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# Strategy in Ngoni Women's Oral Poetry

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## Introduction

One of the most significant developments in folkloristics in the past decade has been the movement away from analysis of folklore as merely products to the study of process - 'the doing of folklore - and artistic event - the performance situation, involving performer, art form, audience, and setting' (Bauman, 1977:4). The elaboration of folklore as a communicative process which is culturally rule-governed has gone hand in hand with work in other disciplines concerned with communication in specific groups: socio-linguistics, rhetorical theory, communication theory and the ethnography of speaking (Hymes, 1972; Bauman and Sherzer, 1974; Burke, 1957). These scholars and other performance-oriented folklorists (Ben-Amos and Goldstein 1974) as well as Erving Goffman (1974) focus on the dynamics of small group interaction and emphasize the significance of individual strategy for stylized communication and the achievement of one's goal. Such factors as individual choice, persuasion, negotiation, and manipulation of linguistic and cultural rules and norms in the accomplishment of social action are said to be important because verbal behaviour is purposeful.

Likewise this study maintains that strategies as norms of group interaction are goal-centred and that folklore is the strategic styliza-

tion of communicative devices in order to achieve individual or group goals. Furthermore in the case of the Maseko Ngoni of Dedza and Ntcheu districts in Malawi, women employ the pounding song, a genre Ruth Finnegan (1977) terms 'special purpose poetry', as a medium of communication to achieve their social goals. The success or failure of the women to achieve their purpose largely depends on their ability to convey thoroughly their message through. The study therefore analyses the culture specific linguistic and social keys available to Maseko Ngoni women in a pounding song performance and the way the women employ these devices in an attempt to achieve their social ends.

### **Pounding Song Audience and Composition**

Pounding songs (*nyimbo za pamtondo*), more specifically, songs performed while pounding maize, are an important genre of Ngoni women. The people's social organisation and agricultural activities provide an atmosphere conducive to the composition and performance of pounding songs, furnish themes for songs, and facilitate the thriving of such an oral form of tradition.

Similar to most societies in the world, marriage involves a division of labour and responsibility between husband and wife in the Ngoni community. The woman helps her husband in agricultural activities. Additionally she performs the household tasks of fetching firewood and water for the children, mopping and polishing the floor of the house, pounding maize, taking the polished maize to the grinding mill to obtain maize flour for *nsima* (Malawi's main dish), and cooking for the family.

Since *nsima* is the staple food of the Ngoni, pounding maize into maize flour is very important in the lives of the women. In the Ngoni community, work is generally performed by cooperative labour and pounding maize is also a matter of cooperation and of people working in concert. Grain for weddings, funeral memorials, or for general use is usually pounded at a site where women assemble in order to pound and share current events.

Pounding songs are composed by any woman who feels aggravated by prevailing circumstances in her life. Most women model their new songs on old songs and tunes which are familiar to the rest of the women's group. The rhythm of the old song and tune normally remain constant while the words change. Some women compose their songs before they are performed. However, others improvise their songs, instantly patterning their own words to a

song they have heard or know. If a woman has an important issue to introduce in song and feels incompetent to perform it, she solicits a surrogate performer.

The participants of a pounding song session are the immediate audience present at the forum. These are usually women members of families who have cooperated to pound the maize together. Hence they may be sisters, nieces, in-laws, cousins, mother and aunts of the woman whose maize is being pounded. Friends from the neighbourhood also form part of the audience. Another audience of the pounding song performance include those who overhear what songs are being performed. The second group is regarded as an indirect or latent audience.

### Functions and Themes

Pounding songs as a genre of special purpose poetry (Finnegan, 1977: 206-240) have various functions and themes. The pounding session and the song bring women together, uniting them as a female group which is traditionally licensed to express its attitudes and apprehension of the society freely. The musical activity gives the women the reassurance of belonging to a group. In addition, the song is used like a newspaper or a radio broadcast to inform particular persons at the pounding forum or in the village. Pounding maize is an exhausting task but as Ruth Finnegan rightly claims:

*The songs can create excitement and aesthetic pleasure in a participatory audience doing a tedious job or even painfully laborious work (Finnegan, 1977:235).*

My informants agreed with Finnegan's contention and claimed that when they work to rhythm they suffer far less exhaustion than without rhythm. Additionally, musical rhythm is necessary to increase labour productivity. The more the pounding work is regarded as creativity and play the more motivated the women become to work harder.

Moreover, pounding songs are of a particular significance in the Ngoni community because they are directly related to sex division of labour which differentiates males from females. Grinding maize flour is a woman's activity performed for consumption rather than for trade economy (Leacock, 1978:225; Sanday, 1981:130-31). Scholars have maintained that it is this type of activity which devalues women's power in societies of the world and places them in a subordinate position. However the themes of Ngoni women's

pounding songs deal with the work at hand and beyond by verbalizing the women's conceptualisation of their role and status in the Ngoni community. This is done by revealing their experiences within their families in relation to their husbands, mothers-in-law, co-wives, and the community at large. Hence pounding songs become a licensed means of communication employed strategically to play out social conflict and to define, maintain, or alter the position of women in the Ngoni community. The following are the stylistic devices which Ngoni women use in a pounding song performance as an attempt to define or redefine traditional views of male-female relationships and roles.

### **Isolation**

In the study of folklore, scholars are concerned with communicative events as cultural performances which occur during given occasions. But the importance of the fact that the event isolates the performer and the audience from other social groups is downplayed or taken for granted while it is a crucial factor in a communicative process. The women's pounding song performance illustrates that group isolation is an essential factor in executing a performance. The conventions of the Ngoni society discourage women from having a face-to-face confrontation with their husbands. Women are warned against such behaviour because it is believed that quarrels lead to marriage break up. A public accusation and confrontation with one's opponent is also regarded as undesirable behaviour. Women are usually pressed with the need to work out tension and the need to avoid making a public confrontation. The pounding forum provides the means to do this by creating a safe and licensed context and the pounding song as a poetic genre for expressing and defusing social tension.

At a pounding session women are isolated from men and children. The women identify with each other as a social group which frequently works cooperatively and shares social experiences provided by their environment. The isolation of the women from other social groups in the community enables them to regard each other as a social network or focal group. At the pounding session an isolated context is temporarily created outside the everyday life in which public exposure and confrontation are prohibited. The situation permits the women to challenge the social order because their behaviour is generally regarded as women's verbal play which should not be treated seriously. This attitude is revealed in the

proverb: 'Pakundikana ntchembere pali bodza' 'Gossip prevails where women have gathered as a social group'. The pounding forum in this way allows the kind of discourse that would not be permitted elsewhere. The isolation masks the real purpose of the performance by referring to the performance as non-serious or merely gossip. The immunity of the performer, however, does not go beyond the performance context.

Although the men discount singing and conversation among women as gossip, both women and men recognize the importance of women's gossip. Susan Harding's description of the use of gossip by women in a Spanish village corresponds equally to the Maseko Ngoni women and shows the concerns around which women's singing and conversation focus.

*The talk and thought of women are wrapped around people and their personal lives. The first thing a woman wants to know when she meets someone is about her family. In talking with someone she knows but has not seen in some time, she asks more detailed, precise questions about the person's health and family welfare. In her daily life in the home and village, a woman is likewise more interested in how someone feels than in what someone thinks, in who a person is and what a person does in the private rather than the public sphere. From her youth and ongoing conversations and visits, she knows in varying detail about the houses and families in the village (Harding 1975:287).*

These concerns and interests of Maseko Ngoni women are evident in their pounding songs which are a form of conversation. Women's gossip which is performed, in this case, through the medium of song cannot be glossed over as merely chitchat. As Max Gluckman has contended, gossip provides a means 'to maintain the unity, morals, and values of social groups' (Gluckman 1963:308). Through being discussed, people are made to adhere to social values and roles and behave well, for they know that if they do not they risk being verbally condemned and ridiculed. Because the women are dealing with the reconstruction or breaking of reputations, they are in fact manipulating the power hierarchy (Harding 1975:302-303). Gossip through the pounding song is equally important to the men and to the community as a vehicle by which social control is exerted for the maintenance of the society.

