

SINGING PSALMS WITH OWLS: A VENDA 20TH CENTURY MUSICAL HISTORY PART TWO: *TSHIKONA*, BEER SONGS AND PERSONAL SONGS

by

JACO KRUGER

The three categories of Venda music discussed here are *tshikona* (the bamboo pipe dance), beer songs (*malende*, *jive*) and personal songs. As I indicate in Part One of this essay,¹ *tshikona* is useful for the construction of a musical history because its performance is intimately associated with traditional politics. By contrast, beer songs do not feature directly in politics. However, they not only comprise the largest category of adult music, they also have more elaborate texts than Venda music forms such as *tshikona* or *tshigombela*.

While song texts have an important function, they arguably play a secondary role in large scale performances of communal dance music such as *tshigombela* and *tshikona*, which primarily are geared towards emotional arousal through sound and movement. As the continuum of musical performance extends towards smaller groups, and finally the individual musician, performances become more reflective, and their cognitive content increases to a point where a simple accompaniment on a musical bow or guitar becomes the subservient carrier of song texts of epic proportion (see Kruger 1993:348-403). While the study of large-scale dance performance reveals general social developments, the texts of beer songs and personal songs not only uncover the detail of these developments but also the emotional motivations which underpin them.

Tshikona

Tshikona is one of a number of South African pipe dances (see Kirby 1968:135-170). These dances mostly take place under the auspices of traditional leaders, and they are associated with important social rituals. This probably explains why pipe music formerly usually was performed by adults. Kirby (1968:144) notes that among the Korana

¹ The field research for this essay was carried out from 1986-1994. It became apparent during the subsequent assessment of field data that too many important facts related to recent Venda musical history would have to be omitted in a single essay of standard length. Andrew Tracey (then editor of *African Music*), agreed to publish an extended essay in two successive editions of this journal. The first part, which discussed the communal dance form *tshigombela*, was published in Volume 7(4), 1999. Interested readers can obtain Part One by contacting ILAM via email at ilamsales@ru.ac.za. The second part of this essay, now published some eight years after the first part, is likely to raise some expectation of current theoretical perspectives among readers. I would like to thank the reviewers of this second part for their valuable comments in this regard. Unfortunately, the original theoretical egg cannot now be unscrambled. It is hoped that this work can at least serve as a basis for criticism and debate that may allow the re-evaluation of Venda musical history.

people “no boy might join the ranks of the flute-players until he had been initiated into manhood”.²

According to oral testimony, hunters of chief Ravhura of Makonde encountered the bamboo grove from which the *tshikona* pipes are obtained, while on an elephant hunt in eastern Venda.³ The earliest literary account of *tshikona* appears in the diary of Voortrekker leader Louis Trichardt in 1837 (see Le Roux 1966:32).

The original participants of *tshikona* were young men attending *thondo*, an institution under the auspices of traditional leaders (see Blacking 1962:76, Burnett-van Tonder 1984:330, 1987:53). These young men were trained in warfare, and acted as royal bodyguards and community police. They assembled as *tshikona tsha thondo* (see footnote 7), and were dispatched by a traditional leader to collect fines and outstanding debts (Burnett-van Tonder 1984:282-284). *Tshikona* hence was a mechanism by which a leader could exercise direct political control. The dance is described by Blacking as “the most important single item of Venda music”, and “a symbol of the power of chiefs and a sonorous emblem of national pride” (Blacking 1957:20, 1965:52).

A second type of *tshikona* was associated with the death of a traditional leader (Burnett-van Tonder 1984:283). The leader’s *tshikona* group performed at the ritual accompanying his burial. On this occasion they were referred to as *tshikona tsha tshikuma* (from *kuma*, to mourn in a low voice). *Tshikona* performances held when the death of a chief was commemorated were events where people often sang the well-known *tshikona* song, *Ro vha sia vho lala* (“We are leaving the dead behind”).

Tshikona performances also preceded the start of the *domba* initiation school as well as compulsory work parties for chiefs.⁴ *Tshikona* formalised these two events while promoting cooperation and cultivating political loyalty. *Tshikona* also was performed during *thevhula*, the first-fruits ritual of Venda ruling families (see Van Warmelo 1932:153-163). As such it also was a means of communication with ancestral spirits (see Kruger 1993:8, 1996).

² The exception is pipe dances for boys found among the Venda and North Sotho people. However, it seems that these dances (such as *mathangwa* in Venda) in fact function to train young musicians for adult pipe dances.

³ Petros Tshikudo Bohwana, Tshaulu, 10 April 1984. Bohwana’s testimony described a meeting between hunters of chief Ravhura from Makonde and inhabitants of Tshaulu, an aboriginal Ngona village. This meeting later led to closer ties between these two clans, culminating in their union through marriage. Bohwana mentioned the bamboo grove from which the pipes are made but made no reference to the pipes themselves or to *tshikona*. Ethnologist Wilfred Phophi (Tshifudi, 10 May 1984) argued that the Singo clan brought *tshikona* and its instruments with them when they migrated from Central Africa. However, Blacking (1995:145-146) suggests that *tshikona* and certain other styles of Venda music originated from aboriginal clans, and that they were appropriated by the Singo who were “culturally ‘poor’ but politically and militarily strong”.

⁴ A *tshikona* song still performed at the village of Ngudza goes: *Li a tsha, Vho-Luvhengo* (“It is daybreak, Mrs Luvhengo”). Daybreak is the time when compulsory work starts. Mrs Luvhengo was an important member of the ruling family.

Tshikona performances thus promoted stratification between ruling and non-ruling families. This also is evident in the structure of the dance. Dancers show allegiance to their political leader in their submission to his dance representative. The spatial arrangement of the dancers also affirms the political hierarchy. The dance-line is led by members of ruling families who are followed by members from non-ruling families (Burnett-van Tonder 1984:400-401).



Figure 1. Male *tshikona* dancing (photo by author, Gaba, 1986).

While promoting social stratification, *tshikona* also generates a spirit of community by creating a shared emotional condition. The hoquet form the music takes, serves this purpose. Hocketing in *tshikona* involves the periodic projection of single pipe tones by dancers into the musical cycle, thus creating an interlocking effect. Blacking notes that the performance of *tshikona*:

involves the largest number of people, and its music incorporates the largest number of tones in any single piece of Venda music ... *tshikona* is valuable and beautiful to the Venda, not only because of the quantity of people and tones involved, but because of the quality of the relationships that must be established between people and (musical) tones whenever it is performed (Blacking 1976:51).

The hoquet structure of *tshikona* in other words promotes interdependence and social solidarity, as does the unison team dance step (*mona*). Hocketing and solo dancing (*gaya*) generate a sense of individuality as well as community. Performers have unique identity as reflected in the playing of a particular pipe or solo dancing, yet

their individuality is not rampant. It finds expression in a communal setting in which individuality serves communal interests and performers distinguish themselves from each other while they remain dynamically related.

