The flamboyant rooster
and other Tshivenda song stories

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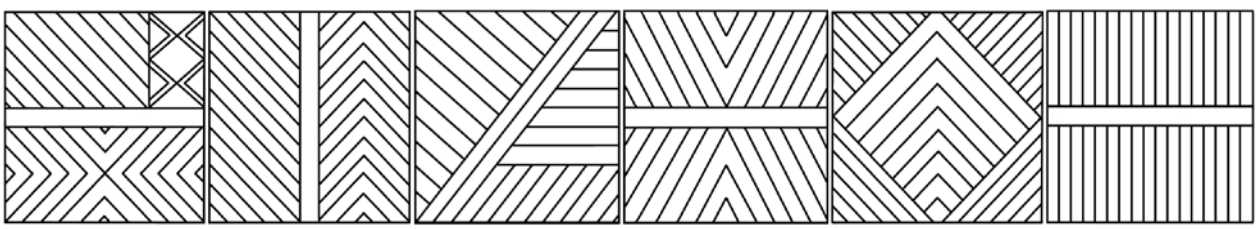
Also in this series:
Venḓa ḽashu: Tshivenda songs, musical games and song stories

All I can say is that we are mistaken to gouge such a deep rift in history that the things old men and old women know have become so useless as to be not worth passing on to grandchildren.
(Charles Frazier: *Thirteen Moons)*

All the cultural treasures of mankind shall be open to all, by free exchange of books, ideas and contact with other lands.
(The Freedom Charter, adopted at the Congress of the People, Kliptown, 26 June 1955)

Dedicated to the memory of Piet Malori Mavheta (1942-2005)



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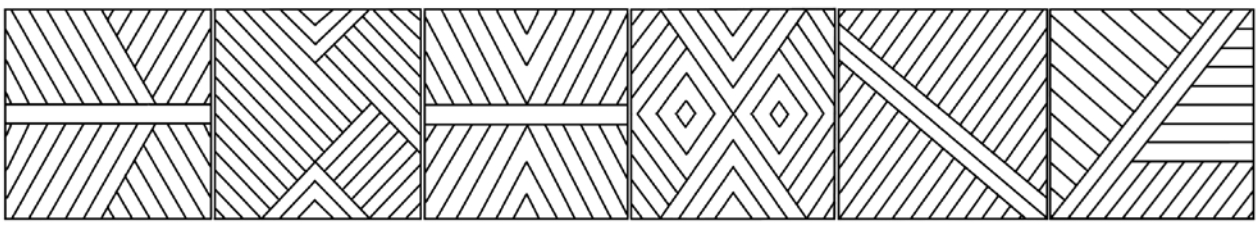

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Preface

Ngano are song stories of precolonial origin told by the Tshivenda-speaking people of South Africa. There are various reasons why they deserve a larger audience. Like folklore elsewhere, they are ancient artistic maps of the human condition. Although by no means devoid of humour, they cannot be regarded as frivolous entertainment. They provide listeners with a privileged view of human relationships in an African society. Their characters are enmeshed in a complex web of conflict and interdependency. Class, patriarchy, seniority and physical power are some bases from which the world is controlled. Primordial desires and vested interests find easy prey in women, children and the underclasses. Overt violence takes the form of kidnapping, sexual assault and murder. Men typically turn into marauding animals who hunt their human victims. But there also are more subtle forms of violation, like rejection, jealousy and selfishness which often are driven by loneliness and insecurity.

Although the persecuted appear helpless, they are not denied redemption. They find refuge within the community of the vulnerable, while their physical frailty belies a spirit of rebellion that enables them to escape and even undermine those who abuse them. And so mutually defining forms of power clash throughout, while resistance becomes contradictory: those that are subordinate also may shift with ease into authoritarian roles.

Ngano are associated with home and hearth, with grandmothers and grandchildren gathered around winter fires. Perhaps because of this, they are neither as obvious as communal dances, nor are their functions fully acknowledged, except by their narrators and folklorists. *Ngano* in fact are a covert form of moral consciousness that helps to shape social relations. The rebellion of Hare, Tortoise and their human counterparts reminds society of the possibility of a different order. Venda oral artists attribute the power of a flying arrow to their voice: it can penetrate the heart of human darkness and generate shared emotions and strategies for redemption.

African histories are marked by time-honoured, often subtle opposition to various forms of intracultural domination. Accordingly, the concluding *ngano* marker *Ha mbo ḓi u vha ha ṅwana wa lungano* ('This is the death of the child who is a song story') points to *ngano* as a form of moral knowledge transmitted between generations: just as there will always be children, so there will be forms of artistic expression that engage social life incisively. It is clear that there is an intention for the resistant ideology of *ngano* to remain an enduring artistic objective and human endeavour.

The ideological content of *ngano* places them firmly in the ongoing debate on those cherished ideals contained in the South African national constitution. The dissemination of *ngano* and other ancient forms of African oral art can promote the South African government's People's Contract (2004). This policy statement emphasises the importance of 'life beyond material things,' of the need for good social relations, value systems and moral regeneration. *'Ngano* are important to us,' narrator Sophia Nefholovhodwe remarks, 'because they help to bring children inside the home from the streets at night.'

In pursuit of this objective, ten of the narratives included in this collection appeared previously in lesson form in *The Talking Drum*. This publication is the mouthpiece of the Pan-African Society of Musical Arts Education. Its aim is to provide suitable teaching material in the Arts and Culture Learning Area.

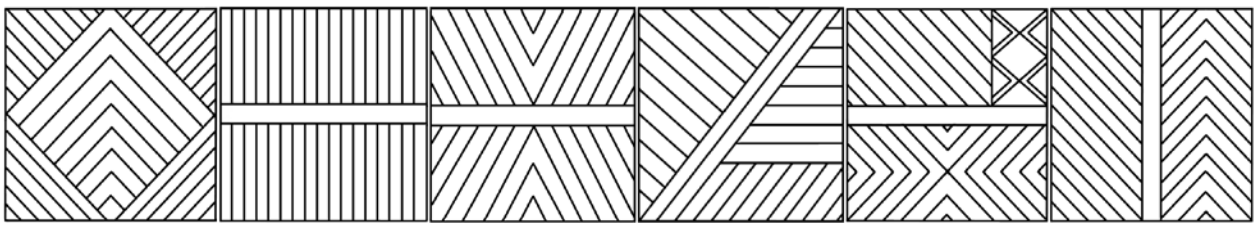
The general outcome of the lessons based on *ngano* is that young learners should be aware of their political and social rights. The specific outcomes are that they should be able to perform selected *ngano*, and then create song stories in response to their own experiences. They also should have elementary understanding of the nature of social differentiation (in particular how role allocations organise social and political life) and of the extent to which social identity is determined biologically and ideologically.

Seventeen *ngano* have been added here to those first published in *The Talking Drum*. We trust this enlarged collection will be useful for teachers required to educate learners through the modes of literature, music and drama. Since the collection also is aimed at a general readership, it is presented as an extended rather than a basic educational resource. As such, we do not provide explicit lesson plans. Instead, the introduction and explanatory notes that follow each story should provide sufficient contextual information on *ngano* to help teachers to achieve the outcomes of the local Arts and Culture Learning Area, as well as those of curricula in other countries.

The pursuit of the educational outcomes envisaged for this collection is not without irony. *Ngano* narration was a common social skill in precolonial times. However, when this collection was documented in 1991-92, several narrators were experiencing memory loss because they no longer had sufficient opportunity to tell their stories. 'When you tell people *ngano*, they simply do not care. They prefer to dance jive songs,' Sophia Nefholovhodwe observed. In addition, only a limited number of expert *ngano* narrators remains. Of the ten narrators presented here, three passed away since their narratives were first recorded. Two of them, Matamela Rasivhetshele and Takalani Munyai, died before we were able to hear their life stories. The remaining narrators all are elderly. They may be some of the last exponents of a once vital performance culture.

Although there are efforts to revitalise *ngano* at school, narrators complain that teachers prioritise superficial, entertaining versions of older, deeply reflective stories. In addition, *ngano* classes usually involve the reading of published collections. The mass media strongly influences this shift from the production of art to its consumption. Storytelling usually takes a back seat when a television antenna comes to squat predatorially on a roof. The lounge with its radio and television has replaced the kitchen where people formerly gathered around an evening fire to tell stories.

While *ngano* performance may have passed a point of no return, its ancient themes still resonate strongly in contemporary life, and one may still, although not without effort, find a few skilled narrators in some communities. We yet have much to discover about *ngano* from them. A story, told around a winter fire in the Limpopo valley in 2005, describes a group of people walking between two villages at night. The menacing roar of a lion follows them home. Everyone is afraid, except one woman: she realises with mirth that the lion is roaring in her husband's voice, and that he is playing a prank. And so the tender bond between husband and wife is evident in the fact that she alone is able to guess at a truth: that man is not a rapacious lion only, but also a caring one. There must be more stories that deal with a loving humanity. Our task is to find them.



Introduction

Themes in *ngano* song narratives

Geography

Most of South Africa's approximately 900 000 Tshivenda-speaking population live in a mountaineous region called Venda.[1] This area unfolds for some 250 km from the Kruger National Park in the east to Blouberg ('Blue Mountain') in the west. Many of its peaks have Tshivenda names, but the entire range often is referred to by its Afrikaans name, the Soutpansberg ('Salt Pan Mountain').

Neighbouring populations

The Limpopo River is the northern boundary of Venda. It is also the border between South Africa and Zimbabwe. The ancestors of many Venda families migrated from Zimbabwe to the Soutpansberg from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century. They share cultural characteristics with the Shona people of Zimbabwe. There still are traces of Tshikalanga, a language of southern Zimbabwe, in Venda songs and oral narratives.

Venda is bordered in the south and west by areas mostly inhabited by Northern Sotho and Tsonga populations. Life stories of *ngano* narrators who live in border areas describe shared experiences with these groups, and their songs often contain phrases from their language.

Climate

Most of Venda generally is hot and wet, with an average summer temperature of 30°C, and annual rainfall in excess of 1000 mm in some areas. Warm south-easterly winds from the Moçambique channel cause precipitation on the southern slopes of the mountains. Numerous waterfalls cascade down them during wet years.

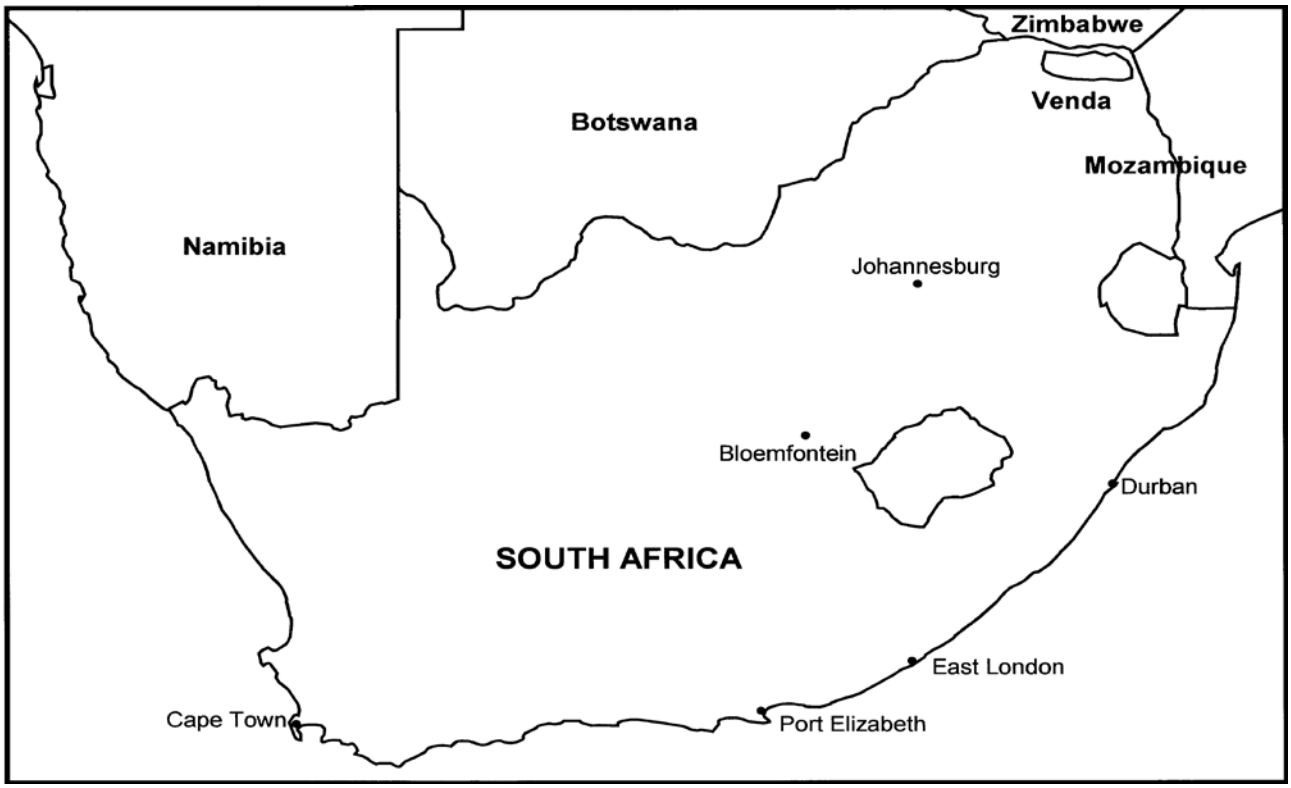
There are several rivers that are constant except during drought. The biggest river in the region is the Limpopo, while the Nzhelele, Luvhuvhu and Mutale Rivers wind their way through the central valleys.

The natural world often determines action in *ngano*. Water and rain are central to certain stories. Hence the cooling effect of water, so important in African spiritual life, helps to bring about emotional healing in the story entitled 'To be human again.'[2]

The lush appearance of the Soutpansberg often conceals lack of grazing and water. Drought is an ever-present threat to the people and animals that inhabit *ngano*. It often animates plots and tests the conventions that regulate social relationships. So the tension between the need for survival and norms of sharing gives rise to conflict in stories like 'The angry ostrich.'

Wildlife

Secluded mountain tops and valleys still are covered in dense subtropical forest that covered most of the Soutpansberg in earlier times. There is protection for people and wild animals in shady ravines. Ancient rock paintings by San hunter-gatherers evoke an abundance of wildlife in the distant past. Although human settlement over several centuries has restricted the pristine diversity of wildlife to protected areas, people living in some isolated districts remain vulnerable to certain predators. Crocodiles and hippopotami are responsible for several annual fatalities, while villagers in eastern Venda often are threatened by lions that escape from the Kruger National Park.



Animals

Animals, wild and domestic, have important roles in *ngano*. The brutish, dull-witted power of the lion, elephant and hippopotamus is pitted against the agile intellect of smaller animals. Hare, that arch-trickster, as usual undermines social order in 'Mr Hare scrubs his heels,' while the little tortoise rebels against his seniors in 'Mr Tortoise takes a bath.'

Many animals are able to speak with humans: the fowl, goat, donkey, elephant and hippopotamus all are given a voice. Birds become messengers in conflict situations because they can fly. In the title story of this collection, a rooster flies a vast distance to inform a husband of his errant wives, while a dove becomes a redeemer in 'The girls and the dove.'

Trees and birds

The Soutpansberg features numerous tree and bird species. The wild fig and the ancient, iconic baobab tower high. They offer refuge to the weak and poor in stories like 'Mr Elephant sweats' and 'The thin old woman.' Marula, thorn and other bushveld trees hold sway in drier areas south and west of the mountains. They appear in stories like 'The cannibal's tooth' and 'The tree with red flowers.' The beautiful purple-crested lourie in turn conceals the identity of a kidnapper in 'The lourie who was not a bird.'

Farming

The image of farming is the backdrop for spousal conflict in 'The wooden hoe' and 'Also a woman.' Arable land is limited but fertile, and it can produce an abundance of subtropical fruit and vegetables. Maize, the staple crop, appears in various stories about domestic life. Cattle, still an important component of wealth in rural areas, are the centre of family conflict in 'Hate.'

The social roots of ngano

The description of *ngano* as an artistic space inhabited by animals and trees hints at a basic narrative feature: these stories almost never are what they seem. Mr Hare darts amusingly across narrative surfaces while those listeners tempered by married life easily recognise the embarrassed annoyance of a man who discovers his wife's true nature (see 'What a woman!'). However, submerged in

ngano lies a deeply metaphorical mirror that reflects human society in all its adversity, in its cruelty and corruption, and also its salvation and love.

As the preface suggests, the plots of *ngano* are animated by conflicting yet interdependent social relations. These relations play out in institutions like the family, the in-laws, clans, courts, age-sets, musical groups and initiation schools. As stories like 'Crow-woman' and 'The zebras are jiving' show, they are so powerful that they may take precedence over death.[3]

The family

The stories in this book show clear thematic correlation with published *ngano* collections[4] and oral narratives from other African cultures.[5] *Ngano* accordingly share with their regional counterparts the fundamental theme of tension inherent in the family.[6] Theologian John Mbiti notes that, in Africa, 'the shorter the radius of kinship and family ties, the more scapegoats there are.'[7] As the tragic events in 'The young woman and the zebra' show, individuals who fail to observe time-honoured social customs often trigger narrative action. That these individuals usually commit some transgression in the family also is evident in the common *ngano* opening line, *Ho vha hu na muṅwe munna e na musadzi wawe* ('There was a certain man and his wife'). What follows on this opening usually is determined by a combination of customs that shape society.

Patriarchy

The first of these customs is patriarchy, that cultural principle which bestows most social influence on men.[8] As a rule, men are in charge of districts, villages and families. Women pass through the control of fathers, brothers, husbands and other men throughout their lives, a process that confers on them the status of perpetual minor.[9] This is reflected in the expression 'A hen does not announce dawn' *(Khuhu ya phambo a i imbi mutsho)*. The inculcation of such deference ultimately helps to create a female 'culture of silence' that inhibits response in the face of suffering and conflict, and cedes authority to superiors, particularly husbands.[10]

When asked whether young women still narrate the story of 'The wooden hoe' in which the predicament of an abused wife is described, an elderly informant said, 'No, young women nowadays know divorce.' Locked into the politics and the economy of patriarchy, divorce formerly was not an option for women in abusive relationships. When they and their narrative characters rebelled against their prescribed roles, they faced isolation, economic hardship and violence.[11]

Female *ngano* narrators accordingly describe themselves as 'the silent ones.' They quote expressions like *Munna o fara lubada* ('The man holds the stick that punishes') and *Arali munna asiho, mudzimu a vho fa* ('When a man falls away, a god[12] dies'). Stories like 'The flamboyant rooster' reflect the association of the term *baba* (father) with respect, obedience and authority.[13] *Ngano* that deal with gender relations in fact abound with violent, primordial images of male aggression. Particularly evocative are narratives that deal with abduction, rape and incest in which men are portrayed as marauding animals and monsters. These narratives correlate in many respects with ethnographic descriptions of the subjugation of women.[14]

Sexual violence

'Things are falling apart' is a particularly evocative description of the horror of rape and murder. Youthful naivety and carelessness meet violent maleness, and the emotional force of the events that follow is intensified by antiphonal chanting and vividly suggestive ideophones.

Poetic elements are just as important in 'The lion who hunted his daughter.' This narrative expresses the shock of a mother who discovers that her husband has been abusing her daughters sexually. The story deals less with the flight of the woman and her daughters than with the traumatised state in which she

reproaches herself in song for having been fooled by her husband's benign appearance.

Married life

The Venda family not only is patriarchal, but also patrilocal. In other words, married sons and their family live at their father's homestead. *Ngano* often describe the movement of people between the homesteads of families linked by marriage. As stories like 'To be human again' show, these movements almost always relate to some form of marital conflict.

Although a newly-wed woman joins the household of her in-laws, her parental home remains a refuge, both emotionally and physically. This is where she flees to in times of distress ('The pumpkin that could speak') or when she becomes divorced ('Also a woman').

Polygamy

Central to a large number of *ngano* is the tension that develops from polygamy, the custom that allows a man to have more than one wife. As 'A tree with red flowers' show, the relationship between co-wives often is marked by conflict and feelings of insecurity. A senior wife in particular often feels threatened by a younger, newly-married wife.

'The pumpkin that could speak' provides a different perspective on polygamy. It is an exceptional, metaphorical description of the confusion of a newly-married woman. Such women often struggle to adapt to married life. They may be dominated by their mother-in-law and senior co-wives. They often find their chores boring, and long for emotional union with their husband. However, the proverb 'A father has many off-spring' points to the fact that he often heads a large family and cannot always pay sufficient attention to the troubles of individual wives. Familiarity also undermines his need for impartiality and he therefore 'is most careful not to show any favouritism. Even if he has his predilection he does not allow the others to notice it.'[15] He consequently maintains order among his wives by remaining mysterious and invisible like a snake.

Seniority

The conflict between co-wives points to another basic feature of social relations, namely the power accorded to seniority. Those who disrespect their elders can expect reprimand and even punishment. The eldest brother in particular receives most honour among children since he is the future head of the homestead. A hierarchy also exists between sisters, and younger sisters must honour and help older sisters.[16] This explains the predicament of a younger sister who is torn between loyalty to her parents and her elder sister in 'To be human again.'

The relationship between brother and sister is intimate and they help each other in times of need. This is explained partly by the fact that a sister who marries brings bridewealth into a family, thus allowing her brother to marry in turn. If she is an elder sister, she helps the head of the family to make important decisions. The interdependence between brother and sister is particularly evident in stories like 'Hippopotamus throws his weight around' and 'Hate.'

Political relations

The hierarchies that determine social relations also are political. Archaeological and documented oral evidence trace settlement patterns in the Venda area back as long ago as 800 A.D. These patterns featured numerous migrations by diverse groups who sometimes remained independent, or intermarried and formed alliances, subjugated weaker groups and struggled for internal leadership.[17] Most notable in this process was the invasion of the Soutpansberg in the 18th century by the military superior Singo clan who had migrated there from Zimbabwe. Their subjugation of local populations resulted in the distinction between themselves *(vhakololo)* and those they conquered *(vhalanda)*.

Members of the Singo clan hold most of the important posts in tribal life.[18] The office of the king is upheld strictly, and transgressions against it were punishable

by summary execution in precolonial times.[19] Influential headmen and trusted councillors are members of the royal family. Non-relatives usually are excluded from ruling clan rituals and political decision-making. However, there are subjects who achieve positions of relative power because of special skills. Leaders of subjugated clans may become headmen, but they usually lack influence.

Children from ruling families formerly were educated separately and intermarriage with commoners was not allowed. This cemented an attitude of superiority and even suspicion against people of lesser importance.[20] The military school for subjects *(thondo ya vhaḓiṋḓa)* in turn inculcated values such as endurance, humility and obedience.

Traditional rulers

Despite clear ruling class consciousness, it is the obligation of leaders to rule justly and not to abuse their power. They are required to protect the interests of all people and to use their wealth to help the aged, the disabled and the destitute.[21]

Ngano portray rulers as both caring and corrupt. The head of a village or ward helps to resolve marital conflict in 'Also a woman,' while a king mobilises a community during drought in 'Mr Hare scrubs his heels.' In contrast, stories in this collection also describe how leaders abduct the wives and daughters of their subordinates, and allow their relatives to escape justice. Their power is portrayed as absolute and often as undermining justice. The son of a king abducts the only daughter of a widow in 'A thin old woman,' while a king ignores evidence of crime in 'The lourie who was not a bird.' Narrator Rosiena Magadani and her audience pointed out that it sometimes is of little use to complain to rulers, especially when women are the victims, or, as in this case, when the culprit is a member of a royal family.

Ngano as law

Ngano dealing with oppressive relationships and their explanations by narrators often express profound emotion and hopelessness. This bleak outlook mainly appears related to the power of oppressive institutions. The values of these institutions are inculcated by means of various rituals. These rituals are exemplified by initiation schools, but *ngano* also have a moral-didactic function:[22] they are *milayo nyana*, or 'small laws'[23] that prescribe social relations.

Although Venda women therefore clearly are subject to certain contraints, they also act out roles of power and independence within certain contexts. They are shown in *ngano* to resist men and dominate other women and children. Children in turn also struggle against their peers.

The power of women

A woman accrues authority from a number of social statuses, of which the most common are wife, sister, mother, mother-in-law, grandmother, diviner and ritual specialist (such as initiation school instructor and trance dance leader). These statuses often accord significant social standing and security to women.[24]

Of all the positions of dominance in which a woman may find herself, none gives rise to so much controversy as that of elder wife. Narrators and their female friends remarked that many of their stories are triggered by experiences of jealousy and violence within polygamous families. As stories like 'Also a woman' show, a 'terrible hatred' of a favourite wife may take root. This even may lead to the murder of the rival or her husband.[25]

Despite the frequent exploitation of the aged, the positions of grandmother and mother-in-law also provide women with authority. Younger, present-day female informants indicate that mothers-in-law still retain significant control over their daughters-in-law. 'A man without proper legs' demonstrates that they can be jealous and demanding, especially when they have to share their sons' wealth with their wives.

Women also are portrayed as exploiting the vulnerability of children. 'Spears eat those who make them' is Rosiena Magadani's version of a popular *ngano* in which the widowed wives of a man attempt to steal the cattle inherited by his orphaned eldest boy. Attempts to poison and assassinate the boy are thwarted by his little sister, and the two children eventually flee with the herd.

Sibling rivalry

While *ngano* regularly describe the exploitation of children by adults, 'Mr Tortoise takes a bath' shows how younger children also fall prey to older children. The entrenched status of an elder brother or sister is particularly irritating to younger siblings. Older children not only often look down upon, but also may bully the youngest.[26] The theme of the youngest child, particularly a son, who struggles against older children, accordingly is common in Venda and Shona oral narratives.

While *ngano* and their explanations often are statements of hopelessness and cynicism, they also reveal a critical awareness of the self in relation to others that is a prerequisite for the conception of aspirations and the consideration of alternatives. The conclusion (and also songs) of *ngano* often features moments of revelation. A newly-married wife comes to understand the predicament of polygamy in 'The pumpkin that could speak'; a young wife comprehends the bitterness of barrenness in 'The clay-child,' while young women are reminded of the fragility of marriage in 'The tree with red flowers.'

Ngano as a site of contestation

Ngano do not merely express understanding, but also a clear rebellious consciousness. African folklore has been described in this regard as 'a discreet protest of weakness against strength, a protest of spiritual against material force' and 'a warning to those in power from those who suffer.'[27] Individual behaviour does not necessarily conform to the dictates of idealised roles and people do not always accept their subservient status passively.[28] 'The wooden hoe' accordingly illustrates how individuals develop strategies of resistance from their own positions of relative power. This story shows how a woman resists her abusive husband. Her defiance hinges on the fact that married women have access to land. They control its agricultural production and their own labour.[29] The failure of a husband to respect his wife's independence or his neglect of her is legitimate grounds for divorce.[30] In fact, the woman's husband is fortunate to be scolded only. Several cases cited in customary law describe wives severely pinching and even beating husbands who are guilty of offenses against them.[31]

Music as rebellion

Narrator Masindi Maliyehe reveals awareness of a different source of resistant power in 'The thin old woman.' The image of the mute African woman correlates with her exclusion from certain legal and political forums, particularly tribal courts. However, women and other subordinates have access to various modes of oral art that allow them to criticise virtually any form of power, even if obliquely. *Malende* drinking songs and *tshigombela* choral dance songs are performance styles of precolonial origin that continue to provide public platforms for women.[32] Singing thus becomes the means used by a widow in 'The thin old woman' to challenge the son of a king who has abducted her daughter. She describes her song as *kuimbo kwanga* ('my little song'). This is a satirical reference to the apparent powerlessness of the subjugated, and to the deliberate modesty of their artistic protest. Its diminutive form is intended to be ironic, and serves to veil its actual power to undermine an oppressive social order.

Musicianship

'The king and the musician' also invokes the power of musical performance to persuade. This popular *ngano* describes how a king abducts the beautiful wife of a poor man.[33] As in the case of 'The thin old woman,' the victim publically confronts the abductor in song. However, he then turns his wife into a pole. A mere

commoner would find it difficult to put a ruler to shame in musical performance unless he invokes time-honoured moral values. Expert musicians usually are called to their art by ancestral spirits.[34] These spirits are religious authorities that control human behaviour and they sanction musical performance that protests against injustice. Such sanction allows musicians to deny responsibility for their role as critics, and imbues them with moral power, here expressed as a magical act (see 'The magic song').

Moral authority also seems to intercede in 'Mr Tortoise takes a bath.' Here special power is accorded to a little tortoise who is rejected by the other animals after he finds water for them during drought. As in the case of his Shona counterpart, the little tortoise wreaks revenge on his superiors, and teaches them a lesson in reciprocal relations. He is the small but hardy symbol of 'righteousness, justice, equity, perseverance and all those qualities that will ultimately ensure the wellbeing of society.'[35]

In conclusion, *ngano* song narratives do not reveal any simple distinction between dominance and submission. When viewed in isolation, forms of power tend to support stereotypes and therefore deny individuality, contradictions and resistance. They in fact are mutually defining and underpinned by patterns of interdependence. They define a collective humanity in which actions are influenced strongly by deep-rooted urges and powerful traditions.

Male identity

Male identity in *ngano* narratives is particularly problematic, and lacks close scrutiny. Given that most narrators are female, it comes as no surprise that men are stereotyped as aggressors. Although this collection provides a unique interpretation of female experience, its portrayal of men sometimes appears to be strategic and hence it tends towards caricature rather than accurate description.[36]

The male stereotype is undermined by the power of cultural prescription. As the experiences of the lonely wife in 'The pumpkin that could speak' show, men too may be constrained by the codes that regulate social conduct. This is also the case in 'The young woman and the zebra' in which a brother murders his sister's unsuitable suitor, in keeping with the often strict requirements of marriage customs.

Vulnerability of characters

Reprehensible behaviour by narrative characters also appears to be motivated by a need for control and acceptance. Translator Edward Mpilo suggested that the woman who thwarts her young co-wife in 'The tree with red flowers' is not really evil, but rather driven by jealousy. This is also the case in 'Also a woman,' in which a senior wife oppresses her younger co-wife. Her only too human feelings become evident when she says to her husband, *'Na nṋe ndi musadzi-vho*' ('I am also a woman'; one who hurts). 'A tree falls' in turn carries the universal theme of young men who undergo some ordeal to marry, and who manage to overcome their predicament by means of courage and ingenuity. However, this version of the theme provides a perspective from the bride's mother: her attempts to impede young suitors are motivated by her fear of loneliness.

Finally, as 'small laws,' *ngano* offer moral instruction and uphold certain tenets of Venda customary law. However, these laws are no coherent expression of power, and the inculcation of patriarchal values is not their only strategic objective. *Ngano* counterbalance efforts towards conformity and submission that tend to mark institutions like initiation schools. They are a symbolic domain on which an unmistakable rebellious streak and a notion of freedom play out in a tense struggle with dominance. Just as *ngano* formalise oppressive relationships, they also entrench the principle of confrontation with those very conventions they uphold.

Ngano[37] are performed by a narrator and a chorus who chant *salungano!* (lit. 'like a song story') at short intervals. *Ngano* usually include several repetitions of at least one song and/or chant, also shared antiphonally between narrator and chorus. *Ngano* performances do not involve dance or any overt dramatisation. Actions by the narrator are limited to small movements of the head, torso, arms and hands.

Performance practice

Ngano performance formerly was a common social skill and most people were able to tell one or more stories. However, in practice there was a tendency for older women to be experts, while the chorus usually comprised children and other women.

Time of performance

Ngano performances mainly took place during autumn and winter evenings. The popular interpretation of this practice was that various forms of misfortune would strike if stories were told at any other time. This includes baldness, growing horns, failing to grow up and having narrative animal characters trample people's fields.[38] A more realistic reason for the proscription on performance was the fear that enticing storytelling would keep people from doing their important horticultural work in summer and their daytime domestic chores.

Performance location

The habitual performance setting for *ngano* is the kitchen. This performance practice has contributed towards the popular misconception of these stories as primarily a form of entertainment for children, or at most, an ancient body of lessons that merely inculcates patriarchal values.

The kitchen is a hospitable space where food is stored and prepared. A hollow in the dung-smeared floor contains a small cooking fire. Story-time comes when the fire starts to die and shadows deepen. A few last maize cobs or peanuts are roasted. Embers occasionally crackle loudly, frightening unsuspecting listeners. Wisps of smoke curl up into the dark recesses of the roof, giving hazy shape to magical narrative characters that imprint themselves on the imagination and create highly emotional experiences.

Starting a story

Narrators usually start a story by chanting *salungano! salungano!*, often with increasing pitch, tempo and intensity. This chant does not add any meaning to a story, nor is it in the first instance a way of capturing audience attention. As an opening statement, *salungano!* may be understood as 'Here comes a story!' This announcement of a narrative world to come is inherent in the reference of the prefix *sa-* to an agreement, so that *salungano!* appears to urge consensus to accept *ngano* as fiction. In addition, *salungano!* also is interpreted as a contraction of the phrase *Ho sala lungano*, meaning 'Only the story remains.' In other words, narrative characters live in a different dimension. *Salungano!* therefore marks off a symbolic space in which anything is possible; in which words and actions become free of the restrictions of the real world, and turn upon their iniquity.

Certain narrators prefer to start their performance with a song from the story they are about to tell. This forces the chorus to settle down because they have to participate in the song. The song also creates an immediate emotional mood as well as suspense, since it hints at the plot to come.

The role of songs

Songs and specific chants are not optional elements of *ngano.* Like the *salungano!* response, they allow participation and emotional involvement, only more so. They not only are integral to dramatic presentation, but also to unfolding plots. In particular, they help to construct expansible images on which stories are based.[39] An expansible image is a core action or event that is repeated, often with

small but important variations. It aids the memory of narrators, increases tension and propels a plot towards resolution. This is evident in a story like 'Hate.' Here the song is a warning to the boy that his life is threatened, but each verse points to a new form of danger. The chant that imitates the sounds of the *mbila* (lamellaphone) musical instrument in 'The zebras are jiving' is of equal importance: it is repeated increasingly slower and incoherently to suggest the deteriorating condition of the instrument, a process compellingly metaphorical of waning political power.

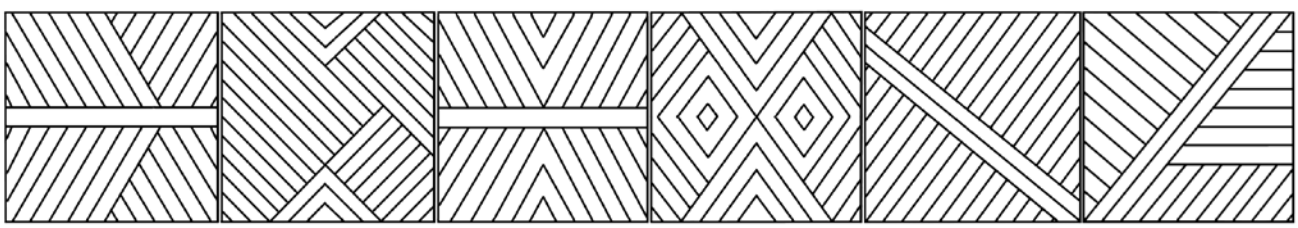
Songs in this collection reveal subterfuge and corruption ('What a woman!' and 'Crow-woman'); they reprimand, criticise and warn ('The lourie who was not a bird' and 'Things are falling apart'); they reveal personal emotions and thoughts ('The lion who hunted his daughter'); they confirm or conceal identity ('The cannibal's tooth' and 'A hippopotamus throws his weight around'); they indicate the death or disappearance of a person by the performance of a solo song line only ('The thin old woman' and 'The young woman and the zebra') and they have a magical function ('The king and the musician' and 'The magic song').

Word painting

Music also contributes to meaning by means of word painting. In 'Crow-woman' and 'To be human again,' the onomatopoeia that describes diving and surfacing in water *(ṭululu-ṭu-ṭuṅwi, ṭululululu-ṭubwa)* accordingly takes the form of a descending and ascending melodic phrase, while in 'The clay child' the onomatopoeia for flowing rain water *(kumbe-mbelele-kumbe)* is represented by a melody with a bouncy three-pulse beat.

Poetic elements such as these not only contribute towards meaning. They also imbue a story with emotional content which words alone cannot provide. In 'Things are falling apart,' the opening line of the song reveals the hysteria of a girl who gives birth after an affair with an older man in an almost incoherently fast descending phrase. Similarly, the frightened, almost breathless warning to an old woman about to be attacked by an ostrich in 'The angry ostrich' takes the form of a frantic chant. In 'Also a woman,' the chorus part is performed monotonously to imitate the singing of a zombie. The deep-seated grief of a mother losing her daughter ('The thin old woman') is represented by plaintive verbal-melodic play on the name of the girl *(Salundee-lundee-lundee-hee, Salundee-handeeha!)*. Song thus is particularly effective as lamentation. Short, repetitive chorus phrases insistently underline suffering and grief in 'The pumpkin that could speak' and 'The wooden hoe.'

One of the most powerful emotional expressions in song occurs in 'The lion who hunted his daughter.' Here Rosiena Magadani uses her rich alto voice over a huge melodic range in a slow, deliberately hesitating, deeply expressive rendition of a mother in emotional turmoil. Mere words, even set to music, apparently cannot adequately capture her emotion: she can only express her anguish fully in vocables. When silence is no answer, and one is lost for meaningful words, the melodic whimper of fractured sounds appears to be the only appropriate form of expression.



On translation and presentation

Two approaches to translation were considered. The first assumes that a written translation should aim at a literal reproduction of the original. This kind of approach impedes meaning and easy reading. Not only are *ngano* replete with culture-specific references, but, as oral drama, they also do not always lend themselves well to the conventions of the printed word. The second approach assumes that a written translation is a re-presentation of an original in a different mode with its own aesthetics. In adhering mainly to the latter approach, we attempted to make the *ngano* in this collection accessible to a wider readership while adhering to the style of the original performances where possible.

Tshivenda and English

Although a good case can be made for the publication of these stories in Tshivenda, the objectives of this book require their presentation in translated form. Nevertheless, our presentation includes song texts and onomatopoeia in their original form. There is evidence in this collection of the interaction between the speakers of Tshivenda, Sesotho, Tshikalanga, Xitsonga and Afrikaans. The actual practice of Tshivenda use is that it features increasingly on various terrains in contemporary polyglot South Africa. It is portrayed prominently in television dramas as integral to both rural and urban existence. In this lies not its demise, but the roots of its creative redefinition in a changing world. As such, our effort to combine Tshivenda and English in narrative form is not new. Within the context of *ngano* it is perhaps even overdue.

Because this collection is intended for reading as well as performance, song texts also are presented in Tshivenda. The conventions of song style are more difficult to manipulate than those of prose. Words, melody and rhythm are a unit and preferably should not be separated in performance.

The original form of onomatopoeia similarly has been retained. Not only is the meaning of these vocal imitations self-evident, but their presence provides texts with an authentic poetic quality.

Individual styles

We also attempted to retain the individuality of certain stories. Although *ngano* have clear stylistic characteristics, specific modes of presentation serve particular objectives: Piet Mavhetha's irrepressible sense of humour emerges in his playful description of Mr Hare's tricks; Masindi Maliyehe's unique passive form of description in 'The thin old woman' helps to portray the shock experienced by a confused mother, while Rosiena Magadani's unusually direct mode in 'The zebras are jiving' reinforces the nervous vibrancy of the conflict between the animals.

General style

We tried to remain faithful to the general terse style of *ngano* narration. This is especially evident in the tendency towards short sentences. Certain common grammatical constructs also have been retained. They include adverbs of place ('there is food here' and 'there by the pool'), demonstrative pronouns ('that young woman,' 'these people' and 'those baboons'), interjections ('Hah!' and 'Ah!'), connecting adjuncts ('and then,' 'now' and 'so') and amplifying colour adjuncts (especially 'truly').

Repetition

Extensive repetition was avoided. Such repetition often occurs in song texts, or when there is some repeated dramatic action. Only the first lines of an exact repetition of a song text or chant is provided, followed by three full-stops. Song repetitions are indicated by means of repeat signs in the transcriptions. In any case, the narratives remain replete with various forms of repetition to underscore this stylistic convention.

The use of tense

The narratives mainly were translated into the safer albeit somewhat stilted past tense. The original texts alternate freely between past tense and the historic present tense. While the latter provides a definite sense of urgency, its juxta-position with the past tense in English results in lack of stylistic coherence and clear meaning.

Plots

Some stories were reorganised because their narrators experienced memory loss. Such reorganisation did not involve adding any information, but only the rearranging of existing sections of the texts.

Performance instructions

Salungano response

There is no explicit formula for the frequency of the *salungano!* response. As a rule, it is interjected by the chorus between sentences or phrases. The chorus listens for a decrease in pitch as the narrator gets breathless and prepares to breathe again. *Salungano!* also follows certain key words. *Zwino* (now), a term that initiates a new set of actions, is almost always followed by this response.

There usually is a brief but clear demarcation between the narrator's lines and the chorus response. However, narrative climaxes often are marked by an overlap as the narrator speeds up her delivery to achieve a desired level of emotional intensity.

Songs

Song transcriptions have been placed after the text of stories to facilitate reading.

Chorus

When a first chorus line is bracketed, it means that line is sung only during repetitions.

Allocation of parts

The narrator performs the top line in a system and the chorus the bottom line. Where only one line is provided (see e.g. 'What a woman!'), it is performed by all.

Note groupings

Note groupings do not necessarily suggest beats, although a three-pulse beat is common in cycles comprising multiples of six.

Pronunciation guide

Vowels

a (short) *(mafula,* marula tree): m**o**ther

a (long) *(ngafhi,* where): **a**rgue

e (short) *(vhone,* see): n**e**ck

e (long) *(fhela,* end): p**ea**r

i *(ri,* think): s**i**ck

o *(Vho,* Mr or Mrs): p**o**rt

u *(makhulu*, granny): b**oo**k

Paired vowels

The following paired vowels must be pronounced separately:

eu *(tseula,* first summer rain)

au (thagaume, danger)

ie (dzhie, take)

ei (temei, difficult)

Consonants

t d l and n: the tongue touches the palate behind the teeth

t d l and n: the tongue curls back into the mouth against the palate, producing a rounded sound

bw *(rambwa,* to summon): ***Bj****örk*

fh *(ngafhi,* where): like vh (see below), but voiceless

g *(gumbo,* leg): **g**arden

hl *(hlaka,* flap): the tongue curls gently back against the palate; it unfolds with a hiss

ṅ *(vhaṅwe,* others): a velar nasal sound; like si**ng**

tsh *(matshena,* white or clear): **ch**arge

vh *(vhana,* children): a voiced consonant; like **wh**y, but with the lips pouted

v *(mmvulela,* open for): **v**enom

w *(wanga,* mine): **w**ater

x (in the 'The tree with red flowers'): like tsh

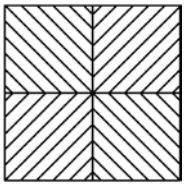
y *(ya,* of): **y**ard

zh *(mulenzhe,* leg): **g**enre

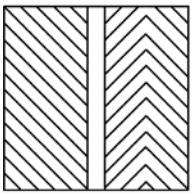
zw *(zwino,* now): one sound; do not overemphasise the 'w'

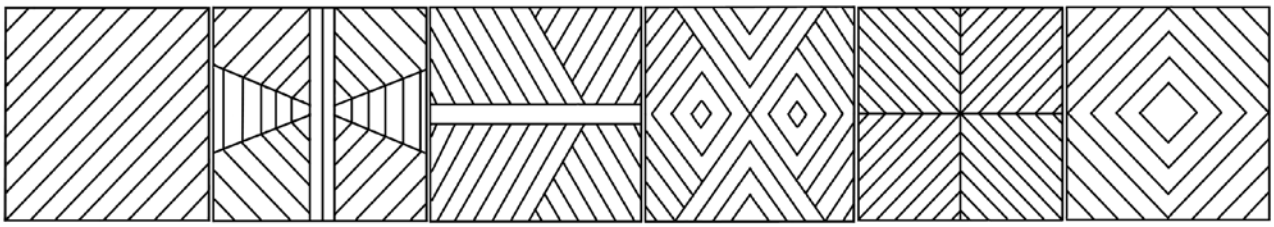
The meaning of the decorative patterns

The graphic patterns that decorate this book are variations of certain basic designs that are carved on the Venda xylophone *(mbila mutondo)* and *ngoma* drums.[40] They represent some of the core social categories portrayed in *ngano*, namely authority and old age, and youth and fertility. Authority and old age are symbolised by the crocodile which not only is a feared animal, but also lives to a great age. The longevity of the crocodile is thought to be transferred to traditional leaders when they swallow pebbles from its stomach. The crocodile is represented by a basic X shape:



Youth and fertility are symbolised by the python. Symbolism related to the python plays a central role in the laws and dance movements of *domba*, the girls' initiation school. The python is represented by a chevron motif, and parallel lines which depict the coils of the snake:





Notes

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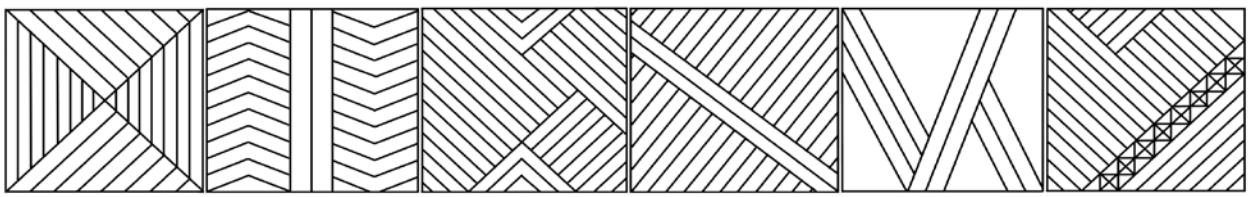
Stayt, H.A. 1931. The Bavenda. London: Oxford University Press. (Stayt, 1931)
Van Warmelo, N.J. & Phophi, W.M. 1948. Venda Law. Pretoria: Government Printer. (Van Warmelo & Phophi, 1948)

1. The origin of the name is uncertain. Its use was promoted by 19th century Berlin Lutheran missionaries. The area is now officially known as Vhembe, but 'Venda' is still in general use.
2. As a rule, *ngano* carry no explicit titles. The titles in this collection were selected by the editors.
3. Du Plessis, 1940:29, 33, 44.
4. Gavhi, G.T. 1991. *Ngano dza vha kale*. Pietermaritzburg: Centaur; Khuba, A.E. 1988. *Zwa ṋwaha wa mmbo na tsikidzi*. Pietermaritzburg: Travis; Kruger, J. 2004. *Venḓa ḽashu*: Tshivenda songs, musical games and song stories. Potchefstroom: North-West University; Lestrade, G.P. 1942. Some Venda folk-tales. Cape Town: School of African Studies; Maumela, B.H. 1990. *Ngano dzashu na maambele a Tshivenḓa*. Pietermaritzburg: Centaur; Maumela, T.N. 1968. *Dzingano na dzithai dza Tshivenḓa*. Pretoria: Van Schaik; Mavhina, S., Muedi, R.V., Maumela, T.N. & Mbuwe, A.R. 1977. *Salungano! Salungano!* Pretoria: Van Schaik; Nenzhelele, P.H. 1961. *Ngano*. Johannesburg: Afrikaanse Pers-Boekhandel; Phophi, W.M. 1990. *Ngano dziṋwe dza Vhavenḓa*. Pretoria: De Jager-HAUM Publishers; Phophi, W.M. 1992. *Ngano dza vhana vha Vhumbedzi*. Pietermaritzburg: Centaur; Stayt, 1931.
5. Finnegan, R. 1970. Oral literature in Africa. London: Oxford University Press; Fortune, G., *ed*. 1983. *Ngano*. Harare: Mercury Press; Junod, H.A. 1927. The life of a South African tribe, vol. 2. London: Macmillan; Kriel, A. 1971. An African horizon. Cape Town: Permanent Publishing House; Posselt, F.W.T. 1929. Fables of the veld. London: Oxford University Press; Scheub, H. 1975. The Xhosa *ntsomi*. London: Oxford University Press; Smith, A.M. 2004. The girl who married a lion. Edinburgh: Canongate; Tracey, H. 1986. The lion on the path and other African stories. Grahamstown: International Library of African Music, Rhodes University; Werner, A. 1933. Myths and legends of the Bantu. London: George G. Harrap.
6. See e.g. Fortune, G., *ed*. 1983. *Ngano*. Harare: Mercury Press.
7. Mbiti, J.S. 1990. African religions and philosophy. Oxford: Heinemann, p. 204.
8. The Venda kinship system is characterised by double descent. A person's status firstly is determined by patrilineal descent that is invoked in marriage, inheritance and judicial matters. However, people also are bound by matrilineal ties that may not be ignored in important family matters such as religious observances (Du Plessis, 1940:36).
9. Ramphele & Boonzaier, p. 156. The minor status of women in customary law is changing through laws such as that which nullifies patrilineal inheritance. Previously, the property of a deceased man not only was inherited by his male relatives, but his widows also were placed in their custody. This was necessary since bridewealth had been paid for them and they had become the responsibility of their in-laws. This was a practice most widows disliked. Their transfer to another family often was opposed by its women, and hence they sometimes were treated as little more than servants.
10. See Jeannerat, C.F. 1997. Invoking the female *vhusha* ceremony and the struggle for identity and security in Tshiendeulu, Venda. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 15(1):87-106. Also see narrator Sophia Magoro's biography.
11. See Walker, C. 1990. Women and gender in Southern Africa to 1945: An overview, p. 30. (*In* Walker, C. *ed*. Women and gender in Southern Africa to 1945. Cape Town: David Phillip, p. 1-32.); Ramphele & Boonzaier, 1988.

