

## POSSESSION MUSIC OF THE SHANGANA-TSONGA

by

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Exorcism (*mancomane*) is one of the more important musical practices among the Tsonga of Mozambique and the northern Transvaal,<sup>1</sup> involving possession dancing, playing of the special *ncomane* tambourine, from which the rite obtains its name, and the singing of spirit-specific songs. It is organised by a specialist diviner or exorcist known as the *dzwavi*, who is 'licensed' by the chief in return for payment, rather than appointed. Fees known as the *mbulaxifwa* are collected from patients; this term means 'medicine-pouch loosener', and the fee may be paid in beer, fowl or cash. Successful and well-attended exorcism rites thus tend to be a source of revenue for Tsonga chiefs (through diviners), and the participants and audiences which are attracted into the area provide part of the broad pyramid base necessary to maintain chiefly power and prestige.

The insignia of office of a specialist diviner are his skin hat, wooden 'stage-prop' hatchet, kilt of tails, ceremonial skin-mat and four *ncomane* tambourines, usually played by his wives (public exhibition of the latter constituting a conspicuous display of personal wealth and serving to affirm previous successful practice).

The patients are adults who have become possessed by an undesirable spirit, always Zulu or Ndaui in origin.<sup>2</sup> To expel a Zulu spirit, pentatonic songs utilizing the four-square *mandblozi* rhythm are necessary, and many Zulu words and the names of Zulu chiefs must be dropped in. The term is Tsonga for 'undesirable Zulu spirit', and the appropriate music is named after it. *Mandblozi* rhythm is not of one unvarying pattern, but consists of different combinations of quavers and semiquavers over a crochet base. It is distinct not only metrically but tonally, from the fact that four shallow, single-membraned tambourines are beaten in concert with sticks. To expel an Ndaui spirit, heptatonic songs utilizing the drumming-triplet *xidzimba* rhythm are necessary, and many Ndaui, Shona and Rotse words are dropped in. Junod was the first to note part of the distinctions which in 1969 and 1970 I learned to make during actual rites:

The Ndaui possessions appear to be worse than the Zulu. *BuNdaui bya karata* - 'The Ndaui possession is painful'. If the incantations used are in Zulu for Zulu possessions, they are in the Ndaui language when such are caused by Ndaui spirits, and those who suffer from this affliction are known by the large white beads which they wear in their hair.<sup>3</sup>

### Historical contact between the Zulu, Ndaui and Tsonga

The destruction of the Ndwandwe kingdom by the Zulu king Shaka in 1819 had extensive repercussions. Many surrounding chiefs who had either opposed or broken away from Shaka were caught in centrifugal forces. Umzilikazi fled into the Transvaal whence, after defeat by the Voortrekkers at Vechtkop in 1836, he fled with his considerable following into Rhodesia, founding the Matabele kingdom. Soshangane, a cousin of Shaka's opponent in 1819, ranged eastward among the Chopi, Tsonga and Ndaui in southern Mozambique. There he forced Tsonga males into his army, where they learned the Zulu language and many Zulu customs. Tsonga women were carried off and became part of the Zulu kraals, but remained culturally Tsonga and did not learn Zulu. Those who could fled westward across the Lebombo Hills into the north-

<sup>1</sup> See the map on p. 59 of the previous issue of this journal.

<sup>2</sup> Johnston, Thomas: Shangana-Tsonga drum and bow rhythms, *African Music*, V, 1, 1971, p. 64.

<sup>3</sup> Junod, Henri: *The life of a South African tribe*. London, Macmillan, 2 vols, 1927.

eastern Transvaal, where they now constitute the 500,000 Tsonga resident within the borders of the Republic of South Africa.<sup>4</sup>

Decades of intermarriage and of eastern residence Tsonga-ised these Soshangane-s, or Shangaans, as they were and still are called, and impingement upon Ndauland produced a group along the coast near the Sabi River known as the Shangana-Ndaul. According to Hugh Tracey acculturation produced a form of musical 'pollution':

In the case of the Ndaul, who are much intermarried with the Shangaan raiders, the hexatonic tunings of individual mbiras are so dissimilar as to offer no apparent foundation. Here the admixture of foreign blood (Shangaan) seems to have completely upset local musical standards.<sup>5</sup>

