

GUMBOOTS, BHACA MIGRANTS, AND FRED ASTAIRE: SOUTH AFRICAN WORKER DANCE AND MUSICAL STYLE¹

by

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This article is dedicated to the memory of gumboot dancer Jonney Hadebe, or 'C to C', who died of cancer in the Centacow mission hospital near Creighton in southern KwaZulu Natal on 12 January 1996.

On Saturday 6 January 1996, gumboot dance team leader Blanket Mkhize threw a party and slaughtered a sheep at his homestead in the southern part of KwaZulu Natal. He had informed his local chief that he and his neighbours would be welcoming to his homestead ourselves, the two white women that he had taught to gumboot dance in Durban in 1985. As with all traditional Zulu celebrations, an animal was slaughtered and its meat shared with the community and guests, *utshwala* (traditional sorghum beer) was brewed beforehand and competitive song and dance took place. Blanket's own sons and their friends who lived in Jolivet (near Ixopo) had been rehearsing their gumboot dance team, and a second team arrived in a mini-bus taxi from Creighton, the Bhaca² area in southern KwaZulu Natal. Most of the members of the second team were migrant workers employed by the parastatal company Spoornet that was formerly the state-controlled South African Railways.

As is typical of gumboot dance, the team of dancers from Bulwer was heralded by a guitarist and concertina player playing a cyclical riff that moved between the tonic, subdominant and dominant chords. The leader of the team came ahead of the dance team who moved into the performance space with a stylised walk, their arms outstretched at the sides of their bodies. He was dressed slightly differently from the others, all of whom had on the traditional black wellington boots, baseball caps, black trousers tied at the knee with white handkerchiefs, and 'cowboy' shirts. One or two of the dancers had tied pieces of wire with bottle tops strung on them around the lower part of their boots, to create the sound of rattles. Occasionally, they punctuated this movement by hitting their boots together at the ankles in a quick rhythmic pattern. They circled around the open space in the homestead, and then moved into

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² The southern part of KwaZulu Natal has historically been inhabited by the southern Nguni peoples: the Xhosa and Mpondo. In the early nineteenth century, the Bhaca and Mfengu peoples fled the rampages of Zulu king Shaka, and came to live in the southern region. The Bhaca speak Zulu (with some Xhosa influence) (Readers Digest 1994:64).

a stationary straight line formation, with the leader and musicians standing apart from the rest of the team.



Gumboot dancers from Bulwer, mostly Transwerk-Spoornet (railway) employees, at Blanket Mkhize's homestead, Jan. 1996. Photo: Eric Grau.

While the dancers waited for the leader's call, they 'marked time' with a quick marching movement on the spot. The leader paced up and down in front of the team, checking the attire and making sure that everyone was standing in the correct position. The stronger dancers usually stand at the outer ends of the line, with the weaker ones in the middle. "*Lef-light*"³ called the leader and the team responded with a quick hitting of the boots together as they continued to march on the spot. He began to call out a series of commands more aggressively. The team of dancers responded with precision and power. "Attention!" "Attention!" "Two-Attention!" "Nasisalutho!". The leader continued to randomly shout out a series of commands. Each of these called for a fixed pattern of steps that had been composed by individual dancers and learnt by team members over time in many rehearsals.

The gumboot style of dance draws on a variety of dance sources: Bhaca traditional dances such as *ngoma*; minstrel performance; popular social dances such as those that accompanied jazz music performance in the 1930s and 40s — the jitterbug for example; and most obviously, the tap dance popularised through films of Fred Astaire and Gene Kelley. Gumboot dancers may have been influenced by touring black tap dance groups (Erlmann 1991:100). Black South Africans who

³ 'Lef-light' refers to marching orders — left-right, but in the Zulu language there is no 'r' sound. Frequently, the 'r' sound is verbalised as an 'l' sound.

served in World War II certainly returned to the country and used tap dance in stage performances like the 1950s musical revue *Zonk!* and the international production of *King Kong!*⁴ The aesthetic of gumboot performance also embodies the regimentation of military marching and the discipline required of labour working underground in the mines. The dancers are expected to respond quickly, without hesitation, regardless of what the leader commands. Precision of movement — starting and ending on the same beat — is crucial to effecting a powerful performance.

The community of people that had gathered at Blanket's homestead that day stood in a circle around the dancers. Those watching these dancers hardly noticed the dust kicked up by the fast moving footwork, boot-slapping and thumping on the ground, as the group performance intensified. Women ululated and danced in front of the dancers; men whistled, everybody cheered enthusiastically at the sharpness and discipline of this team of dancers who were in peak condition on that warm January morning. The leader paced back and forth across the line of dancers, occasionally blowing on his police whistle to keep his team alert and responsive. "*Abelungu!*" (a derogatory term meaning White People!) "*Amaphoyisa!*" (Police!) "*GwazamaZulu!*" (Stab the Zulu!) "*Germiston!*" (the name of a mining town) and "*Jowanisberg!*" (Johannesburg!).

Sometime in the middle of the collective performance of "*amadoubles*", the leader called for "*singles*", the highly competitive solo performances by individual team members, where each man demonstrates his improvisatory skills in gumboot dance performance. It is particularly in these singles that the links with the tap dancing of Hollywood film stars such as Fred Astaire and Gene Kelley is evident. With each new improvised sequence, the power of performance increases. Selected members of the community began to throw small coins at the performers, to communicate to the dancers and the rest of the onlookers which of the soloists they favoured. The more coins thrown, the better the spectacle. With its improvised solos and fixed arrangements, gumboot dance created a parallel structure with the musical form of a jazz ensemble.

The practice of throwing money has a long tradition in black performance culture. Coplan (1985:76) describes the auctioneering and bidding on performance that characterised *shebeen* (drinking establishments) culture in the slumyards of the cities in the 1930s and 40s. Erlmann (1991:139) cites a 1917 description of 'bidding' in performances in KwaZulu Natal. Hugh Tracey describes these practices in urban townships in the 1940s in this way:

In many concerts, members of the audience show their appreciation by showering pennies upon the stage, or by walking up and putting silver in a saucer. The "Turn" will oblige just so long as the pennies fall. It is an infallible indication of the degree of popularity

⁴ Local newspaper reports of *Zonk!* describe tap dance as part of the programme, and the programme notes for the London performance of *King Kong!* describe tap dance as part of the show. (One of these programmes and the cast recording of *King Kong!* are in the International Music section of the British Library).

(1948:xi).