12. Lit. 'ancestral spirit.' We use the term 'god' because it conveys a clearer notion of authority. This expression firstly points to the god-like status of men. It also expresses the dependency of a woman on her husband, and the fact that her identity is shaped strongly by her status as wife and mother.
13. Holleman, cited in Kriel, 1971:106. The violent nature of paternal control described in *ngano* is also evident in regional narratives. A Shona *ngano* describes a father beating his daughter for falling in love with an unsuitable man, while a Xhosa *ntsomi* story describes how a father attempts to kill his daughter for disobeying an instruction (see Tracey, H. 1986. The lion on the path and other African stories. Grahamstown: International Library of African Music, Rhodes University, p. 34-38; Scheub, H. The Xhosa *ntsomi*. London: Oxford University Press, p. 405-7).
14. See Cloete, P.H. 1980. *Die reg en regstelsel van die Vhavenda van Dzanani met betrekking tot geslagsonregmatighede*. LLD thesis. Potchefstroom: North-West University; Du Plessis, 1940; Rambau, J.V. 1987. The role of a Venda woman in a changing society. B.A. Honours dissertation. Thohoyandou: University of Venda; Van Warmelo & Phophi, 1948.
15. Van Warmelo & Phophi, 1948:249, 309.
16. Du Plessis, 1940:34, 41.
17. See Hanisch, E. 1994. Legends, oral traditions and archaeology: A look at early Venda history. *Luvhone* 3(1):68-76.
18. For a comprehensive description of precolonial political organisation, see Du Plessis, 1940.
19. These transgressions included: entering a king's private quarters without permission, becoming too wealthy and therefore competing with royal status, abusing royal messengers, rebellion and adultery with a royal wife. During the 20th century, when the tribal death penalty became illegal, people were fined or banned (Du Plessis, 1940).
20. See Van Warmelo, N.J. 1971. Courts and court speech. *African Studies*, 30:355-70.
21. See Du Plessis, 1940; Matshidze, E.P. 1988. The role of the female ruler in traditional Venda society with particular reference to Vondwe. B.A. Honours dissertation. Thohoyandou: University of Venda.
22. See e.g. Gavhi, G.T. 1991. *Ngano dza vha kale* [Ancient stories]. Pietermaritzburg: Centaur. Maumela in turn describes *ngano* as the 'literature of our ancestors' (In Mavhina, *et al.* 1977. *Salungano! Salungano!* Pretoria: Van Schaik, p. 37.)
23. Jabes Mavhetha of Muswodi, 18/06/05. *Milayo* is the term used to describe the social norms inculcated at initiation schools. Ndebele *nonwane* oral narratives similarly do not only include imaginary stories but also 'non-fictional accounts touching on topics like local history and appropriate social conduct for girls and women that [go] under the rubric *megkwa le melao*, a complex phrase meaning law, duty, right, virtue, customary observance, order, justice and so on' (Hofmeyr, I. 1993. 'We spend our years as a tale that is told': Oral historical narrative in a South African kingdom. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, p. 28).
24. Stayt in particular presents a benign portrayal of female lives, noting that women 'seem content with their lot and do not resent their inferior position … [they] work hard, but have considerable freedom, frequently visiting their parents' homes and taking part in every festivity and excitement. They are not treated as slaves of their husbands in any way (Stayt, 1931:142, 157). Van Warmelo & Phophi (1948), in contrast, offer a more nuanced view, also extensively citing cases of male violence. Rambau similarly describes the exploitation of women in a time of rapid economic change. (Rambau, J.V. 1987. The role of a Venda woman in a changing society. B.A. Honours dissertation. Thohoyandou: University of Venda.)
25. Van Warmelo & Phophi, 1948:305-10. Mafenya quotes a song in which a senior wife remarks: *Nangwe vha nnyamba. A thi wari-wari. Khii ndi dzanga*. ('I do not worry even though they gossip about me. The key of the house is mine.') (Mafenya, L.L 1988. Venda female songs and their functions. B.A. Honours dissertation. Thohoyandou: University of Venda.)
26. Kriel, 1971:108.
27. Junod, H.A. 1927. The life of a South African tribe, vol. 2. London: Macmillan, p. 224.
28. Ramphele & Boonzaier, 1988:156, 161.
29. Guy, J. 1990. Gender oppression in precapitalist societies, p. 46. (*In* Walker, C., *ed.* Women and gender in Southern Africa to 1945. Cape Town: David Phillip, pp. 33-47.) Stayt notes that 'At marriage a wife lives with her husband's mother until after the birth of her first child, when her husband builds her a hut for herself and allots to her a portion of land as her own personal property. It is her duty to feed her husband and support her own family, and she may dispose of her surplus produce as she wishes.' (Stayt, 1931:142.) Also see Du Plessis, 1940:30-31; Van Warmelo & Phophi, 1948:317; Wessmann, R. 1908. The Bawenda of the spelonken. London: The African World.

30. A woman could desert her husband if he did not supply her with grain, especially during drought. Separation also was legal when a husband neglected his wife during illness, or when he did not build a house for her (Van Warmelo & Phophi, 1948:265, 475).
31. One case describes how a man attempts to beat his wife, whereupon she 'threw him flat on the ground and began pinching him on his thighs so that he could hardly walk. All he said was, "Woman, I don't want even to see you again." ' (Van Warmelo & Phophi, 1948:473.)
32. See Kruger, J. 1999 (part I). 2007 (part II). 'Singing psalms with owls': A Venda 20th century musical history. *Journal of African Music*, 7(4):122:46. 8(1):36-59.
33. Stayt notes that 'Possibly at one time the chief had sexual rights over all the women of the tribe, but today if the chief commits adultery he is expected to pay compensation to the woman's husband. There are still cases where chiefs, usually young and irresponsible, during their tours about the country, have stolen any girls whose appearance attracted them … these cases are rare and considered to be unworthy of a chief.' (Stayt, 1931:204-5.)
34. See Kruger, J. 1999. Of heroes and madmen: Venda *zwilombe*. *South African Journal of Musicology*, 19:15-31.
35. Kriel, 1971:56, 59, 79.
36. Scheub suggests in this regard that oral narratives frequently feature 'warped characters' because they want to reveal a certain feeling about them, rather than to provide an objective appraisal of them (Scheub, H. 2002. The poem in the story: Music, poetry and narrative. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, p. 48).
37. Sing. *lungano*, pl. *dzingano*.
38. Rananga, N.C. 1997. The structural elements of Venda folktales: The transcriber versus the narrator. M.A. dissertation. Pretoria: University of South Africa, p. 4-5.
39. The concept of the expansible image was formulated by Harold Scheub. For a more comprehensive discussion of the structure of African folktales, and the role of songs in them, see the following publications by him: 1974/5. Oral narrative process and the use of models. *New Literary History*, 6(2):353-77; 1975. The Xhosa *ntsomi*. London: Oxford University Press; 1976. Body and image in oral narrative performance. *New Literary History*, 8:345-67; 2002. The poem in the story: Music, poetry and narrative. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
40. See Kirby, P.R. 1968. The musical instruments of the native races of South Africa. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Press; Nettleton, A.C.E. 1984. The traditional figurative woodcarving of the Shona and Venda. Ph.D thesis. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.



Matamela Rasivhetshele

Far into the Nzhelele valley a small dirt road turns north into the mountains at the village of Tshithuthuni. It rises and then becomes two deep ruts. A goat path later turns off to the right. Against a slope, under litchi and pawpaw trees, is the homestead of Matamela Rasivhetshele.

A television antenna beckons through the leaves of an avocado tree. The house is neatly plastered with clay and cattle dung. The huts are redolent with the frank-sweet smell of wild mint: someone has swept the courtyard with branches of this plant.

The children are neatly dressed and the small girls greet shyly one by one. A young girl is stirring porridge in the red glow of a fire in the kitchen hut. She turns the radio off and also comes to greet the visitors.

Matamela was born at Tshithuthuni in 1929. She worked as a cleaner at Siloam hospital. She passed away in 1999, before she was able to tell us the story of her life. However, her children vividly remember her storytelling. They recall running home and scattering dogs in their haste to get to the fire around which their mother told her stories.

Matamela ran *musevheto* girls' initiation schools during the 1970s and 1980s. These schools teach young girls to respect their elders and how to behave as married women. Girls came in large numbers for dancing, singing and learning *milayo*, the lessons of the school.

Matamela's children now live separately with their families. It is difficult for them to continue their mother's traditions. 'It is sad to be left by a talented mother and a loving grandmother,' her son Ntsundeni remarked.

The story of Badamuguvha was Matamela's favourite. It is a priceless description of a rooster who publically embarrasses his owner ...

Matamela Rasivhetshele (left) with
her relative Nyadzanga Rangadza

The flamboyant rooster

Salungano! Salungano! Here comes a story!

Badamuguvha had five wives. ‘I am leaving for work in Johannesburg,’ he said. ‘Stay here. Do not eat from this wild fig tree.’

Those women agreed. But after Badamuguvha had left, four of them said, ‘We will eat. After all, this tree belongs to our husband.’

The fifth wife refused to eat with them. The other women picked and ate, and picked and ate! Those wives of Badamuguvha all died.[1]

That wife who remained said, ‘Well, whom shall I send to inform Badamuguvha? Goat, I will send you.’

‘I cannot go,’ the goat replied. ‘All I can say is *mee!’*

‘Donkey, I will send you,’ the wife said.

‘I cannot go,’ the donkey replied. ‘All I can say is *oho-oho!’*

‘You, cow!’

‘Not me,’ the cow answered. ‘All I can say is *moo!’*

‘But whom shall I send then?’ that wife asked. ‘I will send you, rooster.’[2]

The rooster then flapped his wings like this, *ba-ba-ba-ba-ba!*

He crowed:

(Narrator chants)[3]

Kukulikoo!	(The sound of crowing)
Khuhu yashu, wee!	Hey, our rooster!
Ke kgogo ya rona![4]	They say: this is our rooster!
Ri khuvhela basadi ba Badamuguvha!	We are talking about Badamuguvha’s wives.
Re bolela basadi ba Badamuguvha.	We are talking about Badamuguvha’s wives.
Ba fela ba fedile!	They have perished!

(Narrator sings)

Ahee! Go ya lililwe gae.	Oh dear! They are crying at home.
Badamuguvha, ba fela ba fedile!	Badamuguvha, they have perished!

(Chorus)
Badamuguvha!

Now, that rooster landed with a thud in the city of Polokwane. He flapped his wings, *ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba!*

He crowed:

(Narrator chants)
Kukulikoo!
Khuhu yashu, wee! …

Then he sang:

(Narrator sings)
Ahee! Go ya lililwe gae.
Badamuguvha, ba fela ba fedile! …

That rooster flew *phurrrrrrr!* and landed in Johannesburg. He flapped his wings, *ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba!* He crowed:

(Narrator chants)
Kukulikoo!
Khuhu yashu, wee! …

Then he sang:

(Narrator sings)
Ke kgogo ya rona!
Re bolela basadi ba Badamuguvha …

'Hey, hey, hey! There is a rooster here! He says he is looking for Badamuguvha. All his wives are dead at home!'

People found Badamuguvha and he came there. The rooster flapped his wings, crowed and sang his song:

(Narrator chants)
Kukulikoo!
Khuhu yashu, wee! …

(Narrator sings)
Ke kgogo ya rona!
Re bolela basadi ba Badamuguvha …

'Ah!' Badamuguvha said. 'Now, if it is indeed so that my wives are dead at home, then I must leave with this rooster.'

Badamaguvha took the rooster and got onto the train with him. That rooster crowed:

(Narrator chants)
Kukulikoo!
Khuhu yashu, wee! …

Then he sang:

(Narrator sings)
Ke kgogo ya rona!
Re bolela basadi ba Badamuguvha …

Badamuguvha arrived at home, and the rooster landed with him. He found his wives dead.

'I told them that we should not eat from the tree,' the remaining wife explained.

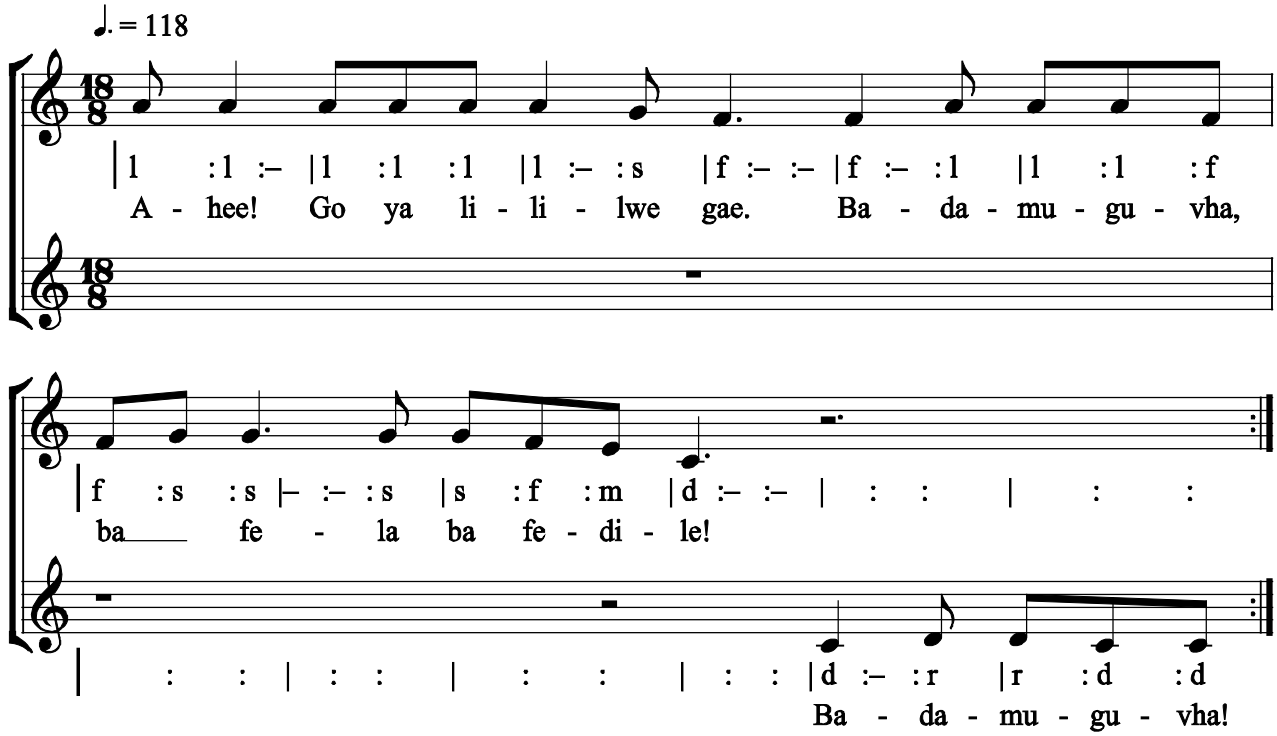
It was then that Badamuguvha took a cane! He beat those four wives until they woke up!

Ha mbo ḓi vha u fa ha lungano. This is the end of the story.

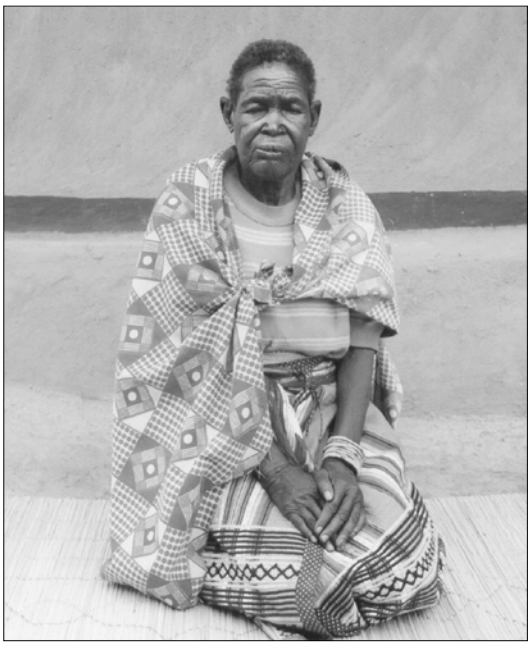
Tshitutuni, 31/05/91

This story affirms the status of men as head of the household in a patriarchal society (other versions of this theme assert the status of kings), as well as the violent means by which their authority often is exercised.

1 This is a popular *ngano* theme.
2 Their ability to fly makes birds the obvious messengers in African narratives.
3 These lines must be chanted fast and in the high voice of a rooster.
4 Although the rooster resides in a Tshivenda-speaking home, it mostly sings in Northern Sotho. There is a historic perception, if not admiration, in Venda of the self-assertive nature of Sotho people. In addition, the rooster has to travel to Johannesburg through Northern Sotho-speaking areas. Thus he follows the tracks of many Venda migrant workers who first travelled south during the late 19th century to work in the diamond mines of Kimberley.



Matodzi Goma



Matodzi Goma lives in the village of Muswodi which is situated in the arid and hot Limpopo valley, some seven hundred kilometers north-east of Johannesburg. Muswodi borders onto the neighbouring village of Folovhodwe. The Nwanedi River flows through a section of Folovhodwe. Its narrow banks are farmed intensively with tomatoes, other vegetables, fruit and maize during good years. However, for most villagers soil cultivation is not a viable means of survival. The rainfall is low and summers are mercilessly hot.

There is almost no cattle farming in the area. Goats, however, abound, and their bells can be heard at a distance at all hours. They are hardy, opportunistic animals that eat virtually anything. Young fruit trees all are surrounded by loosely stacked bricks, and almost all natural vegetation in the district has been stripped of leaves to the height of a goat standing on its hind legs. Many households have equally opportunistic fowls and pigeons. There are no other domestic animals except a myriad of underfed dogs. There is very little domestic litter: every scrap of food is utilised. Rubbish piles and refuse bins contain nothing that even a goat can eat.

The soil generally is infertile, being extremely stony and alkaline. The landscape is barren and white with lime dust: trees are pale and legs are pale too. Natural vegetation is stunted. In places next to roads pieces of paper and plastic cling to bare tree trunks. Some enterprising households have trees on their property and manage to keep them growing with manure. It comes as a surprise to hear birds in them.

There is no electricity. Some homes have solar power units. However, their batteries need regular servicing and nobody can do this.

Some people still have some distance to walk for water, but most of them have access to a tap quite close to their property. Some families have started to recirculate their water to cultivate their gardens. Water-borne sewage remains a dream. Virtually all households have pit latrines, but the first French drain sewage systems are being planned. How the meagre local water resource will cope with this technology remains to be seen.

There is no local industry, nor any farming projects. Some women collect the seeds of baobab trees. The oil from these seeds is used in cosmetics. Ina le Roux runs a small embroidery project, and the two hundred rand per month that the participants each earns helps to keep starvation at bay. Some men work at a small local magnesium mine. One of them, narrator Piet Mavheta's eldest son Peter, is a machine operator. He remarked that 'there is no prospect for me in this job.' Soon after he spoke to us, his chest was seriously injured when a bulldozer he was trying to repair ran over him. He wants to institute a legal claim but lacks the means and knowledge to do so.

Boys play soccer in the dusty streets, using stones as goal posts which are quickly removed when a car appears. Many boys, even teenagers, play with self-made wire cars. Girls often are dressed in tight-fitting pants.

Many people clearly are struggling, but they do not want to admit it. They ask for nothing. They only explain how fortunate they are to have a son and a small pension, and that they are able to buy bread and cooldrink. But they worry about not having jobs. When they pray, their voices are filled with emotion.

Matodzi was born at Dzimauli ‘before the locusts came’ (in 1915 and 1924). She appears to be in her eighties. She is named Matodzi (tears) because her parents lost a son and daughter during the time she was born. They were killed by witchcraft, she said with loathing. Their deaths are etched permanently into her memory.

Matodzi worked in the family field with her mother when she was a child. Here they hoed, planted, weeded and harvested. She remembers this time with fondness because her family always had food: to be happy is not to be hungry.

Matodzi got married to Simson Goma who was a soldier in the Second World War. He returned uninjured, wearing his uniform and a medal, and carrying his kit bag and rifle. She was very happy to see him. He showed her how he could march, and the exercises he had to do: standing on one leg, holding his rifle above his head. Children saw his antics and copied his movements. Matodzi demonstrated them, complete with sounds and jerky movements, to everybody’s amusement. Simson died long ago when the locusts came once again.

Matodzi gave birth to two boys and one daughter, but only one son has survived. She lives with him, his wife and their five children. They are dependent on her pension of R780 a month. She buys one eighty kilogram bag of maize meal every month: ‘We eat a bit of maize porridge in the morning; there is nothing for the rest of the day, there is nothing for the evening.’ She has a field, but cannot plant when there is no rain. They have no animals. They collect and sell mopani worms (a nutricious local delicacy) when they can find them. She says that although she has only one child left, she is happy: there is nothing to worry her.

Also a woman

Salungano! Salungano! Here comes a story!

Now, there were two women and their husband. The wife who was married first buried the second wife. She buried her like a grinding stone. She put her at the bottom of a hole. She ground maize on her.

(Narrator)
Ihii-hi-hi, Nyamutshalinga. Nyamutshalinga.
Ihii-hi-hi, tombo ḽi tihweni? What must be done with the stone?

(Chorus)
Ḽi no dada, yehee! There is a monster!

Now, the husband arrived home. ‘Where is my second wife?’

‘Hey,’ his first wife answered, ‘I am telling you again: stop wandering around and picking up mad women. She packed her things and left. She went back to her mother. Now what can I do? I am also a woman.’

‘Is that so?’

‘Yes.’

The next morning that woman fetched her maize. She went to the grinding stone.

Ihii-hi-hi, Nyamutshalinga, ḽi no dada.
Ihii-hi-hi, tombo ḽi tihweni? …

Now, a certain old woman who was a spirit came there. She was pale as death. When she arrived, she heard the first wife singing.

‘Now, who is under your grinding stone?’ she asked.

‘Nobody, I am singing alone,’ that first wife replied.[1]

‘But where is that one who disappeared?’ the pale old woman asked.

‘I don’t know,’ the wife answered. ‘She is not my business.’ She spoke like this because of jealousy. ‘Why did the new wife come here? I put her under the grinding stone so that she should die down there. Then I lived with my husband.’

‘Is that so?’ the pale old woman said. ‘Hah! Let me grind and see for myself.’ She went to the grinding stone and knelt.

Ihii-hi-hi, Nyamutshalinga, ḽi no dada.
Ihii-hi-hi, tombo ḽi tihweni? …

Hey! Who was singing the chorus part? It was the second wife!

Well, that old woman called the others. ‘Now, you people, let us go to court.’

They went to the king. When they arrived there, they said, ‘Honourable king, that young woman who disappeared is under the elder wife’s grinding stone. She has been buried by her.’

‘Don’t worry,’ the king said, ‘my wife will go there to see.’

The king’s wife got up and took some maize after the first wife left for her field. Then the king’s wife sang:

Ihii-hi-hi, Nyamutshalinga, ḽi no dada.
Ihii-hi-hi, tombo ḽi tihweni? …

‘My lord!’ the king’s wife exclaimed, ‘that small girl who is lost, she is here under the grinding stone!’

The king got up. He went to that house with his wife. But they found no-one there.

‘Can you not hear that sound?’ people asked.

Ihii-hi-hi, Nyamutshalinga, ḽi no dada.
Ihii-hi-hi, tombo ḽi tihweni? …

‘Hey councillors,’ the king said, ‘there is a person under the grinding stone. Now, what shall we do?’

‘Let us take her out and smear her with magic fat,’ they said. ‘Then she will go to your house and live there.’

Truly, they took that woman out and wrote to her husband. He came home and said, ‘What is the matter?’

‘Your wife is at the king’s house,’ people answered. ‘She was buried by this jealous one.’

The husband went to the king, who said, ‘Everyone to court! And your in-laws, they must also be there.’

Those in-laws gathered, and the king said to them, ‘You must slaughter five cattle.’[2]

People came to eat the meat with porridge. They came with donkeys. Those donkeys carried the meat. That first wife was brought forward. She was chased away, back to her parents.

Ha mbo vha u fa ha lungano. This is the end of the story.

Folovhodwe, 30/09/92

Narrative action in *ngano* frequently is triggered by conflict among wives in polygamous families. Such conflict often stems from feelings of insecurity experienced by senior wives who feel threatened by younger, newly-married wives (also see 'The tree with red flowers').

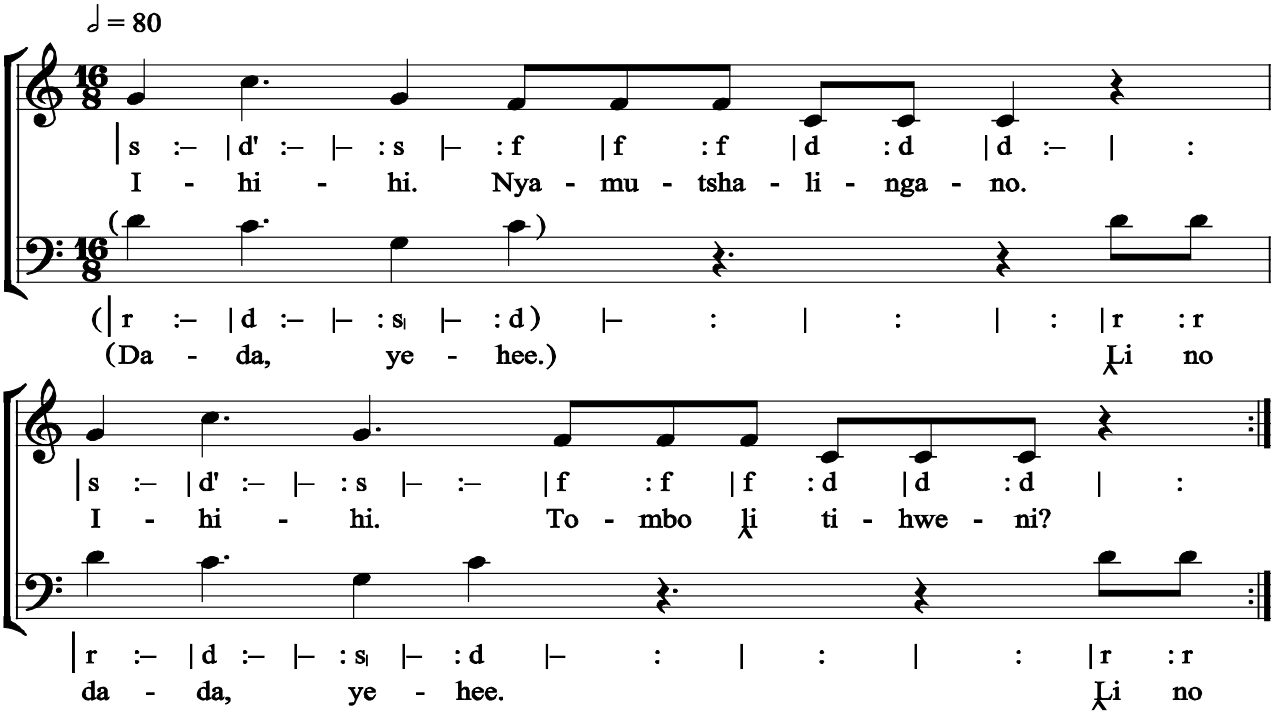
Women habitually complain about their husband and co-wives when performing *mafhuwe*, songs that accompany the pounding and grinding of maize and millet.

The grinding stone is a metaphor for the suffering the second wife endures under the first wife. Her name accordingly is Nyamutshalingeni which means 'What-do-you-want-with-my-husband?' As in the story entitled 'The tree with red flowers,' the younger wife is controlled by magic. The elder wife turns her into a zombie (the monster in the song). Accordingly, she sings the chorus part in a monotonous way.

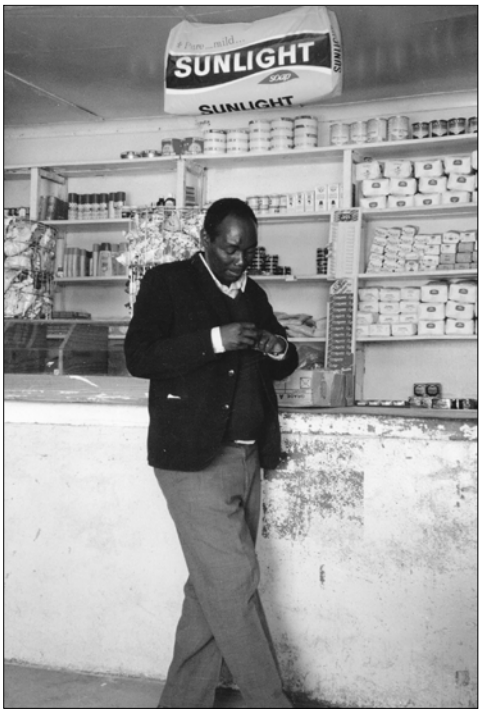
Although the behaviour of the elder wife is condemned, she is not merely portrayed as errant. She identifies herself as 'also a woman' *(Na nṋe ndi musadzi-vho)*, in other words, as a person experiencing self-doubt and hurt.

Elderly narrators agreed that, unlike today, divorce seldom was an option when they were young. It undermined social cohesion and the status of the woman accorded to her by marriage. It also caused financial problems. Bridewealth had to be returned following a divorce, but it may already have been passed on to another family through marriage.

1 This is suspicious because Venda music is antiphonal and therefore always requires chorus singers. The second wife in fact is singing the chorus part.
2 By way of a fine, but also to ease the conflict between the families.



Piet Mavhetha



Piet Malori Mavhetha was born on 23 June 1942 in the small village of Waterpoort, not far from Musina. It was a turbulent time. World War Two was at its height and many lorries transporting soldiers to Durban harbour rumbled by day and night. They eventually became fewer and later stopped churning up dust altogether. 'We will call him Malori,' Piet's father said, 'this son of ours who arrived in the time of lorries.'

Piet's father was a railway worker. Life was exciting for the Mavhetha children. Every hot afternoon a steam engine and a long line of coaches came thundering along the railway line. 'Our house was made of corrugated iron and wood beams. It trembled and shook, and steam and smoke came through our front door. When the train stopped, we rushed to find flattened pennies that we had placed on the track.'

'I waited for my father at the station every evening. That was the best part of my day. He always left some coffee for me in his billy can. Then we walked home and I told him everything that had happened that day: the baboons coming right up to the water tank and the ambulance passing by.'

'We all went to a small school at Waterpoort where the teacher taught us to read and write. "Now you are better educated than me!" my father said to me one day when I could write my name as well as his.'

Piet's father retired at sixty with a modest railway pension. He made a fatal decision to take on a second wife in that same year. From the beginning there was jealousy, bickering and even serious violence at home. The family was never happy again. Piet's older brother left one day with just a blanket. He couldn't bear to see how his mother got beaten up night after night. She eventually gathered her children and their few possessions and left.

They moved in with her sister Tambani Mamavhulo in Muswodi. Twelve children had to be fed and this placed enormous strain on the two single mothers. 'We were very poor and often hungry, but there was no more fighting.'

Tambani was an excellent narrator. She would tell *ngano* in the kitchen in the evenings. 'All the stories I know I heard from Tambani during the years when we were so poor at Muswodi.'

When Piet was twelve he had the good fortune of finding himself a job at the home of a medical doctor. He also became the playmate of Johan, the doctor's four-year old son. 'They paid me at the end of the month. I never opened my pay packet. I gave it all to my mother. I was like a child in the doctor's house for two years. The day they moved to Pretoria we all cried. Johan's mother put her arms around me. It was like a funeral for all of us.'

Piet found work at the Department of Water Affairs as a young man. He was very proud of his job, and soon worked in the laboratory, testing concrete. Piet was transferred when a new dam was built in the Potgietersrust district (Mokopane). He lived a lonely life far away from his family.

'I became a man of beer. Every Friday afternoon I bought two quarts Black Label. Mulaudzi, a man from Venda who worked with me, and I sat outside my shack. I drank my beer and Mulaudzi read his Bible. Every weekend Mulaudzi nagged me to go to church with him. But I told him I was a man of beer, not a person who went to church.'

‘One Sunday morning I could not stand his nagging any longer and went to church with him. A very strange thing happened that day: I went into church as a man of beer and I came out of church as a man of God!’

Not long after his stay at Potgietersrust, Piet entered the Bible school of the Church of the Nazarene in Pietersburg (Polokwane). He completed a two-year course and accepted the position as pastor at Folovhodwe. Life at that time was difficult. The congregation was mostly unemployed and extremely poor. Their pastor with his nine children was equally deprived.

Outlying villages like Matshena, Domboni, Tshiungani and Manenzhe also fell under Piet’s pastoral care. He had to visit them once a month. Not being able to afford the taxi fare, Piet travelled by bicycle. ‘It took me most of Thursday to cycle to Matshena where I held services on Friday. I would return on Saturday to be ready for the Sunday service at Folovhodwe.’

Piet became a moral leader in his community and served on various councils and committees. After thirty years of faithful service as pastor, the church board called an urgent meeting. ‘The elders came to tell me there would be a gathering. I wondered what it could be about. The church board welcomed me and said they wanted to apologise to me. The leader of the board stood up and said, “In all these years we never gave you a holiday. We did not even think about a holiday. We are so sorry. You can take three months’ paid leave.” We all had a good laugh. I thanked them and I spent three months in Folovhodwe with my family.’

Piet Mavhetha passed away on 23 January 2005 after a heart attack. His widow Selina and her adult children remain a hub of community life.

Mr Hare scrubs his heels

Salungano! Salungano! Here comes a story!

It was the year of drought.[1] ‘There is a meeting for all the animals at the king’s homestead,’ Mr Lion said.

Truly, everyone gathered there. Mr Elephant came, Mr Duiker too. The baboons moved closer, those gentlemen who climb down branches. The monkeys arrived and Mr Jackal followed them. Also the rock rabbits, those kings of the mountains: they stepped inside. And Sankambe, the hare, also came along because a meeting had been called at the court. When he arrived there, he squatted behind the others.

‘Now,’ those animals said, ‘the king must explain why we have been summoned.’

‘Well,’ the king answered, ‘I called you because the drought is very bad. There is almost nothing to eat. Even though we pick up something here and there, we have no water. Look all over, from west to north: there is nothing. Now what shall we do? I thought we should go and dig a well. Then we will go to a good place to graze. We will return at night and go to our grass shelters. We will drink water and wash. Then we will sleep with the wind blowing over us.’

Well, now. Sankambe was sitting there at the back. ‘Your Majesty! I wish to say something. About us hares: we do not need water. We live without it. So, I ask that you excuse me from this meeting. Hares are not creatures of the water. We do not care about water.’

Other animals also asked to speak: Mr Duiker, Mr Impala, Mr Monkey and so on until the king spoke again.[2] ‘Well, let us make an agreement. The person who does not want to be part of our group may go.’ And so Sankambe left the meeting.

The king’s councillors gathered. They took things to dig with: picks and crowbars. Then the animals went to the veld. When they arrived there, the men dug and dug in search of their big fountain. Then the workers went to bed.

Truly, the water came out: there it was! It sparkled! Those gentlemen walked around proudly. Mr Elephant was very glad. He jumped about. Yes, the animals smiled, giggled and laughed. Then

they went to bed.

Well, the next morning the animals said, 'Now, what we must do is to go out and look for food. That is a big chore. When we come back with our food, we will go to our fountain to drink and wash.' Yes, things happened like that.

A crowd gathered the next morning. There they went! The animals gathered food over there in the veld.

Now, while they were busy, Sankambe realised they had found water. Thirst got hold of him too: 'I will drink that water first!'

Sankambe had a water calabash. He also had a honey calabash. He went to the fountain. 'Hey! Hello! Hello! Hello!'

There was nobody. Well, Sankambe filled his water calabash. His bag became heavy. Yes! The water in the calabash sloshed around, *kutu! kutu!*

Sankambe took his clothes off. He put them down there. He was going to wash himself. Now, this gentleman always carried a stone for washing himself. He scrubbed himself, his feet and his heels that had become rough during the long drought. Hey! He washed himself so that his coat had a beautiful sheen. He came out at sunset and took his clothes. He also took his water cans.

Then! Mr Elephant came back, Mr Lion came back. When they arrived, they left their food in their grass shelters. Here they were in a cloud of dust. These gentlemen were glad.

'We are going to the water,' they said.

When they got to the fountain, they said, 'Hey, do not step in the water. It will become muddy!'

While they were rebuking each other like this, they looked over there and saw hair by the reeds.

'Hair?' they wondered.

Those who knew said that the hair belonged to Sankambe. He was the impudent one who came here to drink and wash himself.

'Now, what shall we do with him?' the animals asked.

Well, that evening those gentlemen called a meeting.

'Now, boys,' they said, 'did you see what Sankambe did? He spoiled our fountain. What must we do?'

Some came with ideas. 'Let us post a guard.'

'Yes! Who shall it be?'

'I will stay,' Mr Baboon said. He was a person who did not like too much work. He preferred to eat the food of others.[3]

So, Mr Baboon remained at the fountain. He found a stone over there by the tree. He sat down and leaned back comfortably.

Sankambe returned again.

(Narrator)

Vhaṅwe vha tshi ramba dzunde.	Others are called for communal work.
Nṋe ndi tshi rambwa dzunde.	I am called for work.
Vhaṅwe vha tshi wana kunwa.	Others found something to drink.

(Chorus)

Tshangamela![4]	
A thi zwi funi zwanga.	I do not like it.[5]

Sankambe ran over there with his water calabash and honey calabash. Hey! That rascal cut a leaf with which to scoop the honey. That small leaf peeped from the honey calabash.

'Hello! Is there somebody there?'

'*Homu!*'[6] Mr Baboon replied. 'Yes! I am here, I am here. What is it?'

‘I was thinking of visiting you, Your Honour.’

‘Speak, man.’

‘My Lord, I have brought something. This is my syrup, my wonder syrup.’

‘Let me taste some.’

Mr Baboon was a person who liked to eat a lot, not so? Well, then Sankambe stirred the honey. He held it near Mr Baboon’s nostrils.

‘Hey! It smells nice! Give me some!’ Baboon exclaimed.

‘Not yet,’ Sankambe answered. ‘It is wonder syrup my Lord. I have to tie you up first. Because you will eat and then rush around like mad!’

Truly now, Mr Baboon said, ‘All right, tie me up, tie me up, tie me up!’

Sankambe took the rope he had plaited from the bark of a baobab tree. He tied Mr Baboon’s legs. Yes, and his hands too.

Then he said, ‘Sir, could you kindly wriggle so that we can see whether you are tied up properly?’

So! Mr Baboon wriggled, *dzigi-dzigi!* It was difficult! Impossible! The rope was secure.

‘Now give me the honey and let me eat,’ Mr Baboon said.

‘All right,’ Sankambe replied, ‘I will give you honey. But wait, I want to fetch water first.’

‘You are not allowed to drink the water!’

Mr Baboon pulled and tugged at the rope. Sankambe took his honey calabash and put it down, *tshanzha!* And the water calabash, *nzhanzha!* Then he poured water into that calabash. He put it against the honey calabash. Then he took his clothes off, *kutu! kutu! kutu! kutu! kutu!* He put them on the ground. Then he waded into the water.

Well! Mr Baboon shouted, ‘What are you doing?’

But Sankambe just went further into the water. He took his wash stone and scrubbed himself. Especially those rough parts: thoroughly! When he had finished, he dried and dressed himself. He took his honey calabash and his water calabash. Well, and then he left.

Oh dear, the other animals came back. When they arrived there, they found Mr Baboon. ‘You, baboon, why are you tied up?’

‘Sankambe came here. It is he who tied me up. Then he went to fetch water.’

‘But why did you allow him to tie you up?’

‘Never mind,’ Mr Monkey replied, ‘this baboon is known for being a bit dense. I will remain here tomorrow. I will see who trespasses here.’

Well, now! They left and went to bed. At daybreak they got up and went to work, carrying their lunch boxes.

Sankambe returned at noon. He looked around carefully and said, ‘I am going to wash.’

Vhaṅwe vha tshi ramba dzunde.
Nn̰e ndi tshi rambwa dzunde …

Well, that little rascal sneaked closer. When he got to the fountain, he found Mr Monkey in the place of Mr Baboon who had been tricked.

‘Sankambe!’ Mr Monkey said from over there.

‘Oh! Greetings Sir!’

‘What do you want?’

‘Nothing! I decided to come for a quick visit. I came to pay respects because we belong to the same family.’

‘All right then,’ Mr Monkey said, ‘come and visit me.’

Well! Mr Monkey leapt from branch to branch, *pelevhele! pelevhele! pelevhele!*, and jumped onto the ground.

When he got down there, Sankambe said, ‘Now look, I am just visiting quickly to give you something tasty. I always carry it with me. As a friend I will give you some. I do not mind.’

Well, he had that leaf with him, that one that peeps from the mouth of the calabash. And he stirred the honey, *tshofu-tshofu-tshofu!*

'Here it is,' he said, 'if you want to taste some, just smear it under your nose.'

When Mr Monkey wanted some more, Sankambe said, 'Now, if you want more, I will pour some into a calabash. But you must be tied up first, otherwise there will be trouble.'

'Just tie my legs so that I can hold the calabash with my hands,' Mr Monkey said.

'No, I must tie your hands too.'

Well! Mr Monkey agreed and was tied up. Sankambe told him to try jumping up and down. Mr Monkey wrestled hard, but he gave up because he was tied with rope made from the bark of a baobab tree.

Then Sankambe said, *'Hah! Pfoo!'*

He went over there to the fountain. When he got there, he scooped water into his small calabash. He put the calabash down. Then he took that honey calabash and put it against the other one. He took his clothes off. Hah! Mr Sankambe went into the water.

Mr Monkey made a huge racket but Sankambe ignored him. When he went into the fountain, he washed himself. He took out his wash stone and scrubbed himself. When he had finished, he basked in the sun for a while. Then he saw that the sun was setting. He fetched his things and got dressed. He took his calabashes. Just look! Then he left.

Now, those others came back at sunset. They put down the things from their work. When they arrived at the fountain, they found Mr Monkey tied up.

'You! Monkey! Did you agree to be tied up?'

'I knew this one would be tricked too,' Mr Kudu said. 'You must let me stay behind. I, Kudu, have long horns. I will maul that little hare with them and toss him aside. You must let me remain here.'

'Let us do that,' the others agreed.

Well, Mr Kudu remained behind, keeping careful watch. 'When that little good for nothing comes here I will see him. I will maul him and kill him on the spot.'

'I must go and drink water,' Sankambe said. He had been looking for honey and saw that the day was passing.

Then he sang:

Vhaṅwe vha tshi ramba dzunde.
Nn̂e ndi tshi rambwa dzunde ...

That little villain went to the fountain. When he arrived there, he saw Mr Kudu.

'It is going to be a difficult day,' he said. He called, 'Hello Sir!'

'What are you doing here, Mister?' Kudu asked.

'I am just passing by,' Sankambe replied. 'But since we are friends, I decided to stop for a short visit, like a person who lives agreeably with others, like a good person. I am not looking for anything, I am just passing by.'

He came closer and said, 'I want you to taste some of this stuff I have collected along the way.'

Well! Sankambe put that leaf scoop inside the honey calabash. He gave it to Mr Kudu.

'Your honey tastes nice, very nice indeed! Where did you find it?'

'Oh, I find it when I roam around. I have friends who give it to me.'

Sankambe smeared some more around Mr Kudu's mouth.

'You must smear properly!' Mr Kudu said.

'That is the plan!' Sankambe answered, 'but when I do that without tying you up, you will jump about like mad.'

'All right, tie me up!'

Mr Kudu was tied up.

'Try to move a bit,' Sankambe said.

Well, and so Sankambe repeated his tricks. He went to the water and washed himself. When he had finished, he left. When the other animals came back, they found that the same had happened again.

'This person is a real villain,' they said. 'Two of us must remain behind. Sankambe will see one and not the other.'

'Yes, we will stay here in the fountain because we are people of the water,' Mr Crocodile and Mr Hippopotamus said.

So, Sankambe returned.

Vhaṅwe vha tshi ramba dzunde.
Nṋe ndi tshi rambwa dzunde ...

He climbed down into the fountain.

'Hello! Hello! Hello!'

Nothing. He took his clothes off and went into the water. Hey, he started to wash himself. Mr Hippopotamus came closer and grabbed him, *tswi!*

'No! No!' Sankambe shouted, 'you do not have me, you have caught the root of a tree!'

'We have you!'

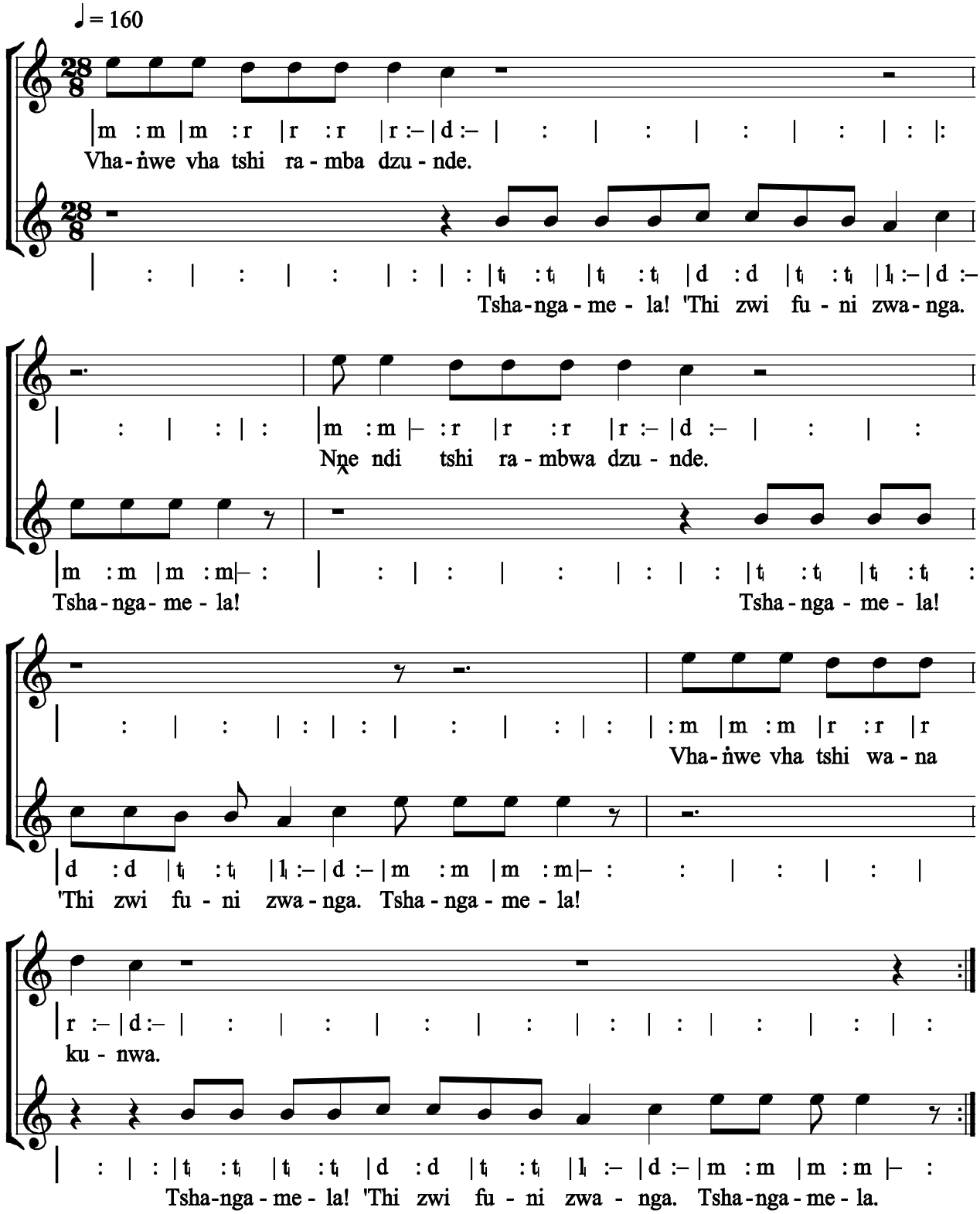
It happened like that. When the other animals returned at sunset, they found Sankambe where he had been caught in the fountain.[7]

Ha mbo ḓi vha ndi u fa ha lungano. This is the end of the story.

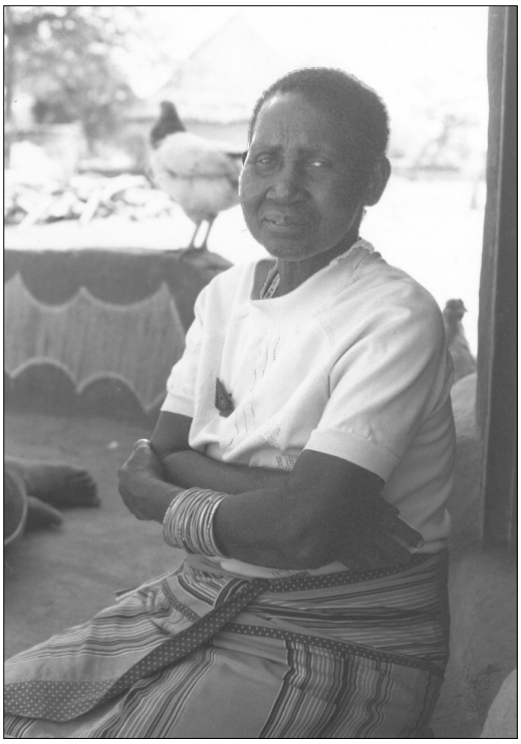
Folovhodwe, 30/09/92

This is one of numerous *ngano* dealing with the dramatic escapades of Sankambe, the villain of the animal kingdom who undermines the authority of larger animals. This symbolic role is accorded to him because he 'lives in the grass, where [he] appears at almost any place and vanishes again' (Kriel 1971:59). His resistant antics are immensely popular, not merely because they are amusing, but also because they imaginatively subvert an often rigidly structured distinction between ruling and non-ruling classes *(vhakololo* vs. *vhalanda).*

1 The theme of drought is common in Venda stories and other African folktales. This particular adventure of Sankambe also is recounted regularly in regional narratives.
2 Meetings of Venda tribal councils are opened by the uncle or brother of a king. Members address the council in order of diminishing status. Amendments can be suggested, and efforts are made to arrive at consensus.
3 An oblique reference to the raids that baboons make on people's crops.
4 This is a common chorus response. *Tshangamela* appears to be a corruption of the Shona term *Changamire*, referring to a polity from southern Zimbabwe. Refugees from there settled in Venda during the 18th century.
5 I.e. to work. Sankambe's habitual laziness also is the cause of his stumpy tail. When the animals were called by their creator to select tails for themselves, the hares were too lazy to answer the summons and ended up with short tails (Stayt, 1931).
6 Pronounced with a throaty growl.
7 A Tshivenda proverb accordingly warns that 'To be too smart will lead to trouble' (Stayt, 1931).


