



The Functional Role of Traditional Music and Dance in Xhosa Traditional Healers' Ceremonial Rites

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ABSTRACT

African societies have always used traditional music and dance to celebrate events, interface, and connect with divinity, especially during communal ceremonies. The central thesis of this paper is that traditional music and dance are transforming agents used by Xhosa traditional healers during ceremonies to gain insights into the nature of a society's experiences and to connect with supernatural beings. This study, therefore, investigates the functional role of traditional music and dance used during Xhosa traditional healer's ceremonies, employing direct observation, video recordings, and interviews, as well as a descriptive qualitative research design. The findings revealed that traditional music and dance provide a safe environment for divinity practices and healing. Furthermore, traditional music and dance bring traditional healers closer to their ancestors, increasing acceptance and self-discovery during ritual proceedings. Even though music and dance are vital parts of various aspects of Xhosa cultural life, they have received limited scholarly attention. This paper, therefore, provides commentary on the functional role of traditional music and dance during Xhosa traditional healer's ceremonies and offers reflections on the functionality of traditional music and dance in contemporary Xhosa culture.

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Publication History

Received 7th November, 2022

Accepted 6th December, 2022

Published online 30th December, 2022

Keywords: Xhosa; traditional music and dance; traditional healers

INTRODUCTION

The Xhosa people are an ethnic group making up 18% of the South African population and comprising numerous large family clans and lineages whose history has existed in oral form for centuries. They are in South Africa's Eastern Cape Province, with 7.9 million speaking isiXhosa as their home language.¹ The Xhosa language is the country's second most widely spoken.²

Traditional beliefs are widespread among the Xhosa people, and the use of traditional healers is a common phenomenon.³ The Xhosa people believe ancestors need to be esteemed and revered and

¹ Nicola Graham et al., "Traditional Healers' Views of the Required Processes for a 'Good Death' Among Xhosa Patients Pre- and Post-Death," *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* 46, no. 3 (September 2013): 386–94, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpainsymman.2012.08.005>.

² Alberta S J van der Watt et al., "Becoming a Xhosa Traditional Healer: The Calling, Illness, Conflict and Belonging," *South African Journal of Psychiatry* 27, no. 1 (2021): 1–9.

³ Isabell Schierenbeck et al., "Collaboration or Renunciation? The Role of Traditional Medicine in Mental Health Care in Rwanda and Eastern Cape Province, South Africa," *Global Public Health* 13, no. 2 (February 7, 2018): 159–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2016.1239269>.

that they can influence the living for both good and evil. Booi and Edwards opine that ancestor reverence has always been central to the lives of Xhosa traditional healers.⁴

These traditional healers are a spiritual group that believes in ancestral veneration. They perform various rituals to communicate with their ancestors and are so organised that they share different roles in different ceremonies depending on the rites being performed. They use traditional music and dance during these ceremonial rites and rituals to communicate and connect with their ancestors, enabling them to conduct healing and divination. As a result of their diverse and spiritual experiences, Xhosa traditional healers develop strategies for healing, which influence the music they use. As a result, traditional healers may interpret the same song differently.⁵ When music and dances are performed to enhance connecting with ancestors, the questions that arise are, "What makes music and dance potent as a conduit to divination?" and "what role do music and dance play in traditional healing processes?" This paper was the product of focused research conducted to address these questions.

Traditional music and dance have been viewed the world over as serving several functions in the communities where they are created and practised, for entertainment, aiding communication and connection with ancestors, and evoking spirits. Like other African communities, the Xhosa traditional healers conduct rituals in which they perform music. Even though traditional music and dance are vital parts of various aspects of Xhosa cultural life and are a critical component of Xhosa traditional healers' practices, they have received limited scholarly attention. This paper, therefore, provides a commentary on the functional role of traditional music and dance during Xhosa traditional healer's ceremonies and offers reflections on the functionality of traditional music and dance in contemporary Xhosa culture.

The study objectives were to identify how traditional healers utilise traditional music and dance to aid healing and connect with their ancestors and to determine the functional roles of traditional music and dance during ceremonial rites. The study also enumerates the importance of music in traditional healers' practices and the linkage between music and ritual ceremonies. This study will benefit traditional music and dance scholars by helping them appreciate cultural diversity and cultural preservation through further research. The study will also help ethnomusicologist scholars develop a sense of correlation among cultures, hence an attempt to trace the diverse cultures through the theoretical structural organisation of traditional music and dance. In addition, it will help people from other cultures discover how traditional music and dance enhance different ritual ceremonies.

