

MNGENISO PERFORMANCE: THE ARTICULATION
OF Ngoni IDENTITY AND UNITY*

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Recent studies of cyclical and calendrical ritual and symbolic actions such as play, festivals, symbolic communication, carnivals, enactment, and many other ludic genres have shown the variety of artistic forms people in different cultures and societies construct and reconstruct for the enactment of social themes; and theories have been employed to analyze such forms of human behavior. The models and theories adapted by many scholars in their studies have been influenced by Clifford Geertz (1972) and Victor Turner (1974, 1977, 1982). Geertz (1972) examines the Balinese cockfight in terms of its reflexive, metasocial, metacommentary, metamessage, and metastructural aspects. He suggests that these rituals and symbols are stories the Balinese tell themselves about themselves in the realm of art rather than objective reality (1972:26). Hence "cultural forms can be treated as texts, as imaginative works built out of social material" because "the culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles" (Geertz 1972:28-29). Turner suggests that since celebration brings many members of a community into a single sociocultural situation for a fixed time, it brings them into a spirit of *communitas* and the social drama is replete with creative fantasy and license (Turner 1982:24). Supporting Turner's view, Barbara Myerhoff states that celebrations or rites of passage provide frames in which individuals or groups can "scan, critique images ideal or realistic," and these images often merge with the message that "the individual and the group are one, inseparable

vehicles for each other" (Myerhoff 1982:112).

The cross-cultural validity of this interpretation can only be verified by examining as many symbolic actions as possible, because the variation in form and content of celebrations is staggering. Among the Ngoni people of Malawi marriage is accompanied by a series of ritual and symbolic actions. One such important celebration is *mngeniso*, a communal dance, music, song, and beer drinking event that marks a son-in-law's incorporation into his parents-in-law's house and affinity group (Barnes 1951:9, 133-135). This study focuses on a *mngeniso* ceremony as performed by the Ngoni of Mpezeni Zulu's area in Mchinji district, central Malawi, and argues that *mngeniso* is a communal symbolic dramatic performance which can be read as a cultural text, either as a narrative or documentary (Ricoeur 1971:135-150; Geertz 1972:26-29). Taken as a narrative text which is organized and presented to members of the community in order to express their shared life experiences, the performance provides a means of status transformation and recognition. Since the social drama involves individuals as well as the larger fabric, the performance is a vital public device which is manipulated to unify the son-in-law with his parents-in-law; and it is also employed to construct and reconstruct individual and group awareness, identity, and links between members of the larger Ngoni community.

Performance in contemporary folklore studies, as proposed by Richard Bauman (1975) conveys "a dual sense of artistic action - the doing of folklore, and artistic event - the performance situation, involving performer, art form, audience, and setting" (1975:290). Roger Abrahams (1977) replaces Bauman's term performance with the neologism 'enactment' to describe such events as Balinese cockfights, Chamula carnivals, and initiation ceremonies,

and defines them as the coming together of an occasion, a performer, a performance tradition, and audience-participants competent to observe and evaluate effectively. Erving Goffman adds another dimension in the perspective of performance. He asserts that

a performance... is that arrangement which transforms an individual into a stage performer, the latter, in turn, being an object that can be looked at in the round and at length without offense, and looked to for engaging behavior, by persons in an audience-participants role (Goffman 1974:124).

Goffman's concept of transformation suggests that verbal doing or symbolic action is rule-governed. The performer must frame his performance by manipulating conventions of the situation. It is for this reason that Bauman has suggested performance framing or keying devices, such as special codes, special formulae, and figurative language (1975:295). Such conventional framing devices are called metamessages by Bateson (1972).

Ronald Grimes (1976), Carole Farber (1983), and Robert Lavenda (1983), have studied North American ludic and metaphorical celebrations, each from a different perspective, while agreeing and emphasizing that celebrations are about personal and group identity. Celebrations are constructed and reconstructed by a social group to effect links between people in a particular community and the wider cultural fabric (Farber 1983:34). In addition to that, celebrations are the enactment and re-enactment of history and origins. Grimes (1976) examines the Santa Fe festivals in terms of how they deal with the historical relationship between a number of ethnic elements in the community. Farber focuses on the role of festivals in Ontario. She maintains that the festival functions as a device for ritualizing and dramatizing a community's myths and ideologies, as

well as unifying the community to ensure its continuity and stability (Farber 1983:34). Agreeing with Farber's view, in addition to those proposed by Geertz (1972) and Turner (1974, 1977), Lavenda (1983) examines two celebrations in central Minnesota and suggests that the festival is a metaphor of the community's social structure, in which self-awareness and group identity is reflected and promoted (1983:60-63).⁽¹⁾

With the above notions as guidelines of describing and interpreting the *mngenis* performance as a device for unifying families and the community, as well as a means for expressing social identity, this discussion is focused on interrelated features of *mngenis*: the dance, the songs, the beer drinking, and the society at large. The dancing arena emerges as a microcosm of the Ngoni society.

