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## SHANGANA-TSONGA DANCE: ITS ROLE IN EXORCISM, INITIATION, AND THE SOCIAL BEER-DRINK

*ABSTRACT — This study results from two years of field work in the Northern Transvaal and Mozambique funded by the Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. It examines the diverse functions of traditional dance in Shangana-Tsonga social institutions, and its use as a means of organizing the ritual activities of participants. Traditional dance serves to reinforce beliefs and values; it reflects the division of labor and hierarchical levels of authority. Movement in Shangana-Tsonga dance is often symbolic of subsistence roles; dance performance may reflect the relative wealth and power of local chiefs.*

*KEY WORDS: Shangana-Tsonga dance — Ritual — Northern Transvaal — Mozambique.*

The Tsonga are a dispersed, immigrant, Bantu-speaking people numbering about two million in Mozambique and one million in the Northern Transvaal. They are patrilineal, practice virilocal residence, and to a large extent still worship ancestor-spirits. They are primarily maize-growers, but also keep some cattle.

The Tsonga are split into two large groups, one on each side of the Mozambique-Transvaal border. These groups are not separate cultural and linguistic units, as might occur where an international border is drawn between two peaceful sessile populations whose affinal and consanguinal relations and language dialects are territorially defined. There was a nineteenth-century westward migration bearing the characteristics of a panic evacuation, as Zulu marauders under Soshangane (he gave his name to the Tsonga) pillaged Tsonga villages. Hence clans were divided haphazardly and became further separated as other waves of refugees crossed the Lebombo Hills. Colonial governments later froze them into their chance locations.

This has important bearing on Tsonga dance: two years of field work among the Tsonga revealed

that unusual emphasis is placed upon maintaining ancient dance traditions, which are a historical and cultural repository. Alan Lomax (1968: 5) has written that "In the end, a person's emotional stability is a function of his command of a communication style that binds him to a human community with a history." Dance serves as a cohesive, integrative mechanism to reinforce Tsonga cultural stability at a time when the latter is threatened in the political environment by an alien polyglot: "The standard Venda opinion is that the Tsonga are rude, ill-mannered, and eat atrociously" (Blacking 1967: 31).

In order further to illustrate the psychological importance of Tsonga dance as a badge of ethnic identity, it is necessary to present a brief history of Tsonga migration. 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 Transvaal whence, after defeat by the Voortrekkers at Vechtkop in 1836, he fled with his considerable following into Rhodesia, founding the Ma-

tabelle kingdom. Soshangane, a cousin of Shaka's opponent in 1819, ranged eastward among the Chopi, Tsonga, and Ndaui 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. Decades of intermarriage and of shifting residence Tsonga-ised these Soshangane-s, or Shangaans, as they were and still are called, and impingement upon Ndaui-land produced a group along the coast near the Sabi River known as the Shanganana-Ndaui. Nghunghunyane, warlords. He acceded to the chieftdom of Gaza in 1890, established a despotic reign over the Tsonga from his capital at Mandlakazi, and was defeated by the Portuguese at Magul in 1895. The Tsonga are thus a dislocated people on 'foreign' soil, somewhat fearful of surrounding tribes who in the past resented their presence.

On October 15, 1901, twenty Venda were killed during a clash between the forces of Tsonga chief Muhlaba and Venda chief Sikororo, at Shiluvane in the Northern Transvaal. On November 7, 1901, during a hut-burning attack by 700 Venda against the Tsonga, Tsonga killed forty Venda. Climactic points in this intertribal strife are reflected in Tsonga dance, particularly in the *mancomane* exorcism dances, which are largely accompanied by historical songs such as "We were pushed by the Vendas over the Xikarile River."

#### MANCOMANE EXORCISM DANCING

In *mancomane*, undesirable possessing spirits are consistently identified as being of foreign origin, emanating from the aforementioned neighboring tribes, and *mancomane* dancing frequently involves three time levels: the duration of the performance, dance motor time, and the historical interval portrayed in the particular *mancomane* dance.

Regular outdoor display of, and participation in, Tsonga dance events assists in the reduction of social stress. As Nketia has noted, among the Yoruba in Accra "music brings a renewal of tribal solidarity" (1958: 43). Tsonga dance today serves as an expressive but peaceful outlet for any aggression and hostility felt toward those neighboring tribes perceived as threatening, thus serving as a release for politically unacceptable emotions, and fostering stability in the heterogeneous milieu. In ancient times, certain southern African populations developed the technique of freezing motor-gesture patterns via pictorialization in lithics, and some of these pictorializations suggest that the perceived threat to the group was another human group, rather than nature.

The Tsonga today are not lithic artists, but there are strong indications that Tsonga uniformity of symbolic movement is thought to ensure community stability. Precision is demanded in the symbolic fertility mimes of the girls' *khomba* initiation rites (which ensure procreation and continuity), and in the

boys' *murhundzu* circumcision rites, where the "little chameleons" must all change color at the same time (white ochre to red ochre), symbolizing the all-important transition from boyhood to manhood.

A left-handed Tsonga, who may tend to hold his *muchongolo* dance baton in the wrong hand, is ostracized as a *nwarimatsi*, Child-of-the-Left-Handed-One. It refers to social attitudes toward left- and right-hand functions. There is a Tsonga saying which runs thus:

Ku senga homu hi rimatsi  
To milk a cow on the left side (wrongly).

The Tsonga allude to the left hand as the 'hand of the *nfene*' (monkey), for in Tsonga life it is reserved for toilet functions, the right hand being reserved for offering food to guests at social beer-drink dances. A left-handed dancer may disturb uniformity of symbolic movement, and therefore appear to threaten community stability.

