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-- VOL.17, NO.1, PP.14-36, 1976

JOHNSTON, THOMAS F. "SECRET RITES OF THE TSONGA..."

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SECRET RITES OF THE TSONGA GIRLS' INITIATION SCHOOL (KHOMBA)

By

THOMAS F. JOHNSTON

**ABSTRACT:** This is a cultural explanation of the secret river-rites of the Khomba initiation school in Mozambique and the Northern Transvaal, as practiced among the Tsonga. The author was unusually fortunate in gaining admittance to the school, with tape-recorder and camera, and in gaining access to hitherto unavailable anthropological material. He did this by cultivating the friendship of initiation officiants who agreed, after two years of refusal, to explain the rites observed and to divulge related information. The beliefs and values underlying the various mimes, dances, and song-routines are examined and related to the Tsonga culture as a whole. Where applicable, patterns of acculturation are pointed out, particularly those involving the neighboring Venda (to the north) and Pedi (to the south). Khomba is a didactic process, teaching the women's role as pleaser-of-the-husband, bearer-of-children, keeper-of-the-home, and tiller-of-the-soil, in that order.

The Tsonga girls' initiation school (Khomba - probably acquired from the Pedi)<sup>1</sup> serves, among other purposes, to announce a girl's marriage-eligibility and bring cattle to her father, and eventually to announce her daughter's marriage-eligibility and bring cattle to her husband. It also teaches and reinforces the social role of women as pleaser of the husband, bearer of children, keeper of the home, and tiller of the soil, in that order. It derives from the Tsonga verb ku khomba, "to menstruate for the first time," but is not strictly reserved for girls experiencing same. Girls may attend even after marriage so long as they have not co-habited: co-habitation marks the end of their eligibility for attendance.

Khomba is held annually in each village from ritlhavula ("the ripening of the maize" - May onward) to xirimo ("the time of hoeing" - October onward), and is supervised by a village elder ordinarily known as the nkulukumba ("the big one"), appointed by the Chief in return for a token beer payment known as the nlhengo (the paying of this token is called ku suma - "to render tribute"). At khomba the above mentioned elder becomes known as the mubebuli wa khomba ("carrier of the novice").

A khomba novice must "formally report the condition" (ni byela sesekuri ni kurili) to her mothers' sister (mhani lo ntsongo), whereupon she is formally issued with a special staunching cloth called the xidege. If this should happen to occur between the months of May and October, she attends when word is passed along (yisa xi tluka) and the novices assemble at a special hut called the nhanga. If it occurs between the months of November and April, she becomes eligible for attendance at the forthcoming khomba. Reasons for attendance are "to learn vubasi" ('clearness' - a term connected with Tsonga concepts of the nature of blood)<sup>2</sup> and "xinhanga" (ways of the girls' hut - including lengthening of the labia minora, a process begun before khomba).

There are certain Tsonga khomba songs which accompany ritual acts, dances, and mimes performed in seclusion. These are secret and are not heard outside the context of khomba river-rites, or khomba within the special hut. There is, however, a larger body of khomba-associated songs used during the assembly, dispatch and return of khomba, in the singing of which often a hundred pre-khomba and post-

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khomba females may participate on any one occasion. Such an occasion will be described in detail when we refer to events which took place in the Northern Transvaal village of Samarie. Seeing that assembly, dispatch, and return (greeting-back) songs may occur daily over the six months' period May to October, thus becoming known to all women and girls in the village, they may be said to constitute a significant proportion of the corporate body of Tsonga communal vocal music.

Khomba at Langutani, June 13, 1970

Langutani is only a small village, but it is centrally-located with respect to several surrounding small villages, and had been previously selected as a rallying site for the area's khomba novices, their 'schoolmothers' (vandzabi), and their attendant friends and relatives, for this year's khomba opening.

After noon, long organized lines of women and girls could be seen approaching Langutani from the north, east, south, and west. All wore calico salempores (nceka) dyed pale blue, and a soft wound headcloth (managa), also dyed pale blue. Deferential covering of the head is essential up to the point where actual rites commence. Each line was led by a headman's wife blowing an antelope horn - one long tone followed by several short ones. Words were occasionally shouted through the horn, perhaps representing what Sachs (1962:85) refers to as "the impersonification of the human voice in magical rites" (Lane (1959:30) mentions Nigerian "singing through buffalo horns").

Behind each horn-blower came a village elder known as the mbangoma, carrying an inverted drum upon her head, and behind her came, in the given order, elders, 'schoolmothers', the headman's daughter, the khomba novices, and the younger pre-khomba girls. A very young member of the latter is called mutavini or vutsongwana; when her breasts develop she is called mamayila or warinwenyani, and for the year immediately prior to khomba she is called nhwanyana, nhombela, or warixuburi. These three informally-constituted groups may participate in the khomba assembly, dispatch, and greeting, but are carefully guarded from overhearing secret songs and formulae.

The formal constitution, according to rank, of these marching lines of women is a visible and audible sign of one of the ascending chains of authority within Tsonga society, and, because the institution of khomba annually yields a number of marriages, each marching line 'moves up' from year to year in a never-ending social process.

Each approaching group of women sang Khomba Song 1 unaccompanied, asynchronously to the other approaching groups.