Finally, the leader called “*Shiyalekhaya*”. All the dancers reformed the straight line to ‘leave behind at home’, as the leader had instructed. There were a few more patterns danced and finally the performance ended, as freshly slaughtered (and grilled) meat was passed around to all in attendance.

While it was not specifically recognised by the dancers on the day, the 1996 celebration amongst gumboot dancers coincided with the centenary of gumboot dance performance as a black, predominantly male, genre that emerged amongst Bhaca migrant workers from southern KwaZulu Natal. These men migrated, sometimes by foot and often by train,⁵ to and from both the gold mines in Johannesburg⁶ and harbour and railway work in the port city of Durban, from the late 1890s. The gumboot dancers that we learnt from in 1985,⁷ and those with whom Carol has continued to work, are either employed in the city of Durban, or living there hoping to find work. The majority come from the Bhaca region near Creighton or Port Shepstone.

In this paper we examine gumboot dance as a genre of performance that straddles the rural and urban spaces within which migrant workers from southern KwaZulu Natal have operated for the last one hundred years. We suggest that while there may be traditional characteristics embedded in the performance — the Bulwer-Creighton style is considered to be stylistically connected to *ngoma* performances — the environment most critical to the formation of gumboot style was the peculiar social space of the gold mine in and around the city of Johannesburg. For most Bhaca migrants to *eGoli*, the City of Gold, work and leisure were continually controlled by structures of authority and surveillance in the form of mine bosses, managers and police. In this context, all space was public — there was little room for individual expression or privacy. The nature of this experience gave rise to the particular aesthetic of gumboot dance performance, regardless of who now performs the dance.

We discuss the formation of gumboot style and aesthetic in three parts. First, we trace the early roots of gumboot dance performance that draw on nineteenth century traditions of local Bhaca culture, of Anglo-American minstrel performance and mission culture. Second, the dance form is located in what Moodie (1983) calls ‘mine culture’, the highly controlled work and leisure space which so powerfully shaped this dance in practice and aesthetics. We outline how the creation and development

⁵ Both the Cape and Natal had railways that reached the borders of the South African Republic (what was the Transvaal until 1994, where most of the gold mining took place) (Readers Digest 1994:233), and Pirie (1993:722) writes that while Zulus were generally dissuaded from crossing the border into the Transvaal by the legislation of high rail tariffs, concessions were granted to workers from Basutoland, Griqualand and Pondoland who caught trains at Port Shepstone, Creighton and Richmond. The latter three places are all stations close to where the gumboot dancers we have worked with, and their fathers and grandfathers who were migrant workers, come from.

⁶ Blanket Mkhize’s father left for work in the gold mines in Johannesburg in 1939; Blanket has never been to the mines, but has worked both for the Railways and on a factory assembly line since 1970. He returns home to his ‘farm’ near Ixopo on week-ends once or twice a month.

⁷ See Muller and Topp (1985).

of gumboot dance style narrates the details of the rigid labour relations found within the confines of the mine. Third, we discuss gumboot dance in its contemporary context in terms of the politics of gender, local and global community construction and ethnic identity. In this context, gumboot dance embodies what Hannerz (1994) calls the 'global ecumene' — the simultaneous presence in a single performance of ancestral beliefs and dance style, Hollywood cowboy and tap dance films, nineteenth century Anglo-American minstrel performance, industrial labour relations, European folk music, mission Christianity and ethnic tensions. In this sense, the genre is neither African nor Western, Christian nor ancestral, neither traditional nor modern. Much like its migrant practitioners who are neither fully urban nor fully rural, gumboot dance exists in the interstices of South African society. While its practitioners are Zulu-speaking, they are not Zulu ethnic extremists, such as one finds in the membership of Mangosuthu Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party. As one member told me recently, "We belong to no [political] party."

Early history of gumboot dance

Drawing on Clegg (1982), Hugh Tracey (1952), Muller and Topp (1985) and his own archival evidence, Erlmann (1991:99-100) argues that *isicathulo* or gumboot dance was developed around mission stations in KwaZulu Natal with the introduction of footgear to African peoples by missionaries in the late 19th century. He cites a reference to mission-educated ragtime composer Reuben Caluza performing *isicathulo* in 1916. Erlmann later suggests that a similar step dance was developed by Bhaca migrants from the 1920s in Durban.

Our more recent research suggests that while Erlmann seems to have been on the right track with regard to the historical development of *isicathulo*, there are at least two separate streams in the creation of contemporary gumboot dance performance. The one strand is characterised by the word *isicathulo* and is linked with the Inanda Valley (where Caluza spent many creative years) and the other strand is defined by the words *idadla*, *isiBhaca* or simply *gumboots dance*. *Isicathulo* appears to be associated with a light stepping dance style of the black middle class, mission or school-educated community and *idadla* to the least visible of working class people. Referring to a heavier style of performance, more strongly linked with *ngoma* dance,⁸ *idadla* is specifically connected to the *amaBhaca* people originally from the southern coastal region of KwaZulu Natal. These are the people who are known to have been the toilet cleaners — those who worked at night sanitizing latrines. Because of the low social status accorded the *amaBhaca*, retrieving a solid narrative of that strand of gumboot dance history has been quite difficult. Nevertheless, the *amaBhaca* were also miners on the Witwatersrand in the early decades of the century, and the gumboot dancers we have done most of our work with are all *amaBhaca*. Thus, while parts of our historical narrative will refer to both strands of gumboot dance performance, others will obviously pertain to only one of the styles.

⁸ Thami Jali, personal communication with CM, August 1996.

It is not easy to know specifically to what extent gumboot dance performance generally was contiguous with traditional cultural forms. There are several elements of gumboot dance that are characteristic of precolonial Nguni music and dance practices. These include: the call-and-response interaction between dance leader and the rest of the team; the competitive element both between dance teams and within the teams,⁹ as it occurs between individual dancers (this is particularly so in the improvised solos that team members perform); the importance of audience/community support in the performance context; the comical element in performance (drawn from both traditional and minstrel performance); and the manner in which gumboot dance engages with, and is constituted from the substance of everyday life and experience.

What clearly distinguishes all gumboot dance from earlier rural practices is its use of footgear for its performance. Precolonial dance forms are generally thought to have been performed barefoot. One Zulu name given to gumboot dance, *isicathulo*, provides the first indication of innovation. Initially, the word referred to the leather shoes worn by warriors who had to travel long distances. In the nineteenth century, it also began to refer to shoes and rubber wellington boots, both of which were crucial apparel when an African came into contact with Europeans and Americans on mission stations and farms, or later in the urban areas. In all cases, *isicathulo* constituted signs of contact with the western or non-African world.¹⁰ The root of the word *cathama* means to walk softly, quietly and stealthily. It has been incorporated into two kinds of black performance culture in South Africa: *isicathamiya* and *isicathulo*. The first is the style of music and dance performance recently made famous by Joseph Shabalala and Ladysmith Black Mambazo. In this context it means to walk softly and stealthily, like a cat. The second refers to the opposite, gumboot dance, which is characterised by louder stepping in gumboots, the clapping of hands and slapping of the boots.