*Mancomane* exorcism dances which, in their use to dispel alien possessing spirits, mock traits and custom of the Shona, Zulu, Pedi, and Lovedu, tend to reflect cultural canons of taste, and feature in-group/out-group stereotyping. One dance mimes Zulu eating fish, and berates them pictorially for this 'bad' habit; another makes allusion to the Zulu avoidance of circumcision, so necessary among the Tsonga.

*Mancomane* exorcism dancing releases inhibitory mechanisms, and patients speak freely in tongues, thus aiding the *dzwavi* in her diagnosis of the spirit's provenance. This specialist healer is licensed by the local chief, in return for a fee, and she in turn collects a fee from patients and their relatives, in the form of beer, fowl, or cash. Her dance accoutrements include a skin hat, wooden stage-prop hatchet, kilt of tails, hyena-tail whisk, ceremonial skin mat, and four or more flat, round tambourine-drums, played by numerous assistants. In the case of a male exorcist, he is assisted by his wives, the public exhibition of whom constitutes a conspicuous display of personal wealth and serves to affirm previous successful practice. Well-attended exorcism dances are a source of revenue for healers, and, through them, the local Tsonga chiefs and headmen, thus *mancomane* dancing may be seen as part of tribal economics.

To expel the mild *mandlhozi* (Zulu) spirits, dances using duplet rhythm are prescribed, while abhorrent Ndaui spirits require dances featuring triplet rhythm, which materializes as a faster, more intense pulsation. Thus the differential severity of Tsonga historical experience at the hands of alien groups, is reflected in the differential severity of cases of possession, which in turn is reflected in the intensity of dance movement.

In Tsonga *mancomane* dancing, the patient is covered with a large calico cloth, 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 spirit. Closing in on the patient, the

drummers provide auditory rhythmic driving for several hours, while the exorcist implores the spirit to identify itself by name. The patient, eventually brought to an altered state of consciousness by the complementary effects of the drugs, the exhaustion, and by the 8 1/2-to-13 1/2 cycles per second rhythm (the rate of alpha waves), leaps up wildly, dances frenetically, shouts in tongues, and then composes her own 'expelling' dance. Failure to do so results in an emetic being introduced, inducing vomiting. The exorcist then performs a drum-dance to re-start the procedure.

The patient wears *marhonge* fruitshell leg-rattles which, when sounding during dance, are thought to be the voice of the gods directing the newly-created dance steps. The fruitshells are those of fruit used for making a much-valued alcoholic beverage often imbibed at religious rites. The seeds which rattle within the fruitshells symbolize fertility. *Marhonge* leg-rattles are often ancient heirlooms and are revered as a repository for Tsonga ancestor-spirits. Thus their supernatural communications to dancers during *mancomane* are of consequence to the dance itself.

