

Exploring *Amahubo Akwazulu*: Bridging Past, Present, and Future through Indigenous Zulu Music

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Abstract

This article delves into the cultural significance of Zulu war chants, known as *amahubo*, and their transformative power. These chants embody ideals crucial to Zulu identity, such as unity, patriotism, loyalty, and dignity, making them profound musical expressions. They represent the vibrant cultural, social, and historical dimensions of the Zulu personality. Through qualitative content analysis and a review of existing literature, this article uncovers the rich tapestry of *amahubo*. Drawing on communicative theory, it argues that preserving cultural elements is vital for societal vibrancy. The article analyses how traditions, values, and practices are transmitted across generations, ensuring cultural continuity. It highlights the dynamic evolution of *amahubo*, showing their pivotal role in shaping Zulu cultural identity, especially among the youth. Beyond their historical function, these war chants serve as platforms for addressing contemporary social issues, becoming vehicles for social commentary and engagement. The article presents three examples of *amahubo* sung on different occasions, demonstrating their diverse roles. This research contributes to a nuanced understanding of *amahubo* as dynamic expressions of cultural continuity and agency within the Zulu community, bridging the past, present, and future as vibrant carriers of Zulu cultural heritage.

Keywords: *amahubo* (chants); folklore; indigenous Zulu music; social commentary; Zulu cultural identity

Introduction

It is prudent to foreground this study by giving a brief background on various forms of poetry in oral traditional literature among amaZulu, so that *amahubo* under scrutiny can be contextualised. According to Turner (1994, 59), the Zulu Language Board has recently categorised the various forms of poetry in oral traditional literature in the following way: *imilolozelo* (lullabies), *amahubo* (poetry accompanied by song), and *izibongo* (praise poetry). The classification of Zulu poetry by the Zulu Language Board reflects the rich and diverse oral tradition of the Zulu people. Through these poetic forms, the Zulu culture is preserved, celebrated, and passed on to future generations (Biyela 2003).

The problem statement in the context of this article is rooted in the existing gap within scholarly literature concerning the holistic exploration of *amahubo*'s role as a tool for connecting past, present, and future generations, and their efficacy in addressing contemporary social issues within the Zulu community. While various studies have made significant contributions to understanding different facets of *amahubo*, such as their historical, cultural, and social dimensions, there remains a notable deficiency in comprehensively examining how these musical expressions function as a bridge across time and generations (Dickie 2017; Gumede 2009; Masuku 2009; Ngema 2020). The article aims to bridge this gap by comprehensively analysing cultural, historical, and sociopolitical dimensions. It seeks to understand how *amahubo* act as conduits for Zulu heritage and communication, providing a voice for social commentary and advocacy. Through this exploration, the article aims to highlight the enduring significance and adaptability of *amahubo* in Zulu culture.

Amahubo have their roots in ancient times, often linked to the very beginning of Zulu history, tracing back to the emergence of the first Zulu people from the bed of reeds. This is supported by Turner (1994, 63), who emphasises that

Amahubo include work songs which are chanted in a solo-chorus fashion in group work situations and serve to lighten the burden of manual labour. They create a sense of team effort and often contain derisive but amusing words aimed at a particular person or group of people. The other categories of songs included under *amahubo*, such as love songs, elegiac songs, political songs and war songs fall beyond the scope of the present brief overview.

Furthermore, when heard as musical expressions, *amahubo* readily conjure up memories of the pre-colonial Zulu period, when the people were in control of their own lives and destiny. Weddings, the funerals of kings, chiefs, induna, and deputy chiefs, as well as wartime and other commemoration ceremonies, are among the important events at which they are performed. The Zulu community's cultural and historical environment is shaped by these ceremonial performances, which are intricately entwined with ritual and symbolism. It is worth noting that Ngema (2020) shares this perspective, asserting that *amahubo* are deeply rooted in the spiritual and social life of the Zulu people. These

songs function as chants¹ and praise songs, forming an integral part of their cultural and religious identity.

Literature Review

Several studies (Masuku 2009; Ngema 2020; Turner 1994; Xulu 1992) have mentioned that *amahubo*, known as Zulu chants, are a unique genre of indigenous Zulu music that extends beyond mere melodic compositions. They embody a profound cultural and historical legacy that resonates through successive generations (Ngema 2020; Turner 1994; Xulu 1992).