To relate these various historical aspects to our discussion of possession music, it is noteworthy that acculturation gave the Chopi of southern Mozambique the Tsonga term for spirit, *xikwembu*, and that the Chopi recognise undesirable *baNguni* spirits in their own possession dances. Nguni is the generic term designating the Zulu, Swazi and Xhosa peoples, all click-language users. The Chopi, unlike the Tsonga and Ndaul, were never actually defeated in battle. In fact, an extant Chopi song goes thus: "See Nghunghunyane flees!"<sup>6</sup> Nghunghunyane, son of Muzila, son of Soshangane, was the last of the Shangaan war lords. He acceded to the chiefdom of Gaza in 1890, established a despotic reign over the Tsonga from his capital at Mandlakazi and was defeated by the Portuguese at Magul in 1895.

It should now be clear how the Tsonga came to recognise *mandblozi* (Zulu) spirits. With reference to the *xidzimba* spirits, this is the name of a Shona dance performed across the northern border in the southern part of Rhodesia. Use of the term reflects a general tendency for possession cults to flow southward from the area of the ancient Monomotapa empire which at one point in history – several centuries ago – considerably influenced all of the cultures of the southeast.

Historical contact is thus seen to have produced a southward-moving diffusion of possession cult phenomena into present-day Tsongaland, and a northward-moving diffusion of linguistic phenomena (Zulu). Subsequent to the Tsonga eastward migration, they commenced exporting their own particular brand of exorcism, in the form of specialist diviners together with the unique (in southern Africa) tambourine:

The Swazi have copied this method of exorcizing evil spirits from the Tsonga . . . and I have even obtained a specimen of an actual *mancomane* made and played by a pure Swazi . . . Many Tsonga doctors have a great reputation outside their own country, and it is not surprising to find the *mancomane* used by one of their number who has settled among people of another race.<sup>7</sup>

Huskisson mentions its use by the Pedi to the south in sets of three,<sup>8</sup> and Krige mentions its use by the Lovedu.<sup>9</sup>

### The exorcism procedure

The exorcism procedure, which has been described by Junod,<sup>10</sup> does not seem to have changed much in the last half-century. The patient is covered with a large calico cloth, and a clay pot containing smouldering embers is inserted under the cloth. Into the clay pot are introduced various medicinal pellets, made from animal fat and other substances supposedly related to the diagnosed provenance of the undesirable spirit. The exorcist and his assistants (often his wives) then close in on the patient with their drums and commence fast, hard playing of the appropriate exorcism rhythm. The

<sup>4</sup> For a breakdown into districts see Johnston, Thomas: Xizambi friction-bow music of the Shangana-Tsonga, *African Music*, IV, 4, 1970.

<sup>5</sup> Tracey, Hugh: *Chopi Musicians, their music, poetry and instruments*. Oxford, 1948.

<sup>6</sup> Tracey, Hugh: *op. cit.* p. 75.

<sup>7</sup> Kirby, Percival: *The musical instruments of the native races of South Africa*. Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1934.

<sup>8</sup> Huskisson, Yvonne: The social and ceremonial music of the Pedi. Johannesburg, unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, 1958.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Huskisson, Yvonne: *op. cit.* p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> Junod, Henri: *op. cit.* 1927, vol. 2, p. 484.

drumming may be kept up for several hours, sometimes all night, while additional embers and pellets are introduced under the white sheet.

In various songs the exorcist and his assistants implore the spirit to identify itself by name, and the common practice is for the concealed and half-smothered patient to eventually respond with the name of one Zulu chief or another, often the already mentioned Nghunghunyane (see our musical examples). Other questions will be shouted loudly at the patient under the sheet, and the beating drums moved closer to his ears. Sooner or later the patient leaps up and begins dancing wildly, often stepping into the smouldering embers but remaining oblivious to the pain.

The drummers stand back and allow the dancer free reign; they cease singing, for it is now that the patient must compose his own song (some of the time under the sheet may have been used for this purpose, but the possibility of extempore inspiration should not be overlooked). Ideally, Zulu words should be introduced into the song, reflecting the presence of an undesirable 'foreign' spirit, and, in the song text, the spirit should endeavour to bargain with the exorcist, i.e. it will promise to go away if offered some minor form of compensation in the form of beer, food, item of clothing, etc. A relative of the patient fetches the desired article, which is then laid within the circle but later claimed by the exorcist.