In this study, the researchers utilised a culturally entrenched, qualitative descriptive ethnographic approach to interpreting the context, which was informed by Ruskin and Rice, who stated that 'ethnography means the observation and interpretation of culture to learn about their musical culture.'⁶ The researchers engaged informants who knew the running of the various traditional healer's ceremonial rites in which traditional music and dance were performed. The ethnographic approach enabled the researchers to obtain a complete picture of the functional roles of traditional music and dance during Xhosa traditional healers' ceremonial rites under study. At the same time, interviews and observation were employed as the data collection instruments.

⁴ Beauty N. Booi and David J. A. Edwards, "Becoming a Xhosa Healer: Nomzi's Story," *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* 14, no. 2 (October 15, 2014): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.2989/IPJP.2014.14.2.3.1242>.

⁵ Nunziatina Nomalibo Faxi-Lewis, "Intlombe Zamagqirha: An Assessment of the Meaning and Value of Xhosa-Speaking Diviners' Songs" (University of Cape Town, 2003).

⁶ Jesse D Ruskin and Timothy Rice, "The Individual in Musical Ethnography," *Ethnomusicology* 56, no. 2 (2012): 299–327, 301.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Issues

Traditional music and dance and healing in Xhosa culture

In Africa, traditional music and dance are used to edify, ridicule, caution, entertain, heal, and connect an individual to the ancestral world, among other things.⁷ Similarly, music and dance are widely used in Xhosa societies to appease and communicate with the ancestors. Dowling and Stinson, cited in Izu and de Villiers, state that traditional music is essential in Xhosa indigenous healing traditions, as a musical performance directed by the traditional healer and supported by the participating audience is vital for a healing ritual to be successful.⁸ Lebaka opines that the interface between traditional healers and ancestral spirits occurs through visions and music.⁹ Music and dance are performed to create a harmonious relationship between the traditional healer and the ancestors. Although traditional healers use various traditional music and dances, they all retain the salient ritual norms.¹⁰ According to Lebaka, when contacting the ancestors, music and dance, as well as divination, are the most effective methods.¹¹

Mpono explains how music and dance are used in traditional healers' ceremonial rites.¹² She claims that dancing and singing give the healer the capability to diagnose and converse with the ancestors and that music and dance are considered ancestor connectivity devices. The energy generated during this performance is believed to alter the individual's consciousness. This energy goes through several stages, beginning with anxiety and transforming into intuitive insight.¹³ Like many other African cultural groups, the Xhosa people make music to facilitate sacred and societal rituals and to reflect on their cultural traditions and historical experiences.¹⁴

Kigunda states that traditional healers have little or no chance of experiencing mystical healing unless they perform traditional music and dance to it.¹⁵ Music and dance are so highly regarded among healers that they not only serve as a conduit for communication with the supernatural realm but also allow the ancestors to dance through the bodies of the living. According to Mlisa, music is a means of evoking ancestral spirits.¹⁶ It not only opens connections between traditional healers but also forms a vital link between the traditional healer, their ancestors, and their audiences.

Concept of traditional healing

Traditional healers in South Africa treat a wide range of health-related issues and culturally bound ailments that are thought to be unresponsive to conventional medicine.¹⁷ Moagi defines a traditional healer from the South African perspective as someone who can receive mystical directions from the ancestral world.¹⁸ Most of the time, such an individual is chosen by the ancestors from a family with

⁷ James M Mutuku, "Kilumi Dance Among The Kamba Community: A Link To The Spiritual World _," *African Musicology On-Line*, 2008, 1.

⁸ Benjamin Izu and Alethea de Villiers, "A Review of the Sociocultural Roles of Traditional Musical Arts in Xhosa Society," *ADRRJ Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* 18, no. 2 (6) July-September (2021): 148–65.

⁹ Morakeng E K Lebaka, "The Art of Establishing and Maintaining Contact with Ancestors: A Study of Bapedi Tradition," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74, no. 1 (2018).

¹⁰ Faxi-Lewis, "Tintlombe Zamagqirha: An Assessment of the Meaning and Value of Xhosa-Speaking Diviners' Songs."

¹¹ Lebaka, "The Art of Establishing and Maintaining Contact with Ancestors: A Study of Bapedi Tradition."