Ngema (2020) describes *amahubo* (chants) as more than just musical refrains, emphasising their role as living testaments to Zulu heritage, carrying the stories of ancestors and the wisdom of traditions. Scholars such as d'Abdon (2014), Wainwright (1982), and Xulu (1992) support this view, highlighting how *amahubo* preserve the essence of being Zulu and narrate tales of triumphs and tribulations. They also serve as a means of communication with the divine, offering blessings and solace (Buthelezi 2012; Masuku 2009).

Amahubo play a central role in the traditional aspects of Zulu culture, including religion and politics (Dickie 2017; Gumede 2009; Groenewald 1990). They are not just musical refrains but living testaments to the depth of Zulu heritage, carrying the weight of centuries of history. Passed down through generations, they preserve the essence of what it means to be Zulu. Each note and rhythm is infused with the stories of ancestors, the wisdom of traditions, and the vibrant spirit of a people (Buthelezi 2012; Dickie 2017; Masuku 2012; Ngubane 2023). The sociopolitical role of *amahubo* is also significant, serving as a platform for social commentary and advocacy. Through their verses, *amahubo* became a powerful vehicle for catalysing social change and providing a voice to the collective conscience of the Zulu community. They are not confined to the past but continue to thread their way into the present, offering a sense of continuity and belonging in a rapidly changing world. Despite existing research, there is a gap in understanding *amahubo*'s role in connecting past, present, and future generations and addressing contemporary issues.

Poetic and Linguistic Features

Scholars have explored the linguistic and stylistic features of *amahubo*, highlighting their poetic sophistication and literary merit. Studies by Brown (1995) and Dickie (2017) have analysed the intricate rhyme schemes, metaphors, and symbolic imagery employed in these chants, showcasing their artistic excellence and poetic depth. Despite these contributions, there remains a gap in the literature regarding a comprehensive analysis of *amahubo*'s role in bridging the past, present, and future of the Zulu community. While existing studies have touched on aspects of their historical and

¹ A *chant* is a repeated rhythmic phrase, typically one shouted or sung in unison by a crowd.

cultural significance, there is a need for a more holistic examination that considers how these chants function as a dynamic force in shaping Zulu cultural identity and fostering intergenerational continuity. This gap in the literature forms the basis of my research, as I seek to explore the transformative potential of *amahubo* in connecting Zulu people with their cultural heritage and guiding them towards a shared future.

Methodology

This article utilises qualitative content analysis, drawing from existing literature to delve into the historical, cultural, and social dimensions of this indigenous Zulu music. Stemler (2015) highlights the effectiveness of qualitative content analysis for examining textual or visual data, involving systematic analysis to identify patterns and themes. In the context of *amahubo* (the Zulu chants), this methodology facilitates a comprehensive exploration of the music's rich narratives and cultural significance, allowing for the extraction and interpretation of meanings and values associated with it. This approach contributes to a nuanced understanding of *amahubo* as a repository of cultural memory within the Zulu community.

This article leverages existing literature, encompassing academic articles, ethnographic accounts, historical records, and cultural studies (Stemler 2015). This comprehensive approach allows this article to tap into a wealth of perspectives, offering insights into the deep historical and cultural roots of *amahubo*. The use of existing literature is justified by its accessibility, comprehensiveness, and the expertise of scholars who have extensively researched and documented *amahubo*, providing a historical continuum and insights into its evolution over time. Triangulation, a methodological strategy employed in this article, involves cross-verifying information from multiple sources to enhance data quality and mitigate potential biases or inaccuracies in the existing literature.

Evidently, by consulting diverse sources such as academic articles, ethnographic fieldwork, and historical records, this article ensures a well-rounded analysis of *amahubo*, contributing to the credibility of the findings. Furthermore, Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis serves as an analytical tool to systematically extract meaningful themes from the collected data (Braun and Clarke 2006). This method facilitates a structured exploration of key themes related to *amahubo*, allowing for the uncovering of underlying cultural, historical, and social narratives within the music. Thematic analysis provides a means to distil complex information into coherent patterns, offering valuable insights into the cultural significance of this indigenous Zulu music.