♩ = 160
28/8
m :m |m :r |r :r |r :- |d :- | : | : | : | : | : |:
Vha-ṅwe vha tshi ra-mba dzu-nde.
: | : | : | : | : |t, :t, |t, :t, |d :d |t, :t, |l, :- |d :-
Tsha-nga-me-la! 'Thi zwi fu-ni zwa-nga.
: | : | : |m :m |- :r |r :r |r :- |d :- | : | :
Nne ndi tshi ra-mbwa dzu-nde.
m :m |m :m |- : : | : | : | : | : |t, :t, |t, :t, :
Tsha-nga-me-la! Tsha-nga-me-la!
: | : | : | : | : | : | : | : |:m |m :m |r :r |r
Vha-ṅwe vha tshi wa-na
d :d |t, :t, |l, :- |d :- |m :m |m :m |- : : | : | : |
'Thi zwi fu-ni zwa-nga. Tsha-nga-me-la!
r :- |d :- | : | : | : | : | : | : | : | : | :
ku-nwa.
: | : |t, :t, |t, :t, |d :d |t, :t, |l, :- |d :- |m :m |m :m |- :
Tsha-nga-me-la! 'Thi zwi fu-ni zwa-nga. Tsha-nga-me-la.

Masindi Maliyehe



Masindi Maliyehe lives in the village of Sanari (‘place of the buffalo’), close to the bank of the Mutale River in the far north-eastern corner of Venda. This part of Venda is unbearably hot in summer, particularly during times of drought.

Masindi lives with her sons in a homestead which consists of three huts and one square room with a flat corrugated iron roof. She is a healer and her consulting room is one of the huts that faces the back fence of her property. This is where she stores her herbal remedies. Her certificate as a healer hangs against the wall.

‘I had a hard life for a very long time. My husband and his good friend went to clear a field of trees one day. When they rested, they drank beer in the shade of a tree. Later they said, “Our work is almost done.” My husband started burning branches, while that other man remained drinking. When my husband returned, his friend said, “Finish the rest of the beer, I have had enough.” My husband drank, not knowing that his friend had poisoned the remaining beer. We got a message at home to rush to him. There he lay. He died before we could take him to the doctor.’

‘It hurts a lot to lose your husband. I cannot forget his death, even after so many years. When a woman’s husband dies, a god dies.’[1]

‘When my husband was no longer there, I eked out a living by throwing bones to heal sick people. I got fifty cents, sometimes two rand. In this way I could keep my children at school. I raised all of them. My eldest daughter works at Maguga store in Masisi. My second eldest child is Maliyehe Ratshibvumo. He passed matric and worked as a temporary teacher. Because there is no work here, he started to sell poultry. This came to nothing because the fowls died of heat. My third child is Robert, he works for Iscor (Iron and Steel Corporation). The fourth child is Elisa: she is here at home. She is still at school but is pregnant now. Asaph is the fifth and youngest. He is in grade eleven. I struggle to support him at school. When I think he is at school, he walks around with girls. I won’t be surprised when he brings a pregnant girl home.’

‘There were times when things were different. We hoed and had pumpkins in our field and big water lilies in the Mutale River. The goats were fat. But now things have changed. Even the kudus come here to our village when they smell water. This is because the river is dry. When they come here, the young men kill them. The police are now stopping this slaughter of animals.’

‘Times were good then, not now. The maize grew well, with three cobs. There was so much food, one did not know what to eat first. You could not even break the thick stems of sugar cane. But we are speechless now. The land is so dry. I wonder what will happen, because children now-adays do not know what a river with water looks like. In those times the Mutale was a big river.’

‘When it is so dry, I pray to my ancestral spirits. But I also pray to God. I usually ask that He should meet my ancestral spirits on earth and answer my prayer. I pray to Him because I know everything on earth was made by Him. The God of heaven hears me and I respect Him.’

‘The ancestral spirits fight the other spirits and they run away. They have nowhere to hide and then they enter people. But not just any person, only people like myself.[2] Before I decided to become a healer, I went through a difficult time. For three years I did not eat properly and I

argued with my parents. I accused them of poisoning my food. I had a feeling of constant restlessness. I could not sleep. I yearned all night for healing. Nobody could help me. I had a child and no place to stay. I did not want to see my family, I always argued with them.'

'During that time I cured a woman who had an illness of the eyes. Then people brought me a woman who had been childless for twenty years. I collected herbs and that woman had a child. The child's name was Azwindini. After this I became a healer.'

'Now that time of suffering is over. I stay here with my children. They are obedient and we live together in peace. We do not have a stormy life. My sisters and brothers visit me and we are friends. My daughters-in-law are obedient and we live happily together. I earn enough as healer. I can buy a bag of sugar when I need it.'

'This other woman works for me and helps me with the medicines. I want to marry her, because I want a person who is beautiful and intelligent and can think for herself.[3] The woman can have a child with a man and I will accept the child as my own as if I am the father. The woman I marry must not drink. I drink, and do not want to marry a person who is also a drinker.'

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1 This is a reference to the authority of men and women's dependence on them.
2 Masindi is describing the process that leads a person to become a spirit medium.
3 Female marriage takes various forms. In the case of a traditional ruler having daughters only, the eldest daughter marries a woman. A relative becomes the daughter's lover. There is also a tendency for wealthy women to be married in this way.

A tree falls

Ri a thoma. We are starting.

There was an old woman and her child, a girl. The girl lived there at home. She had no husband. Young men came and asked her to marry them.

When they arrived, the old woman said, 'Chop down that large tree! Only then may you take my girl.'

A young man came, took his axe and chopped, *tema-tema-tema!*

(Narrator)
Tema-tema-tema! Chop-chop-chop!
Tshavhumbwe o mmbonisani? Look what I must do for you Tshavhumbwe!
Hee! Nda vhuya nda tibwa mungome. Hey! I need a diviner.

(Chorus)
A u temei, we dzhatsha! It it is difficult to chop!

The sun rose higher in the sky. The girl cooked stiff porridge and meat in the courtyard.

'Come and eat, sir,' she said to that young man.

He put the axe down and went into the house. He sat down on the reedmat and ate his food.

That old woman saw that the tree was about to fall. While the young man was eating she got up. She picked up the wood chips. She threw them back into the tree!

(Narrator chants)
Kwa! Kwa! Kwa! Tshikwati! Kwa! Kwa! Kwa! Fly small wood chip!

(Chorus chants)

Nambatela!	Stick to the tree!

Kwa! Kwa! Kwa! Tshikwati!
Nambatela! …

And so that tree became whole again. The young man came from the house. He went to the tree and found it was without a scratch.

'Excuse me mother!' he said.

'I am going back into the house,' that old woman replied. 'Travel safely my son.'

'I am not getting this girl,' that young man complained. And he was gone!

Another young man arrived the next day. 'Good morning! I am looking for Tshavhumbwe.'

'Here she is,' the old woman replied. 'There is the axe. And that is the tree.'

The young man went there and started to chop.

(Narrator)

Tinge-tinge!	(The sound of the axe)
Tshavhumbwe o mmbonisani?	Look what I must do for you Tshavhumbwe!
Hee! Nda vhuya nda tibwa mungome.	Hey! I need a diviner.
Nzingi-nzingi!	(The sound of the axe)

(Chorus)

Dza vha ngoma wa dzhatsha!	This is very hard for me![1]

'Sir!' the young woman called, 'come and eat!'

The young man put down the axe. He went over there to the house. He ate stiff porridge and meat. Tshavhumbwe sat next to him. Silence! He is eating.

'Just wait!' the young man said, 'I will chop it down today.'

He ate more. Tshavhumbwe also gave him beer.

'So!' he said, 'now I will finish chopping. Only a bit remains.'

But the old woman had been at the tree again!

Kwa! Kwa! Kwa! Tshikwati!
Nambatela! …

When that young man went out with Tshavhumbwe, he found the tree without scars.

'Oh no!' he exclaimed, 'did I not leave a bit only to finish? Goodbye old woman! I will come again tomorrow.'

'All right, goodbye,' that old woman replied, 'you may go my dear son.' And he was gone!

'Hey,' that young man said to himself, 'this girl is beautiful. But oh dear, things are difficult. What must I do? Man, my plan is to come back tomorrow. I will refuse to eat porridge.'

He went back the next day. 'Good morning, old woman,' he said, 'I have returned. Where is Tshavhumbwe?'

'Well, my dear son,' she answered, 'it is still the same tree. And there is the axe.'

Then the boy went to the tree.

Tinge-tinge!
Tshavhumbwe o mmbonisani? …

That tree started to crack!

'Hey, come here!' the old woman ordered.

‘Just now!’ the young man shouted.

Tinge-tinge!
Tshavhumbwe o mmbonisani? …

‘You child, I am telling you to come here!’ the old woman called.
‘I am coming, man.’
‘Just stop doing that!’
Nzingi-a-zingi-nzingi! That tree fell, *vholo-vholo-vholo-vholo-vholo!* and crashed to the ground, *zheketee!*
‘You have killed me today!’ the old woman cried out.
And so she died. Tshavhumbwe left with the young man. She arrived at his home and lived there as his wife.

Ha vha u fa ha lungano. This is the end of the story.

Sanari, 05/06/92

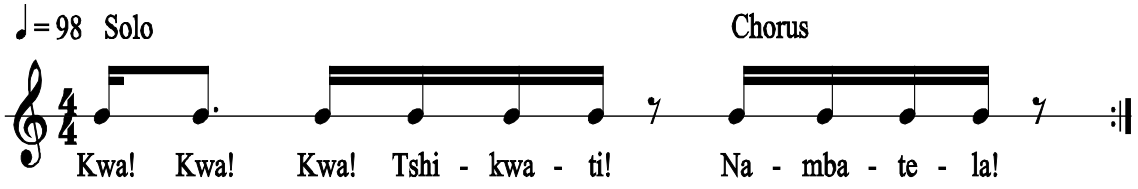
The folklore theme of a young man who undergoes some ordeal to marry, and who manages to overcome challenges by means of wit and bravery, is common to many world cultures. Unusually, this particular treatment of the theme is sympathetic to the bride’s mother. Her efforts to thwart her daughter’s suitors are motivated by her fear of loneliness (see ‘A thin old woman’).

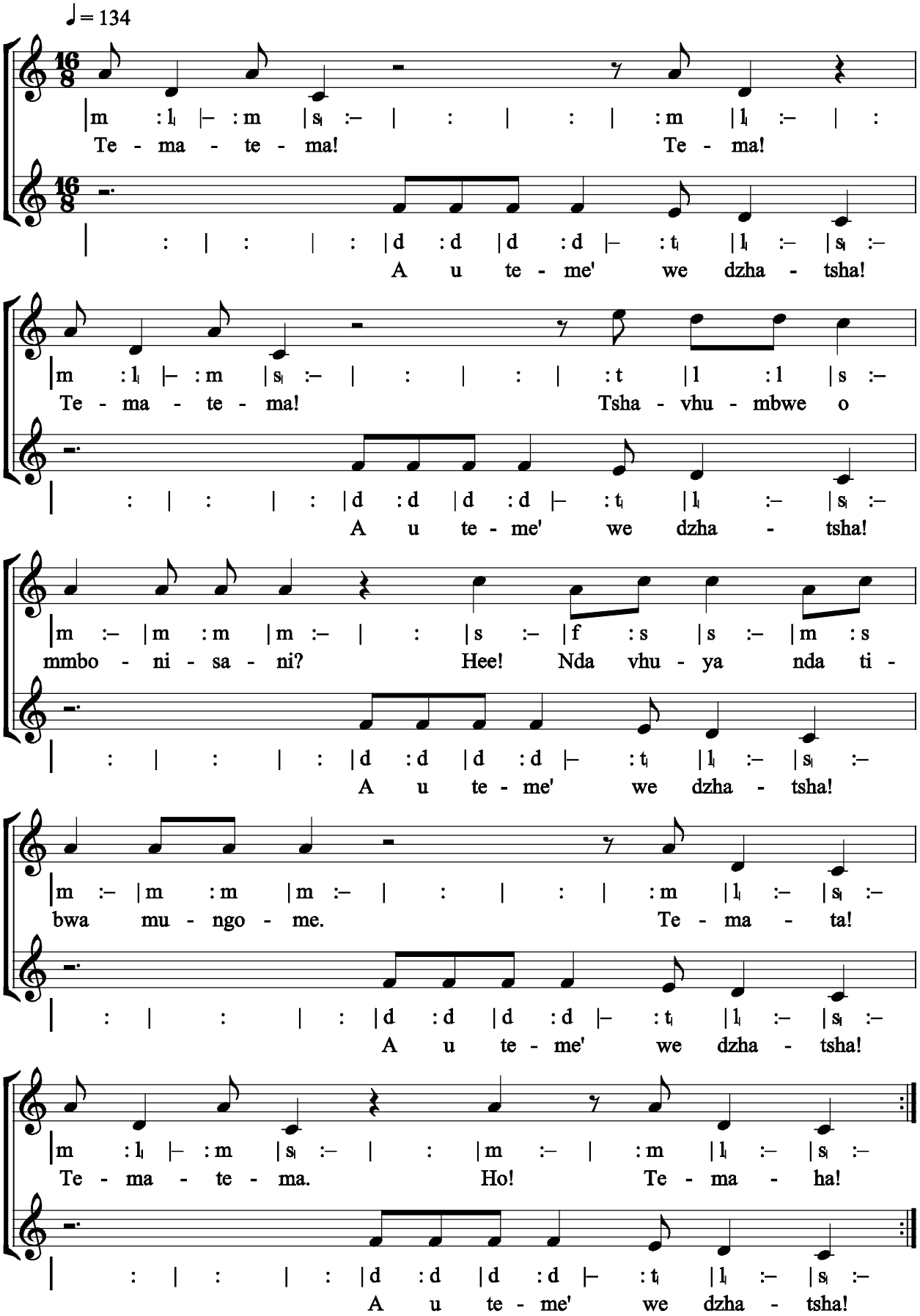
The narrator explains that this story also has contemporary application because young suitors nowadays tend to negotiate personally with in-laws. This is in contrast to the older convention that requires family members to act as go-betweens.

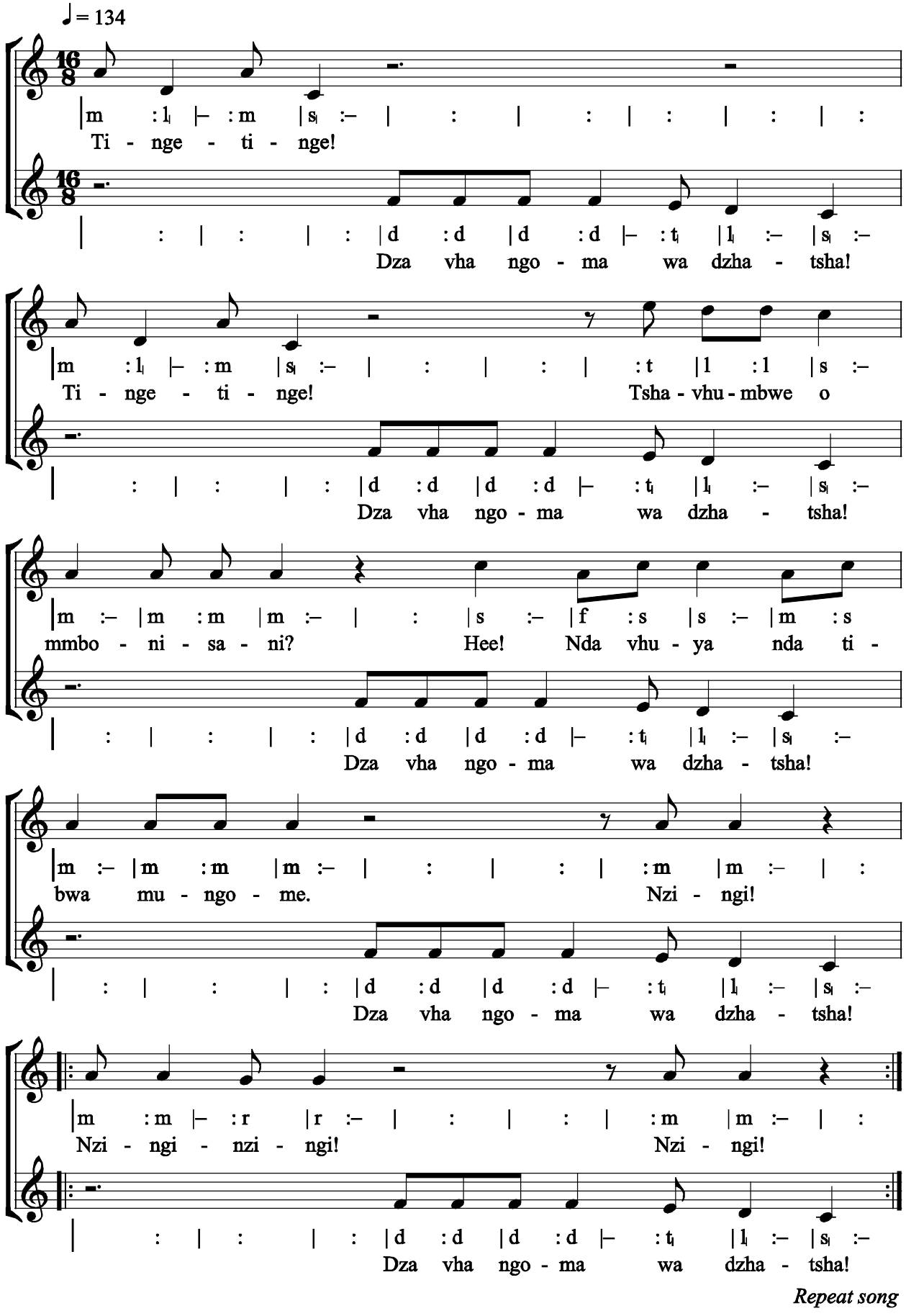
Because the tree is healed magically, the young man consults a diviner who performs a ritual known as *u bikwa tshivholovholo* (‘to cook medicines’). Stones are heated in a fire and then placed in a pot with water and medicines. The patient sits with a blanket over his head and bends over the pot. The steam then ‘cooks’ him in order to solve his problem.

1 Lit. ‘the ritual of difficulties.’ This seems to be a comparison to the physical and emotional endurance required from young people undergoing initiation and those participating in trance dance.

Chant: Repeat higher and faster




♩= 134
16/8
m :l, |– :m |s, :– | : | : | :m |l, :– | :
Te - ma - te - ma! Te - ma!
| : | : | : |d :d |d :d |– :t, |l, :– |s, :–
A u te - me' we dzha - tsha!
m :l, |– :m |s, :– | : | : | :t |l :l |s :–
Te - ma - te - ma! Tsha - vhu - mbwe o
| : | : | : |d :d |d :d |– :t, |l, :– |s, :–
A u te - me' we dzha - tsha!
m :– |m :m |m :– | : |s :– |f :s |s :– |m :s
mmbo - ni - sa - ni? Hee! Nda vhu - ya nda ti -
| : | : | : |d :d |d :d |– :t, |l, :– |s, :–
A u te - me' we dzha - tsha!
m :– |m :m |m :– | : | : | :m |l, :– |s, :–
bwa mu - ngo - me. Te - ma - ta!
| : | : | : |d :d |d :d |– :t, |l, :– |s, :–
A u te - me' we dzha - tsha!
m :l, |– :m |s, :– | : |m :– | :m |l, :– |s, :–
Te - ma - te - ma. Ho! Te - ma - ha!
| : | : | : |d :d |d :d |– :t, |l, :– |s, :–
A u te - me' we dzha - tsha!


♩= 134
Ti - nge - ti - nge!
Dza vha ngo - ma wa dzha - tsha!
Ti - nge - ti - nge!
Tsha - vhu - mbwe o
Dza vha ngo - ma wa dzha - tsha!
mmbo - ni - sa - ni?
Hee! Nda vhu - ya nda ti -
Dza vha ngo - ma wa dzha - tsha!
bwa mu - ngo - me.
Nzi - ngi!
Dza vha ngo - ma wa dzha - tsha!
Nzi - ngi - nzi - ngi!
Nzi - ngi!
Dza vha ngo - ma wa dzha - tsha!

Repeat song

Crow-woman

Salungano! Salungano! This is where the story starts!

People had a certain custom long ago when they still lived in peace: if a man married a woman - a good woman - and she became a cripple because of a piece of firewood, he could chase her away.[1] He would say, 'She is mine no longer because she is a cripple thing.'[2]

So, there was a girl, a beautiful girl. Young men passed by and saw her. Hah! They all fell in love because she was so beautiful. They asked her to marry them but she always turned them down.

Then she found a man she liked.

'I love you,' she said.

'Let us go then,' he answered.

So she went away with that young man. He took her over there to his house. She stayed there in seclusion.[3] Yes, in the time of our ancestors people even put a blanket over the bride's head.

Her in-laws cooked porridge for her. They brought it to her. When they went back they found that the porridge had not been eaten, even after three days.

'Come into the courtyard,' they told her.

That woman came out of her house.

'Here is the maize,' they said.

She went back inside and started to pound the maize. When she finished pounding, she went to the river to fetch water. She put her water calabash down by a pool.

'Mvingi-mvingi-mvingi-mvingi-mvingi!' she chanted.
She became a crow!

(Narrator)

Ṱ̂ululu-ṱu-ṱûṅwi.	(The sound of diving and surfacing in water)
A thi zwi funa zwanga.	I do not like it.
Vhaṅwe vha tshi ḽa mavhele.	Some eat maize.
A thi zwi funi zwanga.	I do not like it.
Nne ndo ima nga maḓula.	I only eat frogs.
A thi zwi funi zwanga.	I do not like it.

(Chorus)
Tshangamela.[4]

The crow snatched those frogs from the water! She ate until she could eat no more!

'Mvingi-mvingi-mvingi-mvingi-mvingi!' she chanted.

She became a young woman again! She took her calabash and filled it with water. She picked it up and went home. When she arrived home, she put her clay pot on the fire and cooked. She gave the people their food.

'Do you not eat girl?' they asked.

'No, I will eat later.'

She got up very early the next morning. It was still dark. She pounded maize. She took her water calabash and went to the river. She put her calabash down and went to the pool.

When she got there, she chanted, *'Mvingi-mvingi-mvingi-mvingi-mvingi!'*

She became a crow again!

Ṱ̂ululu-ṱu-ṱûṅwi.
A thi zwi funa zwanga …

'Mvingi-mvingi-mvingi-mvingi-mvingi!' the crow chanted.

It turned back into a young woman! She collected water and went back home. When she arrived there, she took the calabash off her head.

Now, her mother-in-law, uncles and the others in the homestead gathered.

'Who is this bride who doesn't eat porridge?' they asked. 'What has she eaten since arriving here? We don't know.'

'It's all right,' her husband said, 'let her be. Perhaps she also did not eat at her father's home.' But he said to himself, 'I will follow her to the river and hide in a bush.'[5] And so he went to sleep.

The young woman got up early in the morning. She swept and put the pot on the fire. She prepared the vegetables, took the plates and gave the people their food. When they had eaten, she cleaned everything.

She picked up her water calabash. She was now hungry and was going to eat by the pool. Her husband was hiding there in a small bush. He saw her arriving. She put down the water calabash and took off her head roll.[6]

'Mvingi-mvingi-mvingi-mvingi-mvingi!'

And then she sang again:

Tululu-tu-tuniwi.
A thi zwi funa zwanga …

So, that girl was a crow all along! People thought she was a beautiful girl but that thing was a crow.

'Mvingi-mvingi-mvingi-mvingi-mvingi!'

The young woman filled the calabash. She picked up her head roll and put the calabash on her head. She went home.

Her husband was already there. 'That woman is no human!' he told his parents. 'You found me a crow for a wife.'

'Is that so?' they said sceptically, because it was always difficult to find the right wife for a young man.

'I have just returned from the river,' the husband said. 'You all better go there and wait. You will see. She even goes there after cooking supper.'

'Really?'

'Yes!'

So now, there was cooking and eating. The young woman finished tidying while the sun was high.

'I am going to the river,' she announced.

'All right,' the others said.

Then they followed her too, some along this way, some along that way. She arrived at the river. They saw her putting her water calabash on the ground. She also put her head roll there, and took her clothes off. She put them on the ground.

'Mvingi-mvingi-mvingi-mvingi-mvingi!'

She became a crow, *'Ru-ru-ru! Ru-ru-ru! Ru-ru-ru!'*

Ṱululu-ṱu-ṱuṅwi.
A thi zwi funa zwanga ...

While she sang, lots of frogs appeared. She feasted on them.

(Narrator chants repeatedly)

Ṱa-ṱapu, ṱa-ṱapu![7]	Pick-pick!
Dzho-dzhombi!	Peck-peck!
Mili-mili!	Swallow-swallow!

'Hey!' the people said amazed, 'we thought the girl was human!'

The young husband had a bow. He cocked it, *thukhu!* That crow collapsed just there, *ṱazalala!*

Ha vha u fa ha ṅwana wa lungano. This is the end of this child that is a story.

Sanari, 03/08/92

Venda customary law points out that, while a wife is required to be faithful to her husband so that her children may be his, 'it is not common for a husband to be faithful to his wife, and limit his attentions to her' (Van Warmelo & Phophi, 1948:319). Stayt notes that 'in the old days if a man discovered his wife with a lover he killed him on the spot' (1931:152).

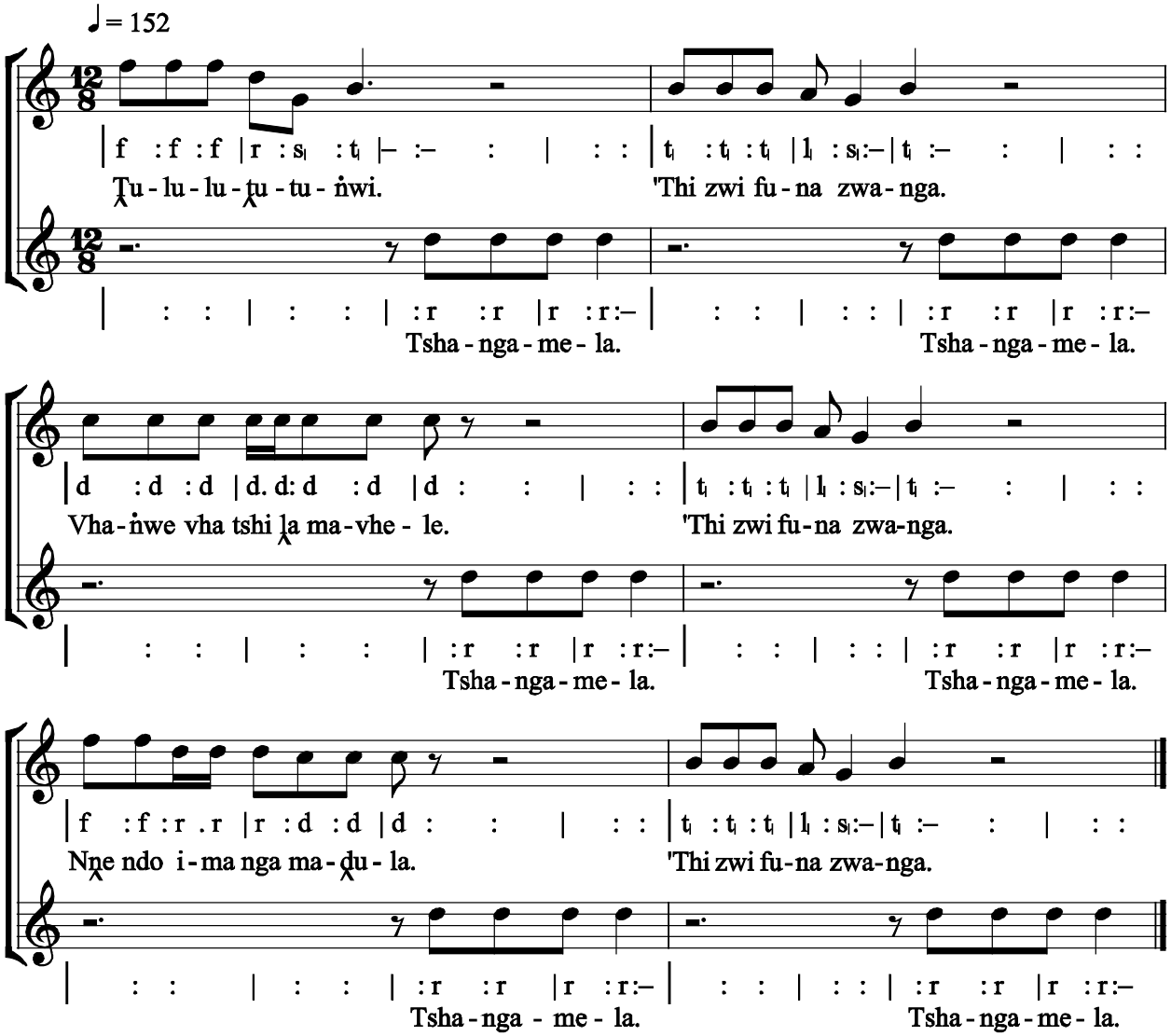
The narrator explains that the key to this story is the headroll of the young woman. She unwinds and opens it for her lovers (symbolised by frogs). Her magic chant, *mvingi,* accordingly denotes drooping branches like that of a willow providing a secret meeting place.

A crow obeys no law. It eats almost everything, including carcasses and domestic refuse. The young woman accordingly refuses to follow custom ('I do not like it'). Instead of being loyal to her husband, she 'feeds' off lovers outside marriage. Her status as outcast is evident in references to her as 'it' *(Ḽa vha funguvhu;* 'it becomes a crow'), and the fact that she is not regarded as human.

However, the narrator's judgement is not as severe as it seems. She compares the fate of the young woman with that of a man who not only beats his wife and then chases her away when she becomes cripple, but also conducts extramarital affairs with impunity. Van Warmelo & Phophi

(1948:463) indicate that 'When man and wife do not agree, the blame is seldom put on the man. No matter how much he beats her, they will always say he merely corrected her.'

1 Van Warmelo & Phophi (1948:333) describe the case of a man who beat his wives 'with a heavy end of firewood when they were so drunk that they had even forgotten altogether to cook for him.'
2 This explanation serves as an introduction to the story. It requires no audience participation.
3 *Pfunda*, a process of ritual seclusion that newly-married women must undergo. Also see 'What a woman!' (note 3).
4 See 'Mr Hare scrubs his heels' (note 4).
5 Van Warmelo & Phophi (1948:335-37) note in connection with related cases that 'Wife-beating often goes with what is termed *lindo*, the excessive vigilance of a husband who spends all his time following his wife around, sneaking in the background when she goes collecting firewood and following her when she goes down to the river, to see whether there are other men with whom she chats.'
6 *Khare*, a coil plated from cloth or plant matter that enables women to carry objects on their head.
7 These words must be chanted very fast to portray the voracious appetite of the crow.



A thin old woman

Salungano! Salungano! Here comes a story!

I was a thin old woman. I lived inside a hole in a baobab tree with my child.[1] She was a girl. When I went away to look for wild fruit, she stayed in that hole. I would come back and give the food to my child. Day after day I went out. When I came home I sang:

(Verse 1: narrator)
Salundee-lundee-lundee-hee, Salundee-ha-ndeeha! Salundee! Salundee!
Salundee, i̤dani-ha ni dzhie, Salundee-ha-ndeeha! Salundee, come and take it!

(Chorus)
Ndi enda-vho. I am also going.

That child of mine appeared when I arrived there. She came and took the food. We went inside. We ate and slept.

When I, an old woman, was not there, this girl sometimes got up. She went out of the hole. She stood there with the sun on her. The young men looked at her.

'Hey! Is this girl not beautiful?'

But they did not know how to take her away.

I got up again this morning and went out to look for food. When I came back, I found that my child had been stolen. Richard stole her, that python.[2] He carried her away.[3] He made her elope.

'Hah!' he said, 'I will take her.'

'No, you must not take her,' all the other wild animals[4] said. 'She is inside the tree.'

But the python sang:

(Verse 2: narrator)
Salundee-lundee-lundee-hee, Salundee-ha-ndeeha! Salundee! Salundee!
Salundee, ndi nda ita hani, Salundee-ha-ndeeha? Salundee, how do I do it, Salundee?
Salundee, ṅwananga u ngafhi, Salundee-ha-ndeeha? Salundee, where is my child, Salundee?
Salundee, i̤dani u swotola, Salundee-ha-ndeeha. Salundee, come and take the clay off, Salundee.

(Chorus)
Ndi enda-vho. I am also going.

When the child opened the hole, she found a man.

'Hey!' he said, 'come here, let us go. Come, let us leave. Do not tell me you are waiting for a thin old woman!'

The girl stepped down from the tree and went away with her young man.

And now, there I was, looking for food. Then I came back home. When I arrived there I greeted, *'Aa!'* I came and stood there.

(Verse 3: narrator only)
Salundee-lundee-lundee- hee, Salundee-ha-ndeeha! Salundee! Salundee!
Salundee, ṅwananga u ngafhi, Salundee-ha-ndeeha? Salundee, where is my child, Salundee?
Salundee, o i̤uwa na vhafhio, Salundee-ha-ndeeha? Salundee, with whom did she leave? Salundee?
Salundee, i̤dani-ha ni dzhie, Salundee-ha-ndeeha! Salundee, come and take it!

There was no child. When I looked inside the hole, I saw that the girl was gone. I threw down everything I had gathered. What must I do now? I … must make a drum. So I made myself a small drum. I put its skin on and put it on my head.

I will walk to the king. As I walk, I will sing my song. Wherever my child is, she will come out. Then I will see her.

I entered a king's homestead where I found children playing.

'Hey, you children,' I said, 'will you not come and sing with me?'

'Hey!' those children shouted, 'granny is wearing an old-fashioned leather skirt![5] Let us go and sing with her.'

But one asked, 'What? Sing with a person smeared white with ash?'[6]

'Yes, let us go and sing with her!'

So I said, 'Sing the chorus part my grandchildren.'

(Verse 3: narrator)

Salundee-lundee-lundee- hee, Salundee-ha-ndeeha!	Salundee! Salundee!
Salundee, ṅwananga u ngafhi, Salundee-ha-ndeeha?	Salundee, where is my child, Salundee?
Salundee, o ṱuwa na vhafhio, Salundee-ha-ndeeha?	Salundee, with whom did she leave?
Salundee, iḓani-ha ni dzhie, Salundee-ha-ndeeha!	Salundee, come and take it!

(Chorus)

Ndi enda-vho.	I am also going.

Everybody came immediately! They gathered in the courtyard.

'Where did the thin old thing come from, this pale old woman? Let her come inside the king's homestead.'

When I looked, I saw that my girl was not there. So I went to the homestead of king Mphaphuli. When I arrived there at Mbilwi village, I was taken into the courtyard. I put my small drum down. I found the king's children playing there.

'You, children of the king. Will you not come and sing with me?'

Those children already knew of me. 'No, we do not want to sing with a thin old woman who is so pale. Where do you come from?'

'Hey!' I said, 'come and sing the chorus part for me, my grandchildren.'

'We are not coming, granny! No, you are wearing a leather skirt!'

'But these are the clothes I always wear! Will you not sing with me, children of my children? Sit here in a line and sing the chorus part of my little song:'

(Verse 3: narrator)

Salundee-lundee-lundee- hee, Salundee-ha-ndeeha!	Salundee! Salundee!
Salundee, ṅwananga u ngafhi, Salundee-ha-ndeeha?	Salundee, where is my child, Salundee?
Salundee, o ṱuwa na vhafhio, Salundee-ha-ndeeha?	Salundee, with whom did she leave?
Salundee, iḓani-ha ni dzhie, Salundee-ha-ndeeha!	Salundee, come and take it!

(Chorus)

Ndi enda-vho.	I am also going.

All the young wives of the king were working in the homestead, *kikiri-kikiri!* They came out. When they arrived, my child came with them.

'Hey!' they said, 'who is this old thin woman who is so pale? We do not know her. Where does she come from?'

But I saw my daughter was there. So I sang:

(Verse 4: narrator)

Salundee-lundee-lundee-hee, Salundee-ha-ndeeha!	Salundee! Salundee!
Salundee, ṅwananga u ngafhi, Salundee-ha-ndeeha?	Salundee, where is my child, Salundee?
Salundee, iḓani-ha ni dzhie, Salundee-ha-ndeeha!	Salundee, come and take it! Salundee!
Salundee, iḓani-ha ri ṱuwe, Salundee-ha-ndeeha!	Salundee, come, let us go, Salundee!

(Chorus)

Ndi enda-vho.	I am also going.

That small drum sang on and on.

'No! She is not my mother!' the child exclaimed.

'You girl, is that not your mother?' the king's wives asked.

'No, she is not my mother!'

That girl went back to the king's homestead.

'No,' I said, 'I will not leave here. I found her, my only child who is a girl. She was taken away. I found the tracks of the python. But she says she does not know me!'

'Hey!' the people said, 'let five cattle be paid.[7] Give them to the thin old woman. She must go back with them to that hole.'

Then they were given to me. But I said, 'You can give me my five cattle, but I will die here. Come, sing with me:'

(Verse 1: narrator)

Salundee-lundee-lundee-hee, Salundee-ha-ndeeha!	Salundee! Salundee!
Salundee, iḓani-ha ni dzhie, Salundee-ha-ndeeha!	Salundee, come and take it! Salundee!

(Chorus)

Ndi enda-vho.	I am also going.

The thin old woman fell down next to her drum, *kwavhalalaa!* She died there. The girl remained at the king's homestead, where she cooked.

Ha mbo ḓi vha u fa ha ṅwana wa lungano.	This is the end of this child that is a story.

Sanari, 05/06/92

The narrator warns mothers not to be possessive about their daughters. A mother cannot hide a beautiful daughter from the attention of young men forever (see 'A tree falls').

1 Old women in Shona *ngano* narratives similarly often are pictured in repugnant settings (Kriel, 1971). Baobabs are well-known for hollows in which water gathers, as well as having hollow trunks used by people for storage.

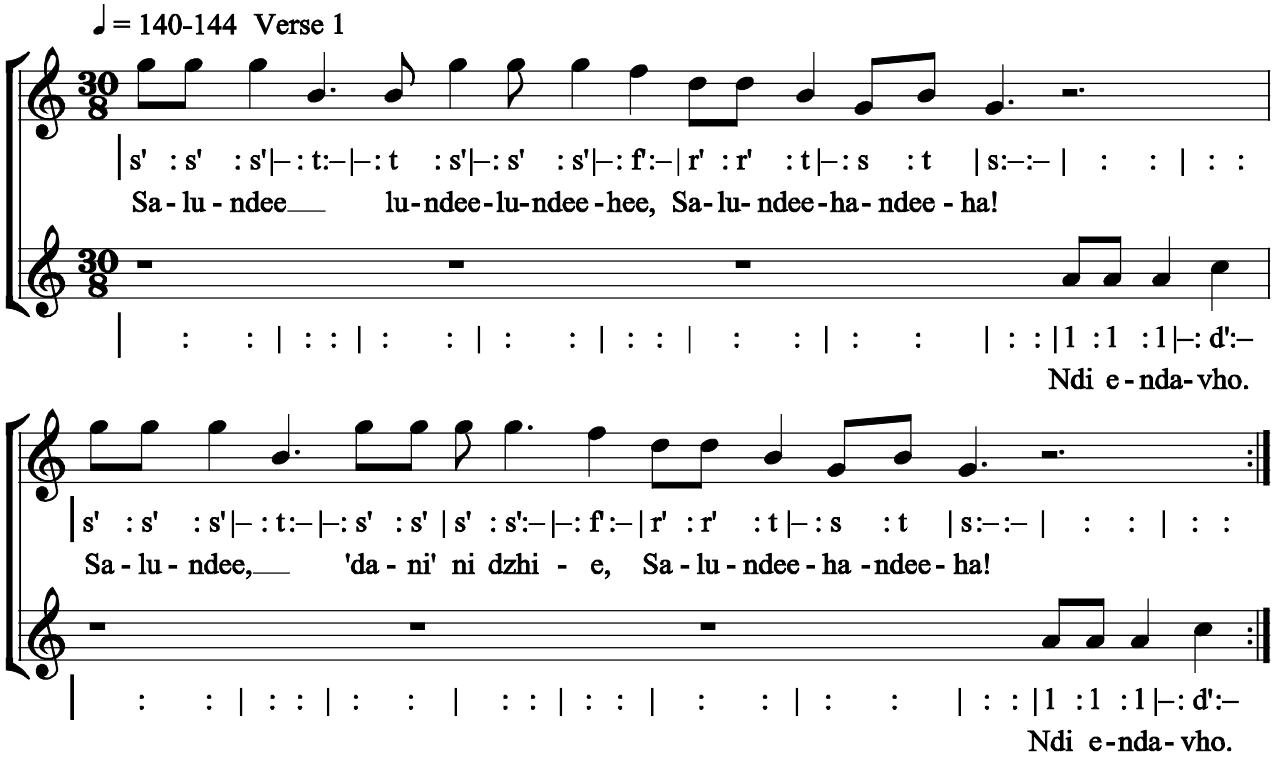
2 The python represents the king and his relatives who simply 'swallow' those who are weaker than them (see 'The king and the musician').

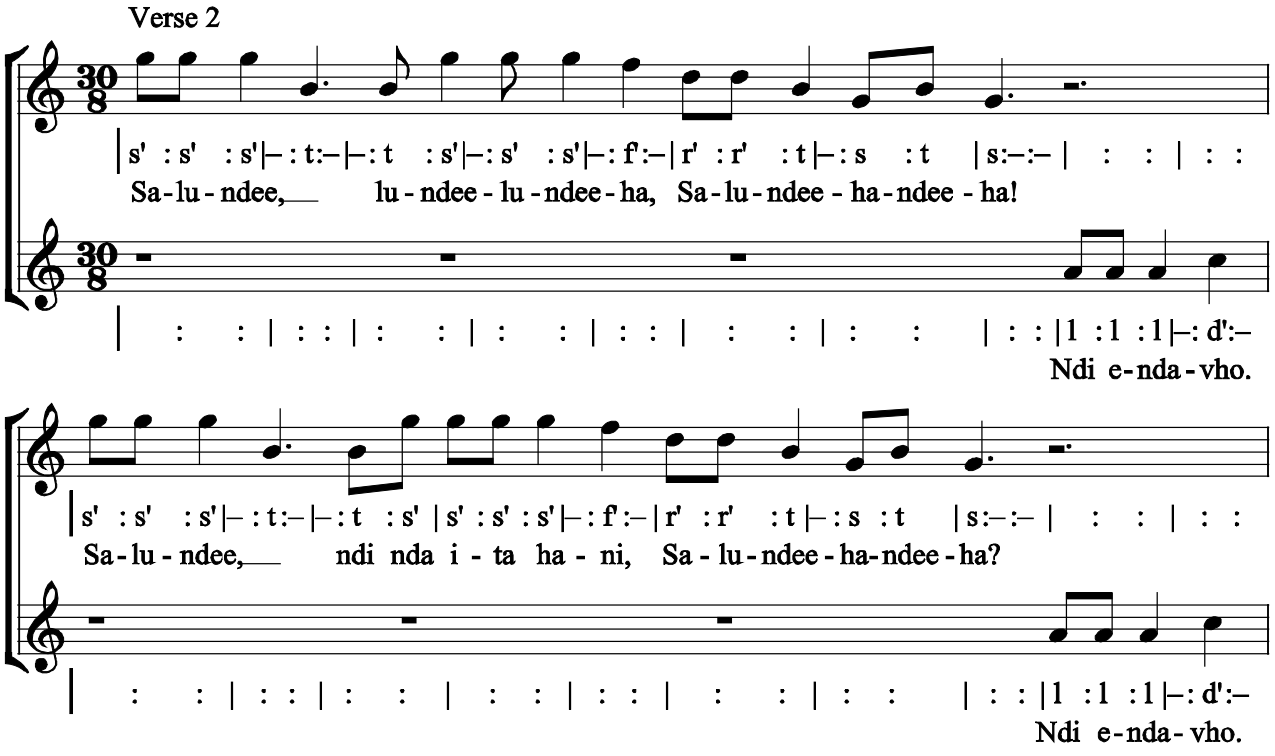
3 The abduction of a young woman sometimes is aimed at forcing her parents to conclude marriage proceedings (Cloete, 1980). It usually occurs when parents refuse to let their daughter go because only part of the bridewealth has been transferred. The abduction in effect puts pressure on both families to fulfil their obligations.

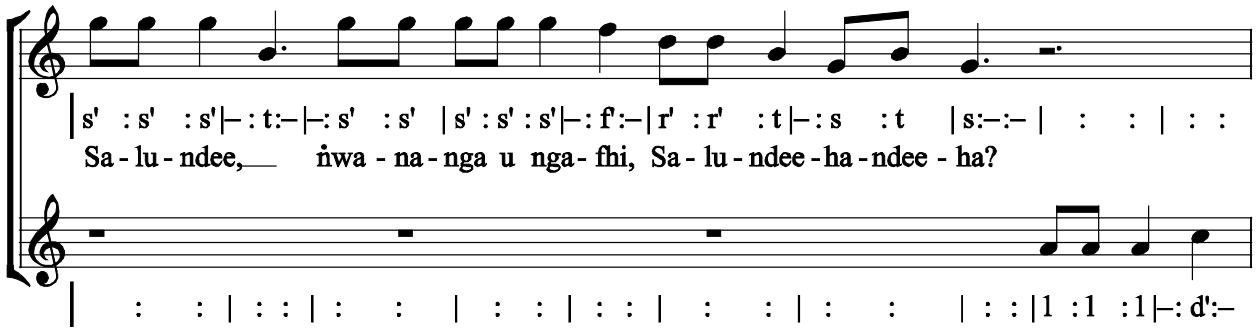
4 Young males of less importance than the sons of the king.

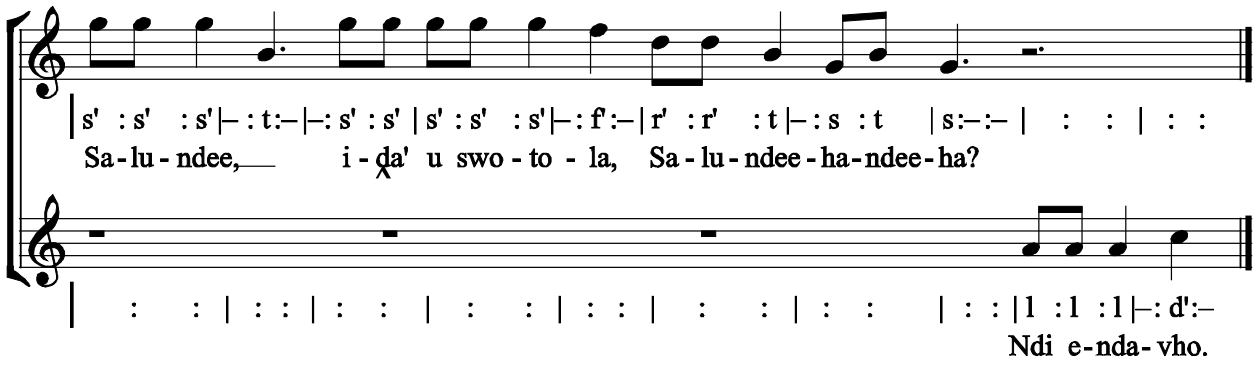
5 The woman's old-fashioned leather skirt is symbolic of her status as a social outsider.

6 Ash symbolises a state of mourning.
7 Kings were obliged to rule in collaboration with their private and tribal councils which curbed autocratic behaviour. Such control was especially required with young, inexperienced kings who were prone to selfish rule (Du Plessis, 1940).