Khomba Song 1:

Ndzi Ya Ka Homu

Call: Mhani wa rila maseve  
Ndzi ya ka Homu

Response: Wa rila maseve

Call: Ndzi ya ka Homu na Thomo mina /

Ndzi ya Xingowe mhani /  
Mhani n' wana wa munghana ndza n'wi teka /

(Diagonal strokes indicate a repetition of the response)

I'm Travelling To Homu

Call: Mother, my friend weeps  
I'm travelling to Homu

Response: My friend weeps

Call: I'm travelling to Homu and Thomo /  
I'm travelling to Xingowe, Mother /  
Mother, I carry the friend's infant /

In the above khomba marching song, Homu, Thomo and Xingowe are all place-names, but their literal translations may have some relevance - 'cat,' 'cow,' and 'good luck,' respectively. Use of the place-name Homu, furthermore, may be related to the fact that the Tsonga term xi-homu means 'distant relationship established through bride-price.' Khomba graduation often results in the establishment of such relationships, and that the song's mention of this place-name is symbolic is supported by its reappearance in Khomba Song 6, below. The three place-names are described by Van Warmelo (1935:95) as being Tsonga areas, and their occurrence within this and other khomba songs may be associated with 'travel' or 'passage.' Participation in khomba signifies 'passage' from childhood (malembe ya kondlo a ndzi dyi, or lontswa) to womanhood (vukhomba, or yusati).

The final line - 'I carry the friend's infant' - is of special relevance to khomba, for the khomba supervisor is called 'carrier of the novice,' and one of the khomba acts mimes infant-carrying.

The drumming accompanying khomba Song 1 was performed upon the oval or goblet-shaped Tsonga drum called ndzumba, or ndzumbana for the smaller model. After the majority of the women had reached the centre of the village, one of these ndzumba drums was set down, and a number of elders gathered around it. The number of villages represented could be assessed by counting the large and conspicuous antelope horns (possessed only by khomba supervisors), the unusual array of which constituted visible and audible evidence of parallel links in the Tsonga system of musical authority.

Soon a dance-circle was formed (ku biya dada) and a song-leader (mufambisi) stepped forward. The next hour was spent singing khomba songs of the ku khana class ('joy-dancing' - used for assembly, dispatch, and greeting-back). Three of these are given below.

Khomba Song 2:

Nhwanyana Xo Managa Xi Nga Khombangi Hoza Cawo

Call: Mhane Sarah  
Response: Mhane Sarah a Xirindzini hoza cawo  
Call: Nhwanyana xo boha mpandini  
Response: Nhwanyana xo boha mpandini xi nga khombangi hoza cawo  
Call: Lembe ni fako

Response: Lembe ni fako va ta ni rilo hoza cawo  
Call: Mo tshika mo ni  
Response: Mo tshika mo ni boha mananga ni nga khombangi hoza cawo

The Girl Wore A Headcloth Before Initiation

Call: The mother of Sarah  
Response: The mother of Sarah at Xirindzini, come sing  
Call: The girl who has tied her forehead  
Response: The girl who has tied her forehead before initiation  
Call: The year of my death  
Response: The year of my death all will mourn for me  
Call: You tied for me  
Response: You tied the headcloth before I am initiated

Khomba Song 3:

He Vikhoma Bya Nyan'waka Xiyisa!

Call: Xayisa vakon'wani a ma wu welele  
Response: He vikhomba bya nyan'waka xayisa!  
Va ta khomba ro vhiki

This Year's Puberty School!

Call: In-laws are coming  
Response: This year's puberty school!  
They will only spend a week at the puberty school

Khomba Song 4:

A Nga Khombanga

Unison chorus: A nga khombanga N'wa-Xiperepere  
Wa gurumbela N'wa-Xiperepere

She Did Not Attend Puberty School

Unison chorus: She did not attend puberty school,  
Daughter-of-Xiperepere  
She shaved herself, Daughter-of-Xiperepere

In Khomba Song 3, the line "they will only spend a week at the puberty school" refers to the fact that many households cannot spare their 'domestic aide' for longer periods of time, and in Khomba Song 4, the line "she shaved herself" refers to the fact that one may learn to shave public hairs without attending khomba.

Presently, the khomba supervisor emerged from the special hut where she had been in conference with a group of old women. The dancing circle thereupon broke up and large groups of women moved over to the eastern end of the village. There they gathered around the supervisor in V-formation under a high-waving blue flag, with the tip of the V pointing east (vuxa, 'the dawn') - toward 'the light' and away from 'the darkness.' Doing this is called ku orha masana; greeting the supervisor under the flag is called mujekojeko. Three of the mabangoma (women-drummers) then squatted down and played the xisotho rhythm common to much khomba

music, thus:

<p>Two hands</p>	<p>ndzumbana, a small oval single-membraned wooden drum</p>
<p>Two hands</p>	<p>ndzumba, as above, medium-sized</p>
<p>Stick</p>	<p>ngoma, a large pot-shaped drum</p>

The khomba supervisor then performed a solo dance called xikhiringo, moving the hands up and down rhythmically toward her left side. Soon, all started toward the riverbed, leaders carrying suitcases on their heads containing straw disguises and other accoutrements. They permitted no man to accompany them.

Khomba at Samarie, June 14, 1970

Soon after sunrise, I found Chief Mutsetweni and herbalist Mahlavahlavani in conference with fifty members of the Samarie council and, being closely acquainted with the Chief's aide, Wilson Zulu, a xizambi friction-bow player under whom I had spent some weeks studying the instrument, an approach to the Chief was made and it was agreed that I could photograph khomba rites that day. There had been a death near the khomba hut, so those rites normally performed there would of necessity take place in the riverbed along with the 'water rites.'

Outside the village on a strip of flat ground called the puwa, three 'school-mothers' set up drums while the supervisor shouted 'a prayer' through her antelope horn, asking the 'gods of the bush' (swikwembu swa nhova) to 'gather firewood' (ku rhotela tihunyi). This represented "consecration" of the ground on which certain semi-secret khomba dances were to take place.