Theoretical Framework

For this article, a communicative theory was applied, which is rooted in the works of theorists such as Jürgen Habermas and Mikhail Bakhtin and provides a framework for understanding how communication shapes social reality (Bakhtin 1981; Habermas 1970). At its core, communicative theory emphasises the importance of dialogue and

interaction in shaping human understanding and social structures (Bakhtin 1981; Stevenson 2002). One key aspect of communicative theory is the concept of the “public sphere,” which refers to a space where individuals come together to engage in rational discourse about common concerns (Habermas 1970). Another important concept within communicative theory is the idea of “intersubjectivity,” which emphasises the role of shared meaning in communication (Brinck 2008). Applying communicative theory to the study of *amahubo* offers a valuable framework for understanding the cultural and social significance of these indigenous forms of music. Examining *amahubo* through the lens of communicative theory shows how these chants function as a form of cultural communication that transcends time and connects generations of Zulu people.

Furthermore, communicative theory provides a nuanced understanding of how communication shapes cultural identity and social cohesion. By exploring the communicative aspects of *amahubo*, this article provides a deeper appreciation for the role of music in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage. The communicative theory offers a valuable framework for understanding the cultural and social significance of *amahubo*. By examining these chants as forms of cultural communication, this article shows how music shapes cultural identity and connects communities across time and space.

In the context of *amahubo*, the performance of these chants can be seen as a form of public sphere where community members gather to express their shared experiences and values. Through this communal act of singing and listening, individuals contribute to the creation of a shared cultural narrative that spans generations. Hereunder is an example of *ihubo* of war. When individuals engage with *amahubo* they are participating in a form of communication that is deeply rooted in shared cultural symbols and meanings. This shared understanding creates a sense of solidarity and belonging within the community, strengthening social bonds and reinforcing cultural norms. Additionally, communicative theory highlights the role of power dynamics in communication.

Wathinta thina: (You strike us)

Wathinta thina
Wathint' abangas' okufa
Safa saphenduka
Saphenduk' inj'ebovu

WeNkonyane KaNdaba
Kwanyakaz' imikhonto

(You strike us
You strike those who will not die
We died and turned.
We turned into a mad dog

Son of Ndaba
Sharpen your spears)

“Wathinta thina” is a powerful Zulu war chant that embodies the spirit of resilience and defiance in the face of adversity. The chant is often used to rally warriors before battle, reminding them of their strength and determination to overcome challenges (Gunner and Gwala 1991). Communicative theory provides a framework for understanding how “Wathinta thina” functions as a form of cultural communication that shapes the collective identity of Zulu warriors. According to Habermas (1970), communication is not just about transmitting information but also about shaping social reality and reinforcing cultural norms. In the context of “Wathinta thina,” the chant serves as a form of communication that reinforces the values of resilience, courage, and determination within the Zulu warrior culture.

The repetition of phrases like “Wathinta thina” and “Wathint’ abangas’ okufa” in the chant serves as a rhetorical device that emphasises the message of resilience and defiance. Bakhtin (1981) notes that repetition is a common feature in communicative acts that seek to reinforce certain ideas or values within a community. By repeating these phrases, the chant creates a sense of unity and solidarity among the warriors, reminding them of their shared values and beliefs.

Additionally, the imagery used in the chant, such as “Saphenduk’ inj’ ebovu” (We turned into a mad dog), conveys a sense of determination and perseverance in the face of adversity. This imagery not only evokes a strong emotional response but also reinforces the idea of overcoming challenges and emerging stronger. The communicative theory supports the analysis of “Wathinta thina” by highlighting its role as a form of cultural communication that shapes the values and beliefs of the Zulu warrior culture. Through its use of repetition and imagery, the chant serves as a powerful tool for rallying the warriors and reinforcing their sense of identity and purpose in the face of conflict.

Ihubo Lokuphakwa kwempi (war chant)

Waqedaqed’izizwe,
Uyakuhlaselaphi na?
E! Uyakuhlaselaphi na?
E! - E! - E! - E!- Uhlaselaphi na?

(You destroyed the nations
Where are going you attack?
E! Where are going you attack?
Where are going you attack?
E! - Hey! - Hey! - E!-)

Wahlul’amakhosi, Izwe ngelesil’indlovu
Wanqoba amakhosi!

Ozizwayo kabuye,
Aphinde kwaZulu Wawel'uSuthu,

(You defeated kings, the country is for the King
You defeated kings!
He who can stand let him come
Let him go back to Kwa-Zulu, You crossed uSuthu River,)

Wawel'uMkhomazi,
Wawel'iMbuluza!

(You crossed UMkhomazi River,
You crossed iMbuluza River!)

