

PREFACE

Saliva and dust. Writing about the body, I write about the voice. About the swivel of the foot to the percussive click of the tongue. The torso stretching and twisting to song.

I listen to the body *of* a voice, its weight, quality, and form. The stridence of the lead singer's throat. The resonant bassy response of his team. The piercing attack of a boastful interjection. Dental whistles. A mother's quivering ululation ringing out. Verbal art as performance. I listen to the body of a voice.

I hear the state of the body *in* the voice. Saliva wetting the sound. Breath expelled from heaving dancers having danced. *Ulaka*, moral anger, said to reside in the throat, audible in the vocal qualities of Zulu *ngoma* singing.

I notice the body *as* a voice. Uzowotha kick-stamping to the sound of his own dance name. "Val'inkunzi, Val'inkunzi, Vala, ji!" Zabiwe brushing his hand against his ear in improvised solo display. *Do you hear what I'm saying (with my dance)?*

I register that the voice is *of* a body that has personality and biography. Mlambo's aged vocal fry. Siyazi's poetic contemporary lyrics: "Hey, maggots, you who eat our father's children"; the shimmer of his hands as he begins to dance. Zabiwe's old-style signature head bob. Uzowotha's mammoth grace. I register the singularity of a voice.

I approach the voice as produced in relation with multiple other voices. The camaraderie of seated teammates vocally producing the soundtrack that supports and amplifies a dancer's solo. Mqubi competing against Mboneni, sequence by improvised sequence. Mqubi. Mboneni. Mqubi. Mboneni.

(Dust!) Whistles from their teammates, and from men in the crowd. Cheers from the throats of women. Mqubi's mothers and sisters calling out "He's from our house!" as he completes his final sequence. Deep in the crowd, a girl takes notice. But I will come to this.

I first met ngoma singer-dancers during a recording session at Down-Town Studios in Johannesburg, 1990. Siyazi Zulu and friends were recording a new Zulu traditional album featuring the concertina ace Msawetshitshi Zakwe. I listened in on the creative process in the control room, research that became *Sound of Africa: Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio* (Duke University Press, 2003). Siyazi told me his ngoma group sang and danced outside Jeppe men's hostel on the edge of the inner city on Sunday afternoons. Johnny Clegg (South Africa's Afro-rock celebrity) had learned from them, he said, and sometimes Clegg still came to dance with them. "By all means, you are welcome," he offered. "Come and see us." Times were precarious, dangerous, for Siyazi's dancers. I didn't often find them at their spot. But dotted around the hostel neighborhood, others were clapping, kicking, stamping, whistling, singing, and shouting out. Frequently TJ Lemon, whose photographs appear in this book, accompanied me. He photographed; I conversed, practicing isiZulu, and recorded in sound. (Later I turned to video.) Sometimes Siyazi met us there. For the long Easter weekend in 1991, he invited us to his home in the subward esiPongweni in the ward Uthuli lweZulu (Dust of the Zulu) of the Mchunu chiefdom in Msinga KwaZulu-Natal. I have been visiting ever since.