The term Nguni or Ngoni is used to denote the peoples in the southeast coastlands of southern Africa who speak similar languages and who share some aspects of a common culture. The Zulu, the Swazi, and the Sotho have been culturally and linguistically classified as Nguni. Murdock, in classifying the Nguni, includes not only the Ndebele of Zimbabwe, who broke away from the Shakan kingdom of the early nineteenth century and who still speak the Nguni language, but also the Ngoni of Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia (Murdock 1959:102).

The Ngoni of Malawi are one of the several Nguni groups from the east coast of South Africa, who during the turmoil of "mufecane" resisted amalgamation into the Zulu kingdom under the leadership of Shaka ka Senzangakona, and marched northward as far as the lake region of central Tanzania. They carried with them Ngoni military tactics, political and social structure, and culture. Two of these displaced bands of Ngoni people moved from Tanzania into Malawi and resettled in northern and central

Malawi in 1850 and 1865, respectively (Phiri 1982: 11-14; Rangeley 1966: 62-86). The Mpezeni Zulu Ngoni people of Mchinji district, among whom the research discussed here was conducted in 1981 and 1982, are offshoots of the northern Ngoni group.

Linguistically, the Ngoni of Mchinji district are in a predominantly Chinsenga and Chichewa speaking area. As a result, the Ngoni people speak Ngoni which has been influenced by these two languages, as John Barnes remarks:

Three languages are used in the region: Ci-Ngoni, a language akin to Zulu, is now heard only in songs and royal praises; Ci-Nyanja (Chichewa) is taught in schools and is used for communication with Europeans and Indians; while the normal language used everyday in the villages is a dialect of Ci-Nsenga (1951:196).

The language situation is illustrated in the songs included in this paper. During the performance, the singers switch codes within a single song. Some songs are a mixture of Ngoni and Chichewa or Chinsenga while others are sung only in Ngoni. The persistence of the Ngoni language in the songs supports my contention that *mngeniso* is a means of strengthening or reconstructing the Ngoni identity. The occurrence of Ngoni in the songs helps the Ngoni people have "a badge of identity that instantly establishes who are the 'we' and who are the 'they'" (Royce 1982:148).

The Ngoni are pastoral people, and also cultivate a number of crops. Corn is the principal crop and is used as food and as malt for brewing beer. In addition to growing corn, the people grow tobacco, groundnuts, and a great variety of vegetables such as beans, peas, tomatoes, and pumpkin leaves.

Cattle ownership amongst the Ngoni people is not only an economic interest. Cattle have always played an important part in Ngoni life and as Margaret Read discusses in her book, *The*

Ngoni of Nyasaland, they have important social and religious connotations as well as the more obvious economic and nutritional roles (Read 1956: 30, 125-127, 168-177). Cattle are a symbol of the people's existence--a symbol of their power and their cohesion. This aspect will be elaborated when discussing the performance of *mngeniso* in the cattle kraal.

In their political and social organization, the Ngoni are patrilineal and marriage is patrilocal. Inheritance and succession are patrilineal, so that it is the eldest son of the principal wife who succeeds the chief when he is dead. It is both the political and marriage systems which differentiate the Ngoni people from the other ethnic groups in the district and in the whole country. The Chewa and the Nsenga are matrilineal and matrilocal. If a chief dies in the Chewa society, it is his nephew who succeeds him and not his son; if there is none, the brother of the deceased succeeds (Young and Banda 1946:12).

Ngoni marriage involves the payment of *lobola* (bride-wealth), and marriage within the Ngoni ethnic group is often encouraged for two important reasons. First, it encourages the perpetration of ethnic cohesion and the preservation of distinctive cultural and ethnic identity. This intense ethnic self-consciousness of the Ngoni people is reflected in the *mngeniso* songs. Second, since this society marriage involves the payment of *lobola* in the form of cattle, marriage within the Ngoni ethnic group ensures the stockpiling and even distribution of wealth within the same ethnic community.

