

## THE VOICE OF A PRISONER: RECORDINGS OF JOSEPH NTWANAMBI IN THE RUHLEBEN PRISONER OF WAR CAMP, BERLIN, 1917

*by*

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### **Identifying a Xhosa prisoner of war**

The Xhosa WWI prisoner of war, Joseph Ntwanambi, whose recordings form the basis of this article, was recorded by two German ethnologists, first on wax cylinder by George Schünemann and then on shellac discs by Wilhelm Doegen and the Odeon recording company.<sup>1</sup> The shellac disc recordings reside in the Lautarchiv at Humboldt University and it is the recordings on the discs which are analysed in this article. Unfortunately, the wax cylinders held at the Berlin Phonogramm Archiv<sup>2</sup> have not yet been digitised and therefore are not accessible.<sup>3</sup> These recordings of Ntwanambi may be the earliest recordings of Xhosa music which are accessible and still in existence. Regarding the prisoner himself, he was clearly recruited into the South African Army after enlisting into the South African Native Labour Corps, and sent to Germany during World War I where he was captured by the Germans and ended up with other African prisoners in the Ruhleben camp.<sup>4</sup>

On 7 September 2014 Esra Karakaya, a musicology student at Humboldt University in Berlin, sent me an e-mail letter. She was working with other students on a project to publish recordings from the Lautarchiv at Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany, on a CD to promote the Lautarchiv. One of the songs chosen was in Xhosa, a recording of a Xhosa prisoner of war in the Ruhleben camp made in 1917.<sup>5</sup> It was among the many recordings of prisoners of war in Germany made by German ethnologists and

<sup>1</sup> The author's sincere thanks are due to three people without whose gracious help this article may never have been written: Dr Susanne Ziegler of the Berlin Phonogramme Archiv, now retired; Dr Nepomuk Riva, Humboldt University, Berlin; and Mr Tsolwana Mpayipheli, manager and performer in the Ngqoko Xhosa Traditional Music Ensemble ("Ngqoko Group").

<sup>2</sup> The history of the Berlin Phonogram Archiv is described in the publications Berner, Hoffmann and Lange 2011; Bredekamp, Brüning and C. Weber, eds. 2000a and 2000b; Scheer, 2010; Lange 2011; and S. Ziegler 2000, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> S. Ziegler, e-mail communication, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> For further reading on the role of black South Africans in the First World War, see Mohlamme 1995 and Swinney 1995.

<sup>5</sup> In such camps the British and French prisoners were regarded as "at the top", the Black Africans were the "bottom" people (Scheer 2010: 288–9). For information on the Ruhleben camp see Stibbe 2008.

musicologists when the war made it impossible for them to continue the work they had previously been carrying out in many areas of the world.

Ms Karakaya's supervisor, Dr Nepomuk Riva, who was familiar with my work on Xhosa music, suggested that she write to me for assistance in transcribing and translating the song. Naturally I was extremely interested. I had not known that any such early recording of traditional Xhosa music existed. Some days later I received a copy of the song on a CD, together with the information written by Wilhelm Doegen, the language scholar who had made the recording in 1917. The information was on a form called a "Personal-Bogen" ("Personal information") (see Figure 1) that accompanied the disc on which the song was recorded.

Lfd. Nr. \_\_\_\_\_

### PERSONAL-BOGEN

Lautliche Aufnahme Nr: *PK. 865* Kriegsgefangenenlager: *Mulliken-Bethin Wessels*  
 Datum: *1917 11/11*  
 Zeitangabe: *11 Uhr 45 Min*

Dauer der Aufnahme: \_\_\_\_\_ Durchmesser der Platte: *27 cm*

Raum der Aufnahme: \_\_\_\_\_

Art der Aufnahme (Sprechaufnahme, Gesangsaufnahme, Chorusaufnahme, Instrumentenaufnahme, Orchesteraufnahme): *1. Ungewöhnliche Musik (Musikanten) 2. Joseph Ntwanambi (Xhosa)*  
*Xhosa (Kaffern)*

Name (in der Muttersprache geschrieben): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name (lateinisch geschrieben): *Ntwanambi* s. *PK. 866*  
 Vorname: \_\_\_\_\_

Wann geboren (oder ungefähres Alter)? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Wo geboren (Heimat)? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Welche größere Stadt liegt in der Nähe des Geburtsortes? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Kanton – Kreis (Ujeds): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Departement – Gouvernement (Gubernija) – Grafschaft (County): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Wo gelebt in den ersten 6 Jahren? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Wo gelebt vom 7. bis 20. Lebensjahr? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Was für Schulbildung? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Wo die Schule besucht? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Wo gelebt vom 20. Lebensjahr? \_\_\_\_\_

Aus welchem Ort (Ort und Kreis angeben) stammt der Vater? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Aus welchem Ort (Ort und Kreis angeben) stammt die Mutter? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Welchem Volksstamm angehörig? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Welche Sprache als Muttersprache? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Welche Sprachen spricht er außerdem? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Kann er lesen? \_\_\_\_\_ Welche Sprachen? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Kann er schreiben? \_\_\_\_\_ Welche Sprachen? \_\_\_\_\_

Spielt er ein im Lager vorhandenes Instrument aus der Heimat? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Singt oder spielt er modern europäische Musikweisen? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Religion: \_\_\_\_\_ Beruf: \_\_\_\_\_

Vorgeschlagen von: 1. \_\_\_\_\_  
 2. \_\_\_\_\_

Beschaffenheit der Stimme: { 1. Urteil des Fachmannes (des Assistenten): \_\_\_\_\_  
 2. Urteil des Kommissars: *Kräftige dunkle Stimme mit geringem Gesang*  
*Riva u. Doegen*

Figure 1. Personal-Bögen accompanying a recording of Joseph Ntwanambi

Here is the content of the Personal-Bogen information sheet accompanying the song which Ms Karakaya asked me to analyse (author's translation):

Place: War Prisoners Camp Ruhleben. Date: 19/5/1917.

