POSSESSION MUSIC OF THE SHANGANA-TSONGA

by

THOMAS F. JOHNSTON

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

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

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

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

Historical contact between the Zulu, Ndau and Tsonga

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

See the map on p. 59 of the previous issue of this journal.
 Johnston, Thomas: Shangana-Tsonga drum and bow rhythms, African Music, V, 1, 1971, p. 64.
 Junod, Henri: The life of a South African tribe. London, Macmillan, 2 vols, 1927.

astern Transvaal, where they now constitute the 500,000 Tsonga resident within the borders of the Republic of South Africa. 4

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

In the case of the Ndau, who are much intermarried with the Shangaan raiders, the hexatonic unings of individual mbiras are so dissimilar as to offer no apparent foundation. Here the admixture of foreign blood (Shangaan) seems to have completely upset local musical standards.⁶

To relate these various historical aspects to our discussion of possession music, it is conteworthy that acculturation gave the Chopi of southern Mozambique the Tsonga term for spirit, xikwembu, and that the Chopi recognise undesirable baNguni spirits in their own possession dances. Nguni is the generic term designating the Zulu, Swazi and Xhosa peoples, all click-language users. The Chopi, unlike the Tsonga and Ndau, vere never actually defeated in battle. In fact, an extant Chopi song goes thus: "See Nghunghunyane flees!" 8 Nghunghunyane, son of Muzila, son of Soshangane, was the last of the Shangaan war lords. He acceded to the chiefdom of Gaza in 1890, establabed a despotic reign over the Tsonga from his capital at Mandlakazi and was defeated by the Portuguese at Magul in 1895.

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

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

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

Huskisson mentions its use by the Pedi to the south in sets of three, 8 and Krige mentions its use by the Lovedu.

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

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

Tracey, Hugh: Chopi Musicians, their music, postry and instruments. Oxford, 1948.
Tracey, Hugh: op. cit. p. 75.
Tracey, Hugh: op. cit. p. 16.
The musical instruments of the native races of South Africa. Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1934.

Quoted in Huskisson, Yvonne: op. cit. p. 16.

Quoted in Huskisson, Yvonne: op. cit. p. 16.

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

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

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

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

Mandhlozi songs of the mancomane rite

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

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

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

We dance the Rhonge dance The echo comes back to us from the gods12

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

Johnston, Thomas: The music of the Shangana-Tsonga. Johannesburg, unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, p. 19.
 Junod, Henri: op. cit., 1927, vol. 2, p. 206.
 Njungu, Agrippa: Music of my people. African Music, II, 4, 1964.

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They come sually very

song heard is thought by the text

patients by e dancing:
"13; using

eg-rattles in this way is called kokoco-kokoco, or kotla-kotla. Further empathy between concizer and exorcized is established by the wearing of cult uniforms made from white alico, called rigidawa or xibayane, with the addition of xiluva headwear (from xiluva,

Note in Nos. 8 and 9 mention of Chief Nhunghunyane. Possessed patients sing not of Nghunghunyane but also of his son Thuli-lamahashe, who fled into the Trans-He has been called Thulamahasi but this appellation misses the meaning of his ame - 'dust-of-horses'.

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

Lidzimba songs of the mancomane rite

Some mancomane songs for use when exorcizing Ndau spirits will be found on page

As already noted, cases of Ndau possession are generally worse than the Zulu; we now come to two songs (see page 19) which are employed in exorcizing unusually roublesome Ndau spirits, for which xidzimba songs are deemed ineffective. They are toown as tinsimu ta xiNdau, songs in the xiNdau rhythm and style. There are thus three distinct musical styles within mancomane exorcism music:

- (i) Mandhlozi, pentatonic songs in foursquare drum-rhythm, for exorcizing Zulu
- (ii) Xidzimba, heptatonic songs in triplet drum-rhythm, for exorcizing Ndau spirits;
- (iii) XiNdau, heptatonic songs in foursquare rhythm, for particularly stubborn cases of Ndau possession.

brief musical analysis

A musical analysis of the tape-recorded performances of 75 exorcism songs of all rics revealed the following. Mandhlozi songs use pentatonic melodic patterns and are generally devoid of minor 2nds; this appears to correlate with what is known of some forms of Zulu songs to the south. 14 Xidzimba and xiNdau songs use heptatonic melodic patterns which include minor 2nds; this appears to correlate with what is known of ome forms of Ndau and Shona songs to the north. 15