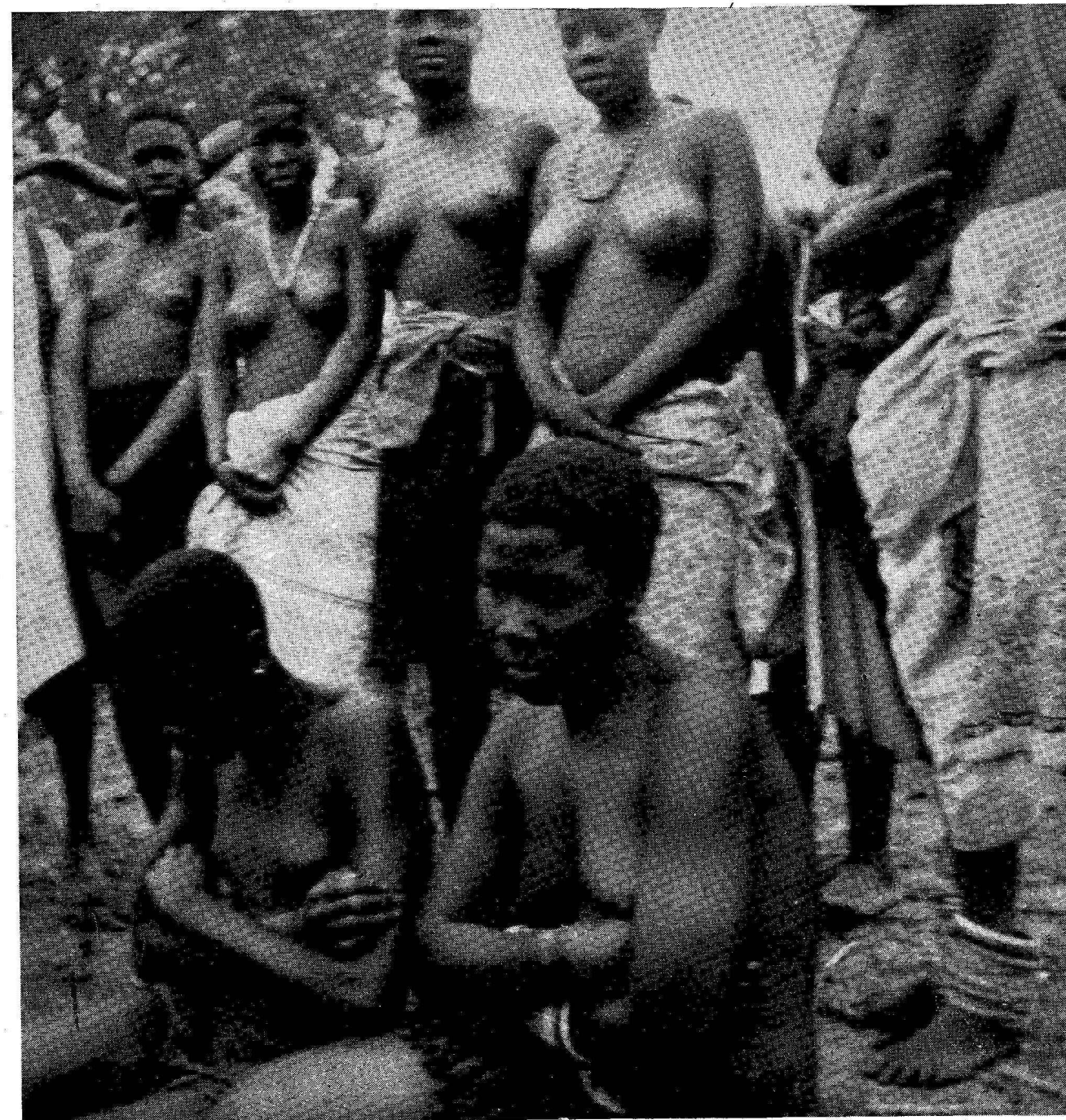


PLATE 1. Initiate dancers of the Shanganana-Tsonga *khomba* puberty rite first squat and bow in deference to tribal authority, accompanied by musical signals on the mhalamhala kudu horn blown by the leader.



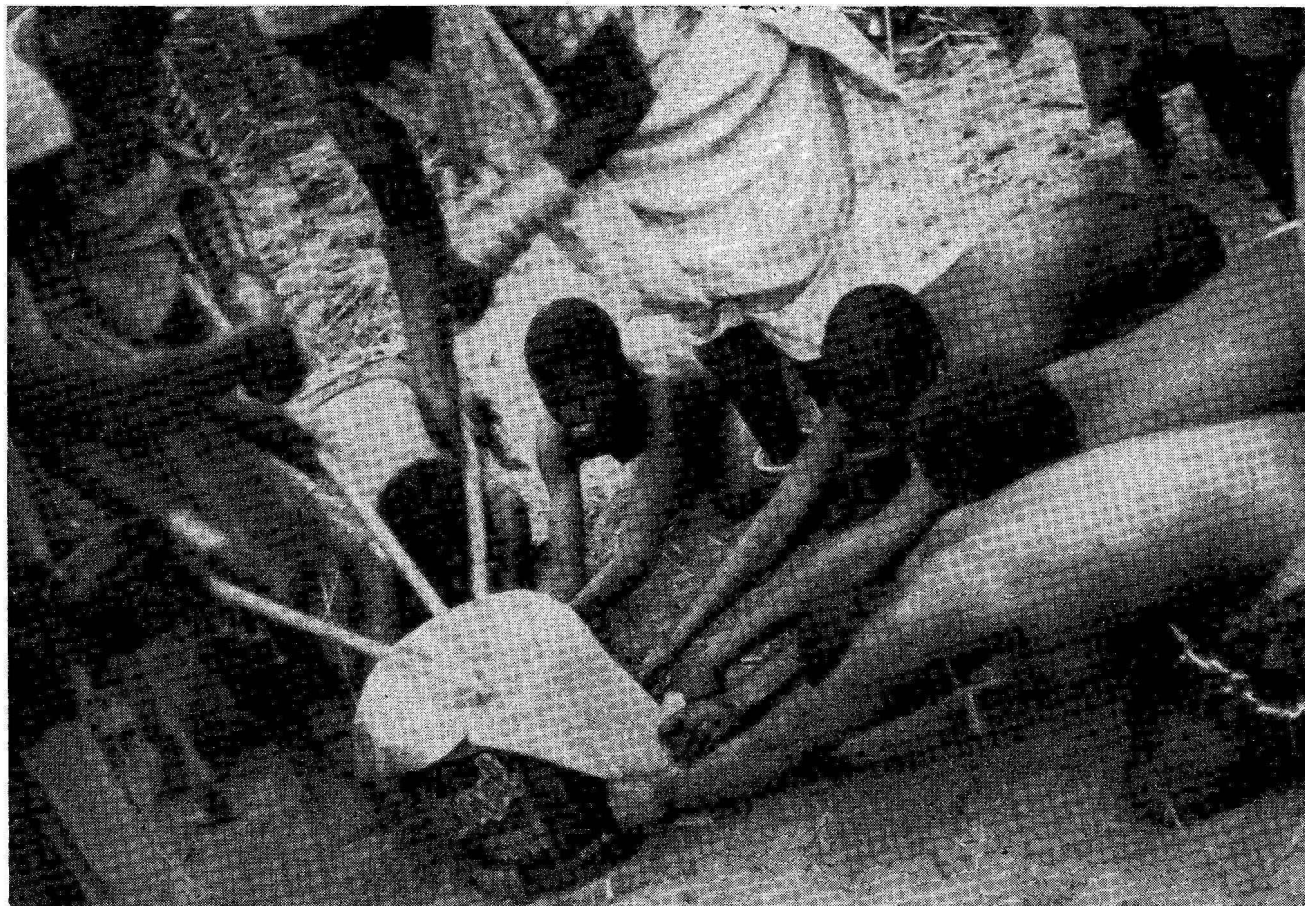


PLATE 2. Women elders and khomba initiation novices participate in 'a'mime-dance where water in a drum is stirred by poles, after the drumskin has been punctured, symbolizing flow of water at childbirth. The mime is part of a sequence of fertility dances.

Tsonga possession cults are supported mainly by middle-aged women, who make the ever-changing uniforms, perform the drumming, and constitute the vast majority of patients. In traditional Tsonga society, men's work is energetic, spasmodic, and interesting. Women's work is continuous and monotonous, involving raising the children, gathering firewood, collecting water many miles distant, clearing the ashes from the village hearths, and tending the maize gardens and sugar-cane fields. The hut floor must be polished frequently, to a mirror-like surface, with a mixture of clay and cow dung, and the children and menfolk must be cooked for and fed. In addition there is the frequent beer-brewing, which is carried out by women.