Time: 12h10. Size of the recorded disc: 30 cm.

Type of recording: Song: Circumcision song (*Beschneidungslied*).

Name: Twanumbee. Given name: Josef. Age: 38 years.

Place of birth: Sons River, near Port Elizabeth, Cape Colony (see Figure 2).

Dwelling place until 7 years of age: at home.

Dwelling place until 20 years old: at home. Schooling: none.

Dwelling-place after 20 years of age: "Seit 1897 in Indien" (since 1897 in India).

Parents: Xosa. Population group: Xosa.

Mother tongue: Xosa.

Also speaks *Hollandisch* (undoubtedly "Cape Dutch", i.e. Afrikaans) and English.

Religion: Heathen (*Heidnisch*). Profession: Worker.

Comment by W. Doegen: Powerful dark voice with sufficient consonance.

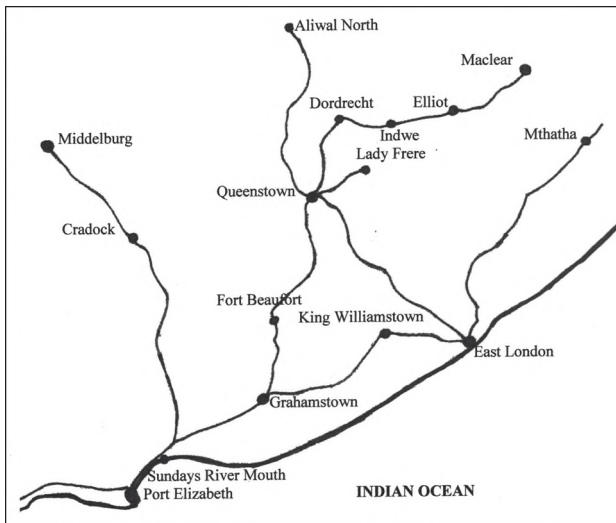


Figure 2. Region of the Eastern Cape Province. Note Sundays River near Port Elizabeth.<sup>6</sup>

The other two Personal-Bögen contain the same information about the prisoner, but with additional information on the respective recordings on each disc. The three Personal-Bogen are numbered PK (abbreviation for *Phon. Komm Ruhleben*) 865, 866 and 867. As mentioned, the same prisoner had earlier been recorded on three phonographic wax cylinders by Georg Schünemann. The Personal-Bogen accompanying the cylinders had the following details (translations by S. Ziegler, e-mail communication 2014):

Cylinders: PK (*Phon. Komm Ruhleben*) 649, 650 and 651.

Man from Port Elizabeth (South Africa), from a village about 25 miles from there.

Name: Josef Tuanambi.

Ethnic Group Anakosa (clicking language).

<sup>6</sup> The map (Figure 2) and all score transcriptions (Figures 3 to 10) are by the author.

When I listened to the recording of the “Circumcision Song” I realised I would need the expert help Mr Tsolwana Mpayipheli, a native Xhosa speaker of the Ngqoko Traditional Xhosa Music Ensemble (“Ngqoko Group”) who has assisted me with my research on Xhosa music in South Africa over the years. I told him the written information I had received, and played him the recording over the phone, holding an earphone to the phone microphone. Mr Mpayipheli at once could tell me the texts of the song, and also sing what he had heard. He told me immediately with conviction that the family name of the prisoner was Ntwanambi and that he knows branches of this family in Queenstown, where he lives, and nearby in Lady Frere where Mr Mpayipheli used to live is where the Ngqoko Group is based. Thus I established that the name of the prisoner was Ntwanambi, with given name Joseph. The population group and the “clicking language” are Xhosa, in present-day orthography.

Problems had to be solved regarding the places mentioned in the information sheets. Joseph Ntwanambi was born in and lived the first part of his life in “Sons River”, about 25 miles from Port Elizabeth. This clearly means Sundays River (in Afrikaans *Sondagsrivier*), a small village at the mouth of that river which is about that distance east of Port Elizabeth.

It was very difficult to accept that a young Xhosa man, with no schooling should have gone to India at 20 years of age, and stayed there for 18 years. The German name of India, *Indien*, sounds fairly similar to the name of a much more likely place to which the young man may have moved, namely the town of Indwe in the north-eastern part of the Eastern Cape Province. I discussed the matter with Mr Mpayipheli in another telephone call (27 November 2014). He said that, while it was feasible that a school educated Xhosa person might have been taken to India by a missionary as a mission helper there in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, it would have been quite impossible for an uneducated (and also apparently non-Christian) young Xhosa man to get to India, let alone live there for nearly 20 years. It would have been quite likely for the young Ntwanambi to have gone to Indwe to look for work on a farm or on the railway.

The town of Indwe was founded in 1896 as a result of large coal deposits being discovered in the area (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indwe>). It seems extremely likely that young Ntwanambi, needing work to survive (as stated in one of his recorded songs) should have gone to seek employment at the new town and the mines nearby in 1897, just a year after the founding of the town. Coal mining at Indwe continued for a number of years, although the Indwe coal was of very poor quality. Once better quality coal was found elsewhere in South Africa the Indwe mines were abandoned.<sup>7</sup> However it is not only possible but would make good sense if Joseph Ntwanambi worked on the Indwe mines. Many Xhosa men from the Eastern Cape Province work in mines far from home to this day. For some years the Indwe mines provided mining job opportunities closer to home.

<sup>7</sup> This was well-known to the many relatives I had who lived in the Indwe/Elliot area. As a schoolboy travelling by train to visit relatives at Elliot near Indwe in the late 1940s I could easily see smoke rising out of holes on a hillside near Indwe where one of the abandoned mines had caught fire by spontaneous combustion and burned for years.