As suggested earlier, the first evidence of new dance styles that emerged with the introduction of shoes and boots appears to have been on the mission stations.¹¹ There are several words that point to mission, and by extension, western influence on the formation of these new styles. They are discussed by Cockrell (1987:422). The words are: *thamba*, *boloha*, *isicathulo* and *umqhumqhumbe*. The first, *thamba* (discussed below) refers to dancing in a straight line with uniform movement, controlled by a conductor (usually playing a concertina). *Boloha* is possibly an Afrikaans or Xhosa

⁹ See Pewa (1995) for a discussion on the continuity of traditional [Zulu] aesthetics of competitiveness in urban performances in KwaZulu Natal.

¹⁰ See Bryant (n.d.) *Incwadi Yesingisi NesiZulu* (pp.47-48) in which is contained a discussion about the distinction between European and Native clothing, as to be explained by the European to the native in his own tongue, Zulu.

¹¹ CM's discussions with Creighton gumboot dancer, Steven Shelembe (March 1996), suggest that gumboot dance was not a mission station initiative per se so much as an invention of the Bhaca people. Using shoes, they added imitations of white police spats, over their shoes. Later they changed the shoe/spats idea into gumboots as they purchased boots for work purposes.

derivative of the word 'polka'.¹² It is defined as either a boot dance (and cross-referenced with *isicathulo*), a rough concert or an all night carnival party. As suggested above, *isicathulo* means shoe, boot or sandal; it also refers to a boot dance performed by young boys since the first contact with Europeans. *Umqhumqhumbelo* is perhaps the most intriguing in terms of the development of gumboot dance. It is translated as 'a modern rhythmic dance adopted by certain Christian natives, in which dancing is both individual and in groups' (Cockrell 1987:422). *Umqhumqhumbelo* is also related to the word *umqhuqho*. This translates into the onomatopoeic sound of the trotting of a horse and the clapping of its heels¹³. This reference to the sound of horses ties in with the word used in competitions to indicate poor performance: *ihashi* or horse (Muller and Topp 1985, chapter 7). The matter of horses resurfaces later in our discussion.

In addition to the linguistic evidence, Hugh Tracey (1952:7) suggests that the origins of the dance are to be found in step dances developed in a mission station where traditional Nguni dancing was banned. The Bhaca region is inhabited by several Catholic missions — both Blanket and Jonney were born in Catholic mission hospitals — suggesting the powerful impact of mission culture on local Bhaca communities from the nineteenth century. There is evidence from the Mariannhill Mission Archives (now closed to the general public) of missionaries teaching military drills and marching steps to young black African converts who came to their schools.¹⁴ The sharp sound of shoes on a mission floor would have created a powerful contrast with the softer thud of bare feet on the ground that typified older Nguni dance practices. This notion is corroborated by Jonney's account below in which he says that the dance was initially performed using shoes on the feet and the rubber from gumboots around the legs. There is a suggestion, nonetheless, that mission schools required children wearing shoes to walk quietly.¹⁵

Although Hugh Tracey does not discuss the mines (it is implicit in his 1952 photographic essay) as the centre of the development of gumboot dance in its present form, our teacher Blanket Mkhize is convinced that gumboot dancing originated in the gold mines of Johannesburg.¹⁶ That is certainly where Blanket's father participated in the dance. Along with photographic evidence of gumboot dance on the mines, Tracey locates the next development of the genre in the Durban harbour,

¹² The polka was a popular pastime amongst European immigrants and eventually was indigenised into Afrikaans folk culture. It is now known as the *vastrap*, and has musical accompaniment in the form of concertina or piano accordion, bass, drum and guitar.

¹³ In Zulu the 'q' represents a click produced with the tip of the tongue pressed against the ridge of the palate (McLaren 1933:7).

¹⁴ We were kindly given photocopies of handwritten descriptions of these activities by Veit Erlmann in 1985. We are unable to reference them exactly because we are now unable to check the references in the Mission Archives.

¹⁵ See Muller and Topp (1985:ch.6, n.b) in the section under Musical Drill, 1st Exercise/Marking Time. The second paragraph begins: "The children should be instructed to place their feet on the ground very softly each time, not to stamp, and not to move from their places."

¹⁶ CM personal communication 22 March 1996.

where migrant workers were issued with gumboots when they began to handle chemical fertilizers.¹⁷ Performing outside in both mining or municipal compounds (where migrants were housed) would have required power in the volume of sound, and in this instance boots would have become preferable to the shoes of the mission station.

There are two sets of clues to the other cultural forces that shaped gumboot dance from the late nineteenth century: the following oral history account by team member Jonney Hadebe, and American and English minstrel shows that took place in Durban in the 19th century. Jonney Hadebe's rendition of the early history of gumboot dance was transcribed in a programme note for the South African Railways' gumboot dancers.¹⁸ In this he suggested that

[i]n 1896, subsequent to watching white men tap dancing and clapping their hands, the *amaBacas* [sic] decided to make a dance of their own. They called it the gumboots dance. The dance was a rhythmically performed act of dancing, clapping hands and slapping the calves — the calf muscles being protected by the rubber gumboots.

In the year 1896, the group consisted of eight members in all, six dancers and two playing musical instruments. In those days, the soles of the gumboots were cut off and the dancers wore shoes.¹⁹

With the passage of time, the group became more sophisticated in their dancing performances. They started playing a guitar, concertina, violin and a piano accordion all at the same time. The group presently consists of from twelve to twenty persons. After performing all over the country, where they did their duty towards the younger generation, the group changed their base from Johannesburg to Durban.

The *amaBacas* dance in the SATS [South African Transport Services] tournament and have danced in Johannesburg, Bloemfontein and Durban. I have been a gumboots dancer for the past twenty-three years. Jonney Hadebe [ca. 1978].

Jonney's account is remarkable for the way in which it is reinforced by the evidence contained in secondary literature on black performance culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in South Africa.²⁰ Reference will be made to Hadebe's account through the course of this essay.