In some cases of possession, the patient wears a crown of woven roots and twigs which, from time to time, the exorcist snatches from his head and sniffs vigorously in order to "smell out" the spirit. In other cases, a fowl or goat is brought forward and cut so as to bleed profusely, whereupon the patient seizes the animal and sucks at the wound. He is then forcibly separated from the animal and, given an emetic, commences severe vomiting. He is next smeared with red ochre and proceeds to be "dressed" in the feathers or skin of the sacrificed animal, which has now died or been killed, and wears in his hair the bladder, which has been extracted by the exorcist. After propitiation of the spirits, by throwing pieces of cooked meat in certain directions, the assembly sits down to feast and celebrate the successful exorcism. Convalescence is considered to take "from one garden-planting to another", i.e. a full year, and the patient often goes on to train as a skilled exorcist. His year is filled with protective rites, which occur particularly at every new moon, and upon successful completion of them the patient is considered to have been "born again".

### Mandhlozi songs of the mancomane rite

Some songs for use when exorcizing *mandhlozi* spirits will be found on page 14. Note the use of Zulu terms (*dzelela* instead of *holovela*, to scold; *mbuzi* instead of *mbuti*, goat) and the mention of Zulu warriors or Zulu-descended warlords.

Note in No. 6 use of the Tsonga fruitshell leg-rattles known as *marbonge*. They come in pairs, are thought of as repositories of Tsonga ancestor-spirits, and are usually very old and highly valued.<sup>11</sup>

The rattles undergo harsh treatment during some of the dances, and one song heard refers to the spirits as 'destroyers of the *marbonge*'. Their characteristic sound is thought of as being 'the voice of the spirits'; the existence of this belief is confirmed by the text of the following song, collected by Junod:

We dance the Rhonge dance  
The echo comes back to us from the gods<sup>12</sup>

Some exorcists guide the dance steps of their entranced or hypnotized patients by the sound of leg-rattles, a procedure which resembles that found in Rotse dancing: "Real Sipelu fans usually wear calf rattles to guide their partners into steps"<sup>13</sup>; using

<sup>11</sup> Johnston, Thomas: The music of the Shangaana-Tsonga. Johannesburg, unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> Junod, Henri: *op. cit.*, 1927, vol. 2, p. 206.

<sup>13</sup> Njunga, Agrippa: Music of my people. *African Music*, II, 4, 1964.

leg-rattles in this way is called *kokoco-kokoco*, or *kotla-kotla*. Further empathy between exorcizer and exorcized is established by the wearing of cult uniforms made from white calico, called *rigidawa* or *xibayane*, with the addition of *xiluwa* headwear (from *xiluwa*, blossom).

Note in Nos. 8 and 9 mention of Chief Nhunghunyane. Possessed patients sing not only of Nhunghunyane but also of his son Thuli-lamahashe, who fled into the Transvaal. He has been called Thulamahasi but this appellation misses the meaning of his name – ‘dust-of-horses’.

Note in No. 12 the use of hand-clapping along with the trance-inducing drumming. Unison hand-clapping is deemed particularly appropriate during the stages of exorcism known as *ku rbenzleleka* (to spin around) and *ku pakamisa mandla* (to wave a hyena-tail whisk known as *xipunga*). This song uses an interesting formal structure, thus: Call – 6 crotchets, response – 3 crotchets, call – 6 crotchets, response – 9 crotchets . . . a total metrical length of 24 crotchets.

### Xidzimba songs of the mancomane rite

Some *mancomane* songs for use when exorcizing Ndaus will be found on page 17.

As already noted, cases of Ndaus are generally worse than the Zulus; we now come to two songs (see page 19) which are employed in exorcizing unusually troublesome Ndaus, for which *xidzimba* songs are deemed ineffective. They are known as *tinsimu ta xiNdaus*, songs in the xiNdaus rhythm and style. There are thus three distinct musical styles within *mancomane* exorcism music:

- (i) *Mandblozi*, pentatonic songs in foursquare drum-rhythm, for exorcizing Zulu spirits;
- (ii) *Xidzimba*, heptatonic songs in triplet drum-rhythm, for exorcizing Ndaus;
- (iii) *XiNdaus*, heptatonic songs in foursquare rhythm, for particularly stubborn cases of Ndaus possession.