The pounding song as an isolated event allows a woman who

has social conflict to manipulate the traditional system to her own advantage. Because the woman is the exclusive keeper of the pounding forum and the de facto authority within it, it is there that she builds her base of power to attract personal attention. Singing as a form of conversation has built into it a hierarchic ordering of 'leader' and 'follower'.

The conversations of singing give it power to change social interactions and relationships, besides its topical license. The pattern is: a leader begins to sing or to lead a song (*kutsogolera*) and then all the others join in later to follow in an obbligate harmony (*kupolokeza*). The leader-to-followers relationship is expressed first of all in the selection of what is to be sung.

The starter of the song also assumes leadership. Only one person begins and sings the melody line or solo, all others join in later in harmony. After the leader has finished singing the last syllables of the first line, the rest of the audience participants join in singing. The participants observe turn-taking in singing a personal song. This implies that anyone may begin to sing. The person who succeeds in leading a song for the audience-participants to follow gains leadership. Theoretically, the ability to lead a song successfully is open to all, but the maintenance of the floor once a turn has been gained is dependent on any given singer's communicative competence. While each person negotiates for a turn to lead a song, the strategy is to maximize one's turn once an opportunity to assume a leadership role has been achieved.

Because each woman wants a turn singing about her own experiences, a competition for song leadership is often noticeable in pounding song contexts. Successful singers are not generally interrupted. Interrupting the lead voice is considered impolite. However, when a singer is weak, hesitant and fails to attract the audience-participants to take up the chorus or join in singing the rest of the song, it is acceptable to take away the leadership role from her. The following sequence illustrates a turn takeover before a singer had concluded her song:

**Singer A:**

*Ana amuna akulira*

*Akaona ine*

*Ana amuna akulira*

*Akaona ine*

*Ilala tenge*

*Ilala tenge*

*Ilala tenge*  
*Ndikayiwale kumanda.*  
*Ilala tenge*  
*Ilala tenge*  
*Ilala te... (out of breath, laughs).<sup>1</sup>*  
*Men cry when they see me.*  
*Men cry when they see me.*  
*Ilala take me away*  
*Ilala take me away*  
*Ilala take me away*  
*Ilala take me away*  
*So that I go and forget the graveyard?*  
*Ilala take me away*  
*Ilala take me away*  
*Ilala ta... (out of breath, laughs)*

*Audience-participants: laugh*

*One member of audience: (Atopa - she is tired 'out of breath').*

**Singer B:**

*Awiyo, eee*  
*Awiyo, eee*  
*Awiyo, eee*  
*Awiyo, eee*  
*Pamdzi pano n'pachipongwe*  
*Aye eee*  
*Posakhala mkamwini*  
*Aye eee*  
*Ndimka kwa Chemtulo*  
*Ndiko nkakhale nawo*  
*Mkabale mwana akayende*  
*Aye eee*  
*Ndimka kwa Chemtulo*  
*Ndiko nkakhale nawo*  
*Mkabale mwana akayende*  
*Aye eee*

*Audience: Chapysa tsopano phulani.*

*The maize is now polished. Remove it from the mortar.*  
*(They remove the maize from the mortar. Before*  
*new maize is put in the mortar Singer C starts a song).<sup>3</sup>*



In the example cited above, Singer A lost her turn because she did not have 'a good chest' 'Anali ndi chifuwa choipa.' As soon as Singer B noticed that Singer A was a poor or faltering lead singer, Singer B negotiated for a turn. She gave a cue to indicate her intention to takeover the leadership by repeating the first line of her song three times before the audience-participants accompanied her singing. After she took the floor, the audience-participants joined in singing the rest of the song. Having lost her turn, Singer A did not immediately attempt to regain her leadership role.

Overlapping in leading a song is very unusual. There is generally a strict observance of turn-taking and cue-giving to indicate one's intent to introduce a song performance. The number of songs one person sings depends on her ability to sing her song effectively and attract audience participation. Some singers are recognized by others as exceptionally good singers. At the pounding session, people are interested in what the singer says and how she says it through song. The following characteristics are significant in judging a singer:

1. She must possess a clear and sweet voice.
2. Her enunciation must be clear for otherwise the audience cannot understand her message.
3. She must have the ability to vary the melody to add force and expression to the words of the song.
4. She must be able to maintain good rhythm and coordination with the movement of the pestle in and out of the mortar so that it becomes especially exciting for work.
5. The emotional quality of her singing must be sincere, touching in tone, and deeply felt. She must have the ability to make the audience laugh or sympathize with her.

Singers vary a great deal in the degree to which they make strategic use of musical resources. However, singers are aware that what gives a singer distinction and the possible achievement of the purpose of the song performance depend on the above mentioned characteristics. People prefer a voice that is strong, that sings in a reasonably high tessitura, and whose enunciation is clear (mawu anthetenya). When some good singers performed their songs, the audience-participants remarked, 'Ali ndi mawu okoma! Ali ndi chifuwa champhamvu!' 'She has a sweet voice! She has a powerful chest!' A sweet voice is one that is beautiful and pleasing to the ear.

It is as sweet as honey and moves the audience to pay attention to the singer and to participate in the performance. In such a context then the audience can appreciate her social problem. In turn, through her good performance, she 'gains a measure of prestige and control over the audience - prestige because of the demonstrated competence he (she) has displayed, control because the determination of the flow of the interaction in his (her) hands' (Bauman, 1977:44). The isolation provided by the pounding forum also enables a woman who is vulnerable and insecure in her house to achieve psychological satisfaction by temporarily resolving her problem by singing about it to the audience-participants. But a better gratification prevails when her opponent has received and acted on the message.

Once the performer has assumed an esteem attracting and authority- wielding role, the amount of singing time she has depends on the quality and quantity of audience-participation she elicits. Besides a strong, sweet voice and clear enunciation so that what she sings is intelligible, the performer maintains the floor and controls the audience-participants by manipulating discourse strategies. A competitive performer sometimes strings two or three songs together during one rendition. In order to string songs together easily and successfully, the performer focuses either on a common theme or character. Singer C, who gained her turn after Singer B in the above- given situation, skillfully maintained her turn this way:

**Nyimbo 1:**

*Padza mkamwini pano*  
*Padza mkamwini pano*  
*Womera mano mkhosi*  
*Womera mano mkhosi*  
*Mano mkhosi*  
*Nkhokwe ija agulula*  
*Nkhokwe ija agulula*  
*Nkhokwe ija agulula*  
*Ndatopa nayo singayithe.*

**Nyimbo 2:**

*Gulireni ndolo*  
*Gulireni ndolo*  
*Ooo ndolo*  
*Ooo ndolo*

*Gulireni ndolo eee*  
*Gulireni ndolo eee*  
*Ooo ndolo*  
*Ooo ndolo*  
*Ndatopa nayo singayithe*

**Nyimbo 3:**

*Sitimvana mawu*  
*Sitimvana mawu*  
*Ooo mawu*  
*Ooo mawu*  
*Sitimvana mawu ee*  
*Sitimvana mawu eee*  
*Sitimvana mawu eee*  
*Ndatopa nayo singayithe*