Communicative theory offers a lens through which to understand the cultural significance of the “Ihubo Lokuphakwa kwempi” (Chant of planning for war) and its role in shaping the collective identity of Zulu warriors. According to this theory, communication is a symbolic process through which people create and interpret meanings (Habermas 1970). In the context of the Zulu chant, communication takes the form of music and lyrics that convey cultural values, history, and aspirations. The chant serves as a form of cultural communication that reinforces the values of bravery, triumph, and readiness for battle within the Zulu warrior culture. The rhetorical questions posed in the chant, such as “Uyakuhlaselaphi na?” (Where are going you attack?), serve to instil a sense of determination and preparedness in the warriors. This type of communication is not just about transmitting information, but also about shaping social reality and reinforcing cultural norms (Habermas 1970).

Furthermore, the imagery used in the chant, such as the comparison of the Zulu army to an elephant and the reference to crossing rivers, conveys a sense of power and invincibility. This imagery is a form of symbolic communication that reinforces the idea of the Zulu warriors' military prowess and their ability to overcome any obstacles in their path. Through its use of music, lyrics, and imagery, the chant serves as a powerful tool for rallying the warriors and reinforcing their sense of identity and purpose in the face of conflict.

Ihubo lempi enqobile (Victory war song)

Sayidudul' impi yethu!
Sayidudula, eyaya ye!
Impi! Eyaya ye! Eyaye!

(We have conquered our war
We have conquered, eyaya ye!
A war! Eyaya ye!)

Sayidudula le mpi, eyaye!

Impi eyaye! Sayidudula, eyaye!
Impi sayidudula, sayidudula bo!
Sayidudula! Dudu! Sayilahl' ethala!
Sayidudul' impi!
Sayidudula bo!
Sayidudula nans' iyoshona ngale!

(We have conquered our war
A war! We have conquered

A war! We have conquered, a war! We have conquered
We have conquered! We threw it on the terrace!
We have conquered the war!
We have conquered!
We have conquered, here it goes there!)

The “Ihubo lempi enqobile” (Chant of victory) is an example of a triumphant Zulu war cry celebrating success in battle. It proclaims the conquest of war and the defeat of enemies, exuding pride and jubilation. Communicative theory provides a framework for understanding the cultural significance of the “Ihubo lempi enqobile” (Chant of victory) and its role in shaping the collective identity of the Zulu warriors. According to this theory, communication is not just about transmitting information but also about shaping social reality and reinforcing cultural norms, as mentioned by Habermas (1984).

The repetition of “Sayidudula” in the war chant serves as a form of rhetorical device that emphasises the message of victory and triumph. This repetition is a common feature in communicative acts that seek to reinforce certain ideas or values within a community (Bakhtin 1981). By repeating this phrase, the chant creates a sense of unity and solidarity among the Zulu warriors, reminding them of their shared victory and the strength of their collective identity.

Furthermore, the imagery used in the chant, such as the reference to throwing conquered foes on the terrace, conveys a sense of triumph and dominance over their enemies. This imagery is a form of symbolic communication that reinforces the idea of the Zulu warriors' military prowess and their ability to overcome any obstacles in their path. Overall, communicative theory supports the analysis of the “Ihubo lempi enqobile” by highlighting its role as a form of cultural capital. Through its use of music, lyrics, and imagery, the chant serves as a powerful tool for celebrating victory and reinforcing the collective identity of the Zulu warriors.

The literature on *amahubo*, as a form of Zulu traditional poetry and folklore, offers a rich tapestry of insights into its cultural significance and historical evolution. Scholars have explored various aspects of *amahubo*, including their poetic structure, thematic content, and performance contexts, shedding light on their role in Zulu society (Kaschula 2021; Okigbo 2010).

One prominent theme in the literature is the role of *amahubo* in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage. Scholars such as Ballantine (2017) and Turner (1994) have highlighted how these chants serve as repositories of historical knowledge, capturing the collective memory of the Zulu people. Through their poetic verses, *amahubo* recount significant events in Zulu history, celebrate the achievements of Zulu kings and warriors, and convey moral and ethical teachings. Another area of interest in the literature is the performative aspect of *amahubo*. Researchers like Ballantine (2017) and Kaschula (2021) have documented the various performance practices associated with these chants, including the use of call-and-response patterns, rhythmic drumming, and choreographed dance movements. These performances are not only aesthetic but also serve as communal rituals that foster social cohesion and solidarity among the participants.