It was clear, therefore, that the prisoner in question was a Western Thembu Xhosa<sup>8</sup> man named Joseph Ntwanambi, born at Sunday's River near Port Elizabeth, who was working in Indwe in the Eastern Cape Province at the time he joined the South African forces fighting in Europe in the First World War. Mr Mpayipheli has been trying to trace any of the Ntwanambi family members in the Western Thembu area who know of Joseph the non-combatant soldier, so far without success. I found telephone numbers for two Ntwanambis via the internet, one in East London and the other in Engcobo. Unfortunately no-one at either of those numbers knew of the prisoner. Our search will continue as there are quite a number of Ntwanambis in the Eastern Cape.

### **The Ntwanambi recordings of 1917**

After working on the song *Nank' undalamba* sent to me by Ms Karakaya, I sent her the information she required, and then wrote a short article (Dargie 2014) on the song for the publication being produced by Dr Riva, to publicise the Humboldt University Lautarchiv. During the process of producing the short article I received from Dr Riva copies of all eight recordings made of Joseph Ntwanambi by Doegen in 1917. These include four songs and four speech recordings.

Regarding the recordings in the First World War prison camps, Monique Scheer writes the following:

Several careers were made because of the POW camp studies. But they do not appear to have made, in any field, the kind of breakthrough that the scientists had assumed ... that such an opportunity would provide. The comparative method ... (regarded) ... as the royal path to forming general laws about all of humanity, did not rise to this task in the setting of the POW camps.... In the end much of the data gathered there languished in the Viennese and Berlin Phonographic Archives for decades, unused by anyone for scholarly purposes. ... the POW-camp project was, in the final analysis, a project of collection and preservation, an archival project. As such, it may yet have purposes to serve in the present and the future" (2010: 309).

As previously mentioned, these are early recordings of Xhosa music—possibly the earliest still existing. As such, they are important as historical documentation for musicological analysis for the variety of information that can be discerned from them. In this article the recordings of Joseph Ntwanambi will be examined to discover what purposes they may serve: to study his own situation, both in the prison camp and also in his prior life in the Eastern Cape, to cast light on his own social condition and to examine his cultural background. Insights can be found in the texts of his speech recordings and songs. The song lyrics are important as an expressive resource linked to Joseph Ntwanambi's personal history and war experience. In order to make comparisons with present-day Xhosa traditional music, transcriptions of the songs appear in the article, with reconstructions to indicate how they might have been realised in group performance.

<sup>8</sup> The Thembu are one of the population groups which make up the Xhosa people. The Western Thembu are those who now live west of the Tsomo River, which their ancestors crossed in the 19th century.

There are eight recorded items, four songs and four spoken [DVD tracks 1–8] as follows:

1. *Sicela ingqula*: We ask that our voice be heard (song). (2 min. 20 sec.)
  2. *Sicel' intsebenzo*: We ask for work (song). (1 min. 52 sec.)
  3. *Nank' undalamba*: Behold starvation (song). (1 min. 24 sec.)
  4. *Ukucela intsebenzo*: Asking for work (song) (1 min. 28 sec.)
  5. Counting in Xhosa from 1 to 70. (1 min. 18 sec.)
  6. *Amadodana siyakuzingela*: "Hunting story". (1 min. 35 sec.)
  7. Narrating names of things: various words and names: animals, people etc. (44 sec.)
  8. *Umngqungqo, yincwadi*: (just those two words) translation: *umngqungqo* – dance for girls' initiation; *yincwadi* – letter. (36 sec.)
- (Translations by Tolwana Mpayipheli)

The Personal-Bogen written by Wilhelm Doegen show items 1 and 2 on P.K. 865; items 3, 4 and 5 on P.K. 866; and items 7 and 8 on P.K. 867. Doegen gives classifications for each song as follows:

1. *Unqungo gwentombi: Mädchentanz (Umngqungqo wentombi*: Girls' dance);
2. *Ukuxenza amadoda Männertanz (Ukuxhentsa amadoda*: Men's dance);
3. *Beschneidigungslied* (Circumcision song);
4. *Arbeitslied* (Work song);
5. *Zahlen 1–60* (Counting from 1 to 60);
6. *Erzählung, Jagdgeschichte* (Recitation, Hunting story);
7. *Wörter (einige mehrfach gesprochen)* (Words—some spoken repeatedly).
8. *Umngqungqo, yincwadi* (Doegen does not describe recording which is only two words). Nevertheless, I suggest these two words are important, perhaps giving a key to Ntwanambi's thoughts.

Tsolwana Mpayipheli provided translation of the text of item 3 to me in 2013. His transcriptions of the texts of items 1, 2, 5, 6, 7 and 8 were given to me in 2014. Mpayipheli described song 4 as the "same song" as song 2. However, there are differences, both in the text and musically. The texts of song 4 were transcribed by the author, and then checked with Mr Mpayipheli by telephone. After transcribing the texts Mr Mpayipheli then translated the texts and explained how he understood their meanings to me verbally.

It is typical in the performance of many traditional Xhosa songs that considerable use may be made of exclamations.<sup>9</sup> In order to get a true understanding of the texts of a song it may be necessary to sort out exclamations from essential texts. For example, in song 1, when the girl uses the word *Bawo* (our or my father) she is actually referring to her own father. However, in song 3, *Bawo* is used as an exclamation. The words "*Helele, Bawo*"—"Alas, Father"—do not necessarily refer to any specific person: they are simply an exclamation. In normal usage "*Bawo*" or "*Tata*", both meaning father, are used to address any man, even one younger than the speaker, just as "*Ma*" or

<sup>9</sup> This may be seen in many of the song transcriptions in Dargie 1988.