¹² Lindelwa Judith Mpono, "Traditional Healing among the Nguni People." (2007).

¹³ Mpono, "Traditional Healing among the Nguni People."

¹⁴ Izu and de Villiers, "A Review of the Sociocultural Roles of Traditional Musical Arts in Xhosa Society."

¹⁵ Muriithi Kigunda, "Music and Health in Kenya: Sound, Spirituality and Altered Consciousness Juxtaposed with Emotions" (Magdeburg, Univ., Diss., 2007), 44.

¹⁶ Lily-Rose Nomfundo Mlisa, "Ukuthwasa Initiation of Amagqirha: Identity Construction and the Training of Xhosa Women as Traditional Healers" (University of the Free State, 2009).

¹⁷ Alberta Susanna Johanna van der Watt et al., "South African IsiXhosa Traditional Healer Self-Identification, Training, Practices, and Their Perceptions of Collaboration with Medical Providers: An Exploratory Study," *South African Journal of Psychology* 50, no. 1 (2020): 115–27.

¹⁸ Moagi Lefatshe, "Transformation of the South African Health Care System with Regard to African Traditional Healers: The Social Effects of Inclusion and Regulation," *International NGO Journal* 4, no. 4 (2009): 116–26.

a lineage of traditional healers.¹⁹ A traditional healer also practices indigenous medicine, according to Mokgobi.²⁰ The practice is considered indigenous because the practitioner invokes African belief systems to induce healing and well-being.²¹

Moreover, Sodi, et al. state that a traditional healer is selected by the ancestors who confer mystic powers on them, typically through ancestral dreams.²² When initiates accept the call, they undergo healing and divination training, including routine ritual dances and sexual abstinence.²³ According to Thornton, traditional healers believe their knowledge comes from their ancestors (*amadlozi*) through rigorous and intense dancing, singing, and ritual training.²⁴ As a result, most traditional healers practice with great humility and acknowledge that their talent comes from their ancestors.²⁵ Cumes also states that because the ancestors live in the realm of spirits, they cannot communicate normally.²⁶ As a result, they prefer to communicate through trance-channelling, possession states, divining bones, and dreams.

Faku and Mhlangulana define traditional healing in the Xhosa culture in South Africa as a mystical experience because of the participation of the ancestral spirit to detect, treat, and prevent physical, spiritual, and mental illness and maintain a complete sense of wellness.²⁷ A traditional healer's indigenous knowledge and practices are passed down to them through dreams, visions, and intuition.²⁸ Sandlana also describes how Xhosa traditional healers include traditional music and dance performance as part of the initiation procedure for an aspiring healer.²⁹ Senior traditional healers gradually introduce the initiative to ancestral spirits to improve communication with ancestors. Traditional music and dance are performed periodically for initiates to share their dreams with the traditional healer in charge for evaluation and explanation, which aids in tracking the training's progress. In some cases, before the initiation rites, music and dance are performed to invite the ancestors to the ceremony.³⁰

RESEARCH METHODS

The descriptive qualitative research design was used in this study to investigate the functional roles of music and dance among Xhosa traditional healers. According to Nassaji, one key feature of descriptive qualitative research is the use of naturalistic data.³¹ They try to study the phenomenon in its natural setting, with no interference or modification of variables. Nassaji states further that the primary objective of a descriptive study is to portray an event and its features.³² Furthermore, Kim Sefcik and

¹⁹ Jan R Maluleka, "Acquisition, Transfer and Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge by Traditional Healers in the Limpopo Province of South Africa," *PhD Diss. University of South Africa*, 2017.

²⁰ M. G. Mokgobi, "Towards Integration of Traditional Healing and Western Healing: Is This a Remote Possibility?," *African Journal for Physical Health Education, Recreation, and Dance* 2013, no. Suppl 1 (November 2013): 47–57.

²¹ Mokgobi, "Towards Integration of Traditional Healing and Western Healing."

²² T Sodi et al., "Indigenous Healing Practices in Limpopo Province of South Africa: A Qualitative Study," *International Journal of Health Promotion and Education* 49, no. 3 (January 2011): 101–10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14635240.2011.10708216>.

²³ Birgitta Berglund et al., "Guidelines for Community Noise," 1999.

²⁴ Robert Thornton, "Magical Empiricism and 'Exposed Being' in Medicine and Traditional Healing," *Medical Anthropology* 34, no. 4 (2015): 353–70.