Contextualising the *Amahubo*

The contextualisation of *amahubo*, in alignment with the preceding discussions, unveils a profound cultural richness among AmaZulu. These indigenous Zulu chants serve as living conduits, transmitting historical narratives, values, and traditions through generations. Contemporary adaptations reflect a dynamic cultural identity, blending ancient wisdom with modern influences. For Zulu youth, they play a pivotal role in shaping their cultural identity and fostering a sense of belonging. Furthermore, *amahubo* emerged as a powerful tool for addressing pressing social issues, embodying the collective conscience of the Zulu community. Overall, these findings underscore the enduring significance of *amahubo*, bridging past, present, and future in the vibrant mosaic of Zulu culture. The following themes emerged and are discussed using existing scholarly writings.

Historical Narratives and Cultural Heritage Transmission through *Amahubo*

Amahubo as a distinctive genre of indigenous Zulu music hold an esteemed position within the cultural tapestry of the Zulu community. Beyond their musicality, these chants and praise songs play a pivotal role in preserving historical narratives and cultural wisdom. This theme delves into the profound significance of *amahubo* as a medium for passing down the collective memory of the Zulu people (Xulu 1992). Through generations, they have functioned as living testaments, bearing witness to the depth and richness of Zulu heritage. Each note, each rhythm, carries the weight of centuries of history, reverberating through the valleys and hills of Zululand (Lock and Quantrill 2015; Yende and Ngema 2022). Within the poetic verses and evocative melodies, a narrative unfolds—one that recounts the triumphs, the trials, and the transformative moments that have shaped the Zulu nation.

Moreover, the transmission of historical narratives through *amahubo* is not a passive act; it is a dynamic process of cultural preservation (Dickie 2017; Ngema 2020). The oral tradition, integral to *amahubo*, ensures that these narratives are not relegated to the

annals of history but are breathed to life in the present moment. It is through the act of singing, of passing down these songs, that the cultural memory of the Zulu people is rejuvenated and kept vibrant. In this process, the Zulu community becomes a living bridge across time, linking the past with the present (Dickie 2017; Gumede 2009; Groenewald 1990). Through *amahubo*, the struggles and triumphs of ancestors become tangible, and their wisdom continues to guide and inspire. This living connection with history instils a profound sense of pride and identity among the Zulu people, forging a resilient bond between generations.

The transmission of historical narratives through *amahubo* is not a passive endeavour but rather a dynamic process deeply rooted in cultural preservation, as noted by scholars such as Dickie (2017) and Ngema (2020). The integral role of the oral tradition in *amahubo* ensures that these narratives transcend the confines of historical archives, coming to life in the present moment. Through the act of singing, the Zulu community actively engages with the cultural memory embedded in *amahubo*, breathing new vitality into age-old stories. One compelling example of this dynamic process is found in *amahubo* dedicated to Zulu historical figures such as Shaka.

The song “uShaka KaSenzangakhona” serves as a living chronicle, allowing the Zulu community to actively participate in the historical narrative of Shaka’s legendary reign. *Amahubo* are traditional Zulu praise songs that serve as oral histories and cultural expressions. The song “uShaka KaSenzangakhona” is an *ihubo* that commemorates Shaka Zulu’s reign, allowing the community to participate in preserving his legacy. These chants, often performed during ceremonies and rituals, reinforce cultural identity, collective memory, and communal bonds. They educate younger generations about historical figures and cultural values, ensuring that significant events and leadership qualities are remembered and honoured. Through musical storytelling, *amahubo* like “uShaka KaSenzangakhona” keep the history and traditions of the Zulu people alive. The living bridge across time, mentioned by scholars such as Dickie (2017), Gumede (2009), and Groenewald (1990), is exemplified during initiation ceremonies. Specific *amahubo* performed during rituals, such as “Isivivane,” serve as a link between generations, connecting today’s youth with age-old initiation practices (Jethro 2013). These traditional Zulu praise songs are integral to rites of passage and other significant ceremonies, embedding cultural values and ancestral wisdom within their lyrics and melodies. It is evident that by participating in these musical traditions, young people learn about their heritage, the importance of communal bonds, and the spiritual significance of these practices. The performance of *amahubo* like “Isivivane” ensures that cultural knowledge and traditions are preserved and passed down, fostering a sense of identity and continuity within the community.