¹⁷ The specific details in the historical narrative of gumboot dance remain to be confirmed by oral or archival evidence. Coplan (1985:78) suggests the dance started in urban-influenced dance genres in schools that then spread to the dock workers in Durban and later to the mines in the Witwatersrand. Erlmann (1991:99-101) argues that while middle class performers of *isicathulo* such as Reuben Caluza were dancing as late as 1916 in Durban, it was really a style that developed by intermingling with "rural, urban, mission, and working-class traditions". Erlmann comments that Clegg "maintains that as early as the 1880s Bhaca migrants brought the style to the Reef mines from where it filtered back to Durban. From the 1920s Bhaca workers also constituted an increasingly larger percentage of Durban's migrant labour force" (Erlmann 1991:100).

¹⁸ Shortly after Jonney Hadebe's death, Blanket Mkhize gave CM a piece of paper containing this information when she asked him about the history of gumboot dance.

¹⁹ Steven Shelembe says (CM personal communication, March 1996) that initially the men wore shoes with the rubber from the gumboots around the legs, in imitation of the spats worn by police and army band members. The Bhaca men could not afford the real spats so created their own versions of them.

²⁰ See, for example, Coplan (1985), Cockrell (1987) and Erlmann (1991).

Cockrell (1987:419) suggests that the three most significant American musical cultures that shaped black South African performance in the nineteenth century (and that continue to characterise this performance) were gospel music, the minstrel shows and jubilee singing. Both Cockrell (1987) and Erlmann (1991) provide evidence for the tours of mostly white minstrels from the United States of America (such as the famous *Christy Minstrels*) and England who entertained South Africans with the painted black faces in the nineteenth century. The main exception was the African-American troupe of Orpheus McAdoo that visited South Africa several times in the 1890s.²¹ Cockrell highlights the most outstanding features of the minstrel show, many of which became central to the shaping not only of *isicathamiya* performance (as embodied in Joseph Shabalala and Ladysmith Black Mambazo) but also of the *isicathulo* form of gumboot dance. Cockrell writes:

Perhaps the most striking feature of a typical [American] minstrel show was the makeup used by the performers. In the early years all the entertainers were whites in blackface who wore additional makeup to exaggerate their lips and eyes. Their dress was of two sorts: shabby, ragged, and grotesque to depict southern rural slaves, or fanciful and dandified — replete with tails, white ties, and white gloves, all in excruciatingly bad taste. The troupe was arrayed in a semicircle. The interlocutor was usually named Mr Johnson and sat in the center. He served as the butt of jokes that streamed forth from the endmen, typically called after the instruments they played: Mr. Bones and Mr. Tambo. Other minstrels formed the chorus and played banjos, guitars, fiddles, concertinas, triangles, or other instruments. The entertainment took the form of derisive mimicking of the black man (Cockrell 1987:419).

There are several elements in this account that transfer into *isicathulo* and parts of *idadla* performance: the exaggerated makeup which was still used by black school children in gumboot dance performance in Durban in the mid-1980s,²² the shabby dress for the leader (as the dance leader, Blanket typically wore such attire) and dandy dress for the chorus (smart attire for the team could make or break the group in competition); the leader in the centre (Blanket typically paced up and down in front of the group); satire and humour in the content of performance (Blanket frequently deliberately fell over in performance to make the audience laugh), and finally, musical accompaniment in the form of guitar, fiddle and concertina (this links directly to Jonney's account).²³ The reference to bones is of particular interest and

²¹ This is discussed in Erlmann (1991:ch.2).

²² Personal communication, Thandeka Mazibuko, March 1996.

²³ This instrumentation was popular in nineteenth-century popular music practices, particularly, for example, with English and European women. Evidence for this is to be found on sheet music owned by these women. I have in my own personal collection, gatherings of sheet music for pianoforte that have illustrations of accompanying instruments drawn on the front page. On a piece of sheet music entitled *Christy Minstrels' Popular Songs for the Piano-Forte with Chorus* the additional instruments include the triangle, tambourine, a small horn, banjo, ukelele/mandolin and fiddle. The other powerful model of performance may also have been the emergent Afrikaner folk culture, which may have included a farmer playing a concertina on his verandah in the late afternoon, with possible accompaniment on concertina/piano accordion and violin. Johnny Clegg posits this as an explanation for the kind of musical practices developed by Zulu migrant workers from northern KwaZulu Natal who went to Durban and other towns in search of work in the early decades of this century.

will be discussed below.

Hadebe's account of gumboot dance links its early history to these minstrel performances in several ways. The first is with his reference to "white men tap dancing and clapping their hands". It is quite feasible that the *amaBhaca* saw minstrel shows by white black-faced minstrels in the year 1896. It is not clear, however, if it is tap dancing or simply the complex footwork of minstrel performance that impacted upon these men in that year.²⁴ It seems more likely, that Hadebe is recalling two distinct processes in the development of gumboot dance style: what was recounted to him by older gumboot dancers with regard to minstrel performances in the 1890s, and what he may have seen himself in mining compounds in Johannesburg in the 1950s — films by Fred Astaire and Gene Kelley of tap dancing. Tap dancing is also reported to have been extremely popular at the Bantu Men's Social Centre in Johannesburg in the 1930s (Phillips ca. 1938:297). This would have been the more sophisticated gumboot dancing that Hadebe subsequently discusses.

The second pointer to minstrel influence is Hadebe's description of the early dancers: a group of eight with six dancers and two instrumentalists. Once again, Cockrell (1987:420) provides telling evidence. He cites a quotation from the local Durban newspaper, *The Natal Mercury* (December 28, 1880) which reads:

KAFIR CHRISTY MINSTRELS

a novelty this Christmas, is a troupe of eight genuine natives, bones and all, complete who really get through their songs very well. (My emphasis)

The two instruments may well have referred to the bones and tambo. Cockrell suggests that the bones played by white minstrels were similar to those documented in the examination of indigenous instruments played in South Africa in the early twentieth century by Percival Kirby (1968 [1934]); and that the tambo was incorporated into Zulu language in the word *tamba* (as discussed above). There is an additional point pertaining to the link between minstrel performance and gumboot dance and its transformations, which also pertains to Hadebe's statement about the inclusion of the guitar, as the dance form became more sophisticated. In the handwritten manuscript of the first English-Zulu dictionary compiled by missionary a. Bryant in 1894, the entry for 'guitar' reads as follows: *into e-shaywayo e-nezimTambo* (the thing that is struck or sounded by means of strings or with a bone). *Tambo* clearly refers to both strings and bones. Perhaps it is no coincidence that it is the bones that are replaced with the guitar in gumboot dance performance. In contrast, the concertina is simply translated by Bryant as *inkositini*.²⁵

²⁴ It is not clear from secondary sources when 'tap' dance was first classified as a dance style, though Emery (1972:212) mentions tap dance as part of the "Darktown Follies" performance in 1913. Fast footwork was however, an integral element of dance performance in blackface minstrelsy of the nineteenth century. And it could be this style that Jonney makes reference to.