Soon, about two hundred women and girls assembled outside Samarie, forming a five-deep barrier called ntlokontloko, which effectively obscured the puwa area from men and boys in the village. A dance-team of twelve novices, after walking across to a pathway and marking off a level dance-area called the phangu, proceeded to change into uniforms. Ten dancers put on white headcloths called xifezana, and two assistant dance-leaders put on brown-check headcloths called kepisi. All donned white vests called xisokisana xo rhangisa, red underskirts called roko, brown striped skirts called nguvu, and red cloth-belts called ngixi. All held a wooden 'stage-prop' hatchet called swigwagwa in the right hand and carried a metal police-whistle strung around the neck. These uniforms and props for khomba are (so the writer was informed) currently in vogue throughout large

areas of the Northern Transvaal at the time of writing, and from Rhodesian Shona dancers Andrew Tracey (1970) recently collected almost identical wooden 'stage-prop' hatchets.

The dance-leader wore a cone shaped hat specifically to distinguish her from the novices, and led the team into a dance called nanayila ('to move slowly'), with singing of the following song by the drummers and dance-leader (but not by the dancers).

Khomba Song 5:

Swivulavula Famando

Call: Famando, swivulavula Famando  
Response: Hayi, hayi Famando  
Vulavula Famando  
Call: Wa yi vona Famando /  
Na ku famba na famba /  
Na ku cina na cina /

They Are Talking Of Famando

Call: Famando, they are talking of Famando  
Response: Hayi, hayi Famando  
They are talking of Famando  
Call: Do you see Famando /  
I can walk and walk /  
I can dance and dance /

To execute this dance the team formed a curved line which moved counter-clockwise around the drums and dance-leader. The two girls wearing brown-check-head-cloth occupied 'vanguard' and 'rearguard' positions respectively, and affixed small pink 'flags' to their hatchets. All the dancers moved parallel to the perimeter but with the trunk half-turned inward and, until-signalled to begin nanayila, merely blew rhythmic whistle-blasts as they nodded their heads in time with the drums and the singing.

The song's cycle lasted 18 quarter notes with primary accents occurring every 6 quarter notes, and at the first primary accent after the signal each member of the team lunged inward with the left foot and the hatchet-waving right hand, the upper trunk and head inclined to the left. Each hatchet was pointed toward the drums and brought sharply down with a chopping movement.

The nanayila dance consists of a pendulous swaying to and from the drums while proceeding round them, and 6 quarter notes after the inward lunge each dancer swayed outward on the right foot, lifting the left knee high so that it crossed the former. The right hand was fully extended away from the trunk, with the hatchet raised ready for the next inward lunge.

After several revolutions around the drums each dancer dropped the whistle from between her teeth and marked time on the spot by shifting weight from foot to foot. The left knee was raised higher than the right, and both hands were held facing upward at waist height, with the left palm slightly extended forward.

Soon, a dancer with many arm-bangles blew a new whistle-signal, whereupon the team, instead of facing half-inward, turned to face the direction of counter-clockwise movement. The girls then commenced a step that jangled the leg and arm bangles that some were wearing. In this step the feet were kept together, the arms were extended in front of the body at waist height with wrists together, the head was turned inward to the left, and the whistle hung loosely at the neck.

The nanayila dance completed, an elder selected a new, smaller area (xivandla) for the managa dance, and sprinkled the ground with medicine. Two girls donned brown bandoliers called mukhupula and green milala palm-leaf skirts called xidundo, and performed a dance wherein the skirts were made to 'swish.' The dancers faced each other holding a wooden hatchet in the right hand and a yellow scarf in the left. While one's wooden hatchet was raised the other's scarf was raised and vice versa, so that the audience saw a 'ping-pong' effect of raised 'colour' changing from one side of the dancers to the other, with the hip propelled skirts joining the 'colour.' The crowd, now gathered closer than before, sang the following song.

Khomba Song 6:

Ni Va Siya Ka Homu

Call: Mhane!  
Response: Bazi mayengi no nehe  
Call: Mo nehe bazi mayengi mhane /  
Ni ta famba ni va siya chiridzine le Chiawelo /  
Ni ta muka ni va siya ka Homu /  
Ku vula mina /  
A lo wawuna xi ni yengile hikunene mhane /

So That I Can Go To Homu

Call: Mother!  
Response: Just bring the bus  
Call: Just bring the bus, mother /  
So that I can go to Chiawelo and leave them behind /  
So that I can go to Homu and leave them behind /  
I am stating it /  
This man has deceived me, mother /

After the managa dance, the crowd was ordered back into the village and khomba moved to the riverbed area. At the time of writing, a special uniform for riverbed rites was prevalent throughout many areas of the Northern Transvaal, and the various items of clothing will be listed here in detail both because of their universality and because their step-by-step removal marks phases of the rites. The Langutani khomba supervisor wore a khancu (red-and-white patterned salempore), the four 'schoolmothers' each wore a xambalo and hembe outfit (white-fringed blue pleated dance-skirt with blouse), and the twelve novices each wore the following:

- 1) gumegume, navy-blue undershorts
- 2) lapi ro khwaxa, a white-towelling waist-wrap
- 3) yeleli, a 12" blue ruffled skirt
- 4) xitlakatlaka, a pale-blue salempore tied over the right shoulder
- 5) khancu, a salempore tied over the left shoulder, of the same pattern as that of the supervisor
- 6) rihlalu, strings of coloured beads



The riverbank was inspected for a convenient 'stage' or 'platform' area (khwatikhwati), and the riverbed below it then 'consecrated' with medicine. A half-circle was formed and two novices, A and B, knelt to be undressed and 'prepared' (xangula'd) by two 'schoolmothers,' while the remaining novices stood behind with hands clasped in front and heads bowed. The 'schoolmothers' then sang the following song.