Furthermore, during celebratory events like weddings, *amahubo*, including songs of *umabo*, which are traditional songs, play a crucial role in Zulu cultural rituals. The songs of *umabo* are specifically connected with traditional wedding ceremonies, where it is performed to celebrate and honour the union of a couple (Ngubane 2023). Princess

Magogo was a renowned Zulu composer and musician, known for her contributions to preserving and enriching Zulu music and cultural practices (Mbanda 2020; Mhlambi 2015). Through her compositions, she has helped bridge generations, allowing contemporary audiences to connect with and appreciate age-old traditions and practices (Mbanda 2020). Through these performances, the Zulu community ensures that the cultural memory associated with familial bonds and traditional ceremonies remains vibrant and relevant in the contemporary context. These examples vividly illustrate how the dynamic process of singing *amahubo* actively contributes to cultural preservation, fostering a living connection with history that resonates with pride and identity across generations.

Contemporary Adaptations of *Amahubo*: Reflections of Evolving Zulu Cultural Identity

Amahubo, steeped in tradition, have not remained static relics of the past. Instead, they have dynamically evolved to mirror the shifting cultural identity and values of the Zulu people in the contemporary era. This theme illuminates the subtle yet significant transformations that have occurred, showcasing how modern influences have been seamlessly integrated while preserving the core essence of this sacred music.

In examining contemporary adaptations of *amahubo*, it is evident that the Zulu community has ingeniously embraced modern instruments, rhythms, and styles (Ngema 2020). While traditional elements remain cherished, the music has undergone a subtle metamorphosis, resonating with the pulse of the present day. Drums, once the heartbeat of *amahubo*, now find companionship with newer instruments, creating a harmonious fusion that bridges the old with the new. Moreover, the incorporation of contemporary themes and topics within their lyrics reflects the evolving values and priorities of the Zulu people (Ngema 2020; Teie 2016). These songs, once exclusively dedicated to historical accounts and cultural wisdom, now serve as platforms for addressing pressing issues of the present. Themes of unity, resilience, and societal aspirations find resonance within the verses, offering poignant reflections on the challenges and aspirations of contemporary Zulu society (Dickie 2017; Ngema 2020; Teie 2016).

In this evolution, *amahubo* retain their quintessential spirit while embracing the transformative power of change (Dickie 2017; Turner 2018). The music, once confined to specific rituals and ceremonies, now finds itself woven into diverse social contexts. It has become a dynamic expression of Zulu identity, a cultural beacon that adapts to the ever-shifting currents of the times (Mbeje 2017; Ngema 2020; Teie 2016). Contemporary adaptations of *amahubo* showcase the remarkable capacity of this indigenous Zulu music to evolve without losing its core essence. It is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of Zulu cultural identity. Through the integration of modern elements, *amahubo* continue to be a vibrant and living expression of the Zulu spirit, embodying both tradition and transformation in harmonious unison.

“WeNkonyane kaNdaba kwanyakaza imikhonto” is one notable example of the enduring influence of *ihubo* found in the work of the late artist Mphatheni Khumalo, popularly known as Mfaz’Omnyama. In the year 2000, Mfaz’Omnyama released his album titled *Ngisebenzile Mama*, and it was within this collection that the *ihubo* “WeNkonyane kaNdaba kwanyakaza imikhonto” found its place. The resonance of this particular *ihubo* with the Zulu people became unmistakably evident as it swiftly emerged as a standout hit on the album. The success of “Wenkonyane kaNdaba kwanyakaza imikhonto” goes beyond musical appreciation; it reflects a profound connection between Mfaz’Omnyama’s interpretation and the cultural sentiments of the Zulu community. The artist’s rendition not only preserved the authenticity of *ihubo* but also breathed new life into it, making it accessible to a wider audience and ensuring its continuity in the contemporary Zulu musical landscape.

This adoption and subsequent popularity underscore the dynamic nature of traditional music, its ability to transcend time, and its power to resonate across generations. Mfaz’Omnyama’s rendition serves as a bridge between the rich cultural heritage encapsulated in the *ihubo* and the evolving musical tastes of the Zulu people. It stands as a testament to the enduring significance of *ihubo* in shaping the cultural identity and musical expressions of the Zulu nation.

Despite the evolving musical landscape and the incorporation of *amahubo* into contemporary styles, particularly in uMaskandi songs, it is crucial to recognise that *amahubo* cannot be simply translated into uMaskandi. The essence of *amahubo* persists in its original form, resonating through the valleys of KwaZulu-Natal with a distinct and timeless presence. The continued existence of *amahubo* in their traditional style reflects not just a musical preference but a deep-seated cultural significance within the Zulu tribe. These songs carry an indispensable role, serving as cultural markers, historical narratives, and expressions of identity for the Zulu people.

