

https://dspace.org/

Reading the Swazi reed dance (umhlanga) as a literary traditional performance art

Masango, Lomagugu Precious

2009-09-18T12:15:13Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/7296

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

READING THE SWAZI REED DANCE (*UMHLANGA*) AS A LITERARY TRADITIONAL PERFORMANCE ART

LOMAGUGU PRECIOUS MASANGO

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG, IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

JOHANNESBURG, 2008

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any other degree or examination in any other university.

_____

Lomagugu Precious Masango

13th November 2008

DEDICATION

To the memory of Dr Puleng Hanong

"DEATH WHERE IS THY STING"

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is impossible to acknowledge by name all those who contributed to this study. As such, words are not enough to express my deep appreciation and recognition to all those named and unnamed. I was extremely lucky to encounter professionals in the African Literature Department such as Professor Isabel Hofmeyr, Professor James Ogude, Dr Dan Ojwang, and Professor Bheki Peterson during my Honors and MA studies. It was their meticulous expertise that sharpened my intuition and gave me the edge to embark on a PhD. My supervisors, however, deserve distinguished mention and gratitude for their guidance, criticism and patience. Our lengthy sessions were indeed, for me, a challenging learning experience in intellectual co-operation. Professor Carolyn Hamilton provided numerous insights into the main research question and objectives of the thesis; Dr Tom Odhiambo for steering me towards a literary perspective; and last but not least Dr Dan Ojwang indispensably guided me and sacrificed generously his time. His critical comments led to substantial corrections of this thesis. It is from him that I gleaned valuable lessons which have provided the basis for my thesis analyses, its completion and final submission. The views and shortcomings of this work are my own and I take full responsibility.

In doing my fieldwork, many people assisted me. Princess Msindisi Dlamini, from the start, offered her support as we sought permission to undertake a study on the *Umhlanga* from the relevant authorities. In addition, although most of the data has been derived from my personal observation and interviews, I am however grateful to the following informants: Richard Patricks (Mdvumowencwala), senior researcher at the Swaziland National Trust Commission; Phanginjobo Metiso, overseer of *emabutfo* and King's liaison at Buhleni Royal Residence in the Hhohho region; Chief Mvelase Mdluli of Mvembili in the Hhohho region who also resides at Buhleni Royal residence; Chief Jubiphathi Magagula of Nyakatfo in the Hhohho region; elder Onicah Precious (nee Masango) Shungube whose oral transcript has been adopted for the study; *Umhlanga*

participants and non-participants; *Imbali* and *tindvuna* or guards, particularly from Buhleni and Nyakatfo.

My gratitude also goes to *Imbali* (female student participants), colleagues from Ntsinini High School and the Head teacher Joseph Malambe, who supported me during the preliminary period of my study. Joseph Malambe went an extra mile to ensure that I finish my study by 'standing in the gap'. Gcinangaye Tsabedze from the Swaziland Broadcasting and Information Services (SBIS) assisted me greatly to obtain the permit to take *Umhlanga* pictures, record the event and conduct interviews at Ludzidzini Royal residence during the events' performances. Special mention also goes to *The Times of Swaziland* photographer Mduduzi Mngomezulu for photographs of the ritual which have enhanced the study as they are spread throughout the thesis' chapters.

A number of my colleagues in and out of the Department of African Literature and Languages at the University of the Witwatersrand offered enthusiasm, interest and encouragement for this project. To Agatha Ukata, Grace Musila, Joseph Minga, Pascal Mwale, Senayon Olaoluwa and Tibekile Manana I offer sincere thanks. A special word of gratitude goes to Dr Innocentia Mhlambi for offering good suggestions on the drafts.

At the University of Swaziland, I wish to thank Dr Lucy Zodwa Dlamini who kindly sacrificed her time and helped me shape the thesis theme. Eric Sibanda's assistance on orthographical issues is acknowledged. Despite an exacting schedule, Nomsa Zindela (UNISA), kindly agreed to read the final draft of this thesis. I did see the light at the end of the tunnel when I received the complete edited work. To her I say *kwandza kwaliwa batsakatsi Sisi wami.*

I am particularly grateful to Mzala George Sandile Mkhonta who extended his generosity and assisted me financially during those times when I could not pay for certain services. I learned a great deal from his kind gesture without which my stay would have been miserable. To my mother, Khakhazi Mildred Mkhonta, to all family members and loving friends, who have supported and remembered me in their prayers. To you all, I am truly grateful. Be reminded that God's "hand is long enough to guide and His ears are sharp enough to hear". Be blessed.