Khomba Song 7:

Xangula!

Call: I mi xangu-xangu wo xangula khomba  
Response: Ayi ye xangule  
Call: Na va Makhanani va xangule /  
Na va Tsatsawani va xangule /

Prepare Her!

Call: Prepare, prepare, prepare the novice  
Response: Ayi ye prepare  
Call: Makhanani and the others are being prepared /  
Tsatsawani and the others are being prepared /

It is noteworthy that the Venda vhusha initiation school also uses similar words with similar music for the same function, during the same initial stage of the rites.<sup>3</sup>

While both novices knelt upright, novice A was stripped down to the 12" blue ruffled skirt. Above the waist only the coloured beads remained; as the 'schoolmothers' took these, novice A sang the following song.

Khomba Song 8:

Va Teka Vuhlalu Bya Mina

Call: N'wananga va teka vuhlalu by mina  
Va nyika vanuna ya vona  
Response: Hayi, huwelele n'wananga  
Call: Va teka tikhwini ta mina  
Va nyika vanhvana va vona /  
N'wananga xipitifaya xi huma enyimpini /  
Ni ta rhuma tsolo n'wananga /

They Took My Beads

Call: Child, they took my beads and  
they gave them to their boys  
Response: Hayi, huwelele, child  
Call: They took my beads and  
Gave them to their girls /  
Child, a bomber will arrive from the Congo, there is  
war /  
I will send my kneecap for protection, child /

Novice B then knelt lower while her left shoulder was bared and the red-and-white patterned salempore removed. At this point novice A folded her arms and moved up and down on haunches with feet together (ku thaga) to this song sung by the 'schoolmothers.'

Khomba Song 9:

A Va Rubeli

Call: A va rubeli  
Response: Huwelele  
Call: A va kombeli /

They Don't Beg

Call: They don't beg  
Response: Huwelele  
Call: They don't entreat /

Novice B's right shoulder was then bared and the pale-blue salempore removed. Novice A continued doing ku thaga and the 'schoolmothers' sang the following song.

Khomba Song 10:

Rila Rila Khomba

Call: Rila, rila, khomba  
Response: Hiya he  
Call: Loko 'nga rili awukhombangi /  
He xikhombana rilo! /  
Rila, rila, n'wana /

Cry, Cry, Novice

Call: Cry, cry, novice  
Response: Hiya he  
Call: If you do not cry you are not initiated /  
Little novice, cry! /  
Cry, cry, child /

The above text appears to indicate that a Tsonga novice must cry, and this is supported by Junod's (1927:177) statement that she "goes to her adoptive mother to weep near her (a rilela ka yena)."<sup>4</sup> It is noteworthy that the Venda vhusha initiation school also uses the same words, with different music, at the same stage of the rites.<sup>4</sup> During the rila rila song 'schoolmothers' pinched novice B in an endeavour to make her cry, and when they snatched off her white-towelling waist-wrap she cried. The horn was then blown, and both novices bowed their heads, folded their arms, and knelt sitting on their heels (ku putsa mavoko). The other novices stood as previously described, and the 'schoolmothers' sang the following song.

Khomba Song 11:

I Yivile

Call: I yivile

Response: Va n'wi rhuma xitolo yiva ngopfu  
Call: I yivile  
Response: Tihuku ta vanhu, ha! Mina!

She Has Stolen

Call: She has stolen  
Response: When sent to the shop, she steals much  
Call: She has stolen  
Response: Fowls of people, my goodness!

The references to begging and stealing in khomba Songs 9 and 11 do not refer to actual events, but refer to formal acts performed within the context of khomba and related to 'laws of the novices' (tumbuluku wa tikhomba).

Novices A and B maintained their bowed, kneeling position while the horn was blown again and a 'schoolmother' stepped forward and demanded the names of their 'boy-friends.' The novices were each required to give, not the name of their real boy-friend, but the name of a male infant of the village, this rite being known as ku ganga xifanyatani a khombeni. Novice A then sang the following song, in which she volunteered the name 'David.'

Khomba Song 12:

Ni Deviti Wa Manana

Solo: Wa manana, i Kiyasi wa manana  
Ni ku yini?  
Ni Deviti wa manana

It Is David Of My Mother

Solo: Oh mother, it is Kiyasi of my mother  
What should I say?  
It is David of my mother

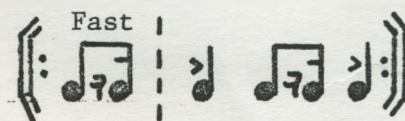
It was now mid-morning, all rites which belong exclusively to the opening day of khomba had been completed, and the novices' ritual condition was now known as tyambu-tyambu ('naked as a new-born infant'). Rites between tyambu-tyambu and coming-out are daily rites of the khomba puberty school. They were performed at mid-morning on this day at Samarie, and are as follows.

The supervisor took a spherical lump of reddish-orange clay, the size of a tennis-ball, and smeared a novice from head to toe with faint orange-coloured stripes (vatola ntshumani). Of Pedi initiation it is known that girls are "smeared from head to foot with red ochre",<sup>5</sup> and of Zulu initiation that girls "paint themselves red and white."<sup>6</sup>

The ochre-smeared novice then laid curled up upon a milala palm-leaf mat which had been spread out, the position being called ku losa (among the Luvedu losa occurs in the boys' circumcision school).<sup>7</sup> The Tsonga greet a superior with the spoken phrase hi losile, so ku losa can be taken to mean 'humble one's self.' It involves lying on the left side with feet together, knees half-drawn up, head down, eyes closed, fingers touching the palms but not clenched, and knuckles pressed to the

forehead.