Furthermore, a woman's life is complicated by friction among her co-wives, who may be more senior and possess more privileges such as leisure time and work-party authority. In fact, there is a category of co-wifely jealousy dances, called *vukwele*, which function to express perceived favoritism and marital injustices. The Great Wife may possess the right to order junior wives to carry out menial tasks, but the junior wives (each of whom possesses her own small hut within the kraal) may enjoy more nighttime visitation by the husband.

Possession cult dancing therefore functions as a cathartic release for the pent-up emotional rivalry of the polygynous kraal, as a respite from oppressive labor, as a creative and expressive medium, and as a women's front against patrilineal dominance-submission hierarchies. It also serves to reduce inter-personal stress: junior wives' children are subservient to senior wives' children, with less territorial and inheritance rights. These are matters which can cause a high level of anxiety among junior wives. There also occurs a limited redistribution of wealth: Tsonga men fear the alien spirits, and the gifts-in-kind which with they must placate those spirits bring food and drink and pleasure to possession cult women, who perceive in this a measure and means of social redress.

#### KHOMBA INITIATION DANCING

Tsonga dance is a prime mechanism of enculturation, particularly in children's mime-games, in the teenage girls' *khomba* initiation rites, and in the teenage boys' *murhundzu* circumcision rites. There is also the boys' pre-circumcision drumming school, called *xigubu*, in which the dances *xifase* and *ku*

*wamikapa* are performed. *Xifase* is danced on moonlit evenings when one *xigubu* school sends a team to compete with a neighboring school, and members of opposing lines of singing, clapping youngsters energetically dance out in turn to brush a chosen partner with the hand, starting a chain of partner-changing. *Ku wamikapa* is a circle dance in which about ten dancing couples take turns occupying that part of the circle not taken up by the drums. Girls usually participate in the boys' *xigubu* drumming school dances, but are somewhat limited in leisure time because of their numerous household chores and responsibilities with regard to infant care. *Xigubu* dancing is didactic with regard to basic Tsonga rhythmic patterns, and a mechanism of socialization between the sexes.

The outdoor, vigorous nature of Tsonga young people's dance encourages the retention of an unembellished vocal delivery style, and the repeated patterns of floor movement reinforce Tsonga rhythmic norms, which call for consistent tempo and even dynamics. The communal nature of Tsonga dance acts as a conservative force, preserving melody and the words to dance songs. Young people's dance songtexts strongly reflect Tsonga values and beliefs, and thus are enculturative.

The core Tsonga rhythmic patterns which are learned early through dance and drumming form a deep-rooted component of Tsonga modal personality, and in many ways may be regarded as a crystallization of the culture. Physiological learning mechanisms have been well-studied. Neural tissue is by nature active, with its own characteristic rhythm and synchronies of firing sequences which can be recorded on the EEG for the infant from the time of birth. These patterns, which form a basic substratum of neural activity, are consistently broken into by sensory activity associated with outside stimuli, such as dance. Instead of supporting the rhythmic, long, slow waves already being discharged, the internalization of outside sensory activity breaks up the established firing sequences and gradually changes them in a never-ending learning process (Robertson-DeCarbo 1974: 34).

The order, both mathematical and acoustical, found in dance rhythm may serve to bring order into a developing schemata sorting system, and that order is culturally determined. Hanna (1977: 222) has pointed out that dance rhythm may contrast and interact with the numerous autonomic rhythms of the human body, such as brain waves, muscle contractions, heart and respiratory rates, and hor-



PLATE 3. Near the end of the khomba initiation rite, each novice must climb a tree possessing white sap, symbolizing mothers' milk and also semen. A second novice beats her with a stick while a third lies in foetal position on the ground. All must recite secret khomba verbal formulae.



monal tides. It is this rhythmic interaction which may heighten emotional experience during ritual dance, and render dancers compliant to symbol-laden tribal teachings.

In Tsonga children's mime-games such as Leg-Counting, and Beetle, reciprocal motions teach interlocking rhythms, ensure participation, and teach about local fauna. The exact repetition required inculcates a sense of absolute time, so that the 8-bar and 16-bar repeating metrical cycles are internalized, and the counting of beats may be dispensed with. The mime-game Makululuku Java-Java (Caught by the Witches) teaches prevalent beliefs in witchcraft, and how to avoid magic spells.

In connection with reincarnation beliefs and the revered, spiritual status of great-grandmother, a child rounding a corner and surprising his great-grandmother must perform a little 'penance' jig; she will soon be a wandering spirit, anxiously to be placated. Children's mime-games often reflect the natural environment, and so does their scheduling. The mime-games cease when the Tsonga hillsides in the rainy season become too muddy and slippery.

The girls' *khomba* initiation dances mirror (and sometimes reflect) Tsonga social structure and techno-environmental factors. For instance, in the various line dances the *nkulukumba* (Great One) proceeds first, followed in turn by the *vandzabi* schoolmothers (last year's initiates) and the *tikhombi* (novices) reflecting dominance-submission hierarchies. Dance grouping and didactic social networks at *khomba* reflect the fact that, outside *khomba*, the girls constitute a work-party age-group. The period of *khomba* itself reflects subsistence, for it must wait until after the harvest, when women's work is done.

*Khomba* combines diverse symbolic behavior: movement, gesture, mime, music, and play. The author was fortunate in being permitted to observe the ritual. In one mime, the novices must break away and find a stick or rough staff which, upon rejoining the mime, they must pound rhythmically on the ground in simulation of mortar and pestle. In another, they mime the gathering of firewood, and hold one hand on their back in simulation of backache. In another, they break away and climb a species of tree which emits a white sap (this may have Freudian implications). In another, each novice is hoisted in turn to shoulder-height by four others, and danced around while making suggestive hand movements high in the air. In many of the mimes, the meaning has been lost, but the mime survives in abstract.

