rhythmic-derived music material. Thus, you will hear a rhythmic ostinato performed in *"Cha Bo!"* where the *C* click and its variants are used to build the ostinato. I use the term build here because of how this ostinato pattern is performed. I used a sampler to perform the resultant sound heard throughout the song. In this sampler, I map three pronunciations of the click (taken from the click database of unmanipulated, original sounds). Specifically, I map *"c", "gc,"* and "*ch"* to a MIDI controller, where I use the controller to trigger the clicks as an extension of myself. Doing this allows one to physically play the clicks instead of relying on one's vocal performance, which is important for embracing the rhythmic patterns that may be difficult to perform with the voice.

One can control several aspects within the sampler, as with any synthesizer (see Figure 7 to see the manipulated parameters). For each click sound, I re-tuned pitch material by five negative half-tones as I wanted the *C* clicks, which generally have higher frequencies, to be low and dark in presence without relying solely on equalization. I could achieve this by removing higher frequencies through a low-pass filter in an equalizer, but this only attenuates frequencies. By re-tuning the pitch, I can allow new frequency material (thereby, new timbres) to be present at this re-tuned pitch; I boost the low frequencies through the presence of a low-pass filter, boosting the frequencies around 80 Hz and attenuating the frequencies below this and above 7500

Hz. Before this, the click was passive in sound, commonly heard quietly. This process resulted in the *C* click that is more aggressive. The new aggressive timbres and their rhythmic patterns wonderfully underscore the song's message that asserts independence.

The *Q* click is another one whose timbre suggests it would serve in rhythmically derived music material. The resonant pop of the click enhances this role, akin to claves, and prompted me to think about it as a percussive instrument, further informing my improvised performance of the click. You can hear this in several parts of the EP, particularly at the end of *"Alke"* and "*Sithi Gqi!."* During "*Alke,"* the *Q* clicks—consonant sounds combined with vowels that I performed aleatorically—interact with synthesized electronic instrumental sounds. However, I aspire to present this section live in future performances, improvising the *Q* click for each show. Thus, the interaction heard in this recording is not the final version; it is simply what was captured in that moment of performance in the studio. Meanwhile, the improvised expressions at the end of "*Sithi Gqi!"* are set in stone.

The other manipulation is one where sampling is used again. In the opening work, "*Alke,"* I use granular synthesis to break the *Q* click down to sound particles, as it were, where I can manipulate the size, shape, pitch, and width of a sound.[118] The name, *"Alke,"* is an abbreviation that I use for the term "*Alkebulan."* This term is one used by Indigenous people to describe the continent of Africa in pre-colonial societies. It is understood as "the garden of Eden," i.e., the beginnings of mankind.[119] I named it this

[118] Sam Elsey, "Granular Synthesis: Turn Sound from Basic to Beautiful," Lunacy, accessed October 7, 2024,https://lunacy.audio/granular-synthesis/?gad_source=5&gclid=EAIaIQobChMImLanjeaDiQMViUL_AR0zfyTVEAAYAiAAEgKfM_D_BwE.
[119] Wiafe, Ernestina, "African Indigenous Epistemologies, Traditions, and Practices Before the Arrival of Europeans," *Educational Considerations* 49, No. 2 (2023): 1.

way due to the sound environment in this piece, which is reminiscent of an environment of beginnings. GRM Spacegrain, the plug-in that allows me to achieve granular synthesis, is configured to manipulate the sound to move around a stereo field (i.e., two channels) but can move to up to 32 channels in a multichannel format, which I used in another work of mine entitled "Echoes of a Dying Breed."[120] This EP is created for stereo listening; thus, the clicks sound in a stereo field. GRM Spacegrain also allows users to edit the sound further within the plug-in, adjusting parameters like delay, reverb, and many more (see Figure 8.) The resultant effect is a sporadic explosion of *Q* clicks, which form another instrumental layer for other songs (can be heard in "I Promise," "I Am Black," and "*Sithi Gqi!").*

These clicks lend themselves well to rhythmically deriving musical material due to two main factors: their quick attack and high resonance. The same can be said for the *X* click. However, pronouncing the *X* click feels like visually observing ripping apart Velcro tapes – as a gradual process. Due to this, I was interested in whether or not the *X* click might be sonically pleasing if it is stretched in time. All clicks are short in time, with the *Q* click being the most resonant. However, even though they are all short in time, one may find that the *X* click is longer as pronounced. At the beginning of "I Promise," two moments of an *X* click are heard (one on the right stereo field and another on the left.) This click is time-stretched using "Paulstretch" within Audacity, another DAW, allowing users to slow an audio file down without changing the pitch quality.[121] The *X* click is generally perceived as harsh in texture when spoken.

