UMASKANDI IZIBONGO: SEMANTIC, PROSODIC AND MUSICAL DIMENSIONS OF VOICE IN ZULU POPULAR PRAISES

by

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Abstract. *Umaskandi izibongo* are Zulu popular praises characterized by rapid, tonally nuanced phrases of incisive social comment set to instrumental music. They articulate the experiences, genealogy and heritage of their orators, and are replete with idioms and lyrical encodings intelligible only to those familiar with the contexts, symbols and sounds specific to *umaskandi* life worlds. *Izibongo* have been combined with features of Zulu style and idiom to create a hybrid, indigenous genre of popular music. *Umaskandi* orators articulate shared experiences of poverty, inequality, migrancy and dispossession in South Africa, and often use martial, caustic imagery to evince their social critique. A genealogy of *izibongo* is offered linking *umaskandi* to other popular praises, to genres of dance and bow music, and to *izibongo zamakhosi*, or the praises of kings. From research based on fieldwork in KwaZulu-Natal conducted between 2012 and 2015, the close analysis, transcription and translation of songs by *umaskandi* artists Phuzekhemisi, Mfaz' Omnyama and Jonathan Mathenjwa offers insight into the style and structure of *izibongo*. The semantic, prosodic and musical dimensions of voice are explored through graphic representation and analysis in 'Praat'. The analyses demonstrate the complex interplay of speech tone, intonation, rhythm and rate, and how these prosodic features articulate and complicate *umaskandi* texts. The emphasis on voice complements a literature that has to date focused on its instrumental accompaniment on guitar. The use of digital methods of analysis and transcription offers an alternative to staff notation as a toolset for theorizing African music.

Izibongo are declamatory praises used to dramatic effect in *umaskandi* music.[1] The practice of personal and popular praising is common across Zulu cultures in southern Africa.[2] *Umaskandi izibongo* are distinct in their synthesis of elements. Rapid, tonally nuanced phrases of incisive social comment are set to instrumental music. *Umaskandi izibongo* articulate the experiences, genealogy, and heritage of their orators, and are

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[1] I use the isiZulu word '*umaskandi*' to refer to the genre of accompanied song often termed 'maskanda' in the literature (Davies 1992, Muller 2004, Collins 2006, Titus 2013, Olsen 2014). Jonathan Clegg and Bongani Mthethwa use the term *umaskande* (Mthethwa 1981, Clegg 1981), while the Zulu linguist D.B. Ntuli uses the orthographically correct '*umaskandi*' in his article on *izibongo* praise poetry (Ntuli 1990) rather than the Anglicized 'maskanda.' All of the musicians whom I interviewed during research describe themselves and the music the play as '*maskandi* or *umaskandi*. CD compilations such as '*Maskandi Hits*' (2012) also reflect this usage.

[2] I am grateful to my *umfowethu* Ngawu 'Roger' Gumede who assisted me with the fieldwork for this research at Ndumo. Owen Jabulani Nene and Nkosi Ngcobo provided important commentary on the translations of the *izibongo*. I am also grateful to Jonathan Mathenjwa, Mqamuli Wezintambo, and all of the *umaskandi* whom I interviewed and recorded for the Zulu Song Project.

replete with idioms and lyrical encodings intelligible only to those familiar with the contexts, symbols and sounds specific to *umaskandi* life worlds.[3] Since the mid-twentieth century this combination of Zulu style and idiom has come to define the genre as an indigenous popular music. The interpretation of *izibongo* require therefore that close attention be paid not only to semantics, but also to the prosodic and musical information embodied in the performance of these rich social texts. This article focuses on features of voice to complement a literature that has to date emphasized its instrumental accompaniment on guitar. The research is based on fieldwork conducted in KwaZulu-Natal between 2012 and 2015, and on close readings of performances by major recording artists Phuzekhemisi and Mfaz' Omnyama.

The first part of the article describes the relation of *umaskandi izibongo* to genres of choral dance song, gourd bow music, and other forms of recited *izibongo*. The social dimensions and generic features of *umaskandi izibongo* are explored through discussion of song texts in the second part before attention is turned to questions of method in a short excursus. The third and final part of the article examines the prosodic and musical dimensions of *izibongo* through transcription and analysis of performances by Phuzekhemisi and Jonathan Mathenjwa, the latter whom I recorded at Ndumo in 2012.

For the analysis I used the software application Praat as an alternative method of visual representation to staff notation to show how the pitch contours of *izibongo* are inflected by factors of speech tone, intonation, and melody. The combination of sonic and social perspectives on *izibongo* demonstrate the complex intertextuality of *umaskandi* as a genre embedded in the everyday that constantly engages with the symbolism and ritual of Zulu cosmology. *Izibongo* connect orators with listeners who share experiences of displacement and desire, of migrancy and marginality. By listening closely to the sounds of *izibongo* we gain understanding of the distinctly personal means by which *umaskandi* orators assert their agency by speaking to and for imagined communities across the rural-urban ethnoscape.

The dual emphasis on semantic and prosodic elements in this article shows how 'social' and 'sonic' dimensions, so often separate in theory and method, may be approached with analytic rigour as complements. By emphasizing close sonic-social relations I aim to bridge the research paradigms of ethnomusicology and music theory. The goal is to find common ground in the analysis of *umaskandi* music for the forging of research domains often considered distinct, perhaps even inviolable given the resistance to 'scientific' instruments and methods in reflexive ethnomusicology since the 1980s (*cf.* Titon 2004). Reflexivity need not rule out close musical analysis. The purpose here is on the one hand to begin a broad musicological inquiry into the sounds and structures of *umaskandi* (cf. Davies 1992; Titus 2013), and on the other to demonstrate the utility of coupling social critique to sonic analysis using digital technologies.

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3   Popular praises are distinct from *izibongo zamakhosi* that are associated with the royal household and which are performed by *izimbongi* for kings and patrons.

Izibongo

In isiZulu, a sub-Saharan Nguni language of Bantu origin, 'izibongo' is a word used to describe the praises declaimed in oratory and in song for the purposes of veneration, identification and social comment. "The Zulu term 'izibongo' may either denote the plural of 'isibongo' (meaning 'surname' of a clan or family) or, more commonly, a personal praise-name or a set of these, applying to an individual (or sometimes to an animal or an inanimate object)" (Rycroft and Ngcobo 1988: 11). Izibongo contrast with izithakazelo which are the clan praises recited when men introduce themselves. These clan praises are brief, formulaic and specific. Izibongo contain similar formulaic elements but are more complex in structure, more fluid in content, and are declaimed with a more nuanced and melodic prosodic profile. They are performed in a wide range of genres in heightened declamation and draw on aspects of both speech and song. Izibongo do not conform to the conventions of speech or song. They occupy instead an intermediate zone that makes them suitable for insertion into a wide range of genres while retaining their distinctive poetic potency and prosodic signature.

The declamation of solitary izibongo is an art performed by izimbongi, or praise poets, who extol the virtues, foibles and idiosyncrasies of kings, rulers, and other venerable personages in public. In formal contexts izibongo serve to introduce dignitaries by reflecting on their exceptional achievements and characteristics using metaphoric language and ingenious narrative devices. The laudatory qualities of izibongo embody meanings associated with the related term, bonga, which means to praise, laud, extol, or to give thanks and express gratitude. Izibongo praise poetry, then, is used not only to name and to identify, but also to accord status and recognition, to thank and to celebrate, and finally to critique and provide social and political comment. As with praise poetry and song in many other African cultures, the Zulu imbongi is granted license and latitude for public comment and criticism that would otherwise be restricted by virtue of rank and decorum. Eileen Jensen Krige describes the imbongi as a kind of 'bard,' or 'praiser,' in service of izinduna [headmen] and amakhosi [chiefs].

> Every headman in Zululand had an imbongi, and there was one at every military kraal besides the special izimbongi of the king, who lived at the royal kraal. Their function was to proclaim publicly the praises of their chief, or any notable visitor, at public festivals or grand occasions. For this they selected the most brilliant incidents in the career of their chief or the history of the nation, and composed praises that may be considered as the poetry of the Zulu nation, similar to the sagas or ballads of other races. The praises of the kings are handed down from generation to generation, and they are sung when the spirits of the chiefs of old are specially approached for their blessings. In singing praises, the object of the izimbongi is to chant them in as loud a voice as possible, and with as little regard for punctuation as the need for breathing will allow. The herald or imbongi was also a jester, and took part in all the dances at the royal kraal, disguised in some grotesque attire (Krige 1950: 340).

Features of the izibongo recited by these izimbongi are retained in the practices of umaskandi musicians today, who, outside of the traditional court and kraal, have taken on the role of social critics. The sharp criticism, witticism and satire characteristic of umaskandi izibongo address social issues of broad importance to urban and rural

communities. Comparing these praises to solitary *izibongo* there are two important similarities: first, is that the performance of praises lends itself, and indeed invites, very loud and rapid declamation inhibited only by 'the need for breathing.' Second, as seen in the examples discussed below, is that both the *umaskandi* and the *imbongi* occupy the role of jester.