**Song 1:**

*There has arrived a son-in-law*  
*There has arrived a son-in-law*  
*Who has teeth on his neck*  
*Who has teeth on his neck*  
*Teeth on his neck*  
*He will drain the maize storage*  
*He will drain the maize storage*  
*He will drain the maize storage*  
*I am tired;*  
*I can't accommodate his behaviour.*

**Song 2:**

*Buy me earrings*  
*Buy me earrings*  
*Ooo earrings*  
*Ooo earrings*  
*Buy me earrings eee*  
*Buy me earrings eee*  
*Ooo earrings*  
*Ooo earrings*  
*I am tired; I can't accommodate*  
*his behaviour.*

**Song 3:**

*We don't agree*

*We don't agree*

*Ooo agree*

*Ooo agree*

*We don't agree eee*

*We don't agree eee*

*I am tired; I can't accommodate his behaviour.*

*Audience-participant: Pumanino*

*You rest now.*

**Singer C:**

*Chabwino. Okay<sup>4</sup>*

The performer chained three songs together by using one melody and theme. In all three songs she spells out that she disagrees with her husband because of his behaviour. He eats too much food so that one maize storage is not enough for feeding him. Moreover, even when she asks him to buy her personal objects such as earrings, he does not do so. She is tired of family feuds.

Besides the strategic use of melody and theme, the performer manipulates the syntactical pattern of all the three songs. The last sentence in each one of the songs is semantically and syntactically uniform. The lines in each song are repeated to create a uniform rhythmic pattern as well as to emphasize the meaning of the message.

The function of the song performance is to arouse feelings of embarrassment and shame and to compel the addressee to do something about it. The woman narrates her experiences with her husband using plausible language designed to induce pity from the audience and to manipulate and control the conflict with her husband. In order to arouse the sympathy of the audience-participants, she remarks, 'Nkhokwe ija agulula' 'He will drain the maize storage' and 'Ndatopa nayo singayithe' 'I am tired; I can't accommodate his behaviour.' People in the community generally like to have enough food throughout the year; they do not want to be hungry. Moreover, they always keep surplus food for a bad season, anticipating a drought or a poor harvest. The song implies that the woman will be unable to stock surplus food because of her gluttonous husband. This threatens her food security and she declares that she can no longer accept his behaviour. The sentence 'I am tired; I can't accommodate his behaviour' is loaded with implicit meaning. This means

that if her husband does not change, she will divorce him. She has persevered for some time in anticipation that he would change his behaviour, but he has not. As a result, her perseverance and patience have expired.

In the second and third songs other women who had more or less similar complaints slotted in their lines. When Singer C was leading the second part of the song which reads, 'Ndigulireni ndolo' 'Buy me earrings,' one of the audience-participants embedded the line 'Ndigulireni nsalu' 'Buy me a cotton wrapper.' She was corrected by another participant who thought that the singer of this line was incorrect. The singer was correct. She found the song meaningful and applicable to her situation. The only difference is that while the originator of the song needed earrings the latter was in dire need of a cotton wrapper. The motif of disagreement and won out patience also bore significance to the latter. The performer who had assumed a leadership role to control and manipulate the performance situation in order to negotiate for a better social status concluded her turn at the request of one of the audience-participants. A woman who had assumed the role of a time keeper interjected, 'Pumanino.' 'You rest now.' Singer C noted that she had monopolised the performance long enough and another singer had to take over. She needed the advice and another singer introduced her own song. Despite the fact that women are in a sort of classless social group at the maize pounding forum, it is clear that rules of precedence seem to operate. Each woman has to negotiate for a turn and a leadership role in order to perform her song. The ability to manipulate audience-participants enables the performer to assume an authority role through which she attempts to manage her social conflict.

### **Audience Participation**

In his list of devices that key performance in verbal art performance, Richard Bauman excludes audience participation (Bauman, 1977:16). But as one of the advocates of the performance-centred approach, he indicates the importance of the relationship between the performer and the audience as follows: 'Also basic to the structure of performance events are participants, performer(s) and audience. Performance roles constitute a major dimension of the patterning of performance within communities' (Bauman, 1977:29). Dell Hymes, in his essay on 'breakthrough' into performance, analyses folklore texts from Wasco informants but also glosses over the role of the

audience in folklore performance. İlhan Başgöz in 'The Tale Teller and his Audience' suggests that the composition of the audience determines what genre of folklore, theme, style or language to use in a particular situation (Başgöz, 1975:143-203). Examples also abound of audience participation in an actual performance by way of song, dance, or comment.

In the case of the pounding song performance, the role of the audience is a very important factor in keying a performance. The singer of a song is the principal performer and leader of the performance, but the audience plays a significant role. The performer renders the song while the audience acts as co-participants, patrons, chorus, as well as critics or judges of the singer's communicative ability. The pounding song becomes a group activity with the singer leading and the audience joining in singing the message and supporting by giving an immediate feedback to the lead singer. In the absence of audience participation, the performer cannot effectively sing her song and convey her message.

The pounding forum is a communicative event within which conversational interchange takes place. Within the small group setting, the women tell each other individual social experiences through song as a means of transmitting information. Additionally, they gossip through ordinary conversation. In this social network of individuals who know each other, the gossip and the stories they tell each other bind them together. As indicated earlier on, there is a general understanding of turn-taking in leading the group in a given song or conversation. And 'once the exchange of words has brought individuals into a jointly sustained and ratified focus of attention, once, that is, a fire has been built, any visible thing (just as any spoken referent) can be burnt in it' (Goffman, 1981:37). Any woman contending for the attention of the group then takes advantage of the face-to-face conversational opportunity and the freedom of speech provided by the pounding forum, to introduce songs in the general flow of gossiping, joking, and storytelling. She uses her artistic skill to speak through song about social relations and experiences. She teaches the audience how to sing the whole song or the chorus. If the audience fails to learn the song and sing with her, she abandons it altogether and switches to a different song if she has not lost her turn.

Audience participation is important for several reasons. The singer needs audience presence and participation in order to execute the song and convey its message. Besides the already existing con-

ventional immunity provided by the pounding forum, the performer disclaims personal responsibility for the accusations because the audience has been implicated. The audience-participants enable the performer to turn her personal discourse into an impersonal social one, thus establishing distance between herself and her opponent while at the same time focusing on the social tension to be resolved. Drawing the audience into the performance unites all the participants in the singing of the accusations or protests. Audience participation also heightens and gives strength to the accusations and invokes support and guarantees impartiality in the settlement of dispute.

### **Dialogue**

Joel Sherzer states that Cuna songs and narratives normally involve a dialogue between the performer and responder, the latter playing the role of interpreter, reteller, translator, and editor (Sherzer, 1982:171-190). Kwesi Yankah also reports that the role of auxiliary performer, otherwise known as epicenter, answerer, or linguist occurs in some African cultures such as the Limba of Sierra Leone, the Anyi Bono of the Ivory Coast, and the Nzema of Ghana (Yankah, 1985:140). The observations made by Sherzer and Yankah have parallels in the pounding song performance. The audience collectively so functions. Yankah indicates that the auxiliary performer is appointed by the performer 'to enhance the rhythm of the narrative, but he is also responsible for encouraging the performer through his rhythmic interpolations, signalling approval or disapproval' (Ibid.:140). The performer in a pounding song performance usually addresses the immediate audience and strikes a conversational fire that bounces back and forth between the performer and audience-participants. The conversational give-and-take structure takes three forms:

#### ***First form***

Each song exhibits a leader-to-followers relationship. The performer begins or leads her song and the auxiliary performers follow the leader in response to the song. The auxiliary performers embellish and ornament the song. However, some of the auxiliary performers are critics who make sure that the aesthetics of the performance are maintained. If a pitch has gone down or up too high, it is immediately corrected. For instance, in the following song:

Gocho ali ndi nzeru pogona

*Amaliza mkonono*  
*Ali maso eee.*  
*Amaliza mkonono*  
*Ali maso eee.*  
*An impotent man is clever in bed.*  
*He snores loudly*  
*While he is awake eee*  
*He snores loudly*  
*While he is awake eee.*<sup>5</sup>

One of the auxiliary participants remarked, 'Mukukweza' 'Your voice is too high.' Then one of the criticised participants replied, 'Awawa sapolokeza bwino. Mudzitsitsa inuyo.' 'It is this one who is not harmonising properly. You should flatten your pitch downwards.' But singing is not just a harmonised melody and rhythm, the meaning of a song is also emphasised. The critics correct words which are wrongly pronounced or not clearly articulated. In another situation, the aural ambiance of the singing was sweet, but a wrong word was used. In the line 'Atsikana a ku Matenje ndi mahule' 'Matenje girls are prostitutes,' the last word was pronounced as 'mahole.' This word is meaningless and it rendered the sentence meaningless too. One of the auxiliary performers laughed and remarked, 'Mahule osati mahole' 'Mahule (prostitutes) not 'mahole'. The singer answered back 'Ndi mahule, inde.' 'Yes, they are prostitutes.' In yet another song, the lead singer started the song:

*Bambo a Duwe eee ae*  
*Bambo a Duwe eee ae*  
*Chikwati poyamba eee ae*  
*Chinayambira n'fodya eee ae*  
*A Duwe eee*  
*A Duwe eee*  
*Eee (ndi mbambande)*  
*A Duwe eee*  
*A Duwe eee*  
*Eee ndi mbambande*  
*Mr Duwe eee ae*  
*Mr Duwe eee ae*  
*The marriage proposal eee ae*  
*Started by asking for snuff eee ae*  
*Mr Duwe eee*



Mr Duwe eee  
Eee (he is smart)  
Mr Duwe eee  
Mr Duwe eee  
He is smart.

The song takes a leader-response pattern. After the lead performer had sung the sixth line, the auxiliary performers replied 'Eee' but forgot how to extend the sentence. The lead singer prompted them by saying, 'ndi mbambande' (He is smart). The interaction between the lead performer and auxiliary performers or participants illustrates Bauman's contention:

*There is, however, a distinctive potential in performance by its very nature which has implications for the creation of social structure in performance. It is part of the essence of performance that it offers to participants a special enhancement of experience, bringing with it a heightened intensity of communicative interaction which bind the audience to the performer in a way that is specific to performance, the performer elicits the participative attention and energy of his audience, and to the extent that they value his performance, they will allow themselves to be caught up in it. (Bauman, 1977:43)*

More significant also is the fact that in the heat of a performance participants evaluate the performer and act as guardians of tradition to ensure that the meaning and aesthetics of the performance are not neglected.

At the same time, the response of the auxiliary performers helps the principal performer to shape her performance in accord with the aesthetic expectations of her audience. And adherence to conventional rules of the pounding song performance enhances the possibility of her performance's success. Consequently the success of her performance might significantly contribute to the accomplishment of her purpose.

### **Second form**

Each verse or couplet is punctuated with a brief period of talk and laughter. The participants take turns in arguing, agreeing, adding a point, or just affirming that they are actively involved in the performance. For example, in one situation the following occurred:

*Apongozi tsopano ndatopa*

*Ndikamasinja anthu balala*  
*Ndikamasinja anthu balala*  
*Ndikamaphika anthu bibibi*  
*Milomo njenjenje*  
*Kutsata kudyaku*  
*Ndikamaphika anthu bibibi*  
*Milomo njenjenje*  
*Kutsata kudyaku.*  
*Nanunso apongozi*  
*Mudzikonola.*  
*Mother-in-law, I am tired*  
*When I am pounding people wallow about.*  
*When I am pounding people wallow about.*  
*When I am cooking mealie-meal*  
*Everybody assembles*  
*And open their mouths*  
*To eat the food.*  
*When I am cooking mealie-meal*  
*Everybody assembles*  
*And open their mouths*  
*To eat the food*  
*You too, mother-in-law, should pound.<sup>6</sup>*

Thematically, pounding songs more frequently focus upon husbands, co-wives, and in-laws. These persons are accused of failing to behave properly toward the singers. In the above song the complaint and insult is aimed at the mother-in-law. In this particular context the mother-in-law who left all the pounding work to her daughter-in-law was present at the pounding session. The daughter-in-law performed the song to embarrass her mother-in-law. As already stated, the playful and gamelike definition of the pounding song makes it possible to blend creativity with purpose. The complaint is serious but the audience-participants enjoy the creativity of the composer whilst insult is poured on the addressee. The mother-in-law was uncomfortable with the above song, but the audience-participants enjoyed joining in the singing and insulting the mother-in-law. The audience found the song humorous because of the performer's artistic manipulation of linguistic features. In this case, the performer used ideophones. The ideophone 'balala' describes the action of the people accused. The people run away to all directions as soon as they are supposed to pound maize and leave

the work to be done by only the daughter-in-law. 'Balala' is usually used in the context of people running away to safety out of fear, especially when there is war or fire. This comic image was completed with the use of 'milomo njenjenje,' mouths shaking and running water eager to eat the food. The ideophone 'njenjenje' is often used to describe a person who is very hungry and is salivating before eating food. These two ideophones were artistically used to establish the meaning of the song as well as helping to create humour.

The audience laughed and the mother-in-law asked 'Akana tsokwe ndani?' 'Who refuses to pound maize?' The daughter-in-law replied, 'Suja mumakana tsokwe' 'Yes, you refuse to pound maize.' There was a pause which reflected the tension between the two persons. Then the daughter-in-law remarked, 'Phulanino mayino. Nanga munditukwananso? Ndagwiratu chikamwinino apa.' 'Remove the maize from the mortar now. Will you harass me again? I have worked for you as your daughter-in-law!' Her mother-in-law challenged her, 'Ungatero ndiwe mkamwini udzikonola.' 'Whatever the case may be, you are still my daughter-in-law. You will be pounding maize.' One member of the audience-participants commented, 'Dziyamikani mayi, mkamwini siwachibalo, ayi.' 'You should appreciate what she does. A daughter-in-law is not a slave.'

The dialogue between the performer and her mother-in-law shows that the former performed her song in an attempt to negotiate for a better treatment. The dialogue also helped to give meaning to the song. On the other hand, the audience-participants help in singing the song as well as in the dialogue in order to support the performer in her attempt to alter her relationship with her mother-in-law.

### **Third form**

When a singer performs her song, her perlocutionary acts are directed to addressees, co-participants, side participants, and overhearers. She separates the participants from the overhearers and defines the particular addressee by the way she designs her utterance and by the way she positions herself physically with respect to the audience-participants. Sometimes, in the performance of a particular song, the performer instigates a dialogue in the form of a poetic duel. She addresses her remark directly to her opponent if she is one of the participants. If her ostensible target is her husband and her mother-in-law or sister-in-law are among the audience-par-

ticipants, she directs her point to the in-law. The target improvises a song to challenge the instigator. This form of poetic dialogue which provides immediate feedback from the opponent, is here called an instant dialogue. The poetic dialogue that occurs at a later pounding forum, long after an instigator has ridiculed, criticised, and poked fun at her opponent is called delayed dialogue or duel. The dialogue normally consists of insults, challenges, and retorts because the performer and the participants are in a liminal world where any talk burns in it under licensed conditions. This is done not as a means of promoting enmity or conflict, but rather to resolve conflict and enhance mutual understanding. In one instance, a woman performed the following song:

*Mwamuna wachiwiri wanditopetsa*

*Kulima alime uko.*

*Nthawi yanjala*

*Wodyetsa ndikhale ine.*

*Matenda abwere uko*

*Wochiza ndikhale ine.*

*Wanditopetsa*

*I am tired of a polygamist.*

*He works in my co-wife's garden,*

*Yet during famine*

*I'm the one who feeds him.*

*When he is ill,*

*I'm the one who nurses him.*

*I'm tired of him.<sup>7</sup>*

In the song the woman complains that her husband remembers her only when he has problems. Pleasurable moments are never shared with the singer, but her co-wife. The husband only needs the performer when there is no food at the home of his other wife and when he is ill. The singer dislikes such behaviour because she works alone in the maize garden to grow the maize which he comes to eat with her.

