9. Coming to terms with Chronic Affliction & Misfortune the Ngoma Way

Ngom among the Tiv is „mother“ and refers to a „mother“ or lead drum in an ensemble. Throughout most of Bantu-speaking Africa the root *goma refers to drum, the instrument. In Eastern Bantu it refers to drum and song-dance. In many regions it is thus the performance of healing, music, creating relationships, and communing with the spirits.
Ngoma for Beginners

• Modes of affliction

• Spirits announce themselves through affliction

• Some sufferers become healers

• Common suffering and misfortune establishes basis for formation of social network or group, the „order“ or „cult“ of affliction

• Divining, treating, initiation, purification are most common rituals

• The Work of Ngoma

• Waxing and waning of particular orders

• Identifying the „difficult issues“ at the basis of the ngoma
Divination is usually the basis for an individual’s recruitment to a particular order for healing or misfortune. Diviners themselves usually belong to such orders, as here in Swaziland.
Mpombo for threatened reproduction on the Southern Savanna

Reproductive disorders are a very common mode of affliction in ngoma orders. A woman whose pregnancy is threatened is seen in seclusion in the Mpombo order. She is released from domestic chores and remains under care of a sponsoring nganga Mpombo.
Reproduction in abundance

Above, mother of twins anointed in kaolin to signify liminal association with the spirit world. Right, “Christian twins.” Both, southern savanna.
Members of folkloric Mungano do their ngoma before a large crowd at the National Museum. The original Mungano is a viper handling society in Western Tanzania.
Prominent waganga in Dar es Salaam work with Ruhani spirits and “do ngoma”
Ngoma in Dar es Salaam

Each drum plays for a particular spirit in ngoma work by Mganga Botoli Laie, seen here.
Living under Apartheid
Doing *ngoma* in the townships

Predominantly Xhosa *amaqira* (full healers) „do ngoma“ with their *amakweta* sufferer-apprentices in Guguleto township, Western Cape.
“Doing ngoma,” the core ritual unit

“Ka Ngwane, hear me...”

“Sing & clap for the crab next to the river”

“Hey Majola, come out of jail. I have news of your house”
Sa ngoma, “Doing ngoma”
Transformations

*Nkweta*, novice-sufferer

Recent graduate, wearing veil

Fully qualified *sangoma / igqira*
The novice (Ego) becomes the existential center of a new set of new relationships that extends in many directions, becoming the conduit of transmission of knowledge and wisdom. (Based on original by Harriet Ngubane, 1981, p. 363)
### Networks of networks

<table>
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<th>Event Type</th>
<th>Full Amagqira/Sangoma and Novices Present</th>
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<td>1. “Washing of beads” for B, sponsored by A</td>
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<td>2. Initiation <em>nthlombe</em> for novice of B</td>
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<td>3. “Washing of beads” for novice of G</td>
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<td>4. “Washing of beads” for novice of B</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Graduation <em>nthlombe</em> for novice of L</td>
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Pattern of association of individual healers and their novices in five events in Western Cape *ngoma* networks, late 1982. Capital letters refer to senior healers present at particular events; clusters of enclosed x’s refer to these healers’ novices in therapy or training with them. J. Janzen, *Ngoma*, p. 167.
Contradictions of Atlantic Mercantilism

Large *min’kisi* such as Lemba were said to be “drummed up” meaning they had a collective adherence of members who met together, and who performed rituals. From the 17th to the early 20th centuries in north bank Lower Congo, Lemba was effectively a government; it regulated trade, paths between villages, markets, and gave the mercantile elite great protection and privilege. Lemba created special marriage alliances that established networks of Lemba mercantile elite throughout the entire region.
Lemba as drum of affliction: What was the affliction?

The relief carvings on this *nkonzi* Lemba drum depicts a couple with child facing a doctor/priest with his nkobe Lemba box. Lemba’s affliction was non-specific. Common signs & symptoms included loss of speech, infertility, headache, and fear of subordinates’ envy.
The Lemba couple, a link in an endless network of alliances

This statue of a Lemba couple at right shows them seated on their chest of trade goods, wearing Lemba bracelets, necklace, and special caps. Why are they embracing?
Lemba’s distribution from Mpumbu to the Ocean (1650-1930)
Lemba controlled markets and market councils
...heha mbongo at the market entrances whence comes wealth...
The distribution of rituals of initiation in space and time are typical of Central African min’kisi. Domains of the cosmos (water & land) and the cycle of time (day & night) are recognized. The sufferer-initiates are purified, and then inaugurated, in the midst of a celebrating community.
Initiating to Lemba: the nkobe

Figure 21
Takobe of the Western Lemba region:
Mayombe

[Diagram of Lemba initiation objects and ceremonies]

Western Mayombe: Kanga, DAC 40240-158 (39), collected by E. Dulfenague. (Plates 8–7)

Eastern Mayombe: Maimba, after Babaladi (1971: 10)
Lemba metaphors & metonyms

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<th>substance and color</th>
<th>animal order</th>
<th>cosmologic space</th>
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<td>aboveground, tree-level</td>
<td>lemba-</td>
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<td>&quot;Pfemba&quot;</td>
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<td>n'kaka pangolin</td>
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