The social contract implicit in *izibongo* enables this license and freedom of expression even in societies otherwise resistant to public dissent. To understand this we need to figure *izibongo* within this larger practice that Leroy Vail and Landeg White describe as 'public poetry.' "The performers seek through poetic expression a language with the authority to marshal a public response, and the poetry confronts the changing panorama of African history with a stream of comment—heroic, celebratory, elegiac, satiric—always attempting to construct, as our Mozambican informants put it, 'a map of experience'" (Vail and White 1991: 57). By speaking directly to people's lived experiences, *izibongo* may be read also as a genre of public theatre and spectacle that engages with and demands a response from its subjects. This engagement is true also of the *popular* self-praises of which *umaskandi* is a sub-genre, *izibongo* that draw on the same structural conventions and range of expressive devices to serve different ends.

Popular praises are distinct from *izibongo zamakhosi*, or the praises of kings.[4] The formal recitation of royal praises are lengthy, dignified and sanctioned performances that employ a carefully measured style of vocal delivery with much closer attention paid to genealogy and history than the popular praises characteristic of *umaskandi* and other popular genres. The latter extend features of popular praising used in everyday social interactions, and also extensively in choral dance music. Adrian Koopman classifies the popular praises of young men into subcategories such as *izibongo zokushela* [courting praises], *izibongo zokulwa* [fighting praises], *izibongo zokugiya* [dancing praises], and the like, and describes them as "the oral poetry of the common people as opposed to that of the professional bards; they have a lively, earthy nature which reflects the characteristics of those who compose them; and they are still very much a feature of modern Zulu society" (Koopman 1987: 52). The naming practices found in these *izibongo* are used by *umaskandi* who describe themselves and one another using colourful imagery.

The borrowing of conventions and formulae make *izibongo* an unusually broad category interjected into many song and dance genres, including *isicathamiya*, *isigekle*, *umakhweyana* and *ughubu* bow music, and *umaskandi*. Liz Gunner and Mafika Gwala point to the "very close relation [of popular *izibongo*] to song and chant, particularly *izigiyo* which we translate as 'songs to go with the war dance' […]. *Izibongo* are also

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4   The *izibongo* of the abaThembu royal house that I recorded at the offices of the *Inkhosi* at Thukela Estates near Weenen, KwaZulu-Natal, in 2012, show how popular and royal praises differ. For instance, the demeanor of the *imbongi* is sincere and respectful, and his articulation of the praises lacks the melodic inflections characteristic of *umaskandi*. Comparison with *umaskandi izibongo* demonstrates differences in duration, meter and tonality. *Izibongo zamaKhosi* tend to have a monotone and metronomic declamation, lack the characteristic fluidity of *umaskandi*, and are without musical accompaniment.

closely related to dance, particularly but not only *ukugiya*, 'the war dance.' In popular performance, the three activities of praising, dancing and calling out *izigiyo* fuse together" (Gunner and Gwala 1991: 1). These popular *self*-praises are an important part of everyday performances of self and society, a means of articulating one's identity and distinctiveness amongst friends and neighbours with ever more poignancy in a world of strangers. Popular self-praises became iconic to the minstrel art of *umaskandi* in the mid-twentieth century, and have through subsequent convention become integral to the character and substance of the genre as an expression of Zulu identities. As *umaskandi* itself migrated from the art of solitary 'strolling musicians' to become a popular guitar, drum-and-bass style on radio, cassette and compact disc, it retained these roots, and *izibongo* continue to give expression to this heritage.

Umaskandi izibongo

"*Umaskandi*," writes D.B. Ntuli, "stands out as the forerunner and initiator of a style that combines music and praise-poetry together in a unique fashion" (Ntuli 1990: 302). There are many features of *umaskandi* that extend principles of Zulu music that exist in other genres, including especially choral dance song and gourd bow music. Jonathan Clegg (1981), David Rycroft (1977), Nollene Davies (1992), Carol Muller (2004), Tom Collins (2006), David Coplan (2007), Kathryn Olsen (2009, 2014) and Barbara Titus (2013), amongst others, have all emphasized the relationship of 'maskanda' to bow music while recognizing the power of choral dance song in the rhythms and choruses that define several dance styles (Davies 1992).

Writing in the 1970s about the rise of 'township music,' Rycroft observed that "[the guitar] has adopted almost exactly the functional role previously fulfilled by the *umakhweyana* gourd-bow (apart from the fact that it was also used by girls) in that it serves for self-accompaniment to solo singing. Also, as in former times, this kind of musical activity is frequently performed while out walking" (Rycroft 1977: 228-229). The practice of solo singing and praising that was initially performed to the accompaniment of single-string bows was transferred to the guitar. What made the guitar an ideal exponent for this tradition of minstrelsy was that its multiple voice parts could double as the customary choral response. The addition of voice parts in the guitar "demonstrate a furtherance in the expression of Zulu musical principles that was formerly quite beyond the capacity of any form of traditional bow" (ibid: 234).

Rosemary Joseph (1987), writing of a similar fashioning of imported instruments to indigenous principles, describes "an active tradition of young men's topical songs and love songs performed to the accompaniment of the *udloko*, a single-stringed bowed instrument with tin resonator attached at the upper end of the stave" (1987: 92). During her fieldwork she documented "an active tradition of young men's topical songs and love songs performed to the accompaniment of the guitar and concertina which clearly reflects the principles of musical organization inherent in traditional bow music" (ibid.). She remarks that, "[t]he guitar and concertina traditions would seem to stem ultimately from a male tradition of performance on indigenous string instruments such as the

ugubhu, *umakhweyana*, *isithontolo* and *udloko* although the more immediate stimulus may have come from the women's tradition of playing particularly the *umakhweyana* and *ugubhu* at a time when the male tradition of playing these bows had ceased to be active" (ibid). This evidence shows the strong continuities that existed between *umaskandi* and other forms of Zulu culture, and it explains how *umaskandi* itself became an indigenous music drawing on a wide range of cultural practices.

Continuities with older forms of Zulu music are evident also in the practice of *izibongo*. The royal praises performed by Princess Constance Magogo KaDinuzulu in several archival recordings are testament to this (Magogo 1972 [2004]). It has been established by Clegg (1981), Davies (1992), Coplan (2007), and many others that *umaskandi* emerged from the experience of labour migrancy in South Africa whereby men and women took up jobs in urban areas and on mines to sustain their families who remained in rural areas, or in what under apartheid came to be known as 'homelands.' Those men who worked manual labour for corporations or on the mines were often housed in all-male dormitories (hostels) and 'compounds.' *uMaskandi, isicathamiya*, and various forms of song and dance became popular modes of expression in these hostels (Muller 2004). The articulation of identities in *izibongo* may be read as a response to these changing conditions and the need to express, often in difficult and hostile environments, a sense of place and identity. Ntuli elaborates on this new function for *izibongo* in *umaskandi*:

> When *maskandi* music was initiated, the tradition of praising was still very strong. Most of the *maskandi* musicians lived in compounds close to their places of employment. When one of them played and sang well, his colleagues praised him; otherwise he praised himself. His fans sometimes wanted him to demonstrate his skill to other groups. This eventually led to open contests which were held in the street, mainly at the weekends. Since the musician was a complete stranger to some of the members of his audience, he felt obliged to introduce himself. He would tell the people who he was, where he came from, which river or mountain was in the vicinity of his homestead, who his chief or headman was, and whatever information he could supply for the benefit of his audience. In between all this he would also recite his praises (Ntuli 1990: 302).

Being 'a complete stranger' in a foreign context created the need for a common mode of communication, and so developed the conventions of *izibongo* in which extended self-praises came to include standard features of geography, such as river, mountain, district and chief. These served as 'social' introductions that were imbued also with musical characteristics of emplacement like the *umzansi* and *isiZulu* regional dance rhythms used in the guitar music (Davies 1992: 44).

The language and gesture of these *izibongo* were also shaped by experiences of encounter, but drew upon familiar modalities to express and contend with these new challenges. Jonathan Clegg was immersed in these conditions during the 1970s both as anthropologist and musician. His observations on the origins and practice of *umaskandi* in this period are invaluable because he became part of the tradition through his partnership with Sipho Mchunu and many other Zulu musicians from the Msinga area, and also in the migrant hostels of Johannesburg and Soweto. Clegg locates the origins of the competitive element to *umaskandi* in the martial arts of Zulu stick fighting.