“Dancing with joy”: Continuity in *tshikona*

While ruling families in Venda legitimised their status by remobilising cultural institutions of precolonial origin, these institutions in fact invoked positive social relationships at a non-political level. Many young people participated in *tshikona* and *tshigombela* dancing as they, like their elders, believed in “continuing the ways of our ancestors”. Most of them used the same term to explain the value they attached to music making, namely *takala* (from *dakalo*, joy). They often remarked that “dancing fills us with joy”. *Tshikona* and *tshigombela* were important to them even though these dances competed with modern forms of entertainment such as the radio. While the radio was a popular source of entertainment, it lacked the social interaction of communal dance.⁵ This was a conscious reference to the value many people attached to the maintenance of good human relations in communal dance. Statements such as, “We listen to our headman” and, “The headman agrees with us”, were common in villages where traditional leaders performed their administrative duties satisfactorily, were respected by their followers, and communal dancing was popular. Hence there were more aspiring *tshikona* dancers than the available number of pipes at Tshidimbini in 1987, while three *tshikona* groups performed at the installation of headman Abraham Ramugondo at the neighbouring village of Ngudza on 28 June 1986.⁶ They were the headman’s group, and groups from Tshidimbini and Johannesburg. The three teams gave twelve *tshikona* performances during the main part of the installation which lasted five hours. *Tshikona* performances also took place at the installation of headmen at Tshixwadza, Tshikonelo and Mukula in 1990, 1993 and 1994,⁷ while the Muswodi *tshikona* team performed at a local royal wedding in 1994.⁸ *Tshikona* performances also formed part of the fleeting

⁵ Joyce Tshivhase, aged 23, Tshidimbini, 17/6/87. Similarly, *xizambi* mouthbow player Jim Nkuna of Valdezia remarked that for sound production his instrument did not need a battery like a radio, only “people and beer” (Valdezia, 11 June 1988).

⁶ Before the installation the village carried out compulsory work, preparing the ceremonial arena. The headman rewarded them with an ox, porridge and beer at a party given about three months after the installation. This ritual was known as *tamba zwanda* (to wash the hands prior to eating) or *tanzwa bodo* (to wash pots - a reference to cleaning up after the installation).

⁷ *Tshikona tsha thondo* fulfilled a symbolic function at the installations at Ngudza and Tshixwada. The *tshikona* team of the newly-appointed headmen assembled on the ceremonial arena outside the royal homestead where all the guests were gathered. The musicians moved towards the headman’s homestead while performing. On their arrival the headman, his deputy, and his aunt emerged, covered with blankets. The latter is a symbolic inheritance from times when a new ruler’s identity was kept secret until the last moment. This was a precaution against assassination. The *tshikona* group surrounded the blanketed figures, and, acting as symbolic bodyguards, escorted them to the public meeting place while performing.

⁸ Eric Makhado and Sannie Nemaxwi. Interviews, University of Venda, 30 August 1994.

musical upsurge accompanying celebrations marking the tenth year of independence in 1989. Thus a *tshikona* team from Lwamondo sang:

<i>Ri ya vhudilangi ha Venda.</i>	We are going to the independence celebrations. ⁹
<i>Venda lo wana mbofhololo ndi kale.</i>	Venda has been free for long.
<i>Kha ri ye ri yo pembela.</i>	Let us go and dance excitedly.
<i>Ri takalele Venda lashu.</i>	Let us be happy for our country.

“A barbaric act”: Change in *tshikona*

The social organisation and performance practice of *tshikona* were marked by several innovations during the second half of the 20th century. These innovations were related to changing relations of production and accompanying changes in social statuses. Few Venda families were not affected by migrant labour which took men away from their homes for long periods. There simply were not enough adult men available in many rural villages to form *tshikona* teams of adequate size. It became common to see *tshikona* teams comprising boys, some as young as ten years old.

Three *tshikona* teams participated in the 1991 Dzimauli regional show held at the village of Tshixwadza. These teams came from the surrounding villages of Mukondeni, Mabuvha and Matshavhawe. The social organisation of the Mukondeni team was typical of that of many contemporary *tshikona* teams. It had eight dancers in their 30s and 40s, 15 aged about 12 years, and the remaining 24 were older teenagers. The preponderance of rural boys in *tshikona* had become symbolic of their increasing political power, even though it was not accompanied by significant economic empowerment. As in other communal dances, participation in *tshikona* was an aspect of rural existence characterised to an extent by social relationships of precolonial origin. By contrast, non-participation in *tshikona* usually was related to changing social statuses and their attendant ambitions. A young taxi driver from Thohoyandou remarked that “*Tshikona* is primitive and for old people”,¹⁰ while a university student noted that “Nowadays people no longer perform *tshikona* in urban areas. Everyone wants to be independent and work for his family. People criticise *tshikona* performance as an old and barbaric act.”¹¹

As in the case of *tshigombela*, there was an increasing tendency for *tshikona* dancers not to assemble on the basis of shared residency only. Schools also became a useful institution by means of which chiefs could mobilise *tshikona* teams, and school vacations often were the best times to observe *tshikona* performances. Coming from a culture in which musical performance often is the antithesis of sport, I was surprised to learn that the *tshikona* team of the village of Gaba in eastern Venda also was the local soccer team, and that a *tshikona* rehearsal often was followed by a soccer practice.

⁹ Performed on 10 June 1989 at Dzwerani Primary School during the Dzindi circuit schools’ show (Ramovha 1989:15).

¹⁰ Dennis Tshitahle, Makwarela, 1990.

¹¹ Mr D. Magoro, University of Venda, 23 August 1994.

The change in social power relations evident in the incorporation of women into *tshigombela* (see Part One, *African Music* 7[4]) was mirrored in the emergence of the first *tshikona* team comprising mostly female members (see Figure 2).¹² The village of Muswodi Tshisimani, situated in arid northern Venda, had received an instruction from the Department of Education and Culture to enter a *tshigombela* team for the regional agricultural show at Mutale during the early 1980s. However, local women were not familiar with *tshigombela* dancing which formerly was restricted to the central and southern districts of Venda. Efforts among villagers to organise *tshikona* dancing instead initially failed. Although the headman owned a set of pipes, his *tshikona* group had long been disbanded as men left their economically depressed and drought-ravaged district to seek employment. Most local boys had never seen *tshikona* performed at their village and did not respond to prompts to establish a *tshikona* team. A number of adult women, however, still had recollections of *tshikona* performances at their village. A local woman, Nyawadzulesa Madou, mobilised a small group of friends, and under her leadership they approached their headman who agreed to their request to establish a *tshikona* team.¹³



Figure 2. Female *tshikona* dancing at Muswodi, 1988 (photo by author).

¹² Blacking (1962:76) reports the presence of three girls in the *tshikona* team from Shakadza.

¹³ The appearance of the El Niño weather phenomenon in Southern Africa during 1982-1983 aggravated the already arid conditions in the Muswodi area. The establishment of a *tshikona* team also was supported by a general desire to appeal to ancestral spirits for rain by dancing *tshikona*.