Frequently, *khomba* dances make use of asymmetrical costuming and accoutrements which deny the body's bilateral symmetry and sensory frontal plane which normally leads to innate forward, upright, bipedal movement. Red ochre body stripes foreshorten image, while (later) tree-climbing and hoisting novices to shoulder-height lengthen it. In an acoustical mirroring of this physical asymmetry, a dance motion may intentionally disrupt the melodic symmetry of the dance song.

In *khomba* dancing, fertility symbolism abounds. The novices are required to squat upon an upturned, elongated drum temporarily called Penis, to the

sound of a hollow, snakelike *mhalamhala* kudu antelope horn, with which they are later deflowered.

In Tsonga old age, the funeral feast (critical for after-life) is given by one's children, but sterility and infant mortality are very high. The *lobola* (bride-price) is really a child-price, for if the bride does not bear a child, she may be returned, or be used by all for the heaviest menial tasks in her husband's village. Furthermore, her brother may have already used the incoming cattle to buy himself a bride, and his marriage also is in jeopardy. *Khomba* dances guarantee fertility and serve to reduce stress levels before and after marriage. The dance steps require precision, and this very precision provides an explanation for later sterility: someone committed dance errors, perhaps deliberately. To counter this, certain *khomba* dances exist to provide immunity and amulets to protect one from the social malevolence of witches, who are always one's real-life social enemies in disguise. Such dances frequently feature much pelvic and torso shimmying, which have fertility rather than erotic significance. One such dance features the songwords "Ngele-ngele:", which is an onomatopoeism for the sound made by a broken clay pot, as it is tested by being rolled on the ground, after firing. *Ngele-ngele* symbolizes the infant who perishes prior to one complete garden-planting year, and who thus did not survive 'the firing' (Tsonga children are not named until this year has elapsed). Such infants are buried in a broken clay pot, because they are a broken clay pot, returning to earth. Another *khomba* fertility symbol is the color black, used as paint, powder, or in the form of a black fowl. It symbolizes black rain clouds to bring growth.

*Khomba* is a form of psychomotor socialization, for, in the hand-drumming, it is the physical sensation of the upstroke which produces the tension-laden rhythmic syncopation of *khomba* dance rhythms. *Khomba* dance may also be of psychobiological significance: in secret mimes performed within the nighttime confines of the *nhanga* initiation hut, the novices sit in pairs, elongating the labia minora. Without considerable elongation, girls cannot marry. Nineteenth-century anthropologists ignorant of the *nhanga* described this phenomenon as a genetic mutation called Hottentots' Apron. The resulting alteration of body physiology may affect dance style, in much the same way as, in other parts of Africa, elongated heads, necks, ear-lobes, lips, and penes project altered image-shapes, and modify posture.

In the final week of *khomba* dancing, novices undergo a drug rite on a woven mat which "separates them from the dust they know as children." The ritual administering of *datura fastuosa*, auditory rhythmic driving, exhaustion, and auto-suggestion combine to produce and sustain an altered state of consciousness, during which the novices are required to report hearing the voice of the fertility god *xihundze*, and perceive snakelike blue-green visions. The concept of *xihundze* derives from the harmless blue-green snakes (*dendrophis subcarinatus*) which customarily

inhabit Tsonga thatched conical roofs, and it inspires blue face-paint, blue uniforms, and music-color synesthesia during the rite, when the vision-specific drumming is performed. The voices and visions are unanimously reported by all novices, the visions probably being the spiral and conical geometries of the human optical system made amenable to perception via the hallucinogenic alkaloid plant-drug *datura fastuosa*.

Perceptual distortion and disturbed time sense in *khomba* dance and mime help suspend the usual rules of life. They add a mysticism which facilitates the transition from childhood, through a liminal state, to social reintegration as a marriageable woman. *Khomba* dancing is protected by walls of secrecy and taboos which provide insulation in which disorientation and discontinuity of experience can be savoured.

*Khomba*, which is run by women, manifests many parallels with *mancomane*, which is likewise run by women, often the same women. They both exhibit selected imported fads and fashions from year to year, in the costumes, accoutrements, uniforms, and dance styles. This acts to counter and modify the aforementioned conservative influence of dance upon society, and limited change, particularly in material culture such as musical instruments (which may be borrowed) does in fact occur.

*Khomba* changes originate in imprecise oral transmission, in selective borrowing from the Shona and Venda, in re-working of the old, and in invention stimulated by changing ethos. For instance, in one *khomba* dance the novices mime being chained together in jail after being arrested for violation of South Africa's Bantu Administration pass-book laws.

Many *khomba* dance components, such as the waving of stage-prop wooden hatchets, and the limited administering of drugs, are shared by *mancomane* dancing. This multiple function aids dance survival, for such dances are not tied to just one social institution. In the context of certain of the dances, *khomba* elders encourage improvisation and the spontaneous composition of new dance steps; this, together with *khomba* dance's cultural references and allusions, and its high entertainment value, ensures survival and continuity. The secret *khomba* dances serve in later life as credentials with which to identify oneself and one's age-set, in distant villages, and furthermore serve to distinguish Tsonga women's dance style from that of the neighboring Pedi and Lovedu. This identity function helps to ensure relative perpetuity of *khomba* dance.

#### MURHUNDZU CIRCUMCISION DANCING

*Murhundzu* occurs within the confines of the secret circumcision lodge, and is associated with a limited degree of hazing. The lodge is organized every four or five years by a visiting Pedi medicine-man known as *muxeki*, from *ku xeka*, to cut with a knife. The mandatory dances are characterized by body-to-body touching, and symbolize the cutting of the mother-son tie, virility, hunting skills, warrior

skills, and formal entry into manhood. Cross-cultural study of African circumcision rites suggests that the severity of hazing within the lodge is proportionate to the closeness of the society's mother-son tie.