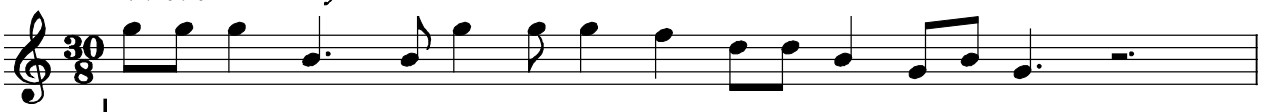


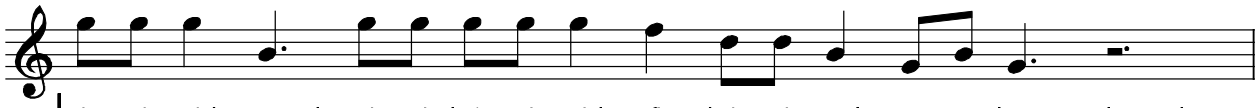


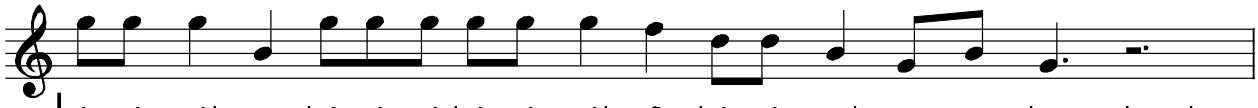


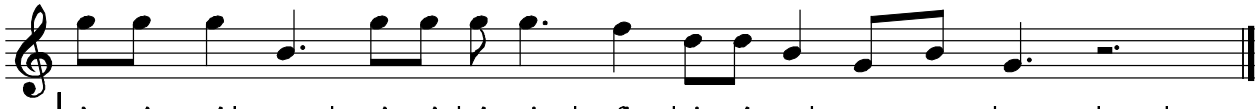


Verse 3 *Solo only*

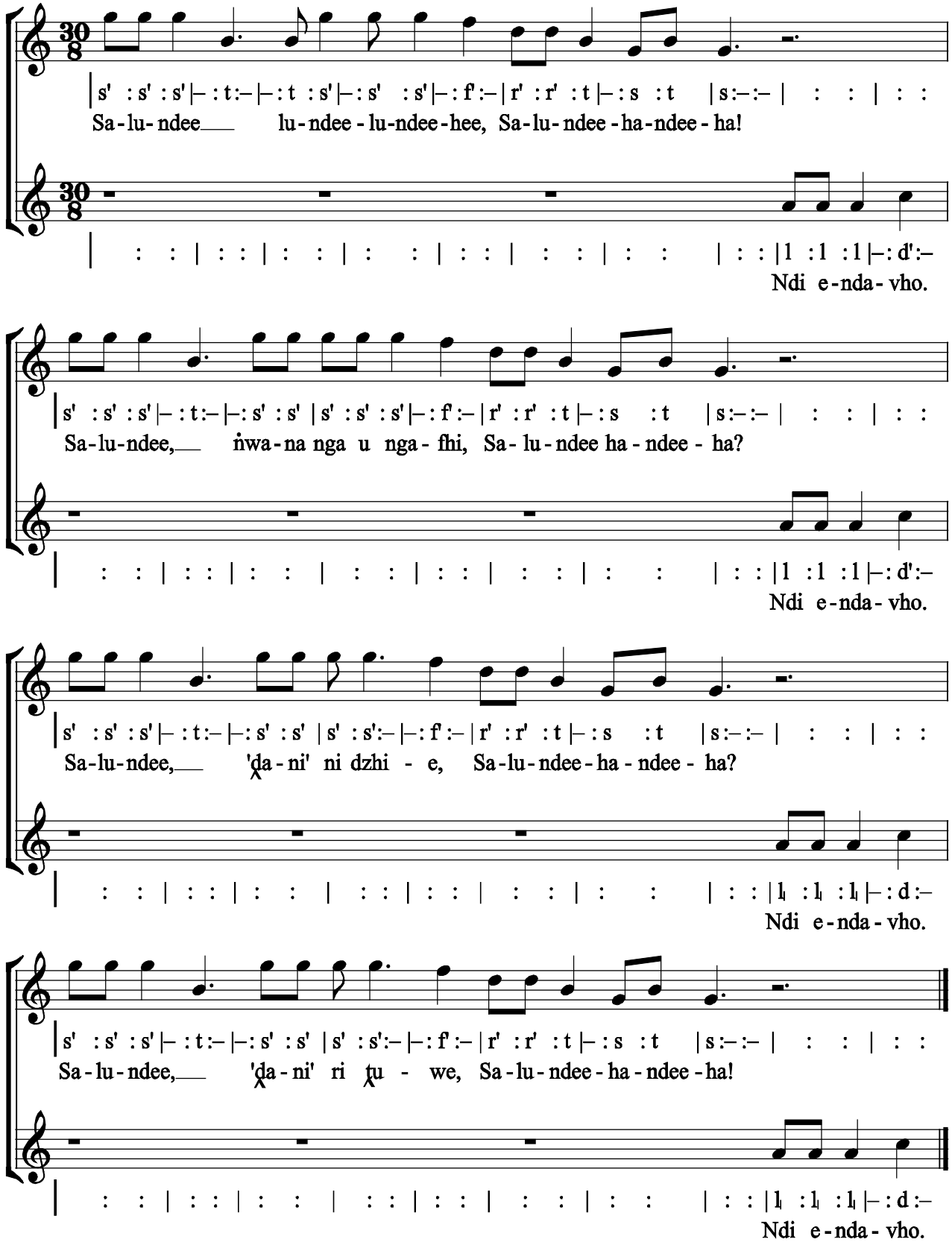








Verse 4


Sa-lu-ndee lu-ndee-lu-ndee-hee, Sa-lu-ndee-ha-ndee-ha!
Ndi e-nda-vho.
Sa-lu-ndee, ṅwa-na nga u nga-fhi, Sa-lu-ndee ha-ndee-ha?
Ndi e-nda-vho.
Sa-lu-ndee, 'da-ni' ni dzhi-e, Sa-lu-ndee-ha-ndee-ha?
Ndi e-nda-vho.
Sa-lu-ndee, 'da-ni' ri tu-we, Sa-lu-ndee-ha-ndee-ha!
Ndi e-nda-vho.

The pumpkin that could speak

Salungano! Salungano! Here comes a story!

There was a certain girl. She was asked by another woman to be married.

'Come and be my husband's second wife,' that woman said.[1]

The girl agreed. She became married and joined her in-laws. When she arrived at their place, they sat down. The houserules were explained to her: 'The porridge must be cooked and put on a plate. Put the plate and water in that house.'[2]

Well, the girl cooked and took the plate to the house. She also took water there.

After a while she was told, 'Go and fetch the plate, the meal is over.'

When the girl went inside, she found that the porridge had been eaten. This happened day after day. The girl became worried.

'Who is this man I do not see? Who eats the porridge that I bring? I must make a plan.'

Now, it was autumn.

'Let us harvest our peanuts,' people said.

The girl put her snuffbox there on the low courtyard wall.

When people were on their way to the peanut fields, she said, 'Oh no! I forgot my snuffbox!'

'Leave it, my sister,' the elder wife replied, 'I will fetch it.'

'No!' the young woman insisted, 'let me get it.'

'No!' that other woman pleaded, 'do not go my young sister!' And she ran home while the young wife waited with their baskets.

When the elder wife arrived home, she found that Mr Snake had left his house. He was lying in the courtyard.

'I always tell you to go out only when it is quiet,' the elder wife said. 'Today that young wife would have found you.'

Mr Snake went back into the house. The woman took the snuffbox. She went back to the younger wife. When they came to the field, they harvested their peanuts.

Well, they returned home. They sat and fried their peanuts. The younger wife cooked porridge. She took it over there to the house. She came back. The women waited while eating peanuts.

'Let us go to bed,' they said. And so each woman went to her own house.

At night that young wife could feel a man, but during the day she did not see him.

Well, so she said to herself, 'Ah! Who is this man I am sleeping with? I bring water in the morning and find later that somebody has washed with soap. I bring porridge and it is eaten. But I only feel him under the blankets. What kind of man is this?'

But that girl kept quiet. She cooked and brought the porridge. She also brought water. People ate outside the house with her.

'Take the dishes to the house,' the elder wife said. 'Then we will go to the fields.' When the younger wife came inside the house, she found that the porridge had been eaten. She put the dishes away and threw the water out.

'Well,' the elder wife said, 'let us go to the fields.' She wanted Mr Snake to bask in the sun.

They took their baskets and put them on their heads. Then that young wife dropped her snuffbox behind the wall. 'I will find out what that woman does not want me to see,' she said to herself.

They walked and walked until they arrived over there at the fields.

'Ah!' the younger wife said, 'my snuffbox! I forgot it again!'

'Leave it!' that other wife said, 'I will fetch it, my sister.'

'No, let me fetch it!'

'Come back, I will do it!'

When the girl arrived at home, she found a big snake uncoiled in the courtyard.

'Hoi!' she exclaimed, 'is this my husband?'

'Your mother's fanny!' the snake shouted.

'What?' the girl said.

She started to run away. The snake followed her. He was close behind her! The girl fled to her father's homestead.[3] When she arrived there, she shouted loudly.

'What is the matter?' her mother asked.

When the woman looked behind her daughter, she saw the snake.

'Hoe, where are you?' she shouted.

She bashed the snake's big head! He continued moving. She hit him again! He was still moving. When she beat that snake for the fifth time, he jerked, *pwaṱa!* and died. As he died, the mother said, 'No! My son-in-law! I have killed him today!'

Later that afternoon she said, 'Let me bury him.'

She dug and dug and dug there at the fence of the homestead. Then she dragged the snake to the hole and put him inside. She covered him with soil. Then she took a stone and put it on top of the grave.

Her daughter told her what had happened. 'I always cooked porridge and took it to the house. I found that it had been eaten. I also slept there with a person, but during the day I did not see him. The other wife did not want me to return home during the day because he was basking in the sun.'

They went to bed. The rain fell during the night. It sifted down.

'Ah,' the mother said, 'it is daybreak. Let me sow pumpkin seed on the grave of my son-in-law.'

She came there and planted two seeds. One grew. It made tendrils that grew from here to over there! Then it bore a huge pumpkin.

'Yes! Yes!' the mother exclaimed, 'a big pumpkin is growing on the grave of my son-in-law. This pumpkin is now ripe. Let us pick it. Then we can cook pumpkin stew. You there, my grandchild. Pick that pumpkin. Roll it over here.'[4]

When that child got to the pumpkin, it said, 'If you touch me I will grab you!'

The child was afraid! He came back and said, 'The pumpkin wants to grab me!'

'I said, go and pick that pumpkin over there!'

'No! You are mad, man! I will not go again!'

'You, go there,' the grandmother instructed another child. That child went there.

When he arrived there, the pumpkin said, 'If you touch me I will grab you!'

'The pumpkin says he will grab me!' the child shouted.

'This brood is mad,' the grandmother complained. 'If I cook pumpkin stew, will you eat it?'

So she picked the pumpkin and brought it back.

'Bring the spoons,' she said.

She started to scrape the inside of the pumpkin.

'You must carry on scraping because I have other work to do,' she told her grandchildren.

When those children each took a spoon the pumpkin said, 'If you scrape me I will scrape you!'

'Why does he say that he will scrape us?' the children asked.

'Don't be daft!' the grandmother said. 'Hey man, this brood is really mad! Since when does a pumpkin have a mouth? Come here Vhuḓi, my grandchild.'

Vhuḓi also took a spoon. 'All right, I will scrape him granny.'

'If you scrape me I will scrape you!'

'Oh no! I am leaving it alone granny. It says its wants to scrape me too!'

'Voertsek!' that granny said.[5] 'You lot are really mad, man. Since when does a pumpkin have hands to scrape with?'

So there, pumpkin! You are cooked! The children wanted to eat it. When they reached for it, the pumpkin said, 'If you eat me I will eat you too!'

'Hey! He says, "If you eat me I will eat you too!" '

'You lot are mad. How can a pumpkin eat you? But all right, leave him.'

Then the mother said to her daughter, ‘Come and eat this pumpkin of my son-in-law.’

That young woman ate with her mother, just the two of them. Now, the sun went down. Then they went to bed.

They got up the next morning. The young woman washed herself and then ate the soft pumpkin. When the sun rose, she went behind the kitchen.

(Narrator)

Hee nandi, Nyamuṱwa-wo-lala.	Hey you, one who always sleeps.
Inwi ni ḓi mmbidzelani?	Why are you always calling me?
Mme aṉu wa ndi tema.	Your mother hit me with the hoe.
Vho ndi tema mapindi maṉa.	She hit me four times.
La vhuṱanu nda dzhena fhasi.	I died after the fifth blow.
Khezwi u songo kho mulenzhe?	Why did you not bite her on the leg?
Ndi tshi kho makhulu wanga?	What, bite my mother-in-law?

(Chorus)

Ndindee-ndindee.	(Vocables)

She was a young woman who mourned at the grave of her husband. Every morning she went behind the kitchen and sang her song.

‘Hey!’ her mother said, ‘whom are you speaking to there behind the kitchen?’

‘Nobody! I was just singing mother.’

Things came to an end. Those children did not eat the pumpkin. The snake did not die. He still loved the girl. He lived there in the house. The girl was now used to him.

Ha vha u fa ha ṋwana wa lungano.	This is the end of this child that is a story.

Sanari, 04/08/92

A young, newly-married woman often struggles to find her place in a polygamous marriage. She is subject to the control of older women and finds her duties exhausting and boring. She also may experience loneliness.

Her husband ensures stability in his large family by being impartial and keeping his dependents at a distance. He consequently acts stealthily like a snake.

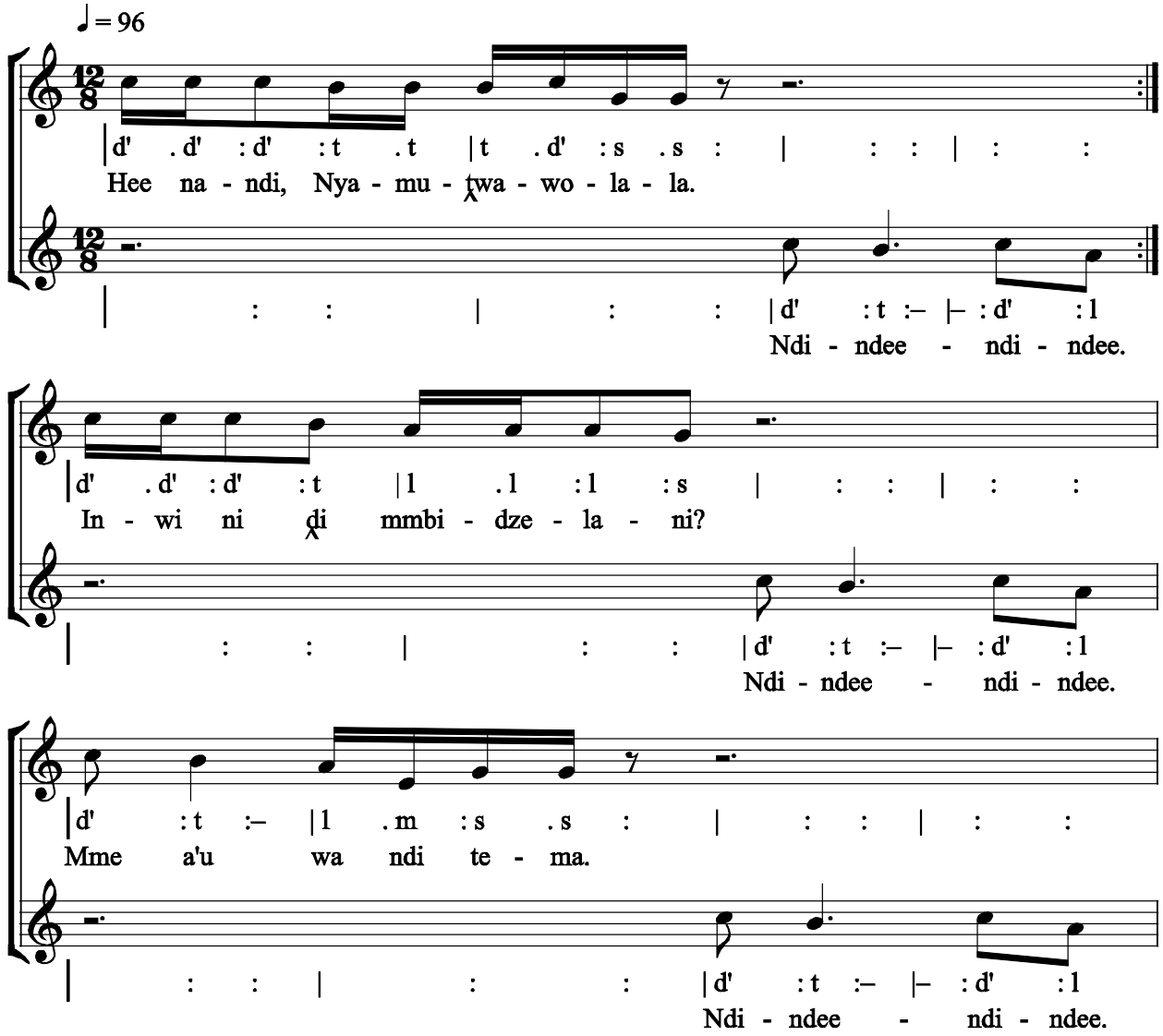
The young woman’s revelation to her mother initiates a process of healing. As in ‘To be human again,’ water plays an important role in emotional regeneration: rain falls, and love, understanding and acceptance flower in the form of a pumpkin that allows only the young woman to eat it.

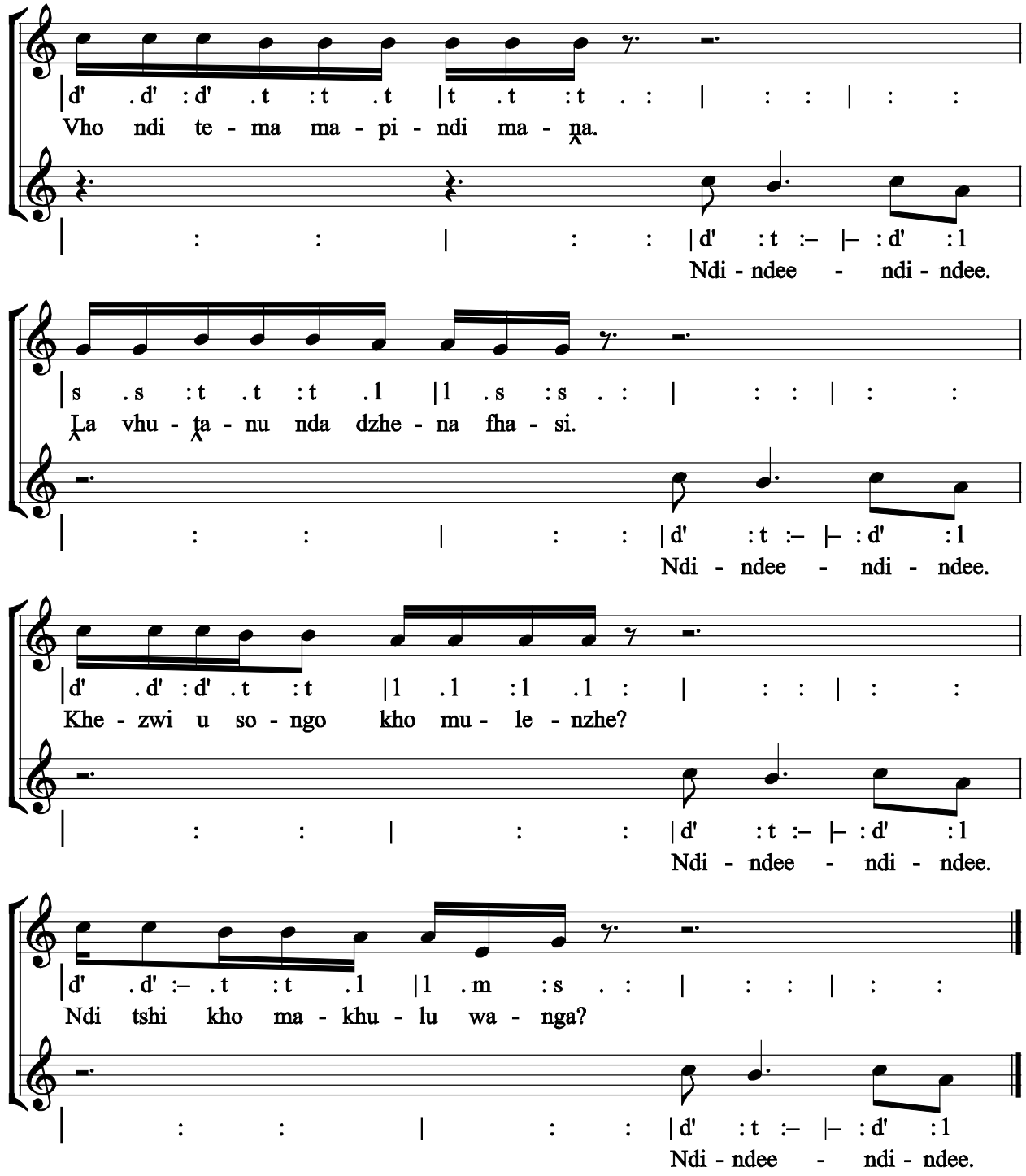
1 This is not an uncommon practice, since it diminishes the household chores individuals have to do. Also, it enhances a husband’s social status (Van Warmelo & Phophi, 1948:297).

2 ‘The husband always eats alone in his hut, his food being prepared by his youngest wife and brought to him on a wooden platter … [He] sleeps alone in his hut where his wives visit him’ (Stayt, 1931:154-55).

‘The husband’s platter is an important and respected object to a *muselwa* [a newly-married woman]. Whenever she touches it, though empty, she first kneels down and makes obeisance, and again when putting it down … It is *tabu* for the wife to eat porridge from the dish of her husband. If she has left some over and she wants to eat it, she must first make obeisance, remove it and put it in a small dish or basket … A woman who does not so treat her husband’s platter with ceremony is not a good wife, she is disrespectful.’ (Van Warmelo & Phophi, 1948:245.)

3 A married woman never severs ties with her parents. They are required to help her in times of trouble, and their home remains a physical and emotional haven (Du Plessis, 1940).
4 Grandparents tend to spoil their grandchildren. In keeping with gender roles, a grandfather is formally respected, while the relationship between a grandmother and her grandchildren is more caring and informal (Du Plessis, 1940; also see 'The angry ostrich').
5 *Pfutseke/pfutsekisa.* From Afrikaans *voert sê ek*, used to chase a dog away (see 'The wooden hoe'). Initial contact between settlers of Dutch descent (later known as Afrikaners) and Venda people date back to the early 19th century. Traders first entered the Venda area, followed in 1836 by the first group of Voortrekkers, Afrikaners who migrated north during the 19th century to escape British colonial rule in the Cape.

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Ndi - ndee - ndi - ndee.

Mr Tortoise takes a bath

Salungano! Salungano! Here comes a story!

The country was dry. There was no water anywhere. There was nothing. The Mutale River was dry. The animals suffered from thirst: snakes, tortoises, elephants, lions; also impalas, duikers and hares. All the animals.

Now, the animals gathered. They decided to dig a hole over there in the dry riverbed.

'We will dig for water here,' they said. 'When we find it, we will all drink.'

So they told Mr Elephant to dig first because he was so big and strong.

They chanted:

(Narrator chants)
Pandu, pandu, pandu! Dig, dig, dig!
Mavula matshena, pandu! Dig for lots of clear water!

(Chorus chants)
A vha mavula matshena! And there was lots of clear water!

'Stop!' the animals said to Mr Elephant. 'Look at the size of that hole! But where is the water? Come out and stand over there. Let Mr Lion try.'

Pandu, pandu, pandu!
Mavula matshena, pandu! …

'We still see no water,' the animals complained. 'Many of us will die here. You must also dig, Mr Kudu.'

Pandu, pandu, pandu!
Mavula matshena, pandu! …

Mr Kudu also failed.

'You must dig now, Mr Impala.'

Mr Impala went into the hole.

Pandu, pandu, pandu!
Mavula matshena, pandu! …

'Hey man, Mr Impala! You better also get out. Let Mr Bushbuck try.'

Pandu, pandu, pandu!
Mavula matshena, pandu! …

'There is no water at this place,' Mr Bushbuck said.

'I will go inside here,' Mr Duiker offered.

Pandu, pandu, pandu!
Mavula matshena, pandu! …

'Hah! You liar!'

‘I will climb down here,’ Mr Baboon said. ‘I will find water.’

Pandu, pandu, pandu!
Mavula matshena, pandu! …

‘Ah no! Get out, you!’
‘People will collapse of thirst.’
‘There is no water at this place.’
Now, Sankambe the hare came forward. ‘I will find water.’

Pandu, pandu, pandu!
Mavula matshena, pandu! …

Now, because he was unimportant, Sankambe was picked up and thrown aside.[1] ‘You are useless.’
‘Wait, let me try,’ Mr Tortoise said, ‘perhaps I will be lucky.’

(Narrator chants)
Pandu, pandu, pandu! Dig, dig, dig!

(Chorus chants)
A vha mavula matshena! And there was lots of clear water!

‘Bugger off, Tortoise!’
Mr Tortoise was flung far away. All the animals started to drink. When there was only a little water left, they said, ‘Hey! Come here, Mr Tortoise. Dig again.’

Pandu, pandu, pandu!
A vha mavula matshena!

The fountain was wide open. The water rose, *ti-ti-ti-ti-ti-ti!*
‘Hey, this tortoise is just washing himself,’ the animals said. ‘Let us throw him far away and drink the water.’
Now, the tortoise kept quiet because he was small. Then the animals surrounded him. Mr Elephant grabbed him with his trunk and tossed him far away. The animals drank water until they had enough.
‘Hah!’ they said, ‘we will come here every day to drink.’
‘Do you know who found the water?’ Mr Tortoise asked. ‘As far as I can see you all failed. I found the water. And today you hurt me here. The water will dry up. All of it.’
‘Well, let it dry up right now!’ the animals mocked Mr Tortoise.
They picked him up and threw him into the veld. All the water dried up immediately!
‘Let us find an ox to apologise to Tortoise,’ the animals decided, ‘so that he must dig for water again.’
‘No,’ that Tortoise said, ‘I will not return to dig for water. I will find water for myself only.’
‘Let us beg him,’ the animals said. And so they begged Tortoise for water and gave him two oxen.
When Mr Tortoise came back he sang:

(Narrator)
Mavula matshena, pandu! Dig! Clear water!
Mavula matshena kabwa! Clear water splashes!
Mavula matshena kunwu! Clear water sloshes!

(Chorus)
A vha mavula matshena! And there was lots of clear water!

Mr Tortoise jumped into the fountain. ‘Tough luck to those who do not want to drink water here because they find me digusting,’ he said.

And so all the animals had to drink that water!

Zwo fhela. This is the end.

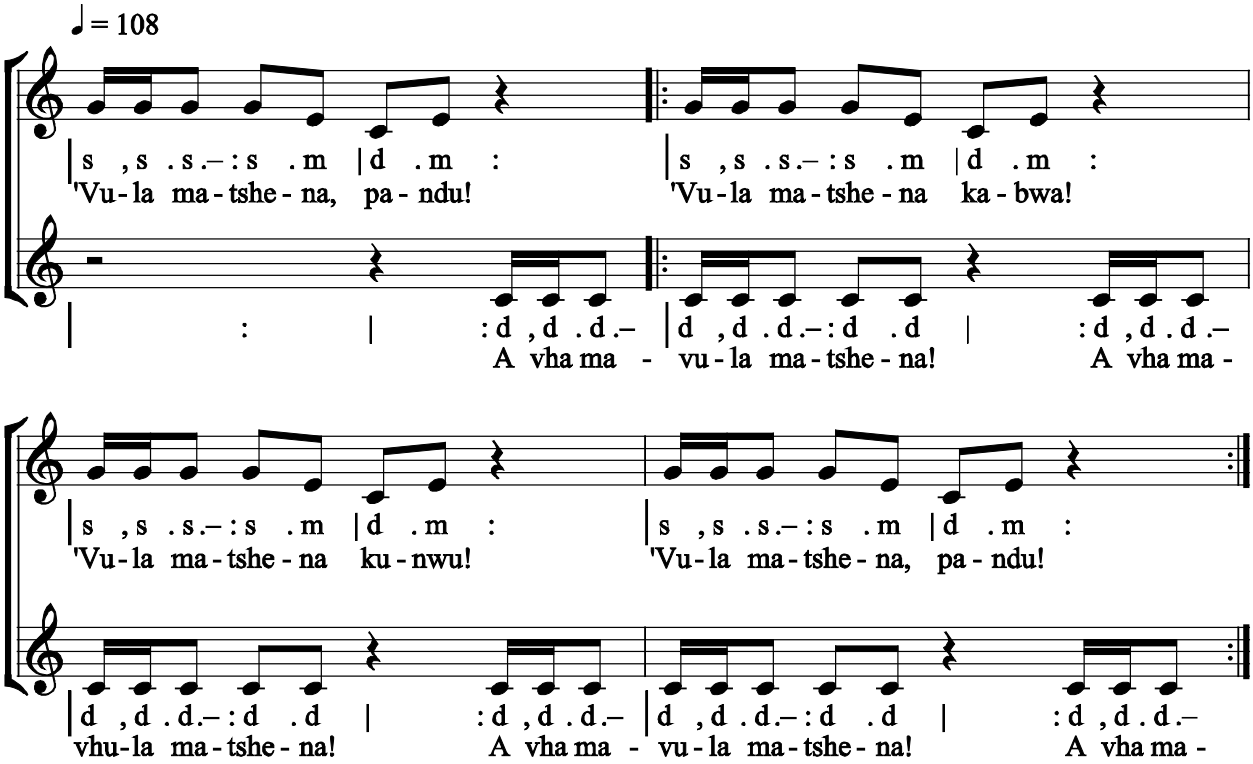
Sanari, 05/06/92

The organisation of relationships by seniority also applies to children. This is evident in different forms of address: *mukomana* is an elder sibling and *murathu* a younger one. Needless to say, the entrenched power of seniority also leads to conflict between children. As in the case of Sankambe stories, *ngano* about children often describe how the weak and subordinate overcome their senior adversaries.

The little tortoise does not retort when his mother is insulted and he is chased away from the well. The narrator emphasises that aggression is not the best strategy in a family conflict. Kriel notes of the behaviour of tortoise in Shona *ngano* that it ‘will seldom harm a creature except in self-defence. When it takes the initiative in tricking others, the aim is not to destroy or harm them, but rather to teach them a lesson in humility’ (Kriel, 1971:56, 59).

Continued oppression eventually may lead spiritual or magical forces to intercede. This is evident in the control that the little tortoise has over the water supply. Kriel (1971) notes of the tortoise in Shona *ngano* that he not only displays wisdom, but that he also is the only animal with magical power.

1 This is a reference to Sankambe as the symbol of disempowerment in a class-based system.



Sophia Magoro

Sophia Magoro was born in 1933. She lives in the Masia district in southern Venda. Her husband died in 1985. She underwent a big operation in 1989, and now receives a disability grant.

'Our family did not wear traditional clothes because my father was born and raised at the village of Tshakuma.[1] He went to school, and so did we, his children. I passed grade seven.'

'My father was a builder. One day he arrived home with something wonderful. It was a machine that could make clothes. You cut a piece of cloth like this, you sewed it like that, and then you had a sleeve. When there was no work, my father and mother sewed. My father taught us that people can do any kind of work. He said that us girls (we were only daughters) also had to herd cattle. Sometimes he hired boys too, but we helped with everything.'

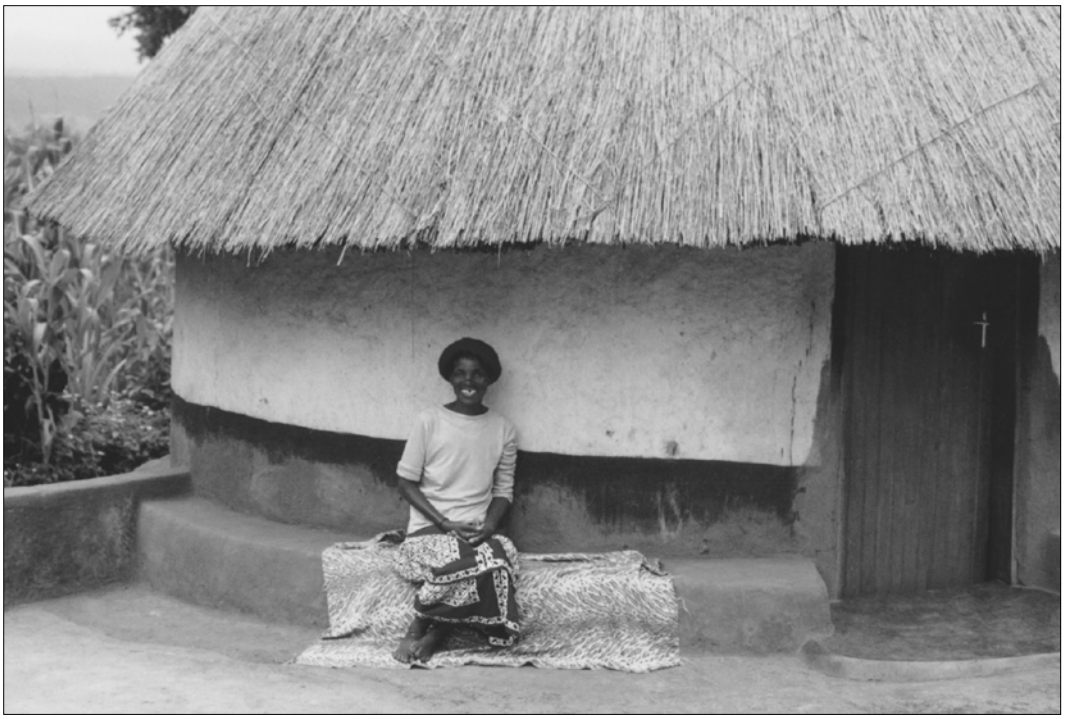
'You know, when we were young, people said a girl had "the curse of women." This meant she had become an adult. When a girl started to menstruate, she had to go to an adult. They then told the girl's parents. When the parents received this news, they told their daughter that she had to be initiated. That girl would be very scared. In those days, when we saw initiates walking in line, we ran like hell.'

'When we cooked food for boys who were being initiated, we had to wear traditional dress, whether we attended school or not. The initiation started in June and ended in August.[2] The initiates wore no clothes during these two months.'[3]

'When a girl was at initiation school, she was controlled by older women. By the last day of the school she would be silent because she was scolded so often. After initiation she was not allowed to look her parents in the face. No. And she had become unusually quiet.'

'We were raised strictly. This mixing of boys and girls that makes a girl expect a baby: we did not know it. No, we were raised strictly. It never happened during those times that a boy and a girl stood chatting openly. "What are they talking about?" So people would wonder.'

'There also was more rain in the past. It was not the kind of rain that we get nowadays. When it rained, we usually sang, "Dance aunty, we are going to the water furrow." Then we sang and played outside in the rain until someone called us inside to do work. We worked and worked and worked.'



‘We did not go to the clinic when we were ill. Somebody just prepared a herbal cure. Yes, you would sit there and shiver, and people would say you had malaria. We first heard of a clinic when we went to school at Kuruleng. We played practical jokes on one another. “Hey, those small tablets, what can they do against malaria? They are just pebbles, herbs are better!” ’

‘Old people placed a stone in a fire to heal a fever. When the stone was red-hot, they placed a blanket over your head and a pot with water on the fire. The stone was put into the pot and the heat steamed you. You sweated like hell. Wow, wow, wow! The sweat poured down your face. Then they took the blanket off and said you were cured.’

‘We never ate sugar because it caused malaria. Children in those days never ate as much sugar as nowadays. People always said that white people could not cure pain-in-the-side. But we could heal everything. When a child was ill, people just said, “Get the *tshingai* and smear him.” Yes, it was pork fat and soot. It works. Sometimes people took the leaves of the monkey pod tree and burnt them. A sick child was put on top of the burnt leaves, and he would be cured.’

‘We usually planted maize, millet and sorghum. *Tshivheletani* is sorghum with a big vein and white grains. It has many grains, like that of millet. There is the millet called *tshikotame* and that straight one whose head does not bend.’

‘There were many birds in our crops then, that is why I say it was a wonderful time. We knew a Shangaan[4] named Magezi. There was nobody who could scare off birds like him. Although he was a Shangaan, everybody from the Masia district came to him for help. He had enchanted thongs. He would say, “I need all the boys and girls tonight.” That night everyone walked in the ploughed fields to enchant the birds. Magezi knotted his thongs, and the magic power worked for all the fields. Afterwards he told us to pick green maize and watermelons. Then we would go to the river. We made a fire, roasted the cobs and ate the watermelons. We went to the headman’s homestead afterwards. The boys slept one side and the girls on the other side. We went home the next morning. The following day nobody, not even adults, were allowed to go to the ploughed fields. At first we paid that Shangaan a shilling for every homestead. Later he said that a shilling was not enough, so we gave him a half-crown.’

‘During those years one could do very little with money. We wore dresses in our family, not the leather loincloth. We could afford dresses because my father was quite wealthy. A dress only cost a half-crown. When we went to the shop, they poured sugar into our two small hands, and it was free. Sometimes the shopkeeper gave us some of those flat sweets. They were free, the red or pink sweets that looked like candles. There were also sweets that looked like small figures and could be stretched, but they were sold.’

‘My sister and I looked after my father’s cattle. We milked many cows. We had a special hut where the milk was kept. Nobody was allowed to stay there. It had to be kept very clean. When we got home with the milk, we put a clean white cloth on a clay pot and then poured the milk through it. The milk would be sour the next day. We skimmed the cream off into another pot. My mother made butter from the cream. Then she baked bread in a three-legged pot. Did we eat! When pure cream fell on the ground, it did not become dirty. We cooked finely ground maize in cream. We also cooked milk until the butterfat became clear like water. Milk is now too expensive to buy, but then we had an abundance. My mother did all those things, but now I cannot do them any longer. Times have changed.’

‘Then the white people came. There was a white man by the name of Hess. Some said he was a German who got lost during the war. He bought leather and skins from us, first for two shillings and sixpence, and later for five shillings per skin.’

‘We were glad when white people came to work at Kuruleng clinic. People did not really go there to consult them, they just wanted to see what they looked like. We sat silently and looked at the white, white man. Then we called the others, “Hey, there is a white man here today, come and see!” ’

‘We played dance music on two grammophones at home. The biggest one had windows that could open. We used to dance to the song *Tshidavhula mananga:* “You, Shonisani my child who

goes through the veld. It belongs to Mr Raulinga. The shorts of Mbengeni goes through the veld. I will die and wake up again." That was a song we played time and again.'

'The cattle were so fat. We liked looking after them and hunting locusts.[5] I was only six at the time. During harvest we made houses from maize stalks and even smeared the ground with cattle dung, then we stayed there. We drank a little milk straight from a cow's udder at one o' clock. And those cattle were so beautiful. There was Vhatlani, whose name means ax, and Batomu, which means Bantam. Morofin, she was a beautiful cow! Korland was a red cow. We milked Missisi without tethering her. Queenie too. Vhatlani was not as aggressive as Lukas. Morofin was as big as a buffalo. People were frightened of her. Kimbini, meaning Kimberley, was a huge bull. Kimberley was the only big city people knew of then. So they named any big animal Kimbini. Then there was a big drought in 1946, or was it 1945? Only Queenie and Lukas survived. Of all our beautiful cattle just Queenie and Lukas remained. Only money is important nowadays.'

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1 The site of a well-known Berlin Lutheran mission.
2 This is the rest period during the agricultural year.
3 To inculcate perseverance.
4 A member of the Xitsonga-speaking population whose area borders onto southern Venda.
5 People eat a variety of nutritious insects, including locusts, termites and beetles.

The magic song

Salungani wa salungani! [1] Here comes a story!

There was a certain man. He always killed many wild animals. When he left home and came back, he carried meat. There were always carcasses at his home. People were surprised at this. How did he kill them?

Well, when he arrived in the veld, he changed into a wild animal. He stood on a plain so that the animals should come to him quickly. He called them by singing:

Hae! Kumani mungome! [2]	Hey, find the diviner!
Hae! Wanani mungome!	Hey, find the diviner!
Hu tshee kaḽe ndi fara nga mbili.	Long ago I caught you two at a time.
Hu si zwino ndi ḓo fara ṱhihi.	Now I am able to catch one of you only.[3]

Those animals, they all gathered. There were different kinds. The diviner caught and killed them. Then he dragged them home. The next morning people found lots of meat at his home.

'Hey,' they asked, 'these animals that you kill: where do they come from?'

'I catch them with traps,' the diviner said. 'I place them over there on the mountain.'

But he did not prepare any traps. These traps were himself. He used his magic power.

People started to talk. 'Hey! Let us be courageous and speak to this man. To ask him what he does, because we are surprised at so much meat.'

Then they started to follow him. They left during the evening after he had gone. When they went over there to the mountain, they heard him singing. When they got closer, they found that he was already a dangerous animal.

He sang loudly:

Hae! Kumani mungome!
Hae! Wanani mungome! …

All the animals came to him. They just sat there. Then the diviner captured and killed them. And so people heard his magic song. And that he killed his prey like an animal and not like a person.

Then the time came for the song to be heard and known by all. People sang it when the diviner was at home. When they sang the song, he became afraid of changing into that wild animal. But the song spread, and people accepted him for being able to call animals.

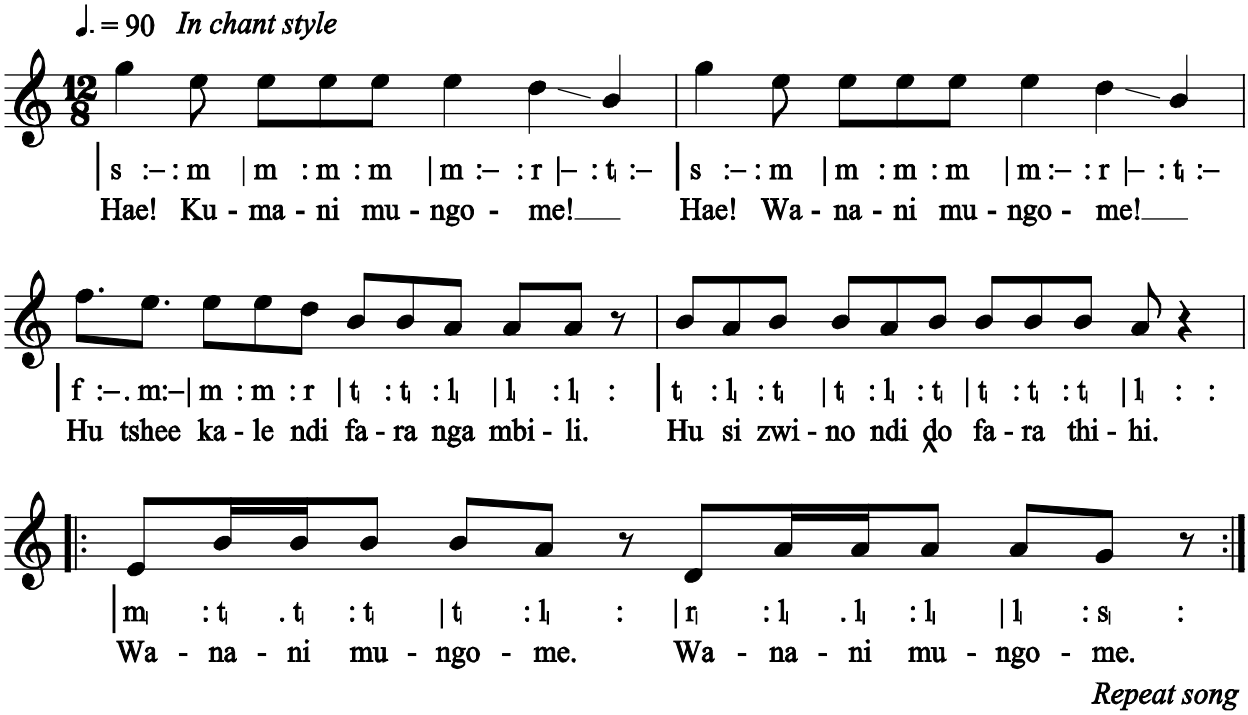
They all gathered at his place.

Ha vha u fa ha ṅwana wa lungano. This is the end of this child that is a story.

Maembeni, 28/05/92

Knowledge of magic was believed to bestow great power and wealth on a class of semi-professional specialists that included diviners, hunters, potters, iron smelters and expert musicians. These specialists often were regarded with awe and suspicion. They usually explained their skills by attributing them to supernatural inspiration. While their social status was legitimised in this way, it nevertheless remained subject to the demands of entrenched power relations and social cohesion (note that there is no chorus part in the song). The diviner in this story accordingly is regarded as being too powerful, and is cut down to size when the source of his power is revealed. However, reconciliation eventually takes place when people acknowledge the importance of his magical power.

1 This variation of the standard opening is of Xitsonga origin (also see 'The angry ostrich'). The location of Sophia Magoro's home on the border with predominantly Xitsonga-speaking areas also is evident in the songs of her stories (see 'The tree with red flowers').
2 The term *kumani* (to find) is of Xitsonga origin. Its use here points to the practice of consulting foreign diviners who are regarded as impartial.
3 In the past the diviner caught many animals. Now he is weaker and animals are fewer.



The girls and the dove

Salungano wa salungano! This is where the story starts!

Girls from the king's homestead woke up one morning and went to the Mudasiri River. When they got there, they started to wash clothes. A young man arrived. He was playing his *dende* musical bow.[1] As he played, he started to dance in front of them.

'Do you like me girls?' he asked.

'No, we don't like you.'

But later one of the girls said, 'The way he plays his bow makes me like him.'

'If you love me, I will not leave you behind,' the young man said. 'Actually, I want to leave with all of you. The place I want to take you to is the Madabane River.'

The girls finished their washing.

'Pack your clothes,' the young man said.

Those girls picked up their bundles. They walked in front.

'The bow that follows is being played by Netshiombo,' the young man said.

(Narrator)
Dende matevhele nga Netshiombo. The bow follows, that of Netshiombo.
Dende matevhele: dzi ḓo lila. The bow follows: it will sing.
Dende matevhele haya ṱhovhele. Listen to the bow here behind you.

(Chorus)[2]
Dende matevhele kindi-kindi. The bow that follows goes *kindi-kindi.*

And so the girls left late in the afternoon with the young man. They walked through the entire night and arrived at his home the next morning. The young man spoke there with his parents.

The girls were given meat and many other dishes. They were very happy. 'We have found a good man,' they said to the bride. 'You girl, you did well to accept this young man. We were scared of him at first and did not like him. Look, now you are receiving many things.'

It was the next morning. That young man came into the house.

'How did you sleep girls?' he asked.

'And we ask you too: how did you sleep?'

'I slept well.'

At dusk the young man left the homestead. Hey! The girls here in the house did not know where he went.

Three days later they saw a big monster. They were walking through a narrow passage in the homestead. The man had changed into a lion that hunted at night. When he returned, he gave the meat to those at home who cooked it for the girls. And did they eat!

Then the young women of the house said to them, 'Hey, when you eat this meat you must collect the bones. Do not throw them away.' Because the bones were for the lion.

'We saw a monster last night,' the girls said the next morning. 'He was eating those bones we were asked to collect.'

'Do not be scared,' the young women of the house said, 'it is just a wild animal that walks around here in the veld.'

The girls said nothing and went to sleep. When they went outside again at night, they heard the noise of breaking bones. Again they found the monster squatting outside and eating bones.

It was then that those girls said to the young bride, 'We cannot stand it any longer. This is where the meat comes from, we have seen it. You can stay here with your in-laws, your new family. We are now running away.'

‘What?’ said that girl, ‘I certainly will not remain here.’

When they gathered outside the house, they were afraid that the monster would follow them. But he did not. And so those children fled.

They met a dove who sat in the footpath. ‘Children of our people,’ he said, ‘where you are going to is far away. Where you are coming from is nearer. Can’t you wait for me to help you? This monster you are fleeing from will follow you. He will find you on the footpath.’

‘How will you do it?’ those children asked. ‘You are just a bird. And we are many.’

‘Listen to me,’ the dove said. ‘I will manage.’

‘Do what you must to help us, little bird,’ the girls replied. ‘But do you know where we are going?’

‘I think I know the place,’ that bird said. ‘Where is it again?’

‘We come from the Mudasiri River. We are children from the king’s homestead.’

Then that bird swallowed the children one by one.

(Narrator chants repeatedly)
Nga muthihi![3] One by one!

(Chorus chants)
Salungano!

All those children ended up in the stomach of the dove! When the last one landed inside, the bird started to sing and fly.

It was sunset. That bird saw the countryside passing below him. When he arrived at royal villages, he stopped at the entrance to the courtyard.

(Narrator)

Si̱li̱li, sina nkhuru, si̱li̱li!	(The call of the dove)
Subani Ha-Mulibana, si̱li̱li!	Show me Mulibana’s village.
Mulaboni wa Mudasiri, si̱li̱li!	Near Mudasiri River.
Nna ki rwalitshe vhana vhawe, si̱li̱li!	I am carrying his children.
Ki bva mulamboni wa Madabani, si̱li̱li!	I have come from Madabani River.

(Chorus)
Si̱li̱li, sina nkhuru, si̱li̱li!

‘No, this is not the place,’ those kings said.

That bird flew on. When he landed at another royal village, the sons of that king said theirs was not the girls’ village either. So the bird flew on and on and on. At last he arrived at the right village.

The king’s people had been looking for the lost children. They did not know where they were. They thought they would never see them again. The entire district knew about them.

The dove did not land inside the king’s courtyard. He stopped at the first houses in that village.

Si̱li̱li, sina nkhuru, si̱li̱li!
Subani Ha-Mulibana, si̱li̱li! …

‘There is a bird that sings of Mulibana’s children,’ people said. ‘They have returned today.’

But it was surprising that these children were being carried by a dove. How did the dove carry them, that dove that flies?

They took the dove to the king’s homestead. ‘There is a bird here, a dove. Here he is. He says he comes from the Madabani River.’

‘I am carrying the children who went to the Mudasiri River,’ the dove explained.

‘How can the children be back?’ people asked. ‘What speaks there is a bird. How did the bird carry the children? Because it is a dove that flies.’

‘Everybody has gathered here,’ the king said. ‘All the families have come together. When my children arrive here, they must land in the courtyard that is covered with reedmats.’

Then the bird arrived there and landed in a tree in the courtyard.

Sililili, sina nkhuru, sililili!
Subani Ha-Mulibana, sililili! …

That bird hopped from the tree onto the ground and sat on a reedmat. He started to cough up the children, *axa!*

‘Who do you say she is?’ he asked.

‘It is Phophi!’

The dove coughed, *axa!*

‘Who do you say she is?’

‘It is Mudangawe!’

He coughed again, *axa!*

‘Who do you say she is?’

‘It is Masindi!’

The dove then coughed up Nyawasedza, Tshinakaho and Nyamukamadi! Then all the king’s children were there.

‘Hey!’ the king said to the dove, ‘where do you come from? I did not know where my children were and you carried them.

‘I picked these children up when they were afraid,’ the bird replied. ‘It was night and they did not know where to go. There was a man that changed into a lion. When the children decided to run away, I said, “You will not escape. That lion will follow you and eat you.” I spoke to these children, but they scoffed at me. They said, “Where will you put us? Because you are only a bird.” I said, “You will see what I am.” Tell me king, do you see any child with an injury?’

‘No.’

‘Is there a child who is missing?’

‘No.’

‘Well, then I will leave. I just wanted to help your children.’

‘No bird,’ the king pleaded, ‘do not go away, stay here.’

‘I cannot stay,’ the bird replied. ‘I have many people to help. I stand here, bird that I am, waiting to find suffering.’

Ha mbo di vha u fhufha ha ṅwana wa tshinoni! This was the flight of the child of the bird!