²⁵ David Cumes, "South African Indigenous Healing: How It Works," *EXPLORE* 9, no. 1 (January 2013): 58–65, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.explore.2012.11.007>.

²⁶ Cumes, "South African Indigenous Healing: How It Works."

²⁷ N. Faku and A. Mhlangulana, "The Spiritual Journey of Becoming a Traditional Healer - New African Magazine," *New African*, 2021, <https://newafricanmagazine.com/26920/>.

²⁸ Faku and Mhlangulana, "The Spiritual Journey of Becoming a Traditional Healer."

²⁹ Nonkululeko Sheilla Sandlana, "Umoya: Understanding the Experiential Value of Traditional African Dance and Music for Traditional Healers," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5, no. 3 (2014): 541.

³⁰ Sandlana, "Umoya."

³¹ Hossein Nassaji, "Qualitative and Descriptive Research: Data Type versus Data Analysis," *Language Teaching Research* (Sage Publications Sage UK: London, England, 2015).

³² Nassaji.

Bradway state that descriptive qualitative research can be regarded as suitable for studies centred on exploring phenomena to gain a better understanding from participants in comprehending the event.³³

The study collected data through interviews, observation, and video recordings of the various musical performances performed during Xhosa traditional healer's ceremonies and initiation rites observed by the researchers. This study was conducted in 2021 in Motherwell, in Gqeberha, in the Eastern Cape Province, and Rosemore, in George, in the Western Cape Province, South Africa. The researchers relied on a translator since the researchers do not speak *isiXhosa*. The researchers also sought consent from the participants before commencing any audiovisual recording. The research participants were assured of anonymity; hence, pseudonyms were used, and their faces blurred.

The study involved 20 participants, including eight Xhosa traditional healers, six initiates and six spectators during the ceremonial rites. The researchers observed their behaviours and experienced the atmosphere during the various performances. Through the researchers' interactions with the participants, they gained insights into the functional role of music and dance in Xhosa traditional healer divination practices.

Interviews were conducted with traditional healers who also sing and dance during the ceremonies to obtain information about the functional role of traditional music and dance in their divination practices. The participants were chosen based on their experience and understanding of Xhosa traditional healers' ceremonies, culture, rites, rituals and associated musical processes, as well as their social, cultural and religious functions as singers and dancers during the ceremonies. The researchers also obtained data from relevant academic books and journal articles. A brief literature survey was also conducted to place this research in the appropriate academic discourse.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Traditional healers have multidimensional functions in Xhosa culture. They can help clarify or explain mystical anomalies that Western civilisation cannot explain due to differences in ways of thought and doing. The ability to interpret dreams is one of the spiritual gifts that some traditional healers possess. They provide advice to those seeking clarity and direction. When Xhosa people want to know why their lives are not going as planned, they seek answers from a traditional healer. According to an informant in this study, for a client to receive solutions to their plights, the healers must communicate with their ancestors to determine what is hindering their progress and how to fix the problems.

Traditional healers are crucial in Xhosa culture, as they often serve as preservers and protectors of their culture through understanding sacred rites, rituals, indigenous songs, and dance. There are rituals in Xhosa culture that necessitate the involvement and leadership of a traditional healer. Because the healer acts as an intermediary during these rituals, relaying messages from the people to their ancestors and vice versa.

Based on field observations and video recordings, it was discovered that music and dance play an important role in strengthening the Xhosa traditional healers' ability to heal, appease spirits, and initiate trainees into the healing arts, allowing them to diagnose the cause of illness and provide treatment advice. During fieldwork, the researchers observed that music and dance facilitate communication with ancestral spirits. One of the research participants, a practising traditional healer, confirmed this in a personal communication that, for healing to occur, a healer must ask and connect with ancestral spirits for guidance by singing and dancing the *umxhentso* traditional dance. In a personal communication with another traditional healer at Motherwell, Qgeberha, Eastern Cape Province, she pointed out that, to attain healing power, traditional healers and their trainees must invoke ancestral spirits through singing and dancing *umxhentso* dance.