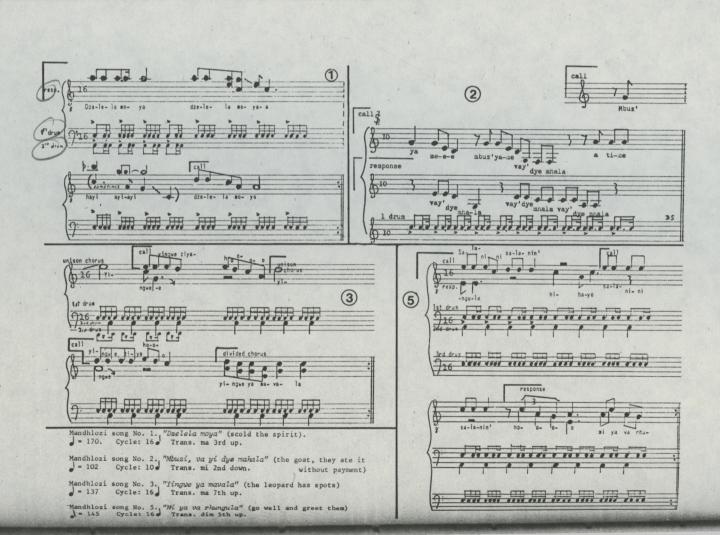
All observe an overall pathogenic (expiratory causation 16) descent from an initial rak to a cadential nadir, the amount of the overall descent being as follows:

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

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

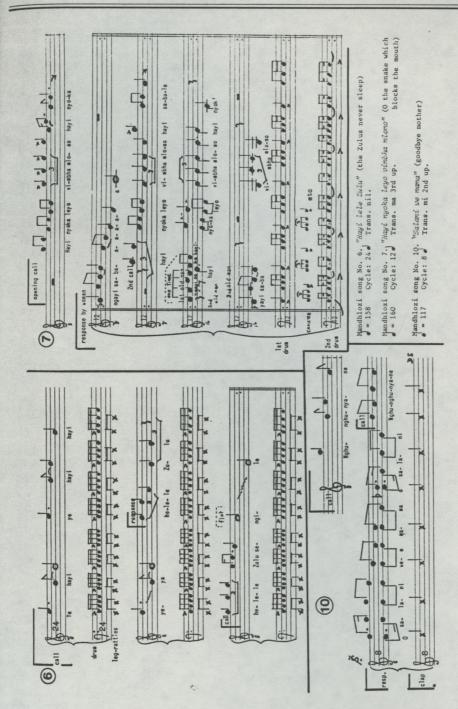
Rycroft, David: Zulu and Xhosa praise-poetry and song. African Music, III, 1, 1962.

Suchs, Curt: The welltprings of music. The Hague, Nijhoff, 1962.



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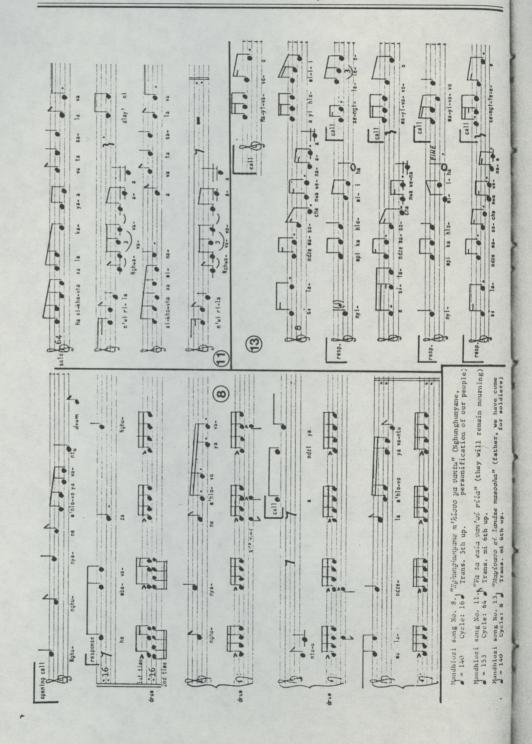


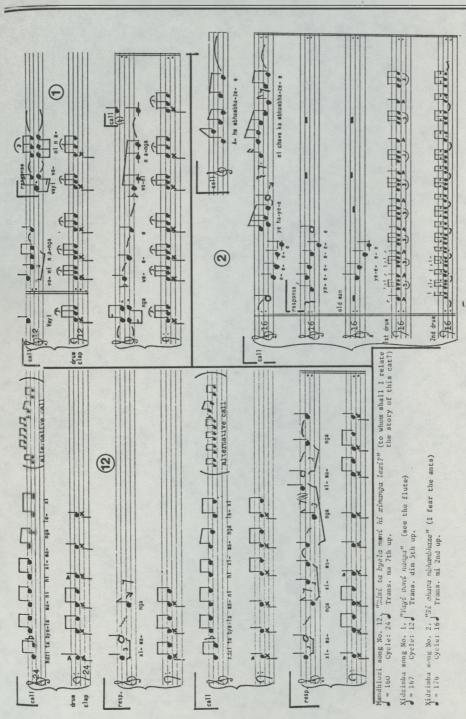
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Mandhlozi song No. 3. "Yingwe ya mavala" (the leopard has spots)