Maembeni, 02/04/92

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1 The Venda braced gourd-bow (see figs. 1 & 2, Kirby, 1968). This instrument was used by young men when courting their girlfriends. Also see ‘The king and the musician.’

2 The structural relationship between the solo and chorus parts is unclear from the recording. The narrator seemed too impatient to teach the chorus part to the audience and merely added it as an extra solo line.

3 Increase the pitch and tempo of the chant when repeating.

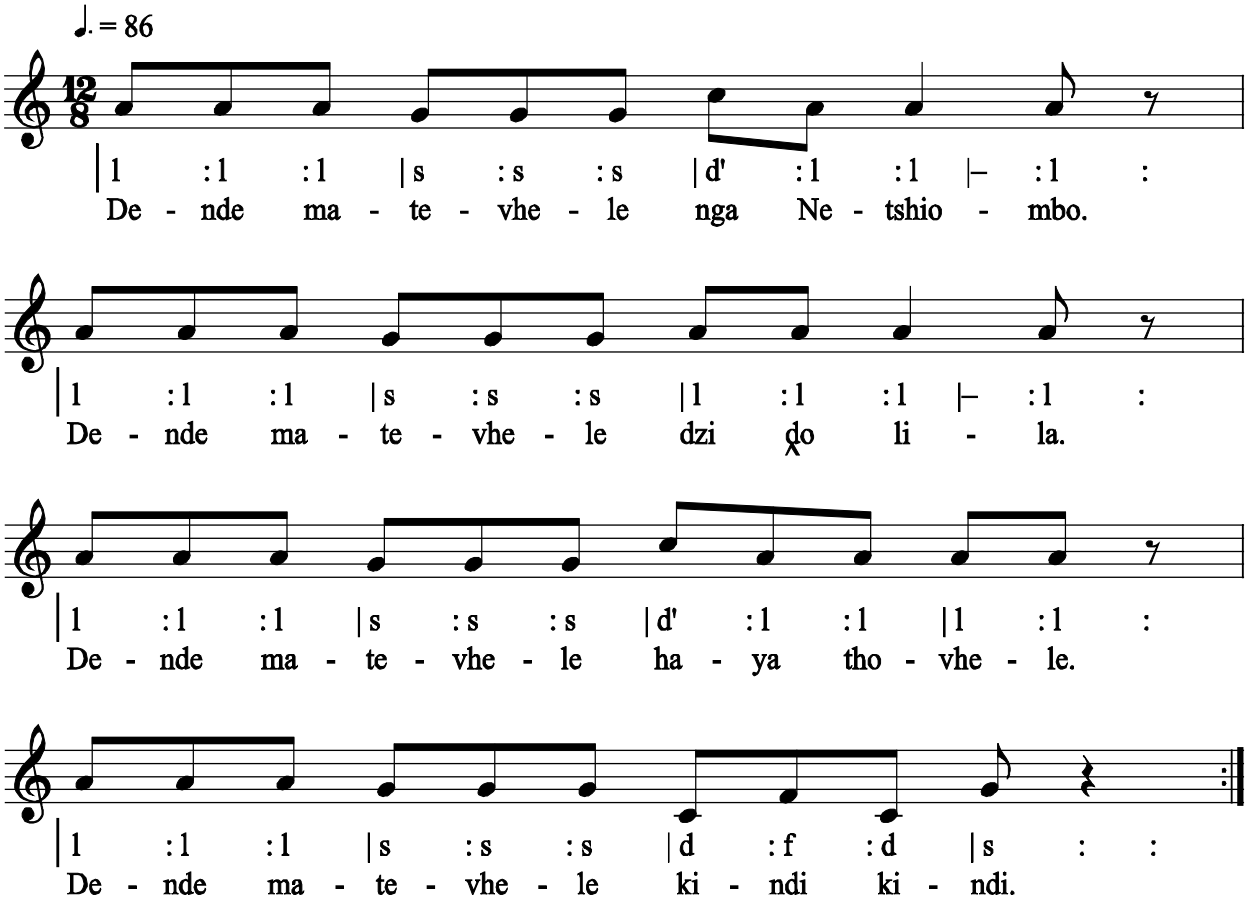
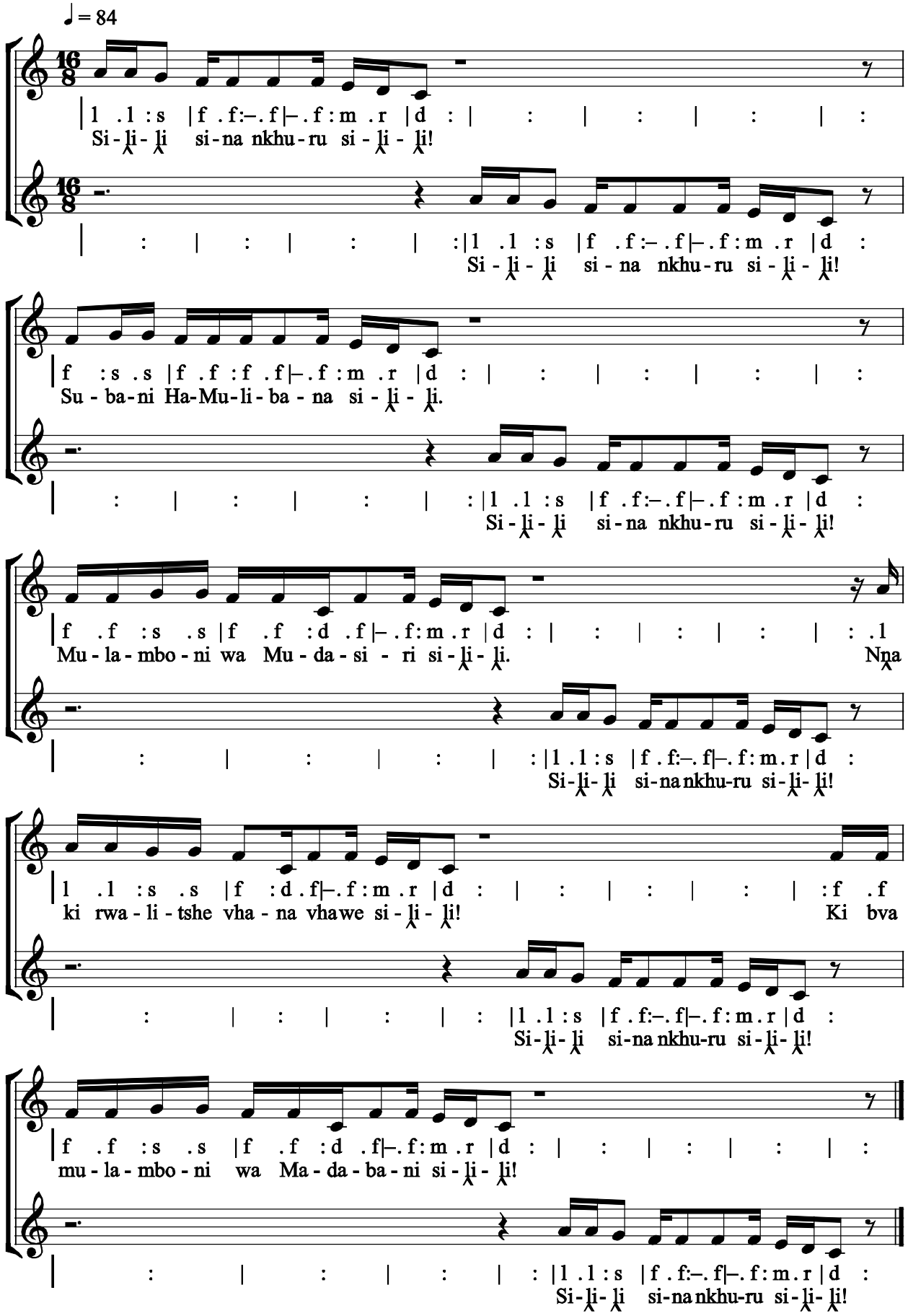


Fig. 1. Elias Ndou of Mangaya playing the *dende*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16/8
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Si - li - li si - na nkhu - ru si - li - li!
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Si - li - li si - na nkhu - ru si - li - li!

The clay child

Salungano! Salungano! Here comes a story!

A certain woman was childless. And so she made herself a boy from clay. This boy was amazing. At first he looked like a zombie, but then he breathed, walked and spoke like a human. He went to the river, and looked after the goats.

Girls were washing their clothes at the river. They saw how attractive the young man was in his suit and hat. He flirted with them, but they rejected him.

'How can you refuse me when I am dressed so neatly in a suit and rakish cap?' he asked.

And so one of the young women said, 'I like this young man!'

The two lovers went to the young man's home the next morning. The young wife was sent to the river to fetch water.

'Do not scoop water that the frogs drink,' her mother-in-law said.

'What must I do when I get to the river?' that young wife asked.

The old woman replied, 'When you reach the river, say: "My husband warns me not to drink the water." If there are frogs, they will answer you.'

The young woman took her clay pot and went to the river. When she arrived there, she chanted:

(Narrator chants)
Munna waka u ri si nwe metsi a̱la! My husband warns me not to drink that water!

(Chorus chants)
Korr, korr! (The sound of a croaking frog)

After that she went further. She came to a different place on the riverbank.

Munna waka u ri si nwe metsi a̱la!
Korr, korr!

'Oh, I am suffering today,' the young woman said. 'Where must I get water?'

She went further until she came to a distant puddle in the river.

Munna waka u ri si nwe metsi a̱la!
Korr, korr!

The frogs answered her again.

'I am now really tired,' the young woman complained.

She then found a dry part of the river bed. She started to dig until water bubbled from the sand.

In the mean time her old mother-in-law said, 'It is late.' She instructed her son to open the byre for the goats.

That young man followed them to the river. 'Why does the girl not return from the river?' he asked himself.

He climbed up the riverbank. Thunder rumbled in the sky.

The old woman stood there and sang:

(Narrator)
Muvhumbe hae, muvhumbe tshuu! Hey clay child, poor clay child!
Muvhumbe ha niwi nga mvula! The rain must not fall on the clay child!
Kumbe-mbelele-kumbe! (The sound of rainwater flowing)
Mutshatshambela! It is pouring!

Muvhumbe, lukole lu a lelemela.	Clay child, a small cloud is drifting closer.
Muvhumbe kha vha vhuye, tshuu!	The poor clay child must return home!

(Chorus)

Ha vhuya danga ḽanga, mutshatshambela!	Return with my cattle, it is pouring!

That girl was cleaning the fountain. 'It sounds as if that song is about my husband,' she said.

The first drops of rain started to fall. The clay man had a stick in his hand. He chased the goats home. The rain came pounding down. The hand that held the stick separated from the clay arm. It fell on the ground, *kunu!*

The young woman saw the small hand … She stood up. 'Hey, why does this person look like my beloved?' she asked.

Oh! The other hand also fell off. And the head, *teku-teku!* The clay body jerked like that of a dancer.

The old woman sang while the girl stood there and watched. That small leg started to … started to fall off, *kunu!* As it came off, the body fell backwards, *ga!*

Oh dear! The clay child was just a creation, an imitation, a zombie! He imploded into an anthill. That girl then realised what had happened.

Ha mbo ḓi vha uri u fa ha ṅwana wa lungano.	This is the end of this child that is a song story.

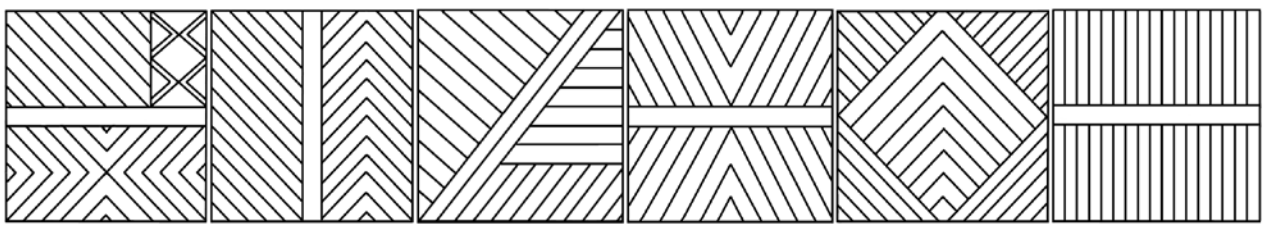
Maembeni, 25/05/92

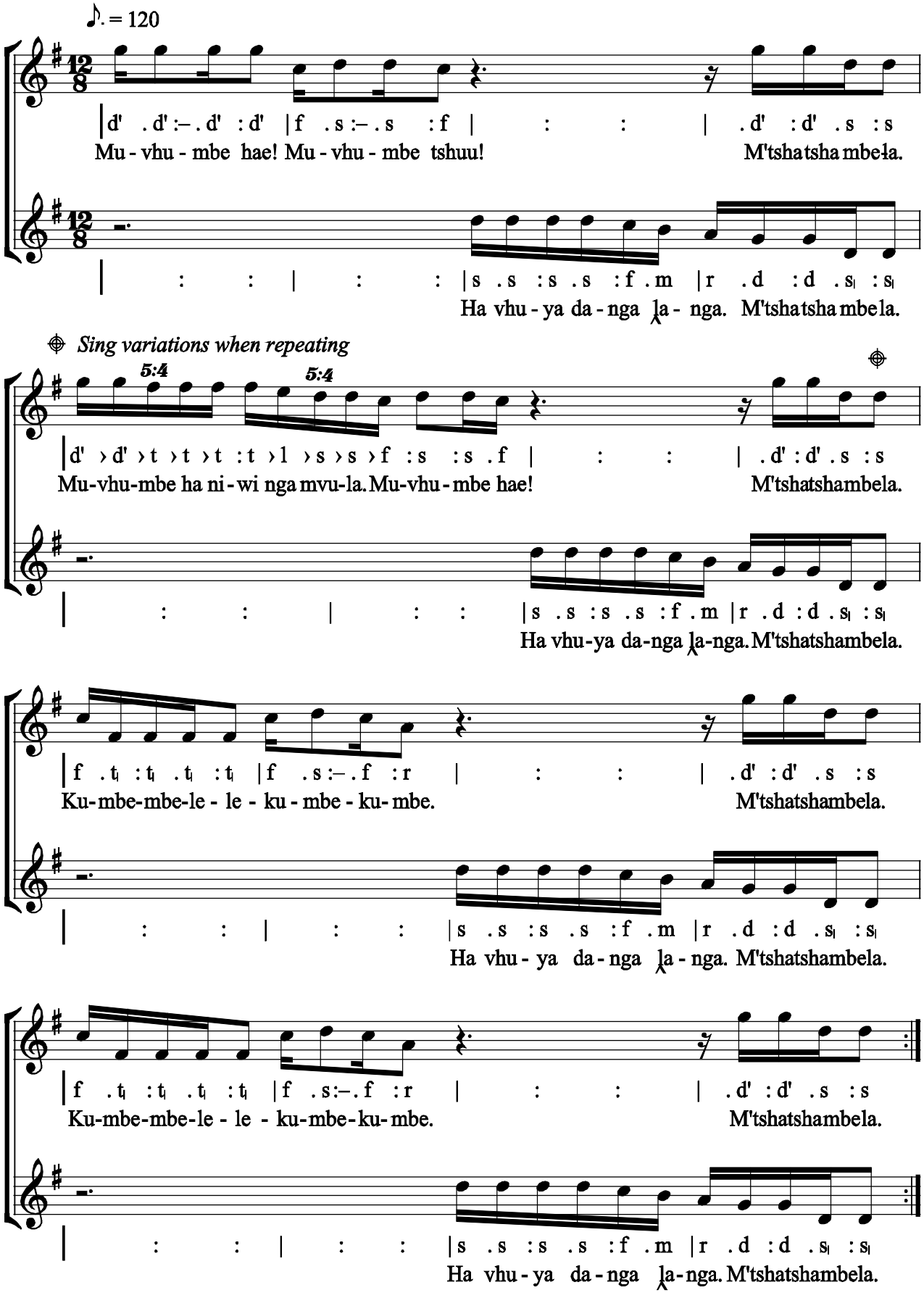
This story describes infertility and the severe pressure to bear children. This is evident in the disintegration of the clay child into a rotund anthill which is metaphoric of pregnancy.

Motherhood is an essential social requirement. Kriel (1971:188) notes that 'The greatest internal threats to the continuation of the house lie in barrenness on the part of the woman.' As such, 'barrenness is more bitter than death' (Bullock, 1927:11). Barren women are objects of pity and scorn, and they often are sent back to their parental home.

The animation of clay figures, a common theme in regional oral narratives, is consistent with an animistic worldview in which the working of spiritual forces is linked to human desires and actions. The narrator explained the story in terms of the belief in zombies. These supernatural humanoid creatures are thought to be created magically by evil people who force them to work secretly in their homes and fields. The control that is exercised over zombies may be linked to the appeal to magic means by barren women wanting to conceive.

The narrator also points out that the clay child was incorrectly fired, thus causing him to disintegrate in the rain. In other words, he was improperly raised. The teaching and discipline that all children must have, strengthens them against the storms of life.

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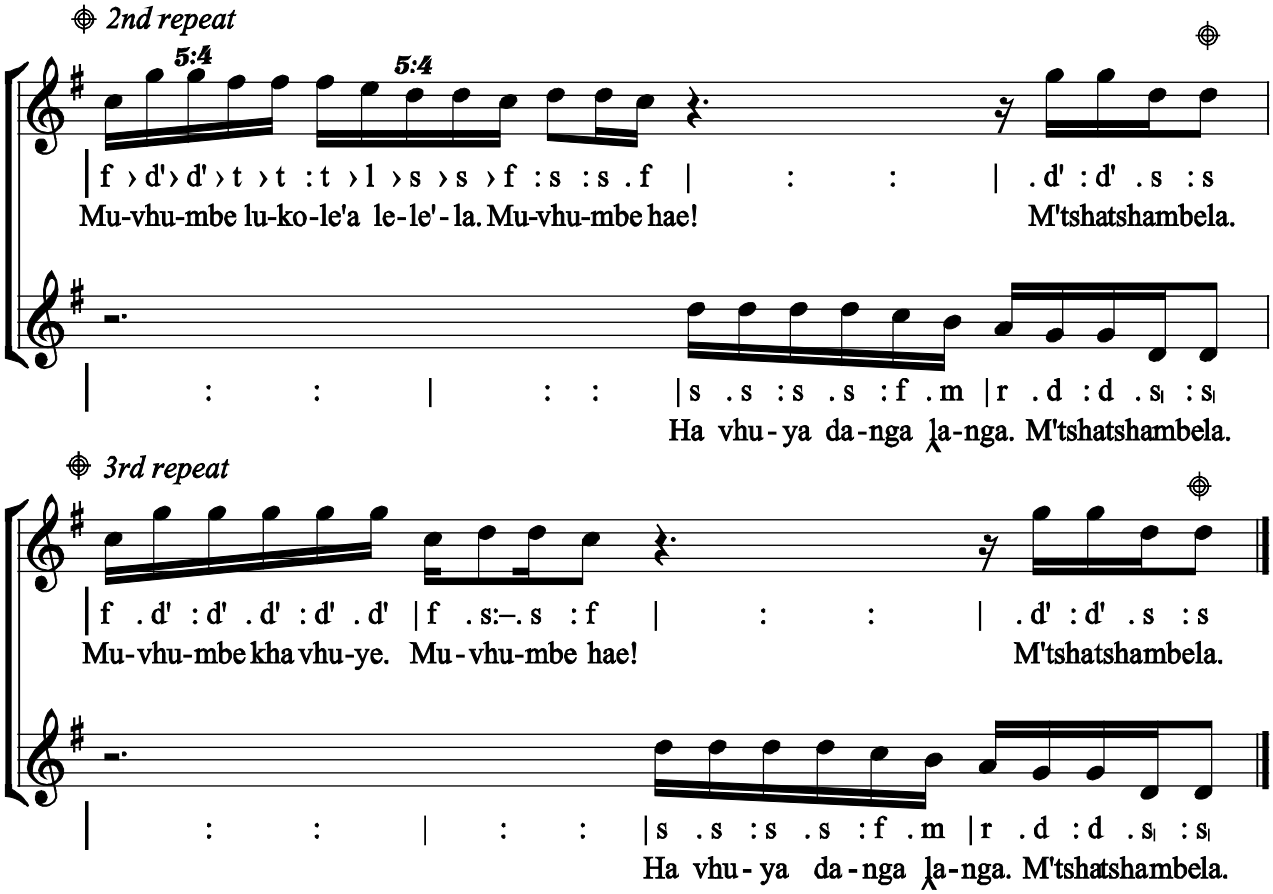
d' . d' :– . d' : d' | f . s :– . s : f | : : | . d' : d' . s : s
Mu - vhu - mbe hae! Mu - vhu - mbe tshuu! M'tshatsha mbe la.
: : | : : | s . s : s . s : f . m | r . d : d . s, : s,
Ha vhu - ya da - nga la - nga. M'tshatsha mbe la.
Sing variations when repeating
5:4
5:4
d' › d' › t › t › t : t › l › s › s › f : s : s . f | : : | . d' : d' . s : s
Mu-vhu-mbe ha ni - wi nga mvu-la. Mu-vhu-mbe hae! M'tshatshambela.
: : | : : | s . s : s . s : f . m | r . d : d . s, : s,
Ha vhu-ya da-nga la-nga. M'tshatshambela.
f . t, : t, . t, : t, | f . s :– . f : r | : : | . d' : d' . s : s
Ku-mbe-mbe-le - le - ku - mbe - ku- mbe. M'tshatshambela.
: : | : : | s . s : s . s : f . m | r . d : d . s, : s,
Ha vhu - ya da - nga la - nga. M'tshatshambela.
f . t, : t, . t, : t, | f . s :– . f : r | : : | . d' : d' . s : s
Ku-mbe-mbe-le - le - ku-mbe-ku- mbe. M'tshatshambela.
: : | : : | s . s : s . s : f . m | r . d : d . s, : s,
Ha vhu - ya da - nga la - nga. M'tshatshambela.



The angry ostrich

Salungani wa salungani! Here comes a story!

It was the year of drought. There were no vegetables or other food in the veld. People only had a little porridge.

An old woman was sad. 'It is better for me to go to the mountain to look for food. Perhaps I will find plants under some large trees. Then the children of my children can eat them.'[1] They were her three small grandsons.

When that old woman arrived in the mountain, she started to search for food. She found an ostrich laying its eggs, and hid from it. The ostrich went into that hole.[2] It came out again and left. Then the old woman went inside.

The eggs of ostriches are big. And so she came out with one egg only. She had a calabash in which she put this egg. She took leaves from a plant she found there at the mountain. She put them on top of the egg. Then she came down the mountain.

'Hello,' people said, 'where have you come from?'

'I have been looking for food for the children of my children,' she answered. 'I found some leaves there on the mountain, under those trees.'

The old woman arrived home and broke that egg. She cooked for the children of her children.

Now, one can take pieces of ostrich eggshell and make a decorated girdle. The old woman polished the pieces of shell and stringed them so that she could have something to barter.

The old woman again went to the mountain.

‘Ah!’ her grandchildren said. ‘Granny, when you return, you always bring eggs. Where do you find those eggs that you cook?’

‘Like you my grandchildren, the eggs are mine,’ the old woman said. ‘I will show you where to find them.’

Well, the old woman and her grandsons went to the mountain. That wild ostrich was not there when she arrived.

‘Do you see that hole?’ she said to her grandchildren. ‘Sit here. You must watch out for the ostrich. When it comes, you must warn me. I am going to look for food down here.’

The old woman went down into the hole. But that ostrich saw what had happened.

‘Now,’ it said, ‘this hole of mine: something went into it. They are the tracks of a person.’

Those children started to shout:

(Narrator and chorus chant)

Gugu! Gugu! Gagama mulindini!	Gran! Gran! Come away from the nest!
Ṭ̂hagaume! Ṭ̂hagaume iyeḍ̂a!	Danger, danger is coming!

The old woman did not come out. She wanted to take an egg that was deep in the hole. And the children called outside in the sun:

Gugu, gugu, gagama mulindini!
Ṭ̂hagaume, ṭ̂hagaume, iyeḍ̂a!

Oh! When the grandchildren saw that ostrich coming, they ran away. They left granny behind. But the children warned her, not so?

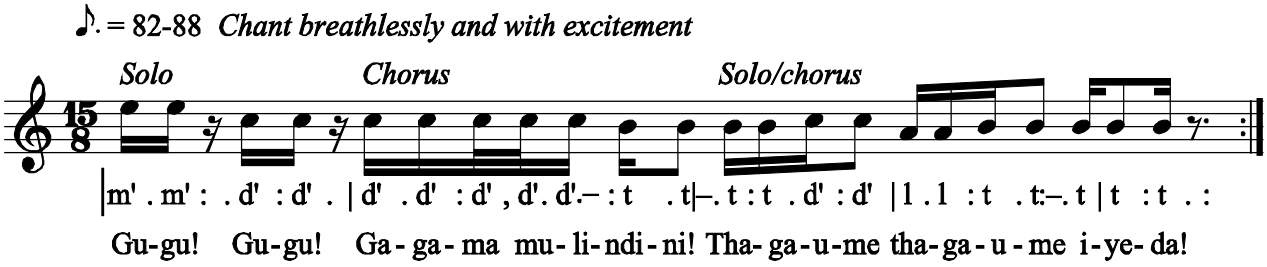
When the ostrich went inside the hole, it found that old woman there. It caught her and killed her and left her there.

Ha vha u fa ha lungano. This is the end of the story.

Maembeni, 28/05/93

According to one interpretation of this story, the old woman got her just reward because she took too many eggs from the ostrich. However, its conventional interpretation points to the unreasonable expectation by men that women must provide food for their family, regardless of poor horticultural and material conditions.

1 While grandfathers are figures of authority, grandmothers are nurturing towards their grandchildren. Also see ‘The pumpkin that could speak.’
2 Ostriches in fact lay their eggs on the ground. The hole mentioned here serves narrative purposes.



The tree with red flowers

Salungano! Salungano! Here comes a story!

Well, there was a certain man. He had two wives. One of them had just married him. Now, his first wife did not want the new wife to fetch water from the river after getting up in the morning. She wanted this young woman to go away.

There was a clay pot behind the door of the elder wife. It was always covered with a lid. There was a bird in that pot. The first wife sent her child who was a bird after the second wife. It followed the young woman there to the river. It found her about to put the pot down. It started to sing.

(Narrator)

U nga holovi whe manani.[1]	Don't be afraid young woman.
Ndi ruṅwa hi manani.	I was sent to the river
Vha ku famba enambweni.	by my mother:
U yo vhona madyoka shi nga dyokangi.	Stop the younger wife from fetching water.
Ho loko xi ku 'hlaka-hlaka!'	And its wings go 'flap-flap!'
Ho loko xi ku 'kepfu-kepfu!'	And it wings go 'clap-clap!'

(Chorus)

Hoza mayiyalayi.	(Meaning unclear)

That woman started to laugh. She did not fetch water, even though it was there in the river. That girl, that young wife, got up. She was pleased about what was happening.

The bird sat in a tree with red flowers.[2] It just sat there near the woman, singing:

U nga holovi whe manani.
Hoza mayiyalayi …

Ah! The woman laughed and laughed. When she got up to go home, the bird also left. She knew that much time had passed. And that she would reach home after the chores had been done.

When the young woman arrived home, she found that her husband had left to cut switches for building a house. Things went on like this for several days.

Hah! That man spoke to the woman who always went to the river and did not return.

'Why do you go to the river early every day and then fail to return?'

'There is a bird at the river. When it arrives there, I become powerless. If it does not go away, I will not be able to fetch water.'

'Well, I will see if this is true,' that man said.

Again the young wife took a clay pot in the morning and went to the river. That man followed her and hid. He found the girl sitting there, and the bird that was settling on a branch in front of her. The bird looked the young woman in the face. It started to sing.

U nga holovi whe manani.
Hoza mayiyalayi …

Hey! The man could not believe his eyes. What was happening? The bird was singing to his wife:

U nga holovi whe manani.
Hoza mayiyalayi …

Then that man walked away. He went to a diviner. The diviner threw his bones, shells and dice and said he would kill this thing. 'When it is dead, take it home. When you get there, you will find this woman beating herself in a fit of fury. Because the bird is her child. It stays behind the door in the clay pot which is covered with a lid. When she sees the younger wife going to the river, she opens the pot. The bird flies out and follows her. When you get home, you will find your first wife saying, "You have killed my child." '

Truly, that man took the magic charms the diviner gave him. He got up and went home.

The next day that young woman left for the river. Then the bird appeared. When it got to the river, it sang while the man watched from his hiding place.

U nga holovi whe manani.
Hoza mayiyaḽayi …

That man squashed the bird. It died. Then the young woman collected water.

The man took the bird and went home. When he got there, he found his furious elder wife.

'You have murdered my child!'

'What! Who is your child?'

'You have come from the river where you killed my child.'

'Ah! Was that your child?'

'Yes! It was my child.'

Then the man called all those from his elder wife's family. He argued with them and that was the end of their friendship. It was also the end of the marriage.

Yes! Do not be surprised young woman …[3]

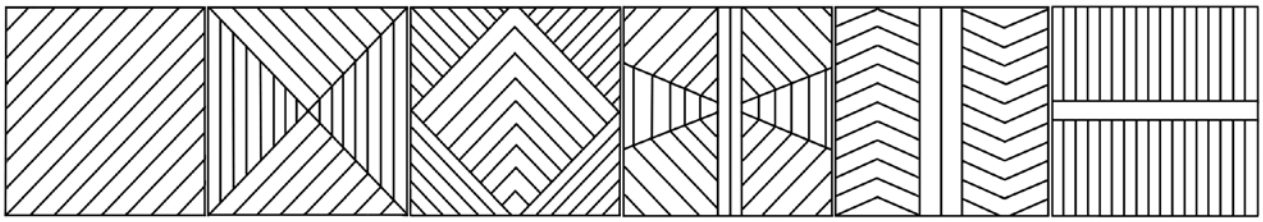
Ha mbo ḓi vha ndi u fa ha lungano. This is the end of the story.

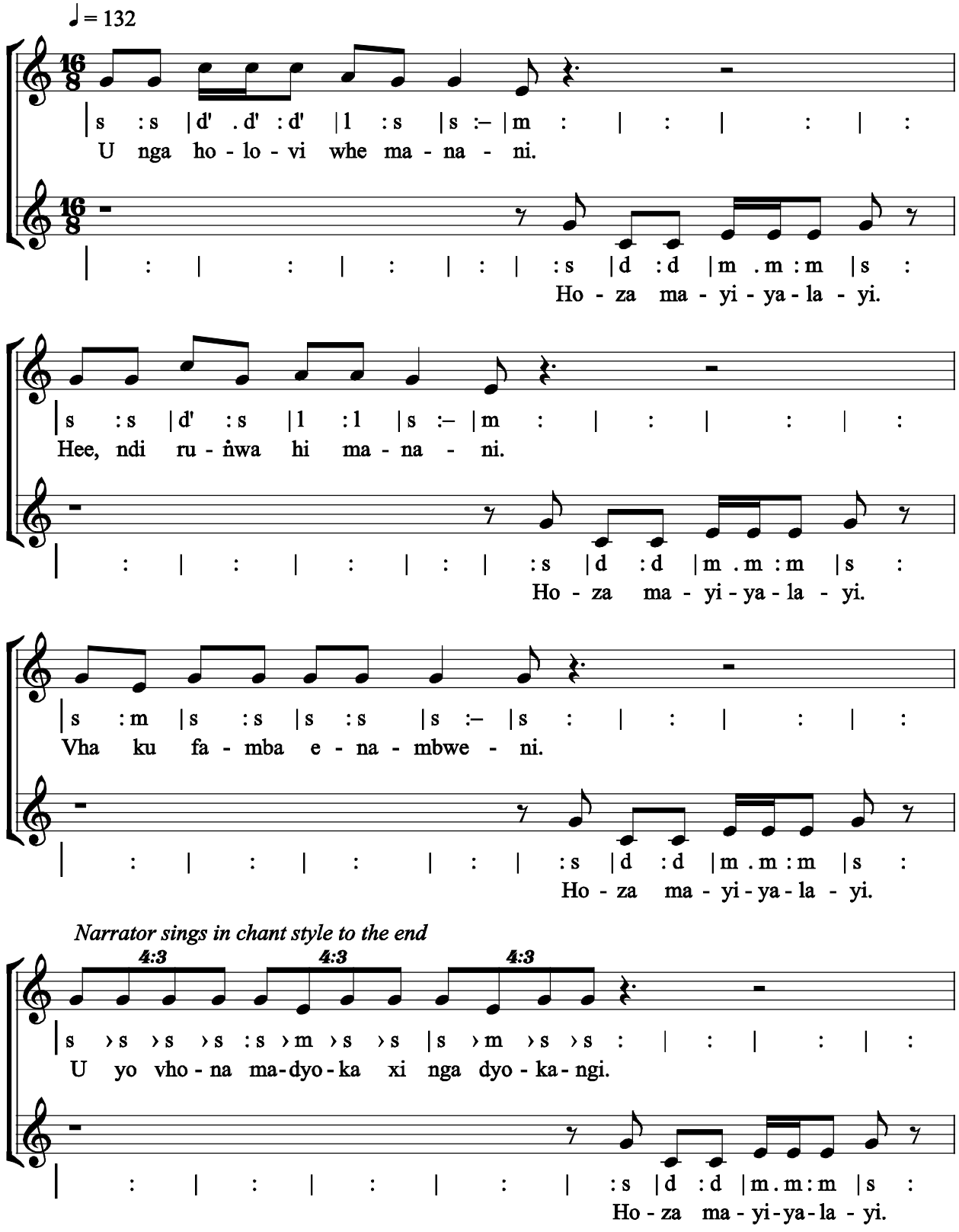
Maembeni, 28/05/92

Tension between wives in a polygamous household is common (see 'Also a woman'). An elder wife in particular often fears that a younger, newly-married wife may undermine her authority. She accordingly may emphasise her status by identifying herself as *musadzi wa dzekiso* (a woman who was married properly and legally by means of bridewealth) or pointing out that she is the only wife who has a key to her husband's house.

The narrative suggests that a man cannot live with a woman who dabbles in witchcraft. Animals who interact with humans in Shona *ngano* narratives similarly have magical power (such as the ability to communicate with people), while women who deal with them are accused of witchcraft (Kriel, 1971).

1 The song is mostly in Xitsonga.
2 *Bauhinia galpinii,* Pride-of-De Kaap.
3 In other words, be vigilant lest you come upon the pitfalls of marriage unawares.

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16/8
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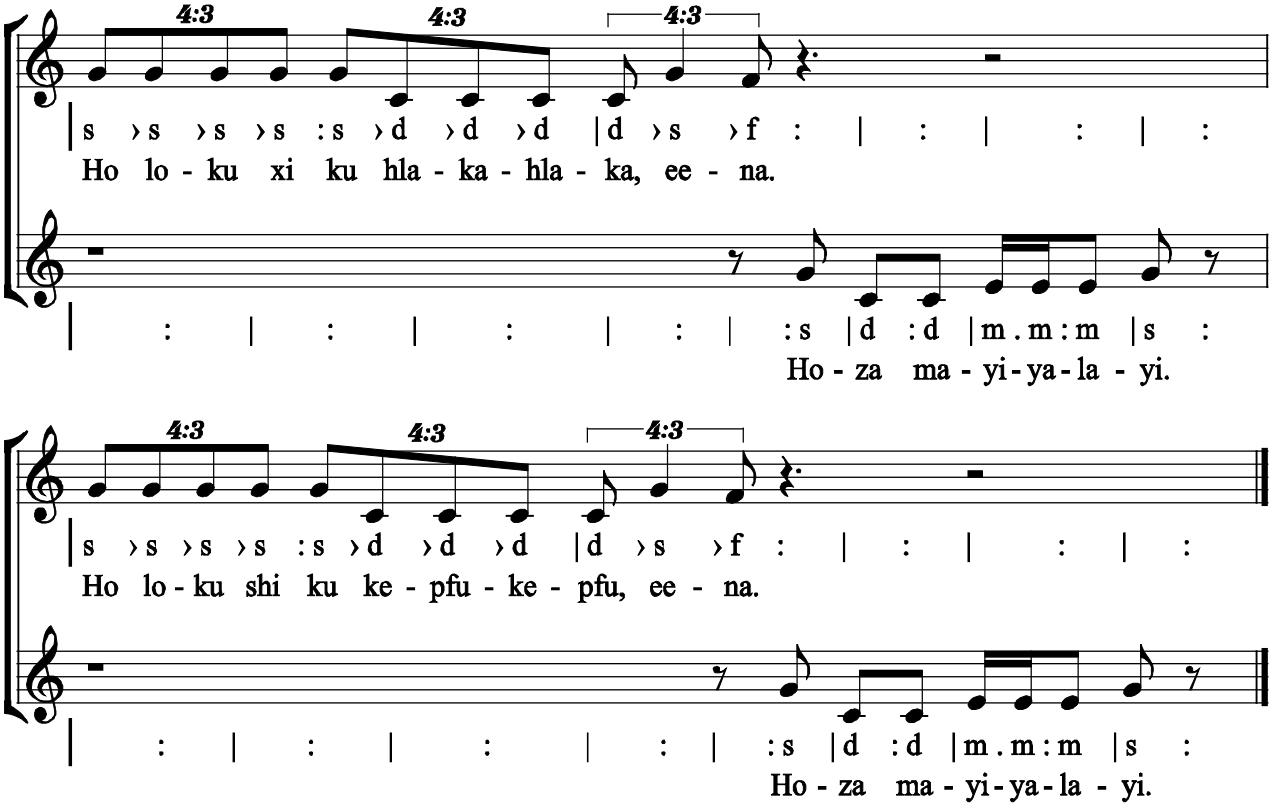
U nga ho - lo - vi whe ma - na - ni.
| : | : | : | : | : s | d : d | m . m : m | s :
Ho - za ma - yi - ya - la - yi.
| s : s | d' : s | l : l | s :– | m : | : | : | :
Hee, ndi ru - ṅwa hi ma - na - ni.
| : | : | : | : | : s | d : d | m . m : m | s :
Ho - za ma - yi - ya - la - yi.
| s : m | s : s | s : s | s :– | s : | : | : | :
Vha ku fa - mba e - na - mbwe - ni.
| : | : | : | : | : s | d : d | m . m : m | s :
Ho - za ma - yi - ya - la - yi.
Narrator sings in chant style to the end
4:3
4:3
4:3
| s › s › s › s : s › m › s › s | s › m › s › s : | : | : | :
U yo vho - na ma-dyo - ka xi nga dyo - ka - ngi.
| : | : | : | : | : s | d : d | m . m : m | s :
Ho - za ma - yi - ya - la - yi.



To be human again

Salungano! Salungano! Here comes a story!

Now, it was a year of famine. Some girls went to pick wild fruit.[1] They met an old woman. She was a leper.

'Hey girls,' that old woman said. 'I am asking for fruit.'

Those girls refused.

But one said, 'Help yourself granny.'

That old woman took some of her fruit. The girl's little sister who was with her ran home.

'That sister of mine is coming,' she told her father and mother. 'She gave some fruit to an old leper woman.'

That elder sister, she came to the entrance of the courtyard.

'Why did you give fruit to the old leper woman?' her father and mother asked.

'I gave that old woman some because she was hungry.'

Then they grabbed her and beat her! They threw her away on the refuse pile when they saw that she was lifeless. She was lying there when the rain came. It fell with a strong wind and thunder. And so that child was washed away to the river.

After many days those girls went to fetch water. Their water pots were bigger than a small girl. The elder sisters helped the younger children to lift the pots onto their head, *tshinikuniku!*

They said, 'The child of the king, that one who ate her sister in the year of hunger, we do not know who will help her lift her pot.'[2]

They got up and left. That child who caused her sister's death was left behind with her water pot. Her elder sister had heard what happened. It was then that she came from the pool in the river.

(Narrator)

Ndo itwa nga vhokhotsi.	I was killed by my parents.
Vha nkaṋa-nkaṋa.	They beat me.
Vha mposa ḓaleḓaleni.	They threw me on the refuse pile.
Mvula ya tseula	The first summer rains
ya nkumba-nkumba	washed me away
ya nnyisa tivhani.	to the pool.
Vho-Mvuvhu na Vho-Ngwena.	Mr Hippopotamus and Mr Crocodile:
Vha mmaga-mmaga.	they shaped me
Nda vhuya nda vha muthu.	to be human again.
Ṱulululu-ṱubwa.	(The sound of diving and surfacing in water)

(Chorus)

Tshangaila![3]	
A thi zwi funi zwanga.	I do not like to help you, but I will.

That younger sister said, 'I don't know who will help me with my water pot.'

'Is it not so that you caused me to be killed in the year of famine?' her elder sister asked. 'Now, I have seen how the others are helped with their pots, leaving you behind. Well, I have come to help you. But don't tell people at home that you saw me.'

'I won't tell.'

'If you talk about me, I will not help you again.'

'I really won't tell.'

And sure enough, the elder sister helped her with her pot.

When that child got home, people said, 'Why have you come so late? We ask because the others have already arrived.'

'I just walked slowly,' she replied, because she was afraid to reveal her secret.

The next morning those girls went to the river again. They helped each other and left the little sister behind. Then her elder sister started singing once more.

Ndo itwa nga vhokhotsi.
A thi zwi funi zwanga …

She came and helped her young sister.

When that child arrived home, people asked, 'Why are you always behind the others?' It was then that she revealed everything.

'My elder sister helped me with my water pot.'

'Which elder sister?'

'My sister that you killed in the time of hunger that was followed by rain. She is over there by the river.'

'We will go there and look for her.'

'No, just hide in the reeds and see what happens.'

Truly, that man and woman waited while their younger daughter left with the other girls. They had a plan to catch that girl in the pool. They gathered people who were strong.

When the girls arrived there at the river, they washed. Afterwards they picked up their water pots, *tshinikuniku!*

'That is the child of the king,' they said. 'She caused her elder sister to be killed in the time of hunger.'

That child remained standing there alone. Then the sisters sang:

Ndo itwa nga vhokhotsi.

A thi zwi funi zwanga …

When the elder sister came out from the water, people grabbed her.

'Let me go, let me go, let me go!'

She had been in the water. But her clothes and beads were not wet, as if she had been outside the river. And so they took her home. When they arrived there, her family sat down with her. She had been asked to marry a man from a royal family.

But her father said, 'You cannot marry a nobleman. It is better for you to be the wife of a poor man.'[4]

It was then that she agreed to marry such a man.

'I already have a wife,' that man said, 'she will work for her.'

They married and she entered his home.

Well, the elder wife was tired of pounding and cooking. She gave maize to the younger wife and said, 'Start pounding.'

The young woman took the mortar and the basket with maize and went into the kitchen. She knew that she would return to the river, that place where she lived, because water was now her real home. Then she took the pestle and started to pound, *gi!*

(Narrator)

A du-dumeli-dumeli!	(The sound of pounding)
Hayani hanga a thi sin̓di.	I do not pound at home.
Ndi runga zwitimbatimbana zwa vhana.	I only string beads for children.
Zwa Vho-Phophi na Vho-Tshinyadzo.	For Mrs Phophi and Mrs Tshinyadzo.

(Chorus)
Dumeli!

Water came into the house, but it did not flow out again. The water became higher whenever she sang *'A du-dumeli-dumeli.'* It was like water in a dam that rises when it rains. That mortar was now under water. Now she was almost under water herself. Then that elder wife grabbed the mortar and threw it outside. And that water, it was gone! There was not a drop. Where it went, nobody saw.

The house was dry when the husband came back that evening.

'How was your day?' he asked.

'We had a good day here at home,' the elder wife replied.

But that young woman was silent.

The next morning the elder wife did the same. She came and put the maize in the mortar. 'Here is the maize. Pound!'

That girl took the pestle.

A du-dumeli-dumeli.
Hayani hanga a thi sin̓di …

The pestle went *gi!* and the water rose higher in the house. It was now higher than the mortar. The bag with maize cobs was also under water. But the elder wife did not pick up the mortar. That girl kept on singing until the water reached the roof.

When the man came back, he found his house filled with water. All that was heard was the sound of the pestle, *gi!*

A du-dumeli-dumeli.
Hayani hanga a thi sin̓di …

‘Well,’ the man asked, ‘who shall we send to explain that this person has left us? Because she is in the house that is full of water. Let us call the old men and send one of them.’

‘We won’t go because the child’s parents will kill us,’ they answered.

It was then that they called a cow.[5] They told the cow to go there and speak. She had to say that the child now lives in the water.

‘I do not speak,’ the cow said. ‘When I get there I will only be able to say, *mooo!’*

‘Well,’ those in-laws said, ‘we have failed. We do not know whom to call now.’

It was then that they called the goat. They said, ‘Goat, we are sending you to explain at the house of the parents of that child that she lives in the water.’

‘I will get there and say *mee!’* the goat said.

‘We have failed again,’ those people complained. ‘These animals speak, but do not explain well. Is it not better to call the rooster?’

The rooster came and they said, ‘Hey rooster, we called you to go and report that the young woman has left us. You, fowl, what will you say when you get there?’

‘I will arrive and say *kukulikoo!‘* the fowl said.

Oh dear.

‘Well,’ those in-laws said, ‘we keep on failing. Let us send an old woman. This old woman who is a cripple.’[6]

That cripple old woman got up and started walking. She walked and walked and walked. Then she met two messengers.[7]

‘Where are you going, one who is cripple?’ those messengers asked.

‘I go to where I have been sent,’ the old woman replied. ‘I have been told to report that a child disappeared in the water.’

‘As messengers we know about this matter,’ those men said.

They told that old woman to go back. When she returned and arrived home, she found that the child of those people had gone away forever.

Ha mbo ḓi vha u fa ha ṋwana wa lungano. This is the end of this child that is a story.

Maembeni, 28/05/92

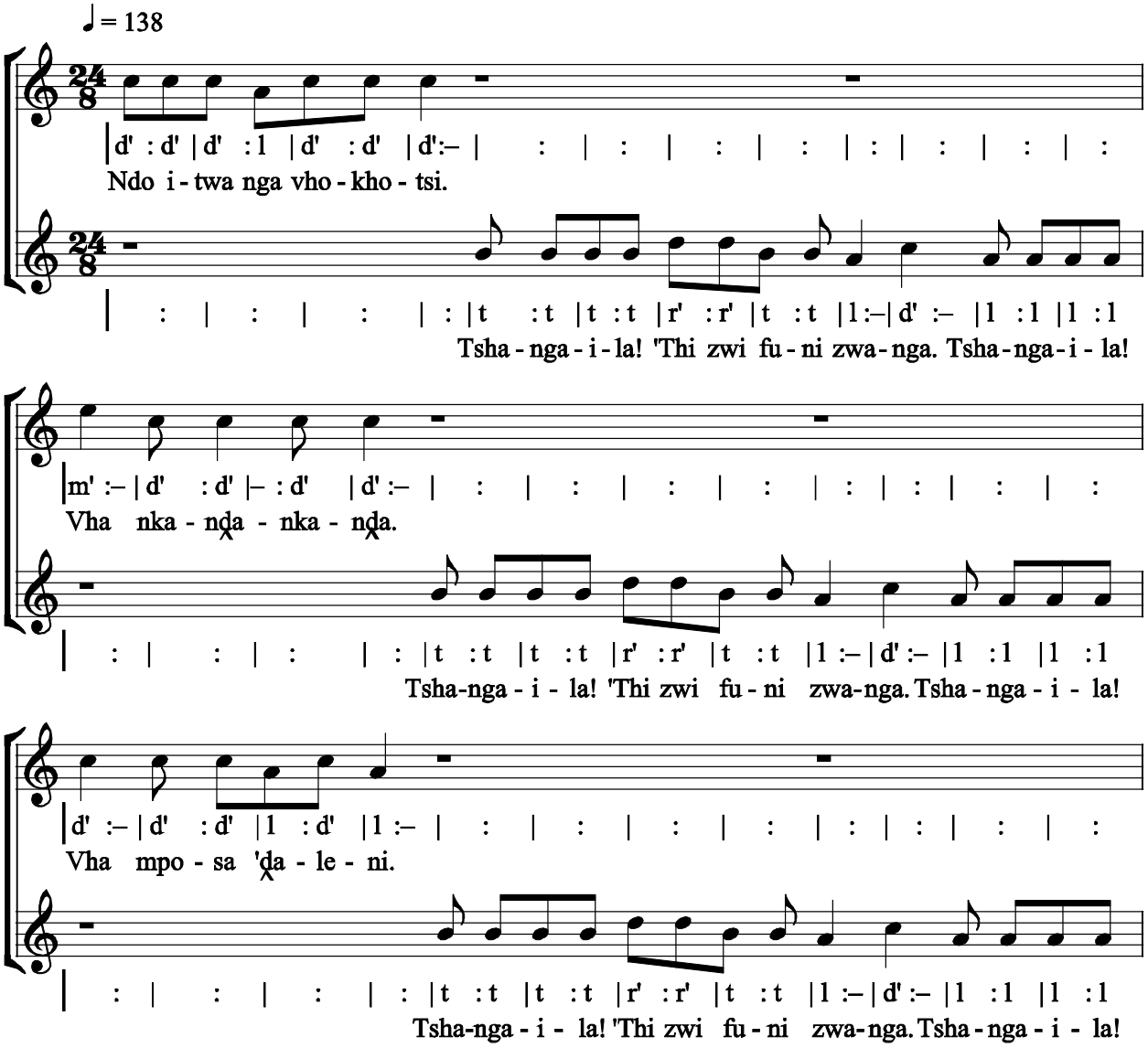
Because marriage is central to socio-economic organisation it is not an affair of individuals, but of families, who have an important say in the choice of partners. This narrative describes the physical and emotional abuse of a young woman who consorts with an unsuitable young man (also see ‘The young woman and the zebra’). ‘We all know this story,’ narrators and their female audiences remarked laconically.