²⁵ Bryant's manuscript is in the Campbell Collections at the University of Natal, Durban South Africa.

Mining culture and gumboot performance

Mining is hard labour. Moreover, mining as a form of production is hard labour undertaken under conditions of extreme discomfort, exacerbated by tension stemming from the need to watch constantly for signs of potential hazard (Moodie 1983:180).

Whenever you go down into a shaft, you are not sure that you will come out alive. You don't want to think about it... Death is so real you keep on praying and thanking God each time you come out alive (Sotho miner quoted in Moodie 1983:180).

The peculiarities of mine experience, or 'mine culture' have been indelibly imprinted into popular consciousness through the very substance of the older style of gumboot dance performance as practised by the two teams of dancers that performed on 6 January 1996 in Jolivet, near Ixopo. Since none of these dancers is currently involved in mine labour, each performance dramatises the historical experience in which either they or their fathers and other kin were the central actors. While gumboot dance has clear precedents in the radical shifts away from precolonial performance cultures as they were repressed by the mission and remodelled on nineteenth century Euro-American popular culture, we argue that it was the experience of migrant labour in the gold mines of South Africa that most powerfully shaped the distinctive features of what is now called gumboot dance. Jonney Hadebe's account of gumboot dance history provides one insider's view on the historical process of the formation of the style. Perhaps the most revealing source, however, is the dance as practised by these older Bhaca dancers and transmitted to their sons in KwaZulu Natal. Unlike the autonomy of many dance forms in the western world, gumboot dance engages and comments on the exigencies of everyday experience in mine culture.

This analysis of the dance and the drama it divulges will consist of a discussion of both the musical accompaniment to the dance sequences and the sequences themselves that are called out by the leader and responded to by his team. The gumboot data will be interwoven with Moodie's text on the characteristics of mine culture in South Africa. Drawing on this analysis, we shall demonstrate how dance performance inscribes and critiques the peculiarities of migrant experience on the mines. Finally, we suggest ways in which the aesthetics of gumboot dance performance, the metaphors used to articulate good performance derive directly from the fears, dangers and lures of migrant worker culture in the mines.

Mine culture

Moodie characterises mine culture in South Africa as a process of total resocialization for the men who have engaged in mine labour, particularly for those who worked underground. This resocialization impacted upon both the work and leisure time of miners, so that what it meant to be a man in a mine contrasted strongly with what was required of a peasant male in the rural areas of South Africa. From the moment a man enlisted as a mine labourer he engaged with this process of resocialization. Moodie cites several informants who described mining experience as

follows:

One man told me that when he goes to work underground he is not a full person. Another said: "When I am underground I do not think of anything else except coming out of the mine" (cited in Moodie 1983:183).

As with mining worldwide, the occupational culture is characterised by emotions of both pride (in the courage to go underground) and fear of doing so. Moodie suggests that in South Africa, these emotions are intensified because South African mining culture differs from that elsewhere in two ways: the racially structured authoritarianism definitive of the local culture and the inseparability of labour migrancy from mine employment. When a man joined the mines he did so not only for the eight hour workday, but for much of his leisure time as well. He ate, slept and worked within the confines of the mine or the mine compound. In this sense, mine culture was a 'totalising' institution as is Foucault's concept of the prison (Foucault 1977).

Labour migrancy intensified the totalising effect of the mine because men were able to return to their rural homes only infrequently. Release from the stress of mine labour took place within the confines of the mine compound. These were highly controlled residential dormitories in which workers resided for the length of their contract. They were crowded into rooms that may house from 16-80 men at a time. There was therefore, little possibility of private space or time for individual men — even in their time off from work. James writes about the mine compounds. He says:

The compounds were located close to mine shafts, making rapid and efficient mobilisation of labour for work possible. Furthermore, they provided a fit work-force, absenteeism would easily be policed, and strikes could be broken with a minimum of effort (1992:3).

Historically, there have been both organised and unofficial mechanisms for the release of work stresses and the occupation of miners in leisure activities. The official channels were films shown in compounds (Philips 1938), and competitions in sport and traditional dance that were organised by the Chamber of Mines from at least the 1940s (see Tracey 1952, Muller and Topp 1985). This was one of the spaces in which gumboot dance was performed by the Bhaca migrants to the mines, certainly in the 1940s (ibid) and, according to oral history, from much earlier. The unofficial activities (as discussed by Moodie, 1983 and Koch, 1983) included the consumption of alcohol, drugs and sex — either with men or women, either in the compounds or in nearby urban townships, such as the renowned Sophiatown (see Hannerz 1994) and Vrededorp (Abrahams 1989).

Miners underground

Tracey's photographic essay entitled *African Dances of the Witwatersrand Gold Mines* (1952) provides visual documents of a wide range of dances that were performed by migrant workers on the gold mines of the Johannesburg area in the middle of this century. The gumboot dance of the Bhacas is represented in this

collection. While several of the teams of dancers have shoes on, the Bhaca are the only ones wearing the boots that typify mine labour. This dance attire suggests the close relationship between dance content and mine experience that is articulated in contemporary gumboot performance. We argue that the tensions associated with underground experience of Bhaca miners provides the material for the formation of a specifically worker style of dance performance. More than simply reflecting mine experience, it constituted an explicit satire on labour discipline and interaction as shaped by mine and compound experience. This was manifest at several levels, each of which is discussed in this section.

Perhaps the most outstanding feature of gumboot dance performance was the unit of social interaction — the team. Early groups of miners were organised into gangs or teams of workers, each with a black ‘boss-boy’ who was then answerable to the white miner. The boss-boy’s relationship with the white boss frequently came into conflict with his loyalties to his black subordinates, fostering considerable tension between teams, boss-boys and white management. The nature of the relationship between ordinary workers and the boss-boy was embodied in the call-and-response interaction between the dance team leader and the team. In this structure, however, the boss-boy (or dance leader) held total control. Whenever he called and whatever he required, had to be responded to by his team with rigour and precision. He often blew on a ‘police whistle’²⁶ to keep his team in tow. In reality, any worker who did not cooperate put his own life and that of his teammates on the line. As Moodie comments:

[m]iners cope with the tensions of their elemental job in various ways. One is by co-operating closely with each other and by exercising constant care while on the job. According to an observer who worked underground, black miners “are keen that every one of them should do a perfect job...else they all face the risk of danger from falling rocks. They try hard to prevent or minimise accidents at work places by giving advice and helping one another.” Despite ethnic tensions in the compound, black underground workers in South Africa regard themselves as members of their work team first and foremost and do not appear to have any interest in ethnic composition (Moodie 1983:180-181).