While the novice losa'd, the supervisor wound several strings of brightly coloured beads around the waist of another novice, and led her to the drum. The girl played the following rhythm known to khomba drummers as nyanyula (working-up excitement), and the schoolmothers sang the following song.



Khomba Song 13:

Mavala!

Call: Ria rona ria rona mpidi mavala  
Response: I-i-i-i-i-i

Colour!

Call: Ria rona ria rona mpidi colour  
Response: I-i-i-i-i-i

The Tsonga word mavala means 'colour,' and the novices claimed not to understand the other words. It is noteworthy that the Venda vhusha initiation school also uses the same words, but with different music. Blacking's (1969:12) translation is given below.

Call: We are smearing ash  
Chorus: We are smearing on the zebra's stripes

After the ochre-smearred novice had losa'd, 'schoolmothers' threw down (or 'planted') handfuls of small twigs across the mat and ordered her to pick them up while hopping. As she did this the following song was sung.

Khomba Song 14:

Doba, Doba

Call: Hayi dombe  
Response: Hiya tlakula hiya  
Call: I mi dobi dobi wa ndzi komba /  
Mbeku-mbeku /

Pick Up, Pick Up

Call: Hayi, pick up  
Response: You there, lift  
Call: Pick up, pick up, she shows me /  
Walk about much /

The above song and its accompanying action symbolize a woman's agricultural or home-keeping duties, such as planting seeds or gathering firewood. The Venda vhusha initiation school uses the same words, with different music, at the same stage of the rites.<sup>8</sup>

After doba doba had been sung the drum was removed to another spot and the

novices formed a half-circle next to it, sitting on their haunches with arms crossed but not folded. Two novices were brought forward and told to rhwala tingoma, which, translated literally, means 'to carry the ceremonial drums' or 'to carry the ritual acts.' Tsonga ritual acts (with the sole exception of circumcision) are usually accompanied by the playing of drums, and both the drums and the ritual acts are known as tingoma.

Each girl put her right-hand fingers behind her back and up to meet the fingers of the left hand over the left shoulder, the tips just meeting, and keeping them thus, she moved from squatting to upright position, facing her partner who was doing likewise. The 'schoolmothers' meanwhile sang the following song.

Khomba Song 15:

Lunyo, Lunya

Call: Lunyo, lunya  
Response: Ha Mavulayis'

Cheek, Cheek

Call: Cheek, cheek  
Response: Will cause your death

Cuénod (1967:88) translates lunya as 'incorrigibility,' and the song instructs the novice that she must obey her future husband. The Venda vhusha initiation school uses the same words, with different music, at approximately the same stage of the rites.<sup>9</sup>

The drum was now moved to the centre of the riverbed, and the twelve novices crawled from one riverbank to the other and back, keeping their heads down and singing the following song.

Khomba Song 16:

Fela Madambi

Call: Fela madambi  
Response: Yowe-e, haye-e  
Call: Ho kasa-kasa-sani /

Snuff That Has Been Bewitched

Call: Snuff that has been bewitched  
Response: Yowe-e, haye-e  
Call: Crawl ye about /

The above reference to 'snuff that has been bewitched' instructs that a woman should not accept snuff from a stranger - the latter may be a 'bewitcher.'

Khomba Song 17 accompanies an action performed on hands and knees (ku qaqqa) by the novices one behind the other, lobbing the neck and head left and right to the following song sung by all.

Khomba Song 17:

Wa Yi Vona Ngwenya

Call: Wa yi vona na wa yi vona  
Ngwenya nkelenga  
Response: as above  
Call: Yi mitile vanhu ngwenya /

You See The Crocodile

Call: You see it, you see it  
The crocodile  
Response: As above  
Call: That crocodile has devoured people /

The above song warns women to approach a crocodile-infested river with caution, for the drawing of water and the washing of clothes there can prove dangerous.

At noon the milala palm-leaf mat was again laid out in the riverbed and the drum set up alongside it. There commenced an action called khoma loko yi vuya e ku petiweni loko yi huma, wherein each novice grasped the hips of the girl in front of her tightly with both hands, keeping the head down against her back. Khoma means 'to grasp,' and huma means 'to come out,' and 'schoolmothers' stated that the action simulated birth-delivery. The following song was meanwhile sung by the 'schoolmothers.'

Khomba Song 18:

Ku Tswala Hi Vambirhi!

Call: He mhane ndzi na khombo  
Response: Ndzi na khombo!  
Call: A ku tswala hi vambirhi /  
Solo shout: Sikayi xikwembu

To Conceive Twins!

Call: Mother, what misfortune befalls me  
Response: What misfortune!  
Call: To conceive twins! /  
Solo shout: 'Tis the decree of the gods

While the action simulates birth-delivery, the song laments the birth of twins, which is regarded as a misfortune by the Tsonga. With the ochre-smearred novice again in quasi-foetal position upon the mat, the supervisor sang the following song and the novices moved forward once more.

Khomba Song 19:

Ndza Bela Mina Mama!

Solo: N' wa-Maxasani ma huwelele  
Lili xinga sise  
Nana xinga sise

Joyce xinga sise  
Johanna xinga sise  
Ni ta nghena ka va mhani  
N'wa-Miswazi i mhane  
Hlengani xinga bava  
Ni ta vula vahahani  
N'wa-Xixawuli i hahani  
Ni ku lan'wisa i mhani xi ngani  
Ndza bela mina mama yilo!

Suck As A Baby!

Solo: Child-of-Maxasani huwelele  
Lily is a sister  
Nana is a sister  
Joyce is a sister  
Johanna is a sister  
Enter, mother  
Child-of-Miswazi, mother  
Antelope the father  
To say and fly  
Child-of-Xixawuli, to fly and  
To lose patience. How many times  
To suck as a baby!