My gratitude goes to the School of Languages and Literature Studies for setting up conferences and seminars. I presented a paper entitled "Media Representations of the *Umhlanga* " at the SLLS Conference held at the University of the Witwatersrand from 4-8 March in 2006. The Colloquium slated for 20th August 2008 organized for Post graduates offered me an opportunity to present a paper entitled: "Faultlines Marking *Umhlanga*". A third paper was presented at a CODESRIA SOS History Conference entitled "Re-Reading the History and Historiography of Domination and Resistance in Africa" held at Kampala/ Uganda, 27-29 October 2008. The paper presented was entitled "Rituals as Strongholds for Socio-economic and Political Domination: the Case of the Swazi Reed Dance (*Umhlanga*)". A paper entitled "The Tenacity and Resilience of the Swazi Reed Dance (*Umhlanga*)" was presented at a History Conference in the University of Swaziland entitled "Swaziland Since 1968: Historical and Contemporary Meanings of Independence"

Last but far from least, I acknowledge with gratitude the financial support I received from the University of the Witwatersrand Financial Aid Office, without which this study would have been impossible to complete. For your magnanimity I thank you most heartily.



Plate I: King Mswati III's daughter, *Nkhosatana* Sikhanyiso (left) and her cousin (right) with younger princesses in full *Umhlanga regalia.* (*The Times of Swaziland* 31/08/2005)

GLOSSARY

Key: p = phrase; n = noun; ip = idiomatic phrase; int = interjection

- ***Emagumbi lamane emhlaba (p)****:* the four regions of the country (Hhohho, Manzini, Shiselweni, Lubombo).
- ***Imbali yeMaswati (n):*** refers to the 'Flower' of the Swazi Nation; the girls' *libutfo* or regiment comprising the *umcwasho* girls who participated in the *Umhlanga* during the event's performance between 2004 and 2007.
- ***Imbokodvo (n):*** stone used for grinding.
- ***Imvunulo(n):*** refers to the traditional regalia shown in Plate I
- ***INcwala (n)****:* first fruit sacred ceremony and national prayer involving the King.

- ***Indlam****u (n):* short colourful beaded skirt worn by younger girls.
- ***Indvuku (n)*****:** sticks held in the right hand (in place of the knife) during the dance.
- ***Inhlambelo (n)****:* King's enclosure made out of *lusekwane.*
- ***Injobo itfungelwa ebandla (id-p)****:* an idiom which means an important topic is discussed by a group of men or council.
- ***Inkhundla (n):*** center used both as polling station and center for communal meetings. (plu: *tinkhundla).*
- ***Inyandzaleyo (n/int)****:* a loud and shrill cry or exclamation used to raise alarm
- ***Kukhonta:*** a Swazi custom where a man seek land to construct his homestead from an area chief.
- ***Kulamuta:*** a Swazi custom where a man eventually marries his wife's younger sister (his sister in-law).
- ***Liduku(n)*****:** a new innovation on the dress code where girls fasten long handkerchiefs of different colours on a ring around their arms.
- ***Lifahlawane(n)*****:** musical strap tied around the ankles as an accompaniment to the singing and dancing.
- ***Ligcabho(n):*** a feeling of pride or something to be proud of or satisfied about.
- ***Ligcebesha(n)*****:** traditional necklace made out of colourful beads.
- ***Liguma(n):*** traditional fencing/enclosure hugging a hut which acts as a windbreaker (plu): *emaguma).*
- ***Ligusha(plu):*** a slippery vegetable (similar to okra) eaten with porridge the stable food in the country.
- ***Ligwalagwala(n)****:* red feather plugged in the hair by the princesses and princes and close relatives to the royal household.
- ***Lihawu(n)*****:** small shield held in the left hand during the dance.
- ***Lihiya(n)***: clothing material tied on top.