The Ngoni do not translate the cultural symbols of their identity only in their political and social systems but also in the performance of *mngeniso*. Through *mngeniso*, ordinary life and reality is transformed into an alternative domain of symbolic discourse. An analysis of the elements of *mngeniso* illustrates

that the Ngoni create and recreate the ceremony not only as a rite of passage which incorporates the son-in-law into the family of his parents-in-law, but to construct and reconstruct their Ngoniness. The organizational, material, temporal, congregational, and performance aspects of **mngeniso** will be analyzed to support my views. The term **mngeniso** is from the Ngoni verb "**ukungenisa**," which means "to cause one to enter another person's house." This term conveys the nature of the performance and assumes the presence of actors within a particular context (Hymes 1972:56). The organizational elements of **mngeniso** show that it is a communal symbolic dramatic performance which brings the Ngoni people together.

Although **mngeniso** is primarily directed at selected individuals and then all members of the ethnic group, it is generally associated with changing seasons and the agricultural cycle. Unlike religious celebrations such as a saint's day or an event tied to secular history (for example, the Malawian July Sixth independence anniversary celebration), there is no fixed or predictable day on the calendar for the performance of **mngeniso**. However, the people in chief Zulu's area have traditionally known it to recur every year during the dry season between August and October after the harvest. Edmund Leach suggests that celebrations function to order time, so that they provide a sense of order to human life (Leach 1972:115). **Mngeniso** is one of the events which regulates the time and life of the Ngoni people in Mchinji district. The dry season marks the end of their hard agricultural work. The performance breaks the monotonous and boring life that pervades the villages after harvest. As there is now enough corn, some of which can be used to brew beer for the performances of **mngeniso**, this becomes the time when the Ngoni people's life flows "out of the past, through the present, toward the

future" (Geertz 1972:25). This is also the time the Ngoni wear their symbols of Ngoniness and dance songs of Ngoniness as well.

The specific time for the occurrence of the *mngeniso* ceremony is determined by the son-in-law's family, his parents-in-law, the chief of the village, and the readiness of the community. After the date of the *mngeniso* performance has been announced, the community participates in the preparation for and the performance of the ceremony. Women collect firewood, make corn and millet malt, and brew beer which normally takes four days to ferment. In addition to this, the women decorate their houses. The men repair and polish their garb, which is a material symbol of Ngoni identity.

Victor Turner suggests that celebratory ritual communicates meaning through what he calls *pars pro toto*; a selected number of "summarizing" symbols represent and integrate a wide spectrum of cultural data (Turner 1967:54). The garb that the Ngoni wear at the *mngeniso* ceremony adheres to this principle. It affirms, unifies, and reinforces a wide field of conceptual and emotional significance (Turner 1983:27). The Ngoni believe that their dances exhibit "their personality, their manhood, that which was born in them," their origin and history (Read 1968:80). The men dancing *ingoma*, the Ngoni people's national dance, wear strips of hide (*chibiya*) around their waist, around their breast a band made of beads (*chihata*), and a head-gear (*nyoni*) made of colorful ostrich feathers, beads, and animal skins. Anklets are worn above the calf, but below the knee and also on the upper part of the arm above the elbow. In addition to these anklets and armulets, they hold in their hands dancing shields rather than man-size war shields; clubs, or sticks, spears, and flywhisks of bull, cow, or elephant tail. This garb represents the type worn by the Shakan warriors when at war and during dances

celebrating their victory.

The women wrap on "chirundu" (cotton fabric) from the waist downwards, and a headband (mthini) around the head. They also wedge one or two twigs or grass stalks in the thick of their hair just next to the head band. Instead of using twigs, some of them bear ostrich feather caps and a small shield and stick or spear in their hands. The women reverse their spears while the men do not. The attire reflects the dance's very origins in war as a wardance. On the other hand, the reversed spears signify that the mngeniso performance is being performed during a peaceful time. In addition to that, the women identify themselves with the men of their ethnic group while showing sex role differences. It is the men who used to go to war while women only participated in the celebrations of their victory. However, the attire reinforces the concept that the women also associate themselves with the ideals and values of the men as a common Ngoni ethnic group. In the presence of observers from the Nsenga and Chewa ethnic groups, the Ngoni garb is a strategy of articulating the cultural differences which separate the three groups.