### Brief musical analysis

A musical analysis of the tape-recorded performances of 75 exorcism songs of all styles revealed the following. *Mandblozi* songs use pentatonic melodic patterns and are generally devoid of minor 2nds; this appears to correlate with what is known of some forms of Zulu songs to the south.<sup>14</sup> *Xidzimba* and *xiNdaus* songs use heptatonic melodic patterns which include minor 2nds; this appears to correlate with what is known of some forms of Ndaus and Shona songs to the north.<sup>15</sup>

All observe an overall pathogenic (expiratory causation<sup>16</sup>) descent from an initial peak to a cadential nadir, the amount of the overall descent being as follows:

Overall descent	% of exorcism music
5th	24
8ve	20
4th	13
Unison	8
Other	35

Half of the songs employ a basic metrical cycle of 16 units, and almost all of the songs use call-and-response structure (the exceptions are spontaneous items, sung solo).

<sup>14</sup> Rycroft, David: Zulu and Xhosa praise-poetry and song. *African Music*, III, 1, 1962.

<sup>15</sup> Blacking, John: 1971.

<sup>16</sup> Sachs, Curt: *The wellsprings of music*. The Hague, Nijhoff, 1962.

16  
resp. Dze-le- la mo- ya dze-le- la mo- ya - a

16  
1<sup>st</sup> drum

call  
ya me-e-e mbuz'ya-me a ti-me

10  
response  
vay' dye mnala  
vay' dye mnala  
vay' dye mnala

1 drum 35

unison chorus  
16  
call yi- ngwe ziya- ngwe-e

unison chorus  
yi-

16  
1<sup>st</sup> drum

2<sup>nd</sup> drum

call  
yi- ngwe zi- ya ho- e

divided chorus  
yi- ngwe ya sa- va- la

Mandhlozi song No. 1. "Dzelela moya" (scold the spirit).  
♩ = 170. Cycle: 16 ♩ Trans. ma 3rd up.

Mandhlozi song No. 2. "Mbuzi, va yi dye mahala" (the goat, they ate it  
without payment).  
♩ = 102 Cycle: 10 ♩ Trans. mi 2nd down.

Mandhlozi song No. 3. "Yingwe ya mavala" (the leopard has spots)  
♩ = 137 Cycle: 16 ♩ Trans. ma 7th up.

Mandhlozi song No. 5. "Mi ya va rhangula" (go well and greet them)  
♩ = 145 Cycle: 16 ♩ Trans. dim 5th up.

call Sa- la- ni sa- la- nin'

16  
resp. - ngu- la hi- ha- yo sa- la- ni- ni

16  
1<sup>st</sup> drum

2<sup>nd</sup> drum

3<sup>rd</sup> drum

response  
sa- la- nin' ho- o- o- o si ya va rhu-

6 call

Ye hayi ye hayi hayi

drum

leg-rattles

response

ye- ya he-le-le Zu- lu

call

he-le-le Zulu se- ngi- le

10

call

Nghu- nghu- nya- ne

resp.

0 sa- la- ni we- e na- sa 0 sa- la- ni Nghu-nghu-nya-ne

clap

7 opening call

Hayi nyoka leyo vi- abha elo- so hayi nyo-ka

response by women

ngayi sa- ba- a- a- a- a-

2nd call

hayi nyoka leyo vi- abha elo- so hayi sa- ba- le

1st old man

ngayi sa- ba- hayi-

2nd old man

hayi nyoka leyo vi- abha elo- so hayi nyok'

3rd old man

yayi sa- ba vi- abha elo- so

1st drum

2nd drum

CAJON

etc

Mandhlozi song No. 6. "Hayi lele Zulu" (the Zulus never sleep)  
 ♩ = 158 Cycle: 24 Trans. nil.

