

XIV

DANCES

‘WHEN primitive man comes in close contact with the mysterious forces that rule his life, and when any important event is taking place in the community, he feels the need to renew the bonds of communal solidity, and it is in the dance that he is best able to do so. The total effect of the dance is to merge the individual will for the time being in that of the group, and so produce harmony and a common will. The dance is a powerful form of ceremonial which has as its function the strengthening of the tie between the group and the individual. The dance is essentially religious in origin.’

These words, which so tersely sum up the attitude of primitive mankind towards dancing and the dance, are specifically true of the Lenge and the T[opi]. In their dances can be read the idiom of the soul, for dancing is their favourite form of self-expression. The initiation rites of the women, by which they are ‘born’ into the full life of the community, are sometimes referred to as *kukina* or *kufina*, the dancing.

Dancing forms an important element in marriage rites, harvest gatherings, funeral ceremonies, and spiritualistic seances. The social life of the Lenge may be termed operatic, for they like everything to be done to the accompaniment of music and dancing. Tiny tots, hardly able to toddle, can be seen heaving their little shoulders and stamping their little bare feet, clutching dramatically a little rag of a garment, in just the same way as a lady dancer on a more civilized stage would manipulate her dancing skirt.

At the sound of the drum a little boy will immediately begin to stamp his feet rhythmically.

It must also be noted that the congregation on Sunday afternoons at evensong at Masiyeni, in the heart of Lengeland, is often a poor one, when at the harvest festival season the annual dancing contests are taking place in the chiefs’ kraals. These dances are held in honour of the spirits whose favourable influences are supposed to have produced a good harvest.

These dances, undoubtedly of very old origin, which figure so prominently in the folk-lore of Gazaland, take place in the winter, after the ground-nuts have been harvested. These contests are called

*nzumba*, *ndzau*, or *luwela*, and take place in the kraal of each petty chief or *nganakana*, who consults his ancestral spirits beforehand to find out if the dances will be successful. The finals are held in the kraal of the chief who rules all the *tinganakana* and may last a fortnight or three weeks, the contingents from the various districts competing in these.<sup>1</sup> On the last day the award (metaphorical) is given to the sib which has displayed the greatest prowess. The act of contesting is called *kupikisana fivangu*. In the year 1930, at the kraal of Σihaṭu Ḍwamusi, the people of Kondzweni were adjudged to be the best dancers for the year.

I watched the contests during some of the week-days, and could quite applaud the decision. The chief Σihaṭu took an axe and cut a gash in the tree-trunk in his kraal saying: 'Your reward is this, people of Kondzweni!' (*fivangu faywina ilefi, vaka Kondzweni*). Then the Kondzweni people danced with rejoicing, to thank for the reward of victory, and they went away singing: '*Wandzodo! Wandzodo!*' 'Victory! Victory!'

#### *Some Dancing Contests*

It may perhaps be worth while to give a short description of some of these dancing contests which I saw in 1927-8.

On passing one day by the chief's kraal at Ḍkumini (one of the Lenge sibs), I saw this dancing contest (*nzumba* or *luwela*) in full swing. I passed by gaily dressed crowds of Lenge, young men and maidens, old women and children, standing, talking, sitting, in woodland ways, or wending their ways to the sports—time four o'clock in the afternoon. Girls were puffing the little musical instrument made with a *Strychnos* shell (*figoriha* or *figoriyu*) in order to summon their companions to dance the *masessa*.<sup>2</sup> Sounds of the *mbalapala* trumpet intermingled with the trilling made by the old women between their teeth (*kuluygela*) came from the kraal. As I passed by, the *filembe* dance was beginning. Some said it was the *dibi* dance, but one of the women said it could not be the *dibi* dance, as the men are accustomed to wear lions' skins while dancing the *dibi*, whereas these wore skirts of wild cat and buck sewn together.