The time the song was performed, the performer's sister-in-law was present. She was aware of the problem between her brother and sister-in-law. She knew that her brother was not so fond of the performer because she was jealous and quarreled a lot. Hence her song was interpreted as an expression of jealousy. The performer's sister-in-law spontaneously improvised a song:

*Olongolola ndimleka ine*

*Olongolola ndimleka ine  
 Apa udziti n'kapita kumowa  
 Ndamputa mkazi wanga  
 Nsima osaphika.  
 Ndidakwatira wotani mkaziyo  
 Oipa ngati njira yakumanda  
 Yomka chotsinzina?  
 Uyu ndimlekeretu  
 Ine ngapalamule.  
 I'll divorce this quarrelsome woman.  
 I'll divorce this quarrelsome woman.  
 When I go out to drink  
 She doesnot cook me nsima  
 What kind of woman is she?  
 A woman whose jealousy is as ugly as the  
 grave-yard path  
 On which one walks with closed eyes?  
 I'll just divorce her, lest I commit a crime.<sup>8</sup>*

The song identifies the original singer's motivation as jealousy. When her husband has gone out to drink and socialise with friends, she thinks that he has gone to see other women and does not cook food for him.

Cooking for a man defines a mutual relationship between a man and a woman. The woman in the song is said to have sanctioned the behaviour of her husband by not giving him food each time he went out to drink. The woman's sister-in-law clearly defines her behaviour as a feeling of unwarranted jealousy. She compares it to the ugliness of the path to a graveyard. Traditionally women weep or lament as they go to a graveyard to bury the dead. Men lower their faces and close their eyes with the palms or rest the right side of the face in one's right palm. The song shows that a jealous wife is deplored like death.

Generally, women are warned against being jealous if they are married to a man who has more than one wife. But jealousy expressed by a woman to a man who is monogamous is also discouraged. If a woman is jealous, it is believed that she wants to control her husband. A certain degree of jealousy is allowed; but if it is excessive and overbearing, a man feels that it impinges on his freedom. This usually leads to family problems. The sister-in-law of the complainant suggests that the best way would be to divorce the

jealous woman.<sup>9</sup>

The woman who had performed the song complaining that her husband needed her only when he had problems responded to her sister-in-law's retort:

*Munandipeza ndili mtsikana  
Bere liri nganganga mkamisolo  
Mwaona kuti Nadiuwe wabadwa  
Mwayamba ukununkha mkhwema  
Mkwema lake munandipatsa inu  
Mundibwezere utsikana wanga  
Nane ndikubwezera unyamata wako  
You found me a virgin  
With full pointed breasts in my bra.  
When Nadiuwe was born  
You started saying that my odour smells.  
You gave me the odour.  
Give me my girlhood  
And I will give you back your boyhood.<sup>10</sup>*

This is a response to the suggestion her sister-in-law made that she would be divorced. She challenges her not to find fault in her now when she has lost her girlhood and virginity. Her status is no longer reversible. Since she is a mother, it is difficult for her to re-marry after divorce. There are so many unmarried girls which a man would marry instead of a divorcee. The man is responsible for her lost virginity and girlhood; he has to take care of her and accept her demands.

The organisational sequence of the song dialogue between the two interactants is ABA. When A performed her song, B was the listener. The pattern changed when B took a turn to perform a response to A's song. Singer A became the listener while B was the performer and A regained her turn and former status. The sequential organisation of this song performance obeys 'the distribution of a speaker's rights rule' in conversational genres as suggested by Sacks and Garfinkel (Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970). Sacks and Garfinkel state that in a sequence of a conversation a questioner has a right to talk again when a respondent returns an answer. In the case of the two pounding song performers, when the man's sister finishes her turn, the right to speak passes back to her sister-in-law. The dialogue is not repeatable because the sister-in-law did not perform another song. In terms of topic selection for the songs, the

man's sister adhered to the theme of jealousy and divorce. Her sister-in-law responded in line with the subject and theme of performer B. This example characterises what I have called an instant song dialogue.

A delayed song dialogue was observed two weeks later after the man's wife had openly complained about his behaviour. At the time her first song was performed, her co-wife was absent. However, she got the message through her sister-in-law who had saved the face of her brother on that occasion. The co-wife composed her own song which explained her position:

*Iwe, iwe taona*

*Iwe, iwe taona*

*Amuna akowa udzatenge.*

*Iwe, iwe taona*

*Ndilibe kubwera kudzalanda*

*Ndi ugalu bwakobo.*

*You, you listen.*

*You, you listen.*

*Come and take your husband.*

*You, you listen.*

*I did not come to your house to hook him.*

*It's because of your dog-like behaviour.<sup>11</sup>*

This co-wife defends herself asserting that she should not be blamed. It is the man who is attracted to her. She claims that her co-wife behaves like a dog. In the Ngoni community dogs are reputed to be good companions, but at the same time they are jealous. It is the negative behaviour of a dog that the woman dwells on in the above song. Dogs guard a bone of beef which they no longer need to eat. However, when hungry dogs attempt to pick up the bone, the guard chases them away. It is this jealous behaviour that the woman attacks. The woman for whom the song was performed felt uncomfortable but did not challenge her co-wife. Everyone knew that the song was a response to a previous accusation. This implies that one theme can be extended through a delayed response to more than one performance. Moreover, the accomplishment of a performance purposes sometimes requires a considerable passage of time.

### **Indirection and Ambiguity**

The Maseko Ngoni community is egalitarian. Open disagreement

and expressed confrontation are usually avoided. Persons use indirection as a device that maintains civil relations within which conflict is resolved or expressed. Indirection is defined as a form of veiled speech that calls attention to the relationship between narrated event and speech event and its potential for multiple messages and interpretations (Read 1959; Rosaldo 1973; Strathern 1975). Women in the Maseko Ngoni community extend indirection to ambiguity.

In the event of disagreement or tension, people use intermediaries to settle the dispute. But since a pounding event is normally a licensed forum for arguing out and bringing conflict to the public arena without being condemned for one's expressions, the women employ the pounding song as an indirect device for managing conflict.