“Mama” – “Mother” – may be used to address any woman. Some exclamations have no specific meaning, others may or may not have meaning at all. The word “*helele*”, for example, may mean “alas” or even have a joyful implication, dependent on context. In the interpretation of the texts below exclamations will largely be ignored in order not to distract from the true meaning of the text. Song text lines are usually in the form of sentences with two phrases, the second phrase often being a response to or a conclusion of the first. However, in performance it may be that a second phrase from one sentence is simply exchanged into another, or a first phrase may be substituted entirely by exclamations. In song 3, for example, the first phrase sung is often only exclamations, but the second phrase, the key text “*Nank’ undalamba*”, is never replaced by exclamations. In the interpretations given below the focus is on the interpretation of meaningful texts in order to try to discover the true (and sometimes hidden) meanings of the songs.

**Song 1: *Ukucel’ ingqula*—Asking to be heard (*Umngqungqo*—dance song)<sup>10</sup>**

Personal-Bogen: *unqungo wentombi* (corrected Xhosa: *Umngqungqo wentombi* trans. Dance of the girls) *Mädchentanz* translation: Girls’ dance; *umngqungqo* trans. dance. Song lyrics as sung:

*Hohoyo hehe yawulele hohehe zintombi he*  
*Uyawalila hohaya wulele uwalila hohayi zintombi he*  
*Uyahla whohayi zintombi he*  
*Uyansahla hohayi zintombi he, Uyansahla hohayi zintombi he*  
*Hohayi zintombi he, hohayi zintombi he,*  
*Ngumngqungqo zintombi he, Ngumngqungqo zintombi he.*  
*Hohayi ngubawo he, hohayi ngubawo he*  
*Hoyoo jananda hohe hohayi hoheyo ngubawo.*  
*Hoyoo ngujananda hohe hohayi*  
*Yohayi, hohayi eyohayi hohayi*  
*Ngumngqungqo ngubawo, ngubawo he, ngubawo he.*  
*Hohayi ngubawo, hohayi ngubawo.*  
*Ntatee ngubawo? Khawelete ngubawo? Howulele jananda?*  
*Hohayi ngucela he hohayi ngucela he*

**Meaning of the texts**

*Ukucel’ ingqula* is a song for *umngqungqo*, the women’s dance at girl’s initiation. As is usual in Xhosa traditional songs, many of the words are exclamations. The pertinent texts are the title: *Ukucela ingqula*, “to ask that our voice be heard,” i.e. please listen to us; *Hohoyo ... zintombi he*: (it is) the girls... Similar texts are sung several times. The lyrics tell us that a girl needs to be initiated, and speaks to her father.

<sup>10</sup> All traditional Xhosa songs are classified according to the rituals for which they are performed.

**Key texts and translations**

<i>Hohoyo, hehe, whohayi et al.</i>	exclamations
<i>Uyawalila hohayi zintombi he</i>	the girls are crying (sung several times). They want the father to prepare for the initiation. (This includes providing food, an ox, three goats, perhaps also sheep, and beer). The father replies
<i>Hohayi, zintombi</i>	No, girls
<i>Ngumngqungqo zintombi (he)</i>	This is the dance for girls' (initiation). The girls say
<i>Hohayi, ngubawo</i>	No, you, Father (must be ready) The father replies
<i>Hoyoo, jananda</i>	if I have to pay for your initiation, I will have nothing (left).
<i>Ntatee, ngubawo</i>	Ntatee (Father) in Sotho language The girls ask
<i>ngubawo</i>	(are you) our father?
<i>Khawelete, ngubawo</i>	are you jealous, you Father! The father replies
<i>Howulele jananda</i>	Alas, I will have nothing left! The girls say
<i>Hohayi, ngucela</i>	No, I am begging....

In Xhosa culture *Umngqungqo* is a dance performed by women at girls' initiation (*intonjane*). Typically some of the women have been teaching and training the initiands and the girls are there, but they do not take part in this dance. When boys are initiated (including circumcision), they come out of the rituals as men. However, when girls are initiated, they do not come out as women. After initiation they are ready to marry. When a girl marries, only then, in traditional Xhosa culture, she becomes a woman. If a girl has not been initiated, she is not yet considered ready for marriage. In the old traditional Xhosa way of life when a girl had been initiated then the family of a (young) man wishing to marry her would approach the girl's family to make arrangements about the bride price (*ikazi*). To pay the bride price is *ukulobola*. When that was settled and the bride price paid then young men of the intended bridegroom's family would carry off the girl, all unsuspecting, for marriage.<sup>11</sup> In this song a girl is begging her father to arrange for her initiation, but he complains about high cost he would have to bear.

Presumably Wilhelm Doegen and/or his assistants asked Joseph Ntwanambi to sing a song of his people. Why he should have chosen to sing an *umngqungqo* dance song for girls' initiation is not possible to know. However, further references to *umngqungqo* in the spoken recordings made after the song recordings suggest to me that there may have been personal implications for him.

<sup>11</sup> Regarding these rituals, especially the songs connected with them, see Dargie 1988: 147–152 & 181–182.



**Song 2: Ukucela intsebenzo—Asking for Work (*Ingoma yokusebenza—A work song*)<sup>12</sup>**

Personal-Bogen: *Uku xenza amadoda—Männertanz* (corrected Xhosa: *Ukuxhentsa amadoda*. Trans. Men's dance).

**Key texts and translations**

<i>Siyakucela intsebenzo</i>	We ask for work.
<i>Singamakhwenkwe, siyakucela intsebenzo</i>	We are boys asking for work.
<i>Singamadodana?</i>	Are we not young men?
<i>Ngamadodana</i>	They are young men.
<i>Iwayini indaba?</i>	What is the problem?
<i>Intsebenzo yindaba</i>	The problem is to find work.
<i>Ngamadodana yintsebenzo</i>	Young men need work.
<i>Yintsebenzo ngubaw</i>	(We need) work for our fathers' sake...
<i>Intsebenzo yimali</i>	Work for the sake of earning money...
<i>Yimali yintsebenzo</i>	Money for working.