Mandhlozi song No. 7. "Hayi nyoka leyo vi- abha mlo- mo" (0 the snake which  
 ♩ = 160 Cycle: 12 Trans. ma 3rd up. blocks the mouth)

Mandhlozi song No. 10. "Salani we mama" (goodbye mother)  
 ♩ = 117 Cycle: 8 Trans. mi 2nd up.

opening call

nglu- nglu- nya- ne a'hlo-vo ya va- ntu drum

response

ho mba- va- za nglu-

1st time

2nd time

nglu- nya- ne a'hlo- vo ya va- (8)

nglu- a ndzi ya.

nglu- u la- nze- la a'hlo-vo ya va-ntu

solo 64

Ha xi-ki-va xa la ka- ya- a va ta sa- la va

n'wi ri- la Nghwa- va- va- a- a clay' ni

xi-ko-va xa si- na- a va ta sa- la va

n'wi ri-la Nghwa- va- va- a- a (11)

call

Ma-yi-va- vo- o

8

si- la- ndze sa- so- cha nva ve- na- a- a a yi hlo- si-i-i

resp.

nyi- mpi ka hlo- si- i- ha se-nge- le- re- e-

call

si- la- ndze sa- so- cha nva ve- na- a- a ma-yi-va- vo- o

resp.

nyi- mpi ka hlo- si- i- ha ma-yi-va- vo

call

si- la- ndze sa- so- cha nva ve- na- a- a se-nge- le- e-

FINE

call

si- la- ndze sa- so- cha nva ve- na- a- a se-nge- le- e-

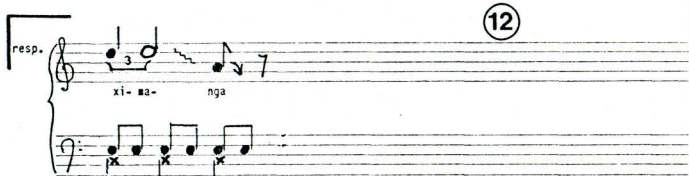
Mandhlozi song No. 8, "Ngunghunyane m'hlovo ya vantu" (Ngunghunyane, personification of our people)  
 • = 140 Cycle: 16 • Trans. 5th up.

Mandhlozi song No. 11, "Va ta sala van'wi rila" (they will remain mourning)  
 • = 153 Cycle: 64 • Trans. mi 6th up.

Mandhlozi song No. 13, "Mayivavo si landse masocha" (father, we have come for soldiers)  
 • = 140 Cycle: 8 • Trans. mi 6th up.

call  (alternative call)  
 Ndzi ta bye-la sa-ni hi xi-ma-nga te-xi

drum  
clap 

resp.  ⑫  
 xi-ma-nga

call  (alternative call)  
 ndzi ta bye-la sa-ni hi xi-ma-nga te-xi

resp.   
 xi-ma-nga xi-ma-nga xi-ma-nga

Mandhlozi song No. 12. "Ndzi ta byela moni hi ximanga lexi?" (to whom shall I relate the story of this cat?)  
 ♩ = 160 Cycle: 24 Trans. ma 7th up.

Xidzimba song No. 1. "Vayi voni nanga" (see the flute)  
 ♩ = 167 Cycle: 12 Trans. dim 5th up.

Xidzimba song No. 2. "Ni chava mbhambhaze" (I fear the ants)  
 ♩ = 176 Cycle: 16 Trans. mi 2nd up.

call  response 3  
 Vayi vo-ni n a-nga vayi vo-ni n a- ①

drum  
clap 

call  ②  
 nga ve-e-e vo-ni n a-nga

call  ②  
 A- he mbhambha-ze-e

call  ②  
 e-e-e ye ha-ye-e ni chava ka mbhambha-ze-e

response   
 ye-e-e-e-e-e

old man   
 ye-e-e-e

1st drum   
 2nd drum 





1st call after drum entr  
Xi-mi-nta ntsengani mangatwa  
drum

call  
Mu-lo-yi wa ku fa we

9  
resp.  
ngoho- ndzwa-ni yo-  
call  
ma-na-va

response  
hi-ya-a-a fa wa nta- ngu-ndi-ndi su-  
call

10  
resp.  
divided  
Mhan' ma-na-na yo-yo-  
1st drum  
2nd drum  
yo ma-na-na va die-le

call  
Mu-ka-ci wa-a ka-a-nya ve-e nya-mbo wa wa-yi ya  
2  
drum  
1st times  
answering times  
caller  
nyambo e-ve  
wayi he-le-e hayi ye yo he yo  
every time  
Start of characteristic 24-quaver drum phrase

call  
su-ka  
ve ye yo-ve-e-e-e

Xizimba song No. 9. "Xi mnta ntsengani mangatwa" (the kite from whom we tear out the feathers)  
• = 147 Cycle: 12 Trans. dim 5th up.