Drumming is not used as dance accompaniment in *murhundzu*, for fear of violating the secrecy of the lodge, which is distant from the village and taboo for women. When the chief's council and the *muxeki* have agreed upon the period and terms for the rite, instructions are sent out for the uncircumcized boys and youths, aged about 9-14, to assemble. The novices are first shaved, then beaten in line, the chief's nephew first. The dance song here goes *Xa vuya Xitsongani na wiyafa witsenge*, meaning the little Tsongas, they must suffer. One form of hazing involves lifting novices in the air by compressing short sticks between their fingers and raising the sticks.

Novices learn dances and mimes, sleep in the open without blankets, are deliberately meagerly fed, and, after undergoing circumcision, perform a purification dance, after which they receive new clothing and a new name. In ancient times, *murhundzu* dancing may have been genetically functional in that weak members of the group did not survive the hardships.

In a stylized metaphor reflecting the natural environment, *murhundzu* dancers are required to shuffle like a chameleon, which changes color:

Kanya-kanya Nwarimpfani  
Hundzuka mavala

Step! Step! Child-of-the-Chameleon  
Change your color!

The novices then exchange their white ochre body-paint for red, symbolizing the red fertile clay of Tsongaland, blood, and the sun.

Dance skill is emphasized as a means of demonstrating virility, and, in fact, a novice who fails to complete all of the stages of *murhundzu* may be shamed and excluded from procreation. The numerous secret formulae memorized by the novices serve in later life as evidence of age-set status, and to establish seniority at the Tsonga formal social beer-drinks.

In pre-contact times, *murhundzu* dancing taught emotional preparation for battle to warriors-to-be, as a compensatory mechanism for the denial of having sons to inherit the cattle. Today, *murhundzu* dancing is gradually being replaced as a rite of passage into manhood and marriage, by the new trends toward migrant labor. Instead of waiting until his father dies to inherit his father's cattle, a man may now earn the equivalent value in cash wages down the Johannesburg gold mines, and then purchase the cattle necessary as *lobola*. Although there are still strong tribal sanctions forcing men to comply with traditional circumcision, acculturative forces in the contemporary contact situation tend to mitigate those sanctions.



## SOCIAL BEER-DRINK DANCES

The Tsonga formal social beer-drink marks life-cycle crises such as birth, marriage, death, the harvest, and ancestor — spirit propitiation. Beer-drink dances include men's *xichayachaya*, women's *xilala*, the competitive team dance *rhambela phikezano*, and the men's and women's *muchongolo*, which is regarded as the Tsonga national dance. *Muchongolo* means to stamp, and the stampers flourish knobbed batons with which they extend their motions in space, and humorously point. This dance behavior serves to effect social control of deviance, and provides social leverage against an intransigent social enemy.

Most Tsonga dances are grouped in standardized categories, each with its own emic classificatory name, and featuring its own set of stylized movements. Tsonga work dances, for instance, exhibit their point of minimum footwork and handclapping at the point where the worker must exert most effort in connection with his or her task. Where women in pairs perform a dance at the mortar for pounding maize, the two pestles are raised alternately as one pounder lifts, the other dances.

Tsonga beer-drink dances are an important integrative mechanism wherein transitional statuses are redefined and validated. Formal dance etiquette marks reaffirmation of order and serves expressively to reduce interpersonal stress. For instance, within the formal arena of the chief's beer-drink, opposing litigating kin groups may dance out their complaints before the local judiciary, emphasizing their main points with analogous dance movements, and with exciting psychodrama which raises the pitch of the proceedings and sways public opinion.

Likewise, at wedding beer-drinks, the opposing groups of in-laws line up on either side of the host's beer-drink forum, and alternately execute dances which reflect the transfer of one valuable unit of labor (the bride) from one kin group to the other. Cattle are only part of the transaction. The dance movements reflect the acting out of suspicions inherent in the economic loss of the donating kin group, and the new economic acquisition of the receiving kin group. In typical dance depictions, the bride is portrayed by the donating side as their sturdiest, most fertile, most willing farmworker, but by the receiving side as a lazy, infertile, and unfaithful parasite.

The dances thus serve to express checks and balances in Tsonga economic life, to reassure both parties of the equity of the transaction, and to redefine and reintegrate the bride into society in her new role.

Maize beer is a greyish, frothy, nutritious beverage with much sediment and minimum alcoholic content. It serves as remuneration for labor, tributary tokens to rulers, a nourishing food in convenient and pleasant form, and a reward for dance. Much formality is observed in the serving and the seating, with eldest being nearest and served first. Beer-drink songs are called *tinsimunta le byalweni*, and they are accompanied by the *ngoma* drums, used

in sets containing three sizes. Dancers respond to various cues from the three drums.

The most important beer-drink dance is the *rhambela phikezano* competitive team dance, in which uniformed and rehearsed adult teams travel the territory, bringing humor and recreation to remote regions, and at the same time bringing power and prestige to their sponsor, the home chief. Constituents tend to gravitate to the chief's courts sponsoring the best and most frequent dancing. In such courts, there are generally food and drink to be shared, and welcome cathartic release from monotonous subsistence chores. Here, one experiences the trembling of the ground, the roar of the drums, the odour of perspiring dancers, the smoke of the wood-fires, and the taste of roast meat and plentiful beer.

Old men are seated on a dais under the house-eaves, out of the sun, out of the rain. Raised, for status, they are able to survey their wives dancing. The house-wall serves as a bass-reflex for the deep thudding of the dancers' feet. Middle-aged women are seated at the edge of the porch, where they perform all of the beer-drink drumming. Here, they can lean the drums on the porch step-up, and survey their charges, the junior wives dancing beyond. These dance on the lowest ground, in the sun, and upright for display as symbols of wealth. Being vulnerable to seduction, the youngest women dancers are surrounded by the low stucco wall. This stucco wall sets the physical parameters for dance floor movement. The junior wives remain close to their pestles and mortars, with which they prepare mealie when not dancing.