With the ochre-smearing novice still on the mat and the file of stooped novices still circling, the supervisor and the 'schoolmothers' sang the following song in 'organum' style.

Khomba Song 20:

Hiya Cinela N'wana

Chorus: He ndhuma! Bombisa n'wana  
Hiya cinela n'wana

We Are Dancing For The Child

Chorus: We celebrate! Dress the child  
We are dancing for the child

For the next miming action the supervisor sent each girl off to find a stick of about an arm's length, this errand being known as xidzingedzinge. Upon their return they formed a single file along the riverbed and held the stick to the ground like a walking-stick. The left hand was placed on the rear of the left hip, the trunk was half-stooped forward, and the 'walking-stick,' although held in the right hand, was placed to the left side of the body. In this position the file moved forward to the following song, sung by the 'schoolmothers.'

Khomba Song 21:

Ndzi Ku Swa Ririsa

Call: Ndzi ku swa ririsa n'wina

Response: Hikunene n'wana mhani swa ririsa  
Call: Me ndzi khumbula Ndaheni n'wana mhani /  
Ndzi ku Ndahen-ndaheni n'wana mhani /

It Is Lamentable

Call: It is lamentable, you  
Response: Honestly, my mother's child, it is lamentable  
Call: I think of Ndaheni my mother's child /  
It is Ndahena-ndaheni my mother's child /

For the next action, called xipesupesu, the novices mounted the 'stage' area on the bank above the riverbed, while the supervisor stood facing them holding the horn vertically high in the air. With the wide end of the horn pointed toward the sky, and the embouchure end held in the right hand, she rocked forward on her right foot and backward on her left foot, in time with the rhythm of the drum on her left. Behind her stood a girl holding a large coloured bangle in the left hand, and in front of her the novices inclined forward from the waist, extending the right foot and open right palm in a stationary pose. They sang the following song.

Khomba Song 22:

A Ni Cin' No Rengelela

Call: Kwelele, kwelele  
Haleno, N'wa-Masimanyana  
Response: Hiyo hahani kwelele N'wa-Masimanyana  
Call: Ni navela N'wa-masimanyana  
Na chava xizambe /  
A ni cin' no rengelela /

I Am Not Dancing But Singing

Call: Envy, envy  
On this side, Daughter-of-Masimanyana  
Response: Envy, Daughter-of-Masimanyana  
Call: I wish for the Daughter-of-Masimanyana  
I am afraid /  
I am not dancing but singing

As soon as the singing of the above song got underway, the girl holding the large coloured bangle in her left hand moved forward from behind the supervisor and performed a solo dance called xijimo. She transferred the bangle to her right hand, held it at shoulder height, and faced the opposite direction to that in which the novices faced. Xijimo means 'thudding,' and as the dancer's feet thudded on the ground her many leg-bangles jangled.

Junod (1927:397) states of a child's illness that "the offering consists of a bracelet . . . the priest will pour consecrated beer over it and say his prayer. The bracelet will then be fastened to the child's foot. He may not remove it, nor exchange it for anything else; it belongs to the gods." Thus the possibility that this 'bangle dance' represents a protective rite should not be overlooked.



Following the bangle dance, novices and 'schoolmothers' lined up side by side behind the drum, facing the riverbed with their hands on their heads. They performed an action called xigonya in which all moved with feet together, revolving 'on the spot.' This is called xigingi, and was accompanied by the following song.

Khomba Song 23:

N'wa-Majozi Wa Rhendzeleka

Call: N'wa-Majozi wa rhendzeleka  
Response: N'wa-Majozi wa jika-jika  
Call: N'wa-Majozi wa vona-vona /  
Solo shout: A rhendzeleka hi ya kaya Phadziri!

Child-of-Majozi Is Turning Round

Call: Child-of-Majozi is turning round  
Response: Child-of-Majozi is spinning round  
Call: Child-of-Majozi is seeing all round /  
Solo shout: Let her turn round so that we can go home to Phadziri!

For the next action the novices filed diagonally across the riverbed, each girl leaning toward the rear and reaching backward over her shoulders with both hands. This action projected the elbows forward toward the girl in front, and each girl's elbows were clasped by the backward-reaching hands of the girl in front. 'Chained' together thus, and simulating a file of escorted prisoners, the entire line of novices moved forward swaying from left to right while the 'schoolmothers' sang the following song about passbook arrests.

Khomba Song 24:

Va Ta Mi Khoma

Call: Madomupasi!  
Loko u nga teki mhane  
Response: Eya, hayi  
Call: Ni kwala timangeni ku na valungu  
Va ta mi khoma /  
Me ndzi khala N'wa-Manara /

Coming To Arrest You

Call: The passbook!  
Beware, if you do not take it, mother  
Response: Eya, hayi  
Call: The whites will get you in the groundnut field  
Coming to arrest you /  
I weep for Child-of-Manara /

The next mime was performed by three novices at a time, on the 'stage' area of the riverbank. One climbed about 12" up a tree while another struck her back once with a stick held in the right hand (ku nwi hlavela nawu wa le wambyeni hi khavi a ndza ku ka hlana), and the third did ku losa on the ground. The tree-climbing

action is known as khayeni yo werisiwa khomba, khayeni meaning 'to pluck fruit' and khomba meaning 'novice.' In the Tsonga term referring to the stick-wielding action, nawu wa le wambyeni means 'law of the novices.' That the tree-climber was being taught a 'law' is supported by the fact that the calling of the following song by the stick-wielder is known as ku hlaya nawu wa le khombeni - 'to recite the law to the novice.'