The presence of broken drums did not hinder the determined group of women. They constructed their own drums (conventionally a male occupation) from large tins and a big iron cooking pot. They started rehearsing in September 1982, and gave their first performance in January 1983. Outsiders initially were shocked to see women performing a male dance,¹⁴ but came to accept their involvement as an innovative novelty. The establishment of this dance team seemed to have boosted the morale of an economically depressed community. A strong sense of community pride followed its enlargement, its first performances, and its subsequent fame.

While the incorporation of boys and women into *tshikona* was an important innovation, changes in the social organisation of *tshikona* also were manifested in the emergence of urban based teams. As elsewhere in rural South Africa, many Venda migrants maintained links with their home areas where their families lived, they had economic interests, and they intended to retire. Town-based *tshikona* groups often organised visits to home areas. These visits had been taking place since the early 1950s (see Blacking 1965:36, 1962:75-78), and they featured some of the best *tshikona* performances of the time. When the South African Black Taxi Association conducted the regional round of its driver-of-the-year competition at the Thohoyandou shopping centre in 1990, the organisers invited a *tshikona* team from Johannesburg to perform at the competition. This team performed so well that many spectators (and some of the adjudicators) lost interest in the driving competition and watched the dancing.¹⁵

Six urban *tshikona* teams were still in existence during the late 1980s. They were situated at Roodepoort, Tshiawelo, Tembisa, Alexandra, George Koch, and Secunda.¹⁶ These teams visited Venda districts from which team members came two or three times a year. Unlike before, when members of dance teams came from the same district, these dance groups fused together performers who lived in various areas in Venda but in the same residential area on the reef. Their visits to Venda usually were associated with visiting a specific traditional leader (see Blacking 1962). Negotiations for a visit were lengthy. Members decided which area they wanted to visit, and the team committee applied to the traditional leader of the area to receive them. Prior negotiation was partly important because it was expected that traditional leaders feed visiting teams.

The Roodepoort team performed at the installation of headman Abraham Ramugondo of Ngudza in 1986. On 30 June 1990 the team paid the same village an informal visit. Members of the team acknowledged that the frequency of *tshikona* performance was declining but scoffed at the suggestion that the traditional political system had become

¹⁴ The women wore *tshigombela* costumes (excluding leg rattles, handkerchiefs and whistles) in a performance in 1988. The team included a few girls in their late teens, and some men. The women mostly performed a standard step comprising small movements. Their dress, as well as their status as women, prevented them from performing the high leg actions and leaps found with male teams.

¹⁵ Eddie Mashau, University of Venda, 25 September 1990.

¹⁶ Roodepoort *tshikona* member Thivhulawi Mutshutshu, Ngudza, 30 June 1990.

obsolete. However, any political purpose their 1990 visit to Venda might have had was not obviously evident. In fact, headman Ramugondo was absent for most of the day, tending his shop. Team members expressed a somewhat apathetic attitude towards the national politics of the time. It was not that politics did not concern them. However, the most pressing reality for them was their jobs, their family and their homes. They remarked that they went to Johannesburg “for food only”.

Although the Roodepoort team was established just prior to, and in anticipation of the Venda’s declaration of independence from South Africa in 1979, it functioned mainly as an urban-based association. The name of the team was *Tshikona tsha maanda nga u pfana* (lit. “*Tshikona* of strength through unity”). This *tshikona* group functioned as a kind of mutual aid association. Team members who became temporarily unemployed remained in the team, and other members rendered them moral support and limited financial assistance. The group also offered limited physical security to its members, most of whom lived in hostels. Hostels became focal points of pre-election violence, and most if not all *tshikona* performances associated with hostel life ceased a few years prior to the 1994 general election.¹⁷

“Away with the show”: After the coup

While independence celebrations were suspended after the 1990 military coup,¹⁸ the annual agricultural and arts and craft show (which included the dance competition) that used to accompany them, continued. The show of 1990 took place with the approval of the military government, although it was co-organised by the *Maanda nga u pfana* (“Unity is strength”) organisation. This organisation was established under the auspices of the Department of Education and Culture during the late 1980s. It described its objective as the development and conservation of Venda culture.¹⁹ Its cultural department mobilised young people into traditional dance groups which went on tour and whose performances were recorded by SABC television.

Although the overt nationalism of previous years was absent at the final round of the 1990 dance competition, all participating teams wore T-shirts on which were printed the head of an elephant (a symbol of Venda ruling clans), a bass drum with dancers and a waterfall (both traditional national symbols), and the name *Maanda nga u pfana*. When it came to light that the *Maanda nga u pfana* organisation co-organised the 1990 show, graffiti appeared in Thohoyandou, saying “Away with the show” and “Away with Ramushwana”. Many people regarded *Maanda nga u pfana*’s involvement in the show as a transparent effort by the deposed Venda National Party to re-empower itself.

¹⁷ Mr D. Magoro, University of Venda, 23 August 1994.

¹⁸ The Venda military under the command of brigadier Gabriel Ramushwana carried out a bloodless coup on 6 April 1990 in response to increasingly autocratic, oppressive rule by the Venda National Party. The military governed Venda until its re-incorporation into South Africa in 1994.

¹⁹ “*Maanda* on tour”, *Mirror*: 4, 19 October 1990.

Subsequent to the coup, the organisation became strongly influenced by members of the Venda National Party who used it to promote their old ideology. Because the organisation was falling into public disfavour, it became secretive and its members concealed their identity. However, its leaders were identified as certain traditional leaders, described by African National Congress-aligned groups as “the old crocks of Ravele’s deposed government”.²⁰ The transitional government disassociated itself from the organisation which was accused of pursuing a violent strategy to achieve its political objectives.

The final phase of the coming to power of the African National Congress in Venda and its opposition to *Maanda nga u pfana* started after its unbanning in 1990. A cultural festival was organised by students of the Central Cultural Committee of Venda University during October 1990. The day-long festival comprised musical performances, poetry readings, drama performances and speeches. Afternoon events like choir performances, gumboot dancing, pantsula dancing, ball room dancing and a karate demonstration expressed some of the social ambitions of the students. However, the entire morning was devoted to outdoor performances of traditional dance and drama. These dances expressed little support for traditional politics.

As in the case of Khubvi Cultural Club (see Part One), their young performers had appropriated traditional communal dances to advance their own political objectives. Songs and their accompanying dance movements and dramatic actions expressed clear support for the recently unbanned African National Congress. Apart from familiar slogans like “*amandla!*”, and references to the leadership of Nelson Mandela, several performances had very strong overtones of violence. In fact, one of the events comprised a simulated rifle and hand grenade attack by an *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (the military wing of the African National Congress) youth commando. The commandos also drilled, and sang and danced with their rifles.