Spatially, the mngeniso performance begins with a communal procession. At about noon, the couple and the people from the home proceed toward the village of the wife's mother. The liminal phase of the son-in-law is indicated by separating him from the entire group with an umbrella. An ingoma dancing party from the woman's group proceed toward the man's village, dancing and singing to meet them halfway. When both parties have met, the procession becomes a joint one of dancing and singing until they reach the cattle kraal of the wife's parents. Then there is the movement from the cattle kraal to the house of his mother-in-law, and from thereto the open-air theater (bwalo). This is usually the space between the cattle kraal and

the house of the man's mother-in-law. At the cattle kraal, meat and beer are used as ritual *materia*. This location reflects the Ngoni people's identity, and the performance illustrates "the relationship between performance and culture, and that between signifier and signified" (Stoeltje 1979:15). At this location, members of the community have an opportunity to participate in ritual, observe, evaluate, and participate in dance, food and beer, and experience music as singers, listeners, or dancers (Stoeltje 1979:11). The cattle kraal is the heart of the Ngoni people. It is the chord binding man to man, the symbol of life itself. For it is in the cattle kraal that family disputes are settled, marriages negotiated, rites of passage are conducted, family histories are recited, and even the heads of families are buried.

Two pots, one containing meat the other beer, are put at the center of the cattle kraal, and the group from the son-in-law's village enters the kraal while addressing its song to the man's parents-in-law's group:

Leader: Wakhala pa msewu	He has been on the road for a long time
Chokoma uzheni	Tell me if it's good
All: Thina baNgoni, eee!	For us the Ngoni?
Leader: Chokoma uzheni	Tell me if it's good
All: Thina baNgoni, eee!	For us the Ngoni?
Leader: Chokoma uzheni	Tell me if it's good
All: Thina baNgoni, eee!	For us the Ngoni?

The performer's sense of belonging, the "we-ness" as opposed to the "they-hood" of the Ngoni ethnic group is explicit in this song. The song, as an opening formula of the *mngeniso* ceremony, questions the communality and group solidarity of the man's group and that of the wife's mother's group. The response of the chorus affirms that "Yes indeed, as you can see

our attire and dance, WE ARE the Ngoni." The Ngoni language is also used in this song to illustrate that the performers share common characteristics with those of the wife's home.

The song also expresses a feeling of disappointment and bitterness. The man's group complains that the man's mother-in-law has taken a long time to call for *mngeniso*. The road is a metaphor for the fact that the son-in-law has been walking in the bush to avoid meeting his mother-in-law face to face. The mother-in-law's delay in incorporating her son-in-law into the family is an insult to him as well as to his group for their being treated like a different ethnic group.

In this song the dancers enact their emotional feeling. The men form two semicircles and the women form two lines facing the men. The men dance as if they were leaning against the cattle kraal, and dance lazily as if exhausted, their bodies wriggling like earthworms. The song is sung with a slow tempo and a tired attitude. The women ululate and sing with a high pitched voice, working the song along with their rhythmic handclapping.

The man's group's question of Ngoni solidarity, identity, and communality is answered by the woman's group:

Nabo baNgoni, eee!	There are the Ngoni, indeed!
Kungena kwabo kwatchaire!	Lead them to enter for good!
Nabo baNgoni, eee!	There are the Ngoni, indeed!
Kungena kwabo kwatchaire!	Lead them to enter for good!
Ee, eyaye!	Yes, yes indeed!
Eyaye, thina baNgoni, eee!	Yes, yes indeed, we are the Ngoni!
Eyaye, thina baNgoni, eee!	Yes, yes indeed, we are the Ngoni!

The song clearly illustrates the Ngoni people's perpetuation of ethnic self-consciousness, identity, and cohesion. The song approves the oneness of the two groups involved in the *mngeniso* performance. Furthermore, the song

declares that the son-in-law has been finally incorporated into his wife's family. The second song which this group sings becomes a means of displaying dance styles, and serves as an expression of joy. The women's ululating, handclapping, and the men's stamping of feet all gather momentum to express the joyous experience and the feeling of group solidarity.

The need for group solidarity and sharing of joy or sorrow among the Ngoni people is well presented in the structural organization of the dance and song. The song is delivered in a choral fashion. The leader calls and the chorus or response by the entire group follows. The semicircle formation is broken up into a complete circle with the women forming their own inner circle in the middle. Each participant plays his or her role. As Mwesa Mapoma suggests (1978:136-137), an organization of this sort guarantees orderliness in the dance performance. However, symbolically the unbroken circles signify the son-in-law's and his mother-in-law's unbroken relationship which has been bound through marriage and *mngeniso*. On the other hand, the unbroken circles represent the cohesion of the man's family and the woman's. By extension, the dance and song pattern signify the solidarity between the two families and the whole Ngoni community.