Amandla (pseudonym), in personal communication, stated that music and dance are the major factors during *amagqhira* (traditional healers) ceremonial rites "because it is the tool that they use to connect with the ancestors and also they can connect with us as well, they give us guidance to that particular ceremony that is taking place." During the traditional healers' ceremonies and rites observed

³³ Hyejin Kim, Justine S. Sefcik, and Christine Bradway, "Characteristics of Qualitative Descriptive Studies: A Systematic Review," *Research in Nursing & Health* 40, no. 1 (February 2017): 23–42, <https://doi.org/10.1002/nur.21768>.

during this study, the researchers observed that the traditional healers and their trainees become spiritually fortified and connected with the supernatural being after entering a trance-like state. Traditional healers' religious rites are based on ancestor veneration, and they sing and dance to be in unison with their ancestors, allowing them to see visions and perform divination. This is consistent with Omatseye and Emeriewen's thesis that music and dance are expressions of indigenous beliefs and practices that depict traditional African religion.³⁴

According to Lebaka, traditional music and dance serve as a conduit, connecting traditional healers to their essence and spiritual world.³⁵ This study supports Lebaka's contention that music does not directly heal but remains a vital component of the healing process.³⁶ Music and dance serve as a means of communication between traditional healers and their ancestors. Furthermore, Ogunrinade opine that traditional music performs communication roles both directly and indirectly through singing and performing musical instrument to spread messages.³⁷ According to him, this is one of music's most salient features in African society.

This study also observed that traditional music and dance are deeply embedded in the superstitions of traditional healers and that participation in dancing and singing during ceremonial rites and rituals induces a mystical process that amplifies divination power. Traditional healers in Xhosa use music and dance to enhance their bonds with their ancestors. An intriguing aspect of this research is the ingenious, expressive, and artistic work directly related to how traditional healers and their interns create distinct complex rhythmic styles and rhythmic songs.

The role of traditional music and dance among Xhosa traditional healers

Since music is a means of establishing a connection with the ancestors during divination and rituals among Xhosa traditional healers, they are both capable song leaders and musical performers to provide the link between the participants and the ancestors in a ritual.³⁸ A distinctive feature of Xhosa traditional healers' divination music, as observed during fieldwork, is the mandatory use of drums to articulate distinct rhythmic patterns accompanied by singing and dancing along with the traditional healers' dance patterns, which induces a trance-like state.

The song's structure comprised solo and chorus phrases, creating a call-and-response form. A song leader will generally lead by singing a song, to which the participants or audience will respond. Xhosa traditional healer's divination songs, like other Xhosa indigenous music, incorporate a variety of tonalities depending on the ceremony. Similarly, improvisation is a vital aspect of divination music: the polyrhythmic harmony created by the diviner through additional vocal phrases based on either the call or response phrases.³⁹

³⁴ B. O. J Omatseye and Kingsley Osewiyi Emeriewen, "An Appraisal of Religious Art and Symbolic Beliefs in the Traditional African Context," *African Research Review* 4, no. 2 (2010).

³⁵ Morakeng Edward Kenneth Lebaka, "Ethnographic Research of the Use of Music in Healing as a Cultural Phenomenon in Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality, Limpopo Province in South Africa," *Dialogo* 7, no. 2 (2021): 60–66.

³⁶ Lebaka, "Ethnographic Research of the Use of Music in Healing as a Cultural Phenomenon in Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality."

³⁷ D. O. A. Ogunrinade, "Teacher's Perception on the Incorporation of Indigenous Music Contents into Music Curriculum in Nigerian Schools," *African Journal of Education and Technology* 2, no. 1 (2012): 108–18.

³⁸ Tessa Dowling and Kathryn Stinson, "Pop Singer as Healer: The Use of Xhosa Lyrics as Cultural Self-Realization," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 23, no. 2 (December 2011): 177–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2012.638021>.

³⁹ Deirdre Doris Hansen, "The Music of the Xhosa - Speaking People," 1981; Faxi-Lewis, "Tintlombe Zamagqirha: An Assessment of the Meaning and Value of Xhosa-Speaking Diviners' Songs"; Daniela Heunis, "The Vocal Traditions of Two Indigenous Cultures of South Africa," *The Phenomenon of Singing* 1 (2013): 122–28.