[120] That work was the beginning of experiments with using clicks, and there, the goal was to have clicks sound from different directions around a room. You can listen to a performance of this work on the YouTube channel, "Dancz Center for New Music."
[121] Audacity, "Paulstretch," Audacity, accessed February 17, 2025, https://manual.audacityteam.org/man/paulstretch.html.

Interestingly, this harsh quality remained in the resultant sound, which, sonically, can be characterized as ancient dinosaur roars or machine-like (I hear them as all the outcries of ancient civilizations occurring simultaneously). I removed some of the harsh frequencies for pleasant listening. However, I thoroughly enjoyed the unpleasant qualities of the sound, so I did not remove them entirely.

Figure 7. Nkululeko Zungu, *“Cha Bo!”*, screenshot of the sampler

To manipulate the click further, I fed three modulators to a synthesizer (“Alchemy”) and performed the first manipulated *X* click (the dinosaur sounds.) I use the manipulated *X* click in the synthesizer here because the duration of each sound is longer than the original click, which is short. Each modifier uses low-frequency

modulators that trigger waveform shapes at random with an attack and release time of 1000 milliseconds, in addition to the processing happening within alchemy helped me achieve the resultant sound. This sound is now characteristically “alien-like.” I use another DSP named Pitch Shifter to retune the manipulated sounds to lower and higher tunings to access lower and higher sonic qualities.

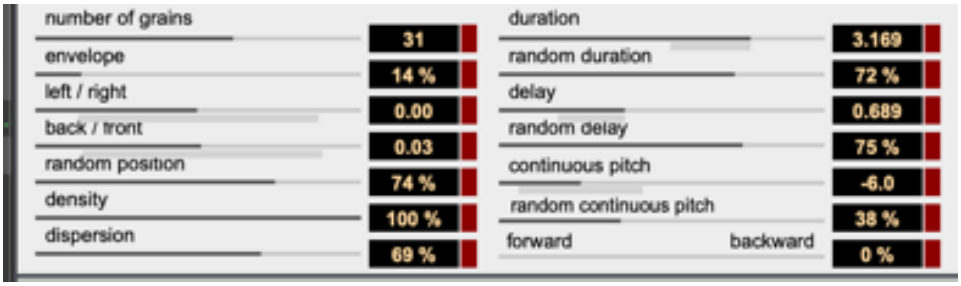

Figure 8. Nkululeko Zungu, screenshot of the plug-in, GRMSpacegrain

Finally, the last piece, “*Umrhubhe,”* consists entirely of manipulated *X* clicks. The name comes from a southern African musical bow instrument of a similar name played by the *amaXhosa*. The *umrhubhe* (the instrument) has evolved from a San-speaking instrument, and the music created with it was used for various ceremonies and everyday tasks, such as putting a child to sleep.[122] The a*maXhosa* bow the instrument, which is why it is called *“Umrhubhe.”* Like “*Qongqothwane,” the name* defines the instrument and sonically imitates the sound it produces (the equivalent San instrument is struck rather than bowed).[123] The bow is placed in the mouth, allowing the performer to control the overtones selected while the instrument is bowed and occasionally sung over. When I manipulated the *X* click through the digital synthesizer, I noticed that as I began using a MIDI controller to turn the sound on, there would be an initial sound

[122] Jo Kunnuki, African Music Conversations: Umrhubhe, A Southern African Musical Bow, YouTube video, accessed February 21, 2025.
[123] Ibid.

before the full resonance appeared, producing another sound. The initial sound reminded me of the melodies created when the *umrhubhe* is played. These melodies are created by manipulating the overtones that develop when the instrument is struck. Thus, I composed this final piece with that in mind.

The initial sound is due to the hold parameter within the synthesizer's modulation envelope (see Figure 9). Generally, digital synthesizers allow us to take control of the attack, sustain, decay, and release a synthesized sound (hereafter, ADSR). The attack refers to how quickly that sound reaches a peak point before decaying. The sound decays until it reaches the sustained point. This point remains until a note-off message is received (i.e., a user releases a MIDI key, for instance), upon which the sound begins to release (further decay) to silence. In this synthesizer, an additional hold parameter, which appears between attack and decay, holds the peak point according to the time parameter. Thus, the melody heard during "*umrhubhe"* uses various held peak points. This melody is continuously interrupted by the other portion of this sound, i.e., the sustain of the synthesizer. Sonically, this sound is reminiscent of the scratching sound made when the *umrhubhe* is bowed.