The most interesting musical performance in terms of local politics was a *tshikona* performance by a small group of young men from Lwamondo village, a western suburb of Thohoyandou. The performance started with a short dramatic prelude: the group entered the dance arena singing a freedom song. With a raised fist the leader of the group shouted: “*Amandla!* Viva the mighty sound of the AK47! Viva hand grenade! (accompanied by a throwing action). Viva ANC! Viva comrade Mandela! Viva MK!²¹ Away with AWB,²² Inkatha²³ and *Maanda nga u pfana!*” This was followed by a dance performance. The entire performance was unique. It is unlikely that the Venda public had ever witnessed a similar *tshikona* before this time.

²⁰ *The Bugle*, Vol.3, October 1990.

²¹ The military wing of the African National Congress.

²² *Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging*, a right-wing Afrikaner movement.

²³ A coalition of Zulu traditional leaders

The violent overtones of this performance came as a shock to a number of people in the audience because *tshikona* usually is a dance of peace and political solidarity (see Blacking 1976:50-51). As already indicated, *tshikona* originally was performed in a military context by the bodyguards and warriors of traditional leaders. The military function of *tshikona* had come the full circle, albeit probably unknown to its present day performers. Blacking (1965:36,38) also recorded instances of *tshikona* performances not representing political solidarity, but division. Similarly, the performance of the Lwamondo group was indicative of serious village conflict. While the performance was of a relatively high standard, it was quite unsuccessful in a traditional social sense.

It was clear from the performance that the dance group was not representative of the entire village. The group only comprised young men in their late teens and early twenties. There were no older men, nor any women, the traditional *tshikona* drummers of recent decades. The slogans shouted by the leader of the group gave an indication of the nature of the division in Lwamondo village. Most significant is the denouncement of the *Maanda nga u pfana* organisation. A month before the cultural festival, the African National Congress-aligned South African Youth Congress staged a protest march in the village of Lwamondo, but the presence of the police, the Venda Defence Force, and *Maanda nga u pfana* forced them to abort it.²⁴

Beer songs and personal songs

Beer songs are the largest category of Venda traditional music. They comprise singing, dancing and dramatic action that accompany beer drinking. The term “beer song” refers here to traditional as well as contemporary music. Traditional beer songs are called *malende*, and they are accompanied by handclapping or drumming. Contemporary beer songs have several names such as *jive* (see Kruger 2000:84-86). These songs usually have a western musical structure, and are accompanied by keyboards and guitars. The selling of beer (especially by poor rural women) is an important economic activity. Beer drinking is a social ritual geared towards the strengthening and exploration of relationships, but most local Christians oppose the consumption of alcohol.



Figure 3. *Malende* beer-song dancing. Matangari, 1988.

²⁴ *The Bugle*, Vol.3, October 1990.

However, many people in fact visit rural bars to socialise, and they drink cool drinks only. The most common theme of beer songs is that of family and gender relations. However, beer songs also address other important social issues. While gender relations still are addressed routinely, the 1980s and 1990s saw a proliferation of beer songs with a political theme. Changing musical aesthetics and relations of production have increased the popularity of personal songs as a separate entity from beer songs. In a society in which communal music making was socially adaptive, individual music making generally was regarded as anti-social. However, individual musicians were recognised as critics whose duty it was to criticise any form of social corruption (see Kruger 1999). It became particularly necessary since the 1970s to “whisper in the deep” about political oppression. Singer Stanley Simeron of Madombidzha indicated in one of his songs that:

<i>Khalino li fhasi hu nana vhaulwane.</i>	Important people own everything.
<i>U si mudivhalea zwi a konda.</i>	Things are difficult if you are not known.
<i>Hu dinga mishumoni.</i>	Such as when looking for work.
<i>Hu dzhena vhone.</i>	They employ those they know.
<i>Ndi vhone vharangi vha zwothe.</i>	They dominate everything.
<i>Wa amba vha milisa tshivhindi.</i>	If you talk you will be killed.

(Makhado 1993:15)

However, as the following discussion shows, whispering about sensitive political issues did not apply to musical performance. A vast number of contemporary amateur and professional singers continued to perform the traditional critical role of the musician.

“Venda ndi la hashu” (“Venda is ours”): Celebrating independence

Patriotic songs were not restricted to *tshigombela* (see Part One). Mukhethoni (1992:13) remarks that “Almost everyone sung about Venda’s independence after 1979”. Personal songs performed around the declaration of independence reveal an aspect of nationalism not obviously evident in communal dance. These songs often were performed in reaction to colonialism and apartheid. While independence was to bring misery and turmoil, it initially was perceived as an escape from apartheid:

<i>Ro tambula ro zwi pfa.</i>	We are tired of oppression.
<i>Namusi ro wana ndila</i>	Today we have found a way
<i>ya u ri bvisa vhupulimi.</i>	to free us from subjection.
<i>Shango lashu ri do li lwela.</i>	We will fight for our country.
<i>Ra lamulela vkhokhosi ashu.</i>	We will free our fathers.

This song was performed by guitarist Samuel Ramufhi of Nzhelele after independence.²⁵ The “way” (*ndila*, road) in line two refers to independence, and “our country” is Venda. Guitarist Mashudu Mulaudzi of Tsianda similarly sang that Venda was “an ugly land” before 1979. “There was no President. We were ruled by S.A.” (Mbedzi 1990:5).

²⁵ Mr A.N. Tsanwani, University of Venda, 14 August 1991.

As in *tshigombela*, individual musicians put their faith in traditional leaders. They praised progress and development, and expressed hope for a promising future:

Nya-ndaa! Vhona madembe.

Venda ndi la hashu.

Nne ndi takala ndo ya Nzhelele.

Hu pfi ndi lone la mulalo.

A li dzheni, mani: tshivhi, mani.

Lo itwa nga nnyiha?

Nda ri, ndi murena

Ramabulana-Thovhela.

Na mu A.A. Tshivhase.

Lo vhuya ndi la hashu.

Venda ili.

Greetings! Come and see wonders.²⁶

Venda is ours.²⁷

I am happy when I am at Nzhelele.²⁸

It is said it is a place of peace.

It does not enter, man: sin, man.

Who developed the place?

I said, it is the honourable chief Ramabulana.²⁹

And A.A. Tshivhase.³⁰

It came back to us.

Our Venda.

Venda lo wana mbofholo.

Ri vho toda mushumo Gambani.

Hono fhatiwa dorobo.

Na dzifeme dzo dala.

Dzihodela dzo dala.

Hu liwa Khamuthakhi.

Venda is independent.³¹

We now look for work at Sibasa.

A town has been built.

There are many businesses.

There are many hotels.

People eat Kentucky [chicken].

Madombidzha u thomani lo

vha li shango li shayaho.

Fhedzi zwino dziposo,

midagasi, mavhengele zwihone.

Vhathu vho takala ngauri

tshifhinga tsho swika, tsho shanduka.

Vhathu vha hone vha vho renga

henefha hayani.

Hu na mvelephanda, mvelephanda.

Madombidzha used to be a poor village.³²

Now there are post offices, electricity and shops.

People are happy because the time of change has arrived.

People shop nearby home.