At Tsonga beer-drinks, the young men dancers in many ways play the role of antagonist. When not dancing, they stand outside the low kraal wall, leaning on it and watching the unavailable young wives denied to them by the wealth and power of the old men. In space, they stand diametrically opposite to their fathers, and, as a potential threatening group, the furthest removed. Participating least in the dancing, they deride, and being symbolically outside the enclosing wall, they possess increasingly new values. They are also in the best position militarily, reflecting ancient defense needs.

The social beer-drink commences with a solo dance by the host, where, in religious expression, a little beer is spilled on the ground over his crooked elbow "for the gods." The host is usually the most senior male present, and his hut is the largest within the kraal. Around the interior perimeter of the kraal are spaced the various cowives' huts in hierarchical order, from the Great Wife to the most junior wife.

Most beer-drink dance movements are sex-specific, reflecting psychological attitudes toward posture in daily life, such as the way women must move so as not to open the fold of the draped salem-pore. In Tsonga life, women must carry enormous clay containers of water on their head for long distances, with head erect and motionless, and this is mirrored in women's movements in certain dances, where only the legs appear to move. As the legs move, the great quantities of copper bangles jingle on the ankles, reinforcing dance rhythm.

It is noteworthy that in African dance, which is nearly always outdoors, leg movement is ample and often exaggerated, with kicks and high trotting. In Eskimo dance, which is most often performed indoors within confined quarters, leg movement is almost non-existent. Tsonga men pirouette, leap, and perform sudden reverses, reflecting their relative freedom, and reflecting ancient warrior needs. Their dance baton is derived from the traditional knobkerrie, once carried by all men for defense, and their gumboots, in the gumboot dance, are derived from their sometime migrant labor role. The slapping of the moving gumboots utilizes dance apparel as a musical instrument, while at the same time the motion is an integral part of the dance. In other dances, parts of the body such as chest and thighs are slapped to produce rhythmic accents.

Some beer-drink dance movement closely resembles subsistence actions, such as scraping a small hole in the ground with the toe, and simulating the dropping of seeds. Men sometimes perform a circular roof-carrying dance, for the thatched conical roofs often outlast the mud walls of a house, and are then transferred by men across fields to a new wattle-and-daub frame.

In the afore-mentioned *rhambela phikezano* competitive dance, the chief oversees the training of

men and women dancers, drummers, and singers, and sends them out seasonally on tour. There, they receive food, drink, and lodging in return for spirited and humorous performance. Teams generally feature a jester who mocks the host, but whose dancing provides him with a form of diplomatic immunity. His (normally) socially unacceptable inversion of the social order is a ritual of rebellion. The jester's role is a cathartic outlet for deviance, for such roles are often filled by epileptics and others outside the pale.

*Muchongolo*, the Tsonga national dance, is a choreographed set of cognitive-sensori-motor dance patterns closely related to the drumming, and which can be recombined, using relational rules for adapting Tsonga motor lexicon. *Muchongolo* was described in 1910 by Daniel da Gruz as "ma-xongulu, ou danca de homens de todas as idades," a dance for men of all ages (1910: 177). A photograph by da Cruz shows one dancer brandishing a switch and leaping from the round, while a second dancer faces the opposite direction, grimacing and stamping. Cuénod describes the dance as one in which young men "raise the knees high remaining in one lace" (1967: 24). An Nhluvuko ("Progress") article presents a photograph showing two women in beaded skirts dancing and three women playing