Mandhlozi song No. 5. "Mi ya Da Primyala" (go well and greet them)



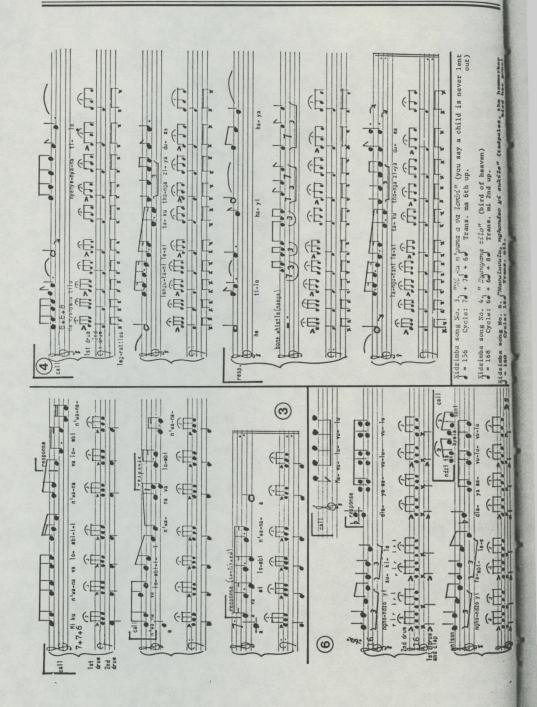


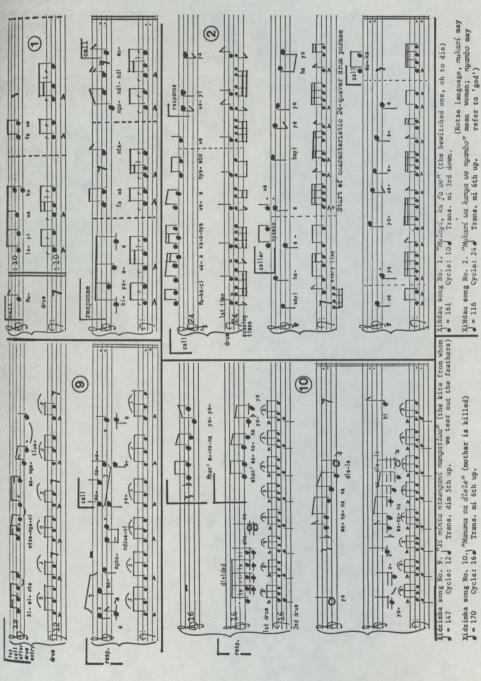
Spoudhers song No. 11, "No to account the "stan" (they will remain mourning) (see) South the stands of the see of tentas and oth up.

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obbleg song No. 2-1 "apleaguages, a "diopo on unera" (Sphunghungane, lee to to the Irans, 5th up. personification of our people)

Translaters which the "fighters of lanks masseds" (father, we have come that to the for soldiers)





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Conclusion

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

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

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

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

The words and translations of some of the songs in this article (a stroke indicates that the response is repeated; C = call, R = response)

Mandlhozi songs

- 2. "Mbuzi, va yi dye mahala" C: Mbuzi ya me-e-el Va yi dye mabala R: Va yi dye mabala
 - C: A Timememe mbuzi ya me-e-el|

A leyi ni nga yi tlbava /

- 3. "Yingwe ya mavala"
 - Yingwe, ziya bol
 - R: Yingwe ya mavala
 - C: Yingwe wa blasela nkosi | Yingwe yi dle muntu baba | Yingwe ya jabula /

"The goat, they are it without payment"
The goat! They are it without payment

They ate it without payment
At Timememe (= goat-bleat) they ate it without payment

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The one which I slew

"The leopard has spots" Leopard!

The leopard has spots The leopard invades

The leopard has killed a person's father The leopard has it good

¹⁷ Terms used by Goodenough, Ward: Culturs, Language and Society, Reading, Addison-Wealey, 1971.
18 Op. cit., p. 81.
19 Neher, Andrew: A physiological explanation of unusual behaviour in ceremonies involving drums. Hawas Biology, IV, 1962.
19 Walter, V. J., and Walter, W. G.: The central effects of rhythmic sensory stimulation. Electromosph. Clim. Naurophysiol., 1, 1949, p. 63.

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IV, 1962. 1, 1949, p. 63.