In the *filembe* the dancers brandished rods and staves (*nduku* and *mutfiso*), and many feathers were stuck in their hair. Some of the girls

<sup>1</sup> Cf. my paper in *Bantu Studies*, ii, 1926, pp. 265-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Masessa* = to dance with the loins—is a favourite dance for all women, married or single, at the annual contests.

climbed a tree in order to see better. The dancers, standing in a semi-circle, did a good deal of foot-work in the way of stamping, going down on one knee and stamping with the foot of the other leg. The dance was accompanied by the clapping of hands by the women, who sang a refrain, to which the men replied in singing. I did not catch the words. At this dance I saw the largest Shangaan harp (*siende*) I have ever seen. The bow must have been about eight feet long, and the gourd which acted as a sounding-box was a very large one. It was carried by a tall youth, but was taller than he.

The *filembe* is said to be allied to the *mutfongolo*.

One evening in June 1927, when preliminary practices were being carried on in the kraals for the annual contests, I saw in a kraal in Mahumaneni the *fitfobe* dance of the women. This was supposed to be a Tjopi dance originally, but had been learnt by the Lenge from their Tjopi neighbours. This dance was accompanied by two drums, a large drum resembling the *ntakula*, but much larger, and the *sidekela* drum. The large drum was first placed for some little time near a fire for the sake of the skin membrane, to make it sound better when beaten. It was then moved near the *sidekela* drum, which was hung on the forked branch of a tree. A Tjopi piano (*timbila* = *marimba*) was brought out, and the musicians began to tune up. The girls formed a procession in single file to the place near the drums where they were going to dance. Boys banged the drums and the piano with great energy, and each girl in turn took the floor (which was the sandy ground of the kraal). The dancers moved their ribs up and down like a concertina.

Some dogs gambolling in the kraal actually began to dance when they heard the music of the accompaniment, and some goats looked as though they were quite used to it all, and would very much like to dance, too, if they had not been tethered to a pole.

On July 25th, 1928, I witnessed part of one of these dancing contests in the kraal of the chief of Nteteni. It is to be noted that some of the local contests take place after the finals which have already taken place in the kraal of the premier chief. Notably this year this happened at Masiyeni and Nteteni, though both these sibs had already taken part in the finals at Nyamfujwini.

I was in a kraal at Nteteni one morning when a long line of women, girls, and children came through in single file. They were on their way to dance the *masessa* at the kraal of the *nganakana* of Nteteni, Maphamu Ntete. Some young girls were piping the *figoriba*, some had whistles, and all carried batons of white wood decorated with black rings.

We followed the procession until it came to the chief's kraal, and there we found another dance going on which had nothing to do with the contest (*nzumba*). A circle of women were sitting round clapping their hands in accompaniment to a soloist dancer, an elderly woman with red-ochred hair who was dancing the spiritualistic dance of the *Ndau gikwembu*; but this was stopped when the other band of women arrived on the scene, and lined themselves up under the trees and began to dance. The leader stood in front of the row of women, who held up their batons as if in salute. Then she exhorted them, pointing with her baton like a musical conductress, and they gave her a hearty greeting. They all then planted their batons in the sand, leaning on them with the right hand. Rising again, they all clapped their hands, and one or two gave forth the peculiar *kulungela* trilling. Two dancers stepped out into the arena, brandishing their batons, which they held aloft. They had pinned their long loin-cloths together so that they looked as if they were wearing knickers, and they wore other loose pieces of print tied round them in the usual way. The first movement was a kick-and-stamp dance. There were high kicks and resounding stamps. Sometimes two women danced alone, sometimes two others came to meet them. One young girl who trilled, and two small children, also danced a little at the side of the main performers. I was surprised to see the dancing of one little mite, hardly more than a baby, who had evidently been trained to take part in the dance. She carried a baton and occasionally turned to the main line of dancers and shook it at them like some old world dominie. She imitated perfectly the dancing of the elders. Another child, a little older, also danced well. It was evidently a dance of mothers and children.

The second movement in the *masessa* was a dance in which, first, the three children fell on the ground resting on the right arm, and moved their back limbs up and down; then three of the women did the same exercise, stamping with one foot at the same time. The musical accompaniment was the clapping of hands by the long line of women singing songs of which the *leit motif* seemed to be:

1. *Eza Dumayi, seda.*
2. *Tfuka se!*
3. *Jimi! makwāā.*

When I asked the meaning of the songs, they said they did not know.

