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Music-Making of the Xhosa Diasporic Community: A Focus on the *Umguyo* Tradition in Zimbabwe

By

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A dissertation submitted for the degree of Masters of Arts (in Music)

in the Wits School of Arts, Faculty of Humanities,

University of the Witwatersrand.

Supervisor: Doctor Marie Jorritsma

Johannesburg, March 2013

DECLARATION

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing that is the outcome of work done in collaboration.

Caciswa Nombembe

Signature:_____ Date:_____

ABSTRACT

Music-Making of the Xhosa Diasporic Community: A Focus on the *Umguyo* Tradition in Zimbabwe

This dissertation is an ethnographic study that focuses on the music of one of the Xhosa ethnic groups, the Mfengu who are settled in Zimbabwe. Taking into consideration that the bulk of the Xhosa ethnic group is situated in South Africa, predominantly in the Eastern Cape Province, I consider the small group of Xhosas in Zimbabwe as a diasporic community. While much has been written on the music of South African Xhosas, ethnomusicological scholars have paid insufficient attention to this group. When this group left the homeland, South Africa, it did not leave its musical traditions behind. One such tradition is the *umguyo*, the boys' circumcision ceremony. My major intention therefore was to find out how this diasporic group makes music for the *umguyo* tradition. By closely analysing the lyrics of the *umguyo* musical repertoire, I discovered that the Xhosas in Zimbabwe archived their history in the song lyrics. Even though the majority of creators of this music have lived and departed, the constant performance and general continuity of this musical tradition assures both the present and future generations of a firmly established source for their identity. Looking at the lyrics once more, I found out that the Zimbabwean Xhosa music-making reflects on gender issues. I state that while Zimbabwean Xhosa men enjoy their patriarchal benefits, through music, women are socially taught to conform to stereotypical gender roles in their society. Thus, Zimbabwean Xhosa women, through their song performance, declare themselves as commodities for Xhosa patriarchy. In addition, this enquiry demonstrates how this diaspora community has deviated from the common way most diaspora communities make music. I mainly attribute this divergence to the 'dominant/subject' or 'master/subordinate' relationship that existed during the colonial period.

DEDICATION

For my children

Lindelwa, Andiswa, Mzimazisi, and Zandile Praise Nombembe

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PREFACE

I began attending the *umguyo* ceremony when I was still a little baby. Most probably, I was around six months of age when I first was taken to *umguyo* the ceremony. This assumption emanates from one of my mother's recurrent stories about my babyhood. She tells me how I stopped breast-feeding after she had decided not to go with me to a particular *umguyo* ceremony in 1973. Her story is that she left me with my aunt in order to attend the ceremony. When she came back, she tried to nurse me as usual but I refused to feed. While she was worried about my behaviour, she found out that most of the babies that attended the ceremony had become sick with some losing their lives. Due to that, she stopped compelling me to breast-feed. Instead, she was grateful that I survived this menace. My mother attributes the babies' deaths and sickness to the effects of *ukuvulwa kwembodlela* (the opening of a bottle) by one of the attendees. *Ukuvulwa kwembodlela* is an act of smearing some harmful traditional ointments on the body. This is not an unusual activity among the Zimbabwean Xhosas especially when attending ceremonies. Those who do it believe that they need to protect themselves from witchcraft despite knowing that these protections can affect people negatively.

I then grew up attending the *umguyo* ceremonies with my friends. Among the dances performed in this ceremony, I used to like watching and performing the *ukutyityimba* dance which is a women's/girls' dance. We would continue performing this dance at our homes in a competitive manner. As I grew older, I became very interested in the music performed during the ceremony and hence became curious about the origins of the tradition itself. Due to this interest, I embarked on several studies related to the tradition. Overall, I believe that this research has been quite revealing.