Khomba Song 25:

Va Ta Dlaya Ndaheni

Call: Ha vana vela Ndaheni mhane n'wina  
Response: Va ta dlaya Ndaheni  
Call: A ri kama nhlonhlo /

They Will Kill Ndaheni

Call: Child, to carry on one's back, Ndaheni  
Response: They will kill Ndaheni  
Call: To squeeze the nhlonhlo tree /

The nhlonhlo tree is the naboom or Candelabra euphorbia (*Euphorbia cooperi* N. E. Br.), but a novice may climb any tree for the purpose, referring to it as the xipingwana, which means 'hammered-in drum-peg.'

The next action was performed by seven novices, each in turn being supported by six others. In one movement each girl was heaved up into the air and her thighs, knees and calves grabbed by the other six girls in order to retain her there. The raised girl stood erect and held in each hand a 12" stick which she raised high. Facing the supervisor and the drum, she then formed the perimeter of a circle with her arms and the two sticks. When the drumming started the raised girl 'measured' the air with the tips of the two sticks, a procedure known as to tlanga tingoma. Ku tlanga refers to elongation of the labia minora, and the girl was demonstrating her stage of elongation.

Khomba Songs 13-25 are sung daily, and by the early afternoon of the day in question they and their accompanying actions had been completed by the group. The 'schoolmothers', being aware of the spectacular nature of the mimes of the penultimate and final days, then asked the supervisor to continue into them on that same day. The supervisor decreed that this would be acceptable so long as the newer khomba arrivals did not witness them, whereupon six of the latter were sent away. A message was sent to the village, asking old women to come to the riverbed and to bring with them the necessary accoutrements.

Soon eight old women arrived carrying a sheet of stiff waxed paper, a canister of water, three 4" poles, and a suitcase. While the six remaining novices knelt low on the ground around the canister stretching the paper across its mouth, three elders each thrust a pole through the paper and 'swished' the water within to the following chant, performed by a senior 'schoolmother.'

Khomba Song 26:

Namuntlha Wa Xaxa

Solo Call: Namunthla wa xaxa

Mindzuku wa huma  
N'wana loyi wa ka Ntimane  
Huma n'wananga huma  
Khomba khomba huluhulu wena Ntimane  
Huma n'wana Johannes Ntimane  
Khomba huluhulu  
Wa xaxa n'wana  
A va ku a a nga humi

Today They Are Dancing

Solo chant: Today they are dancing  
Tomorrow she will go home  
This Daughter-of-Ntimane  
Go home, go home  
You novice Daughter-of-Ntimane  
Go home, Daughter-of-Johannes Ntimane  
You novice  
The child has danced  
They used to say she would not go home

The above formula, while chanted rather than sung by Tsonga novices, is sung in echo-style by Venda vhusha novices, "with one group of singers repeating what the others have just sung. It is for the end of vhusha, as the words suggest."<sup>10</sup>

The stretched-paper mime is called ku handzula n'wana loko a ri ndlwini, meaning 'to cut the girl (on the thigh) in the hut.' Much talking, joking, and dancing followed the water mime, and the following three songs were sung.

Khomba Song 27:

Ma Rhumbini Ya Vona Va Siye Xikhova Na Swona

Call: N'wa-Jani wa loya ma n'win' xo hlamba mahlwen'  
Response: Valoye ho mi nga ni dlayi mpela  
Call: Ma rhumbini ya vona va siye xikhova na swona /  
Ndzi mi lorhile matolo mi ndzi tshame nhlokweni /  
Aho he vabvana va xitasi mi nga ni dlayi tshambebe /

They Have Left An Owl At Their Ruins

Call: Child-of-Jani, when it sees me it washes its face  
Response: Witches, do not kill me  
Call: They have left an owl at their ruins /  
I dreamt last night of you sitting on my face /  
You of the station do not kill me /

Khomba Song 28:

Dlayani Swikhova

Call: Hayi lomvu ka valungwana  
Response: Hayi ka valungwana hayi  
Call: Hayi khomani manjenje

Response: Khomani manjenje hi ya dya xitimeleni  
Dlaya hi torha hi dya xitimeleni  
Call: Hayi lomu ta Rosie / (1st)  
Hayi dlayani swikhova / (2nd)  
Hayi lomu ka Ma-Gwamba / (1st)  
Hayi bulani tinjija / (2nd)

Kill The Owls

Call: Place of the little whites  
Response: Of the little whites  
Call: Catch the termites  
Response: Catch the termites so we'll eat  
on the train  
Call: At Rosie's place / (1st)  
Kill the owls / (2nd)  
The place of the Ma-Gwamba's / (1st)  
Catch the locusts / (2nd)

Khomba Song 29:

Magalachani Ya Van'wani

Call: Magalachani ya van'wani Sinoni  
Response: Ye-ye hayi huwelele

You The Deceivers of Others

Call: You the deceivers of others  
Response: Ye-ye hayi huwelele

Songs 27 and 28 mention the nocturnal 'owl' and Song 29 mentions 'deceivers.' These references allude to the suspected non-virginity of nocturnal women, and to the verification of novices' virginity by elders. The Tsonga say the following of a non-virgin bride:

Manyana a chati muchatu wa ku  
Chachela hi swikhova ni swisepula

She had a marriage feast  
Where the dancers were owls

Following the stretched-paper mime in some khomba schools is a datura-ingestion rite, the description of which is the subject of another article by the writer. Following this, the initiates graduate as mature women of their group, eligible for marriage and child-bearing. The occasion is marked by an extended beer-drink involving all the initiates' relatives, who bring beer, food, gifts, and clothing. The girls have 'crossed over,' and will be the 'schoolmothers' of the next khomba puberty school.