If girls' initiation was high in the thoughts of Joseph Ntwanambi, this was closely followed by the need to find work in order to survive – and very possibly to find money for a bride-price, although the lyrics of this song suggest more than that. The song recounts various aspects of the need for money, the need to help support the parents and the family. The use of the terms for boys (*amakhwenkwe*) and young men (*amadodana*, newly initiated men) seems to indicate that Ntwanambi's thoughts are on his first search for work after his own initiation – possibly the search which took him to the mines at Indwe.

An important aspect of this song is that it highlights the plight of the Xhosa people under colonial rule. The dreadful, even genocidal War of Mlanjeni (1850–1853) between the British colonials and the Xhosa, and its aftermath, the even more dire results of the tragic cattle killing of 1856–1857 gave the British rulers in the Cape their opportunity to impose the migratory labour system as a step to try to break the power of the Xhosa people permanently (Peires 1989: 241–272). Ntwanambi is doing more than just giving a social picture of Xhosa life: he is pointing to the oppression suffered by his people.

**Song 3: Nank' undalamba—Behold Starvation (Famine) (*Ingoma yotywala—A Beer Song*)**

The Personal-Bogen: *Beschneidungslied gesungen*: Circumcision Song sung.

It is notable that Wilhelm Doegen wrote down the classification of this song as "*Beschneidungslied*": a "circumcision song" or song for boys' initiation. He must have been told this by Joseph Ntwanambi. In the Personal-Bogen accompanying the recording of what must be the same song on wax cylinders, Phon.Komm Ruhleben 649/650, the following is written (translation by Dr S. Ziegler): "Song sung after circumcision;

<sup>12</sup> On work songs, see Dargie 1987: 330–1.

women and men sing this song, they are happy that they (i.e. the initiates) are now in the age to marry.” That this is a happy song was undoubtedly stated by Ntwanambi to Doegen. In this he was not revealing the true meaning of the song. Largely omitting the exclamations, the key texts of the song as discerned by Mr Mpayipheli are as follows, with some variations in word arrangement as lines are repeated:

**Key texts and translations**

<i>Ho! Bawo, hau he, etc...</i>	Oh! Father... (exclamations)
<i>Nank' undalamba</i>	Behold hunger (starvation, famine, poverty)
<i>(Nank') abakhwetha</i>	(Behold) the boys being initiated
<i>Abakhwetha... abakhwetha we, Bawo,</i>	the initiate boys..., Father,
<i>Ho! 'ndalamba!</i>	Oh! Starvation!

The texts above (plus exclamations) are repeated in various combinations in the song. Mr Mpayipheli did not know this song himself, but at once identified it as a typical beer song, asserting that it was not a circumcision song. Mr Mpayipheli based this judgment largely on the rhythm of the song: it “feels” like a song for beer dances, he said. The Personal-Bogen accompanying the wax cylinder recording (quoted above) states that the song is sung by men and women. But females do not take part in the performance of circumcision songs. Beer songs are performed by men and women at beer gatherings.

“Beer songs” in the Lady Frere district are often really ancestor songs, mainly because when people drink beer, the ancestral spirits are also present. In addition, such songs often refer to ancestor figures or to events affecting ancestors. This song describes a situation typical of such ancestor songs. *Abakhwetha* are initiands, boys undergoing the initiation ceremonies during which they will be circumcised and then be recognised as men. Such *abakhwetha* have no money, must cover themselves with only a blanket; they live in temporary huts, formerly made out of grass but nowadays made from hessian (rough cloth of woven jute fibres), plastic sheeting or other similar coverings. For their nourishment the *abakhwetha* depend on food supplied by their families. In the old days this process could last several months, as the boys received training in the ways of manhood while in the initiation school. These days the economic state of normal families has caused the time to be reduced to about a month. The present shorter time given to the training of the *abakhwetha* is also because boys’ initiation often has to be scheduled during school vacation time. However, in the old days the boys were in their Spartan initiation camp long enough for them to suffer the effects of under-nourishment fairly severely.

Mr Mpayipheli quoted a Xhosa saying, *Uhlupheke okomkhwetha*, which means that a poor (hungry) person looks like an *umkhwetha*, a boy undergoing initiation: no money, poor clothing, poor housing, not enough food. Perhaps experiencing hunger due to the under-nourishment suffered by war prisoners, the singer remembered this song from his home. The song also bears witness to the poverty and hunger suffered by people of the rural Thembu Xhosa districts who could not afford to feed the

*abakhwetha* adequately. The fact that Mr Ntwanambi chose this song to sing to the German researcher could have been because of his experiences of prisoner of war camp rations, concluded Mr Mpayipheli. The most obvious title to give the song seems to be “*Nank’ undalamba*”—“Behold starvation”, since it is the key text of the song. Perhaps in Mr Ntwanambi’s mind the meaning of the song in his present context was “Behold the prisoners, behold starvation”.

Dr Nepomuk Riva of Humboldt University told me that Ruhleben prisoners being recorded often put messages for the British Army or their families into the recordings in languages which their captors did not know. In their messages they asked to be rescued, or gave news about themselves and the camp. This was often the case with Indian prisoners (N. Riva Pers. comm. 16 November 2014). It is possible that Joseph Ntwanambi was telling anyone who might understand Xhosa that in the Ruhleben camp conditions left much to be desired.

The first two recorded songs reflect on the past experiences of Joseph Ntwanambi. From Song 3 on the recordings rather focus on his war and imprisonment experiences, with the implications hidden from his captors and the scientists making the recordings.

#### **Song 4: *Ukucela intsebenzo*—Asking for work, a work song**

Personal-Bogen: *Arbeitslied gesungen*: Work Song song

Although Tsolwana Mpayipheli did not write out the texts of this song, declaring it “the same as song 2 but done differently”, there are some important differences in the text as follows:

<i>Ukucela intsebenzo</i>	To ask (or asking) for work (the song title)
<i>Howo ya intsebenzo, mlungu, yimali</i>	Work, for money, white person (exclamations)
<i>Siyasebenza, siyasebenza ngamakhwenkhwe yimali</i>	We work, we boys work for money
<i>Ukucela ngumlungu, ukucela ngumlungu</i>	Asking the white person...
<i>Ijobwe ngumlungu: ...</i>	a job with the white person
<i>Yintsebenzo ngubawo: ...</i>	work for the sake of our father (i.e. family).
<i>Yingamakhwenkhwe intsebenzo: ...</i>	work for the boys.