Thus, this piece wonderfully closes the EP as a lullaby to the "African child," who has been rapping affirmations of identity, declaring existence, and asserting independence throughout. However, as you will hear, this lullaby is sonically more and more overwhelmed by the presence of the scratching sound, which steadily progressed through filters that isolate frequencies between 400 Hz and 100 Hz (further emphasized by boosting the lower frequencies with a low-shelf filter) as though the child is overwhelmed by things set out to disturb their existence.

Figure 9. Nkululeko Zungu, *“Umrhubhe”*, screenshot of the synthesizer

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I will share several key research findings and discuss their value and contributions. Additionally, I will outline this study's limitations and propose future research opportunities to conclude the document.

Evolve in the African State of Mind is a work that aimed to address four main categories: a work written by an African composer, utilizing phonemes from an African language, employing electroacoustic tools, and being crafted in commercially successful, radio-based genres (see Table 2 for a summarized contrast with other composers discussed in Chapter 2). This research explored clicks from *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa,* intending to incorporate them as musical material for a creative project. To be successful in such an exploration, I needed to explore identity markers and acknowledge the clicks as more than sounds, i.e., exploring their semiotics. Two questions arose that informed me: “What does it mean to be African for the Black South African?” and “How can I adopt an insider position in my composition?” African thought leaders like Ngugi wa Thiong’o support the former, which informs the latter. Thus, *Evolve in the African State of Mind* is grounded in identity and expression and how these influence the compositional process.

I use clicks in the *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa* languages to reposition myself from an insider’s perspective. As wa Thiong’o encourages, the African must find ways to view themselves from within their African identity. These clicks allow me to express my identity as an African because they are distinctly African and can be heard among many

tribes across southern Africa, particularly in the *Bantu* tribes of the region. The clicks have primarily been employed to convey ideas through language. In Chapter 1, I discuss the languages, their geographical locations, and linguistic properties, and I provide pronunciation guides for the clicks. This research shows that the exciting clicks, with their unique timbres and rhythmic and pseudo-melodic elements, enhance their potential for use in musical contexts and allow them to evolve within those settings. Although those who do not speak the languages may be tempted to use clicks from *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa*, a semiotic understanding of these sounds is crucial. My perception of a click differs from that of a non-native speaker; thus, creative expressions will differ. Consequently, African composers aiming to incorporate the unique linguistic features of their languages can leverage modern technologies to broaden their horizons.

Table 2. A Table Summarizing the Intersection within my Work

	Milton Babbitt	**Snoop Dogg**	**Miriam Makeba**	**Nkululeko Zungu**
African Composer	NO	NO	YES	YES
Electroacoustic Tools	YES	YES	NO	YES
Commercial Music	NO	YES	YES	YES
Use of Phonemes	YES	YES	YES	YES

In Chapter 2, I provide examples of music that utilize these phonemes and explore the contexts in which they are employed. These musical examples span several decades, representing two distinct periods in South Africa: *Apartheid and post-Apartheid.* These environments inform my writing, sometimes subconsciously, highlighting their significance to the research. In South Africa, vocal music is one of the most prominent styles heard across the nation. Many songs, from "Qongqothwane" by Miriam Makeba (circa 1960) to "Gobisiqolo" by Bhizer (circa 2016), are rooted in Indigenous languages that communicate directly with Indigenous communities in South

Africa. Although the former is sung and the latter is rapped, both use phonemes (clicks) embedded in text to convey meaning through language. Other examples, such as Milton Babbitt's "*Phonemena* for Soprano and Synthesized Tape" and Snoop Dogg's "*Drop It Like It's Hot,"* featuring Pharrell Williams, showcase instances where phonemes are utilized outside of language to convey meaning apart from linguistic context. Babbit uses phonemic structures, combining consonant and vowel-based sounds to create text with incoherent meaning. While Dogg and Williams use consonant sounds to present rhythmic derived music material.

In Chapter 3, I discuss how the elements shared in Chapters 1 and 2 inform my writing of *Evolve in the African State of Mind*. In my work, I utilize electroacoustic tools to develop clicks, unveiling new timbres as well as rhythmic and pseudo-melodic elements for creative expression. Specifically, this is achievable as I leverage digital signal processing to create materials that yield pad-like sonorities, such as the manipulation of the *X* click, or percussive sounds, like the manipulation of the *C* and *Q* clicks. This represents the ultimate manipulation of the clicks where the source material is not always discernible in the resultant sound. However, the clicks can be recognized in the initial and penultimate contexts. These include the text and verbal expressions that use clicks.