While elements of *amahubo* may find their way into modern musical interpretations, the core essence and cultural depth they bring remain intact. The valleys of KwaZulu-Natal serve as living archives where *amahubo* persist, preserving the rich heritage and traditions of the Zulu tribe. In this way, *amahubo* maintain their authenticity and play a vital role in connecting the Zulu people with their roots, offering a profound musical experience that transcends time and cultural shifts. The coexistence of *amahubo* in their traditional form alongside contemporary styles reflects the dynamic nature of Zulu culture, where the past and present converge to create a vibrant and enduring musical tapestry.

Zulu Youth’s Perception and Engagement with *Amahubo*: Shaping Cultural Identity and Values

It is prudent to mention that *amahubo* hold a profound significance for the Zulu youth, acting as a dynamic bridge between generations and a catalyst for shaping cultural

identity and values. This theme delves into the pivotal role this indigenous music plays in influencing the perceptions and interactions of Zulu youth, fostering a sense of belonging and a shared heritage.

For the Zulu youth, *amahubo* serve as more than melodies; they are living conduits to their cultural legacy. Through these chants and praise songs, the youth embark on a journey of discovery, immersing themselves in the narratives and wisdom of their forebears. It is in this engagement that a profound sense of belonging and cultural continuity is forged (Mkhombo 2019; Pooley et al. 2024). The resonance of *amahubo* within the hearts of the youth extends beyond the musical; it touches upon the very core of their identity. Through these songs, they find not only a source of pride in their heritage but also a compass by which to navigate the complexities of the modern world. Values of unity, respect, and communal harmony, embedded within the lyrics, become integral components of their evolving cultural identity. In this dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, the Zulu youth find their voice (Mkhombo 2019; Sukdaven and Ndhlovu 2019). They adapt and reinterpret *amahubo*, infusing them with their own unique expressions and perspectives. This process not only ensures the preservation of this indigenous music but also breathes new life into it, allowing it to resonate with the experiences and aspirations of the youth.

The theme of Zulu youth's perception and engagement with *amahubo* underscores the transformative power of this indigenous music within the Zulu community. It serves as a vital conduit for the Zulu youth to connect with their cultural heritage, shaping their values and identity. Through their engagement with *amahubo*, the youth not only honour the past but also contribute to the ongoing evolution of this cherished musical tradition.

Conclusion

This article has sought to delve into the cultural, historical, and contemporary significance of *amahubo* (Zulu chants and praise songs) within the Zulu community. This article looked broadly at the role of *amahubo*, which are at the centre of traditional Zulu culture within the Zulu community, where these indigenous chants and praise songs act as living embodiments of Zulu heritage, resonating with centuries of history. This article recognised that *amahubo* serve as vital conduits, transmitting historical narratives, preserving cultural wisdom, and fostering a deep sense of continuity with past generations. This article also pointed out that *amahubo* encapsulate the essence of Zulu identity through resonating beats and evocative verses.

Using a framework of analysis that was largely informed by the central tenets of Bakhtin's (1981) and Habermas's (Finlayson 2005) communicative theory, this article pointed out the *amahubo* serve as a form of cultural communication that reinforces the values of bravery, triumph, and readiness for battle within the Zulu warrior culture. By so doing, the article has argued and revealed that beyond their historical significance, *amahubo* have emerged as potent vehicles for addressing pressing social issues, offering

platforms for expressing concerns, moral reflections, and societal aspirations. They serve as catalysts for dialogue and action during societal transformations, resonating as powerful instruments for unifying the Zulu community and steering it towards a progressive yet rooted future. The approach and analysis in the article were informed by what the researcher views as a nexus that gradually grew in Zulu culture. Cumulatively, *amahubo* seamlessly integrate modern influences while treasuring traditional elements, showcasing the resilience and adaptability of Zulu cultural identity.

In conclusion, this article significantly contributes to understanding *amahubo*'s multifaceted roles in preserving historical narratives, shaping cultural identity, and addressing contemporary social issues. It provides actionable recommendations for leveraging their cultural and transformative power. Overall, it advances the discourse on indigenous music's vital role in cultural preservation, social cohesion, and transformative potential within the Zulu community.

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