The texts are very similar to those of song 2, but the references to a white person (*umlungu*) are significant. Whereas the first work song seems to look back to the past when Mr Ntwanambi first looked for work, this song has a different feel to it. Perhaps now the reference is to Ntwanambi’s asking for work from a person—probably a white government official or army officer who went around recruiting for the army. Of course this is conjecture, but Mr Mpayipheli thought this a likely explanation for there being two very similar work songs among the four recorded. This song points more directly and powerfully to the oppression of the Xhosa people under white rule than song 2. Musically the two songs are rather similar but not the same, as is shown in their transcriptions shown in Figures 4 and 5.

**Track 5. Counting in Xhosa from 1 to 70**

Personal-Bogen: *Zahlen 1–60*: Counting from 1 to 60.

In fact the counting is from 1 (*inye*) to 70 in this way: he counts from 1 to 69 (*amashumi amathandatu... alinethoba*), after which he adds “*alineshumi*”—plus ten. Perhaps the researchers made a practice of recording counting in different languages as a way of recording words of which the meanings were known.

**Track no. 6. Ten men going hunting: A hunting story**

Personal-Bogen: “*erzahlung, Jagdgeschichte*”: telling a tale, a hunting story.

**Text and Translation**

<i>Ishumi lamadodana siyakuzingela kude:</i>	We are ten young men, going hunting far away.
<i>Siyakubuya nini ngomso:</i>	We will come back tomorrow.
<i>Siyakuzingela iintaka, neembabala, neendlovu, ngezinja nemfene:</i>	We will hunt birds, bushbuck, elephants—we will hunt baboons with dogs,
<i>Sizakulibulala, sizibulala:</i>	We will kill them.
<i>Sitye neenyosi, siphakule iinyosi:</i>	We will eat honey, we will take honey from the bees. <sup>13</sup>
<i>Ukuphakula, siphakule abantu bengaphi?</i>	We will capture people. How many?
<i>Babini, baphakule:</i>	They are two.
<i>Indlu yenyosi, siphakulele inkosi:</i>	We will take the honey to the house of the chief.
<i>Inyosi zityebile, ewe zityebile:</i>	The honey is rich, yes, rich.
<i>Sizakuzenzani? Sizakuzipha inkosi:</i>	What are we going to do? We will give the honey to the chief.
<i>Imfene, imfene siyibulele iimbi:</i>	We have killed the baboon: it is ugly.
<i>Indlovu iphi indlovu intle?</i>	Where is the elephant? The elephant is beautiful.
<i>Imbabala iphi? Ndiyibulele, iphi ndiyithengisile</i>	Where is the bushbuck? I have killed it, I have sold it.
<i>Uyithengisile phi? Ndiyithengisile eTinarha:</i>	Where have you sold it? I sold it at Uitenhage.
<i>Ndifumene malini?</i>	How much money did I get?
<i>Ndifumene ishumi elinesibini leponti:</i>	I got twelve pounds.
<i>Kubani, kuMantyi:</i>	From who? From the magistrate.

**Track 7. Recitation of Xhosa words**

Personal-Bogen: *Wörter (einige mehrfach gesprochen)*: Words, some spoken more than once.

Mr. Ntwanambi spoke twelve words, two of them twice (*uThixo*, twice in succession), and *incwadi* (third and again at the end). The words are *indlovu*: elephant; *ingwenya*: crocodile; *incwadi*: book or letter; *uThixo*: God; *amaza*: waves of the sea; *inqwelo*: transport; *iinkabi*: oxen; *inkosi*: chief; *umphakathi*: people or community; *isandla*: hand; *intlanzi*: fish; *umngqungqo*: the women’s dance at girls’ initiation; *incwadi*: book or letter.

Mr Mpayipheli sees the words chosen as significant. He said the choice of words shows the speaker was under stress, remembering his home. *Incwadi* (book or letter)

<sup>13</sup> Hunting bees means looking for honey. Mr Mpayipheli at times interprets *inyosi*, a bee, as what the bee produces—honey.

implies that he wants to write a letter home. Only God (*uThixo*) knows how he could do that, because the waves of the sea lie between him and his home. There is no ship (*inqwelo*, transport over the sea) to take him home. At home he has oxen (*iinkabi*), the community is ruled by a chief (*inkosi*). In the sea are fish (*intlanzi*), perhaps dangerous one, including sharks. At home the *umngqungqo* dance takes place

### **Track 8. Two spoken words only**

This is a very short recording of just the two words *umngqungqo* and *incwadi*, each said several times. The words are *umngqungqo*, the dance from girls' initiation, and *incwadi*, a letter. The recordings began with a song from *umngqungqo* and *incwadi* was the final word of the words on Track 7. One is tempted to let one's imagination go to work: Joseph Ntwanambi, the hungry prisoner far from home, may have been thinking of a girl whom he had hoped to marry. She would be available for marriage after her initiation. He had found work, and now he had the oxen he needed for the bride price. How he must have longed to write to her or to his family about this! Or perhaps he was remembering things that had happened a long time ago. This of course is pure speculation. But his recordings clearly show a deep sense of nostalgia.

### **Ntwanambi's music**

Joseph Ntwanambi was a Western Thembu. Mr Mpayipheli says that none of Ntwanambi's songs are sung today by any singers whom he knows. However, he clearly identified the ritual classification of the songs, in particular the songs used for important rituals: the *umngqungqo* (song 1) and the beer song (song 3). Mr Mpayipheli asserted that Ntwanambi was singing both leader and follower parts for these songs.