> The songs you choose to sing first are the kinds of blows and the metaphors you'll use—'Why did you choose that song first?' '*Bengifihla induku yami yokugcina*' 'I was hiding my best shot, because I want to play all my weak songs first', and get him to expose his best shot and block it with a good shot from my guitar, and the whole encounter is described in a martial metaphor because it is a martial tradition, it is a martial culture, and there is a set format around which you will play. You will begin with an introduction—the introduction you will play is what is known as *iihlabo, izihlabo* which are just little melody lines which give the person listening an idea of (a) the scale that you're playing on, (b) where you're going to start to play, and that will give him a very rough indication of, (c) the kind of song you're going to play. It also shows off your technique, and *izihlabo* is in fact related to *ukugiya*. 'Before I fight with you and have my weapons, I will perform a series of movements with my stick and my shield just to show you how well I can do it, and then we'll fight, perhaps' (Clegg 1981: 4).

The gestures, music and language of *umaskandi* embody this aggression not only in the guitar work but also in physical exertions, gesticulations and acrobatics of movement and dance. It is striking that words like '*hlaba*' [spear or stab] and '*shaya*' [strike], or other direct or veiled threats, are seldom *sung* in *umaskandi* songs. They are reserved instead for recitation in the *izibongo*. This indicates the power accorded *izibongo* and the *license* afforded *umaskandi* in ways that simulate the practice of *izimbongi*, though with far greater ferocity and often through direct confrontation.

The 'martial' culture Clegg observed in the Msinga and Weenen districts of Natal, and to some extent in Johannesburg hostels, places where I have also conducted fieldwork, may be read also as a response to the sense of vulnerability experienced in alien and hostile conditions. For Zulus working far from home outside of their homesteads and the familiarity of kith and kin, without the commensurate social standing, respect, and security of regulated lifestyles, in short, persons in a contested order of things, *umaskandi* offered and continues to offer a means by which to assert and define oneself as an independent subject where worlds and values collide. In such contexts, *izibongo* offered not only a mode of address, but also an honest signal of social standing. To deliver *izibongo* while playing guitar or concertina in public demonstrates beyond doubt one's abilities and inclinations. To shout out one's genealogy, accomplishments and social comment 'at the top of one's voice' is more than mere braggadocio, it is a demand to be heard, recognized, and validated. It is not the 'truth content' of *izibongo* that render them valid but rather the valence of their symbols read into and against a shared set of experiences, anxieties and ambitions. It is in these foreign contexts that the 'Zuluness' of *umaskandi* took center stage. To be sure, the creation of a synthetic Zuluness in the recording studio (Meintjes 2003), on Radio Bantu (Hamm 1991), and in apartheid policy and ideology (Dubow 2012), are important factors in making sense of this confluence of identities. What *izibongo* call attention to in the midst of all this, and what they implore still today, is that we listen to the humanity of those persons who were at the very center of conditions of social inequality and deprivation whose voices are too often drowned out by the larger narratives of oppression and counter-oppression. The symbols recited in *umaskandi izibongo* share this experience with humour and wit, and transfer to an order of becoming the dignity that has been denied or taken away.

The tension between rural and urban Zulu cultures, and the politics of dispossession and impoverishment, of the social fracture that apartheid policies enacted, is implicit in recordings from this era. The song '*Imbizo*' (1992) by the brothers Phuzekhemisi and Khethani is indicative. This song caused outrage due to its strong criticism of the Zulu chiefs who extracted taxes from their rural subjects, a practice instituted in the late nineteenth century by the British colonists as an instrument to generate cheap migrant labour to fuel the industrial economy. The apartheid government took advantage of this practice and used it to generate a degree of supplication from traditional leaders who benefited from 'hut' taxes on rural homesteads. The song takes aim at the practice itself and also the ways in which it was continually abused by chiefs and headmen to extract profit despite conditions of deprivation experienced by their poor subjects.

'*Imbizo*' [Gathering], Phuzekhemisi and Khethani

Solo and Chorus
Lo mhlaba uyathengwa, ungaboni s'hleli kuwona
This land we pay for, even though you see us living in it.

Chorus
Njalo ngonyaka sikhokha imali yamasimu endunene
Every year we pay tariffs for the fields to the chiefs.

Solo:
Njalo njena kukhon' imbizo　There are always gatherings
Hawu, njalo kukhon' imbizo　Wow, there are always gatherings
Sihlala sibizwa emakhosini　We are being called by the chiefs
Sihlala sibizwa phezulu　We are being called from above [by the elders]
Sihlala sifunwa esikoleni　We are wanted at school
Bathi khona imbizo　They say there is a gathering

Chorus:
Ungaboni s'phila kulo mhlaba siyawukhokhela
Even though you see us living in this land, we pay for

Izibongo
Awu, ngahlaba ngempela, uPhuzekhemisi no Khethani!
Wow, I really stabbed this time, this is Phuzekhemisi and Khethani!
Madoda, khona phansi eMkhomazi　Men, from down there at uMkhomazi valley
S'buya khona kwaDumisa　We come from kwaDumisa
Hay' ngabatshela umfoka baba uKhethani　Hey, I told them it's my uncle Khethani
Ngathi bayo thintha imamba isemgodini　I said, they will touch a [mamba] snake in its hole
Ngathi hayi bafana yo'limaza meyike yaphum'　I said, hey boys, you'll get hurt when it comes out
O'pasopa' insizw' uhamb' kwesgxabhane　Watch out young men if you go where it burns
Lesi esise enzansi siwisa amatshe　It makes the rocks down there to fall
Hoo!　Hoo!

Solo
Hawu, njalo njena khon' imbizo　Wow, again and again there are gatherings
Njalo njena khon' imbizo　Again and again there are gatherings
Ngithi sithathaphi imali?　Where will I get the money?
Sihlala sibizwa endunene　They're calling us to the chiefs
Sihlala sifunwa KwaMtholi　They're looking for us at Mtholi

The song begins with measured outrage. Sarcastic remarks are leveled against the chiefs commenting on the extraordinary lengths they go to extract tariffs, even venturing

so far as to disrupt children in classes at school. The *izibongo* begins with a boast. Phuzekhemisi jests at the boldness of their blunt criticism—criticism, it turns out, that had serious consequences for them. Although the *Imbizo* album sold over 200 000 copies (Olsen 2014), Phuzekhemisi's rural homestead was burnt down in retaliation. This only reinforces the point that '*ngahlaba ngemphela*,' they really did hit the mark this time!

'*Imbizo*' is fascinating also in the ways it rails against a leadership and system that are often taken to co-exist with the nationalist Zulu identity portrayed in the music and criticized by Olsen for its conformity (2001, 2014). In fact, a careful reading of the song shows that Phuzekhemisi and Khetani shatter the image of a mythic and unitary Zuluness beholden to a patriarchal authority. Instead we find in *umaskandi* a potent public critique of the institutions at the root of the rural-urban contradictions that came to define migrant life in the mid-to-late twentieth century. The '*Imbizo*' *izibongo* asserts an aggressive and defiant threat to those who would seek them out 'down where it burns' for they shall meet with 'a snake in its hole'! This aggression is sharp and closer to *izibongo zokulwa* than *izibongo zamaKhosi*. These sorts of questions of style and structure demand further scrutiny for they speak of a musical practice that has achieved considerable sophistication in its range of expressive forms, and a practice that departs from the conventions used in other forms of *izibongo* discussed in this article.

Style and structure

The functions of the *izibongo* section in *umaskandi* music are laid bare in a structure that has become standardized over the past four decades on radio. Ordinarily songs begin with a brief solo flourish on the guitar or concertina known as the *izihlabo* [stabs] or *intela* [introduction]. Alternations between soloist and chorus in call-and-response follow before the *izibongo* are performed half way into the song by the *umaskandi*. Nollene Davies outlined the structure of the *izibongo* section in research conducted in the early 1990s, and this structure still obtains in many performances today, including those I recorded during fieldwork in the country districts of Amazizi, Himeville, Msinga, Mweni, Ndumo, Nkaseni, and Weenen.

> The *izibongo* section [in *umaskandi*] consists of two distinctive portions. The first is relatively concrete and consists of personal praises. The maskandi identifies himself, his place of birth, chief, geographical locale, and other personal information in a rapid declamatory delivery. These praises are often highly idiomatic and thus replete with hidden meanings decipherable only to close friends and relations. The second part of the izibongo is more free and usually involves some form of social critique or narrative. The 'message' of the song is most directly expressed in this section. Technical display must be of a standard with this message if the performance is to be deemed successful. […] This could involve criticism, satire, advice, praise, fears, humour or almost anything. The meaning of, or story behind the lyrics is not always clear to listeners and often requires some further explanation. However, it would certainly be understood by the person at whom the song was directed (Davies 1992: 31).

Major recording artists like iHashi Elimhlophe, Mfaz' Omnyama, and Phuzekhemisi sometimes omit portions of their personal praises and get straight to the point of their critique. But all refer in some shape or form to key markers of identity in their personal

praises before turning to the more specific social comment. The *umaskandi* whom I recorded tended always to include the autobiographical information first, sometimes choosing to recite longer social commentaries than is customary in recorded *umaskandi*.