Fig 1. Traditional healers sing and beat the Igubu drum to invoke the ancestors during a rite
Source: Authors

Indeed, musical performances are intrinsically part of the traditional healers' divination practices. The songs' lyrics distinguish the different ceremonies being performed but can also be used to announce the ceremony. Traditional healers respond to music on both physical and inspirational levels. Susceptibility is integral to the continued existence of any traditional healer as both the religious rites setting and the musical content, which includes song and dance, offer the perspective for effecting connection or dialogue with the ancestors.⁴⁰ The collaborative performance of traditional healers, initiates, and the audience induces a state of mental and physical exhilaration. According to Faxe-Lewis, singing and dancing among initiates allow them to alleviate the pains and illnesses associated with the initiation.⁴¹

The following are some examples of the lyrics of songs used by the traditional healers and their initiates during rites and rituals below:

Xhosa	English translation
Bes'celukungena weeh Ngonyama enamabala wee Ngonyama Thina sicele'ukungene Dlozi. Weeh ngomnya enamabala, wee Ngonyama	We ask the ancestors to allow us in the great Spirit of the leopard the Spirit of the leopard We are asking you, the ancestors, to come the great Spirit of the leopard the Spirit of the leopard

Xhosa	English translation
Buyani Mathongo, nihlolen'entabeni? Ndasokola nikhona nje, nihlolen'entabeni, Buyani Mathongo.	My great ancestors, please come back from the mountains, how is it that I'm suffering, with you being my guide, why are you sitting in those mountains? Please come back to me.

⁴⁰ Izu and de Villiers, "A Review of the Sociocultural Roles of Traditional Musical Arts in Xhosa Society."

⁴¹ Faxe-Lewis, "Intlombe Zamagqirha: An Assessment of the Meaning and Value of Xhosa-Speaking Diviners' Songs."

Xhosa	English translation
Zamaqhirha Ndizolale maweni kulezontaba , ithongo malizole Ndiyazigulela mna , hayi ibuhlungu lengulo Ndicela abantu abadala bahlangane ngentloko Whe thongo lam ndilamlele, andizenzanga ndenziwe ngabalele ukuthula.	I will lie down on the rocks in those mountains. The spirit must calm down because it is driving me sick. This calling is painful. I ask my ancestors to gather and mediate for me I did not do this to myself; you, my ancestors, have called me.

Furthermore, the *umxhentso* dance performed by Xhosa traditional healers has a ritualistic leaning; the dance is endowed with the capability to induce trance and serve as a medium through which the ancestral spirits reveal their thoughts to the living through spirit possession during the dance performance. According to Jumala, traditional dance is considered a curative ritual for illnesses where spirit possession is believed to transpire.⁴² *Umxhentso* dance is usually performed during Xhosa traditional healers' rites and rituals. It is accompanied by *igubu* drums, shakers (which can also be worn by dancers who are also traditional healers), and *impempe* (whistles).

The dance begins with a slow tempo of the musical instrument and progresses to a faster beat as the traditional healer's dance in vehemence, symbolising spirit possession. According to a participant, this dance can last for hours or until the traditional healer falls to the ground as the spirit possession ends, signifying that the message from the ancestor world has been delivered. Moderna, stated that "the *umxhentso* dance connects the traditional healer with their ancestral during the ceremonial rites."⁴³ That is why you find someone during the dance blowing the whistle during dance performance to call and connect fully with the ancestors."

Traditional healers usually begin the dance. The drumming gradually increases in intensity in tandem with the dance energy. The spirit in operation at the time heavily influences the choice of words to use or the song to sing. Songs are not just rendered during the performance; the traditional healer sings in unison with the spirits. According to a participant in personal communication, spirits sometimes influence the lyrics of the song to be sung by the traditional healer, inundating them to serve as the spirits' mouthpiece.



Fig 2. A traditional healer beats the drum while another is dancing during a rite
 Source: Authors

⁴² Francis C Jumala, "Ancestral Spirits as Healers: The" Pagomboh" and" Pag-Igal Jin" Rituals of the Sama Dilaut," *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*, 2013, 195–213.

⁴³ Moderna (Pseudonym), in a personal communication (2021).