Xizimba song No. 10. "Manana va dlele" (mother is killed)  
• = 170 Cycle: 16 Trans. mi 6th up.

XiNdaus song No. 1. "Muloyi, ku fa we" (the bewitched one, oh to die)  
• = 161 Cycle: 10 Trans. mi 3rd down.

XiNdaus song No. 2. "Mukaari wa kanya we nyambo" (Rotse language, mukaari may mean woman; nyambo may refer to 'god')  
• = 116 Cycle: 24 Trans. mi 6th up.

## Conclusion

This study points to Tsonga attitudes concerning their musical needs within exorcism rites: the fact that undesirable spirits are always deemed to be of foreign provenance engenders the use of foreign words and special musical recipes or prescriptions.<sup>17</sup> The geographical and cultural origin of the spirit is carefully diagnosed in order to determine which of two or three bodies of music must be used, each of the latter being relatively homogeneous in scalar and rhythmic style, and spirit-specific. There is a significant parallel between the scalar/rhythmic style selected and the musical characteristics of the southern African people to whom the possessing spirit is attributed, be they northerners (Nda) or southerners (Zulu).

The use of a shallow, circular tambourine to produce the appropriate exorcism rhythm is interesting in the light of the known distribution of this type of drum – it occurs as far afield as Siberia and Mesoamerica, usually with a medicinal use. Sachs, for instance, noted the following: “In many civilisations . . . the shaman dances with clattering anklets, shakes the seed-filled, rattling gourd, strikes his shallow, circular drum, and sings or bawls his incantations for hours”.<sup>18</sup>

The use, in many cultures, of drumming to produce trance has been commented upon by Neher, who notes that drumming stimulates a larger brain area than do single-frequency sounds, and that the ear’s *low*-frequency receptors are more damage-resistant, and thus more energy-absorbent.<sup>19</sup> Walter and Walter’s description of the behavioral effects of auditory driving includes: “Visual sensations with characters not present in the stimulus, that is color, pattern, movement . . . organized hallucinations”.<sup>20</sup> These writers and others suggest that rhythmic drumming affects the central nervous system; if this is true, then culture-specific trance behaviour during drumming may be but a local variant of a universal human response, taking particular shape to accord with the cultural prescription.

Tsonga exorcism music not only fulfils a medicinal function, the study of which may prove useful in the study of mental health in our own society, but it provides for the predominantly female audiences an expressive, recreational outlet which can be seen as balancing and compensating for the subordinate role of women in this patrilineal society, where women’s horticultural activities lend life a monotonous quality.

### The words and translations of some of the songs in this article

(a stroke indicates that the response is repeated; C = call, R = response)

#### Mandlhozi songs

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>2. “<i>Mbuzi, va yi dye mabala</i>”<br/>           C: <i>Mbuzi ya me-e-e!</i> <i>Va yi dye mabala</i><br/>           R: <i>Va yi dye mabala</i><br/>           C: <i>A Timememe mbuzi ya me-e-e!</i><br/> <br/> <i>A leyi ni nga yi tlhava!</i></p>                     | <p>“The goat, they ate it without payment”<br/>           The goat! They ate it without payment<br/>           They ate it without payment<br/>           At Timememe (= goat-bleat) they ate it<br/>               without payment<br/>           The one which I slew</p> |
| <p>3. “<i>Yingwe ya mavala</i>”<br/>           C: <i>Yingwe, ziya bo!</i><br/>           R: <i>Yingwe ya mavala</i><br/>           C: <i>Yingwe wa blasela nkeosi!</i><br/>               <i>Yingwe yi dle muntu baba!</i><br/>               <i>Yingwe ya jabula!</i></p> | <p>“The leopard has spots”<br/>           Leopard!<br/>           The leopard has spots<br/>           The leopard invades<br/>           The leopard has killed a person’s father<br/>           The leopard has it good</p>   |

<sup>17</sup> Terms used by Goodenough, Ward: *Culture, Language and Society*, Reading, Addison-Wesley, 1971.