Besides the use of the pounding song as an indirect device for keying negotiation, the performer addresses the song through third parties to make the message impersonal. In one instance a woman who wanted to complain to her husband about his impotence composed a song to be sung by her younger sister. Her younger sister performed the following song:

*Ede, ede*  
*Ede, ede*  
*Alamu inu*  
*Anzanu adelera inu, aee.*  
*Ede, ede*  
*Mbulukumo*  
*Mulibe chilipo, aee*  
*Akayang'ana*  
*Angoti ndalema ine, aee*  
*Ndatopa ine*  
*Akayang ana*  
*Angoti ndatopa ine, aee*  
*Ndatopa ine, aee*  
*Ndatopa ine.*  
*Ede, ede*  
*Ede, ede*  
*Brother-in-law*  
*Your friend (wife) is complaining, aee*  
*Ede, ede*  
*Inside your pants*  
*There is nothing useful*



*When he looks,  
He just says, 'I'm tired, aee  
I am exhausted.  
I am tired indeed.' aee  
When he looks,  
He just says, 'I'm tired, aee.  
I am exhausted.'*<sup>12</sup>

The song is already an indirect means of sending a message to the husband, but the complainant frames the complaint within another indirect frame. Instead of the man's wife expressing her feelings, it is his sister-in-law who conveys the message. The sister-in-law is a substitute for her older sister who is therefore distanced from the problem while her social concerns are addressed. The immunity of the sister-in-law is twofold: (a) She airs the complaint through a pounding song at a licensed event. The song is protected by the metamessage that it is only a work song. All insults are not meant and therefore should not be taken seriously. (b) A joking relationship between the singer and her brother-in-law permits her to indulge in horseplay and outrageous behaviour towards him without his taking offense. The joking relationship is covered by the metamessage, 'This is play and therefore the negative remarks are not meant.' However, in the pounding song, the singer can also deny or affirm the presence of the metamessage. Thus the ambiguity of the situation protects the performer from blame while she can acknowledge the truth of the accusation or insult. Furthermore, the style of articulating the relationship between her older sister and brother-in-law enables the performer to distance herself. She uses a reported speech style besides the third and second person pronouns 'he' and 'you'.

Besides the impersonal linguistic style, the singer uses ambiguity or veiled speech. This type of speech contains some degree of potential or actual concealment of meaning, depending on its contexts of use. The Maseko Ngoni people define veiled speech as speaking from the rear of one's tongue rather than from the front (kukuluwika). It is a type of speech that is used by adults in all kinds of public argument and debate as well as in formal inter-group discourse situations. Veiled speech functions to obscure the meaning of a text in the process of negotiation without the interactants losing face. In the above song, the singer states, 'In your pants there is nothing useful.' The pants hide the male organ which is a

symbol of manhood. However, his male organ is useless because it is non-functional for the procreation of children. Instead of directly stating that the man is so impotent that he is unable to have sexual intercourse with his wife, the performer indirectly mentions, 'When he looks, he just says, I'm tired. I am exhausted.' This expression is a contextual device which the performer employs to guide the audience to the hidden meaning of the song. These last lines suggest the inability of the man under attack to have an erection and satisfy the woman's emotional needs.

The strategy of indirection also depends largely on ambiguity achieved through the use of metaphor or 'figures of speech that operate on the meaning (the 'signified') rather than the form (the 'signifier') of words' (Sapir, 1977:3). The performer deliberately employs ambiguity for:

- 1) its deniability of a meaning;
- 2) leaving the ultimate interpretation up to the audience-participants and the addressee;
- 3) by its very opacity, compelling listener participation in a performance;
- 4) providing a possibility for a shared corporate understanding;
- 5) its ability to enable the performer to avoid an open public confrontation or placement of guilt.

(Myers and Brenneis, 1984:16).

Consider the following song in which a woman complained of her husband's insatiable sexual appetite:

*Ndakuwatiwa ndi kamnyamata*

*Kadya kasiya*

*Ndakuwatiwa ndi kamnyamata*

*Kadya kasiya*

*Chili kwanga chim gubidi*

*Chingoti tolu gali*

*Ngati aphika achimana*

*Ndakuwatiwa ndi kamnyamata*

*Kadya kasiya*

*I have married a young man*

*Who eats and leaves left-overs.*

*I have married a young man*

*Who eats and leaves left-overs.*

*I have married a gobbler*

*He just picks and swallows (without chewing)*

*As if he had not eaten before.  
I have married a young man  
Who eats and leaves left-overs.*<sup>13</sup>

This song shows how the performer uses ambiguity so that her intended complaint and criticism is oblique. I tried to elicit the meaning and interpretation of the song from two girls who were twelve and thirteen years old, respectively. The two girls agreed that usually children wake up early in the morning requesting food. The traditional meal which is served to a child in the morning is mkute, previous evening's dinner left-overs which are warmed. The singer is complaining to her friend about her greedy husband who eats all the dinner as though he had been hungry for years. As a result, there is no mkute for giving his children as breakfast. This interpretation was at variance with the meaning given by the singer and her adult audience-participants. The women said that the song is about a woman who learns from her friend the way her friend's husband handles her gently in bed. Her friend's husband makes love to her friend in such a way that she wakes up fresh and is fit for another love making the following night. Then the composer and performer of the song explains that she has a man with insatiable appetite. He sleeps with her as if he had not seen a woman for a long time: 'Chingoti tolu gali ngati aphika achimana.' 'He just picks and swallows (without chewing) as if you had never cooked for him before.' Thus she wakes up so worn out that she cannot enjoy making love with him again the next night. However, the women also commented that the interpretation given by the two girls was correct. The two interpretations imply that the performer achieves her use of ambiguity. Both interpretations, although not parallel, are equally acceptable. The performer achieves ambiguity by disguising the truth and her feelings in words encoded in metaphors. The two interpretations further illustrate that the language the singer employed was for a selected audience. The girls who were ignorant of adult talk did not know the second meaning of the song. The ambiguity is used to restrict the audience for her message and to exclude others in order to achieve a degree of privacy because discussions on sex are touchy.

The pounding song is supposed to be a corrective device by addressing specific problems and making the offender realise his or her error by indirect means. The performer uses ambiguity to try to shame the other party into compliance. In the above example, the

meaning of the song was ambiguous and it was seen that only those who had knowledge of the obscure words adequately interpreted its meaning. The message of the song was understood by word association. Adults know that food and sex are words in association and were able to interpret the meaning of the song. Some adults revealed their recognition of the song's message by asking the singer, 'Kodi ukufuna gocho wongoliza mkonono?' 'Do you want an impotent man who just snores in bed?' There was laughter and the performer retorted, 'Adzidya bwino.' 'He should eat properly.' Her answer to the audience's comment is also ambiguous to someone who does not associate food with sex and the act of eating with love making.

In a pounding song performance, the intent of a performer is to convey a message in order to negotiate and resolve a social problem. A singer's intent can be achieved partly because of how she renders her utterances and how the addressee interprets the meaning of her speech acts. While she uses ambiguity to disguise the meaning of her song, she needs markers which guide the addressee or audience to the intended meaning. In several instances performers used metaphor to disguise the message of a song while at the same time humour and drama were employed to achieve an effective performance guiding the audience to the song's meaning.

### **Humour and Drama**

In the following song, the performer uses words which direct the listener to her intended meaning of the song. She verbalises and condemns deviant sexual behaviour in order to convey and assert a social norm. She emphasises the proper social relationship between a man and his sister-in-law. In this situation, the performer's husband was cheating by sleeping with his sister-in-law. This is a potentially embarrassing and touchy topic that must be discussed with the use of obscure words to avoid counter-accusations of inappropriate behaviour. The girl being exposed could then summon the singer to court for having accused her of adultery. But this is an ambivalent situation because the performer is safe from blame according to the convention of the pounding forum which provides immunity to participants and performers. However, performers still protect themselves by disguising their message, simultaneously making the performance aesthetically delightful. Dramatisation and humour enhanced the enjoyment and significance of the following song.