Important characteristics of traditional Xhosa musical style are: hexatonic (sometimes pentatonic) bow scale, tonality shift harmony; melody phrases begin high and fall, in the so-called "saw pattern" because the melodies are closely related to speech and sentence tone; cyclic call-and-response form; use of polyphony, sometimes with many overlapping parts; use of complex rhythm with use of cross-rhythm and pulse delay techniques. The Xhosa hexatonic scale combines the tones of two major triads a whole tone apart, e.g., F-A-C plus G-B-D giving a scale F-G-A-B-C-D.<sup>14</sup>

The transcriptions of Mr Ntwanambi's songs that follow attempt to establish the basic music of each song, as used in certain typical lines of the song sung by him. Since Mr Ntwanambi sang by himself there is no use of polyphony, but the implication of polyphonic parts is there, especially leader and follower call-and-response parts. Mr Ntwanambi did not clap or make any audible body movements (such as footsteps), so

<sup>14</sup> For simplification in transcription it is often convenient to transpose the tonality shift to the F major-G major position, thus avoiding the use of accidentals. When pulse notation is used to represent rhythm main beats are indicated by thicker lines. For discussion of Xhosa music theory, including the influence of musical bows on scale and harmony, see Dargie 1988, chapter 6 (68-102). Chapter 5 (61-67) discusses the traditional Xhosa understanding of music theory based on traditional music terminology.

it is not easy to pinpoint rhythmic usages. Nevertheless in two of the songs, attempts are made to reconstruct possible group performances, including suggested use of rhythm.

### Song transcriptions<sup>15</sup>

#### Song 1: *Ukucela ingqula*

Figure 3. Song 1. *Ukucela ingqula* – We ask that our voice be heard. *Umngqungqo* Song. Approximate pitch: tonality shift = F-G (written as F-G).

*Umngqungqo* is a women's dance performed at *ijaka*, part of the rituals at girls' initiation. Many *umngqungqo* dance songs begin with a slow step, and then change to a fast step: the basic tempo of the music may remain the same, but the body movement doubles.<sup>16</sup> *Umngqungqo* songs often have numerous text lines, each having its own melody. These sung parts overlap: they are performed at the same time, but they may begin at different points in the rhythm cycle.<sup>17</sup> Western Thembu *umngqungqo* songs make much use of cross-rhythm. Typically, three voice beats are sung "against" two body beats. In addition, the body movement (here the dance steps, as the women do not clap) are used with a pulse delay: the dance beats fall a rapid pulse after the voice beats (Dargie 1988, 84–85). These style characteristics are built into the reconstruction attempt of this song in Figure 4.

Figure 3 above shows lines from Mr Ntwanambi's recorded performance of song 1, the *umngqungqo* song *Ukucela ingqula*. The letters H and L in the score mean the (apparent) leader part (H for *-hlabela* meaning to lead a song) and the (apparent) follower part (L for *-landela* meaning to follow). At first Mr Ntwanambi sings a long leader part. The follower part is half as long. These two parts are shown as making up a

<sup>15</sup> All music transcriptions in this article are the work of the author.

<sup>16</sup> These dances may be seen on the DVD Dargie 2005. In the recorded performances on this DVD some men were present (including Tsolwana Mpayipheli, the oldest of the three men). They took part also in the *umngqungqo* dances, which is acceptable for a concert performance, but not for a ritual one.

<sup>17</sup> Transcriptions of such *umngqungqo* songs are in Dargie 1988: 147–53.

full cycle of the song at the slow step. Then the fast step begins, and leader and follower parts become equal. Of course without observing a group performance of the song one cannot be definite about the arrangement, but the indications seem clear.

In the group performance reconstruction (Figure 4) suggested fast and slow step dance patterns are shown. Use of pulse delay for the dance step is shown in the “Fast Step” pattern.

**Song 1. Ukucela ingqula**

Figure 4. Song 1. *Ukucela ingqula*: Possible Performance Arrangement. A = Fast Step, B = Slow Step.

**Song 2. Sicela intsebenzo**

Figure 5. Song 2. *Sicela intsebenzo*: We ask for Work. *Ingoma yomsebenzi* – Work Song. Approximate pitch: tonality shift = E-F sharp (written as F-G).

Work songs are sung for social purposes which may or may not be considered rites or ceremonies (Dargie 1988, 31). *Sicela intsebenzo* is a work song, about the need for work. It may actually have been used in work activities in which the use of rhythm

helps workers to move together. The phrase marked a. (*Siyacela umsebenzo*) is a leader part, sung the same each time. Different responses (b., c. and d.) answer the leader part. Elements in the musical style are consistent with Xhosa traditional music. Because of the similarity of songs 2 and 4, the transcription of no. 4 is given next, before that of no. 3.

#### Song 4: *Ukucela intsebenzo*

1. a. Si-ya-se-be-nza, b. si-ya-se-be-nza nga-ma-khwe-nkhwe i-ma-li.

2. a. U-ku-ce-la u-mlu-ngu, b. u-ku-ce-la u-mlu-ngu i-job we, ngu-mlu-ngu.

Figure 6. Song 4. *Ukucela intsebenzo*: Asking for Work. *Ingoma yomsebenzi* – Work Song. Approximate pitch: tonality shift = E flat-F (written as F-G).

In this song the melody is not as clearly focussed as in song 2, even though the two songs are musically very similar. The first line has more melodic movement than the second. It could be that Mt Ntwanambi improvised this song, or used this version of the song as a vehicle to focus on the white man (*umlungu*) as the author of the Xhosa problem of survival.

#### Song 3: *Nank' undalamba*

Ho! Hala-le Ba-wo, we, we. Ho! Hayi Bawo! We, we, we! Nank'u-nda-la-mba.

Abakhwetha ya ho, we, we, a-bakhwetha ya Bawo, we, we, abakhwetha wo`nda-la-mba.