<sup>18</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>19</sup> Neher, Andrew: A physiological explanation of unusual behaviour in ceremonies involving drums. *Human Biology*, IV, 1962.

<sup>20</sup> Walter, V. J., and Walter, W. G.: The central effects of rhythmic sensory stimulation. *Electroenceph. Clin. Neurophysiol.*, 1, 1949, p. 63.

5. "Mi ya va rhungula"  
 C: *Salanini, salanini!*  
 R: *Ho mi ya va rhungula*  
 C: *Kodwa ndzi ya homba /  
 Ho Javulani jamba /  
 Va ka sesi /* "Go well and greet them"  
 Goodbye, goodbye!  
 Go well and greet them  
 Be content  
 Go, Javulani  
 People of my sister's
7. "Hayi nyoka leyo vimbha mlomo"  
 C: *Hayi nyoka leyo vimbha mlomo*  
*Hayi nyoka*  
 R: *Ngi ya yi sabaa* "The snake which blocks the mouth"  
 O the snake which blocks the mouth  
 O the snake  
 I fear it
9. "Nghunghunyane"  
 C: *Nghunghunyane mihlovo ya vantu*  
 R: *Sa mbavasa mihlovo ya vantu*  
 C: *Ndzi ya mu landzela / A wa ngi ciya ngbe  
 n'wana kbe / A ba wi voni /* "Nghunghunyane"  
 Chief Nghunghunyane, personification of  
 our people  
 We name him, the ideal one  
 We are his followers/his son neglected  
 us/we never catch sight of him.
11. "Va ta sala van'wi rila"  
 Solo: *Va ta sala va n'wi rila Ngbwavava*  
*Xikbova xa la kaya*  
*Dlayani xikbova xa mina* "They will remain mourning"  
 They will remain mourning for Miss  
 Adulteress  
 An owl hoots there  
 Kill my owl
13. "Mayivavo, se landze masocha"  
 C: *Mayivavo, se landze masocha nwa wena*  
*A yi blomi!*  
 R: *Nyimpi, ka blomi ba!*  
 C: *Sengilele se landze masocha nwa wena /  
 He mama va jala-ala / Mina ndzi thwaza eka  
 Mdlhamini /* "Father, we have come for soldiers"  
 Father, we have come for soldiers  
 To arms!  
 Warriors, to arms!  
 Now I am asleep we have come for soldiers/  
 I heard the news mother/They see me  
 Mdlhamini

## Xidzimba songs

1. "Vayi vona nanga"  
 C: *Vayi vona nanga*  
 R: *Nanga wa vaxxavisi*  
 C: *A yi miyeli nanga / Ndzi balatile mina /  
 Ndzi n'wa Pete mina* "See the flute"  
 See the flute  
 Flute of the vendors  
 The flute that never ceases/I have poured  
 out/I am the daughter of Pete

Song 2 is best explained by quoting and amplifying the following Tsonga proverb, offered by one of the singers:

*Tisokoti i murbi wa lomu ndzeni*

Ants are a medicine for internal use

This proverb refers to a Tsonga exorcism cure wherein the exorcist supposedly transfers the misfortune to ants, whose nest is thereafter feared and avoided:

He will put the shell into the hole without looking back toward it.  
 The ants will take all the *imbhorola* (medicine) down into their nest,  
 and so the misfortune will remain with them.<sup>21</sup>

3. "N'wana a va lombi"  
 C: *Mi ku n'wana a va lombi*  
*N'wana a va lombi*  
 R: *A va lombi, a va lombi*  
 C: *Va lomba ntewani /* "A child is never lent out"  
 You say a child is never lent out  
 A child is never lent out  
 Is never lent out, is never lent out  
 They lend out a winnowing basket