On several days in July 1928, while the dancing contests were being

held, I visited Sihaŭu's kraal in order to watch the dancing, which was to last for a fortnight.

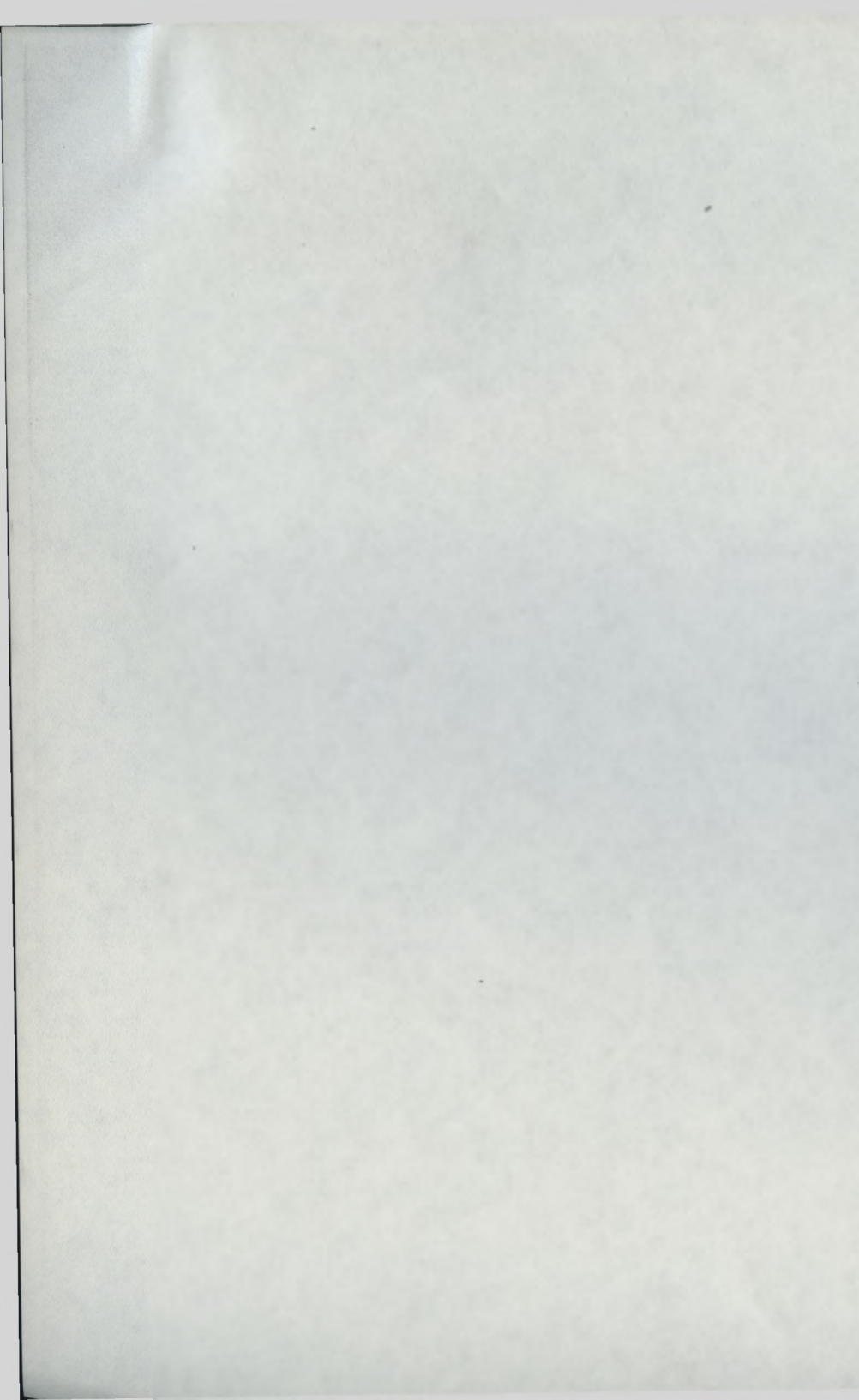
The first day I arrived I saw a very large *sikulu* drum being heated by a fire in the kraal by some men. Five boys then rolled it over till they reached the spot under the tree where it was to be placed. It was then raised a little from the ground and bound to a stout pole driven into the ground. To the left of the *sikulu* drum was another stout forked pole on which a *iluriso* drum (rather smaller than the *sikulu*) was tied, and to the left of that again was a *sidekela* drum, also on a two-forked pole or stake. A basket of drumsticks was hung on a fork of the pole which supported the *sidekela*. Then going still farther to the left were two Tjopi pianos, of the kind known as *vamalandzani*, also supported on stakes, a stake on each side of each piano. The young men who were to beat the drums and play the Tjopi pianos stood each behind his own instrument. A group of spectators, not very many (because it was a dull day), watched from opposite, the wives of the chief and other court habituées sitting in circles, and going on with their work of peeling manioc and preparing food for the evening.