Summary of the Tsonga Khomba Didactic Process

Respect for the khomba institution and deference to the elders who acquire power by organizing it is inculcated and reinforced by the following:

- (a) hierarchical processional order during khomba dispatch
- (b) the 'tying of the forehead' phrase in Song 2
- (c) the ku losa ('self-humbling') position assumed during the singing of Song 13
- (d) the reference to 'incurrigibility' in Song 15

Social membership of good standing is emphasized by the following:

- (a) the wearing of identical marching uniforms during khomba assembly and dispatch
- (b) the use of rehearsed dance-routines during manayila and managa performances
- (c) the disapproving phrase "She did not attend khomba" of Song 4
- (d) the disapproving phrase "They will only spend a week at khomba" of Song 3

Acceptable social behavior is emphasized by the following:

- (a) Song 9's exhortation to abstain from begging
- (b) Song 14's exhortation to abstain from stealing
- (c) Song 24's exhortation to always carry one's passbook
- (d) Song 27 and 28's exhortation to retain one's virginity until after khomba

Motherhood and proper child-rearing is illustrated by means of the following:

- (a) demonstration, by use of a 'clinical model,' of breaking of the water during labor
- (b) naming the supervisor mubebuli wa khomba (carrier of the novice)
- (c) prohibition of twins in Song 18 (perhaps because they would not both fit into the carrying-sling allegorized in (b) above)
- (d) the reference to suckling babies in Song 19
- (e) the reference to dressing the child in Song 20
- (f) the reference to the crawling of babies in Song 16

Women's occupational role as homekeeper and tiller of the soil is emphasized by the following:

- (a) the planting and picking-up mime accompanying Song 14 (doba doba)
- (b) the wood-gathering mime accompanying Song 21

Fecundity, fertility, and virility are emphasized by the following:

- (a) khomba phallic symbolism
- (b) the custom of to tlanga tingoma
- (c) protection from barrenness by witchcraft by the wearing of bangles
- (d) good physique and the development of dancing skills

#### Non-didactic Musical Function

Some of the most important 'laws' of the Tsonga girls' initiation school are embodied in spoken formulae for which a special vocabulary, or secret language, must be learned. In one manner, then, the musical parts of the rites can be seen as interludes or contrasting episodes between the verbal instruction. Certainly

the observer gets the impression that the supervisor, 'schoolmothers,' and novices derive a great deal of pleasure from the musical situation, and that the songs, mimes, and dances appear in sharp contrast to the somewhat threatening non-musical ritual.

Appendix: I

Interval Preference In 80 Tsonga Khomba Songs (given here mainly for purposes of future cross-cultural comparison; see, for instance, the interval count in John Blacking's Venda Children's Songs, 1967)

Interval (Total of 1503 intervals)	<u>%</u> (approx.)
major 2nd, descending . . . . .	26
minor 3rd, descending . . . . .	19
major 2nd, ascending . . . . .	9.5
minor 3rd, ascending . . . . .	9
4th, descending . . . . .	8
5th, ascending . . . . .	6
4th, ascending . . . . .	6
major 3rd, descending . . . . .	4.5
major 3rd, ascending . . . . .	3
5th, descending . . . . .	2.5
major 6th, ascending . . . . .	2
major 7th, ascending . . . . .	1.5
minor 6th, ascending . . . . .	1
8th, ascending . . . . .	1
minor 2nd, ascending . . . . .	0.5
minor 2nd, descending . . . . .	0.5
	<hr style="width: 10%; margin-left: auto; margin-right: 0;"/> 100 %

Appendix: II

Summary of the Musical Characteristics of Puberty School Songs

A musical analysis of the performances of 80 puberty school songs revealed the following:

- (1) All exhibit preference for the intervals of the descending major 2nd, descending minor 3rd, and ascending major 2nd.
- (2) All utilize exclusively pentatonic melodic patterns.
- (3) All observe an overall pathogenic descent from an initial peak.
- (4) Most use a rhythmic accompaniment which may consist of drumming, hand-clapping, or both.
- (5) Half of the songs use either a 16-unit or an 8-unit metrical length.
- (6) All but twelve employ call-and-response alternation (seven are sung in unison chorus and five are sung solo).
- (7) All but six are monodic rather than 'harmonized.'
- (8) When a song is shared with a neighbouring Southern African culture, the

Tsonga version usually omits those passing tones which in the neighbour's version render the music heptatonic or in some way deviant. This is due to cultural selection.

- (9) When a song is shared with a neighbouring Southern African culture, parts of the song may appear to be transposed a 5th or inverted 4th lower. This is due to the principle of 'harmonic equivalence.'
- (10) When a song is shared with a neighbouring Southern African culture, the Tsonga version may appear to commence in the middle of the neighbour's version, or at its end section. This is due to 'circular' form.

Notes:

1  
". . . a characteristic rite has been preserved, or borrowed from the Sotho-Pedis, who attach great importance to it. It is called khomba . . ." (Junod, Henri, The Life of a South African Tribe, London, MacMillan & Co., 1927, Vol. I, p.177).

2  
Among the Venda, "from a woman's first menstruation to her menopause, she is regarded as ritually 'hot' and dangerous, and is always symbolized by the colour red." (Blacking, John, "Venda Girls' Initiation Schools," Part I, African Studies, Vol. XXVIII, No. 1, 1969, p. 25).

3  
Blacking, John, op. cit., p. 12.

4  
Blacking, John, op. cit., p. 12.

5  
Huskisson, Yvonne, The Social and Ceremonial Music of the Pedi. (Ph.D. Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, November, 1958), p. 207.

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8  
Blacking, John, op. cit., p. 13.

9  
Ibid.:15.

10  
Ibid.:27.

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