The structure identified by Davies is manifest in *izibongo* by Jonathan Mathenjwa, an *umaskandi* guitarist and vocalist from Ndumo in northern KwaZulu-Natal. I recorded nine songs by Mathenjwa and his group Mqamuli Wezintambo at a community hall on Ndumo hill on 30 April 2012. The *izibongo* he recites in these songs are nearly identical in respect of the personal praises. The themes of each song change but his personal praises include consistent references to his family, place of origin, river and chief. In the song *Bafana Bafana*, he sings about South Africa's national football team and the role that Nelson Mandela played in bringing the Soccer World Cup 2010 to South Africa. The *izibongo* laments the twenty-seven years Mandela spent 'rotting' in prison as a political prisoner to the apartheid state, and thanks him for bringing to the nation an extraordinary triumph. Mathenjwa's *izibongo* demonstrates in its thematic praise of Mandela, South Africa's first democratically elected president and principled leader, a close relation to the practice of the *imbongi*.

Bafana Bafana, Jonathan Mathenjwa

Hawu ng'khuluma nazo majida eMhlathuz' eMalambane	Hey, I'm speaking to you guys in Mhlathuzi Malambane
Ngiphuma phansi ushay'eng imfula uphuza ushay' engiphum' eNdumo la ngisuka khona esitolo sakithi engithenga kuso leso	I come from down there by the river where I drink, I come from Ndumo, that's where I come from, that's the store where I shop
Yimina madoda umfana ongayidl' inyama yenkomo ngamaphisisi	I, men, am the boy who does not eat beef in small pieces
Umfana kaKhila lo umahamba ngendlela umuntu owazala mina angimazi ngazi umuntu owazala umah	I am the brother of Killer, the one who walks alone on the path, the person who created me I do not know, I only know the one who created my mother
Induna yami engiphethe uNkosinathi, umfan'kan'kosi umfoka kaMathenjwa.	My headman, the one that I belong to is Nkosinathi, son of the chief, brother of Mathenjwa.
Ngaphezulu kamoya akukhanyi la ngiphuma khona	On top, where the wind does not shine, that's where I come from.
Ngithe hlupheka hluphekile uma ngizonda wajabule' bangithandayo	I say those who suffer will suffer more if they hate me. I will be happy for those who love me.
Ngiyambonga mina uMandela ubekhona kulomhlab' ukuba akekho uMandela ukuba ayifikanga indebe e-South Afrika.	I thank Mandela for being here in this world, because if Mandela was not here then the cup would not have come to South Africa
Waboza uMadiba ujele izwe Lethu uMandela	Madiba rotted in jail. Mandela rotted for our country.
ihoba ihaya ihoba ihaya [bridge]	[Vocables]

The meanings of several phrases in these *izibongo* are obscure. Mathenjwa claims, for instance, that he is "the brother of Killer." This could be read as a boast, or alternatively as indication that he is not to be trifled with. A second phrase, '*Ngaphezulu kamoya akukhanyi*' [On top, where the wind does not shine] is difficult to interpret. 'On top' refers perhaps to the high ground of Ndumo hill where he lives. The peculiarities of

Figure 1. Jonathan Mathenjwa performing *umaskandi izibongo* with Mqamuli Wezintambo at Ndumo.
Photo: T. Pooley

wind that does not shine suggest an idiomatic reading. Where words are indecipherable it could be that their meanings are coded by the shape of the performance itself. Some words and syllables in '*Bafana Bafana*' are delivered too fast for accurate transcription. This matter will be explored in more detail below when the musical dimensions to *izibongo* are considered, and also the role of speech tones. It is common practice in *izibongo* for syllables to be concatenated and sometimes entirely omitted, just as Krige pointed out for *izibongo zamaKhosi*. In such instances the tonal features of isiZulu are compromised and meanings must be inferred based on context rather than articulation. This practice holds its own logic, and could be read as a barrier to facile interpretations, an invitation instead for close listening, or an encoding that operates as an obstruction or deferral. The bravura of *umaskandi* takes on an elusive character allowing the orator a further degree of license through ambiguity.

A third example demonstrates further the importance of prosodic features in the interpretation of *izibongo*. Mfaz' Omnyama was one of the most prolific professional musicians in South Africa during the early post-apartheid period. In the *izibongo* to the song '*Nay' Inkinga*' he invokes powers and asserts authority to an audience sensitive to a wide array of Zulu symbolism. He introduces himself as an *inyanga*, or herbalist, and describes this close affinity for ancestral spirits as part of his lineage. To invoke spirits and divine powers in the most public of musical displays serves to intimidate competitors, and at the same time claims a spiritual authority that is very much in keeping with the institution of the *imbongi*.

Nay' Inkinga, Mfaz' Omnyama [2000]

Hha! Zash' mfana mshini wezidalwa zabantu!	Ha! I say this is the boy who is a machine manufacturing human beings!
Wemfaz' Omnyama nezingane zakho	Mfaz' Omnyama and his children
Ntombi ngafa yinhlamba kanyoko	Girls I am dying with the insult of "mother"
Nangu phela umfana ozalwa yinyanga	There is the boy who is the child of a herbalist
Kanti naye uyinyanga	In fact he is a herbalist too
Futhi ugogo wakhe isangoma	And his grandmother is a diviner
Kanti umfowabo ngumthakathi	In fact his brother is a wizard
Khuphuka lapho dlala beyiduda beyithengela amasaka	He has improved the one who enjoys playing who used to buy mealie pap.
Nguye uMaqhude njalo umfo kaSabelo	He is Maqhude this brother of Sabelo
Ngimthatha le eStanger	I brought him from Stanger
Kanti naye uGeorgie, impunga!	And in fact Georgie, grayed!
Ikhona lapho ibhasi-ghita bomabili	There are two bass guitars there
We vuka!	Wake up!

The proof of his powers is demonstrated in his success in *umaskandi*. After all, he has 'improved' the lives of the musicians in his band. The personal praises in this song provide a context for interpreting others. In the song *uVelaphi Wamashushu Dali*, for instance, we find similar statements at the outset but they are not fully developed. In this song Mfaz' Omnyama sings about a lover whose suspicious and drunken behavior he treats with contempt. A comparison of the *izibongo* of the two songs, '*Nay' Inkinga*' and '*uVelaphi*' points to several consistencies in his practice.

uVelaphi Wamashushu Dali? Mfaz' Omnyama [1997], solo and chorus

Solo	
Uvelaphi Dali? Uvelaphi unje?	Where do you come from darling? Where do you come from looking like this? Where do
Uvelaphi dali-we?	you come from my darling?
Chorus	
Wemashushu njen'	Why are you so restless?
Awu, we-Dali	Oh, my darling
Solo	
Uvelaphi?	Where do you come from?
Uvelaphi Dali?	Where do you come from darling?
Wen' uyaphuza Dali	You drink darling.

The *izibongo* broaden the narrative and comment as if in conversation with fellow band members and peers.

Ayi, zashi' uphela	Hey, I say to you,
Mbhobho womathambo	A horn to blow the bones
Bhensa maqina	He crouches hard
Mfaz' Omnyama nezingane zakhe	Mfaz' Omnyama and his children
Matshitshi qomane safa kanyoko inhlamba	Virgin girls agree to the courtship we are tired of the "mother" insult
Phezulu kwaNongoma lapho engiqhamuka khona	On top of Nongoma that's where I come from
Kuphuma uGeorgie lomfana ngimlandele kanti	I brought this boy Georgie, in fact
Uthini Sitayela lapho,	What do you say about this Styler?
Uthini wemfana ziyavova	What do you say boy who makes beer?

Hheyi la, ngehlelwa inkinga ngelinyelanga	Eish, there I encountered a problem one day
Ngihlezi nomuntu kant' angimazi ukuthi	I am living with a person but I did not know
isidakwa uyaphuza	[she] is an alcoholic who drinks [still]
Ngathi ngiyabheka ngelinye ilanga	I tell you I found out one day
Hawu, phela kuyasha langaphansi kwesikhindi	Eish, it's really burning down in those underpants
Kwavela kwaphela itrue love!	True love is over!

These *izibongo* include an extension of the praises from *Nay' Inkinga*. '*Mbhobho womathambo*' refers again to his status as an *inyanga* from the line '*Nangu phela umfana ozalwa yinyanga*.' The 'horn' is used in acts of divination to blow bones thrown by an *isangoma* [diviner] to determine an ailment or to establish a cause. Mfaz' Omnyama invokes the act to give power to his praises, and in homage to his ancestors. In '*uVelaphi*' he refers also to his place of birth, Nongoma, and converses with his band mates Georgie and Sitayela. It is only in the final third that he turns to address more directly the subject of the song itself: the drunk woman he has been living with and whom he is suspicious of. At this point in the *izibongo* he slows down the rate of delivery considerably even while the tempo of the music remains steady. The opening lines are declaimed at maximum speed with very rapid and almost incomprehensible self-praising. Here he takes time to draw out a sardonic reflection on his feelings and repressed anger at being misled. A long breath is taken before he utters the words '*inkinga ngelinyelanga*,' and similarly at the beginning of each of the remaining phrases with a pitch accent placed on '*angimâzi*' [I did not *know*]. It is this state of ignorance and suspicion that pervades the song, and that is reinforced in the prosody. The use of pitch accent is crucial here to the tone of this commentary. The sense of deception is made explicit in the reference to sexual infidelity and disease in the second-last line, '*phela kuyasha langaphansi kwesikhinidi*' [it's really burning down in those underpants']. This creates a point of narrative contrast following his request to '*matshishi*' [virgin girls] to accept his courtship.