5, "Mi ya va rhungula"
C: Salanini, salanini!
R: Ho mi ya va rhungula
C: Kodwa ndzi ya bomba/
Ho Javulani famba/
Va ha wai! Va ka sesi /

1. "Hayi nyoka leyo vimbba mlomo" C: Hayi nyoka leyo vimbba mlomo Hayi nyoka

R: Ngi ya yi sabaa

"Go well and greet them" Goodbye, goodbyel Go well and greet them Be content Go, Javulani People of my sister's

"The snake which blocks the mouth" O the snake which blocks the mouth O the snake I fear it

Teonga ancestor-spirits are frequently thought to take the form of small green snakes. but in this name the reference is to abhorrence of cunnilingus.

9. "Nghanghanyane" C: Nghanghanyane mihlovo ya vantu

R: Sa mbavasa mihlovo ya vantu C: Ndzi ya mu landzela | A wa ngi ciya ngbe n'wana kbe | A ba wi voni |

11. "Va ta sala van'wi rila" Solo: Va ta sala va n'wi rila Nghwavava

Xikbova xa la kaya Dlayani xikbova xa mina

13. "Mayivavo, se landze masocha"

C: Mayivavo, se landze masocha mwa wena
A yi blomi!

R: Nyimpi, ka blomi ba!

C: Sengilele se landze masocha mwa wena/
He mama wa jala-ala/Mina ndzi shwaza eka

Lidzimba songs

"Vayi vona nanga"
 C: Vayi vona nanga
 R: Nanga wa vaxavisi

Mdlbamini /

A yi miyeli nanga | Ndzi balatile mina | Ndzi n'wa Pete mina

"Nghunghunyane"
Chief Nghunghunyane, personification of We name him, the ideal one We are his followers/his son neglected us/we never catch sight of him.

"They will remain mourning" They will remain mourning for Miss Adulteress An owl hoots there Kill my owl

"Father, we have come for soldiers" Father, we have come for soldiers To arms! Warriors, to arms! Now I am asleep we have come for soldiers/ I heard the news mother/They see me Mdlhamini

"See the flute" See the flute Flute of the vendors The flute that never ceases/I have poured out/I am the daughter of Pete

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

Tinkoti i murbi wa lomu ndzeni

Ants are a medicine for internal use

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

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

3. "N'wana a va lombi" C: Mi ku n'wana a va lombi N'wana a va lombi R: A va lombi, a va lombi C: Va lomba ntewani /

"A child is never lent out" You say a child is never lent out A child is never lent out Is never lent out, is never lent out
They lend out a winnowing basket

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

¹¹ Junod, Henri: op. cit., 1927, II, p. 471.

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

They won't lend me a baby! They lend me but a mortar Were I an eagle Were I a bird of prey Quick would I carry it away.25

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

4. "Nyenyana tilo?" C: He nyenyana tilo bayi! A langutani lexi taka ntonga ziya duma

R: He nyenyana tilo! C: Lo wa nhwana va teka langutani | Swin' wanyana va chava | Swin'wanyana va bemba | Swin' wanyana va vulavula / He nyenyana a bi xikwembu, ya bembu ya bemba, langutani

"Bird of heaven!" Bird of heaven! See what comes with the thunderstorm Bird of heaven! See, they are marrying the girl off Some, they are afraid of Some, they tell lies Some, they tell the truth The bird is a spirit, it tells lies, see

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

Loko mi yiva ta balekela bi tilo

6. "Mavuluvulu yi sukile"
C: Mavuluvulu, ngbondzo yi sukile
R: Dlayani mavuluvulu!
C: Ndzi ta byela mani? |
Ndzi ta rhuma mani? |
Ndzi ta tsbama kwibi? |

If you steal you will be struck by heaven

"Tadpoles, it has gone"
Tadpoles, the hammerkop bird has gone
Kill the tadpoles! To whom shall I tell it? Whom shall I send? Where shall I stay?

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

9. "Xi minta ntsengani mangathwa"

C: Xi minta nt sengani mangatlwa

R: A mangbondzwani yol
C: Xi vutla mintsenge, a bi nga poni/
Ku blekiwa ko tani a bi nga poni/ Khale ka manani ku vuya ka yena | "The kite from whom we tear out the feathers" The kite from whom we tear out the feathers By the little hammerkop bird!

Tear out feathers, we are not safe Being laughed at in this way we are not me Long ago when my mother came back

<sup>Junod, Henri: op. cit., 1927, II, p. 284.
Junod, Henri: Les Chants et les Contes des Ba-Ronga, Bridel & Cle., Lausanne, 1897, p. 237.
Kirby, Percival: 1965, p. 100</sup>