After several *réveillés* (for the dancers appeared to be rather coy and unwilling to appear), a band of ten boys came dancing and prancing slowly from the hut which they had been using as a cloak-room in which to don their finery. They were going to dance the *angalangya*. They first faced the music, keeping time with their feet and then, dancing all the time, they arranged themselves as if they were going to have a tug-of-war in two lines, five on this side, five on that. They wore feathers in their hair and *mafowane* rattles on their legs, and highly coloured handkerchiefs round their heads, knotted in front. Over their loin-cloths were worn grass girdles. Most wore *mafowane* rattles on one leg, and something like a horse's tail on the other. Wriggling and jumping movements are the characteristic of the *angalangya*, especially the girdles are twirled round rapidly. The two front dancers bowed to each other occasionally. They were lined up before dancing so that the taller dancers stood in the centre. After the dance they wriggled back again to the hut, and another contingent, the Kondzweni dancers, came out, very high stepping as they advanced. These were older than the first lot and more elaborately dressed, and although they danced better the dance was the same.

Another afternoon during the same contest, when I arrived in the chief's kraal, the dancing was in full swing. There must have been at least 1,000 people there, probably many more, for they were standing



*AJGALAJGA* DANCE



in serried ranks some feet deep all round the kraal in a huge oval. Some of the girls had climbed a big tree as usual, in the centre. Even some Indians from stores in Vila de João Belo were looking on. The chief and his *tinduna* were sitting together watching the dancing. It was a very motley crowd, and a very orderly one. No one seemed to get into anybody else's way, and everybody had a good view, for the taller people withdrew themselves to the back row, and the front row were able to sit on the ground. Quite certainly I was the only person of European race present, and I was received very politely and a chair was brought from a hut for me and placed in the front row, likewise a mat for my native woman companion. The *angalanga* dance, which I had already seen, was going on; but there was a variation in it, for one or two of the chief performers gave a mimic performance of all the other known dances, both those of men and women. Even the distinctive dance of the women's initiation rites was imitated. I should think it was a clever imitation of the other dances, for the congregation applauded and seemed much amused. During the performance of the *angalanga*, occasionally one or two of the elder women would run out into the circle and encourage the dancers by trilling, and once a quite small boy danced out of the circle, right up to the chief, danced a *pas de seul* in front of him, evidently to salute him and win his applause, and returned. In a savage kind of way the scene was a brilliant one; the sunshine, the crowds of gaily dressed and good-natured onlookers; the girls looking on from the trees; the orchestra of huge drums and Tjopi pianos; the extremely graceful dancing; the brilliant splashes of colour of the women's orange, blue, and red prints, with long fringes and head-kerchiefs, and the red-ochred hair of several women, made a memorable scene, and one not often witnessed.

On two other occasions when I saw the *angalanga*, once at Ntjogweni (Chongoene) and once in Tjopiland, the dancers were wearing wild beast skins, with a girdle of tails of the civet and genet cats, apparently. The favourite dance in 1928 was undoubtedly the *angalanga* for the men, and the *masessa*, *sitfobe* and *anginya* for the women. The *sitfobe* dancers followed the *angalanga* in the dance at Sihaḥu's. They wore grass and palm petticoats over their usual *tinguvo* and carried their batons in their hands with a *figoriha* stuck on the top. The *anginya* dance I did not see. It is said to resemble the *masessa*.