The subject of this song is a childless woman's barrenness. Among the Tsonga this condition may be 'caused' by the ancestral spirits of her mother if an insufficient portion of the *lobola* (bride-price) has been paid to the maternal uncle. The words reveal that a barren woman seeking to 'borrow' a child

<sup>21</sup> Junod, Henri: *op. cit.*, 1927, II, p. 471.

may be offered a basket instead. This symbolic substitution is a recurrent theme within Tsonga folklore, and the following song was collected among the Ronga prior to 1897:

They won't lend me a baby!  
They lend me but a mortar  
Were I an eagle  
Were I a bird of prey  
Quick would I carry it away.<sup>23</sup>

There is a Ronga folktale in which the girl asks for a baby but "they gave her a *xirondo* basket"<sup>23</sup> and this theme may be related to Tsonga use, in former times, of baskets as part of *lobola*. *Lobola*, generally thought of as bride-price, with the Tsonga more closely represents child-price because the *lobola* is repayable in the event of barrenness.

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| 4. "Nyenyana tilo!"                            | "Bird of heaven!"                        |
| C: <i>He nyenyana tilo bayi!</i>               | Bird of heaven!                          |
| <i>A langutani lesci taka ntonga ziya duma</i> | See what comes with the thunderstorm     |
| R: <i>He nyenyana tilo!</i>                    | Bird of heaven!                          |
| C: <i>Lo wa nkwana va teka langutani /</i>     | See, they are marrying the girl off      |
| <i>Swin'wanyana va chava /</i>                 | Some, they are afraid of                 |
| <i>Swin'wanyana va hamba /</i>                 | Some, they tell lies                     |
| <i>Swin'wanyana va vulavula /</i>              | Some, they tell the truth                |
| <i>He nyenyana a bi xikwembu, ya hembu ya</i>  | The bird is a spirit, it tells lies, see |
| <i>hamba, langutani</i>                        |  |

This song and No. 5 refer to the 'bird of heaven'. Among some of the southern African Bantu-speaking peoples, 'bird of heaven' or 'bird of lightning' may refer to several different species, but with the Tsonga it is the *ximbungu* (bateleur eagle) because its flight follows a zigzag pattern through the sky. A whistle made from its leg bone provides protection against lightning, which is much feared. The following saying is sometimes used to correct Tsonga children:

*Loko mi yiva ta halekela bi tilo*

If you steal you will be struck by heaven

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|---|---------------------------------------|
| 6. "Mavulwulu yi sukile"                | "Tadpoles, it has gone"               |
| C: <i>Mavulwulu, ngbondzo yi sukile</i> | Tadpoles, the hammerkop bird has gone |
| R: <i>Dlayani mavulwulu!</i>            | Kill the tadpoles!                    |
| C: <i>Ndzi ta byela mani? /</i>         | To whom shall I tell it?              |
| <i>Ndzi ta rbuma mani? /</i>            | Whom shall I send?                    |
| <i>Ndzi ta tsbama kwibi? /</i>          | Where shall I stay?                   |

This song refers to a bird feared by the Tsonga because of the belief that ancestor spirits, in the form of snakes, are found within its nest. Of this bird Kirby states that Pedi doctors utilize "portions of the bird called the hammerkop, *Scopus umbretta*"<sup>24</sup>:

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|---|---|
| 9. "Xi minta ntsengani mangatlwa"             | "The kite from whom we tear out the feathers" |
| C: <i>Xi minta ntsengani mangatlwa</i>        | The kite from whom we tear out the feathers   |
| R: <i>A mangbondzwani yo!</i>                 | By the little hammerkop bird!                 |
| C: <i>Xi vutla mintsenge, a bi nga poni /</i> | Tear out feathers, we are not safe            |
| <i>Ku hlekiwa ko tani a bi nga poni /</i>     | Being laughed at in this way we are not safe  |
| <i>Khale ka manani ku vuya ka yena /</i>      | Long ago when my mother came back             |

<sup>23</sup> Junod, Henri: *op. cit.*, 1927, II, p. 284.

<sup>24</sup> Junod, Henri: *Les Chants et les Contes des Ba-Ronga*, Bridel & Cie., Lausanne, 1897, p. 237.

<sup>25</sup> Kirby, Percival: 1965, p. 100