I look forward to researching clicks beyond the exploration shared in this EP. I will examine aspects not addressed in this work, such as additional click variants and click expressions, and discover new timbres within these for creative material. What has been confirmed in this body of work is that clicks from *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa* are substantial enough to serve as musical material (they do not need to be conveyed

through language alone). Eventually, I will expand to non-*Bantu* tribes and explore linguistic elements through collaboration with the *San* people of southern Africa. The clicks fit well in this EP, which features *Kwaito,* Dance, and electronic genres. However, research to be pursued in the future will investigate other styles within commercially radio-based genres like pop and funk, as well as how well these sonorities blend in.

As a composer who also performs my works, my performances greatly influence my composing. Therefore, much of this composition is embodied, stemming naturally from the clicks and verbal expressions (they emanate from my mouth), along with the body's movement expressed through dance. This approach is commonly observed in commercially successful radio genres, as artists are generally expected to convey their emotions beyond merely singing a song or playing an instrument. The movement of the body is of significant importance. Moreover, the academic field is increasingly incorporating more radio-based genres into our music studies. Thus, choosing to write in commercially successful radio genres is a deliberate decision on my part. My work contributes to the research of African composers who bridge the radio-based music industry and academia.

This research project was conducted on budding ground. In other words, what you hear in the EP and read in this document is not the ultimate exploration of the clicks. The study aimed to plant the seed for me and any other African composer who wishes to start seeing their writing through the lens of their African identity.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

TEXT AND TRANSLATIONS BY NKULULEKO NKANYEZI ZUNGU

*text that appears in parentheses represents text performed in the backing vocals of the EP.

**The full text can be found in the left column. Where appropriate, English translations can be found in the right column.

Track 2, “I Promise”

Full-Text

**I promise,

I promise I will not tell any more of these lies

This choice, this choice was made for me before I was *(they were)

Now (are) let it be

Breathe in me

Dreams that were (are) meant to be

Lived by those before me roaming the world now lost

But it is plain to see that you don’t realize it

You forced it all upon us, never disguised it

Hidden in plain sight in front of our eyes

I am no longer available for these lies

Track 3, "I Am Black"

Full-Text	**English Translation**
Verse 1	**Verse 1**
I am B.l.a.c.k.	
Is there anyone who can stand beside me?	
Ingathi wena awuyazi	It seems you do not know
Yes, I am rich in melanin, *okay!*	
Oh ho, you cannot take it	
Moving in the drums (*uNkuza)* made it	
Deep rooted in the land of Eve	
Standing next to Adam, the geneses.	
Dark, rich, and bold is the way that	
I should have grown up, then made it.	
Alkebulan, yea, they named it.	
Gold empires they invaded.	
Rocked by this trauma, (I'm over it)	
Generations nations (sensations)	
We are strong and mighty *en vogue*	
Never lose your fucking control[124]	

[124] Several expressions feature in this stanza from *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa* as well as African American Vernacular English, "*oh ho"* that is understood as an expression displaying impatience; "okay!" understood as an emphatic expression.

Track 4, "*Sithi Gqi!"*

Full-Text	**English Translation**
Verse 1	**Verse 1**
Siphum' ebumnyameni	We come out of darkness, now we have
safika sathi gqi elizweni!	arrived in the country.
Siphambana so?!	You perceive us as crazy?! Well, we
Safa saphel' emhlabeni.	have witnessed our people being killed.
Abana lutho, thina esingenayo.	They don't have anything that we don't.
(Hayi,) abana lutho, qha thina, sinovalo.	*(*No,) they possess nothing; we are just timid.
Safa saphel' insizwe somunt' omnyama,	The black nation has suffered,
kodwa lento ingajika (jika), baba.	But this can be reversed, father.
Mara baya sibulala kodwa, phela, Sithi gqi!	They do kill us, but we should always arrive.
Refrain	**Refrain**
Sithi gqi! gqi!	We must arrive![125]
Sithi gqi! (hayi, masithi gqi!)	We must arrive!
Masithi gqi! gqi!	We must arrive!
Verse 2	**Verse 2**
Ezi 'ngxaki, 'zibeke phantsi	Put these problems within South Africa to rest

[125] This text is loosely translated, this verbal expression is explained further in Chapter 3.

(Okanye,) masibheke lent' ethafileni sixoxa ezi Or, put them on the table so we can

'ngxaki zaseMzansi discuss them

See, my English so fluent

You can understand every word I say so eloquently

But that's not the case when I switch up

Giving you this click, click, clack on the beat

In the streets, giving you heat

Like I'm global warming burning under your feet

Can you even comprehend what's under this beat?