### *The Timbila Dance*

I was fortunate enough to witness the great *timbila* dance at the

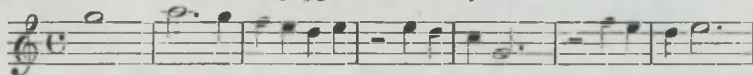


kraal of Maḷatini, the chief of Zandamela, in the height of the dancing season in 1928. The time was early in the morning, and from a neighbouring kraal could be heard the drum of the women's *ambutsa* dance. There were nineteen Tʃopi pianos of various kinds and sizes, two of which were much larger than a grand piano. They were named respectively *sikulu*, *sinzumani*, *bindagari*, *silandzani*, and *dholi*. The dancers, who were all men, wore leggings and armlets of beasts' skins, with long hair, mostly of oxen and goats. Some wore skin-aprons, and three had brightly coloured dyed ostrich plumes, and one or two a head-dress (*singundu*), decorated at one side with a coloured wool rosette from Johannesburg; one had two horns as a head-dress; one carried a black ostrich feather slung over his arm with red wool. One had a rattle made of an old tin of metal polish into which a handle was stuck. The master-of-the-ceremonies walked up and down with an imposing looking staff with a knob. All the dancers carried staves or assegais and shields. They moved their assegais over the top of their shields, as in battle, to the right and to the left as they sang. Such a stirring war-song! Two men danced in front of the instruments, one impersonating a woman, while the rank and file of dancers were lined up behind. An old woman or two trilled most shrilly to incite the warriors. Crowds of men, women, and children witnessed the *timbila* dance. A few weeks later I saw the dance repeated in a neighbouring kraal. On this occasion, while the women were watching, some children danced out to the warriors, performed a *pas de seul* and danced back again.

#### *Other Dances*

*The singombelo.* The origin of this dance is lost in the mists of antiquity. It is a moonlight-night dance for young people of both sexes.

#### *A singombelo Melody*



'It was ordained by people of old that it should be danced at night only,' said my informant. The Tʃopi, the Thonga, and Ndau all dance it. A large circle of dancers is formed in some clearing in the bush, or in a large kraal. It begins about eight o'clock and goes on until midnight or after. One performer will dance out into the ring, choose somebody who will come out and dance too, then the first performer retires, and the second chooses some one else and so on. Meanwhile, the other

dancers clap their hands (*kutſayela*) and sing topical songs. All the news of the neighbourhood can be heard in this way. Engagements are announced, petty jealousies revealed, and sometimes the dancers hear surprising news about themselves, and what the world is thinking of them generally; but they hear it with music and rhythm.

One dancer sings a solo, and the others take up the refrain:

*Yeh! Yeh! a bi bati*  
*Ndziku yavuya Nkambeni nuna wamina*  
*Dlala zakwuya*

(*Dlala* is an obsolete word for *kutlangela*, 'to rejoice'. *Nkambeni* = general term for region occupied by white people.) *Yeh! Yeh! a bi bati!* (obsolete word for *kukina* or *kutſina*, 'to dance'.)

My husband is returning from white man's land.  
 Rejoice! Let us dance!

The following resembles:

Peter Piper picked a peck of peppercorns  
 Ne'er a peck of peppercorns did Peter Piper pick.

*Singombelo sa makone, sa na hola mali!*  
*Siku sana samakone si na hola mali!*

The *singombelo* of this year, it will receive money!  
 What day of the year shall it receive money?

(*Makone* = 'this year' in Lenge.)

And again:

*Yeh! eh! eh! singombelo! ho tſava Nyamandi*  
*Eh! Eh! Eh!*

*Hi lava singombelo, aſakona ha tſava Nyamandi*

*Yeh! eh! We fear Nyamandi!*

We want the *singombelo*, but we fear Nyamandi!