*Atsikana a ku Matenje*  
*Ndi mahule.*  
*Atsikana a ku Matenje*  
*Ndi mahule.*  
*Amavina sinjonjo*  
*Ndalamwawo.*  
*Amavina sinjonjo*  
*Ndalamwawo.*  
*Walira nayo eee*  
*Walira nayo. (yalamwake)*  
*Walira nayo eee*  
*Walira nayo (yalamwake)*  
*Matenje village girls*  
*Are prostitutes.*  
*Matenje village girls*  
*Are prostitutes.*  
*They dance sinjonjo*  
*With their brothers-in-law.*  
*They dance sinjonjo*  
*With their brothers-in-law.*  
*She has cried because of it (his penis)*  
*She has cried because of it (his penis)*  
*Of her brother-in-law.*  
*She has cried because of it (his penis)*  
*She has cried because of it (his penis)*  
*Of her brother-in-law.<sup>14</sup>*

As the woman led the song and co-participants followed, there was laughter. The laughter was elicited by words as well as gestures used in the performance. The word 'hule' (prostitute) is derogatory and improper. But since the song deals with a serious deviation from a social norm, the performer is licensed to indulge in the use of base language. Additionally, the freedom of speech offered by the pounding session permits the singer to employ such language. The situation therefore provides the performer with the opportunity for wriggling her hips and imitating movements of the sexual act. One would be misled by the song that the girls dance this particular dance with their brothers-in-law. However, the performer used non-linguistic aspects of the performance such as gestures and exaggerated humour to cue or mark her real meaning. She wriggled her hips as if she were dancing sinjonjo and made facial expressions

which depicted the crying of the girl.

The words in the song do not explicitly say that the girl is crying because of having sex with her brother-in-law. It is mostly implied and the only line that gives the audience the clue that the dance is a sexual act is: 'Walira nayo ya alamwake' 'She has cried because of it (the penis) of her brother-in-law.' The phrase 'nayo ya' 'it of' is the only clue which leads the audience to interpret the meaning of the song. This possessive phrase in association with the word 'mahule' 'prostitute' consolidate the meaning of the song.

Furthermore, the comic dance performed by the performer illustrated the obscenity of the song. The audience laughed and although the performer obscured the target of the embarrassment and attack by generalising that she was discussing all the girls of Matenje village, the audience knew who the target was. Moreover, the last lines of the song shift from a plural to a singular form. This shift enabled the audience to identify the addressee. The girl who was being condemned for deviant sexual behaviour was so embarrassed that she left the pounding forum. The audience delightfully joined the performer in singing the song and continued to ridicule the deviant as she walked away. Thus through the performance the performer managed to manipulate and control the audience to taunt the girl. The girl's social status was diminished and, on the other hand, the performer coped with her frustration through verbal art directed at her opponent and significantly gave herself a winning edge.

### Ideophones or Onomatopoeia

The language used in the performance of pounding songs is Chichewa, a Bantu language whose linguistic features provide a vehicle for conveying meaning. The ideophone or onomatopoeia is one of the forms usually used by performers for stylistic as well as semantic value. Ruth Finnegan describes the function of the ideophone in Bantu language as follows:

*This is a special word which conveys a kind of idea-in-sound and is commonly used in Bantu languages to add emotion or vividness to a description or recitation. Ideophones are sometimes onomatopoeic, but the acoustic impression often conveys aspects which, in English culture at least, are not normally associated with sound at all - such as manner, colour, taste, smell, silence, action, condition, texture, gait, posture, or intensity... They are specifically introduced to*

*heighten the narrative or add an element of drama. They also come in continually where there is a need for a particularly lively style or vivid description and are used with considerable rhetorical effect to express emotion or excitement (Finnegan, 1970:64).*

Finnegan's remarks are supported by Philip Noss:

*Through the ideophone the listener sees, hears, or feels what is being described, whether it is sound, sensation, emotion, colour, texture, movement, state, quality, or anything else that is describable. And if*

*it cannot be described there will be an ideophone to describe its state of indescribability (Noss, 1977:139).*

Similarly, an ideophone or onomatopoeia is an important device for the Chichewa speaking person performing pounding songs. Through her knowledge of the native language, the performer employs ideophones or onomatopoeia which lend her eloquence, vivify her performance, and clarify the images which describe action. The images created by using ideophones or onomatopoeia help the audience to see, hear, feel, smell, touch, enjoy, and interpret the meaning of the song.

The following is an example of a song whose aesthetics and meaning are heightened by the performer's ability to apply ideophones.

*Apongozi tsopano ndatopa*

*Ndikamasinja anthu balala*

*Ndikamasinja anthu balala*

*Ndikamaphika anthu bibibi*

*Milomo njenjenje*

*Kutsata kudyaku.*

*Ndikamaphika anthu bibibi*

*Milomo njenjenje*

*Kutsata kudyaku*

*Kasinjaniko.*

*Mother-in-law, I am tired.*

*When I am pounding people run away.*

*When I am pounding people run away.*

*When I am cooking mealie-meal*

*Everybody assembles,*

*Salivates and open their mouths*

*To eat the food.  
When I am cooking mealie-meal  
Everybody assembles,  
Salivates and open their mouths  
To eat the food.  
You too, mother-in-law, should pound.<sup>15</sup>*

The first ideophone 'balala' creates an image of women running in different directions at the sight of maize to be pounded. Their departure leaves the daughter-in-law to do all the pounding task alone. The image is humorous because one sees a group of women running away from their usual responsibility. The focus of the ridicule is the singer's mother-in-law who is lazy. Laziness is condemned in the community and the implication that the mother-in-law is lazy lowers her status in the society.

The second ideophone 'bibibi' describes how the women flock and scramble for seats to eat the food prepared by the daughter-in-law. The image of the women is made sharper with the ideophone 'njenjenje' - which describes the movement of the women salivating like Pavlovian dogs as they are assembled at table. This shows a contrast between their readiness to eat and their reluctance to work in order to eat. The insult diminishes the status of the mother-in-law who only knows how to eat but not how to work so that she can eat. The dramatic effectiveness of these ideophones was clearly shown because the audience-participants laughed each time the lead performer articulated these three ideophones. The gravity of the embarrassment was noticeable because the mother-in-law challenged the singer, 'Ndani amakana tsokwe?' 'Who refuses to pound maize?' The daughter-in-law did not compromise with her but contested, 'Phulanino chapsa. Suja mumakana tsokwe. Ndagwirano chikamwini. Nanga munditukwananso?' 'Remove the maize from the mortar it is now polished. You indeed refuse to pound maize. I have worked for you as your daughter-in-law. Will you harass me again?' The mother-in-law tried to respond to this challenge, but the audience took the opportunity to criticise and instruct her.

The verbal skills of the performer aroused the feelings of the audience-participants and thus persuaded them to sympathise with her and criticise her mother-in-law. The song she performed and the ideophones she used had rhetorical value which helped her to assert herself and negotiate for a better treatment. She gained control of both the audience-participants and her mother-in-law.



### **Parallelism and Repetition**

Frequently, the performer also employs parallelism or repetition as a device in making a song memorable, sweet, and meaningful. Partial or full lexico-structural parallel construction or repetition is an aesthetic device, indicating a performer's mastery of the poetic discourse. Additionally, parallelism has a significant semantic value in connection with the purpose of the pounding song performance. The repeated syntactic form and resultant rhythm achieved through parallelism carry the meaning of a song.

In pounding songs, lexical parallelism is achieved in different ways: the first involves initial linking. On the other hand, parallelism is accomplished through linking of words in the final position. Consider the following song:

*Iyo, iyo, inu Anabiyeni*  
*Iyo, iyo, suja mwandinyenga*  
*Iyo, iyo, wokwatiwa kumene*  
*Iyo, iyo, wokwatiwa pogona*  
*Iyo, iyo, inu Anabiyeni*  
*Iyo, iyo, iyo, iyo.*<sup>16</sup>

The first phrase in each of the lines is repeated throughout the song. The second part of each sentence is constantly changing in form. The singer in the song complains to her friend about her miserable marriage. She states that the only time she enjoys a married life is when in bed with her husband. She draws the attention of the audience-participants by repeating the exclamation 'iyo, iyo' which is usually used to express regret and a lament. The message of the song is intensified by repeating the same lament expression in each sentence. The parallelism sets up a special relation between expression and content: the message expresses the underlying meaning of the song while giving it a rhythmic structure.