There is development,

development.

²⁶ Zither-player Petros Mabilu, Phiphidi, 7 July 1983.

²⁷ A common expression after 1979.

²⁸ Because it was the district of President Mphhephu.

²⁹ President Mphhephu.

³⁰ A minister in Mphhephu's cabinet who later was accused of ritual murder (see Koch and Ritchken 1988).

³¹ Lit. "Venda has found deliverance". From a lamellaphone song performed by 63-year old Nelson Mudau of Vhufulwi (Mukhethoni 1992:11-12).

³² Keyboard song performed by Matevhutevhu Ratombo of Madombidzha (Mutobvu 1991:1-2).

Mulaloi:³³ The misery of independence

While personal songs praised social change, they simultaneously were more outspoken against contemporary politics than any other category of song. Musicians performing at bars invoked several aspects of traditional performance culture to justify their criticism and to protect themselves against government informers in their midst. The concept of madness was commonly invoked in song to indicate that musicians were not to be held accountable for exposing injustice. Singers also invoked the religious sanctioning of their status as musical critics to protect themselves (Kruger 1999). Thus guitarist Solomon Mathase of Ngulumbi sang, "The narrator of things will not speak for himself. I am talking while God is quiet." It is in this context that guitarist George Singo of Tshapasha composed the song "Independence". This song was based on a well-known *malende* beer song in which people were urged to attend independence celebrations (Mabuda 1992:8, Kruger 1993:461). Guitarist Mashudu Mulaudzi of Tsianda referred to the Republic of Venda in his songs as *Riphambuliki ya Daka*, "Bush Republic" (Kruger 1993:246) and *Riphambuliki ya Dada*, Republic of Fools (Chawane 1993:6), while ridiculing its political leaders and police force.

Ri yo tangana ngei

Pondo Maria.³⁴

Ndi vhudivhusi na vhudilangi.

Phelekedzi dzi do vha mapfene.

Ahee, rine ri a tuwa.

We are going to meet at the
Independence Stadium.

It is independence and self-government.

Baboons will attend the celebrations.

Alas, we are leaving [the celebrations].

Bow player Elias Ndou from the Thengwe district composed a song during the early 1980s in which he urged the government to share the head of the elephant (Kruger 1986:119). This song used an elephant hunt as metaphor for the achieving of independence, and of the sharing of national resources. Some years later, when it became clear that there was to be little sharing, Ndou added a line to his song indicating that people like himself had been defeated by the head of the elephant, i.e. the government (Raluswina 1990:1).

Conditions of poverty which constituted the hotbed of political discontent in the 1980s were addressed extensively in personal songs. These songs dealt with drought,

³³ An expression coined by guitarist Solomon Mathase of Ngulumbi (Kruger 1993:108). The term is derived from the word *mulalo* (peace) and *muloi* (witch). It refers to the absence of peace because of witchcraft.

³⁴ The independence stadium in Thohoyandou was popularly referred to as *Pondo Maria* because it is situated on the road leading to Punda Maria camp in the Kruger National Park. The term *Pondo Maria* thus has remained synonymous with political celebration:

Rine ri a tuwa.

Ri do tangana Pondo Maria.

Ri a tangana na Vho-Mandela.

Vho-Mandela ri a vha funa.

Vho ri lwela kha zwinzhi.

We are going.

We are going to meet at the Independence Stadium.

We are going to meet Mr Mandela.

We love Mr Mandela.

He fought for many things.

joblessness, low wages, corruption, and family conflict, adultery and mental anguish as a result of poverty.

Gomelelo lo swika fhano Venda.
Na mugayo nanwaha a ri u vho.
Hu vho liwa mushidzhi
na vhurotho.
Hu vho lilwa zwithu zwothe.
Na kholomo nanwaha
dzi khou lovha.
Na dzingwena nanwaha dzi
khou shengela.
Hezwi zwithu zwi pfisa vhusiwana.
Rabelani Mudzimu a ri thuse.

Drought has arrived here in
 Venda.³⁵
 We have no maize this year,
 only blackjacks³⁶ and bread.
 People are crying for
 everything.
 Cattle are dying this year.
 Crocodiles are suffering
 this year.
 These things show poverty.
 Pray to God for help.

However, poverty mostly was ascribed to corruption and nepotism. Hence one of the most popular beer songs of the 1980s complained:

Ndi lila ndi ndothe.
Shango lo fhela.
Vho-Nkheteni
vho wana mushumo.
Vha vho tou tonga.
Mbilu i a vhavha.
I tou tundula Wanda.

I am alone and crying.
 The country is perishing.
 Elected representatives³⁷
 have found work.
 Now they are swanking.
 My heart aches.
 Wanda Furnishers are repossessing.

Netshilema (1990:10) notes that:

This song criticises elected candidates who have attained their position through public votes and do not fulfil their promise of providing the best to people who voted for them. These candidates are accused of corruption and bribery. They seem to be selfish while people are without employment. Their furniture is repossessed and starvation is rife.

This view is supported in a guitar song by Nkheteni Nndwamato of Mukumbani who, as a casual labourer in local state forest, earned R150 a month in 1993 (Takalani 1993:19):

Tshikalo tsho gonya.
Mushumo a hunu.
Muvhuso a u hiri.
Tshidivhano tshone.
Ri shuwa nga matanda.
Ro padziswa hothe-hothe.

Salaries are being raised
 but there are no jobs.
 The government does not hire.
 Nepotism rules.
 We are suffering in the forest.
 We are marking pines all over.³⁸

³⁵ Lamellaphone song performed by 67-year-old Thomas Mathada of Tshiulungoma (Rambau 1992:7).

³⁶ An edible plant.

³⁷ Referring to contested parliamentary seats.

³⁸ In preparation for felling.

Many songs composed after the military coup indicated that Ramushwana and Mandela would help people to get jobs and become wealthy:

<i>Ro takala zwino ngauri</i>	We are rejoicing now because
<i>Vho-Mandela vho vhuya.</i>	Mr Mandela has returned. ³⁹
<i>Mandela o fariwa a shedza</i>	Mandela was jailed.
<i>minwaha ya 27 a tshi khou</i>	For 27 years he fought for
<i>lwela nne.</i>	our freedom.
<i>Uri ri wane tshelede.</i>	So that we can get money.
<i>Ngauri ro zwisiwana.</i>	Because we are poor.
<i>Ro khou toda u fana na Mavhuru.</i>	We want to be like the Boers.
<i>Rine ri khou tuwa na Ramushwana.</i>	We are going with Ramushwana.

Additional themes addressed emotionally in beer and personal songs are those of witchcraft and ritual murder. Whereas ritual murder involves human sacrifice (see Part One), witchcraft relates to personal misfortune thought to be caused by persons in the community. The frequency of witchcraft incidents increases during times of social turmoil. The few years after the un-banning of liberation movements in 1990 and the military coup in Venda saw an upsurge in witchcraft cases, and the majority of homicide cases were attributed to witch killings. Witch killings mostly were perpetrated by youths on older people. So a group of elderly people sang in a beer song:

<i>Mandela o vhuya.</i>	Mandela has returned. ⁴⁰
<i>Munna o tuwa ndi kale.</i>	The man was gone for long.
<i>Ri do la u vhavha nga vhatukana.</i>	Boys will make us suffer.