References to sexual potency are thematic to Mfaz' Omnyama's *izibongo*. In perhaps his greatest hit '*Tshitshi Lami*' [My Girl] he makes a similar boast in the *izibongo*, where, as in the song *Nay' Inkinga* above, he refers to himself as '*mfana mshini wezidalwa zabantu*' ['the boy is a machine manufacturing human beings']. A further parallel extolled in both songs is the danger of alcohol. In '*Tshitshi Lami*' he warns young men to beware of beer ['*pasopa itshwala*!'], perhaps also in view of its tendency to obscure judgment.

We see in these examples a combination of elements that accord with genre-specific features of *umaskandi izibongo* that are both semantic and prosodic. Mfaz' Omnyama relies on patterns of alliteration, assonance, repetition, and concatenation of words and vocables to achieve a convincing performance. These articulatory features are their own music. They simultaneously conceal the meaning of the lyrics, which employ imagery that is aphoristic, obscure, or even deliberate gobbledygook. In these ways, *izibongo* place considerable cognitive demands not only on the performer but on listeners too. This elusive quality is part of an aesthetic of concealment and ambiguity used to similar effect in Jonathan Mathenjwa's *izibongo*.

There are also supra-textual elements specific to the mode of delivery that must

factor in our interpretation. The speed, control, percussive articulation, and carefully weighted phrasing of Mfaz' Omnyama's performance displays considerable bravura comparable perhaps only to iHashi Elimhlophe amongst contemporary *umaskandi* in the sophistication of the praising. These technical attributes facilitate several expressive purposes, including, crucially, a dramatic posturing by the songster: elements of display, self-parody, play, and humour alternate rapidly and are actively engaged with and enjoyed by listeners who applaud the characteristic 'jest' of the *imbongi*. It is this play of prosody and gesture that conveys with communicative force the drama of *umaskandi* over and above its strictly semantic dimensions, some of which, by virtue of their rapid articulation, are lost. The analysis of these prosodic dimensions requires the introduction of a technical apparatus and language for it to be described adequately. Before prosodic features are considered in more detail it is necessary to attend to the *contexts* for analysis, and to a broader range of scholarship on 'maskanda' that has sought to link social and musical factors to one another.

Excursus: analyzing *izibongo*

Scholarship on 'maskanda' has to date focused on structural features of the guitar styles (Rycroft 1980; Clegg 1981; Davies 1992, 1994; Olsen 2009, 2014; Titus 2013), and on the content and social commentary of the lyrics (Olsen 2001, 2009, 2014). Kathryn Olsen (2014) and Barbara Titus (2013) have continued this tradition in recent work that takes a more reflexive turn than their progenitors in Rycroft, Clegg and Davies. Titus foregrounds what she describes as her 'Eurogenic' hearings of 'maskanda' using transcriptions in staff notation. She points out that "music analysis is a culturally specific social practice rather than a transcendental capacity to objectively dissect a unit into parts" (Titus 2013: 287). This truism of critical musicology folds neatly onto a body of 'maskanda' scholarship that is increasingly homogeneous in scope and insight, written as a framing of Zulu music that feeds into global discourses of power and appropriation, and local discourses of ethnicity and identity politics.

That music analysis is a function of the tools it employs is self-evident. Staff notation prescribes the categories of a tonal system even before we have understood the *nature* of that system for a particular culture. Its limitations need therefore to be stressed otherwise what we take as fact are the 'characteristic features' of a culture's tonal structure, harmonic practice, or rhythmic dimensions even where this emphasis is unwarranted or irrelevant to the expressive demands of the culture. In short, what we take to be normative about a musical practice is too often limited by the inappropriate application of tools prescribed for the analysis of Western art music. In the analysis of 'maskanda' these tools are still those of Western staff notation, or at least this is so for Rycroft, Davies and Titus. It should not be surprising therefore that Titus and Davies reach similar findings to Rycroft. His analytic reduction of tonal systems in the pitch patterning of Princess Magogo's *ughubu* bow music (Rycroft 1975) is a classic instance of the reductive impulse, and it is carried over in subsequent theories of Zulu tonal

systems that are satisfied with triadic explanations at the expense of a practice more variegated in its gradience and asymmetry.

To take account of elements of gradience and variation I choose to depart from staff notation because the uses of pitch in song and *izibongo*, or to put it in less prescriptive terms, in vocal musicking all told, cannot be defined by the range and structure of musical instruments tuned to a 'well-tempered' system. The voice is an instrument of its own. The advantage of the analytical pitch reductions that I use as alternatives to staff notation is that the details of pitch production are not reduced to categories of perception. It is for us to make sense of what these categories may be, and to establish how. We need ask: why should we find it necessary, as music scholars, always to invoke common practice tonality as a frame of reference? If the answer is mere convenience, then we need to work harder at making sense of sounds foreign to us.

To use technological innovations for pitch analysis is not new (see Clarke and Cook 2004; Cooper and Sapiro 2006 for a review). It is common practice in linguistics to use fundamental frequency pitch tracking software to analyze tone and intonation, and I employ similar methods here using the software application Praat designed for linguistic research. This is not to claim for these methods any more distance or objectivity than others. It is to simply to recognize in this an alternative that does not reify categories of pitch and duration alien to *umaskandi*.

In the transcriptions below, pitch is graphed from low to high using a measure of frequency in hertz. The range for these recordings is 50-550 Hz. The gradience of pitch is retained in this linear analysis which provides a clear indication of the curvature of intonation gradients. The articulation of consonants and fricatives give rise to brief lapses in these gradients, which appear blank on the transcription, but these spaces are usually 'filled in' by our auditory system (Meyer 1956). The use of digital recording technologies is not without complication. Sampling errors have to be carefully checked. I have edited the pitch contours by removing octave jumps, or other clear and obvious errors in sampling, and I have used my ear to transcribe sections that are indeterminate to Praat but which have a distinctly falling [\], rising [/], falling-rising [^], rising-falling [v], or level [_] pitch contour. I have chosen to indicate *pitch movement* rather than individual High or Low tone contrasts. This is to indicate the ways in which microprosodic elements condition melody. Prosodic features will remain invisible and inaudible to us until we have a technical vocabulary for describing them, and a set of tools for depicting them. The prosodic dimensions of *izibongo* distinguish them from both song and speech. The analysis that follows enables us to recognize the factors of tone, intonation, rhythm and rate that are distinctive of *umaskandi izibongo*. To understand how these fit together means taking account of prosodic features and how these have been approached in music and linguistic theory.

Prosodic features and prosodic structure
Prosody refers to suprasegmental features, or "those aspects of speech that involve more than single consonants or vowels. The principal suprasegmental features are stress,

length, tone, and intonation" (Ladefoged 2006: 237). Features of tone and intonation are conditioned by the manipulation of pitch to convey both lexical and grammatical meanings. In isiZulu, semantic tone is limited to a contrastive High vs. Low pitch relation between adjacent word segments. The pitch height of speech tone is relative rather than absolute, as is the case for melody. Intonation refers to the gradation of pitch contours over the course of an utterance. Fluctuations in pitch are used to signal prominence and to convey paralinguistic meanings and affective states. In *izibongo*, where conventions of speech prosody are sometimes ignored, there is substantial play with prosodic elements of tone and intonation.