- ***Lilangeni:*** praise name for the Dlamini clan/Swazi currency (plu: *Emalangeni).*
- ***Lilawu(n):*** man's hut.
- ***Lisiko(n):*** tradition/custom
- ***Liso leNkhosi(np)****:* Kings'Eye (Private Secretary to the King)
- ***LiSwati(n)****:* a Swazi citizen (plu:*emaSwati)*
- ***Lobola***: is to pay bride price in the form of cows.
- ***Luhlanga(n)****:* one reed ((plu)*imihlanga*).
- ***Luhlanga LwakaNgwane(np)****:* part of praise name for the Dlamini.
- ***Lusekwane(n)****:* tree used to construct the King's enclosure during *iNcwala.*
- ***Marula(n):***an alcoholic drink/brew made from the fruit of a natural wild tree.
- ***Muti(n)****:* a form of concoction/substance associated with witchcraft
- ***Sibhimbi****(n)*: any ceremony held to mark an historical event in the history of the nation or that of the country.
- ***Sika(v)***: cut
- ***Sidvwashi(n)*****:** clothing material tied around the waist instead of the *indlamu.*
- ***Sidvwaba(n)****:* traditional skirt made out of cow's skin worn by women (*lutsango)*
- ***SiSwati(n)****:* Swazi language/culture/custom
- ***Tingoma temhlanga(np)****:* songs sung during the *Umhlanga ceremony*
- ***Umcwasho(n)***: woolen head-gear made up of different colours depending on the girl's age.
- ***Umgaco(n)*****:** long woollen tassels of different colours worn by *Umhlanga* maidens covering the top part of the body reaching below the *indlamu.*
- ***Umjijimba(n)*****:** woollen tassels hanging on the right side of the *indlamu* down to the knee.

- ***Umukhwa(n)*:** knife held in the right hand during the dance(sometimes a stick and recently colourful feather dusts are used in its place).
- ***Uyezwa na!(int):*** Do you hear! (a royal command used to summon people for royal duties such as *Umhlanga*).

Social Distinction

- ***Babe(n)****:* Father
- ***Bayethe(n):*** salutation reserved for the King
- ***Butfobhi(n):*** maidenhood
- ***Butimba(n)****:* Royal Hunt ceremony that involves the King and *emabutfo.*
- ***Emabutfo(n)***: Regiments, could be of men, boys, girls, women
- ***Kubutseka(n)****:* process of initiation to being a member of a particular regiment .
- ***Imbongi(n):*** praise-singer
- ***INdlovukati(n)***: 'She Elephant' or Queen Mother.
- ***INgwenyama(n)****:* 'the Lion' or King.
- ***INkhosatana*** (n)the King's senior daughter.
- ***INkhosi(n):*** a King
- ***INkhosikati(n)*:** the King's wife. (plu: *emakhosikati*) .
- ***Indvuna(n)***: guard.
- ***Intfombi(n)*:** a maiden.
- ***Intsatseli(n):*** journalist
- ***Libandla(n)****:* council of elders.
- ***Ligabazi(n)****:* skilled public performer dancer or singer
- ***Lijaha(n):*** an able bodied young man
- ***Lincusa(n)****:* liaison or go-in between.
- ***Liphovela(n)*:** the King's fiancée.
- ***Lizinyane(n)*:** literally meaning calf (King's biological child).(plu: *emazinyane*)

- ***Lutsango(n)****:* women regiment (who also cuts reeds).
- ***Tingatja(n)****:* regiment name for young boys who cut *lusekwane*
- ***Make(n)****:* mother
- ***Mhlekazi(n)****:* the Queen Mother (meaning the most beautiful one)
- ***Mveli Nqanti(np)****:* The first god of the Swazi people.
- ***Sigodlo(n)****:* Royal Residence
- ***Sikhulu(n)***: area chief.
- ***Sive(n)*****:** ordinary Swazis or commoners.
- ***Umgijimi***(n) chief's forerunner.
- ***Ummemo(n)****:* communal tribute labour entertainment held at the chief's headquarters (*emphakatsini).*
- ***UmntfwaneNkhosi(n)*****:** prince and princess forming the ruling Dlamini lineage (*bantfwabeNkhosi).*
- ***Umphakatsi****(n):* chief's headquarters
- ***Umsebenti weNkhosi(n)****:* a King's duty or tribute labour.

Bugabazi **(dance skills)**

- ***Dlalisela(v)*****:** when *eMakhosikati, iNgwenyama* together with his *libutfo* and *bantfwabeNkhosi* join the *Imbali* regiment in song and dance at the arena. Also evidenced during the solo *giya* performed by the senior princesses acknowledged by their brothers who advance in dance form to salute them using their *emahawu.*
- ***Giya(v)*****:** to display one's dancing skills.
- ***Phoseka(v)*****:** is when *lijaha* (young man) jumps aggressively towards the dancing arena exhibiting his prowess in appreciation of the girls' dance skills, singing and beauty.