One of the most notorious witch hunt cases concerned the assault and burning of nine elderly people at the village of Folovhodwe during March 1990. It has been suggested that these witchcraft killings were part of a revolt by unemployed, militant young people “against a society that is no longer able to support them” (Van Niekerk 1990:7). Accusations were made that inexperienced youths were exploited by ambitious individuals who recognised an opportunity to eliminate political opponents through uncontrolled witch hunts which eschewed the services of recognised witch doctors.

In any case, witch hunts had become a means whereby young people could mobilise themselves politically. Older people not only symbolised authority, but as pensioners in poverty stricken communities they were the centre of webs of social tension. Hence they had become readily available scapegoats unable to defend themselves against youths attempting to rid their community of all evil. One of the most vivid descriptions of a witchcraft related incident appeared in a song by guitarist Mawela Nthabalala (Phalanndwa 1994:2):

³⁹ Beer song performed by the Hamutsha Women’s Stokfel Club in 1992 (Mulaudzi 1992:3).

⁴⁰ Performed by a group of singers at Mapate on 29 July 1990 (Netshiungani 1990:4).

Zwa hoyu nwaha wa 1990
zwi pfisa vhutungu.
Tshi bva tshe nda bebwa
a thi a thu u zwi vhona.
Shangoni hu a fiwa.
Rine ro vhona mboni.
Zwitukana zwituku zwa
mudzavhaladzo uyo wa hone.
Zwikegulu zwo gwadzha.
Ri amba vhomagogo na
vhuloi havho.
Shangoni hu a fiwa.
Ndi tamba khavha.
Ndi tamba na mbado.
Ndi tamba lufhanga.
Rine ri vhona mboni
kha lino shango.
Lushaka lu a fhedzana.
Mivhuso i a lovha.
Ndi humbula linwe duvha
tshinwe tshiwo tsho da tsha
itea Hanthabalala.
Zwikegulu zwiraru zwe zwa
shavha Tshiendeulu nga
matambandou.
Zwo shavhela musanda ha
Vho-Namadzavho.
Ndau vhakoma!
Rine ro da u pota.
Vhakoma vha tshi ya u
vhisa tshiwo musanda.
I kha di diambusa.
Zwikegulu zwa ri, ndi
khwine ri tou shavha ri
yo pota Tshitale.
Zwi tshi swika fhala seli
Hamagobo, khathikho
vhomaxhani zwo vha vhona.
Zwa mbo di vha thivha.
Zwa dzhenisa muedzini.
Vha tshi ita vha tshi rahiwa.
Hu tshi pfi viva.
Na mabuto a tshi wa.
Zwi pfisa vhutungu.

What happened in 1990
 is really painful.
 I had never seen
 anything like this.
 People were dying.
 We are seeing strange things.
 Small boys are
 protesting.
 Old women are frightened.
 We are referring to grand-
 mothers and their witchcraft.
 People were dying.
 I am playing with a knife.
 I am playing with an axe.
 I am playing with a panga.
 We are seeing strange things
 in this country.
 The nation is being destroyed.
 Leadership is collapsing.
 I remember a certain day
 when something happened at
 Nthabalala.
 Three old women fled from
 Tshiendeulu early in the
 morning.
 They fled to the home of
 headman Namadzavho.
 Greetings noble one!
 We want to report a case.
 The headman referred the case
 to the chief.
 The chief was taking a bath.
 The old women said, it is
 better to run and report the
 case to the Tshitale police.
 They were about to arrive at
 Magobo when the boys saw them.
 The boys cut them off
 into a valley.
 They were kicked and
 told to shout viva.
 Their possessions were
 scattered.
 It was painful.

*Zwikegulu zwo gwadzho.
Zwi tshi tetemela.
Zwa vhudziswa mbudziso nga
muthihi u zwiambe vhuloi hazwo.
Nga helo duvha mapholisa vho
thusa.
Vhomaxhani zwa shavha.
Zwa vhudza vhakegulu, a si
uri no ponya ri kha di do
ni wana nga linwe duvha.
Ndi amba mma: kha rali vha
tshi lowa.
Vhuloi vha vhu litshe.
Ndi nsa pfa vhutungu vha
tshi fhiswa ndi tshi khou zwi vhona.
Lushaka lu a fhedzana.
A hu tshe na pfano kha uno shango.*

The old women trembled
with fear.
They were questioned one
by one about their witchcraft.
The police came to their
rescue on that day.
The boys ran away.
They said to the old women,
you have not escaped, we will
find you one day.
I am talking to my mother:
you also practise witchcraft.
Stop your witchcraft.
I will feel heartbroken
when seeing you burned.
The nation is being destroyed.
There is no peace in this land.

***Ravele o kwasha khali (Ravele broke the clay pot):*⁴¹ The coup and after**

Beer songs and personal songs which emerged after the 1990 military coup give a good indication of the popular perceptions of political change. Although freedom of speech in musical performance was an aspect of traditional culture, the oppressive regime of the 1980s did have an inhibiting effect on free speech.⁴² The political atmosphere became more relaxed after the coup, and people could reflect freely on the momentous political events of the previous three years. These events were the death of Mphhephu, his succession by Ravele, the military coup, the release of Mandela and the un-banning of liberation movements. The military coup and the prospect of reincorporation into South Africa often were mentioned in song. These themes became intertwined with the political theme dominating post-coup songs, namely that of the unpopularity of the Ravele regime:

*Nanwaha ro vhona dambi.
Zwa mivhuso itshi nutshelana.
Bulupeni dzo vhwewa fhasi.*

This year we saw a miracle.⁴³
The government was overthrown.
Ballpoints were put down.⁴⁴

⁴¹ The title of a song by guitarist Solomon Mathase of Ngulumbi, referring to Ravele's inept leadership.

⁴² The following song about ritual murder by Dan Tshanda was banned from Radio Thohoyandou in 1989 (Mabale 1992:25):

*Zwi a konda vhone hano maduvha.
Ri tshila nga u shavha sa dziphuka.
A ri tsha kona na u dala vhusiku.
Nga uri fhano vha ya via.
Na hone rine ro vha vhone.*

Things are hard these days.
We are living in fear like wild animals.
We cannot visit at night.
Because ritual murder takes place here.
But we have seen them.

⁴³ A lamellaphone song by Mr J.K. Mathoho of Tshiombo (Ravuhali 1990:1).

⁴⁴ Referring to the national strike accompanying the coup.