A problem faced by a woman in her family is expressed in the following pounding song. The singer uses parallelism in the final linking position to make her song sweet or beautiful to the ears of her audience. Furthermore, parallelism also helps her to emphasize the words which contribute to the meaning of her message:

*Aphiri, Aphiri ngolongolola*  
*Aphiri, Aphiri ngolongolola*  
*Ali mnyumbamo Aphiri ngolongolola*  
*Musayitane Aphiri ngolongolola*  
*Tiyeni kumunda Aphiri ngolongolola*

*Tiyeni kumowa Aphiri ngolongolola*  
*Ndingolira ine*  
*Ndingolira madandaulo*  
*Ndingolira madandaulo*  
*Ndingolira madandaulo.*  
*Mr Phiri, Mr Phiri is quarrelsome.*  
*Mr Phiri, Mr Phiri is quarrelsome.*  
*Quarrelsome Phiri is in the house.*  
*Don't call Mr Phiri, he is quarrelsome.*  
*Even at the garden, Mr Phiri is quarrelsome.*  
*Even at a beer party, Mr Phiri is quarrelsome.*  
*I am just lamenting.*  
*I am just crying laments.*  
*I am just crying laments.*  
*I am just crying laments.<sup>17</sup>*

The singer tells the world that her husband is quarrelsome. She hopes by embarrassing him, he might change his behaviour. The word 'ngolongolola' 'he is quarrelsome' takes the final position in each sentence of the first six lines. The word is repeated to emphasise the message that he is ever fighting with her. The intent of her song performance is clearly defined in the last four lines. The word 'madandaulo' 'laments' is deliberately repeated to give force to her message. Similarly, the repetition of 'ndingolira' 'I am just crying laments/I am just lamenting' restates the message or idea of 'madandaulo' 'laments' in another form. As a result, the singer achieves three lines of parallel syntax and redundancy of message. Although the singer makes a disclaimer that she is merely lamenting, the truth is that she is protesting against her treatment. She disguises her intent by her disclaimer. The syntactical redundancy is deliberate because it helps her show the complexity of her problem. The repetition also signifies how frequently she fights with her husband and how often she laments the hardship of her marriage. Besides women believe in the magical effect of repetition. They contend that their desires and expressions invite audience sympathy when emphasised through repetition. A singer's message is also heard and her purpose is sometimes accomplished due to incessant repetition.

Aesthetically, sentence, word or phrase repetition contribute to the rhythm of the song and move the audience to join in singing. Consequently, audience participation gives more weight to the

protest of the woman. Moreover, audience participation disguises the fact that the song is an individual's complaint. The audience-participants protect the woman from individual accountability to her husband for having embarrassed him in public. When asked by her husband why she exposed him to public scrutiny, she can claim that it is only a pounding song performed by all the women to entertain themselves while working.

### **Conclusion**

My analysis has demonstrated how verbal and non-verbal strategies play a part in the performance of pounding songs in the Maseko Ngoni community. The devices used by the performer are a reflex of a whole system of speech acts that permeate the communicative habits of the people. Within the pounding song performance there is an interplay between many factors: personal with community needs, creativity with societal controls, social conflict with cooperation, and entertainment with protest and hostility. The distinct use of performance keying devices can best be appreciated in the total context of these cultural factors.

Indirection and ambiguity or metaphor can be a very powerful rhetorical device for insult, compliment, and argument. In the performance of the pounding song, anger or frustration becomes humour, misunderstanding understanding. Intensity of feeling temporarily or permanently changes. Intense feeling is converted into intense psychological satisfaction. Through ambiguity, dialogue and repetition the performer and audience-participants are joking, ridiculing, arguing, and contesting. The performer exhibits her communicative competence and gains control of the audience-participants in an attempt to manipulate, negotiate, and alter her social position.

These devices which the performer employs are themselves sub-strategies situated within the megastrategy, the pounding song. However, the pounding song should not be reduced merely to a 'strategy' or a 'function'. Indeed the pounding song is a tool of dispute management. But beyond that, performing the pounding song has meaning. Singing the pounding song means entertainment, relaxation, cooperation and coordination, and the reduction of fatigue and boredom while the women are pounding maize. These are quite contrary to argumentation. Besides, singing at the pounding session is structured. In the dynamics of singing, a performer occupies a temporary leadership position which enables her to control

and manipulate the audience- participants to play a role in her performance. Through her leadership role, she can argue and negotiate status claims within the social order of the society. Strategy, structure, and meaning are mutually interwoven to define what constitutes the women's pounding song performance.

## Notes

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1. Ilala is one of the passenger vessels on Lake Malawi. It is used as a means of transport between Kabwe in northern Malawi. The singer who resides close to Monkey Bay wants to travel to a far away town in the north.
2. Chemtulo is a neighbouring chief's area next to Chief Kwataine's village. This song works on the belief and proverb: 'Kwaweni kumasunga.' 'One lives kinship trouble-free and longer in a foreign land.'
3. Song performed by women of Chief Kwataine's area, Ntcheu district, January 1986.
4. Performance by women of Chief Kwataine's area, Ntcheu district, January 1986.
5. Song performed by women of Chief Kwataine's area, Ntcheu district, January 1986.
6. Song performed by women of Nkutu village, Dedza district, August 1982.
7. Song sung by women of Nkutu village, Dedza district, August 1982.
8. Song performed by women of Nkutu village, Dedza district, August 1982.
9. The community knows the bad consequences of jealousy in families. It is common to hear songs which advise women against being jealous. Such songs are usually performed during wedding ceremonies. Margaret Read gives three songs which she collected from the area in the 1930s. All three songs warn the bride against becoming jealous when living with co-wives. Two of the songs were sung by the Ngoni of northern Malawi while the third one, a version of which I also recorded, was performed by the Gomani Maseko Ngoni:  
*Hoyayiyoyo indoda ilalepi?*  
*Ngiyamfuna*  
*He ngiyamfuna ngezinyawa ho*  
*Ngiyamfuna*  
*Hoyayiyoye ha*

*Indoda ilale endlini*  
*Aye kwamayimkhuyu.*  
*Hau mkhuyw*  
*Indoda ilale endlini*  
*Woe is me! Where has my husband been sleeping?*  
*I am looking for him.*  
*I am looking for him with my feet, ho.*  
*(I am looking for him)*  
*Woe is me!*  
*(My husband is sleeping in the house)*  
*He went to the big mother*  
*Alas to the big one*  
*My husband has been sleeping in the house*  
*(Read, 1937: 6-7)*

- The version I collected of this song was performed by Mayi Erica Homo, Melesiyana Chimpepa, Nasilo Lihako, Mailoti Zakulanda, Abigail Kalilombe, Hanna Chigwammowa, Loliya Jingapansi, and Verines Chigwammowa at Lizulu Inkosini, January 1986.
10. Sung by women of Mkutu village, Dedza district, August 1982.
  11. Song performed at Mkutu village, Dedza district, August 1982.
  12. Song performed at Mkutu village, Dedza district, September 1981.
- Magie Mbilizi also communicated with me about a version she recorded in Blantyre from Ntcheu women in 1982.
13. Sung by women of Mkutu village, Dedza district, August 1982.
  14. Performed by women of Chief Kwataine's area, Ntcheu district, January 1986.
  15. Song sung by women of Mzamani village, Ntcheu district, March 1986.

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