

51

in Anthropologie, XI, 1-2; 1973

AN EXPLANATION OF TSONGA SONG-TEXTS MAKING REFERENCE TO THE TRANSVAAL MIGRATION

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In the second half of the 19th century, the Zulu warlord Shaka invaded Tsongaland in what is now Mozambique, and caused the westward migration of about a third of the Tsonga, into the Northern Transvaal, where they now number about 700,000. The following ten songs reflect this exodus. For instance, the first song mentions how the neighbouring Venda tribe, with government support, reclaimed territory after it had been settled by the immigrants.

Bg Tiko Ra Vakokwani Ri Ta Teka Hi Vabvexa

Call: Ha rhurha hi ya kwale kaya ka Madzivi
Response: A hi fambeni hi ya kwale ntsungeni ha Rhurha a hi fambeni!

Call: Tiko ra vakokwani ri ta teka hi vabvexa
Response: A hi fambeni hi ya kwale ntsungeni ha Rhurha a hi fambeni!

Solo
Shout: I nkarhi loko hi suka Vabvexa va hi Hlongola le ntsungeni wa xikarile hi ta haleni!

Response: A hi fambeni hi ya kwale ntsungeni ha Rhurha a hi fambeni!

Call: Va-Kalanga! Ma ku tiva ka Madzivi?
Response: A hi fambeni hi ya kwale ntsungeni ha Rhurha a hi fambeni!

Solo
Shout: A va taxanisa Vabvexa ni tiko ra vona
Response: A hi fambeni hi ya kwale ntsungeni ha Rhurha a hi fambeni!

My Grandfather's Land Has Been Taken By The Vendas

Call: We are moving back to our home at Madzivi

Response: Let us go then
Let us start out!

Call: My grandfather's land has been taken by the Vendas

Response: Let us go then
Let us start out!

Solo
Shout: Once more we move. Before we were pushed by the Vendas over the Xikarile River!

Response: Let us go then
Let us start out!

Call: Seeing-Ones! Do you know what it is like at Madzivi?

Response: Let us go then
Let us start out!

Solo
Shout: The Vendas are torturing themselves with their voices!

Response: Let us go then
Let us start out!

There has been a recent shifting of tribal peoples by the (white) authorities. While the purpose of the shifts may be explained (by the government) to be of a constructive nature, i.e., territorially unifying certain peoples, its motivation is primarily administrative. Hardship cannot be avoided, and this song laments take-over of Tsonga territory by the Venda (Bvesha). The line "Seeing-Ones! Do you know what it is like at Madzivi?" reflects the people's anxiety about the location to which they are being shifted, and emphasizes their trust in the bone-thrower who attempts to look into the future. The final line "The Vendas are torturing themselves with their voices!" is a jibe at the moving-in celebrations of the Venda who have taken over the location.

Cg Nkitsi-kitsi

Solo: Miyela, miyela yo-ho!
Swi ta hela
Hinkwako-kwako
Nkitsi-kitsi, nkitsi-kitsi yo
Swi ta hela
Miyela, miyela yo-ho!
Swi ta hela hinkwako-kwako
Swi ta hela

Confusion

Solo: Keep silent, keep silent!
Confusion will come to an end
Everywhere, everywhere
Confusion will come to an end
Everywhere, everywhere
Keep silent, keep silent!
Everywhere
It will end

This beer-song reflects the quiet courage of villagers who are confused and perplexed by the happenings

= 10

around them. They sing this song as dirt roads are graded, fences erected, and wells drilled around them.

102Gd Miyela!

Solo: Ndzi na nhlomulo na maxangu
Miyela!
Ndzi na nhlomulo na maxangu
Miyela!

Hold Your Peace!

Solo: I witness much sorrow and misfortune
Hold your peace!
I witness much sorrow and misfortune
Hold your peace!

This beer-song was performed by an old man whose brother's family was visiting him from a newly-established location, and his exhortation to "hold your peace" is directed toward the angry participants, of intertribal disputes.

Bc Mina Ndzi Vona Maxangu

Call: Mina ndzi vona maxangu, Hm!
Response: Mina ndzi vona maxangu, Hm!
Call: Mina salani ni Ma-Bvexa, Hm!
Response: Mina salani ni Ma-Bvexa, Hm!
Call: Baba salani ni mhani, Hm!
Response: Baba salani ni mhani, Hm!

I See All The Misery

Call: I see all the misery, Hm!
Response: I see all the misery, Hm!
Call: Remain behind with the Venda, Hm!
Response: Remain behind with the Venda, Hm!
Call: Father will remain behind with mother, Hm!
Response: Father will remain behind with mother, Hm!