<i>Khabinethe itshi shakuliswa.</i>	The cabinet was chased away.
<i>Phalamenndeni ho bva buli.</i>	There was a hole in the parliament. ⁴⁵
<i>Vuhosi vho tou vhlata.</i>	Traditional rulers were rejected because they were
<i>Vho vhu lata nga u toda mali.</i>	greedy.
<i>Vuhosi a vhu tou rengwa.</i>	Chieftainship cannot be bought.
<i>Afrika Tshipembe liswa.</i>	The new South Africa
<i>Helo shango li toda pfunzo.</i>	needs education. ⁴⁶

Line eight (“Chieftainship cannot be bought”) refers to the rise to power of Frank Ravele. Ravele was Patrick Mphephu’s cousin, and a headman (*gota*) under Mphephu’s jurisdiction. He became councillor in charge of Education and Culture when Venda assumed self-governing status. After independence he was appointed minister of Economic Affairs and Tourism. In 1989 Ravele became one of four councillors (*magota*) who were elevated to the position of chief. This political elevation was regarded widely as illegal. Mrs Nyadenga Nemavhulani of Tshimbupfe remarked, “Mr Ravele is jealous and has no royal blood. Whatever he attempted to do ended up in failure” (Mathekga 1994:25). People also suspected Ravele of complicity in Mphephu’s death. Mphephu’s death in 1988 was attributed to sudden illness. However, the exact circumstances of his death were shrouded in mystery, adding to the suspicion that he was assassinated. Most illegal royal successions are attributed to greed.⁴⁷ Just prior to the coup Ravele travelled to Taiwan on a state visit. Rumours circulated that he had fled Venda, and well-known bow player Thanyani Mundalamo sang:⁴⁸

<i>Vho tuwa shano Dzanani.</i>	He left Dzanani.
<i>Vha gidima nga fulaimatshini.</i>	He rushed away by plane.
<i>Vha yo fariwa Vhembe.</i>	He was caught at the Limpopo river
<i>Vha tshi khou ya na shango.</i>	while trying to abscond with
<i>Vho tswa tshikwama tsha muvhuso.</i>	stolen government money.
<i>Vho-Ravele, ndi ri, vhuurotho</i>	I say, Mr Ravele, bread
<i>ho shufsha mulomoni.</i>	flew out of your mouth.
<i>Vhonani, zwino ndi khou tambula.</i>	Look, you are now suffering.
<i>Ndo ni vhudza, farani</i>	I told you to handle the
<i>matshudeni zwavhudi.</i>	students carefully. ⁴⁹
<i>Fhedzi a no ngo pfa.</i>	But you did not listen.

⁴⁵ A metaphor suggesting the collapsing of the government. This metaphor may be derived from the bombing of the Sibasa police station around independence by people opposed to the VNP regime.

⁴⁶ Meaning that wealth cannot be bought. It must be obtained through education.

⁴⁷ The same kind of accusation that was levelled against Ravele was made against Shavhani Tshivhase in his contest with Kennedy Tshivhase for the powerful Tshivhase chieftainship during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

⁴⁸ Netshitangani 1990:10, Mantshimuli 1992:4. Also see Kruger 1993:98-99.

⁴⁹ Referring to political protest. In 1989 Ravele had remarked in parliament of local youths that they were “associating themselves with the aims and objectives of the radical and subversive organisations operating under the ANC/UDF umbrella” (Heroldt and Dombo 1992:86).

*Vhonani, zwino shango a
litsha vhusea.*

*No vhulaha na Vho-Mphephu
nga ndavha ya tshelede.
Zwino ni khou tambula.*

Look, this country
now is ungovernable.
You killed Mr Mphephu
for money.
Now you are suffering.

By contrast, Gabriel Ramushwana was praised for taking over the government, instituting certain social reforms (such as streamlining the payment of old age pensions) and managing a relatively trouble-free reincorporation of Venda into South Africa:

*Vhavenda ri a diphina.
Hu vhusa Gabriel,
murunwa Gabriel.
Vhudzani Gabriel:
a thole khomishinia
i tode zwa vhuada,
tshidivhano na u via.*

The Venda people are rejoicing.⁵⁰
Gabriel is ruling,
angel Gabriel.
Instruct Gabriel to establish
a commission of enquiry
into corruption, nepotism,
and ritual murder.

*Vho-Ravele, vuhosi havho
ho shelela ngafhi?
Vuhosi havho ha u rengwa
ho dzhiwa nga Ramushwana.
Mahosi a sudzulusana tshi
dzhena munwe hu bva munwe.
Ramushwana ho ngo renga.
Na ene hango dzhena.
tshothe o u dzudzanya zwinwe.
A humusisele hune wa bva
hone ha tshothe.*

Mr Ravele, where did your
chieftainship end?⁵¹
The chieftainship you bought
has been taken by Ramushwana.
Chiefs replace one another:
when one enters another leaves.
Ramushwana did not buy his
position.
He just wants to fix things.
To return to the way things
used to be.

However, Ramushwana too could not escape public criticism. Mrs Tshinakao Musie of Ngovhela remarked in a beer song:

*Ramushwana ndi nzhingwa.
A mbo dzhia shango lo
rembuluwa.
Nne ndi do fa nda
bwehwa nga vhatukana.
Vho-Mphephu vho tuwa.
Mahosi vho shavha
nga zwiendedzi.*

Ramushwana is wealthy.⁵²
He took over the
government.
I will die and be
buried by boys.⁵³
Mr Mphephu has died.
Chiefs have deserted in
their cars.

⁵⁰ Lamellaphone song by J.K. Mathoho of Tshiombo (Mavhungu 1990:20, Ravhuhali 1990:5).

⁵¹ From a song by guitarist Ratshivhadelo Mbedzi of Tshaanda (Khwekhwe 1992:8).

⁵² Performed at a stokfel meeting on 3 July 1993 (Nephawe 1993:6).

⁵³ A typical remark made by older people when accused of witchcraft by young people.

The Venda government payed out civil service pensions subsequent to the military coup because it feared being short changed when joining the South African civil service pension fund. Venda reverberated with gossip and ill-feelings when certain government officials received what was rumoured to be excessive payouts. Guitarist Mmbengeni Sivhugwana of Ngulumbi attributed this situation to Ramushwana's "inexperience in government and chiefly justice" (Kruger 1993:119), while witnesses at a Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearing implicated him in cases of police brutality (Siebane 1996:3) Thus the Khubvi Cultural Club (see Part One) sang in a beer song performance during 1990 that:

Ravele u do la u vhavha.
Yowee, Ramushwana!

Ravele will struggle to survive.
Hey Ramushwana!

Netshiomvani (1990:4) remarks of this song that:

It is mocking. It says Mr Ramushwana, you should follow your friend Mr Ravele. They were saying that what Mr Ramushwana is trying to do is just a waste of effort. This country is ungovernable, so it will be better for people to go back to South Africa.