MAP AND LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Map **Between pages**

I	Figure I Map of Swaziland	7
2	Figure 2 Coat of Arms	87
3	Figure 3 Swazi Flag	88

Illustrations

I	*Nkhosatana* Princess Sikhanyiso and her cousin, with younger princesses (*emazinyane)*	vii
II	King Mswati III dancing his first *sibhimbhi* with his daughters on 27/08/2005	11
III	Discarded *umwasho* by *Imbali* on 26th August 2005	12
IV	*Imbali* after discarding and cleansing in the Great Usuthu River on 27th August 2005	13
V	Participating children	25
VI	King Mswati III giving out orders to princess Sikhanyiso at Ngabezweni	47
VII	An aerial view of the *Imbali* carrying reeds bundles to Ludzidzini	48
VIII	Princess Sikhanyiso and her sisters leading the *Imbali*	49
IX	*INdlovukati* the Queen Mother, Ntombi Tfwala arriving at the arena at Ludzidzini stadium in August 2006 to witness the *Umhlanga*	50
X	Onicah Shungube 4th from the left amongst members of parliament between 1979 and 1983	59
XI	The Reed Dance Shocker Headlines in *The Swazi News* in 2005	94
XII	Princess Sikhanyiso reported beaten	97
XIII	Miss Swaziland finalists demands to be *Liphovela*	99
XIV	*Sibhimbi* picture used to advertise the annual Trade fair	101
XV	*Imbali* alighting from a government truck at Ludzidzini	101

XVI *Imbali* boarding a hired bus from Buhleni Royal residence 102
XVII Photograph by David Blair 121
XVIII Chinese in front of King and Queen Mother 126
XIX Nontobeko Mdluli wearing the *Umhlanga* regalia 169

ABBREVIATIONS

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CNN	Cable News Network (of America)
PUDEMO	People's United Democratic Movement
SBIS	Swaziland Broadcasting and Information Services
SFTU	Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions
SNTC	Swaziland National Trust Commission
STBS	Swaziland Television and Broadcasting Service
STA	Swaziland Television Authority
SWAAGA	Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse
SWAYOCO	Swaziland Youth Congress
TTS	*The Times of Swaziland*
TSO	*The Swazi Observer*
USDF	*Umbutfo* Swaziland Defense Force
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration **i**

Abstract **ii**

Dedication **iii**

Acknowledgements **iv**

Glossary **vii**

Map and List of Illustrations **xii**

Abbreviations **xiv**

CHAPETR ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY OF *UMHLANGA*

1.0. Introduction	**1**
1.2 Background	**5**
1.1.1 Cosmology of the Swazi	**6**
1.1.2 *Umcwasho* and *Umhlanga* Rites	**8**
1.1.3 *Tinkhundla* System of Rule	**13**
1.2. Literature Review	**17**
1.2.1. *Umhlanga* as a Rituals performance	**21**
1.3. Methodology	**25**
1.3.1. Interviews	**27**
1.3.2 Preliminary Survey	**28**
1.4. Fieldwork Constraints	**30**
1.5. Ethical Considerations	**31**
1.6. Study Structure	**34**

CHAPTER TWO

ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE OF THE *EVENT*

2.0. Introduction	**37**
2.1. Synopsis of *Umhlanga*	**37**
2.2. Commercialization of the Event	**51**
2.3. The Written and Oral Scripts	**53**
2.3.1. Oral Script(s)	**55**
2.3.1.1. Interviews with two Chiefs	**56**
2.3.1.2. Interview with elder Shungube	**58**
2.4. Tribute Labour	**62**
2.5. Conclusion	**66**

CHAPTER THREE

***UMHLANGA* SONGS AND SYMBOLS.**

3.0. Introduction	**68**
3.1. *Umhlanga Songs*	**69**
3.1.1. Chastity Songs	**71**
3.2. Song Improvisation	**79**
3.3. *Giya* Songs	**81**
3.4. *Umhlanga Symbols*	**84**
3.4.1. Settings and Contexts	**86**
3.5. Conclusion	**89**

CHAPTER FOUR

INFLUENCES OF MODERNITY AND GLOBALITION ON THE *UMHLANGA*

4.0. Introduction	**90**
4.1. Modernity and Globalization	**91**
4.2. Subversions and Inversions	**93**
4.2.1. The Modern Party	**93**
4.2.2. Girls Demand to 'see King'	**98**
4.3.1. Identity Formations	**102**
4.4. HIV/AIDS Awareness	**105**
4.5. Conclusion	**107**

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERPRETATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF *UMHLANGA*

5.0. Introduction	**108**
5.1. The Ideology of Traditionalism	**108**
5.1.1. Hegemony and Ideology	**109**

5.1.2. The Monarch's Power **110**
5.2. Gender and Human Rights **116**
5.3. Democracy **118**
5.4. Foreign Media, Tourists and Visitors Perceptions **120**
215.4.1. Tourists Interpretations and Perceptions **122**
5.4.2. Visitors Perceptions **125**
5.5. Conclusion **126**

CONCLUSION **128**

APPENDICES **132**

BIBLIOGRAPHY **179**