The importance of speech tone and intonation in African song has been recognized by many scholars, and not least because most African languages are tone languages. J.H. Kwabena Nketia observes that "music and language are not only parallel […] but also that text-tune relations are integral" (Nketia 2002: 145). A.M. Jones (1959) and Kofi Agawu (1995, 2003) provide detailed insight into the features and function of speech tone and its relationship to melody. John Blacking's classic text, *Venda Children Songs* (1967), is perhaps the most detailed account of an African tone system with transcription and analysis of some fifty songs. An important feature of this study is the way in which Blacking links social dimensions to musical practice without reifying an 'objective' pitch structure. Thomas F. Johnston on Tsonga music (1973), Deirdre Hansen on Xhosa music (1981), and David Rycroft (1960, 1962, 1971, 1967, 1982, 1987) on Zulu music have explained similar principles in Nguni and closely related language groups. To date, this body of research on pitch prosody has aimed at establishing the 'rules' and formal function of speech tone and its interaction in the ordering of melody in 'traditional' musics. Discussion of intonation is generally restricted to the observation that 'downdrift' plays a major role in the structure of melodic contour. None of these studies have yet dealt with the tonal features of *izibongo* in *umaskandi*, with only Rycroft contributing to the study of *izibongo* in Nguni song (Rycroft 1981). In his paper on 'Zulu melodic and non-melodic vocal styles' (1987), Rycroft compares *ukubonga* (praising) to *ukuhlabelela* (song) where he makes the following remarks: "Regarding pitch usage, definite levels of stable pitch recur to some extent, and certainly to a greater extent than is the case either in 'non-melodic' song items […] or in speech" (1987: 23). He also points to differences in duration. For *ukubonga* "natural speech rhythm is given a free rein, often at a very rapid tempo. The only rhythmic distortion— or perhaps stylization, in this case—involves prolongation of stanza-initial vowels, and even greater prolongation of stanza-penultimate vowels than occurs in normal speech" (Ibid: 24).

The analyses below focus on features of speech tone and intonation in *izibongo*, and are a preliminary effort to describe and theorize the relations between prosody, melody and semantics. Consideration of these prosodic dimensions provides a sonic complement to the interpretation of *izibongo* texts. IsiZulu is a tone language in which semantic tone plays a crucial role in distinguishing the meaning of otherwise identical words. High vs. Low tone contrast is used. In some instances its realization

is complicated by various forms of assimilation and concatenation, and by the action of depressor consonants and downdrift intonation. Depressor consonants include "all voiced fricatives, clicks, and plosives (excepting implosive *b*), and all compounds containing these sounds" (Rycroft 1982: 306). The action of these consonants results in a drastic lowering of pitch in the following syllable. We see this often in speech and song where these consonants result in a sharp decline in pitch. "High-toned syllables beginning with such consonants commence with a brief rising on-glide (or the high tone may be displaced to the next syllable in some cases, if this has a non-lowering consonant […]). Likewise, descending off-glides from high tones are conditioned by a succeeding consonant of this type" (ibid). These 'depression' features seem also to influence an overall downdrift in intonation for both song and speech.

The action of depressors in *izibongo* is less clear than for speech. Rycroft (1962, 1982) describes a finite arrangement of just four pitch levels in *izibongo*.[5] In a later study based on the analysis of *Izibongo zikaDingana* (the Praises of Dingane), Rycroft and A.B. Ngcobo transcribed Princess Magogo's rendition of King Dingane's *izibongo* (as recorded by Jeff Opland in 1974), and discovered that the tonal and durational features contrast markedly with the renditions by James Stuart and John Mngadi recorded for Rycroft's earlier study (Rycroft 1962). Unlike the prior examples, Princess Magogo retains the downdrift intonation characteristic of spoken and sung utterances in isiZulu. Nollene Davies observes a similar patterning in *umaskandi*, stating that, "The overall movement of melodic patterns here and in the rest of the song, is descending. Thus it appears that maskanda musicians regard their scales as beginning with the highest frequency and then descending […]. The izibongo are recited with a slight fall in pitch in each section" (Davies 1992: 78). It appears, then, that Rycroft's early results are anomalous and that downdrift intonation is characteristic of many *izibongo*.[6]

Analysis

Two examples of *umaskandi izibongo* are analysed here as case studies. These are not representative or distinctive of *umaskandi* as a whole since its exponents adopt widely divergent styles and modes of delivery, many of which are highly unconventional. It is a genre that has developed in multiple directions for several decades, and with increasing technological sophistication in the post-apartheid era. The early practice of minstrels

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5   [F]or Zulu *izibongo*, four recurrent levels of pitch resembling Sol-fa notes *doh'*, *te*, *soh* and *Doh* appear to predominate and serve as a basic tonality in the musical sense. But these are used mechanically, for essential tones, rather than melodically. The upper two notes take all non-final high and low syllables, respectively, except low tones when preceded by a 'lowering consonant' these take *soh*; and any low syllable in *final* position takes low *Doh*. […] Here it is to be noted that normal descending sentence intonation becomes replaced by sustained, equal levels of pitch for all high, low, and consonantally lowered syllables, respectively (until the final low tone). (Rycroft 1982: 308).

6   This is perhaps unsurprising considering that the main *imbongi* in this case was James Stuart who was not a native speaker, and who offered stylized representations of *izibongo* he had himself recorded and transcribed.

accompanied on guitar and concertina gradually gave way to bands, small ensembles with vocal accompaniment, groups inclusive of male and female *umaskandi*, and to various forms of 'backing' in dance and song. Today I know of several groups where the dancers perform to backing tracks and have only limited involvement in the singing and composition of songs. All these forms of *umaskandi* coexist.

Since the introduction of drum machines, synthesizers and digital effects in studio work there has been a great deal of electronic experimentation in *umaskandi*, even if basic structural features, including *izibongo*, remain intact. This 'modernization,' or rather, 'commercialization' process has to some degree resulted in a disjuncture in the previously strong rural-urban interface of the genre and its newer 'world music' character. Some of the *umaskandi* whom I record in rural areas request that I add drum and bass backing tracks to their records. This 'professional' quality is thought to enhance the popularity of their songs, and their potential for radio play. The lyrics to these songs remain rooted in experience, in local features of place and identity that tend not to take on the broader social themes and commentaries characteristic of professional artists like Phuzekhemisi. It is erroneous therefore to consider the performances of a handful of professionals as characteristic of the genre. Amateurs make up the vast majority of performers and yet very little research has been documented on their musical practices to date. For these and other reasons this article is not intended as a survey. Instead it offers a close reading of two texts to demonstrate the utility of new ways of listening to and representing African music using digital technologies.

The transcription and analysis of pitch and durational patterning in the songs 'Imbizo' by Phuzekhemisi and Kethani, and 'Bafana Bafana' by Jonathan Mathenjwa, enable us to examine carefully the prosodic structure of *umaskandi izibongo*, and more specifically the action or suppression of speech tones, the role of downdrift intonation, and the rate and articulation of individual syllables. This shows how *izibongo* are a product of semantic/prosodic complements.

A note on method: pitch tracks were extracted from each of the two recordings using Praat. *Imbizo* is a commercial recording and so it was not possible to extract the pitch from only the lead vocal track. The song has a steady and deliberate duple time beat overlaid with guitar and concertina riffs that repeat as a ground for the verse/chorus and *izibongo* (see the lyrics above for an outline of the structure). The *Bafana Bafana* pitch track is more accurate because I used a multi-track recording technique to isolate the lead vocals using a head-mounted condenser microphone with flat frequency response. The graphs generated for both pitch tracks are organized paradigmatically in terms of: (1) pitch profiles drawn from the fundamental frequency and measured in Hertz on the Y axis from 50 to 550 Hz; (2) syllables of the text; (3) pitch movements of the individual segments represented as symbols. The syntagmatic dimension is structured according to the segmentation of individual syllables in time. These correspond to pitch movements and indicate also the rate of utterance measured in seconds on the X-axis.

'*Imbizo*'

Figure 2 is a transcription of the *izibongo* from the song *Imbizo* by Phuzekhemisi and Khethani. This is a 'classic' instance of early 90s *umaskandi*. Phuzekhemisi performs the *izibongo* in this song in a fashion that contrasts with the styles of iHash' Elimhlophe and Mfaz' Omnyama, both of whom have a much faster rate of delivery, higher-pitched vocals, and a more variegated range of expression. As Kathyrn Olsen (2014) points out, his style was influenced by the pioneering *umaskandi* of the previous generation, Phuzushukela, whose declamation of *izibongo* fluctuated between the liquid and the languorous.