(Nyamandi was a chief of the Zulus of olden days.)

*Dzakka! Dzakka! Dzakka! Dzakka! Dza! ha dlus!*

(Onomatopoeic for the sound of stamping in dancing.)

In the olden days the *singombelo* was played according to the method of dropping the handkerchief, each dancer choosing his or her beloved, but now it is done on the method of Sir Roger de Coverley, so that all get a turn in order. To the favourite tune given above are sung some such words as these:

*Ndza muvona nikukwela sitimela*  
*Ya kwela sitimela Masiye*  
*Ayo ndzi leleza (ku leleta = 'to command').*

All are quiet while one sings:

*Ndza mvona, &c. . . . sitimela Masiye.*

Then all the others join in the refrain:

*Yeb! Yeb!*

(See *singombelo* melody.)

I see him going on board the steamer,  
He climbs on board the steamer, does Masiye,  
He commands me.

A tiny song to finish up the *singombelo*:

*Pau lo! Pau wa matube! Hiku bu!  
Hiku watumbe! Hi yetlela kwihl?*

(*Matube* is a white kind of manioc. *Kutumba* is to roast it by heaping up hot sand on it.)

This is sung in somewhat the same way as

Hot cross buns!

Hot cross buns! One a penny, two a penny, hot cross buns!

and may be translated as follows:

Manioc bread! Manioc bread!  
Bread of manioc! All piping hot! Where shall we sleep?

*The Mutsonyolo* is the boys' version of the *timbila* (men's dance). It is also accompanied by the *tsingu* drum,<sup>1</sup> which resembles a mortar.

The *sigayisana* is also a boys' dance.

The *sindzundindzaku* is a Tjopi dance. The women sit down on the ground, place their legs together, and wriggle backwards moving their shoulders. 'The men run away because the women have taken off their clothes', said my informant. In the *sirwala*, with the accompaniment of the *anginya* drum, the women take off their clothes and put them on their head while they dance. The men run away. These dances must be unusual. I only heard of them from one informant. They are zoomimetic.

### *Mourning Dances*

Some years ago, when I was present at some mourning ceremonies, I saw a dance called the *kumueleketa* = 'in order to accompany him' dance. The women formed a circle and two men in the centre of the

<sup>1</sup> The *tsingu* and the *sidekela* and the *sikulu* are the same species of drum (apparently not used by the Nda), resembling a mortar pierced below. The *ntakula* and the *nkiringwane* drums resemble each other. The *ntakula* also resembles the *anginya*.

circle danced out through an opening in the ring, singing: '*Ya balatiwa ygati ya wena*', 'Thy blood is shed'. These words I took to refer to the victim, a goat which had been sacrificed to please the spirit of the person who was being mourned. The goat had been eaten ceremonially by the mourners.

On the same occasion a woman dancer executed a *pas de seul* in the circle of women, one or two old women making the shrill trilling called *kulungela* which is supposed to please the ancestral spirits. The name of this dance was *mutanggala*.

I was told of a very old dance called *Gi-tfa*, which has been dropped. The men danced it while the women clapped hands. The men made passes with rods over their heads.

The *figandu* is a boy's dance. The boys donned *mabedzi* (skins) of *vibleyane* (small mammals). They made a ring and the *ifingu* drum accompanied the dancing.