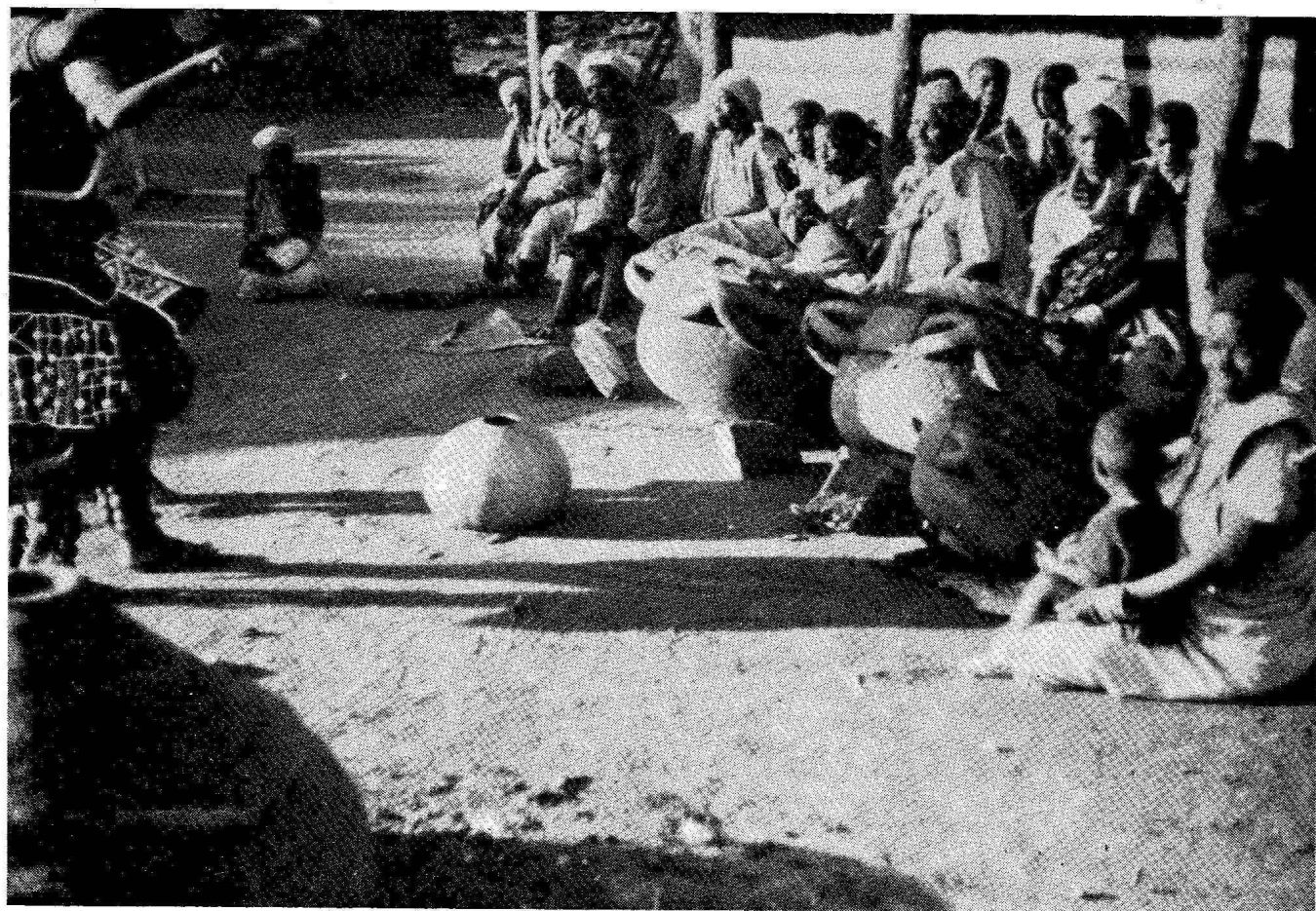


PLATE 4. The chief's wives, wearing fruitshell leg-rattles, dance at the social beer-drink, which is a public arena for economic transactions and life-cycle crises.



double-headed drums. Curiously enough, Junod does not mention the dance.

Muchongolo dance songs are known as *munvimi*, the pointings. Two men (*vakepe-ngoma*, keepers of the drum) enter the circle of singers with loping strides known as *mungenisa*, putting inside. They sing loudly in turn and commence violent baton-waving, pointing toward the sky and toward certain members of the audience. These actions are known as *ku swava*, to chase off, and parallel Tsonga subsistence actions in which birds are driven from crops. *Mubiasa* is a fast section, followed by *multhokosa*, where the dancer points and selects a new soloist, while at the same time performing *ku huma*, to break out.

The meanings of some *muchongolo* movements, such as pointing, are intrinsic; others possess assigned meaning, where context can vary the meaning. Male *muchongolo* dance movements tend to stress maximum effort flow, much extension into space and high amplitude, and peaking via a high-stepping trotting phase where the baton is outstretched and waved wildly. The torso sways, shoulders and diaphragm pulsate up and down, and the arms swing for handclapping. Most Tsonga dance movements possess a hypnotic, repetitive, driving effect. Most Tsonga dances are participant-oriented, emphasize collectivity, and are dominated by group movement, which helps to coordinate the sometimes complex song performance.



PLATE 5. Although this teenage girl is dancing solo, it is an ensemble event, with group singing, handclapping, and instrumental accompaniment.

In many Tsonga dances, movements respond to intensifying drum patterns and drum improvisation, with close eye contact between drummer and dancer for the transmission of visual cues. This is facilitated by the kraal milieu and circular positioning. Tsonga beer-drink dancing, particularly, is a response to, and a reflection of life in the Tsonga polygynous kraal. It is an organizing principle and determinant in life-cycle ceremonies, imposing structural restraints and reflecting social stratification and interpersonal networks. Floor movement patterns across the kraal arena determine song structure, for the latter is bipartite (call-plus-response) and follows a symmetrical numerical cycle which allows dancers to move amply in one direction as long as they return similarly to the starting point. The structural features of the dance help the dancers to keep track of the cycle's endless repetitions.

In Tsonga social beer-drink dancing, hierarchical, bimetric Tsonga drumming and handclapping obligations are distributed among the social group according to experience and hence social rank, and, in the associated dance, the dancers' body movements differentially reflect these rhythmic hierarchies. Thus the feet may be responding to the fast-moving rhythm of the middle-aged women *ngoma*-players, while the shoulders may be responding to the long, slow handclap of the groups of junior wives standing on the sidelines. Tsonga of different status and different social roles relate to each other through strata of pulsation which are themselves socially determined. The dancers belong to a traditional society which places a high value upon the psychophysiological tension induced by contrasting but mathematically-related body movements.

#### CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARD TSONGA DANCE

In the Tsonga highlife dancing performed by Tsonga migrant laborers in the towns, the constraints of traditional group dance are frequently lacking, and town dancers create a new genre where rehearsed individuality, innovation, and audience orientation dominate. In the cast of highlife saxophone and electric guitar bands, musical arrangements tend to

become more complex while floor dances tend to become simpler, with both musical improvisation and dance spontaneity becoming less feasible. Dance and song then move in the direction of separate art forms.

Changing attitudes toward traditional dance are resulting in factionalism among the new Tsonga urbanized elite, as shown by the following published responses to a *Nhlwuko* journal article (May 1969):

- (i) ... education is worthier than ancient dances...
- (ii) ... bad characters linger at dances...
- (iii) ... the Zulu and Pedi have customs, so we must retain ours...
- (iv) ... don't blame your ancestors that you are not Europeans...
- (v) ... our struggle is great, and dancing does not win the diploma...
- (vi) ... civilization is not intended to destroy our traditions...
- (vii) ... we passed first-class even while exhibiting dancing...
- (viii) ... Muchongolo must not be eaten by the White ants.

These responses reflect the cultural crossroads reached sooner or later by all non-Western societies, where difficult choices and aesthetic compromises have to be made concerning traditional dance and its continuing value and meaning in the contact situation and in a technologically oriented world.

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