Contention between the Tsonga and the Venda (Bvesha) dates from the time when "the Ba-Ronga of Delagoa Bay acted as intermediaries between the Whites and the tribes in the interior ... the Mpfumo, Nondwane, Mabota, and Hlanganu natives being particularly engaged in this trade, and going as far as Bvesha (Ba-Venda country) to exchange goods' (Junod 1927, 2: 143). The Tsonga herald Mawewe sang the following in a praise-song to his chief, Muhlabala:

Look at them with terrible eyes!
You are a coward!
The Bveshas want to kill you!
Act with bravery and defend yourself!
... the Bveshas weep at Sikokoro's kraal!
You have taken their charms!
You have sprinkled your warriors with them.
Muhlabala, you have beaten them
With the shaft of the assegai.
Your men crossed the river
They want to kill the enemies in
their own kraal! (1 : 427)

Bg Magangeni

Call: Vana va manana va nga hela magangeni
Response: He, he! Hina hina hi herile!
Call: Vana va manana va nga hela magangeni
Response: He, he! Hina hina hi herile!
Call: Ha kuza na ha pela
Response: He, he! Hina hina hi herile!
Call: Van! wana va hela mabyalweni
Response: He, he! Hina hina hi herile!

Lost Among The Foreigners

Call: My mother's children are finished "up the hill"
Response: Oh, oh! But we are finished!
Call: My mother's children are finished "up the hill"
Response: Oh, oh! But we are finished!
Call: Some meet their end there
Response: Oh, oh! But we are finished!
Call: Others meet their end at the beer-drink
Response: Oh, oh! But we are finished!

The word *magangeni*, in the first line of the above song, comes from *ganga*, meaning "a long ridge"; the phrase "up the hill" means that one's brothers and sisters are lost among the people who live on the "long ridges". John Blacking, in a discussion on the type of terrain preferred by the Venda and the Tsonga respectively, states that the Venda are inclined to settle in the hills, while the Tsonga inhabit the plains (1967 : 25).

The final call of our song refers to an alternative way of being "up the hill" — getting killed at a beer-drink dispute. Thus this song-text describes two types of disintegration affecting Tsonga society: loss of cultural identity and over-indulgence in alcohol.

Cg Va Swi Chaya Venyi

Solo: A swi lunghangi
Va swi chaya venyi
Swona leswi

The Makers Perform These

Solo: It is not well
The makers perform these
They do it excellently

This solo singer at a beer-drink was a ninety-year-old Tsonga xylophonist, and he is commenting on his faulty playing as compared to that of the Ndaui, who were the makers of his ancient instrument. Certain southeastern tribes construct fine xylophones, as Hugh Tracey points out:

The Chopi instrument is as good as, if not better than, the majority of its kind on this continent. It is excellently made by skilled craftsmen, though perhaps not quite so neat as the *Malimba* xylophones to be found 200 miles farther north on the coast near the great Sabie river, where they are played by the Shangana-Ndaui people. (1948a: 118)

Magangeni

♩ = 180
Cycle: 16

(Lost Among the Foreigners)
Transpos.: nil

call 24 Va- na va na-

drum, untuned, but pitch varied

na- na va nga he- la na- ga- nge- ni

drum, 1st time

drum, ensuing times

response he- e

divided hi- na he- ri- le- e- e

call, with overlap vana va na-

DS

Ba

Xi Neka-Neka

Call: Xi Neka-neka!
Response: He milungwani xi kona la he
Milungwani!
Call: Xi neka-neka!
Response: He milungwani xi kona la he
Milungwani!

Roof-Moving

Call: Heave ho! Heave ho!
Response: The roof is now here
You, the European!

Call: Heave ho! Heave ho!
Response: The roof is now here
You, the European!

Neka-neka is an ideophone describing the sound and feel of heaving a weighty object, and *kona* accurately describes a Tsonga roof, the natives having found this English-derived term even more descriptive than their own — *lwango*. Prior to 1897 Henri Junod noted that Tsonga songs “*sont chantés par les hommes quand ils déménagent les toits des huttes*” (1897: 38). In our roof-moving song, the line “The roof is now here, you, the European!” is an

allusion to the enforced removal of villages, and to the long haul incurred as each roof is transported by a score of men across the fields.

In connection with the subjects of both this and the previous song (hut-roofs and xylophones), it is noteworthy that the amount of time spent on instrument playing by Southern African menfolk is governed by the amount of time necessitated by manual chores; in April, the time when roofs are being repaired, one is less likely to hear instrument performance by men and older boys than at other times. This is illustrated by the following Chopi song:

Don't waste your time with *Timbila*
Go and build your hut (Tracey 1948 : 11)

Gd Ha Shwala Mlamla Majapaka

Call: Ha shwala mlamla Majapaka

Response: Mlamla, mlamla!

Call: Njanji Majapaka

Response: Mlamla, mlamla!

Call: Mlanje mjakapa

Response: Mlamla, mlamla!

Lifting the Iron of the Japanese

Call: We lift the iron of the Japanese

Response: La-la, la-la!

Call: Metal of the Japanese

Response: La-la, la-la!

Call: Today! The Japanese

Response: La-la, la-la!

The above song reflects latter-day developments in the Tsonga village, and it perhaps portends not so beautiful construction materials for the Tsonga village of tomorrow. J. Torrend collected the following Rhodesian Tonga tale:

Master Rabbit did this.
He found a pretty rabbit girl
And put up for her
A little house of galvanized iron
(1921 : 174)

Bc Tsema-Kanya!