Figure 2 shows characteristic features of intonation, speech tone and melody as described by Rycroft, Davies and several others. The depressor action of consonants results in rapid lowering of pitch on several syllables. The articulation of fricatives, clicks and plosives has a consistent pitch-lowering effect which is noticeable also in the on-glides to High tones. 67 of the 99 segments have a descending pitch contour [\] and a further 11 have a rising-falling pitch contour [^]. These 'depressor' features seem also to factor in the gradual lowering of pitch across the course of the utterance. This downdrift intonation is a feature of spoken isiZulu. There are very few instances of 'level pitch.' It is difficult to see how staff notation could be used to accurately represent these pitch movements. Consider the extent of variation in the pitch categories used. This does not mean that *umaskandi* musicians do not use what I call 'pitch targets' to orient

Imbizo, Phuzekhemisi and Khethani; *Izibongo* by Phuzekhemisi
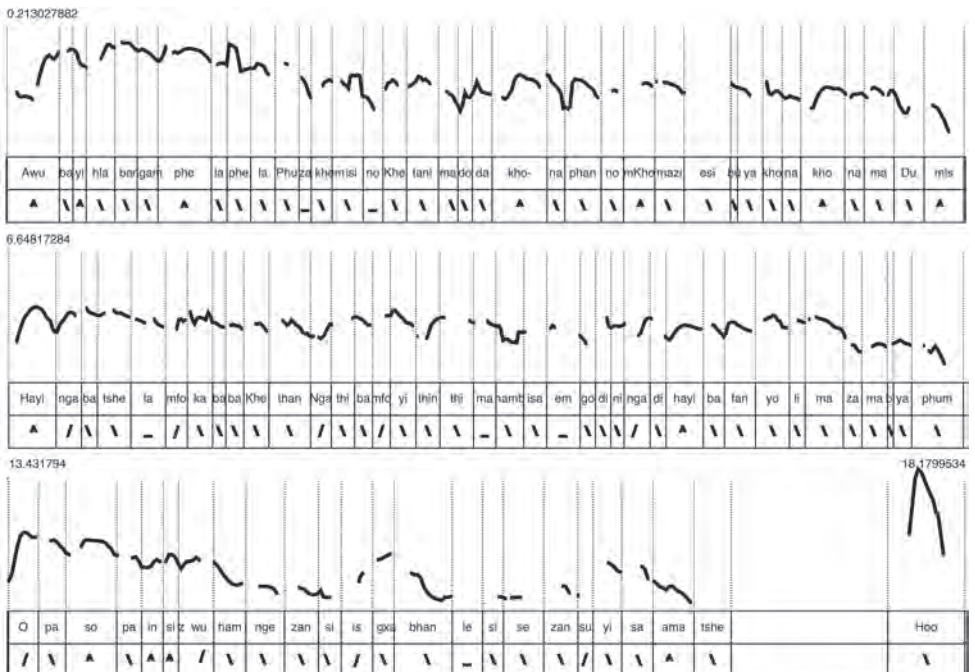

Figure 2. *Imbizo*, Phuzekhemisi and Khethani; *Izibongo* by Phuzekhemisi.

and structure pitch relations. On the contrary, and as I show in a forthcoming article, pitch targets play a crucial role in structuring the pitch space of Zulu songs where there is considerable gradience in the structure of pitch contours.

The tonal features of *izibongo* are represented in descriptive form by the pitch track in the upper system. The overall pattern of the intonational contour shows a gradual descent or downdrift. The pitch patterns are broken up into phrases so that each line indicates a single breath group. Breaks in the pitch pattern indicate stronger consonantal articulations although the line is often perceived to be entirely continuous by the listener. The text in the middle system is divided up into syllables to show how pitch categories are rendered in relation to the action of articulators. The pitch categories in the lower system indicate the direction of pitch movement and are used to measure and compare the action of depressor consonants. The action of these consonants has pitch-lowering effects such as at segments 12 and 23. There are also numerous on-glides. The division of syllables also indicates rate of utterance measured in syllables per second.

The action of depressor features also has an effect on *length*. Vowels in syllables without these consonants are often longer and are used for expressive purposes, including pitch bends, such as 'Awu' [1] and 'Hayi' [37]. The action of depressor consonants is prevalent and is seldom violated since it is a phonetic feature of vocal production. Each of the three breath groups beginning at [1], [37] and [75] show a distinct downward trend from high to low. Where the rate of utterance is high, such as in the first two breath groups, there is an initial high point reached followed by a relatively monotonic declamation ending in a short downward glide. Where the rate decreases in the final breath group there is more variation in pitch, outlining a quasi-melodic mode of declamation closer to song. It appears then that the complexity of pitch renderings is to some extent dependent on the pressure gradient in the airflow mechanism.

The rate of utterance is fast at roughly 6 syllables per second with frequent concatenation. This leads to ambiguity for two reasons. In the first instance, words and syllables are lost or blended into one another and crucial concords are omitted leaving the listener without important grammatical cues. In the second instance, the speed of utterance does not allow the listener sufficient time to make meaningful sense of the words uttered. Idiomatic language runs by too fast to facilitate comprehension. Even the attentive listener struggles to anchor a listening without proper contextual information. This is not the case for all *izibongo*, and it is also not consistently the case even in a single performed *izibongo*. This is a musical strategy on the part of the *umaskandi* who must decide when and where to use speed and lyrical ambiguity for dramatic purposes. Speed and ambiguity figure most prominently where messages are deliberately coded or elusive, and they result in a distinctive prosodic profile. Usually this profile is characterized by a drifting intonation curve that supersedes individual speech tone requirements, and by a rapid rate of delivery and concomitant concatenation of syllables.

Finally, we need to recognize that there is a musical rationale to the structure of *izibongo*. The declamation of *izibongo* must entrain to their musical ground. In '*Imbizo*,'

the phrasing of each of the three breath groups are structured according to the cycles of the call-and-response guitar-concertina accompaniment to which Phuzekhemisi entrains his vocals. The *izibongo* are not declaimed in free rhythm, but are carefully attenuated to the meter of the musical accompaniment defined as it is by the proportions of cyclical melodic and rhythmic riffs. The next example provides similar evidence of these prosodic trends.
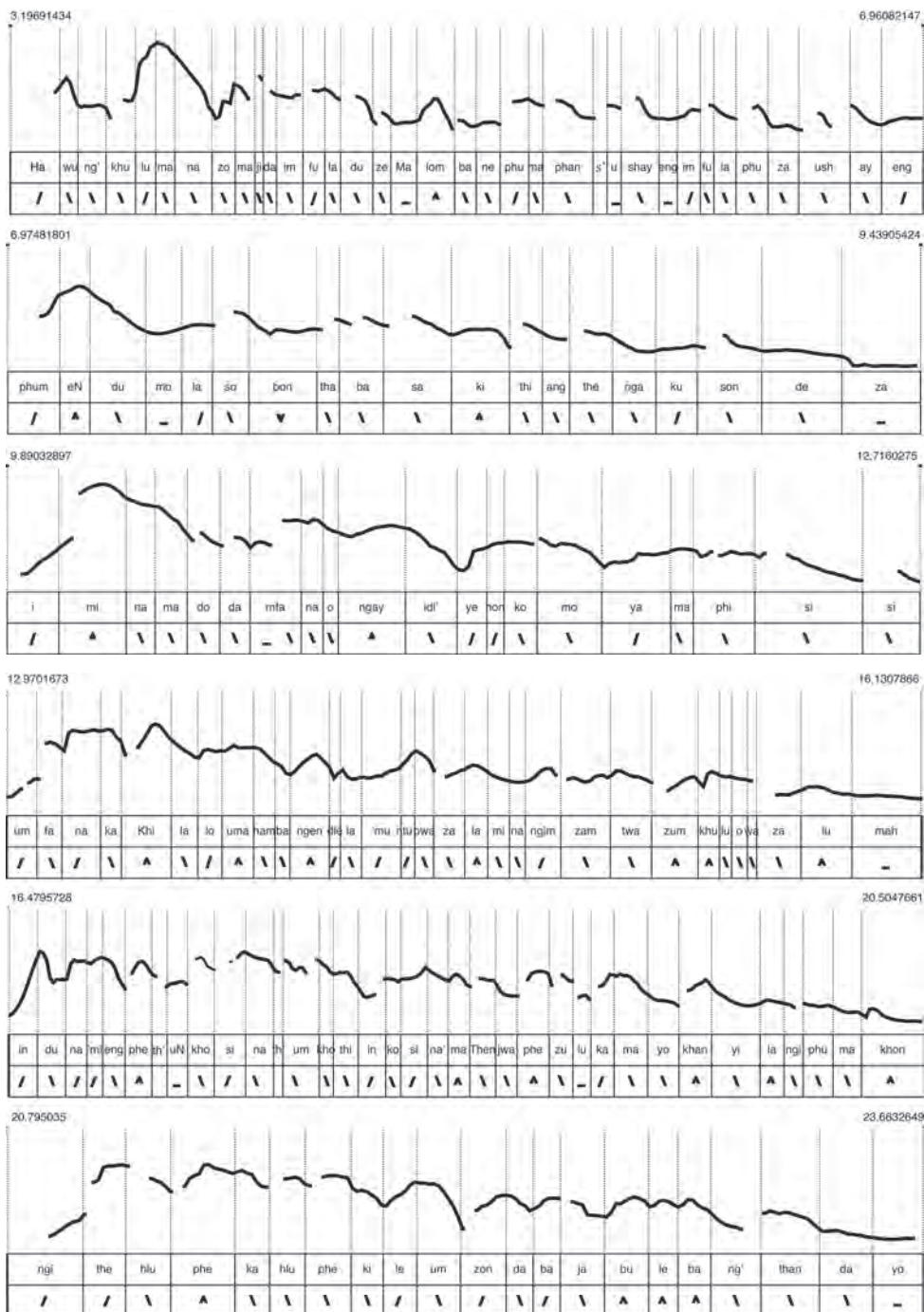
'Bafana Bafana',

'*Bafana Bafana*' conforms to the conventional *izibongo* form outlined by Davies (1992), perhaps more so than Phuzekhemisi's praises which are shorter. Figure 3 shows distinct downdrift intonation for all the *izibongo* breath groups with a penultimate Low tone or very low finalis. This cadential Low supersedes inherent speech tone requirements. The action of depressor consonants is noticeable especially on stops such as 'du' [15, 38] and 'phu' [31], although phrase-initial 'phum' rises to a primary highpoint. This structural cue is characteristic of most *izibongo*. The intonation of each breath group tends to flatten out toward the end suggesting a physiological constraint that is perhaps a consequence of the very high rate of vocal declamation.