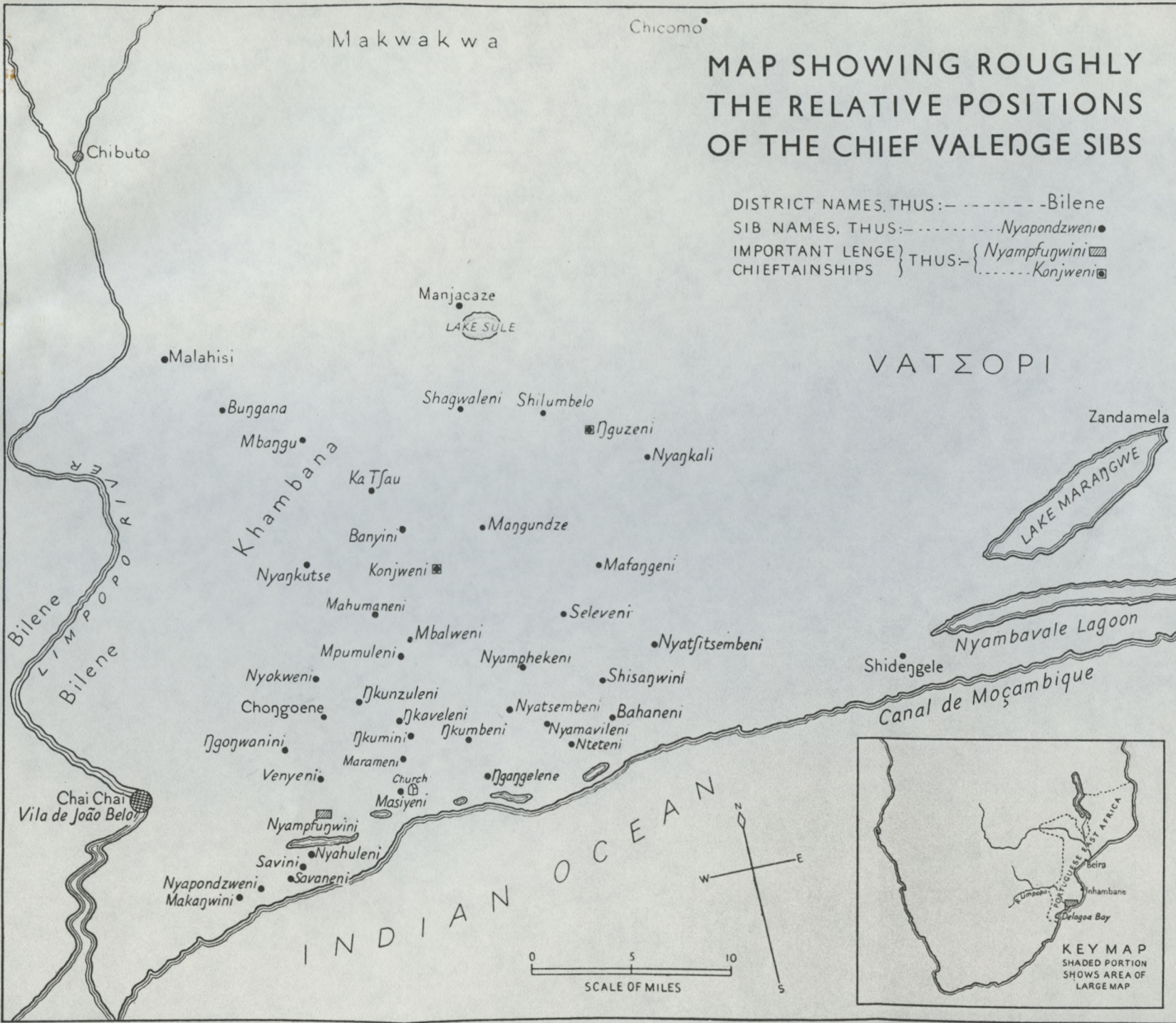
The *Masessa* = to dance with the loins (see pp. 174-5). The origin of the name is not known. All women, married or single, take part in this. It is one of the favourite dances of the annual *nzumba* or dancing-contests. The Tjopi and Thonga dancers wear garments with long fringes. The women accompany this dance by clapping hands. Small reeds (*titekane*) are worn on the forehead and bosom.

Makwakwa

Chicomo

# MAP SHOWING ROUGHLY THE RELATIVE POSITIONS OF THE CHIEF VALENGE SIBS

DISTRICT NAMES, THUS: - - - - - Bilene  
 SIB NAMES, THUS: - - - - - Nyapondzweni ●  
 IMPORTANT LENGE } THUS: { Nyampfungwini ▨  
 CHIEFTAINSHIPS } { Konjweni ■



VATZOPI

Zandamela

LAKE MARANGWE

Nyambavale Lagoon

Canal de Moçambique

SCALE OF MILES