Solo: Tsema-kanya ho! Tiko ra Ritavi

Hiya! He-ho!

Tsema-kanya ho! Tiko ra Ritavi

Hiya! He-ho!

Cross Over!

Solo: Cross over the land of Ritavi

Hee! Yah! Hey! Ho!

Cros over the land of Ritavi

Hee! Yah! Hey! Ho!

An ancient Tsonga poem describes the River Ritavi (Letaba) thus:

Mukhubela wa huntana
Milumbyana saben
Sabe khulu ra barimi

Clouds come from all parts
Rivulets in the sand
Forming the great Sabi

Our song, which was performed at a beer-drink by an aged Tsonga xylophonist, describes early immigrants entering the Transvaal from Mozambique. The area north of the Olifant is, except for the course of the Ritavi River, exceedingly waterless right up to the Dzundwin hills, and this geographical obstacle divided Tsonga immigration into two streams, one north and one south. They rejoined in the present districts of Tzaneen, Duivelsklof, and Spelonken (Van Warmelo 1935 : 90).

The question of the informant's origin is important because of the fact that he possesses an ancient instrument, an instrument which he described as being "in the house when I was born". He assured the present writer that he had been born in Spelonken and that his parents were immigrant Ronga.

Bf Va Ndzi Zondhe Va Ritavi

Solo: Va ndzi zondhe va Ritavi o-yo!

Oh! Yay! Ha! Yay!

Tiko xi etlele

I'm Hated By The People of Ritavi

Solo: I'm hated by the people of Ritavi, Oh, yo

Oh! Yay! Ha! Yay!

It is peaceful here in the land

The aged solo singer in this performance expresses contentment with the area in which he finds himself, as opposed to another area which he fears. He does not mention any tribes by name, but there has always been a certain amount of friction between the various Southern African groups, differing, as they do, in language and customs. The Chopi of Mozambique reveal their intertribal feelings in the following dance-song:

Why do you send Sibuyeye
Into the country of Mahashi Bingwana?
The Shangaans (Tsonga) are detestable
(Tracey 1948 : 16)

This group of ten Tsonga song-texts, then, relates how newly acquired Tsonga territory has been ceded to the Venda, how groups of Tsonga have been "left behind" Venda lines, how the sorrow is drowned at the beer-drink, how xylophones from the east (made by the Ndaú and by the Chopi) have found their way westward into the Northern Transvaal, how the conical Tsonga roofs are saved and carried to new villages when enforced removals occur, how corrugated iron roofing is coming into use in the new environment, and how animosities prevail still, despite the common plight of tribal groups.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

(given only for sounds where the reader might be in doubt)

c as 'ch' in church

g as 'g' in get

h always as an independent aspirate, never as in the English combinations 'th' or 'sh'

q rather like 'k' but with a click



PL. 1
Family group at Njakanjaka sings old Tsonga migration songs

sw as 'sw' but slightly whistled

x as 'sh' in shut

y as 'y' in yes

Stress generally falls on the penultimate syllable.

KEY TO SONG-LETTERING

The first letter indicates the approximate location where the song was tape-recorded. The second letter indicates the month and year of recording.

Some of the Lead Singers Whose Ensembles Were Recorded Within This Area

Place

- | | | | |
|--------------|---|---|--------------------|
| A Sibasa | — | — | Mavila Maganu |
| | | — | Kambisa Maxele |
| | | — | Dayina Manghosi |
| B Shingwidzi | — | — | Mijaja Khubayi |
| | | — | Elias Chavalala |
| | | — | Mamayila Makhubele |

- | | | | |
|-----------|---|---|---------------------|
| C Tzaneen | — | — | Phineas Manganji |
| | | — | Nyanina Khubayi |
| | | — | Mphemphu Nyani |
| D Moamba | — | — | Munyamani Makhubele |
| | | — | Mujaji Baloyi |
| | | — | Yimisa Maswanganyi |
| E Dumela | — | — | Klass Maluleka |
| | | — | Moses Mageza |
| | | — | Elphy Mathye |
| F Magude | — | — | Gavaza Shivonivoni |
| | | — | Rose Mdoka |
| | | — | Lucas Matale |
| G Mapai | — | — | Florence Ngoveni |
| | | — | Sarah Mageza |
| | | — | Rachel Chauke |

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| a — December, 1968 | e — January to March, 1970 |
| b — February to April, 1969 | f — May to July, 1970 |

- c — June to August, 1969 g — September, 1970
d — October to December, 1969

ABSTRACT

Song-words often provide a useful clue to the history of the Bantu-speaking peoples, who did not possess any written historical record. In this paper ten Tsonga song-texts are examined for reference to the great 19th-century migration westward, caused by the ravages of the Zulu leader, Shaka. Song-lines indicate that newly acquired territory was re-taken by the Venda tribe, that groups of Tsonga were isolated behind alien boundaries, that xylophones came west with the immigrants, that present Trans-

vaal residents are being shifted and must take their carefully made conical thatch roofs with them, and that old antagonisms are still preserved despite the march of time and the acculturative process.

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