Figure 3 contains within it a phrase of the sung component of the song. This is extracted from immediately after the *izibongo* [212 to 235] and provides a useful point of comparison for features of *izibongo* and song. The sung portion consists of two sub-phrases with the second sub-phrase divided again in two. This explains the occurrence of secondary highpoints at [226] and [232] where the singer takes additional breaths.

The overall pattern of the intonational contour indicates downdrift declination. The pitch pattern is broken up into phrases so that each line indicates a single breath group. The action of depressor consonants has pitch-lowering effects evident at segments 15 and 78. Sometimes this pitch-lowering effect is overridden by other expressive needs, such as segment 36 at the very beginning of a breath group. On-glides, such as at 151 show this depressor function, too. In '*Bafana Bafana*' the rate of utterance is extremely fast at nearly 7 syllables per second. This makes it exceedingly difficult for the listener to make sense of the lyrics in real time. The consequence of such speed is that the *umaskandi* must concatenate or leave out words and syllables in an effort to 'fit' the *izibongo* to the accompaniment. It is the musical phrase structure that defines the period, not the *izibongo*.

The depressor action of speech tones, and their consequent on- and off- glides are conditioned by several factors. For instance, Mathenjwa tends toward less precipitous and more rounded pitch height adjustments. This leads to a measure of ambiguity in the interpretation of the lyrics that is a consequence of two prosodic factors: rate of delivery and downdrift intonation. Just as in the '*Imbizo*' example, a compromise is reached for musical reasons. The *umaskandi* must fit his *izibongo* to the cycles of the guitar accompaniment. The *izibongo* are uttered at a very fast rate of 7 syllables per second. Not all of these syllables are clearly articulated and so the analyst must infer meanings from close and repeated listening. A comparison with the sung portion of the song

Bafana Bafana, Jonathan Mathenjwa

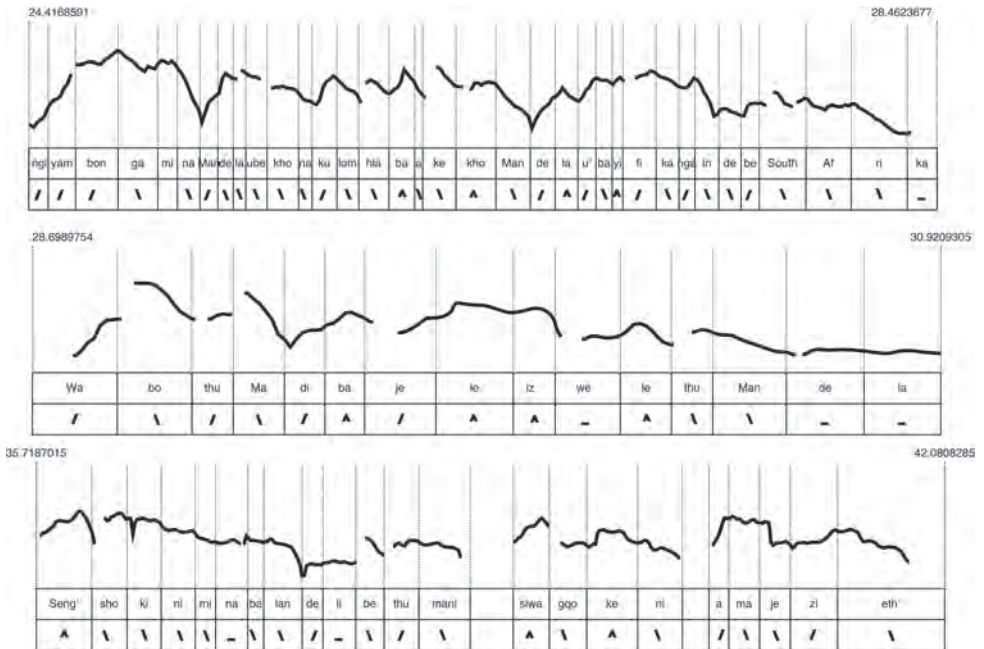Figure 3. *Bafana Bafana*, Jonathan Mathenjwa.

Figure 3 (continued). *Bafana Bafana*, Jonathan Mathenjwa.

makes this clear. Singing happens at a rate of 3.65 syllables per second, or at roughly half the speed of the *izibongo*. There are two points about this. First is that the lyrics are easily comprehended because the articulation is crisp. Second is that the *umaskandi* has time to engage in expressive melodic fluctuations. In other words, expressive melody is a function of time and breath. This is evident also in the recordings by Mfaz' Omnyama who tends to engage in melodic 'play' when he slows the pace of his recitations.

Why do some *umaskandi* insist on such fast *izibongo*? It would be much simpler to compose shorter lines and fit these to the accompaniment with ample time to spare. The answer points perhaps in two directions. On the one hand there is the competitive element to the declamation of *umaskandi izibongo*: the fighter in martial combat with his or her rivals and foes. On the other hand, there are 'aesthetic' considerations involving poetry and play. The meanings of *izibongo*—as with many other Zulu idioms and stories—remain resistant to simplistic interpretation, thus allowing for creative individual responses to complex social phenomena through performance. The *umaskandi* treats the *izibongo* very often as the pinnacle of his or her art, as the distinctive signature of their person, and as the measure of their artistic achievement. Artists are measured in relation to a set of conventions that for *umaskandi izibongo* have solidified into a critical practice.

Features of duration have been discussed only briefly in this article for they are largely beyond its primary focus on factors of pitch. Still, there is a close relation between

pitch and rhythm. Even in cases where a relatively 'free rhythm' is adopted, such as at the very beginning of the *izibongo*, the vocalist must still abide by the underlying pulse in his or her segmentation of syllables and breath groups. The tonal features of the melodies provide structure and inspiration for the melodic intonational structure of the *izibongo*. It is clear that breath control conditions *tone*. Where speed takes precedence over intelligibility, or rather, where *musical fit* trumps semantics, as it does in Mathenjwa's *izibongo*, speech tone requirements are superseded by the logic of melody and meter. The consequence is a surplus of meaning characteristic of *umaskandi izibongo*.

Conclusion

In this article I have sought a balance between contextualized readings of *umaskandi izibongo* as social texts of time and place and close analysis of their prosodic features and structure. The reification of fixed rules of practice, of distinct levels and combinations of tones and intonational features, do not fit this broad interpretation of *umaskandi izibongo*, but they do provide a framework for interpreting details of prosodic structure that illuminate the performative and dramatic dimensions of *umaskandi*. The violations of linguistic conventions so characteristic of *umaskandi izibongo* display a bravura and uncompromising directness very much a part of the 'martial' tradition from which these popular praises originated. The analysis of prosodic pitch movements in the *izibongo* of Phuzekhemisi and Jonathan Mathenjwa show how pitch is conditioned by a range of cognitive factors, including deliberate acts of manipulation, to create dramatically satisfying performances. The desire to perform praises 'at the top of their voices' and 'as fast as possible' explains much of the ambiguity and complexity that results. This social-aesthetic dimension to the practice of praising suggests that we locate it within a broader realm of socio-cultural signification that is musical to the core.

In these myriad ways *umaskandi izibongo* blur the lines between song and speech to create a paralanguage that superimposes and impinges upon semantic readings of the music. The appreciation of *umaskandi* artistry is best figured then through a 'thick' interpretation of its simultaneous semantic, prosodic and paramusical dimensions. The ambiguity and elusiveness of *umaskandi* texts emerge from the frenetic renderings of their idiomatic and obscure uses of language and imagery. This coded aesthetic is consistent with the practice of the *imbongi* praise singers from which their practice emerged in the mid-twentieth century, and against and into which it may be read. The dimensions of *umaskandi izibongo* are nevertheless unique in form and structure, virtuosity and humour, and in the audacious response they continue to present to forces of oppression and colonialism. This is a minstrel art of telling and untelling, of paralinguistic and paramusical communication, and of musicking *par excellence*. We are invited to listen, listen closely. The sharp social and political commentary offered by *umaskandi* is created in a richly symbolic language that displays fitness, skill and standing in a community, and it renders humane the experiences of dispossession, alienation and inequality that are the everyday reality for South Africa's urban and rural poor. *Hawu, ng'khuluma nazo!*

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