As soon as the second song ends, a leader of the woman's *ingoma* dance group starts the following song of welcome:

Sekuru wabwera	Grandfather has come
Sekuru wabwera	Grandfather has come
Msekerereni	Welcome him
Azulu abwera	Mr. Zulu has come
Azulu abwera	Mr. Zulu has come
Asekerereni	Welcome him
Azulu abwera	Mr. Zulu has come
Asekerereni	Welcome him

The expression of happiness and acceptance is carried forward from the songs: **Kungena kwao** to **Sekuru wabwera**. People sing, ululate, and dance until their bodies are triggered into a frenzy of movement. The song invites every participant to join in the welcome of the son-in-law. **Sekuru** literally means grandfather or a man of great importance in the Ngoni tradition. Here, it is a metaphorical praise name for the son. This is his day and he must be given respect and honor. **Sekuru** is an honorific term which acts in free variation with the clan name Zulu in the song. The significance of the song is that the mother-in-law should treat her son-in-law like her grandfather, who is her blood relative and receives considerable respect.

Then the people from the man's village are granted a special welcome:

Salibonani	Welcome, we salute you
Kanda kangithu	Men from home.
Kakhumbula umgani	We remember you friends.
Intombi yakiti	Women from home,
Inkhumbula ingembo	We remember you all.
Indoda yakiti	Men from home,
Inkhumbula ingembo	We remember you all.
Yebo baNgoni	Hail to (you) the Ngoni,
Kuvele kunjalo?	Whence you come, how is it there?
Nangu, nangu babu	There he is, there he is
Emagumeni baonina	They look in the fences of his mothers'
Saliwa,	The Rejected (one)
Uyaliwa nanduna yakwabo	Denied by the counsellors of his place
Wayibona indhlebe kuda-	He sees the lop-eared (one)
buka wathi asiye eSwazini	He says let us go to Swaziland
Lapha ukufa bantu	There people die fat.
nakuluphala	
Yebo baNgoni	Hail to (you) the Ngoni.

The song illustrates the Ngoni people's ethnic awareness, the re-affirmation of their historical ties, and the enactment of their history and origins. In this enactment, their

life flows from the present location to the past in Zululand, when Zwangendaba led his group away from the militant leader Shaka, and to the future of their Ngoni ethnic group's solidarity and cultural environment.

After this song there is a symbolic sharing of food. The son-in-law, represented by his aunt, drinks beer with his mother-in-law from the same calabash. Then there is the eating of meat from the same plate, which also symbolizes the sharing of any kind of food. While this ritual and symbolic action is performed, the following song is sung:

Tutubwi, tunga timwe	Draw the beer we drink.
Timwepo weniweni	Let us drink among ourselves.
Anthu achabe ndi kavuluvulu.	Strangers are whirlwind.
Timwepo weniweni	Let us drink among ourselves.

The above song expresses most clearly the value basic to the Ngoni people. It emphasizes the need of preserving the Ngoni ethnic identity and mannerisms. The message is that other ethnic groups in the community are destructive because they dilute the Ngoni values. Symbolically, the drinking refers to the fact that marriage between Ngoni individuals perpetuates the Ngoni ethnic cohesion.

When the son and his mother-in-law have finished exchanging the calabash of beer, all the participants are served beer. The *mngeniso* ceremony is then turned into a means of instructing the man and his wife and his parents-in-law. At the same time, *mngeniso* as a social dynamic process becomes a communicative agent which confirms the social order and regulates people's behavior. To a large extent, the communal beer drinking is a component of exchanging communal cooperation between the people of the two Ngoni communities. The beer drinking during the *mngeniso* ceremony symbolizes the Ngoni social structure and values, such as

good neighborliness and mutual support. The beer drinking during the *mngeniso* ceremony also encourages communion between men, in the distribution and common consumption of the beer. The beer drinking event facilitates contractual arrangements and the willingness of the participants to interact and share social experiences. This suggests that the meaning that beer drinking has for the Ngoni chief Zulu's area is similar in this respect to that described by Ivan Karp (1980) about the Iteso of Kenya. Most important, however, is the fact that the beer drinking event allows the participants to reconstruct their social and historical experiences, of which they are all part (Karp 1980:113).