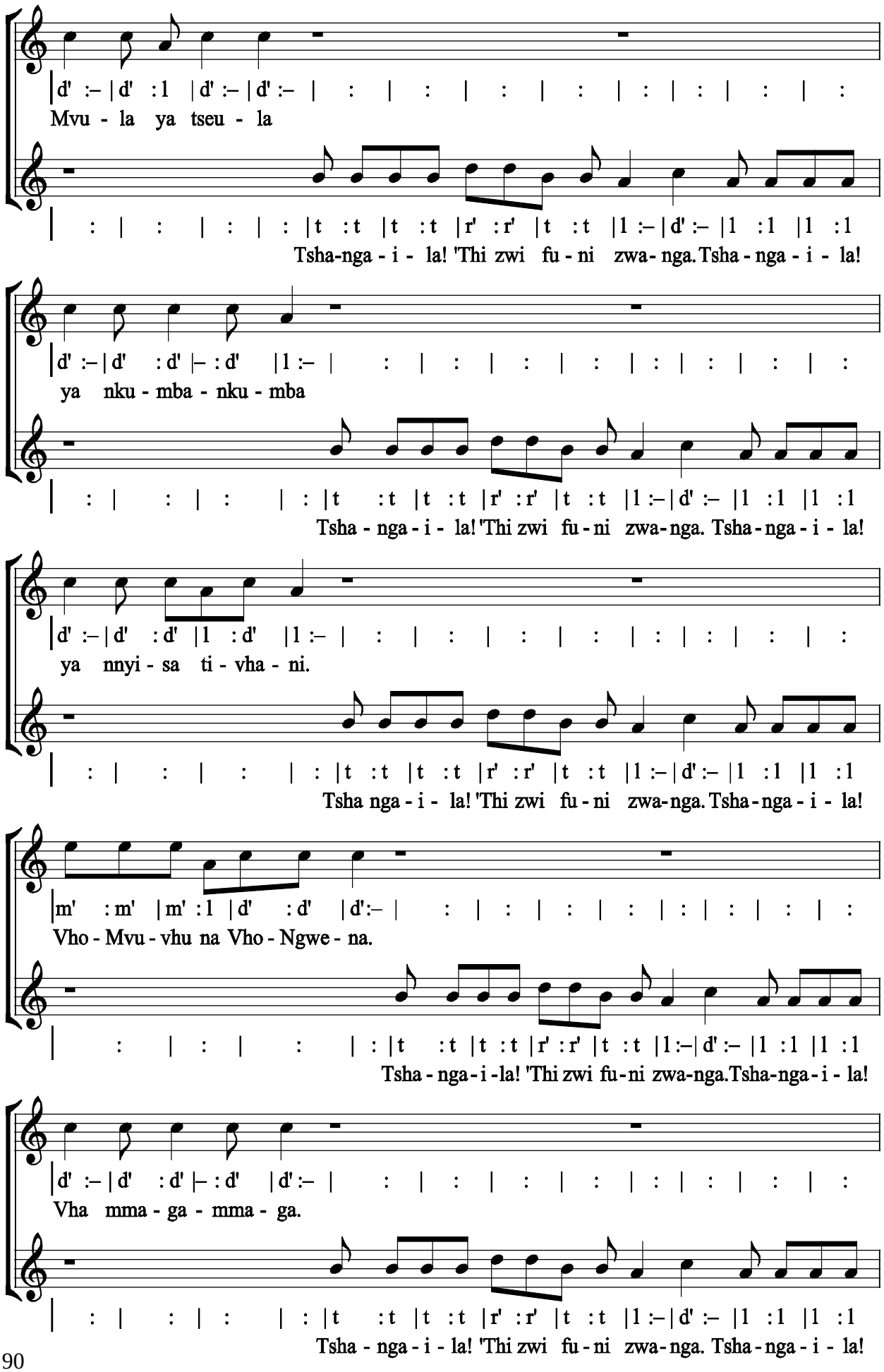
This *ngano* is replete with metaphors. The undesirable suitor is not mentioned directly. He is the son of the old woman, and her leprosy is symbolic of his unsuitability as a husband. The hippopotamus and the crocodile represent the caring woman and her son, while the river with its cooling water is their home where the young woman becomes human again. The metaphoric function of water is evident in the fact that the girl emerges dry from the pool. The animals also represent caring ancestral spirits. Such spirits typically reside in rivers, and certain pools are important places of sacrifice. African narratives also portray certain individuals as going to live voluntarily under water, in particular ‘when they believe that they have been unjustly treated by others’ (Kriel, 1989:13).

The young woman is abducted after a happy interlude at her new home. However, her benefactors again rescue her by means of water that this time fills her new home. The recurring motif of rain and water symbolises the periodic moments of mercy between the two women.

Despite the drought that initiates the story, there is redemption in the coolness of care and sympathy between the weak.

1 The fruit of the red ivory tree *(Berchemia discolor)* which is commonly eaten during times of drought.
2 The younger sister is trapped between parental and sibling loyalty. Children who do not respect their parents may be punished. However, a younger sister also is supposed to help an older sister.
3 See 'Mr Hare scrubs his heels' (note 4).
4 The narrator remarked that the conditions at a poor man's home would suit the young woman better. There are many domestic chores in a king's homestead.
5 As in 'The flamboyant rooster,' animals often are the go-betweens in cases of human conflict.
6 The Tshivenda term for cripple, *tshihole* (varied with *ḽihole* in this text), derives its meaning from the prefix *tshi-* that is mainly used to denote the world of objects and contemptible people (Tshivenda noun class seven). It stands in contrast to respectful terms used to address and describe people. These terms carry the prefix *mu-* (noun class one), as in *muthu* (person).
7 *Vhaḓinḓa*, officials of the king. They usually were dispatched on a variety of administrative missions outside the royal village.

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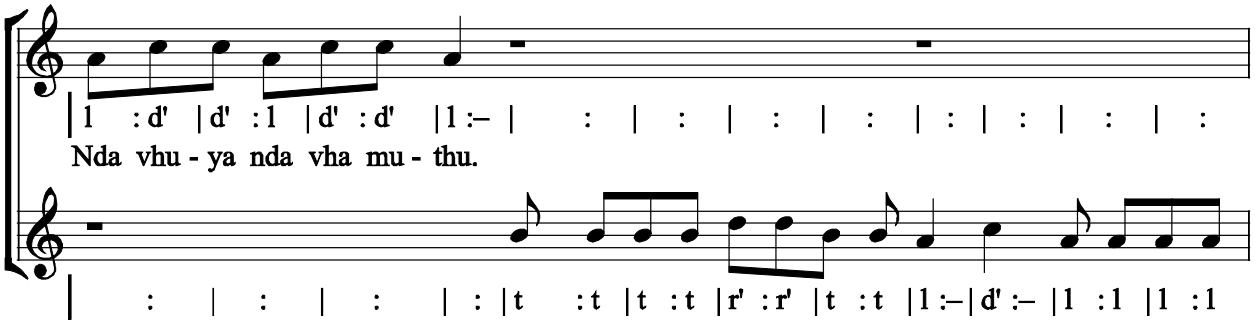
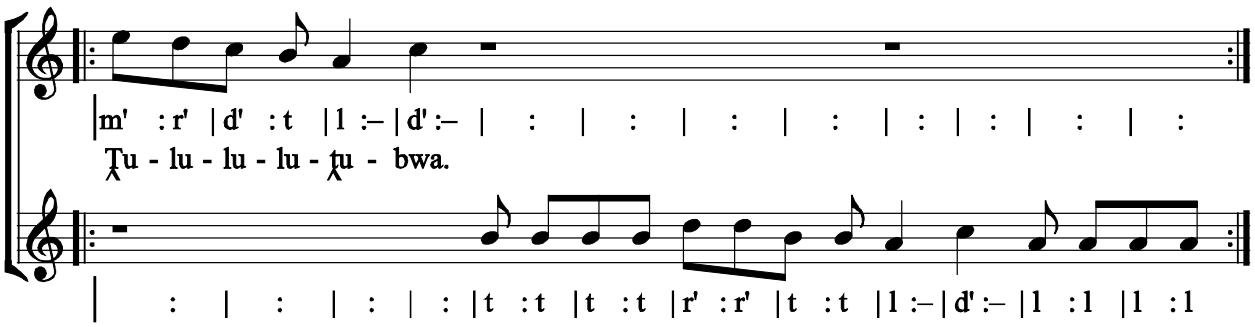
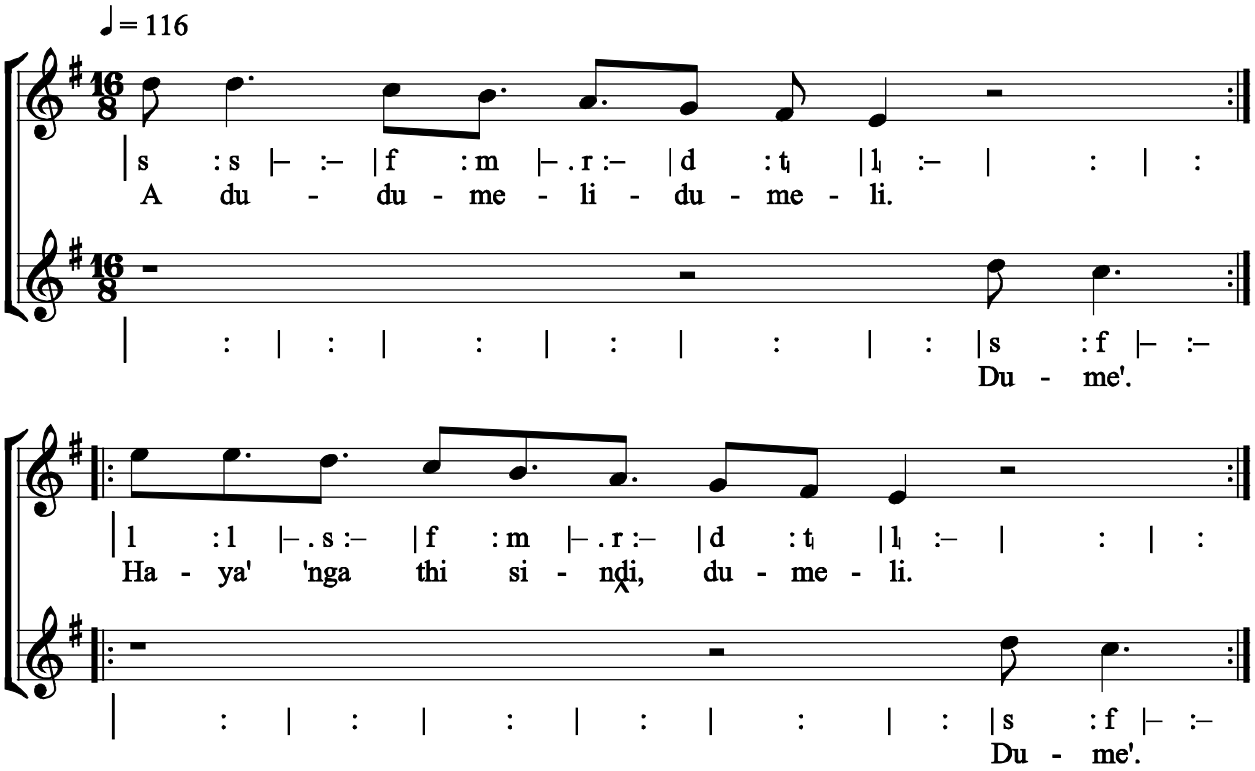
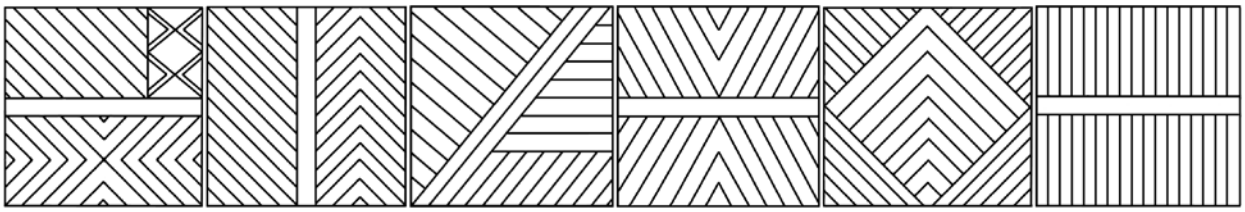
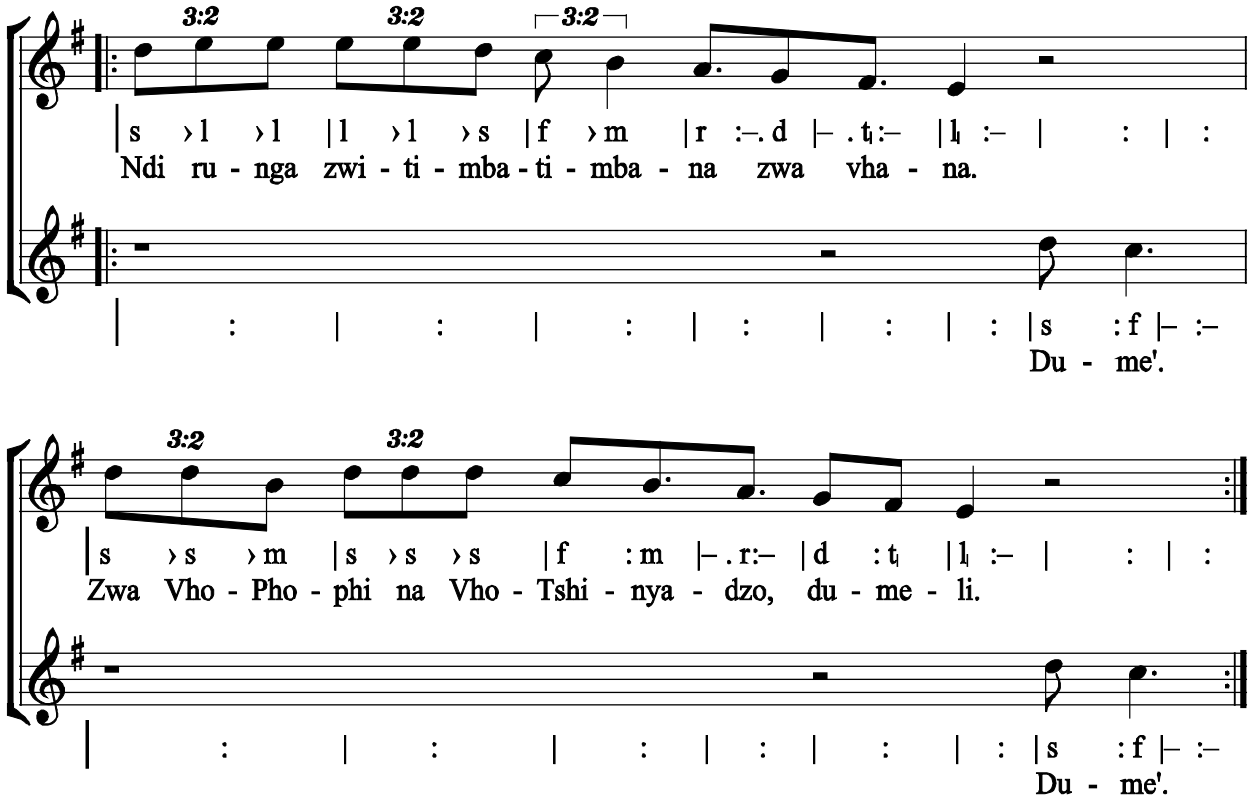
Mvu - la ya tseu - la
: | : | : | : | t :t | t :t | r' :r' | t :t | 1 :– | d' :– | 1 :1 | 1 :1
Tsha-nga - i - la! 'Thi zwi fu - ni zwa - nga. Tsha - nga - i - la!
d' :– | d' :d' |– : d' | 1 :– | : | : | : | : | : | : | : | :
ya nku - mba - nku - mba
: | : | : | : | t :t | t :t | r' :r' | t :t | 1 :– | d' :– | 1 :1 | 1 :1
Tsha - nga - i - la! 'Thi zwi fu - ni zwa - nga. Tsha - nga - i - la!
d' :– | d' :d' | 1 :d' | 1 :– | : | : | : | : | : | : | : | :
ya nnyi - sa ti - vha - ni.
: | : | : | : | t :t | t :t | r' :r' | t :t | 1 :– | d' :– | 1 :1 | 1 :1
Tsha nga - i - la! 'Thi zwi fu - ni zwa - nga. Tsha - nga - i - la!
m' :m' | m' :1 | d' :d' | d' :– | : | : | : | : | : | : | : | :
Vho - Mvu - vhu na Vho - Ngwe - na.
: | : | : | : | t :t | t :t | r' :r' | t :t | 1 :– | d' :– | 1 :1 | 1 :1
Tsha - nga - i - la! 'Thi zwi fu - ni zwa - nga. Tsha - nga - i - la!
d' :– | d' :d' |– : d' | d' :– | : | : | : | : | : | : | : | :
Vha mma - ga - mma - ga.
: | : | : | : | t :t | t :t | r' :r' | t :t | 1 :– | d' :– | 1 :1 | 1 :1
Tsha - nga - i - la! 'Thi zwi fu - ni zwa - nga. Tsha - nga - i - la!


| l : d' | d' : l | d' : d' | l :– | : | : | : | : | : | : | : | :
Nda vhu - ya nda vha mu - thu.
| : | : | : | : |t : t |t : t |r' : r' |t : t |l :–| d' :– |l : l |l : l
Tsha - nga - i - la! 'Thi zwi fu - ni zwa - nga. Tsha - nga - i - la!


| m' : r' | d' : t |l :–| d' :– | : | : | : | : | : | : | : | :
Tu - lu - lu - lu - tu - bwa.
| : | : | : | : |t : t |t : t |r' : r' |t : t |l :–| d' :– |l : l |l : l
Tsha nga - i - la! 'Thi zwi fu - ni zwa - nga. Tsha - nga - i - la!


♩ = 116
| s : s |– :– | f : m |– . r :– | d : t, | l, :– | : | :
A du - du - me - li - du - me - li.
| : | : | : | : | : | : | : |s : f |– :–
Du - me'.
| l : l |– . s :– | f : m |– . r :– | d : t, | l, :– | : | :
Ha - ya' 'nga thi si - ndi, du - me - li.
| : | : | : | : | : | : | : |s : f |– :–
Du - me'.




3:2
3:2
3:2
s ›l ›l |l ›l ›s |f ›m |r :-.d |- .t,:- |l, :- | : | :
Ndi ru - nga zwi - ti - mba - ti - mba - na zwa vha - na.
| : | : | : | : | : | : |s :f |- :-
Du - me'.
3:2
3:2
s ›s ›m |s ›s ›s |f :m |- .r:- |d :t, |l, :- | : | :
Zwa Vho - Pho - phi na Vho - Tshi - nya - dzo, du - me - li.
| : | : | : | : | : | : |s :f |- :-
Du - me'.

Tshililo Manngwe

‘My mother told me that I was born after the locusts came for the second time (1924). All my life I lived here at Muswodi with my family. I never had the opportunity to go to school. I think I would have done well there because I can remember many things.’

‘I was very young when I married Manngwe. We had one cow. Manngwe knew the veld very well and during times of drought he managed to find grazing for our few cows in those distant hills. Our cattle survived all those lean years because my husband knew how to care for them.’

‘One year Manngwe did something that made him famous in the whole district. He grabbed a kudu[1] by the tail. Nobody in the whole world can even get *near* a kudu and there my husband was able to catch one by the tail! That was during a time of great drought. Wild animals like antelope and warthogs came staggering from weakness to the few remaining waterholes. My husband was resting under a tree near a waterhole during the heat of the day when a large kudu stumbled towards him. As he bent down to drink, Manngwe seized him by the tail! The animal swung around with such force that my husband lost his grip. The kudu ran away.’

‘We had a herd of eighty cattle. Then a terrible drought came in 1990. My husband asked the government for relief feed for our cattle. They made many promises but delivered nothing. Our cattle started to die one by one, and that year we lost the entire herd, every animal. It was terrible for my husband to see his cattle like that. He tried to carry water to them but it was useless. Two years later he too passed away.’

Tshililo Manngwe died of asthma in 1996.

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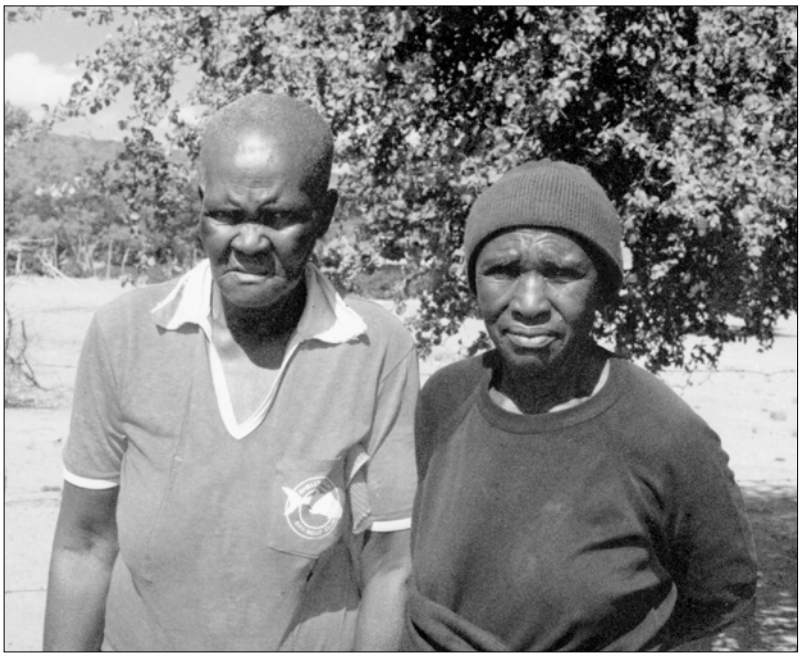
1 *Tragelaphus strepsiceros.*



Tshililo Manngwe (right) with her friend Nyadzani

The king and the musician

Salungano! Salungano! Here comes a story!

Now, there was a certain man. He had no family. He was an orphan. He came during a night known to Jehova only.[1]

He started to carve a pole. He carved a vest and girdles and an elbow and hair. That pole changed into a person.[2]

Now, people were called to work for the king.[3] The woman went there with the others. When they arrived there, they started to work in the royal fields.

The king desired that pole. So he took it.[4] When the others returned home, the woman remained behind.

'And now?' her husband asked, 'where is my wife?'

'We did not see her,' those others said. 'She remained behind.'

Now, the man decided to find his wife. When he arrived at the royal homestead, he asked that the king must summon all his people.

'They must come here because I have a musical instrument.[5] They must come and hear the singer.'

Gu-gu-dende-lee!	(The sound of the musical bow)
Ḽa ḓi tsha nda ḓi tendele.	I roam around until dawn.[6]
Hu rini vha ha thovhele?	Greetings, royal ones!
Vha tshi ramba dzunde na vhaiwe.	You called people for a work party.
Wanga musadzi ha tsha vhuya.	My wife did not return home.
Ndi nga ḽi ṱhuvhula mathenga.	I can pluck the feathers[7] from this pole.
Ḽi ḓo sala ḽi ḽibombola.	Only a tree stump will remain.
Ga-tende-lee!	(The sound of the musical bow)[8]

He grabbed his wife's hair and plucked! A tree stump fell, *mbelengende!* He took his stump. He returned home with that wife of his. Only now she had a plain face.

Ha mbo ḓi vha u fhela ha lungano. This is the end of the story.

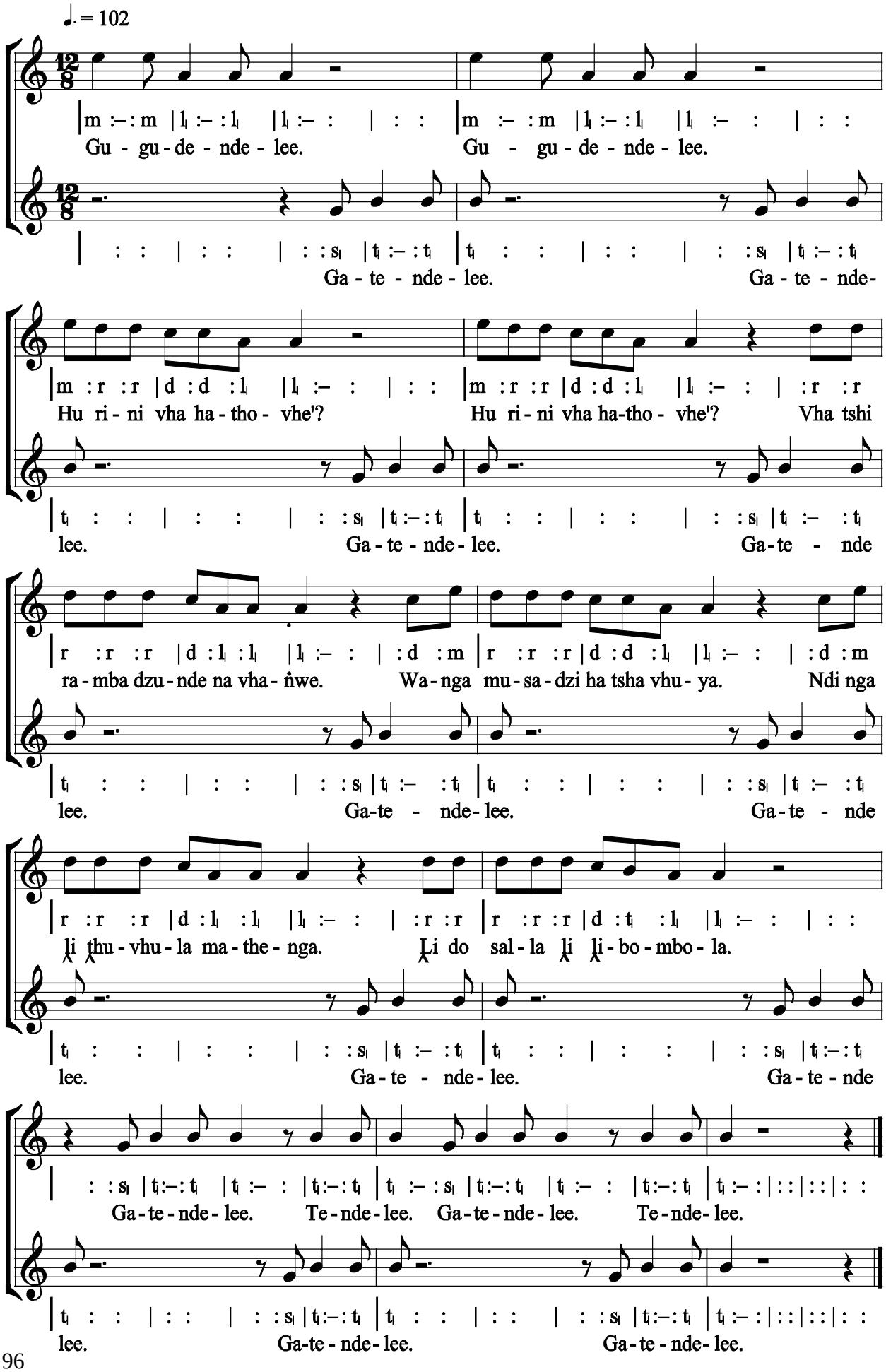
Muswodi, 09/03/91

The term for an orphan, *tshisiwana*, not only signifies a condition of material deprivation but also social exclusion. The prefix *tshi-* depersonalises an orphan to the class of objects (Tshivenda noun class 7). Social exclusion is not limited to relations between equals only. It also refers to persons with little or no influence in a society controlled by a ruling class. Although such subjects have the right to appeal to tribal councils, the status difference between them and their rulers is so vast that they may prefer to take alternative recourse to protest in song.

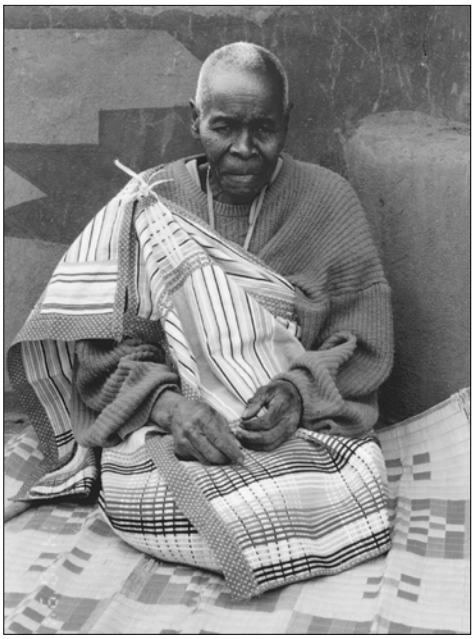
While people in the past took up the playing of various kinds of musical bows, the *dende* gourd-resonated bow was the only one that allowed a musician to sing freely (the mouth is used to amplify sound on other bows). The choice of the *dende* bow here accordingly is motivated clearly by the critical function of singing. The common expression 'My voice is like a piercing arrow' *(Ipfi ḽanga ḽi nga musevhe)* refers to the persuasive and emotive power of vocal music, particularly to regulate political excesses.

1 I.e. nobody but God knows when he was born. This is indicative of his lack of family, and his low status.
2 I.e. a wife. This is a popular story.
3 Rulers are allowed to require free labour from their subjects. During the early part of the 20th century people worked an average of 7-10 days per year for their headman, and 3-4 weeks for their king. Failure to report for work was punishable with a fine (Du Plessis, 1940).
4 Harries describes a case in which chief Mutele took the wife of a poor man. He then murdered the man (Harries, 1929). Stayt (1931:204-5) notes that 'Possibly at one time the chief had sexual rights over all the women of the tribe, but today if the chief commits adultery he is expected to pay compensation to the woman's husband. There are still cases where chiefs, usually young and irresponsible, during their tours about the country, have stolen any girls whose appearance attracted them; … these cases are rare and considered to be unworthy of a chief.'
5 Although the instrument is not named, the onomatopoeia *Gu-gu-dende-lee!* and *Ga-tende-lee!* that appears in the song text imitates the sound of the *dende* braced gourd-bow (fig. 2; also see 'The girls and the dove'). Other versions of the story also identify the instrument as such. In addition, the vocal rhythm is typical of that of *dende* patterns.
6 This line is sung once only, and it is inaudible on the recording. It therefore has not been transcribed.
7 Referring to his wife's hair.
8 Indirectly also 'I am roaming.'

Fig. 2. *Dende* players Andries Ngwalani (left) and Johannes Munyai (right) of Tshamutshedzi


♩. = 102
Gu - gu - de - nde - lee. Gu - gu - de - nde - lee.
Ga - te - nde - lee. Ga - te - nde-
Hu ri - ni vha ha - tho - vhe'? Hu ri - ni vha ha-tho - vhe'? Vha tshi
lee. Ga - te - nde - lee. Ga-te - nde
ra - mba dzu - nde na vha - ńwe. Wa - nga mu - sa - dzi ha tsha vhu - ya. Ndi nga
lee. Ga-te - nde - lee. Ga-te - nde
li thu - vhu - la ma - the - nga. Li do sal - la li li - bo - mbo - la.
lee. Ga - te - nde - lee. Ga - te - nde
Ga - te - nde - lee. Te - nde - lee. Ga - te - nde - lee. Te - nde - lee.
lee. Ga-te - nde - lee. Ga-te - nde - lee.

Tambani Mamavhulo



Like Matodzi Goma, Tambani Mamavhulo lives in the village of Muswodi in the Limpopo valley. She was born in *ṅwaha wa ganunu*, the year of the cannon. This refers to the armed conflict between the South African Republic and king Mphephu in 1898.

Thohoyandou, the biggest town in Venda, was then still a small village called Tshanowa. Because there were no shops, Tambani explained, people made blankets from wild cotton. The cotton was softened with a roller. Rollers were made from iron that people mined and smelted themselves. The cotton was woven by means of a simple device comprising a calabash and a hook.

Tambani's family moved to Makonde in the mountains of central Venda when she was a child. Because there was no grazing for their goats, they returned and settled at Lutshindi in the district of king Mphephu.

Villages were fewer and smaller at that time and they were often attacked. 'One day, when I was still a young child, women made marula beer for king Mphephu. The beer had just been prepared when a group of Zulus arrived. Our men were frightened and fought back. We lit a fire to warn others of this big calamity. While the fire was burning, the Zulus opened the gate of our byres and chased the cattle and goats out. When the Zulus arrived at the Nwanedzi River, they took the cattle across, but the goats did not want to follow them.'

Tambani's great grandfather came from Malungudzi in southern Zimbabwe, called *Vhukalanga* in Tshivenda. He first lived with family in the Dzanani district. His son, Tambani's grandfather, married a Sotho woman called Mamaohulu.

The supernatural world in which people become animals is undisputed reality for Tambani. She is acutely conscious of the frightening ability of malevolent people to change form *(tshanduko, tshandululo)*. She described the case of a young couple from Muswodi who were troubled by a stray pig. This was actually the woman's father who changed into a pig and raided his son-in-law's maize field. The young man set a trap and caught the pig. He shouted, 'Wife, bring the ax!' When the young woman came there, she saw her father. The young man went to the headman and filed for divorce on the grounds of witchcraft. 'This is not something that happened somewhere far away,' Tambani emphasised. 'It happened close to us. The father had to leave Muswodi. He now lives in Musina.'

Then there was an uncle who wanted to kill a nephew. He was caught red-handed but escaped in a flash of lightning. He then struck elsewhere with the lightning. A person like this is able to become a lightning bird that strikes wherever he wants to kill.

Tambani remarked that a person like this always changes shape in the bush beyond human settlements. This is why the bush is so dangerous. The exact location of this untamed bush where magical forces hold sway, is not clear, Tambani explained. 'But it is closer to people at night.'

'Mwari (the Venda creator spirit) still resides in Zimbabwe. He is there. My father once was a messenger sent by king Mphephu to appeal to Mwari for rain. I also heard that Mwari passed by here long ago. There was lightning, and the sound of horns and bells. The mountain at Makonde was burning. I remember this. When he passed by here at night, it was as bright as day.'

'When the white people came, Mwari stopped coming. When I suffer now, I pray and pray but Mwari doesn't help me. I don't pray to him anymore. He says, "You have deserted me. Jehova

must help you now." Mwari no longer cares. He doesn't bring any rain, he is angry. We now eat maize planted by white people. It no longer is the maize of Mwari. Well, it is actually better for people that Mwari should stay far away. He should not come close to people.'

The wooden hoe

Salungano! Salungano! Here comes a story!

A certain man had two wives. One of them gave birth to boys. The other wife had girls. But the man only loved the mother of his girls.[1]

Now, long ago people paid for a bride with iron hoes. They did not pay with cattle like they do today.[2] They used to give two hoes. One was for the mother. The other was for the grandmother.

So, the man hoed with the mother of his girls. That other woman did not receive a hoe.[3] She took an axe when her husband was away from home. She chopped down an ironwood tree[4] that had a hook. She carved and carved and carved and carved and carved. That hook became the blade of a hoe. And so she made herself a hoe from wood.

Now, the family went out to their fields. They worked over there with their hoes. This woman had no hoe. But they found that she was hoeing with a piece of wood.[5] She hoed before the rains came.[6]

When the rain fell, her maize started to grow. Now that they grew, she looked for a shell.[7] She hoed the weeds with the shell. She scraped with that shell when the maize was still young. When she went back home, she hid the shell.

That maize became ripe. Now, here was the man. He returned from guarding his crops.[8] He saw peas, sugar cane and water melons.

'Are you coming to look at my maize?' his wife asked. 'I hoed with a piece of wood!'

(Narrator)

Tshilima-nga-danda, no mmbona naa?	Did you see me, One-who-hoes-with-a-piece-of-wood?[9]
Nda lima nga danda!	I hoed with a piece of wood!
Nda lima nga danda. No mmbona naa?	I hoed with a piece of wood. Did you see me?
Nda lima nga danda. No mmbonafhi?	I hoed with a piece of wood. Where did you see me?
No vha ni tshi ḓi ri u ḓo tama mphwe!	You said that I would be longing for sugar cane!
U ḓo tama mphwe ngeno na maṋawa!	She will want sugar cane here, and beans!
Ee! Ḽo ṱahulwa ndo mbo vhea khumba!	Yes! She scraped the weeds out with a shell!
Ndo ṱahu-ṱahu nda mbo fhasi!	I scraped and scraped and put it down!

(Chorus)

Nda lima nga danda!	I hoed with a piece of wood!

She then told that man to *voertsek*.[10] 'Do not ever put you feet here again.'[11]

People found the woman picking her maize. She carried the cobs on her head. She went away to her home.

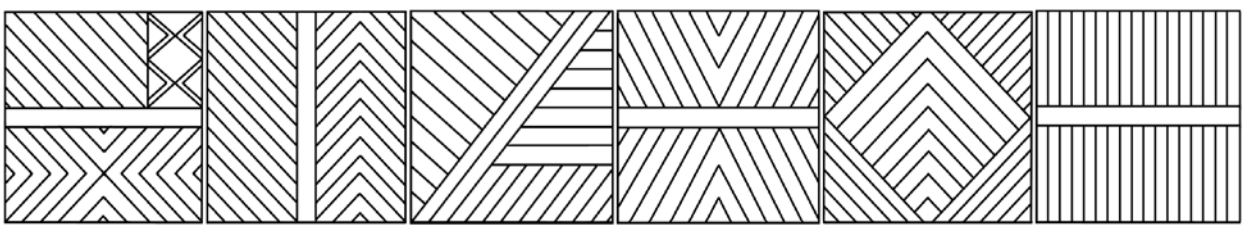
Ndi hone u fa ha ṅwana wa salungano. This is the end of this child that is a story.

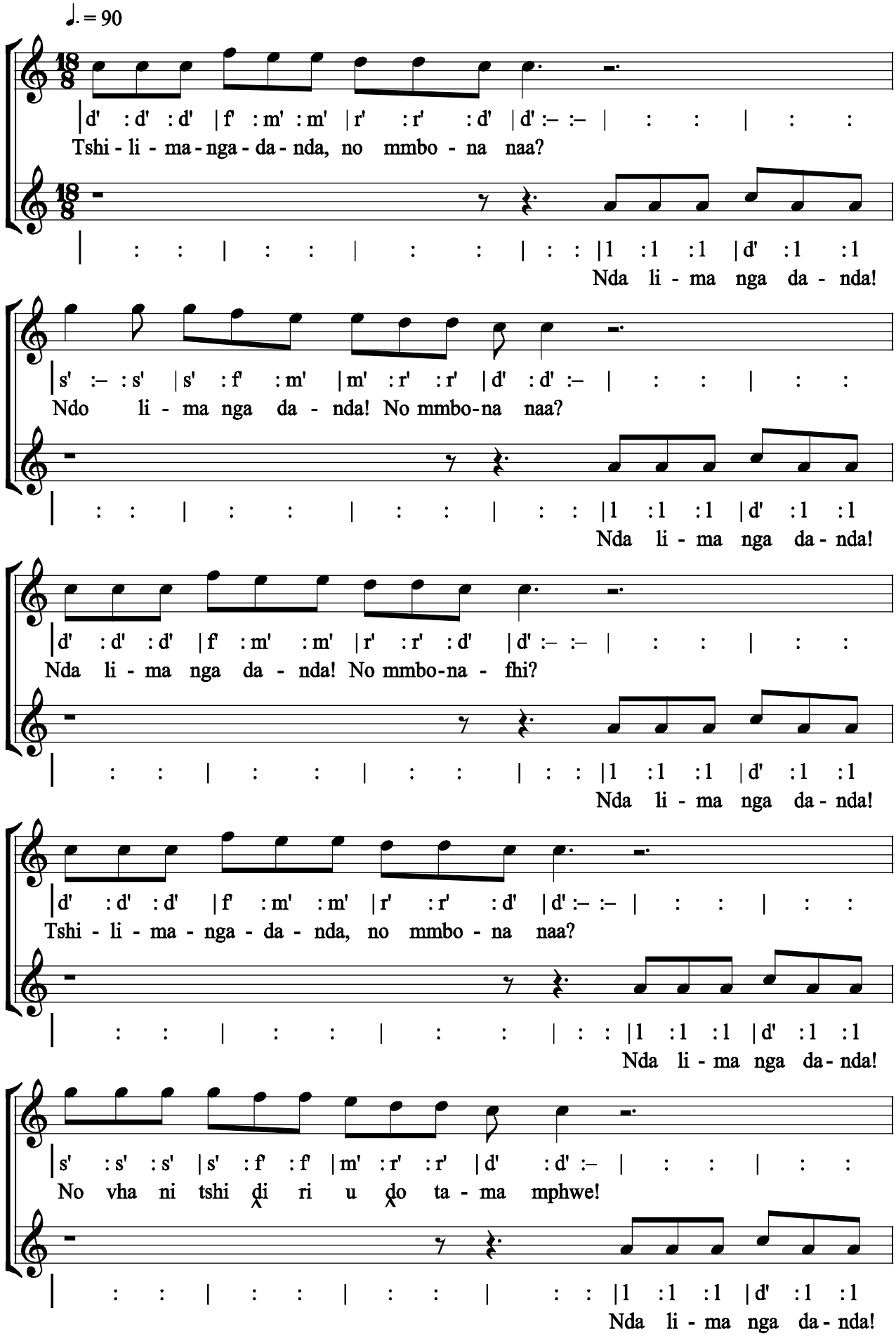
Muswodi, 09/03/91

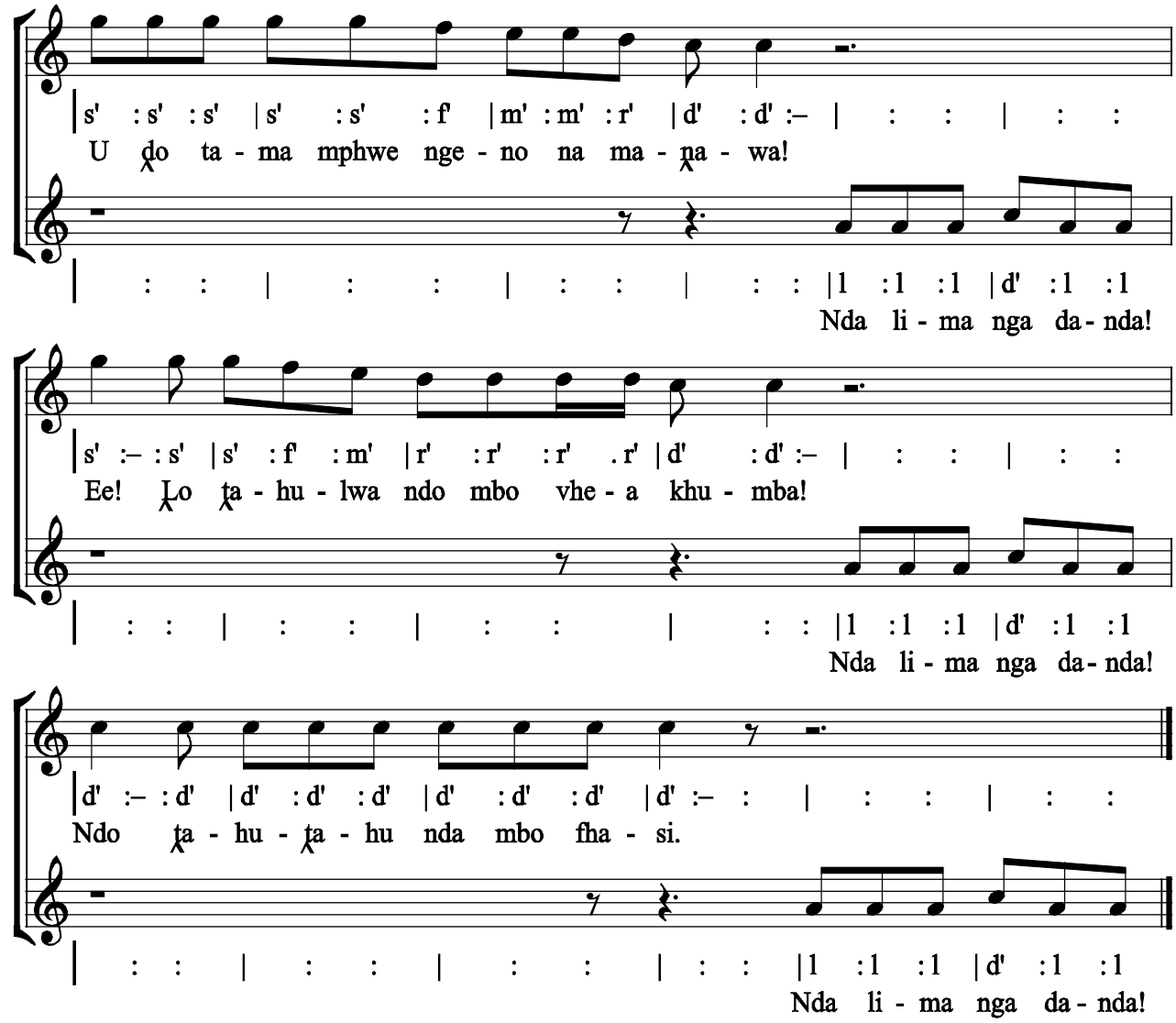
This story shows that individuals may develop strategies of resistance from their own positions of relative power. The defiance of the rejected wife hinges on the fact that married women have access to land. They control its agricultural production and their own labour. The failure of a husband to respect his wife's independence or his neglect of her are legitimate grounds for divorce.

1 Because they bring cattle into the family by way of marriage.
2 Stayt (1931) explains that continuous dry conditions diminished cattle herds to such an extent that hoes became the standard medium of exchange in marriage. Hoes thus not only were emblematic of early agragrian culture, but also of female identity.
3 The man hoped his wife would leave him because of hunger.
4 *Androstachys johnsonii Prain*. Iron wood is exceedingly hard and heavy, and very difficult to carve. The carving process is metaphoric of the woman's physical and emotional ordeal.
5 Customary law requires a man to clear the land of his wife of trees and to erect a fence around it. He also is supposed to help her hoe and weed. However, 'a man who has several wives leaves them to hoe their own gardens; then they all hoe his' (Van Warmelo & Phophi, 1948:315).
6 An indication of the expertise of the woman. Land that is cleared before the first rains has fewer weeds.
7 The shell of *khumba*, a species of the giant African land snail. The snail appears only after heavy rain. As such it is associated with growth. The shell of the snail accordingly is ground into a fine powder to make a fertility potion for barren women.
8 Farmers often construct temporary shelters in their fields. They stay in them to protect their crops against animals like baboons and bush pigs.
9 This name was given initially to the woman by her husband to mock her. However, it becomes a praise name in the song, thus enabling the woman to redefine herself and overcome adversity.
10 *Pfutsekisa*, from Afrikaans *voert sê ek*, used to chase a dog away (also see 'The pumpkin who could speak,' note 5). A Venda proverb accordingly suggests that 'He who casts out his hard-working wife does not laugh; he who has a contented wife laughs' (Stayt, 1931).

The husband was fortunate to have been scolded only. Several cases cited in customary law describe wives severely pinching and even beating husbands who are guilty of offenses against them (see Van Warmelo & Phophi, 1948).
11 The narrator explained that this was also in response to the husband's explanation that he now loved her, and no longer the mother of his daughters.




♩. = 90
18/8
d' : d' : d' | f' : m' : m' | r' : r' : d' | d' :– :– | : : | : :
Tshi - li - ma - nga - da - nda, no mmbo - na naa?
: : | : : | : : | : : |1 :1 :1 |d' :1 :1
Nda li - ma nga da - nda!
s' :– : s' | s' : f' : m' | m' : r' : r' | d' : d' :– | : : | : :
Ndo li - ma nga da - nda! No mmbo-na naa?
: : | : : | : : | : : |1 :1 :1 |d' :1 :1
Nda li - ma nga da - nda!
d' : d' : d' | f' : m' : m' | r' : r' : d' | d' :– :– | : : | : :
Nda li - ma nga da - nda! No mmbo-na - fhi?
: : | : : | : : | : : |1 :1 :1 |d' :1 :1
Nda li - ma nga da - nda!
d' : d' : d' | f' : m' : m' | r' : r' : d' | d' :– :– | : : | : :
Tshi - li - ma - nga - da - nda, no mmbo - na naa?
: : | : : | : : | : : |1 :1 :1 |d' :1 :1
Nda li - ma nga da - nda!
s' : s' : s' | s' : f' : f' | m' : r' : r' | d' : d' :– | : : | : :
No vha ni tshi di ri u do ta - ma mphwe!
: : | : : | : : | : : |1 :1 :1 |d' :1 :1
Nda li - ma nga da - nda!


s' : s' : s' | s' : s' : f' | m' : m' : r' | d' : d' :– | : : | : :
U do ta - ma mphwe nge - no na ma - na - wa!
: : | : : | : : | : : |1 :1 :1 | d' :1 :1
Nda li - ma nga da - nda!
s' :– : s' | s' : f' : m' | r' : r' : r' . r' | d' : d' :– | : : | : :
Ee! Lo ta - hu - lwa ndo mbo vhe - a khu - mba!
: : | : : | : : | : : |1 :1 :1 | d' :1 :1
Nda li - ma nga da - nda!
d' :– : d' | d' : d' : d' | d' : d' : d' | d' :– : | : : | : :
Ndo ta - hu - ta - hu nda mbo fha - si.
: : | : : | : : | : : |1 :1 :1 | d' :1 :1
Nda li - ma nga da - nda!

Rosiena Magadani

Rosiena Magadani lives in the village of Phadzima in the Nzhelele district. Her unmarried daughter Elisa lives with her. Elisa has three teenage children, two sons and a daughter who has a baby. She is the only breadwinner in the family.

Rosiena's kitchen was built by her son. It shows signs of neglect. There is a square room for her grandsons, and an oblong-shaped church hall for the women.

Elisa is an outspoken Christian who is always on her way to a conference or prayer meeting. She is known as *mufunzi* (preacher) and her family as 'people of the church.'

The church hall is the hub of the household. People gather here for church services, Sunday school and prayer meetings. It also houses knitting machines that women use to supplement their meagre income.

Rosiena was born in the area north of Makhado in about 1910. She remembers the locust plague of 1915 and the flu epidemic of 1918. There were so many locusts that people scooped them up without having to look. One woman unknowingly also scooped up a snake into her bag. She made a big fire at home, boiled a pot of water and threw in the locusts. 'I will never forget that evening, that snake escaping from the pot.'