Because of both the pervasive danger intrinsic to underground mine labour and the racially loaded relationship between white miner and his boss boy, the interaction between supervisor and workers was an authoritarian one, based upon the immediate response to a set of commands. In the workplace, such authoritarianism characterised labour relations on several levels: between boss-boy and his team as well as on the broader level, between black labourers and white superiors. This style of interaction was entrenched in the racially constituted labour relations of South African mines from the earliest days.

²⁶ Kirby (1968:130-131) discusses indigenised versions of what he terms the European ‘police’ whistle. The reference to ‘police’ obviously pertains to the people who most commonly used this kind of whistle in African experience — the police!

The linguistic manifestation of this pattern of communication became known as *fanakalo*. It was embodied in a series of booklets issued by the Chamber of Mines from the 1920s through the 1970s. There were various titles, such as the 1920 *Miner's companion in Zulu, for the use of miners on the Witwatersrand gold mines (issued by the Prevention of Accidents Committee)*, the 1938 *Miner's companion in English, Afrikaans, Sesutho and Mine Kaffir*, and the 1970s version of *The miner's dictionary in English, Afrikaans and Fanakalo*. *Fanakalo* (meaning 'like this') is defined as a "pidgin language used and sometimes taught as a *lingua franca* on the mines". The preface to the most recent version, *The miners dictionary*, explains the roots of this language as being with Indian workers in (KwaZulu) Natal in the nineteenth century who developed the language while trying to learn English and Zulu simultaneously. It is explained by the Chamber of Mines as being a language that developed between Black and White on the mines, for effective communication in a context of linguistic diversity.

Fanakalo is generally regarded with extreme contempt by black South Africans, who view it as the defilement of languages such as Zulu and Xhosa, as well as being a language of subservience — it consists of a set of instructions issued by the white miner to the black labourers. The majority of words in the 'dictionary' were written alphabetically as commands with exclamation marks. Examples of this include:

Begin!	<i>Qala!</i>	Go Away!	<i>Suka!</i>
Destroy!	<i>Bulala!</i>	Look Out!	<i>Pas Op!</i>
Go Back!	<i>Penduka!</i>	('Pas op' was also the name given to the supervisor)	

This was a dictionary with specific goals — to keep workers safe in an extremely dangerous situation. In this regard, it was compiled with the assistance of the miners and their boss boys. But it also set the precedent for race relations in South Africa, for many decades. The only common language for many black and white South Africans continues to be one symbolised by *fanakalo* — that of master and servant. This pattern of interaction constitutes the core of gumboot dance performance. It does not simply reflect the time worn tradition of a respectful call and response. Rather, it is deeply loaded with mine labour tensions, and frequently caught up in racist patterns of social relationships.

In gumboot dance performance, these commands became the titles of specific dance sequences: *Bulala!* (Destroy, Murder!), *Dayinja!* (Danger!), *Attention!* (Attention!), *Gobek!* (Go back!), *GwazamaZulu!* (Stab the Zulu! or The Zulu Stabs!). Just as a team member underground in the mines never knew what command would be issued next, though he knew how to respond to the series of possible commands at all times, so too, in gumboot dance, a dancer never knows which command the leader will require next. He had to be ready at all times to meet the request or put his team at the risk of loss — of life (when underground) or of not winning the dance competition (in leisure time).

Miners in the compounds

a constant feature of a miner's life in the compound was the continuous presence of mine police in the compounds and state police in the urban areas. Mining police enforced particular modes of behaviour amongst migrants by frequent patrolling, and checks for drugs and alcohol in the compounds. Peter Abrahams (1989:ch.4) describes police harassment of black urban dwellers in shantytowns such as Malay Camp and Vrededorp in the 1940s. Jonney Hadebe attributed the two names ('*AmaPhoyisa!*' and '*AmaBlekjek!*') of a single dance routine to the presence of both kinds of police in Johannesburg (Muller and Topp 1985). The commands represented what the warnings miners would issue to each other when the police were coming. Team leader, Steven Shelembe comments²⁷ that another routine, '*Isihamba nodali*' (going with your darling) was the way around police harassment. If a man walked alone in the urban areas, the police would often harass or arrest him. If, however, he walked along with a woman, they would merely be warned, but seldom arrested. The routine '*stishi*', which refers to a "ragtime-inspired dance routine" (Erlmann 1991:100) similarly lent a respectability to gumboot dancers.

Another less stringent type of worker control in the compounds took the form of films that were regularly shown in the compounds to both educate largely illiterate workers as well as keep them busy in their time off. Phillips (ca.1938) provides a list of some of the films shown in the compounds in the 1930s. These included both Hollywood style entertainment as well as educational materials developed by the Chamber of Mines. Based on the lists of films with Charlie Chaplin, Fred Astaire and Gene Kelley, as well as Jonney Hadebe's own account of the early history of gumboot dance, it has been suggested that later gumboot dance style may have been modelled on the humour and tap dance steps contained in these films. (see Muller and Top 1985 for specific examples of the links). Certainly, the cowboy movies powerfully impacted upon the kinds of attire worn by dancers — such as the handkerchiefs tied around their legs, the cowboy shirts and Stetson hats typical of movies in the 1950s and later.

A third connection between gumboot dance performance and the mining compounds was located in the institutionalization of competitive dance between mining teams by the Reef Consolidated Mines in the 1940s. There are reports of competitive dance on the mines earlier in the century, that were open to the public.²⁸

²⁷ CM personal communication, March 1996.

²⁸ Mine dancing was open to the public until, in 1929, when the University of the Witwatersrand held an open day for all mine dancing. The resident anthropologist had the texts of the songs translated, revealing that, unlike assertions such as those of Hugh Tracey that "the dances are exactly what they appear to be, movement for the love of movement, without a hidden, secondary or spiritual meaning" (Tracey 1952:2), the songs and dances were critical of the workplace and frequently jeered at mine supervisors and other whites in authority. This upset the public to such an extent that public performances were outlawed for some time (Keith Breckenridge, personal communication, March 1996). Of course, once the dances could be viewed within the confines of a stadium or arena, they could again be considered harmless and able to express "that cosmic reality which makes men dance together for the joy of dancing and for the proof of living" (Tracey 1952:2).