The correlation between ritual and dance in ritual contexts varies. Lebaka (2018) posits that when the ancestors are required or need to be invoked, ritual music and dance are considered the most efficient ways of summoning them.⁴⁴ Kaeppler writes that dances stipulated by the ancestors must be performed as they were instituted; otherwise, the dances are ineffective, making the ritual futile and the message embedded in the ritual worthless to the ancestors.⁴⁵

While in a trance, the traditional healers mutter words that the audience might not understand. Soon after the trance spell, the traditional healer conveys the message delivered in the trance with other traditional healers present and then reveals it to the family members who called for the performance of the ritual. The message is in the form of a prognosis of an illness or a warning against bad luck. Mzimkulu, and Simbayi, say that traditional healers sing and dance to drive evil spirits away from their patients.⁴⁶

Music and dance and healing

Several scholars have studied the concept of music in healing as a cultural phenomenon in the African context.⁴⁷ According to Janzen, cited in Lebaka, traditional healers in the African context appease ancestral spirits for healing and protection through indigenous music and dance performance.⁴⁸ Nzewi states that music and dance are used as accompaniments to healing rites in various parts of Africa.⁴⁹ Wilson also claims that music is an important symbol of traditional healers' spiritual connections with spirits and deities.⁵⁰

Music and dance serve more than just entertainment during healing rituals; they also serve as a unifying factor that connects the traditional healer to the ancestral realm to perform healing.⁵¹ According to Lebaka, in Bapedi culture, the *Malopo* dance is used to cure disorders caused by ancestral spirits.⁵²

⁴⁴ Lebaka, "The Art of Establishing and Maintaining Contact with Ancestors: A Study of Bapedi Tradition."

⁴⁵ Adrienne L Kaeppler, "Interpreting Ritual as Performance and Theory Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania 2010 Distinguished Lecture," *Oceania* 80, no. 3 (2010): 263–71.

⁴⁶ Kanyiswa G Mzimkulu and Leickness C Simbayi, "Perspectives and Practices of Xhosa-speaking African Traditional Healers When Managing Psychosis," *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education* 53, no. 4 (2006): 417–31.

⁴⁷ Lebaka, "Ethnographic Research of the Use of Music in Healing as a Cultural Phenomenon in Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality, Limpopo Province in South Africa."

⁴⁸ Lebaka, "The Art of Establishing and Maintaining Contact with Ancestors: A Study of Bapedi Tradition."

⁴⁹ M. Nzewi, "Acquiring Knowledge of the Musical Arts in Traditional Society," in *Musical Arts in Africa: Theory, Practice and Education*, ed. A. Herbst, M. Nzewi, and K Agawu (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2003), 13–37.

⁵⁰ Benjamin Wilson, "The Drumming of Traditional Ashanti Healing Ceremonies," *Pacific Review of Ethnomusicology* 11 (2006): 1–17.

⁵¹ Naima Penniman, "Rhythm and Movement in Ghana: Healing through Dance through Generations," 2002, https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/african_diaspora_isp/47.

⁵² Lebaka, "Ethnographic Research of the Use of Music in Healing as a Cultural Phenomenon in Greater Sekhukhune."



Fig 3. A traditional healer dances to connect with the ancestors during a ceremony
Source: Authors

Traditional healing involving music and dance typically includes focusing energy through rhythmic movements, such as hand clapping, singing, and dancing in a ritual context to stir their healing intuition.⁵³ Xhosa traditional healers sing, dance, clap, and whistle to illustrate their submission to their ancestors, thereby rekindling their spiritual bond.



Fig 4. A group of traditional healers singing and dancing during traditional rites
Source: Authors

Nothing can replace music and dance in the ceremonial rites of Xhosa traditional healers. They are required to appease the ancestral spirits and to heal; the healer must be told by the spirits what the problem is. The spirits must possess the healer to resolve the issue; for possession to occur, music and dance must be performed. Although music and dance do not heal, they are a vital part of the healing process because they prepare the mind for healing.

Music helps summon the spirits to a traditional healer, who serves as a conduit for the spirits to communicate about the problem and provide a solution. Music is thus critical in this equation. It is the primary pillar of traditional healing. Traditional healers must invoke the ancestors (spirits) in the

⁵³ Stephen David Edwards, "A Psychology of Indigenous Healing in Southern Africa," *Journal of Psychology in Africa* 21, no. 3 (2011): 335–47.

spiritual realm through music and dance to achieve healing. The figure below depicts the process Xhosa traditional healers connect to the spiritual realm through traditional music and dance:

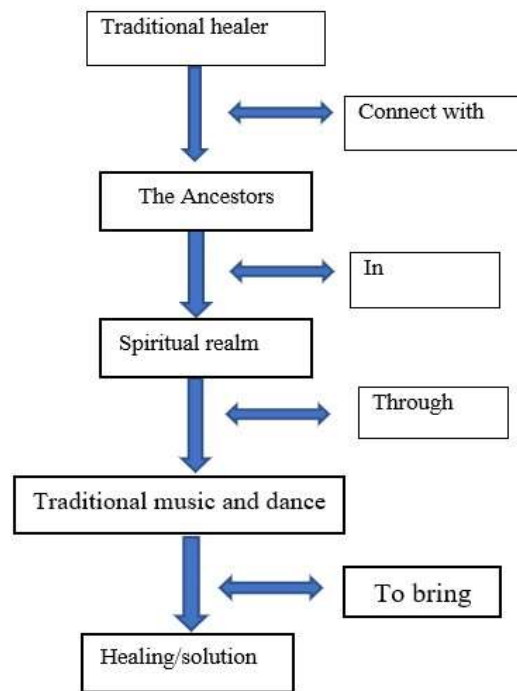


Fig 5. The process of connecting to the spiritual realm through music and dance

It was observed during this study that traditional music and dance are essential for the cultural life of a Xhosa traditional healer because they establish a connection between them and their ancestral spirits, allowing them to perform divination. It also aids in spirit invocation, in which a traditional healer sings to summon the spirits, after which the healer enters a trance-like state to see visions, identify health problems, and heal the sick.

Reflections on traditional music and dance in contemporary Xhosa culture

Traditional art forms in contemporary Xhosa society are typically creative, reflecting new forms of expression emanating from outside origins and indigenous Xhosa practices. Modern Xhosa society is non-localised, with ties formed through formal education, new religions, and new forms of occupation and affiliation. The contrast between traditional and non-traditional music and dance permeates social and cultural life.

Amid all the social transformations and the demand for social and economic growth, traditional music and dance continue to be forces for reshaping or revitalising contemporary social and cultural life. The South African government's cultural policies prioritise preserving aspects of indigenous culture deemed intrinsically valuable to the people. Traditional music and dance performers, such as Xhosa traditional healers, believe that the active presence of art forms will benefit contemporary African arts considerably because they serve as sources of motivation for those seeking to experience new paths.

However, interest in traditional music and dance amongst traditional healers is not limited to Xhosa culture. It is growing among other African societies seeking continuity in their cultural practices. The proliferation of international frontiers, which has similarly sparked attention in the world's diverse musical cultures, has given Xhosa traditional music and dance a new focus. The preservation of traditional African music and dance is a concern for those with ethnic affinities with Africa and those who observe Africa's contribution to world culture.

The increasing influx of popular and Western music has eroded the space and demand for traditional music. Many communities now feature diverse Western music during communal

celebrations, abandoning their African musical roots. The fusion of indigenous musical instruments with Western musical instruments has spread Xhosa traditional music to a contemporary audience, but at the expense of indigenous resonances, sonorities, and timbres.

The generational transmission of traditional music and dance has been disrupted by urbanisation and youth migration into cities. Village rituals and ceremonies are important in preserving ancient religious systems in which music and dance were essential components of communal life, trance, and healing rites. The inundation of mass media and the Internet has exacerbated the desecration of ceremonial rites and ritual spaces, leaving many musical traditions as relics of the past.

CONCLUSIONS

It has emerged from this study that music and dance play a vital role in Xhosa traditional healers' ceremonies and rites to commemorate events and communicate with their ancestors, particularly during healing and initiation ceremonies. Xhosa traditional healers have continued to be admired for their deep affinity to the spiritual realm and ancestral bond, which has been of assistance in times of difficulty in their daily lives. Music and dance play a functional role in this bond, serving as a conduit between them and the spiritual realm, which is also their primary source of mystical powers. They sing songs to appease and invoke the ancestors.

This study also reveals that Xhosa traditional healers use traditional music and dance as transforming agents during rites to gain insight and understanding into the nature of a society's experiences and to connect with mythical beings. The findings indicate that traditional music and dance are intended to enrich the transcendental lives of the people participating. From the findings of this article, traditional music and dance provide a conducive atmosphere to connect with the supernatural realm.

Furthermore, traditional music and dance bring traditional healers nearer to their forbears, boosting their divination capability during ritual practices. Even though traditional music and dance are intricately entwined with various facets of Xhosa cultural life, the music and dance are culturally and functionally rich and thus are part of Xhosa culture. Based on these findings and discussions, it is arguable that traditional healers' use of music and dance is associated with effective interaction with the ancestors, thus qualifying music and dance as a link to the spiritual world among Xhosa traditional healers.

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