There were no schools north of Makhado then. Girls in any case were not allowed to attend school. It was believed that schooling made them mad.

It hurts Rosiena that children nowadays have so little respect for their elders. Even her own grandchildren stand when they speak to her. 'Just like this,' showing a straight finger. 'We old people knew very well as children that we had to speak to our elders on our knees. And these boys who sometimes get home after dark and knock to be let in: is this what children do nowadays?'

Rosiena was not even ten years old when she started to work. Mr Thomas was a miller who came from Paris, France to live at Piesanghoek.[1] Rosiena worked in his kitchen. She cleaned and washed dishes at first. Mrs Thomas later taught her to cook. She enjoyed this period of her life. She worked and lived in the Thomas household until she became an adult.

Rosiena's husband Magadani herded cattle at Orange Grove in Johannesburg. She wanted to be near him and found domestic employment with the Bruintjes family. She was very happy with them. Two of her children were born during this time. She did not want them to grow up in town, so she returned to Piesanghoek.

Then Rosiena's life started to change. Magadani stopped returning to Venda and supporting her, and Rosiena had to find work to raise her children. Magadani returned long afterwards with another wife. She was also a Venda woman whom he had married without Rosiena knowing. Magadani deserted Rosiena and her four children and returned to Johannesburg with his second wife. Rosiena wanted to find refuge with her parents, but the owners of Bloemfontein, the farm on which she lived, said, 'No, stay here. We will provide for you.' These people were named Henning.

Magadani's second wife stopped caring for him when he became old. He returned to Venda and went to live elsewhere without telling Rosiena. Reports of his whereabouts and illness

eventually reached Rosiena. Elisa went to search for her father. She begged him to return home, but he was too ashamed. Later he returned of his own accord. He had been wrong, he apologised.

'I helped him all I could. I washed him and gave him food. The Lord is merciful, so I had to look after my husband. He lived with us for the last five years of his life. His health improved and then became worse. He died in 1984 or 1985. He was from a royal family, the family of headman Magadani. There was a big funeral. His other wife was also there. On the day we buried him, we saw strangers crying. They were coloureds.[2] "Why are you crying like that?" we asked. They said, "It is our father who lies here." And so I heard for the first time that he had a third wife with children. But we had already forgiven him.'

Shortly after Magadani's death, Rosiena got a message from Johannesburg that her son was seriously ill. When they got to the hospital, they could see he was not getting better. She prayed but nothing helped, and he died. They brought his body to Venda to be buried, because his wife was also from Venda. The day following the funeral, she and her children packed their clothes and went away. This is not a Venda custom. A widow is supposed to remain at the home of her in-laws for a period to look after her mother-in-law. 'But what could I do? I let her go because there was nothing I could give her. The wardrobe stood empty with its open doors. I never heard from her or her children again. Perhaps her heart is still sad. Some say I should ask the police to find them, but they cannot make us a family. The Lord knows and will help.'

---

1 'Banana Valley,' a fertile area east of Makhado.
2 South African creoles.

The cannibal's tooth

Salungano! Salungano! Here comes a story!

Now, there was a certain man and his wife. 'We must move to another village,' they said.

'I am not leaving!' their daughter Phophi retorted. 'I am staying in this old homestead.'

'What? On your own?'

'Yes!'

'In what will you live?'

'Put me down there in the cellar.[1] I will hear mother's ankle bracelets when she comes.'

Truly! Her mother brought her food. She arrived there and called.

(Narrator chants repeatedly)
Hoye-yee! (The mother's call sign)

(Chorus chants)
Khombo! Danger!

'Who is that who speaks there?' Phophi asked. 'Is it my mother? Speak, let me hear you.'

Those ankle bracelets sang, *tshaka-tshaka-tshaka-tshaka-tshaka-tshaka.* That girl opened the door. She came out and ate the porridge.

'My child, can we not leave together?' the mother asked.

'No, I am happy in this hole,' her daughter replied.

'Oh, all right!' her mother said.

Now! Radzimu the cannibal was hiding.[2] He was standing flat against a tree. He was spying on the mother.

‘Good!’ he said, ‘now I know how to catch the girl.’

He tied maize leaves around his legs. He went to Phophi’s house before her mother came. He called:

Hoye-yee!
Khombo! …

‘Who is that speaking?’ the girl asked. ‘Is it my mother? Speak, let me hear you.’

Those legs went *tshaka-tshaka-tshaka-tshaka-tshaka-tshaka-tshaka.* That child opened the lid. Radzimu tore her from the hole, *naru!* He put her on his back. He took her away to the veld, to a place where there were big trees. Then he chanted:

(Narrator chants repeatedly)
Murula! Marula![3]

(Chorus chants)
Fhaduwa! Creak!

Then that tree creaked open, *ndere-ndere!* There was a hole inside. Then he put that child inside. He chanted again:

(Narrator chants repeatedly)
Murula! Marula!

(Chorus)
Mumana! Close!

The tree closed, *kwata!* Then Radzimu went away, as far as from here to Tshitavha village. He called all the wild animals.

‘I have caught a cunning little girl.’

‘Really, Radzimu?’

‘Truly!’

Now, that girl’s mother arrived and found the lid open.

‘Phophi!’

That girl answered from the veld.

‘Phophi!’

Phophi again answered from far. Her mother ran over there. She knocked on a tree. ‘This is not the one,’ she said. She knocked on that one. ‘It is not this one either!’ she said. Then she knocked on the third tree. ‘It is this one!’ she shouted. ‘So, how will I get you out?’

‘Mother,’ Phophi said, ‘say: “marula creak!” Do it! That wild animal is coming back!’

Murula!
Fhaduwa! …

That tree creaked open, *ndere-ndere!* Phophi collapsed outside, *kwata!* She and her mother took bees and snakes and put them inside.

They chanted:

Murula!
Mumana! …

The tree closed, *kwata!*

'Let us go,' they said.

'Do you want to go back to the old homestead?' the mother asked.

'No! Never!' Phophi replied.

Then! Radzimu returned with all the wild animals. He whistled *tshwi!* and said, 'You have to be very careful, the child is cunning indeed.'

'Radzimu,' the animals said, 'you tell nothing but lies.'

(Narrator)
Ihi, tshinungu. Hey, porcupine.
Ihi, tshinungu. Hey, porcupine.

(Chorus)
Tsha Nyankokole, wee. Of that marula tree.[4]

'Where is she now, Radzimu?' the animals asked.

'Here, in this tree!'

'Now, what are the magic words, Radzimu?'

'You chant: "marula, creak!" '

Murula!
Fhaduwa! …

That tree creaked open, *ndere-ndere!* Those bees and snakes rushed out. Radzimu jumped up! As he was fleeing, he found the hole of a warthog. He dived inside. But one tooth did not fit. The animals that passed there fell over it, *gubu!* This one and that one too, *gubu!* And the last one fell hardest, *khuphu!*

'Let me dig here,' that animal said. He dug and dug and dug and dug and dug: it was Radzimu! He whistled to the others, *tshwi!* They turned around and tore Radzimu apart. He died there.

Ha vha u fa ha lungano. This is the end of the story.

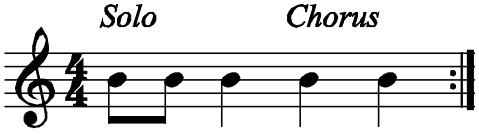
Nzhelele, 15/03/91

The lesson of this story is that children must be obedient to their parents. The story also celebrates the love and resolve of a mother who rescues her child from an attacker. It shows that overwhelming strength may be undermined by creative subterfuge.

1 *Tshisiku*, a hole in the kitchen in which dry crops are stored.
2 A cannibal with a predilection for children. This is a well-known character in Sotho and Venda folktales. The name of the cannibal in this story accordingly is of Sotho origin, and it means 'Father of all cannibals.' Similar characters also appear in Tsonga and Xhosa oral narratives. Xhosa *ntsomi* tales feature *mbulu*, a 'degenerate human' with a restless tail and a lisp who 'has a penchant for pursuing little girls' (Scheub 1975:348; also see 'The lourie who was not a bird').
3 *Sclerocarya birrea,* a tree famous for its fruit from which an intoxicating drink is made.
4 The song originates from the Karanga people, northern neigbours of the Venda. The narrator was unable to explain its meaning clearly.

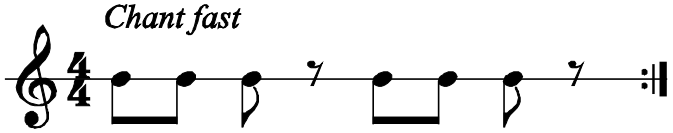
Chant

Solo *Chorus*



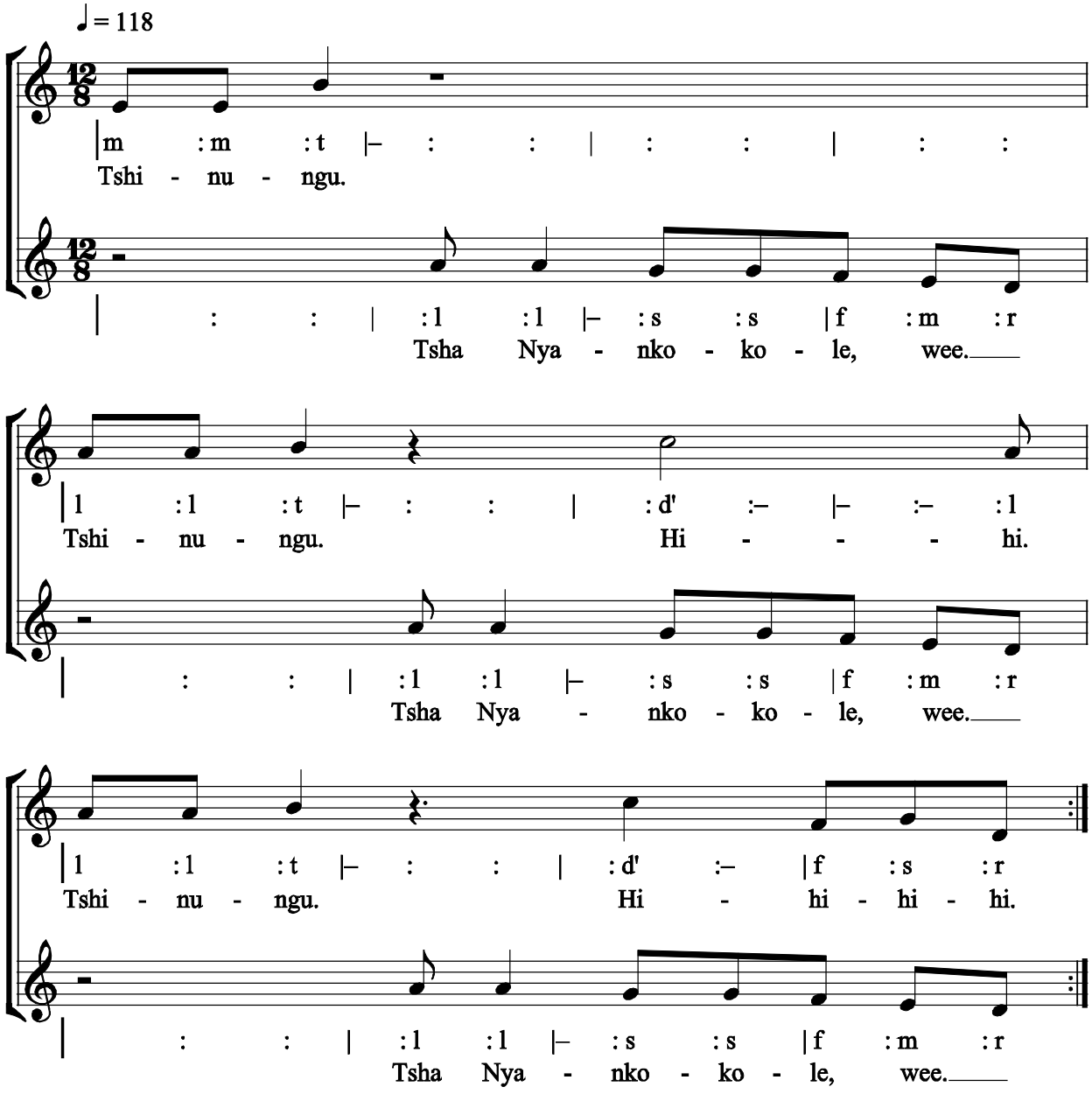
Ho - ye- yee! Kho - mbo!

Chant fast



Ma - ru - la! Fha - du - wa!
Ma - ru - la! Mu - ma - na!

♩= 118



The zebras are jiving

Vhathu vha ri 'salungano!' You people must say *'salungano!'*

Well, well! There once was a family of lions. Now, there were three children. When the husband and his wife went out to hunt, zebras came to their home. When they got there, they kicked the children, *bvu! bvu!*

'Does your father kick this hard?'

'He does not! He does not!'

'Bring your father's *mbila!'* [1]

They brought that musical instrument and gave it to them.

(Narrator)
Nzelelekunze! (The bright sounds of the *mbila)*
Nzelelezeke!
Tsi-ntsi-ntsi! (The metallic sound of the vibrators)[2]

(Chorus)
Ha vhuya gumba ḽanga mu tsha pembela! We will take your place as king of the animals!

The lions came walking back, *kwizi-kwizi.* Those zebras scattered, *wavhaa!* and ran away.

'Hey child, pass me my *mbila.'*

The child fetched it and gave it to his father, that lion. The lion tried to play on it, but the sound was dull, *vovongu-vongu!*

(Narrator chants repeatedly)
Vovongu-vongu![3]

(Chorus)
Gavheka! I am putting the *mbila* down!

'Who was here?'

'Nobody! Nobody!'

Vovongu-vongu!
Gavheka! …

'Oh! By the ancestors!'

Vovongu-vongu!
Gavheka!

'Something is wrong with my *mbila!* You, children, who has tampered with my *mbila?'*

'Nobody! Nobody!'

'Oh well, hang my *mbila* on its hook.' [4]

They did that.

So! It was daybreak. The man and woman went hunting again. Those children remained at home. The zebras arrived and paraded arrogantly, *kigiḓi! kigiḓi! kigiḓi! bvu! bvu!*

'Does your father kick this hard?'

'Yes, he does!'

Bvu! bvu!
'No, he does not! He does not!'
'Bring us your father's *mbila!'*
They fetched the *mbila* and gave it to them.

Nzelelekunze!
Nzelelezeke! …

Dust billowed from the feet of the dancers!
'Hey! Here is your father's *mbila.'*
Those children took it.
'If you tell on us, we will kick you.'
The lions returned, *kwizi-kwizi!*
'Hey, give me my *mbila!'*
'Do not say anything!' the children whispered.
Here it is,' they said to their father.

Vovongu-vongu!
Gavheka! …

'Who was here?'
'Nobody! Nobody!'

Vovongu-vongu!
Gavheka! …

'Hey, something is wrong with my *mbila.'*

Vovongu-vongu!
Gavheka! …

'Why is your cheek swollen?'
'It is nothing.'
'There is a lump on your cheek! Did you fall?'
'No, I did not fall.'
'Hah! Tell me about these hoof marks.'
'We … the zebras came, the zebras came …'
'Ah! Why didn't you tell me sooner?'
'We were afraid that they would beat us up.'
'All right then,' the lion said, 'I will go out and hide close by.'
Hah! Those zebras came galloping closer, *dingindi! dingindi! dingindi!*
'Does your father kick this hard?'
Bvu! bvu!
'No, he doesn't!'
Bvu! bvu!
'Here it is! Here it is! The *mbila!'*
'Yes! Give it to us!'

Nzelelekunze!
Nzelelezeke! …

‘Can your father jive like we do?’
‘No, he can’t.’
‘Which dance is best: ours or your father’s?’
‘Your jive is the best!’

Nzelelekunze!
Nzelelezeke! …

And then! The lions stormed in there, *bulugudu!* They jumped on the zebras and broke their necks with a crack, *tlo-tlo!*

Ha vha u fa ha lungano. This is the end of the story.

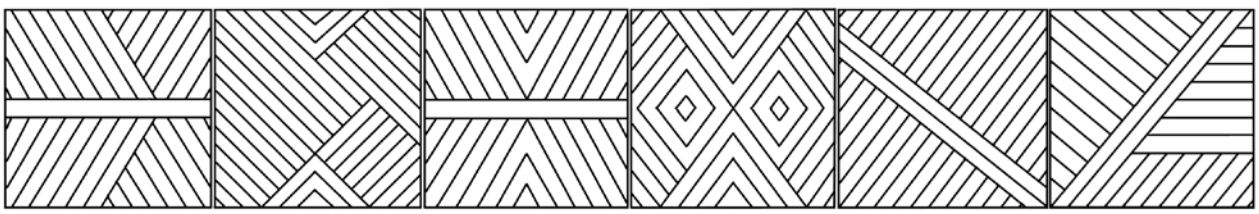
Phadzima, 15/03/91

This story employs a musical metaphor to explore the tension between established and new cultural patterns. The ancient musical instrument, *mbila* (a lamellaphone; fig. 3), and its music and dance represent older, increasingly irrelevant cultural patterns and forms of power. In contrast, jive is presented as a cultural code more appropriate to contemporary social expectations.

Venda rulers often are addressed respectfully as *ndau-ya-nduna* (male lion). The conflict in which the lions in this story find themselves points clearly to the debilitating influence of traditional leaders in contemporary social life. The lions are threatened by the brash zebras who represent migrant labourers. These migrants return periodically from town with new ideas and disruptive behaviour that challenge established cultural norms. Some of them spend all their time going from one bar to the next, enjoying themselves so much that they miss their transport back to town. Certain local musicians adopt their extravagant urban manners. They try to impress girls by dancing in new ways and playing their guitar behind their head.

As in Shona *ngano* narratives, Lion is the symbol of authority who ‘would forever maintain the status quo, seeing to it that his own wants are satified’ (Kriel, 1971:79). However, it is clear that Lion’s *mbila* is becoming increasingly out of tune and discordant. The *vovungu-vongu* pattern decreases in intensity, pitch and coherence to express the lion’s decreasing musical ability and gradual loss of power.

1 *Mbila:* The Venda lamellaphone, also known by its misnomer ‘thumb piano’ (fig. 3).
2 These vibrators comprise metallic rings or bottle tops that buzz when the instrument is played (see fig.).
3 Recite with descending pitch and then repeat slower and increasingly incoherently.
4 Kriel notes in his study of Shona narratives that the intelligence of the lion ‘does not quite match his power and prestige’ (Kriel, 1971: 48).



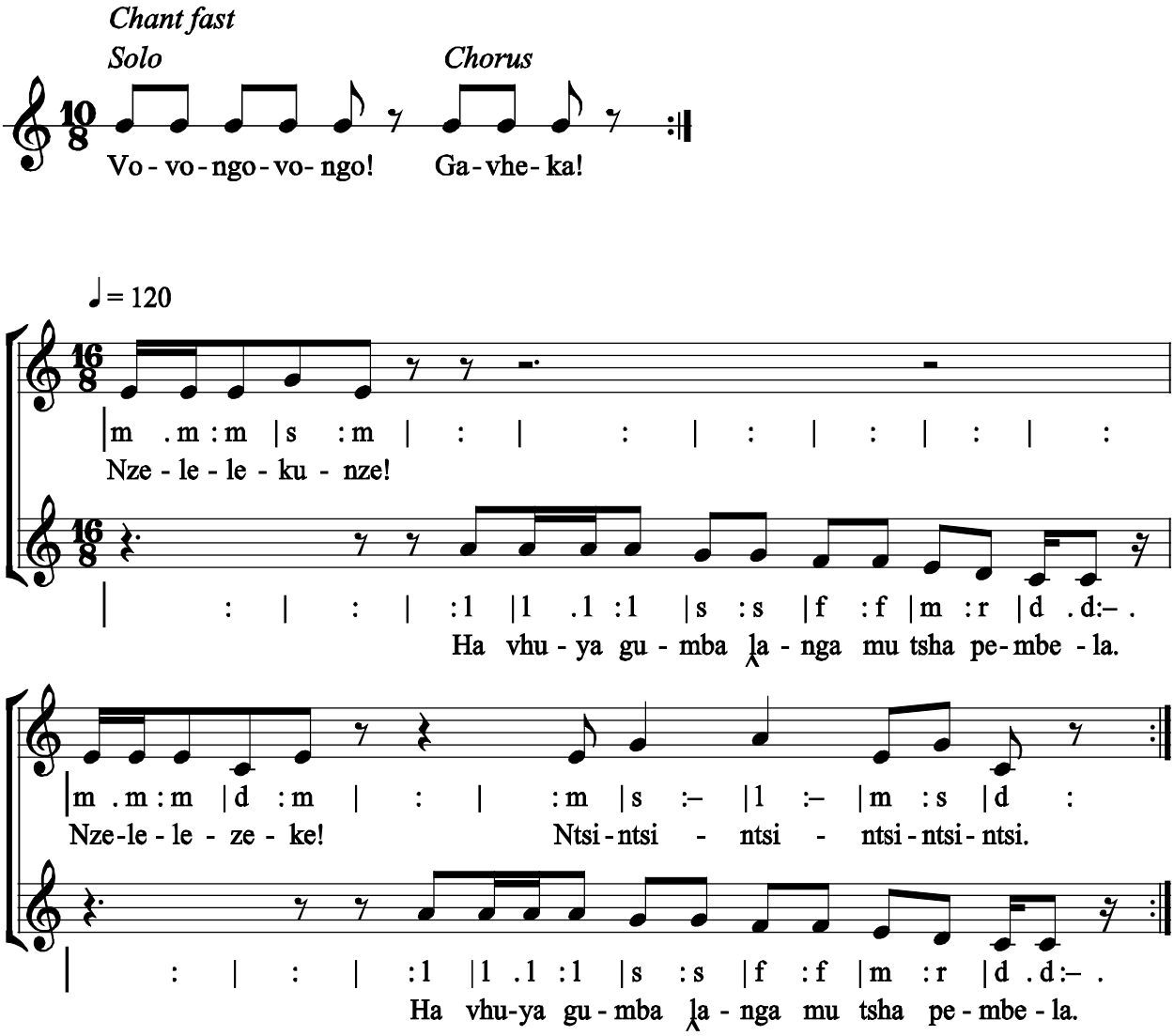


Fig. 3. *Mbila* made by James Munyai of Tshaulu

The lion who hunted his daughter

Salungano! Salungano! Here comes a story!

There was a certain man. He had two wives. The younger wife had children. The elder wife did not have children, but rats.

Now, that woman who had children went to the field. She left her two daughters at home. But her husband wanted to devour them.

'I left my snuff box at home,' that woman said.

She ran back. When she arrived home, she found that her husband had changed into a lion. He was eating her daughters.

That night the woman took her children. She carried them, saying she was taking them away. She sang:

(Narrator)

Nga-nga-huli.	(Vocables)
Ndo vhona tsha katenda ka dzhanya.	I have seen an evil person.
Ndi ndo vhona phele u naka, yowee!	I thought I saw beauty in the hyena.
Nda vho ri ndo wana mutuka, yowee!	I thought I found a husband!
Nde-nde-nde-nde ndeke-nge-nge.	(Vocables)

(Chorus)

Ndo vhona tsha katenda.	I have seen an evil person.

The next morning that man came out of his house and found no-one. 'My wife has run away from me!'

Then he changed into a lion. That lionman found his wife.

'I am asking for snuff,' he said.

'Ah!' she replied, 'where must I find snuff to give to you my husband?'

'I am talking about the rockrabbit that hides between the two big stones,' he said, 'of that girl with the big buttocks.'

The woman gave him that young girl. Then she walked further:

Nga-nga-huli.
Ndo vhona tsha katenda ka dzhanya …

The lionman found his wife again.

'Now,' she said, 'about this snuff: where must I find it? Husband, where between the stones is it, of that girl with the big buttocks?' And so she gave him another girl.

Nga-nga-huli.
Ndo vhona tsha katenda ka dzhanya …

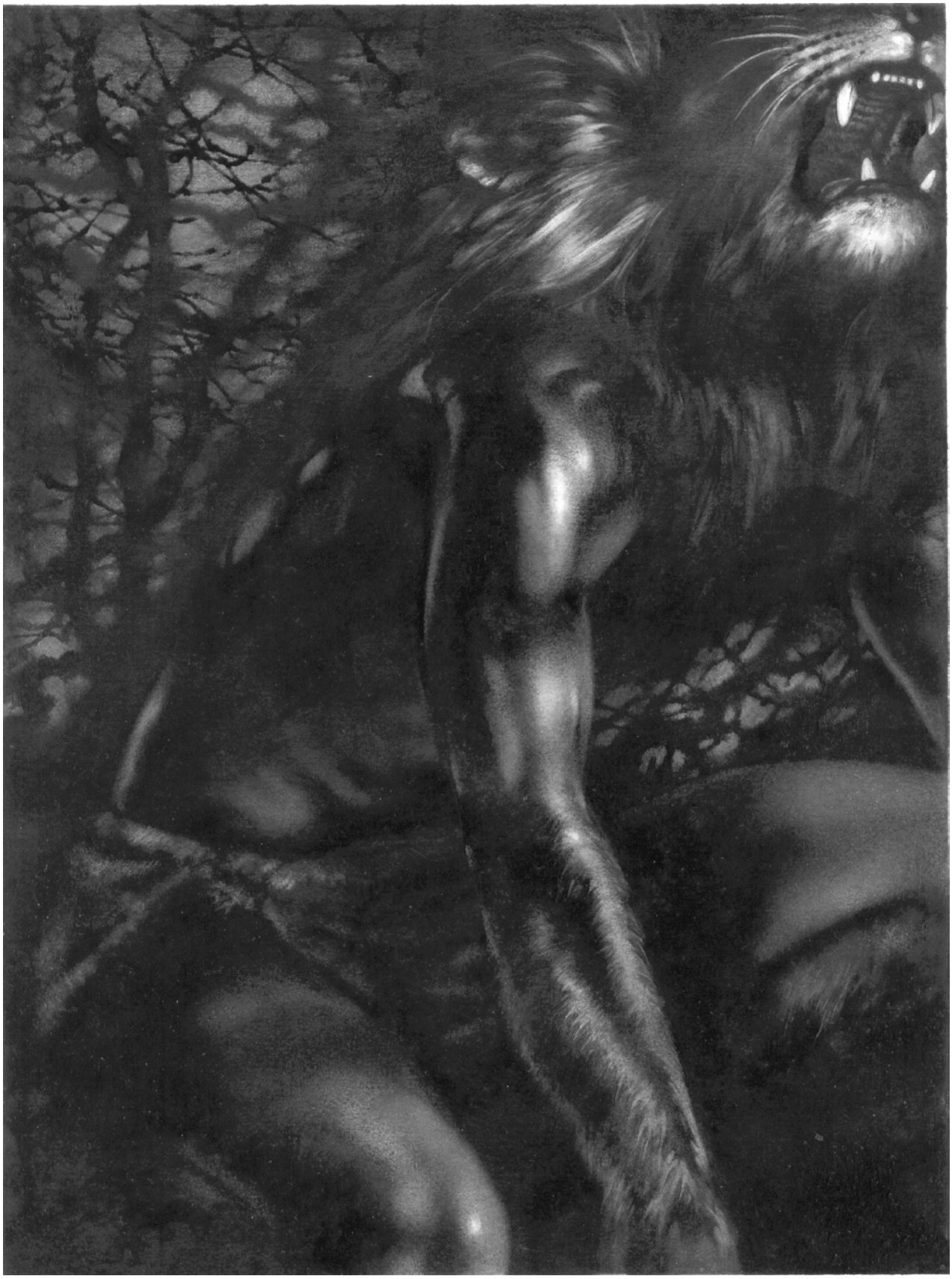
Hah! When she looked ahead, she saw a man on a bicycle under a baobab tree. She arrived there crying.

'Why are you crying?' that man asked.

'My children have been devoured,' she sobbed.

'Come, let me pick you up and put you in the tree,' he offered.

He put his bicycle down. Then he picked that woman and her children up. They sat up there in the baobab.



That lionman was far behind them. He came storming closer. ‘Where is she? Where is she? Find her! Find her!’ he roared.

He saw that there was no-one on the road. He turned back. It was then that the woman got down with her daughters. She went back to the home of her parents.

Ha mbo ḓi vha ndi u fa ha lungano. This is the end of the story.

Phadzima, 15/03/91

The lion is king in Shona and Venda *ngano* stories dealing with animals. However, he becomes a marauding animal in relation to human beings. Numerous stories relate how husbands change into lions during the night, how young men lure away girls and then become lions, or how a lion helps a woman on condition that it may devour her child when it is born (Kriel, 1971).

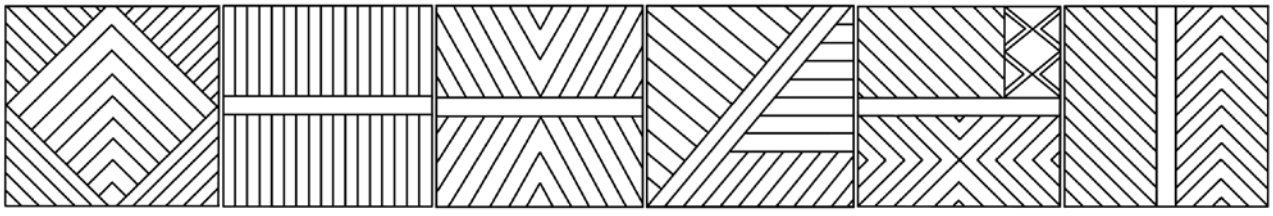
In this story, the behavour of the lion expresses the primal urges of a man who mistreats his wives and abuses his children. The children of his elder wife are like rats who have to scurry furtively around the home to avoid their father.

But even worse, he sexually abuses the daughters of his younger wife (according to one interpretation, he is not their father, but legal guardian). Sniffing or smoking tobacco is a metaphor for sexual intercourse. The woman pretends not to understand her husband’s request, in the vain hope to save her daughters. He then more clearly refers to the female genitalia as a rockrabbit between two big stones.

Stayt (1931:224) notes that ‘Incest is a serious crime; the offender is considered to be a dog and is the subject of horror and scorn. He is tried in the chief’s court and is punished by death or banishment.’

As the woman flees with her children, she reproaches herself in song for having been fooled by her husband. His attractive appearance conceals the nature of a marauding hyena. ‘Hyenas and lions are the same,’ the narrator remarked, ‘they tear others apart.’

For some women in a patriarchal society there sometimes seems little hope. Flight is a possible solution, but only when another male intervenes. The man appears to be in charge of the fate of women, both as persecutor and redeemer.



♩. = 82 *With sadness and flexible tempo*

| l, :– | l, : s | m:– |– : | : | : d | d : d | d :– | : | s, : t, |– : m | m:–
Nga- nga - hu - li. Nde - nde - nde - nde nde - ke - nge - nge.

| : | : | : | : s | s : s | s : f | f : m | : r | d :– | m :– | : | :
Ndo vho - na tsha ka - te - nda ka dzha - nya.

| l, :– | l, : s | m:– |– : | : | d' : d' | d' : d' | d' : t | l : s | f : m | m:– |– : l,
Nga- nga - hu - li. Ndi ndo vho - na phe - le u na - ka, yo - wee!

| : | : | : | : s | s : s | s : f | f : m | : r | d :– | m :– | : | :
Ndo vho - na tsha ka - te - nda ka dzha - nya.

| l, :– | l, : s | m:– |– : | : | d' : d' | d' : d' | d' : t | l : s | f : m | m:– |– : l,
Nga- nga - hu - li. Nda vho ri ndo wa - na mu - tu - ka', yo - wee!

| : | : | : | : s | s : s | s : f | f : m | : r | d :– | m :– | : | :
Ndo vho - na tsha ka - te - nda ka dzha - nya.

Spears eat those who make them

Salungano! Salungano! Here comes a story!

Now, there was a certain child, an orphan called Devhula. He lived with his stepmother and his younger sister.

Well, Devhula's father had had many cattle. So, at sunset his other wives poisoned the boy's supper.[1] They wanted to kill him for those cattle that were now his. His little sister knew this. When she went to throw ash away, she overheard the women plotting.

Devhula returned from the mountains with the cattle. He whistled to his sister, *tswio! tswio! tswio!* She sang:[2]

(Verse 1: narrator)

Khaladzi anga:	My brother:
ni tshi ya hayani,	when you go home,
vhuswa ni songo ḽa.	do not eat the porridge.
Vho longa muri.	It has been poisoned.
Muri mutswuku.	It is red poison.

(Chorus)
Devhula, Devhula, Devhula!

'Thank you for telling me, dear sister,' Devhula said.

He sang:

(Refrain: narrator)

Mvula mutshotsho mutsholi.	Hate is like pouring rain.
Ndi ḓo vhuya nda dzi ombanya.	I will gather the cattle one day,
Nda yo u guma nadzo Vhutonga.	and go away to the land of the Tsonga people.[3]
No shuma na mmbudza, makhadzi.	Thank you for telling me, dear sister.

(Chorus)

Havha mutshotsho mutsholi!	This pouring rain that never stops!

When Devhula came back with his cattle, he whistled *tswio-tswio!* The cattle went into the byre. When Devhula arrived at the hut, he took the porridge and vegetables. He gave them to the other children. He took their food, and ate it.

And then! Well, the child who ate first went down. And so the others did not eat.

'He is down!' they exclaimed.

'Why is he lying flat like that?' their mothers asked.

'We don't know.'

'Which porridge did he eat?'

'Devhula's porridge.'

'Ah! We will get him!'

Devhula woke up. He left with the cattle. His sister gathered the ash. She went out to the ash pile. She sang:

(Verse 2: narrator)

Khaladzi anga:	My brother:
ni tshi ya hayani.	watch out when you go home.

Vho gwa mulindi.	They dug a hole
Vho longa muthu.	and placed someone in it.
O fara pfumo.	He is holding a spear.

(Chorus)
Devhula, Devhula, Devhula!

Devhula arrived at home and whistled, *tswio! tswio! tswio!*
He sang:

(Refrain)
Mvula mutshotsho mutsholi.
Ndi ḓo vhuya nda dzi ombanya …

The cattle went into the byre. One of them fell into the hole. It struggled to get out.
'Hey, you!' Devhula shouted at a boy, 'run and stop the cattle!'
He entered the homestead through the back gate. When he got inside, he found that the small boy had also fallen into the hole.[4]
'Hey!' the others shouted, 'where did you enter?'
'I came in over here.'
'Did you not enter over there?'
They went to see for themselves and found one of the cattle and the small boy.
'Hey!' they fumed, 'this boy, how can we pay him back? Let us poison his blankets.'
Devhula's little sister walked past as if she had not heard anything.
Now, the sun was setting. The sister gathered the ash.
She sang:

(Verse 3: narrator)

Khaladzi anga:	My brother:
ni tshi ya hayani.	watch out when you go home.
Nguvho ni songo fuka.	Do not spread your blankets.
Vho ḓodza muri.	They have been poisoned.
Muri̓ mutsuku.	It is red poison.

(Chorus)
Devhula, Devhula, Devhula!

Devhula replied:

(Refrain)
Mvula mutshotsho mutsholi.
Ndi ḓo vhuya nda dzi ombanya …

Devhula returned at sunset with the cattle. He gave his blankets to the other children and took one of theirs. Two children died during the early morning.
'When will they wake up?' the mothers asked Devhula.
'I don't know, perhaps they overslept.'
When they got there, they found two children dead. Three were still alive.
Now, that night Devhula took his little sister and carried her on his back. He opened the cattle byre.
On the road they sang:

(Refrain)
Mvula mutshotsho mutsholi.
Ndi ḓo vhuya nda dzi ombanya ...

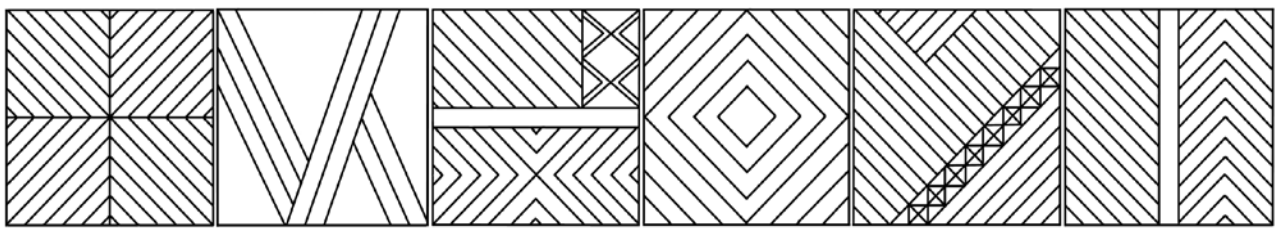
The children went to the home of their mother's brother. They arrived there with the cattle. When their stepmothers woke up the next morning they found that the children were gone.

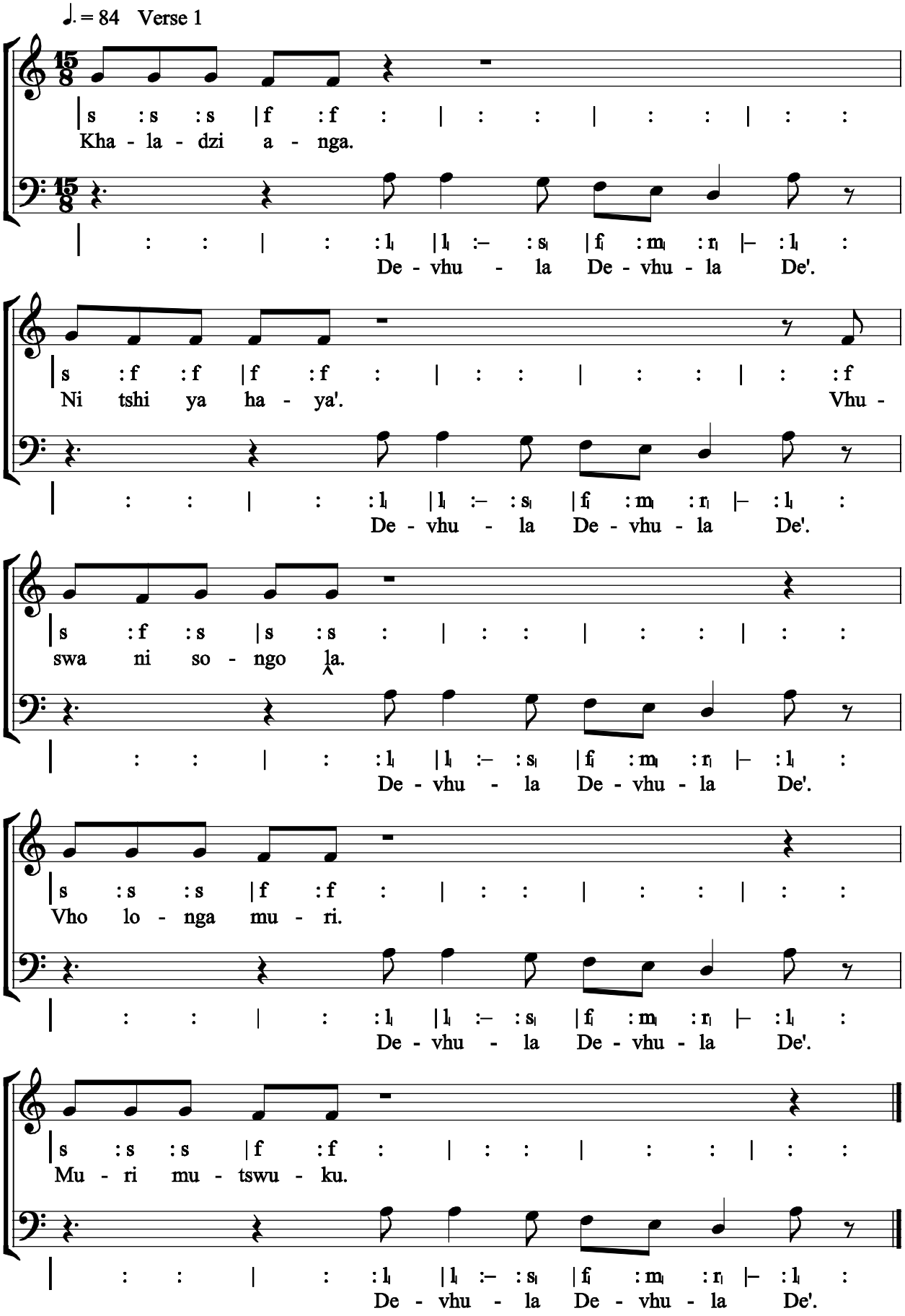
Ndi u guma ha lungano. This is the end of the story.

Phadzima, 15/03/91

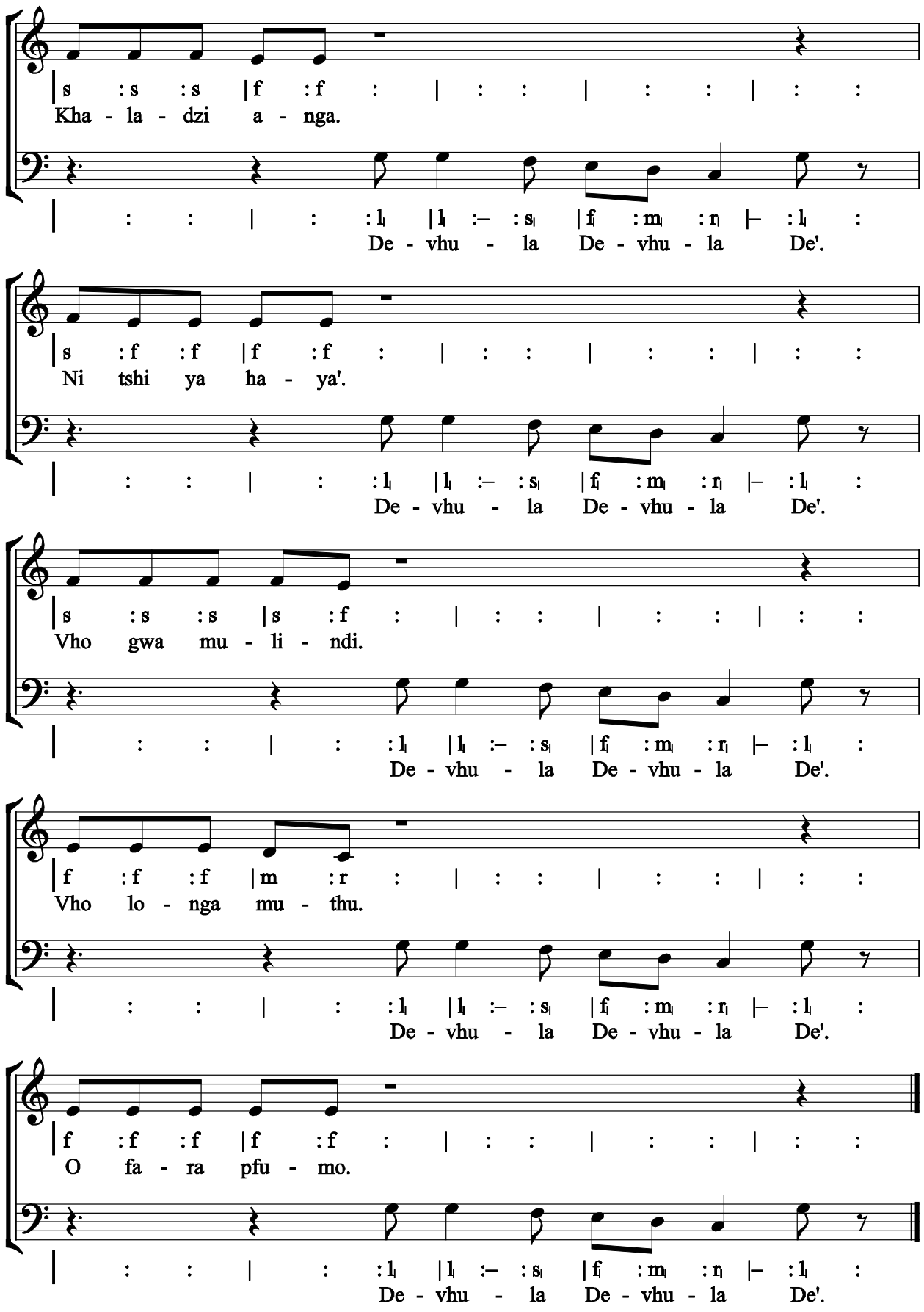
Although Devhula is his father's first-born son and thus legitimate heir, the two orphans in the story are subject to the merciless avarice of their deceased father's remaining wives. Greed, jealousy and knowledge of poison are formidable factors in social relations. The tensions they create may be so severe that victims often see no option but to flee.

1 This is a popular theme in regional narratives.
2 The relationship between a brother and sister is intimate and marked by reciprocal obligations. A brother is endebted to his sister whose marriage brings cattle into the family, thus allowing him to marry in turn (see 'The young woman and the zebra').
3 Southern neighbours of the Venda people.
4 According to a Venda proverb, 'Spears eat those who make them' (Stayt, 1931).

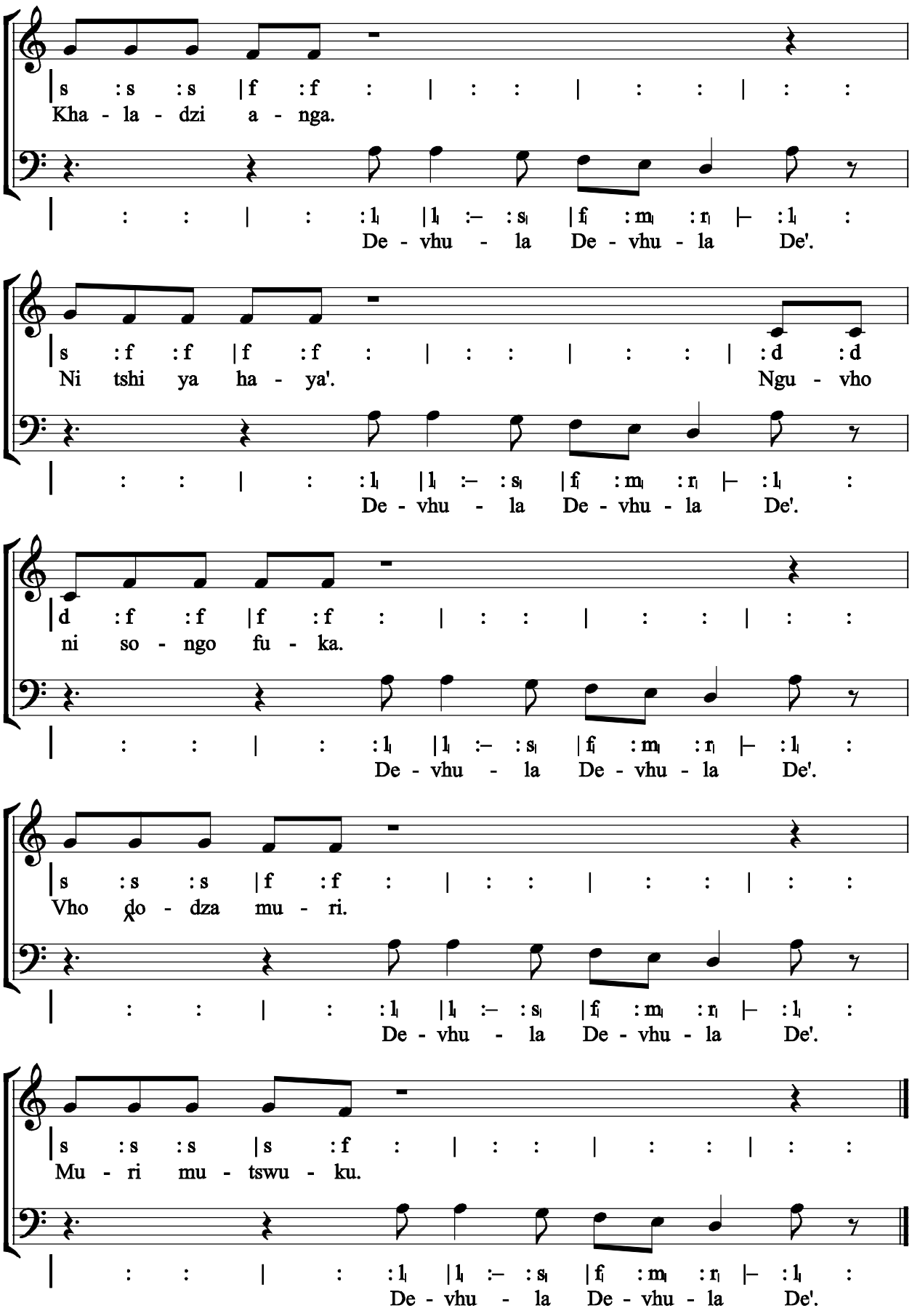



♩. = 84 Verse 1
15/8
s :s :s |f :f : | : : | : : | : :
Kha - la - dzi a - nga.
: : | : :l, |l, :- :s, |f, :m, :r, |- :l, :
De - vhu - la De - vhu - la De'.
s :f :f |f :f : | : : | : : | : :f
Ni tshi ya ha - ya'. Vhu -
: : | : :l, |l, :- :s, |f, :m, :r, |- :l, :
De - vhu - la De - vhu - la De'.
s :f :s |s :s : | : : | : : | : :
swa ni so - ngo la.
: : | : :l, |l, :- :s, |f, :m, :r, |- :l, :
De - vhu - la De - vhu - la De'.
s :s :s |f :f : | : : | : : | : :
Vho lo - nga mu - ri.
: : | : :l, |l, :- :s, |f, :m, :r, |- :l, :
De - vhu - la De - vhu - la De'.
s :s :s |f :f : | : : | : : | : :
Mu - ri mu - tswu - ku.
: : | : :l, |l, :- :s, |f, :m, :r, |- :l, :
De - vhu - la De - vhu - la De'.