In 1943, this mine dancing was institutionalised as a tourist activity with the construction of a semi-circular stadium at one of the mine compounds.²⁹ The ambiguous relationship between capitalist manager and worker dance team has not been fully explored as yet, suffice to say that the very nature of traditional performance was powerfully shaped by the money set aside for dance attire, (frequently more imagined by white compound managers rather than representing any kind of authentic historical costuming) and the criteria by which teams were judged (usually by white adjudicators).³⁰

A fourth though less obvious link between miners and the compounds is embodied in the commands “*Skhula numtwana!*” (the child is still growing!), “*Shiyalekhaya!*” (Abandoned at home!) and “*Germiston!*” (the name of a mining town where Jonney first worked; he composed the Germiston sequence in memory of that experience). Each of these commands makes reference to the rural home (a homestead or *fum* — farm) a miner leaves behind (and sometimes never returns to)³¹ when he goes off to find work in the urban areas. Longing, desire and memory of those a man leaves behind are frequently also the subject of song texts in *isicathamiya*, the vocal performance of migrant men (Pewa 1995 and Erlmann 1996).

Perhaps the definitive feature of this collection of experiences, however, is the manner in which dance performance is shaped by a series of commands. Paralleling the development of *fanakalo*, the miner’s language, all team performance is transformed into a series of commands that is instantly obeyed. Each member of the team looks and sounds the same in collective performance. It is only in the solos, sometime in the middle of the performance, that individuality is catered to. It is at this point that an individual man emerges from the anonymity of the team or the gang, and is valued for his skill in improvisation, his capacity to take the patterns he knows and to transform them into a strategy for self-expression.

Maskanda³² musical accompaniment

While gumboot dance performance is claimed to have originated with Bhaca migrants from southern KwaZulu Natal, the musical accompaniment is more clearly associated with Zulu migrants (i.e. those from North of the Tugela River), many of whom went to the cities of Johannesburg and Durban as domestic workers, employed either inside white homes or in their gardens. The *isicathulo* forms of gumboot dance in Inanda and that on the mines do not use guitar musical accompaniment. Where accompaniment is used, the instrumentation is typically guitar, concertina (and/or piano accordion) and occasionally violin. While the instrumentation parallels the concert parties of the 1920s and 1930s (Coplan 1985) as well as white popular music

²⁹ Ed: Built by L.G. Hallett, compound manager at C.M.R. Mine, designed by Hugh Tracey in a D-shape, with concealed entrances inspired by the shapes of Great Zimbabwe.

³⁰ See Coplan (1985:63).

³¹ See Moodie (1983) for a discussion of the dilemma that miners encounter once they have been ‘resocialised’ into mine culture.

³² For more information on *maskanda* performance, see Davies (1994) and Muller (1995).

practices, particularly as articulated in Afrikaans *boeremusiek*, the performance style and guitar tuning suits a more traditional ear.

Jonney Hadebe told us that there were two styles of tuning: the French (in 'F') and the mandolin (in 'C') (Muller and Topp 1985). The instrument is strung with the thinnest string in the middle to prevent it from snapping: the strumming is fairly aggressive so as to create a distinctly percussive sound. While Blanket Mkhize used all six strings, 'Champion' guitarist and earlier member of Mkhize's team, Albert Nene, would use only five strings on his guitar. A capodastro is frequently placed on the second fret of the guitar neck. Numbering the strings according to thickness (with 1 as the thinnest i.e. the top E string), Blanket described the tuning of his guitar as follows:

- 5. E \flat One of the older members of Mkhize's team explained that this tuning
- 4. B \flat was 'mandolin', a mixture of C and D together, The two keys are
- 1. B \flat clearly articulated. "There are the small strings, the one in the middle,
- 3. E \flat and the two basses, so to make it half and half", Blanket Mkhize
- 2. F explained (Muller and Topp, personal communication, 1985).
- 6. C Certainly, the evidence suggests ties with earlier Nguni musical bow

tuning systems and their transformations (see Rycroft 1977). In this tuning, the two bow fundamentals sit about a second to a minor third apart (explaining the apparent discrepancy between the C and E \flat as opposed to the D one might expect from the description of the mandolin tuning.) As with contemporary *maskanda* performance, there are two guitar styles for gumboot dance: the older block chord vamping or *ukuvamba* and the more recent picking style, called *ukupika*, associated with East African guitar performance, for example (see Davies 1994).

The concertina is similarly retuned to match with the guitar tuning. It functions as a harmonic ostinato, playing a four-chord riff on a 32-pulse (8 beat) cycle, typical of the early *marabi* musical style (Ballantine 1993). The player is free to improvise within this structure, frequently shifting in register and chord inversion. The violinist improvises melodically, often filling in between the chord vamping.

Aesthetics of performance

The history of the development of gumboot dance styles, as outlined above, points to numerous factors that have shaped this genre. Each of these — precolonial performance, minstrel shows, mission culture, industrial labour and migrancy, has contributed to the development of a gumboot dance aesthetic — a sense of what makes for good and powerful performance. There are several characteristics by which a gumboot dance performance is evaluated. First, a performance must engage with everyday realities; second, it does so in a humourous and frequently satirical manner; third, it requires skills in both team and individual (solo) performance; fourth, competitiveness is deeply ingrained in the individual and collective expression; and fifth, the best performance is always judged by the togetherness or 'tightness' of the

team and the 'power' of the resonant sound of their boots as they hit together and stamp the ground.

The competitive aspect of a performance is described by team member Jonney Hadebe:

[Competitions] have changed. Now we go for money. Before, they were winning cups, and the compound manager was giving them food and beer. Now we want money...

A team is supposed to be 12 [men]..including the leader. Not the musicians, that means 14...The best team [has] the leader [who] must shout nicely, and the players must know what they are doing. Then the uniform must be very nice, very smart. The steps must [be done] as one. They must all be the same...When you play it wrong, we call it *ihashi* [horse]. When a team plays wrong, the people just hit their boots and tell [the others] to come out [stop performing]. The whole team must come out because they are doing it wrong. Then the other team goes in and if they do it wrong, we do *ihashi*, and they must come out. When all the teams have gone, we can start again. If you do one *ihashi*, you [lose] one point, if you do two, you lose two points...If you've done one *ihashi* then you are better than a team which has done two (Muller and Topp, personal communication, 1985).