Random sense to you, sickening to me

Shared down generations aurally

Minding our business, we were so happy

Just disturbed by the West...

Kodwa unyawo alinamphumulo The foot does not have a nose.[126]

[126] This is a direct translation. This phrase is a proverb that speaks to the wrongdoing in people's lives. When one gets away with doing something wrong, it does not mean that it will remain that way because one does not know tomorrow's events – in the same way, the foot cannot smell.

Track 5, "*Cha Bo!"*

Full-Text	**English Translation**
Refrain	**Refrain**
Cha bo! cha bo! Sithi (hayibo!)	Heck no! We say (no)[127]
Cha bo! cha bo! Sithi (cha!)	
Cha bo! cha bo! Sithi (hayibo!)	
Cha bo! cha bo! Sithi (cha bo!)	
Cha bo! cha bo! Sithi (cha bo!)	
Cha bo! cha bo! Sithi (hayibo!)	
Cha bo! cha bo! Sithi (cha!)	
Cha bo! cha bo! Sithi	
Verse 1	**Verse 1**
Soze sinikezele lonto bayifunayo	We will not give in to what they want
Kunini sinyamezele, le nonsense	How long have we endured the
yabamhlophe apha pho,	treatment of white supremacy over here
eMzansi nase-global earthi	over in South Africa, and the globe at large
Niyayiva lento? (yho)	Do you hear what I am saying?
Ngithi, yebo, nina bansundu	I am saying, you, Black people, you
ninovalo ninovalo!	are so timid!

[127] This text is loosely translated, this verbal expression is explained further in Chapter 3. During these passages, you will hear other voices exclaiming verbal expressions in *isiZulu* that are understood as "no," "by no means," "not at all," and so on!

Verse 2

Ah ah, nancy, did you get up on your feet to get prancy

Just get up on your tippy toes, *dancy*

This wacky beat of clicks is fancy

Yea, I said, fancy, *dancy,* prancy

You aint never met a brother like me

You aint never sweat a brother like me

You aint never felt a nigga like me

You're thinking, “Huh,

How can he be so dark and lovely?!”

Verse 3	**Verse 3**
Sesikhathele manje, babona sinje,	We are tired, now, they are always
siphuma sonke si-just *“mm”*	looking at us, but we showed up looking
	“mm”
I will never *stoep* down to your level	
This Zulu is on-Leon your Schuster-ing	
this pot like *umphokoqo* on a winter’s night	
Sela amasi sifak’iswekile	Drink *amasi* with sugar[128]
It’s the only way to do it right	
Qha ke	Period
Go fight with *uMa wakho*…	Go argue with your mother
Asitshintshe lapho!	Let’s change this around

[128] **“***Amasi”* is a popular fermented milk product in South Africa commonly mixed with *umphokoqo*), a maize meal (referenced in this stanza).

Verse 4

Darker the berry, the sweeter the juice

You can never walk a mile up in my shoes

Spiritual oozing down in these boots

But never get drunk, just get fucking loose

Hips moving left to right, got you struggling,

mumbling and sweating right?

So thick you just gotta bite your tongue

Come over here, boy, come bite my tongue

Verse 5

Cha boy, *woza lapho*

Ngithi yebo, come stand with me

This night is about you and me

Our skin and dance moves they envy

Bethi vosho

Get down on your knees

Get down low, right down to the beat

Then bring it up, move with your chest

Screaming at the top of our lungs

Singing *cha bo!*

Verse 5

No boy, come over here

I am saying, yes, come stand with me

Hit the *vosho*[129]

[129] The *vosho* is a South African dance characterized by individuals squatting and kicking, simultaneously.

Track 6, “Give My Mind Back (interlude)”

Full-Text	**English Translation**
Refrain	**Refrain**
Umbono wami!	My frame of mind
Give my mind back (umbono wami)	Give my mind back (my frame of mind)
Give my mind back	
Give my mind back (umbono wami)	Give my mind back (my frame of mind)
Give my mind back, give my mind back	
Give my mind back	
Verse	
Misrepresented	
Sitting in the corner of my life, rejected	
Are my feelings respected?	
Bantu education systems infected we	
See, it’s crazy to live in South Africa	
There is nothing for the Black man, so how do we win?	
How do we win?	
How do we win?	

APPENDIX B

Evolved in the African State of Mind EP[130]

[130] Can be listened to online at my website: harmonizeto.com or via streaming services.