The closing formulae of the *mngeniso* performance are songs which the group from the man's village sing as *vithokozo* (praise). The praise deals with clan names and important people of the village. Since the *mngeniso* performance being discussed was in Kwayeka village, the song went thus:

Kamudzi ka Kwayeka	In Kwayeka village,
Kamudzi ka Kwayeka	In Kwayeka village,
Kaliyawa mama ee!	There it was great mothers!
Kaliyawa oo!	There he was
Kuwama mtima	The good-hearted (one),
Nsingo Mpezeni	Nsingo Mpezeni.
Kaliyawa baba aa!	There he was fathers!
Kuwama mtima	The good-hearted (one),
Nsingo Mpezeni	Nsingo Mpezeni.

This song celebrates the good-heartedness of the people of the village in which the *mngeniso* ceremony is performed. The hospitality of the people in Kwayeka village is compared to the openhandedness of Nsingo Mpezeni, the son of Inkosi ya Makosi Mpezeni Zulu 1, a grandson of Zwangendaba. Implicitly the people are urged to be as good-hearted as Nsingo Mpezeni, the one-

time paramount chief of the Ngoni.

The last thanksgiving song is a **chiwongo** (clan name praise) for the Moyo family that hosts the **mngeniso** performance:

Yebo Moyo	Thank you, Moyo (heart)
Yebo Zalilo	Thank you, Zalilo (Life-source)
Mfuzi wa ng'ombe	Heart of bovine
Wena wakwa chilema	You of the deformed
Chilema basekudeni	It is only lame for those who are far away
Basefishane badhlala natsho	Those from nearby play with it
Wena ukababhamba	You who captured them
Unekulahlwa.	But then set them free
Yebo Zalilo	Thank you, Zalilo
Yebo Moyo	Thank you, Moyo.
Yebo bamama	Thank you, mothers.
Yebo baba	Thank you, fathers.

After the above song, the man returns to his village as an individual who has been incorporated into the family of his wife. On the other hand, he is incorporated into the larger community of his parents-in-law. At a group level, the two communities that meet at the **mngeniso** performance are linked, too.

As part of the function that **mngeniso** has to politicize culture and translate cultural symbols and values, one notices that the Ngoni have a distinct musical form which identifies them from other Malawian ethnic groups. The music of the Mpezeni Zulu Ngoni people in Mchinji district is predominantly vocal, with limited use of musical instruments. Similar to the Zulu people's music, the Ngoni music includes: use of hand-clapping and shield-slapping in place of drums for rhythm emphasis, and pentatonic tonal organization, particularly common with Zulu **ingoma** songs. David Rycroff observes that "an open vocal quality seems common to all Ngoni, and there is a tendency

among old men toward a tremulous vibrato, which may be unintentional" (Rycroff 1971: 213-242). The melody line follows the speech tonality of the Ngoni language, and the general contour of the melody follows the Ngoni practice of starting with a high pitch and descending to a lower pitch at the end of the phrase. So too, a common characteristic of Ngoni songs, the musical interval of a fourth frequently leads phrase endings to new phrase beginnings.

While the dance and the songs allow the *mngeniso* performers to enforce their communality and sense of belonging and identity with the Ngoni community, likewise, the music unifies them and links them to their roots--the Shakan Zulu.

This discussion has therefore attempted to demonstrate that *mngeniso* can be read as a cultural text which illustrates the Ngoni people's social identity. In addition to that, apart from showing the incorporation of the son-in-law into his parents-in-law's family, *mngeniso* clearly portrays the meaning of a celebration to the Ngoni people with an opportunity to enact their origins, history, and identity through dance, costume, language, music, and song. The performance also becomes good entertainment and an occasion for displaying dancing abilities. Through the *mngeniso* performance we are able to understand and appreciate some of the concerns of the Ngoni people, as well as the components of *mngeniso* performance in contemporary Malawi.

NOTES

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University of Malawi in Zomba, who was my research assistant while collecting the data presented in this paper.

(1) It is useful to have in mind the following notions of "ethnic identity" and "ethnic group." Wsevolod Isajiw defines ethnicity as "a process by which individuals either identify themselves as being different or belonging to a different group or are identified as different by others, or both identify themselves and are identified as different by others" (1974:115).

Abner Cohen suggests that an ethnic group is "a collectivity of people who (a) share some patterns of normative behavior and (b) form a part of a larger population interacting with people from other collectivities within the framework of a social system" (1974:ix).

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