When we learnt to dance in 1985, Blanket Mkhize would encourage us not to watch the fast footwork so much as to listen to the rhythms and sounds produced by the dancers. He called on us to 'fight' the boots i.e. to hit hard. Once a dance team achieved this unity of sound the leader began to pay attention to the finer details of performance, such as which arm or leg, the left or the right, should be used. Once the sound was tightly together in the older *gumboots dance* style, dancers would add rattles (or 'speakers' as in radios) to the boots to enhance the timbre. These 'speakers' were typically constructed out of old shoe polish tins filled with small pebbles. To create the effect of a 'speaker', holes were punched in the lids of the tins.

In contrast to the extreme tightness of sound, Blanket required our movements and gestures to be fairly loose and flexible. He would often ask us to shake our bodies to release the tension and even rigidity he saw (largely from our lack of experience with this kind of dance form). Clegg provides a parallel discussion of *isishameni* dance. He writes that with *isishameni*, the dancer needs to be firm (*ukuqina*), to be proud or even disdainful (*ukuqosha*), but also to show that he is enjoying what he is doing (Clegg 1982).

South African gumboot dance and worldbeat

Our narrative of the history of the formation of gumboot dance style has thus far stressed the ways in which South Africans have forged new expressive forms by drawing extensively on their own traditions, but perhaps more so, on those of the global metropolitan centres. This borrowing has occurred largely through live and mediated travelling performances to South Africa. Gumboot dance has itself travelled, though it has come to signify quite differently at the local and international levels. While locally, gumboot dance veteran Steven Shelembe and his team from

Creighton insist that *gumboots dance* is a genre that originated with the *amaBhaca*, its performance in the metropolitan centres of the English-speaking world have become emblematic of a larger sense of South Africaness.

In the early 1960s, for example, the performances of the musical *King Kong!* in London featured gumboot dancing by some of its black South African cast.³³ A few years later, gumboot dance was an item in the show *Wait a Minim!* which travelled to both London and the United States. In that context, gumboot dance was performed by white English-speaking South Africans, including Andrew Tracey! A more recent connection between South African gumboot dance and what we now call 'worldbeat' is the piece entitled "Gumboots" on Paul Simon's *Graceland* album. According to Simon, this was the music that drew him to South African popular music. The gumboot instrumental sound was incorporated into the final album on a track entitled "Gumboot" (Simon, 1986).

More recently, the South African President's Award Gumboot Dancers from Grahamstown performed at the July 1996 Music Village in London. Wearing gumboots adorned in the colours of the new South African flag, this team performed alongside several other South African artists (ironically, still organised in terms of ethnicity — the Cape Malay choir, the Ndebele, the Venda and the Xhosa women from Ngqoko). In this context, gumboot dance signified Archbishop Tutu's metaphor of nationhood, the rainbow. Despite the continued ethnic labelling of the other South African groups, The President's Award team of gumboot dancers insisted that while stylistic differences in gumboot dance exist between "Zulus, Xhosas and amaBhacas", they belonged to none of these categories. "We are the modern gumboot dancers. We are trying to create our own thing, not the historical thing. We don't do monotonous things. We are trying to change our style daily so that we can accommodate the civilization that we are" (interview in July 1996 with Alexa Dalby, who kindly provided JTF with a transcript of the interview).

In contrast to the way in which gumboot dance is constructed as a signifier of South African nationhood in the international context, in South Africa, gumboot dance struggles to find its place as a truly sophisticated art form. Unlike with the performances of *isicathamiya*, which find strong support with SATMA (the South African Traditional Music Association) centred in Durban, gumboot dance has little public visibility. The rampant violence of the 1980s and the early 1990s in KwaZulu Natal destroyed many of the traditional spaces for gumboot performance. These included schools, community halls, and even corporate environments. (Spoornet stopped their sponsorship of gumboot dance teams in the late 1980s for fear of political violence erupting between team members).

Nonetheless, gumboot dance has started to capture the imagination of high school girls in KwaZulu Natal in particular. In these contexts, the dance is an extra-curricular activity that is being transformed by the girls to more appropriately reflect their own

³³ See the Recording and Programme Notes in the British Library, International Music Collection.

experiences. So dance sequence names are being changed. One high school team transferred the names of various alcoholic beverages, such as 'Autumn Late Harvest' to dance patterns. Another group has replaced the title 'AmaBlackJack' with 'AmaBlackJazz' (Vicky Godard, personal communication with CM, October 1995). Dance companies, such as the Playhouse Company, and festivals like the Shongololo Dance Festival and the Grahamstown Festival, are actively incorporating gumboot dance routines in their programmes. Much of this dance is now racially integrated.

Our own dance teachers, Blanket Mkhize and Steven Shelembe have adjusted their vision of gumboot dance to the suit the sense of new nationhood. They are willing for anyone to join their teams, as long as they have no political affiliation. Gumboot dance must keep the young people busy so they do not engage with drugs, alcohol or criminal activity. Blanket Mkhize has three specific goals: to pass gumboot dance skills to the next generation; as gumboot dancers, he hopes his sons will attract the attention of company managers so these people will employ his boys; and finally, they aspire, like the President's Award Team, to "keep politics out of gumboot dance". Shelembe is hopeful: "This thing [gumboot dance] is like the pen and the exercise book... It is done by anybody if they like it, be they Zulu, Tswana. They can learn it and pass, learn gumboot dance and be a champion" (personal communication with CM, March 1996.)

Conclusion

Much like the Basotho *difela* (Coplan 1994), gumboot dance is a cultural form that has been powerfully shaped by migrant experience in the South African mines through the course of the twentieth century. Initially attributed to the *amaBhaca* people of southern KwaZulu Natal, it came to be performed by a variety of workers, regardless of tribal, racial or linguistic affiliation.

Historically, the public nature of gumboot dance performance occurred and developed in highly controlled urban spaces, such as sports stadia, political gatherings and tourist sites. In addition, performance arenas were constructed for dance competitions in the gold mines on the Witwatersrand,³⁴ the coal mines in northern KwaZulu Natal, the sugar mills in the province and in municipal halls for black urban dwellers in cities such as Durban and Pietermaritzburg.³⁵ The mine arenas constituted a peculiar kind of public space open to predominantly black male miners and white tourists only. Such performances were heavily monitored by mine or state police.

Gumboot dance is currently performed by a diversity of school and university students, labour unions and other worker groups. Since 1990, it has come to feature in television commercials, local performing arts groups and cultural events. In each of these new contexts, it is being imaginatively recreated to coalesce with the particular vision and daily experiences of each group of performers.

³⁴ See for example Tracey (1952).

³⁵ See Erlmann (1991).

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