Conclusion

The purpose of this Venda musical history has been to re-emphasise that the study of musical thought can make a contribution to social analysis, thus paving the way for cultural policy in education and other areas. While the state of emotion aroused in Venda musical performances may give rise to subsequent aggressive social confrontation, performances themselves seldom if ever are violent. This distinction from other kinds of social behaviour points to musical thought as an adaptive cultural pattern essential for peaceful social evolution. The application of musical thought as an integral part of culture confronts people with social reality. Through musical thought they come to have a better understanding of their society, and even actively shape it.

I point out elsewhere (Kruger 2000:92) that music and drama usually is regarded as an aspect of human "aesthetic" experience not related to the issues of everyday life. Musical thought in South Africa often is neglected to the point where it is under-utilised and even unrecognised as a cultural resource. This Venda musical history shows that musical thought is effective as a cultural resource in societies in which musical performance is an integral aspect of everyday life, it has a critical social function, and education through music is a social objective.

Venda communal musical performance is a clear expression of shared social characteristics and ideals, and hence is a setting for social formation. The meaning of Venda communal dance as symbol of social stratification became more evident after the unbanning of liberation movements in 1990 and the subsequent military coup. While the political divisions underlying emergent dance formations in fact were present before the events of 1990, they were not as clearly evident. The political arena previously was characterised by oppression, and free speech was impeded.

In Venda, as in the rest of South Africa, the history of musical thought has also been the history of economic and political relations. Changing relations of production have been reinforced by changes in dance performance practice which have involved rural women and young people as a political resource. This changing performance practice promoted the reassignment of traditional social roles, and the political restructuring of Venda society in which formal decision making usually was the prerogative of adult males. Response to changes in the organisation of dance reveals varying degrees of initial disapproval. However, these changes in fact became accepted as part of a wider process of constant adjustment to a changing social environment: creativity in musical thought is the rule rather than the exception.

Of all the categories of traditional communal music, *tshigombela* perhaps played the most important role in recent Venda political history. *Tshigombela* became more important because its performance practice was best suited to political needs. Blacking is correct in remarking that “the future of dance in Venda cannot be separated from the political values that are given to different styles and the political uses to which dance is put” (Blacking 1985:87). A number of factors made *tshigombela* useful for the cultivation of political loyalty. First, it had come to surpass *tshikona* in terms of performance frequency and the number of performers. Because of their involvement in home life, rural women and girls were relatively easy to mobilise in *tshigombela* performance. Second, *tshigombela* song texts not only were useful in the promotion of government ideology, but also to challenge it. Third, the texts and dramatic actions of *tshigombela* promoted political consciousness in young performers at an age not often associated with political activism.

It is clear that *tshigombela* became an integral part of the emergent social structure. It helped to define a spectrum of social groupings, and functioned in the political checks and balances of a one-party state. While communal dance performances initially mobilised large numbers of people in support of traditional power relations, traditional leaders did not foresee that these performances later would become a site of anti-government protest. *Tshigombela* was more than an “amusement” in this process. During the early 1980s the dance assumed characteristics of mass culture because its performance was promoted by the government. However, from the middle 1980s onwards *tshigombela* assumed increasing characteristics of popular culture, defined as autonomous efforts by local communities to express their concerns (see Coplan 1983:3).

While musical thought per se cannot topple unpopular governments, it not only mobilises large numbers of people, but it also dramatises social conflict. The Venda National Party government had revitalised traditional dance to achieve and maintain power, but they then failed to heed the musical messages generated in this process. Although *tshikona* played a role in recent Venda history, it never was used as pervasively as *tshigombela*. While *tshikona* was performed at important state functions which maintained the political status quo, it always managed to retain aspects of its traditional

base. *Tshikona* was not as directly under central government control as *tshigombela*, and functioned more prominently in the affairs of local communities. Not only was it an event with religious attributes, but its performance also involved entire communities. Most *tshikona* performances also seldom expressed explicit support for independence. This arguably was related to the fact that the dance mostly was accompanied by pipe playing, and not singing.

Notable in the recent history of power relations in Venda was the redefinition of traditional leadership and its associated cultural institutions. However, the history of Venda dance also shows that an increasing number of new social institutions which promoted aspects of traditional dance were established in the 1980s and 1990s. Older social relations expounded in dance were not irrelevant remnants of an archaic tradition for members of these associations. Musical performance in Venda still showed a drive towards the creation of supportive relationships and hence a “soundly organised humanity” (see Blacking 1976). In any case, traditional socio-political relations as an integral part of a land-based rural existence remained a reality for many people, particularly the elderly, the unschooled and the unemployed.

The fascist revitalisation of communal dance during the period of self-government and independence was typical of the magnified traditions which so often “bolster peoples embittered by subjugation or newly come to nationhood” (Lowenthal 1985:322). Blacking notes that:

People may not only deceive others; they may deceive themselves, in their reification of their body symbolism and social systems...the values of a social system that might seem adaptive in the context of a particular culture could be biologically non-adaptive...Many conflicts arise from inconsistencies between the social forces that bind human societies and man's inadequate cultural descriptions of social situations (Blacking 1977:17).

It is clear that many traditional leaders and elected officials were not equipped to deal with the demands of contemporary government, while their constituencies struggled to interpret the complexities of political change. Many of the political misconceptions of the 1970s and 1980s remained prevalent during the 1990s.

People widely regarded the revitalisation of traditional dance since the 1970s as a non-political issue. They often remarked that “the government wanted to keep its culture alive”, failing to recognise the role of cultural nationalism in the struggle for political power. Researchers in the Musical History Project (see Part One, footnote 2) often commented on the limited political knowledge of their subjects. So Raphulu (1993:13) notes in her study of a family of musicians that “the present situation of political revolution is as if it is not happening in their country. I do not think they understand what is happening.” The fact that this family was devoutly Christian was more than coincidence: many musicians remarked that it was improper for Christians to be politically active.

In the final analysis, “independent” and “unified” Venda was a hegemonic abstraction mirrored in the changing social organisation of dance. The myth of independence and unity was stimulated by apartheid ideology, the tourism industry, and the popular media. During the 1980s many people in Venda came to believe this myth in the hope that it would improve the quality of their life. Independence did stimulate local economic activity and provided a sense of continuity with the past for many. However, dance performance in fact was reflective of a fractured society, and of traditional leaders clinging to ever-diminishing vestiges of power.

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Participants in the Musical History Project, 1986-1994

Department of Anthropology, University of Venda, Thohoyandou: Chawane, T.N.; Khwekhwe, Ezekiel Z.; Mabale, G.; Mabuda, Tinny; Makhado, Eric; Mantshimuli, K.A.; Mathekga, M.M.; Mavhungu, P.S.; Mbedzi, Johanah; Mukhethoni, Justice Mphedziseni; Mukwevho, N.O.; Mulaudzi, V.P.; Mutobvu, M.E.; Nephawe, M.F.; Netshilema, T.; Netshiomvani, S.E.; Netshitangani, Kaiser N.; Netshiungani, F.P.; Phalanndwa, N.N.; Raluswinga, A.S.; Ramovha, M.L.; Rambau, M.A.; Raphulu, M.G.; Ravhuhali, L.M.; Takalani, N.E.