Figure 7. Song 3. *Nank' undalamba*: Behold Starvation. *Ingoma yotywala* – Beer Song. Approximate pitch: tonality shift = G-A (written as G-A in the first example, written as F-G in the others) as sung by Joseph Ntwanambi.

The transcription in Figure 7 uses the (approximate) original pitch of the song. It is also the only one of the four songs which uses all the tones of the Xhosa hexatonic scale, G-A-B-C#-D-E, transposed in the examples to F-G-A-B-C-D. The two lines transcribed have been chosen because they most closely emphasise the meaning of the text: “Alas, my Father! Behold starvation,” and “The initiands (*abakhwetha*), the



initiands—behold starvation!” Most of the other lines of the song hide the meaning to some extent behind many exclamations. Of the four songs sung by Mr Ntwanambi, this one gives the best opportunity for reconstruction as a group song. Mr Mpayipheli insisted that Mr Ntwanambi was singing both leader and follower parts of the song and he insisted that the arrangement should be as in the following score, Figure 8.

The musical score for Figure 8 consists of two staves. The top staff is labeled 'H. (Leader)' and the bottom staff is labeled 'L. (Follower)'. The music is written in a simple notation with notes on a five-line staff. The lyrics for the Leader are: 'Abakhwetha yaho,... /we, we,) abakhwetha ya Bawo (we, we,) abakhwetha wo..... Abakhwetha yaho..'. The lyrics for the Follower are: 'We, we, we, we, we, nank'undala- mba!'. Vertical lines connect the notes of the Leader and Follower parts, indicating their corresponding timing.

Figure 8. An arrangement of Song 3. *Nank' undalamba* in call-and-response form.

This arrangement can be filled out as in figure 9, adding in parallel harmony and body movement.

The musical score for Figure 9 consists of four staves. The top staff is labeled 'H. (Leader)' and the second staff is labeled 'L. (Followers)'. The music is written in a simple notation with notes on a five-line staff. The lyrics for the Leader are: 'Ho! Helele Bawo... Ho! Hayi Bawo... Ho! Helele...'. The lyrics for the Followers are: 'We, we... We, we, we. Nank'undala- mba.'. The third staff is labeled 'Clap:' and the fourth staff is labeled 'Foot stamp:'. The Clap and Foot stamp parts consist of rhythmic patterns represented by dots and lines on a five-line staff.

Figure 9. Group song reconstruction of Song 3. *Nank' undalamba*, based on the second trial arrangement.

## Conclusions

The recordings made of Joseph Ntwanambi, plus the minimal data about him written down by the scholars who made them provide us with material from which it is possible to draw certain inferences regarding the man who was recorded, the words spoken and sung by him, and the music of the songs which he sang. Joseph Ntwanambi, of Western Thembu Xhosa descent, was born in or about 1879 at Sundays River, near Port Elizabeth. He was a Xhosa person living in the traditional way—*iqaba*, a word mistranslated as heathen or pagan. In 1897 he went to the new town of Indwe near Elliot in the then north-eastern Cape Province. Coal mines had recently been opened there, and new opportunities drew Xhosa people there to seek work, including Ntwanambi.

In 1917 he volunteered to join the South African Native Labour Corps, black South Africans recruited to join the South African army fighting for the British in the First World War. After joining the army in Europe he was captured by the Germans—in May of that year he was already in the prison camp at Ruhleben in Berlin. He was put in the barracks with other black African prisoners, and he was recorded there on gramophone discs on 19 May by the language scholar Wilhelm Doegen and previously on wax cylinders by George Schünemann. No further information about Joseph Ntwanambi has come to light.

There is a two-fold focus in Mr Ntwanambi's texts. Some look further back into the past, to his life in South Africa, and others perhaps turn to the more recent past and his present time in Ruhleben camp. Exactly what significance the *umngqungqo* dance held for him is not clear, but it must have been important for him to mention it several times and sing an *umngqungqo* song. The last two words he recorded and spoke several times (Track 8) emphasised his nostalgia, perhaps: *umngqungqo*, and *incwadi*: possibly references to a certain young woman and a letter he wished to write. Another strong reference to his earlier life is the two work songs. Not only do they point to the oppressive colonial rule which he and his people had to endure, they point to a more simple and direct need—survival. Without a job how could a Xhosa man live? It is also just possible that the second work song not only points back to the past but also links that past to his present situation: the white man has indeed given him a job—in the army's Black Labour Corps.

Mr Ntwanambi's songs are all in traditional Xhosa style, with no musical elements borrowed from western music. He was a most capable Xhosa musician. My attempts to reconstruct group songs from Mr Ntwanambi's solos serve to show how easily traditional Xhosa singers could build these songs into group performances. I hope that these scores will facilitate acceptable performance when Xhosa singers with this ability are not available.

The motivation behind the scientists who recorded in Ruhleben camp was to document the music and the spoken words of all the different peoples they could reach. Surely they realised that such brief recordings could not provide material for any deep study of the different cultures represented. Nevertheless it is notable that they tried to record all peoples and all cultures, without ignoring even the "people of the bottom", the black Africans in Ruhleben.<sup>18</sup> There is no doubt that these recordings will mean a lot to his possible physical descendants, and the present Ntwanambi family members, and all Xhosa people, Western Thembu especially. Joseph Ntwanambi did not record calls for rescue in his own language, as did some of the other prisoners. Instead he found a way to record his inmost thoughts and feelings.

This article brings the story of Joseph Ntwanambi, the texts of the recordings, the interpretation of the texts and the performance of the songs to the readers of this journal, but also within the reach of his people in South Africa; the CD accompanying

<sup>18</sup> Blacks as "bottom people" in Ruhleben classification: see Scheer 2010, 288-9.

the journal brings the voice of the prisoner back into his own home area. The German ethnologists who made the recordings and the dedicated curators in the Berlin Phonogram Archiv made this possible.

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