Verse 2


s :s :s |f :f : | : : | : : | : :
Kha - la - dzi a - nga.
: : | : :l, |l, :- :s, |f, :m, :r, |- :l, :
De - vhu - la De - vhu - la De'.
s :f :f |f :f : | : : | : : | : :
Ni tshi ya ha - ya'.
: : | : :l, |l, :- :s, |f, :m, :r, |- :l, :
De - vhu - la De - vhu - la De'.
s :s :s |s :f : | : : | : : | : :
Vho gwa mu - li - ndi.
: : | : :l, |l, :- :s, |f, :m, :r, |- :l, :
De - vhu - la De - vhu - la De'.
f :f :f |m :r : | : : | : : | : :
Vho lo - nga mu - thu.
: : | : :l, |l, :- :s, |f, :m, :r, |- :l, :
De - vhu - la De - vhu - la De'.
f :f :f |f :f : | : : | : : | : :
O fa - ra pfu - mo.
: : | : :l, |l, :- :s, |f, :m, :r, |- :l, :
De - vhu - la De - vhu - la De'.

Verse 3


s :s :s |f :f : | : : | : : | : :
Kha - la - dzi a - nga.
: : | : :l, |l, :– :s, |f, :m, :r, |– :l, :
De - vhu - la De - vhu - la De'.
s :f :f |f :f : | : : | : : | :d :d
Ni tshi ya ha - ya'. Ngu - vho
: : | : :l, |l, :– :s, |f, :m, :r, |– :l, :
De - vhu - la De - vhu - la De'.
d :f :f |f :f : | : : | : : | : :
ni so - ngo fu - ka.
: : | : :l, |l, :– :s, |f, :m, :r, |– :l, :
De - vhu - la De - vhu - la De'.
s :s :s |f :f : | : : | : : | : :
Vho do - dza mu - ri.
: : | : :l, |l, :– :s, |f, :m, :r, |– :l, :
De - vhu - la De - vhu - la De'.
s :s :s |s :f : | : : | : : | : :
Mu - ri mu - tswu - ku.
: : | : :l, |l, :– :s, |f, :m, :r, |– :l, :
De - vhu - la De - vhu - la De'.

♩. = 78 Refrain

| s : m : m | m :– : r | r : d : m | : :
Mvu - la mu - tsho - tsho mu - tsho - li.

(| d : l, : l, | l, :– : l,) | : : | : l, : l,
(mvu - la mu - tsho - tsho.) Ha - vha

| d : d : m | m : m : r | d : d :– | t, : :
Ndi do vhu - ya nda dzi o - mba - nya.

| d : l, : l, | l, :– : l, | : : | : l, : l,
mvu - la mu - tsho - tsho. Ha - vha

| d :– : f | f : f : m | r : r : d | : :
Nd'o 'gu - ma na - dzo Vhu - to - nga.

| d : l, : l, | l, :– : l, | : : | : l, : l,
mvu - la mu - tsho - tsho. Ha - vha

| f : f : f | f :– : m | r : r : r | d : :
No shu - ma na mmbu - dza ma - kha - dzi.

| d : l, : l, | l, :– : l, | : : | : l, : l,
mvu - la mu - tsho - tsho. Ha - vha

The lourie who was not a bird

Salungano! Salungano! Here comes a story!

There were children who said, 'We are going to fetch firewood.'

'When you go, do not take stones and throw them in the river,' their parents warned. 'Cross that river quickly.'

When the children came to the river, it was in flood. They could not cross it. Then a lourie came.[1] Now, Phophi took a stone and threw it into the water.

'Come, let me swallow you,' the lourie offered. 'Otherwise where will you sleep?'

He swallowed them and flew away with them to his house.

After a long time the lourie searched for the homes of the children. When he found them, he went into the king's courtyard. He stood at the entrance and called, *khurukhuru!*

'People must not kill this bird,' the king ordered.

That lourie flew around the back of the homestead and sat down there.

'Now, this is a good place,' he said.

'Oxo!'

Now, people heard coughing behind the homestead. It became louder

'Oxo!' A big child.

'Oxo!' A small child.

'Oxo!' A big child.

And so that lourie coughed up all those children.

Hey, what was that? People went there to look and found the children. They were those missing ones people gave up ever finding. There they were with the lourie!

'Because this lourie brought the children,' the king said, 'I will give him an ox that will go with him. I thank him very much.'

People prepared everything and cooked lots of food. The lourie ate with them there inside the courtyard. Yes! And later he went home with his ox.

(Narrator)

Khurukhuru ya vhurwa.	A lourie came from the south.[2]
Iḓani u vhone!	Come and see!
Ndi vhanani na vhona.	Disobedient children.
Iḓani u vhone!	Come and see!
Vho itwa nga Phophi,	It is because of Phophi.
Iḓani u vhone!	Come and see!
O posa tombo muedzini.	She threw a stone into the river.
Iḓani u vhone!	Come and see!
Muedzi wa mbo ḓala.	The river was in flood.
Iḓani u vhone!	Come and see!

(Chorus)

Malimu maḽavhathu!	Cannibals who eat people!
Iḓani u vhone!	Come and see!

Ha vha u fa ha lungano. This is the end of the story.

Phadzima, 24/04/92

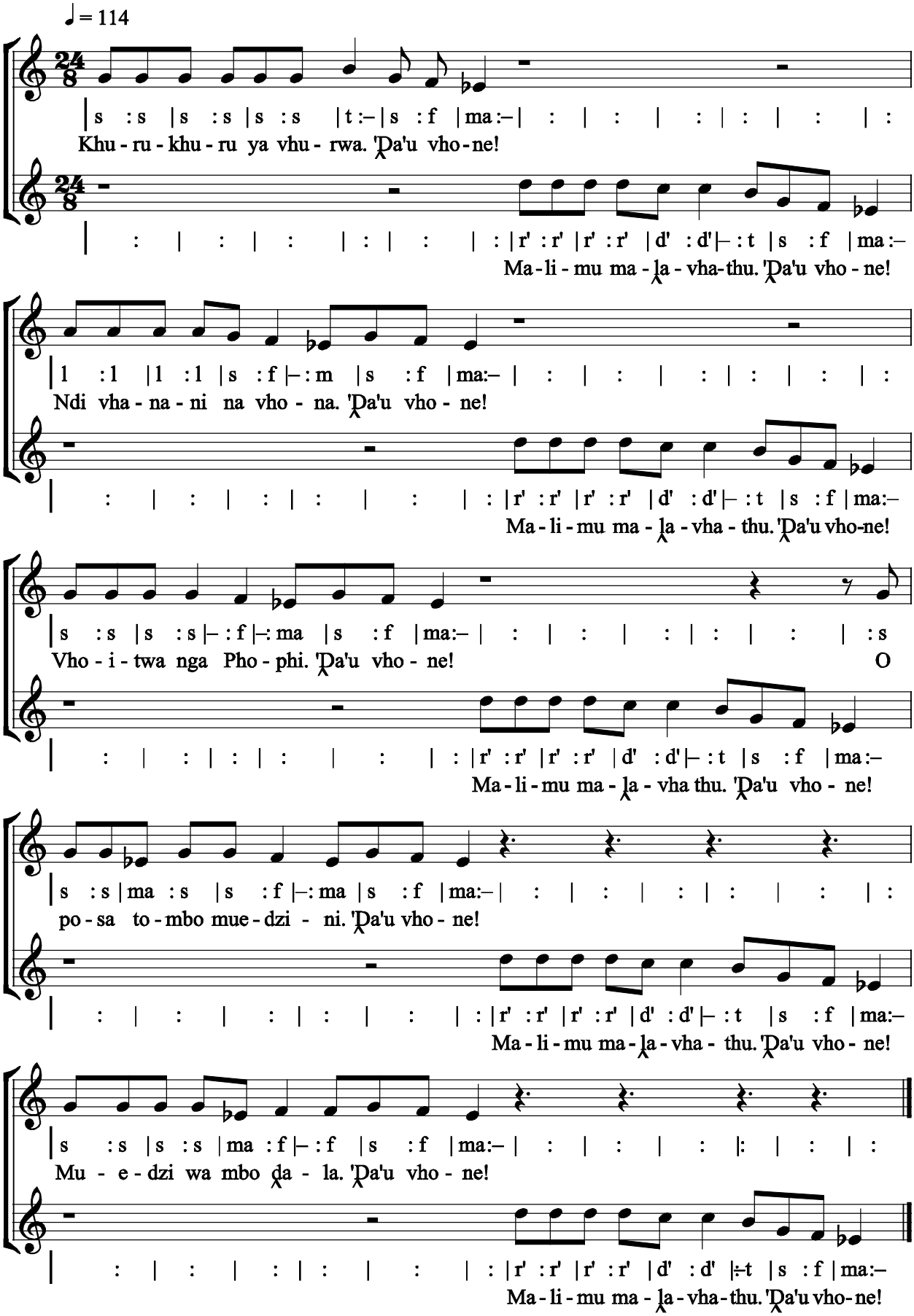
This story warns children against paedophiles and rapists (see ‘The cannibal’s tooth’). Children are not to stop and speak to them (i.e. to throw stones in the river). However, Phophi disobeys the adult instruction, and now she and her young friends are confronted by a dangerous man (the flooded river).

The paedophile is able to disguise his true nature and assumes the form of a beautiful lourie. The bird speaks in a melodious voice and lures the children to his home. Here he sexually abuses the older Phophi while holding the smaller children captive.

He returns the children and presents himself at the royal homestead as their benefactor. However, the children reveal the lourie’s true identity in song: he is no bird but a person who harms others.

The narrator and informants indicated that the king did not consider the truth. They pointed out that it sometimes is of little use to complain to kings, especially when women are the victims, or, as in this case, the culprit is a member of the royal family. Cloete (1980) in contrast points out that kings usually support communal opinion, and that they have a strong sense of justice.

1 *Khurukhuru*, the purple-crested lourie *(Tauraco porphyreolophus)*.
2 The south is associated with the neigbouring Sotho people, some of whose ancestors are claimed to have been cannibals.


♩ = 114
24/8
| s : s | s : s | s : s | t :– | s : f | ma :– | : | : | : | : | : | :
Khu - ru - khu - ru ya vhu - rwa. 'Da'u vho - ne!
| : | : | : | : | : | : | r' : r' | r' : r' | d' : d' |– : t | s : f | ma :–
Ma - li - mu ma - la - vha - thu. 'Da'u vho - ne!
| l : l | l : l | s : f |– : m | s : f | ma :– | : | : | : | : | : | :
Ndi vha - na - ni na vho - na. 'Da'u vho - ne!
| : | : | : | : | : | : | r' : r' | r' : r' | d' : d' |– : t | s : f | ma :–
Ma - li - mu ma - la - vha - thu. 'Da'u vho-ne!
| s : s | s : s |– : f |–: ma | s : f | ma :– | : | : | : | : | : | : s
Vho - i - twa nga Pho - phi. 'Da'u vho - ne! O
| : | : | : | : | : | : | r' : r' | r' : r' | d' : d' |– : t | s : f | ma :–
Ma - li - mu ma - la - vha thu. 'Da'u vho - ne!
| s : s | ma : s | s : f |–: ma | s : f | ma :– | : | : | : | : | : | :
po - sa to - mbo mue - dzi - ni. 'Da'u vho - ne!
| : | : | : | : | : | : | r' : r' | r' : r' | d' : d' |– : t | s : f | ma :–
Ma - li - mu ma - la - vha - thu. 'Da'u vho - ne!
| s : s | s : s | ma : f |– : f | s : f | ma :– | : | : | : |: | : | :
Mu - e - dzi wa mbo da - la. 'Da'u vho - ne!
| : | : | : | : | : | : | r' : r' | r' : r' | d' : d' |÷t | s : f | ma :–
Ma - li - mu ma - la - vha - thu. 'Da'u vho - ne!

A man without proper legs

Salungano! Salungano! Here comes a story!

Now, there was a certain man. He was a cripple. He lived in a cave with his mother, wife and children. Only his mother was able to open that cave.

When this man came upon boys looking after their cattle, he taunted them: 'Hey! Hello boys! When I steal your cattle you will not able to catch me!'

'What, you?' they replied, 'one who doesn't even have proper legs? We will surely catch you!'

The man caught their cattle and rushed home with them. When he arrived there through the dense brush, he sang:

(Narrator)
Na mmvulela, mmawe hae! Hey mother, open for me!
Na mmvulela, inwi mmawe! You, mother, open for me!
Na mmvulela, asivha vho swika! Open for me, here they come!

(Chorus)
Ha vhuya tshipiringano! Here comes trouble!

That old woman opened the cave for him. All the cattle went inside.

Well, when they slaughtered an ox, they gave the old woman only its entrails to eat. The meat was for the man, his wife and their children.

Three days passed. The man went out to steal more cattle.

'Hey, boys!' he called, 'will you be able to catch me if I take your cattle?'

'Where will you go with them? We will catch you!'

'Watch this,' the man said.

He beat those cattle! He beat them hard and they ran! When he arrived home, he sang again:

Na mmvulela, mmawe hae!
Na mmvulela, inwi mmawe! …

That old woman opened the cave once more. All the cattle went inside. The man followed them and his mother closed the opening. Those young men who were outside ran around, looking for their animals.

Well, the next day the man went out again. He found another herd of cattle.

Na mmvulela, mmawe hae!
Na mmvulela, inwi mmawe! …

His mother refused to open the cave.

Wa ndi fha gumbo. You give me meat.
Pata i nani? But what kind of meat is it?

(Chorus)
Ha vhuya tshipiringano! Here comes trouble!

Hah! Those young men came.

‘Hey!’ they shouted to the thief, ‘your mother’s fanny, you are dead! Where did you take all the other cattle to? You are now trapped!’

Then they grabbed that man and beat him. They beat him hard. He died there. Those young men took their cattle and went away.

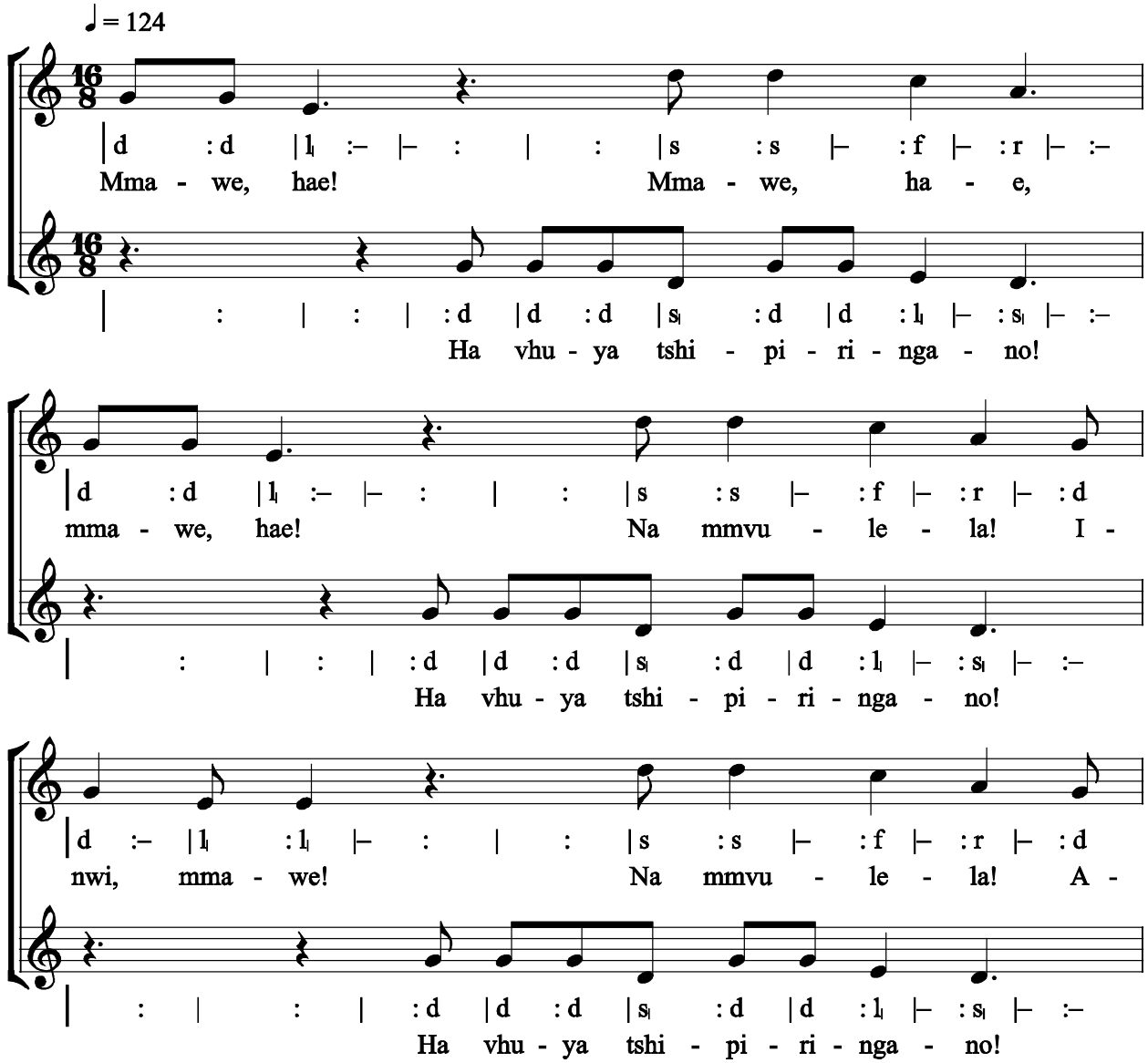
The wife said to her mother-in-law, ‘I should kill you too. Why didn’t you open the cave for him?’

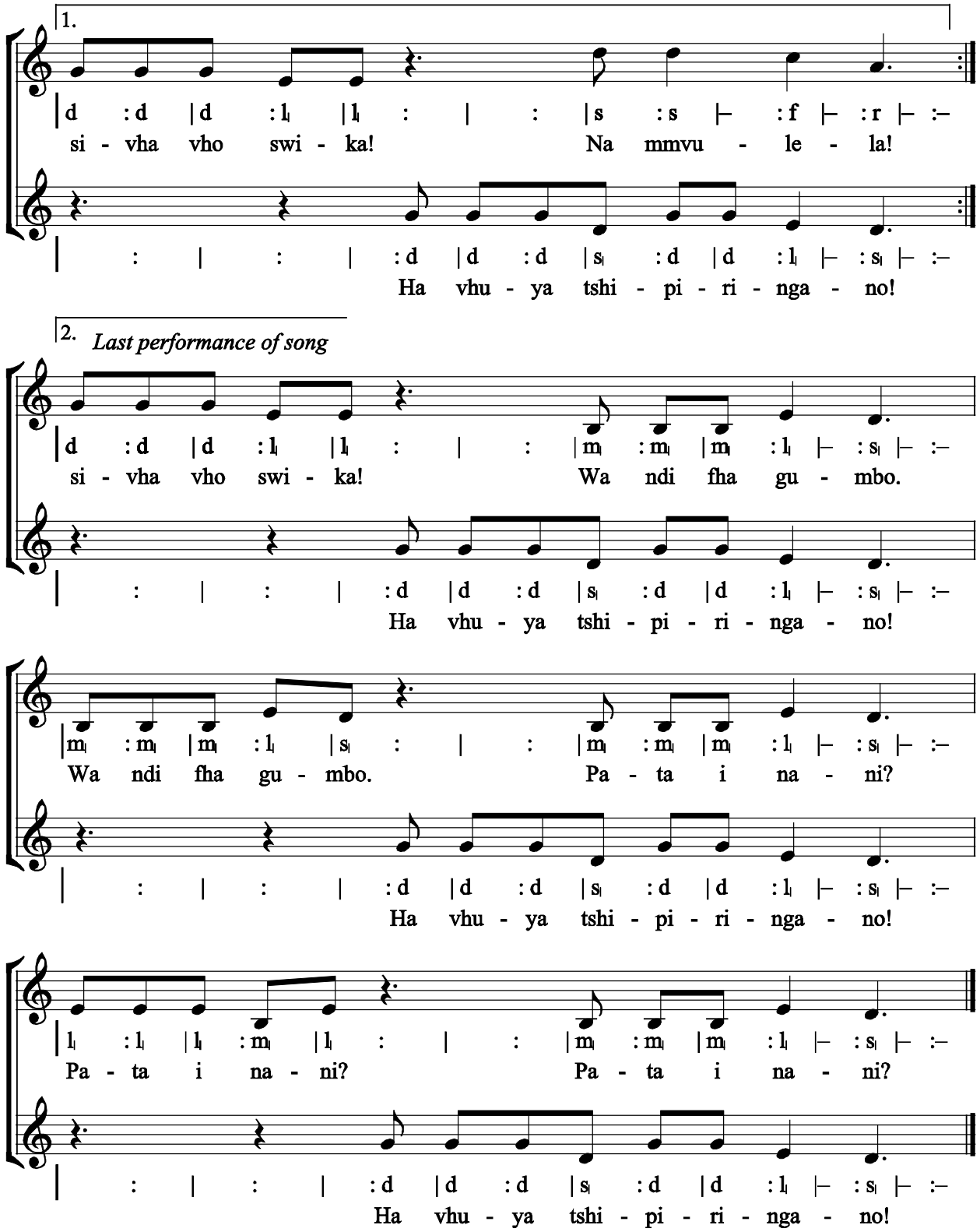
‘You ate meat with your husband,’ the old woman replied. ‘You gave me the entrails only. I paid him back by letting him be killed.’

Ha mbo ḓi vha ndi u fa ha lungano. This is the end of the story.

Phadzima, 15/03/91

This story is a warning to those who exploit elderly women. Such women have an important position in the family and they must be respected accordingly.




1.
d :d |d :l, |l, : | : |s :s |– :f |– :r |– :–
si - vha vho swi - ka! Na mmvu - le - la!
: | : | :d |d :d |s, :d |d :l, |– :s, |– :–
Ha vhu - ya tshi - pi - ri - nga - no!
2. Last performance of song
d :d |d :l, |l, : | : |m, :m, |m, :l, |– :s, |– :–
si - vha vho swi - ka! Wa ndi fha gu - mbo.
: | : | :d |d :d |s, :d |d :l, |– :s, |– :–
Ha vhu - ya tshi - pi - ri - nga - no!
m, :m, |m, :l, |s, : | : |m, :m, |m, :l, |– :s, |– :–
Wa ndi fha gu - mbo. Pa - ta i na - ni?
: | : | :d |d :d |s, :d |d :l, |– :s, |– :–
Ha vhu - ya tshi - pi - ri - nga - no!
l, :l, |l, :m, |l, : | : |m, :m, |m, :l, |– :s, |– :–
Pa - ta i na - ni? Pa - ta i na - ni?
: | : | :d |d :d |s, :d |d :l, |– :s, |– :–
Ha vhu - ya tshi - pi - ri - nga - no!

The young woman and the zebra

Salungano! Salungano! Here comes a story!

Now, there was a certain girl who refused to be married. She courted a wild zebra. He suited her.

When people came to her home to ask for a wife, she rolled in the ashpile to make herself repulsive.

'Ah!' those people exclaimed, 'we will not come back. We cannot accept someone like her.'

Then, when they had left, the girl washed herself. She cooked and put the food in a basket. She went up there into the mountain. When she arrived there, she knelt respectfully.

(Narrator)

Siwawa-wawa-siwawa!	(Vocables)
Siwela vharati vhanna.	Siwela spurns men.
U rata lipeli shangoni.	She loves wild zebras.

(Chorus)

Ha vhuya gole ntsa na siwa ga godoga.	When the cloud returns, my duiker[1] will leave.

The zebra came galloping closer, *kubudu! kubudu! kubudu!*

'Hey!' he said, 'are you here already?'

'Yes, I have arrived.'

She opened the basket. She gave food to the zebra. That zebra ate. He finished eating.

'There are vegetables left for tomorrow,' the girl said. She put them in that basket.

'Dear beloved,' she said, 'I must leave quickly. People are about to return from the fields. I do not want them to see me.'

She took her basket and left. At home she quickly rolled in the ashpile before her parents arrived back from their field. When they got home, they only found that pathetic little thing.

Others who came to look for a wife said, 'We have arrived here in the courtyard. Now, where is the girl?'

'There!' those at home replied.

'Uh … uh, no!' the visitors said, 'we do not want something like *that.'*

Then! The next day people left for their fields. The girl remained behind. She washed herself very well and combed her hair. She cooked and took her basket. She went over there to the mountain. She arrived there and knelt.

Siwawawawa si wawa!
Siwela vharati vhanna …

The zebra galloped toward the girl, *lingindi! lingindi! lingindi!*

'Hah!' he said secretively, 'so you are already here?'

'Yes, but you are late.'

'Hey! I was quite far from here.'

The zebra jumped towards the girl, *khilikhithi!* 'Now, where is the porridge?'

The girl opened the basket. She fed him and he ate.

Now! The girl's brother was hiding. He wanted to see what prevented his sister from marrying. Hah! He saw!

When the girl arrived home, she rolled around in the ash. When her parents came back, they said to their son, 'Now, will this sister of yours ever marry?'

'She will marry,' he replied. 'I saw what she is up to. Tomorrow I will rush to the mountain.'

So! Truly! Before the girl went to the mountain, her brother went there with an axe.

Siwawawawa si wawa!
Siwela vharati vhanna …

The big zebra came galloping along, *kubudu! kubudu!* The young man hacked him in the neck, *munyununyu!*

Later that day the girl went to the mountain. She took the food. When she arrived there, she knelt.

'Ah!' she said, 'what is this that looks like blood?' She became quiet and then sang:

(Narrator only)
Siwawawawa si wawa!
Siwela vharati vhanna …

'Where could he have gone to? Hah! Let me walk here where he always comes through.'

She walked a short distance. She found him, hacked to pieces. That zebra was dead.

This is the end of the story. Amen.

Phadzima, 21/09/91

This narrative describes a sensitive, secret love affair between a young unmarried woman and a stranger, portrayed as a zebra. The narrator explains that the zebra is a man 'from the forest.' Forests are frightening, untamed places whose periphery marks the border between control and disorder. They are home to outsiders whose actual benign nature does not easily surmount irrational prejudice and fear of the unknown. The vision of the zebra as an unsuitable husband seems to have caused an almost uncontrolled, frenzied reaction by the brother.

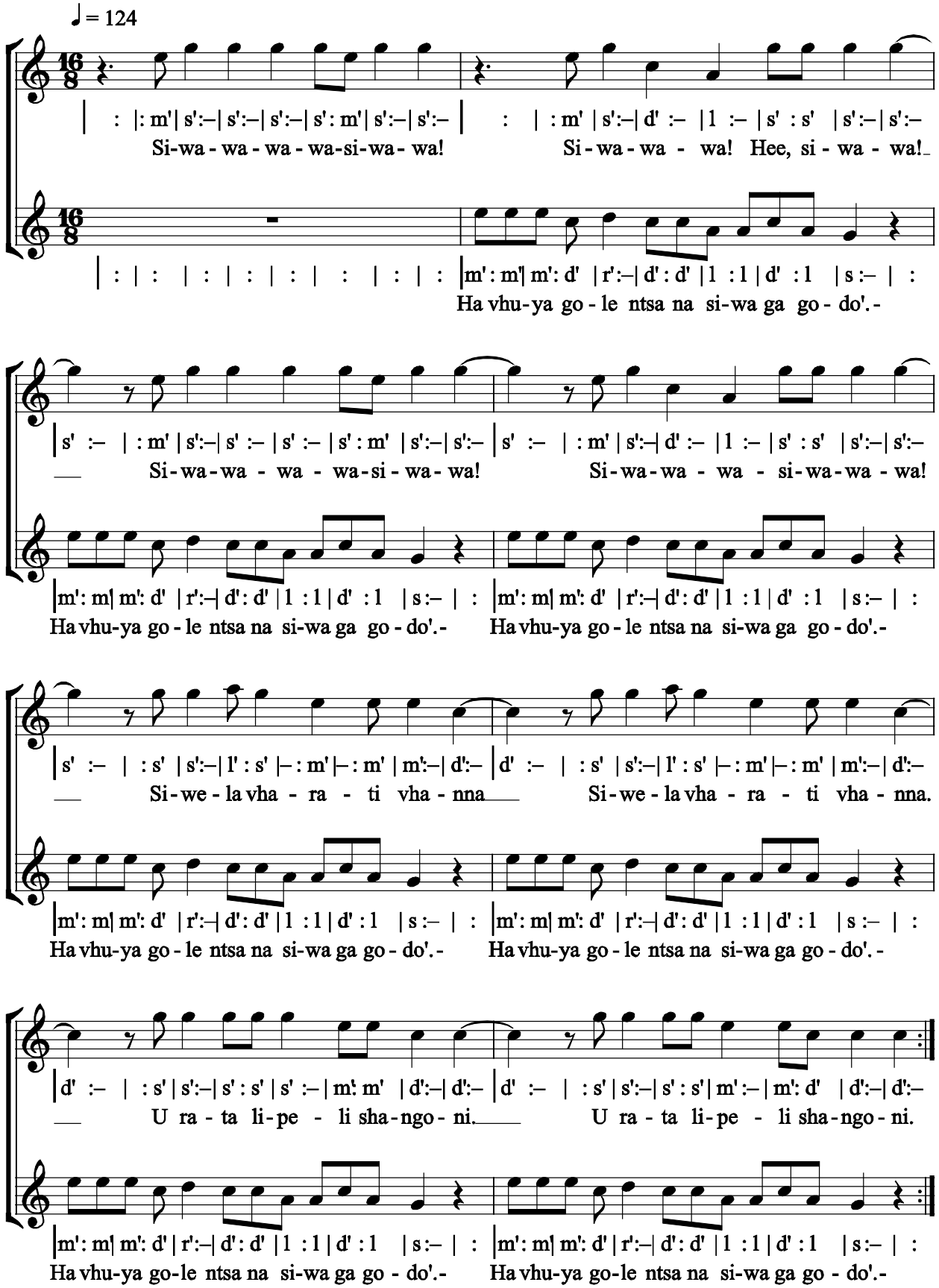
Strangers historically were accepted only if their origins were known, if they were not fleeing justice and if they showed that they could be trusted. Even so, they usually had little social influence and retained a measure of outsidership (Du Plessis, 1940).

Nenzhelele (1961) and Maumela (1990) document a similar narrative in which the undesired lover takes the form of a frog that is killed by the woman's father. In addition, zebras are identified by Nenzhelele as non-Venda people living to the south.

The illicit liaison also militates against the pattern of matrilineal descent that requires cross-cousin marriage (marriage with the mother's brother's daughter). Because of this, a proscription is placed on secret romantic liaisons. Families must be aware of, and even consulted in love relationships (see 'To be human again'). Narrator Sophia Nefolovhodwe remarked that young people in the past often indicated to their parents that they loved someone and wished to marry them. However, if such a person did not meet parental approval, there was nothing they could do but obey. This was very painful.

The absence of a chorus part in the last performance of Siwela's song is a literal representation of the disintegration of Siwela's secret world. Call and response patterns in Venda music are a basic technique for the creation and maintainance of social relationships. Song leaders thus habitually urge chorus singers to respond to them with enthusiasm.

1 A small antelope (genus *cephalophus)*. The meaning of this line is unclear.


♩= 124
Si-wa - wa - wa - wa-si-wa - wa!
Si - wa - wa - wa! Hee, si - wa - wa!
Ha vhu-ya go - le ntsa na si-wa ga go - do'.-
Si-wa-wa - wa - wa-si - wa - wa!
Si-wa-wa - wa - si-wa-wa - wa!
Ha vhu-ya go - le ntsa na si-wa ga go - do'.-
Ha vhu-ya go - le ntsa na si-wa ga go - do'.-
Si - we - la vha - ra - ti vha - nna
Si - we - la vha - ra - ti vha - nna.
Ha vhu-ya go - le ntsa na si-wa ga go - do'.-
Ha vhu-ya go - le ntsa na si-wa ga go - do'.-
U ra - ta li - pe - li sha - ngo - ni.
U ra - ta li - pe - li sha - ngo - ni.
Ha vhu-ya go-le ntsa na si-wa ga go - do'.-
Ha vhu-ya go-le ntsa na si-wa ga go - do'.-

Takalani Munyai

We went to Tshikundamalema in June 2005 to record this narrator's life story. After a long search, we learned that she had died in 2003 from illness. We managed to trace of one her daughters, Tshavhungwe Mulovhedzi.

Takalani was one of four children, three daughters and a boy. She was born in a ruling family at Tshikundamalema. She was one of four wives of Thoga Munyai, a migrant labourer who later became a local headman.

Tshavhungwe described her mother as a person who knew *ngano* and customs related to royalty. She also liked making jokes. She cared for her children because she bought them clothes, blankets and food. She farmed with goats and sold them for income. She was a hard worker and planted her own crops.

Tshavhungwe did not care for *ngano*, and could not even relate a fragment of any story. She attempted to save face by kindly singing 'Twinkle twinkle little star' for us. She learnt this song at school in one of the first grades. We reciprocated by telling her the story her mother told Ina le Roux. It is entitled 'Things are falling apart.'

Things are falling apart

Salungano! Salungano! Here comes a story!

A group of girls said, 'Let us gather firewood.'

They found a gathering of animals sitting on chairs. One of the girls liked the lion very much.

'The sun is setting,' those girls said later, 'let us go.'

The lion's girlfriend tried to get up, but she could not stand or speak. The other girls fled.

Later the lion's girlfriend was seen carrying a baby on her back.[1]

(Narrator)

Ayuwi-yuwi-yu!	Oh dear, oh dear!
Nda kanda ŋiwashe wee!	I am in big trouble!
Wa kanda ŋiwaku dini?	You knew what you were doing.
Wa kanda ŋiwaku dini	Did you not know you were
wa kanda ŋwandomboni?	stepping on a sharp stone?
Zwino ṱoḓe ŋanga?	Perhaps you need a diviner?[2]
Nn̂e ŋweni walwo.	I knew what I was doing.

(Chorus)

Tshinalunde, tshinalunde!	This is a calamity!

But the girl did not really care. She also became the hyena's girlfriend.

Ayuwi-yuwi-yu!
Nda kanda ŋiwashe wee! …

Indeed, the girl did not know the price she would pay. She walked with a calabash filled with termites[3] on her head. She did not see an eagle soaring overhead. The eagle dived down and cracked the calabash, *puvhu!*

(Narrator chants)
Nomuthomu dza pano! Termites are scattering!

(Chorus chants)
A dzi peli! There are many more of them!

Nomuthomu dza pano!
A dzi peli! …

The eagle pecked many times and ate all the termites.

The girl continued to swank. Now everybody wanted her termites. Dear Lord! The hyenas ran with the other animals. See, they found her! And the eagle soared over their heads, calling *khau! khau!*

The lion, hyena, eagle and the other animals bought the girl everything she desired: nappies, food and soap for the baby, and perfume for herself.

This girl! She washed herself and dressed beautifully. She put the baby calmly on her back. She went to her parents' home.

'Hey,' her mother said, 'we have a visitor. Spread the reedmat for her.'

The girl greeted her family respectfully. She sat silently while her relatives peered at her.

'Do you not recognise me?'

'No, we are sitting here, not knowing who you are.'

'Do you not remember your own child?'

'Who?'

'It is me, Azwidivhalei.'

'Oh dear, my child!'

The other girls arrived at that house. They said, 'Look at what Azwidivhalei has over there! Let us go and collect more firewood.'

They rushed to the place of chairs but found no-one there. All left except one girl.

The animals arrived one by one. Then they were all there! They found the girl sitting on a chair. They came pounding towards her, those things that eat raw meat. One of them grabbed her off the chair, *ṱiki-ṱiki!* He started to devour her, *purr, purr, purr!* She became their prey. They tore her apart!

'Give the head to me!' the lion said. 'Leave it!'

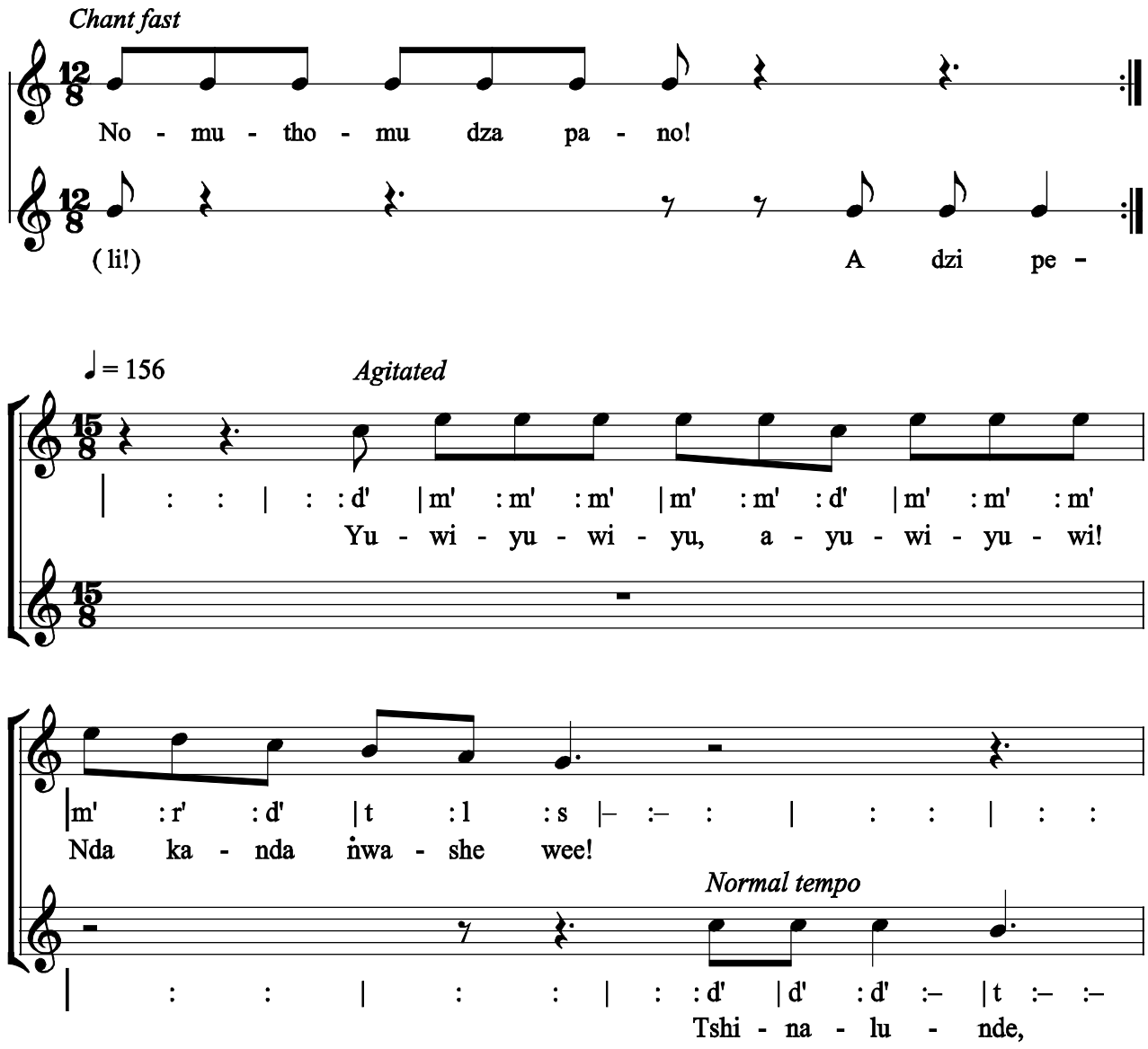
So the other animals came with the girl's head and gave it to him. The lion took feathers, grass stalks and twigs, and thrust them into the mauled head. He gave it to the eagle who called, *khau! khau!* and soared into the sky. When he was flying high above the ground, he let the head go. It fell onto the ground and bounced, *puvhu! puvhu!*

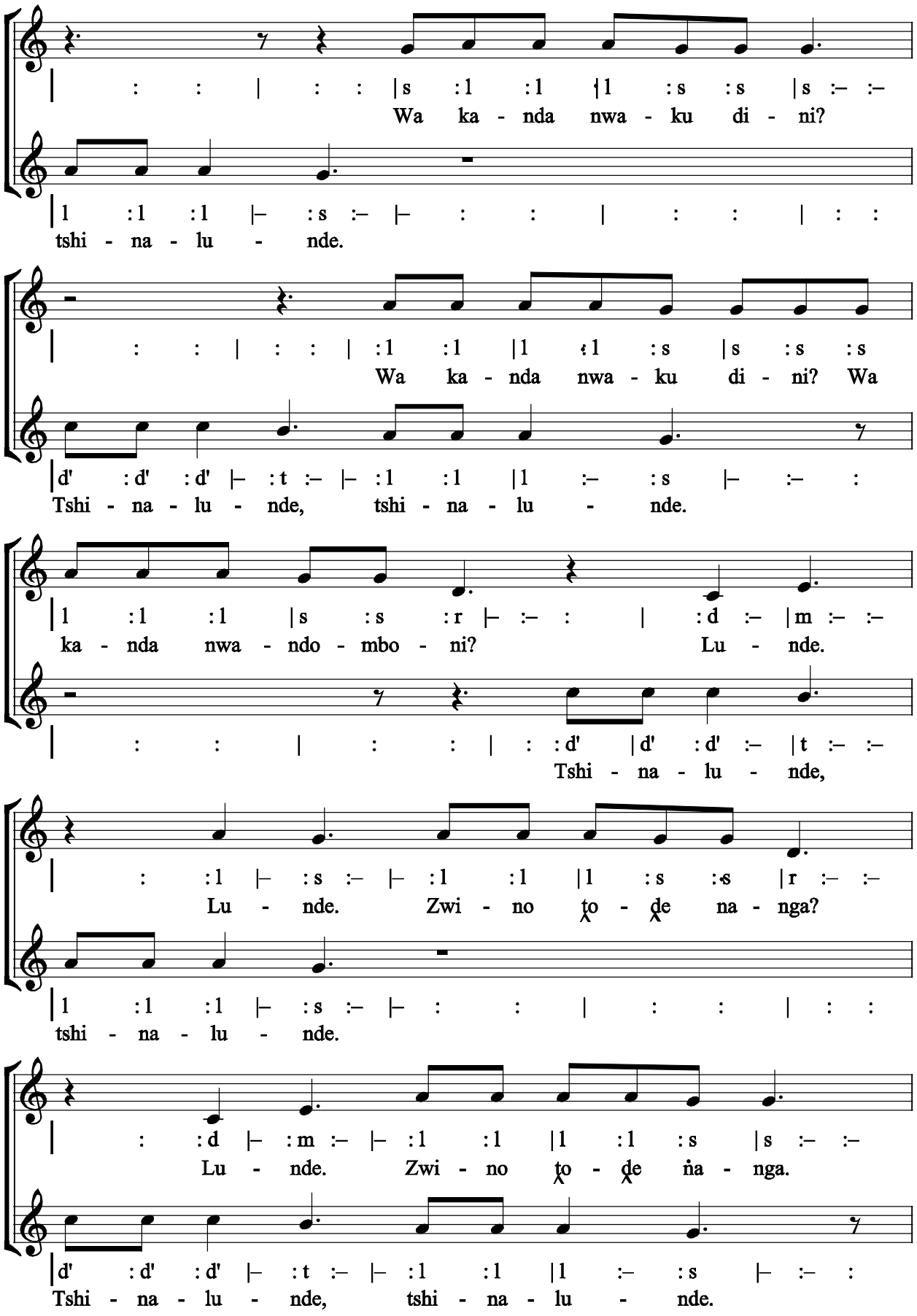
Ha vha u fa ha ṅwana wa lungano. This is the end of this child that is a story.

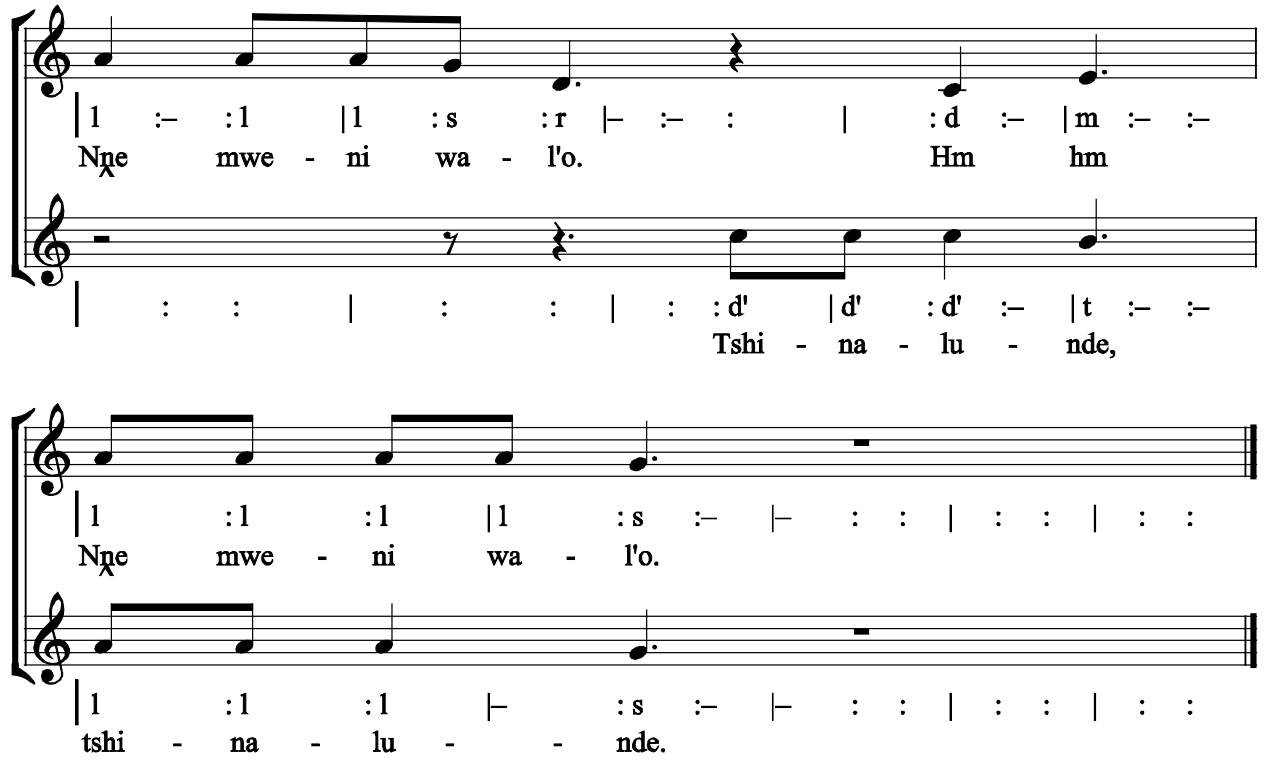
Tshikundamalema, 1/12/91

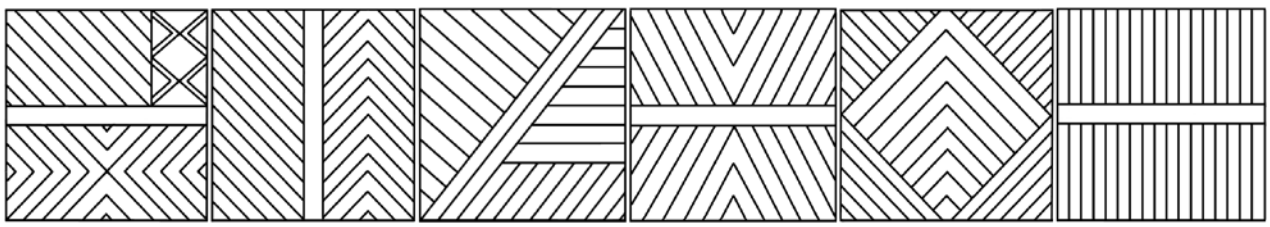
It is the prerogative of older men to sit on chairs because they have wealth and authority. Collecting firewood is a euphemism for young women who initiate affairs with such older men. Azwidivhalei, whose name appropriately translates as 'Things are falling apart,' becomes the mistress of a number of men. Her friends become jealous, and also start affairs. However, one of them is brutally raped and murdered. The end of the story is a warning to girls who also may be thinking of finding wealthy lovers.

1 A similar theme appears in a Shona narrative (see Tracey, 1986). Cases of unmarried pregnant girls historically were regarded in a serious light. The main reasons for this were that the rights and authority of a girl's father were undermined, and that the labour and reproductive potential of the girl was curtailed. Provocative behaviour on the part of a girl did not indemnify a man from being sued for compensation (Cloete, 1980).
2 Apparently to determine who the father of the child is.
3 A local delicacy, used metaphorically to represent the girl's licentiousness.

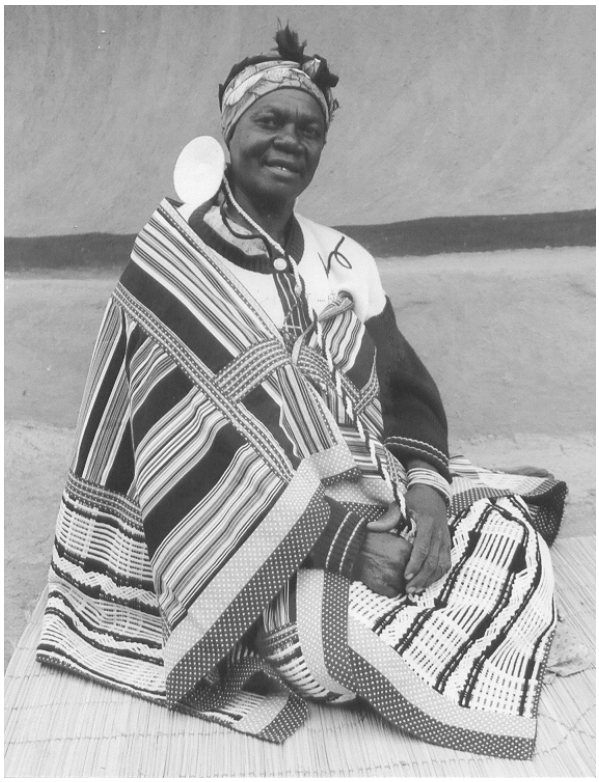



: : | : : |s :1 :1 |1 :s :s |s :– :–
Wa ka - nda nwa - ku di - ni?
1 :1 :1 |– :s :– |– : : | : : | : :
tshi - na - lu - nde.
: : | : : | :1 :1 |1 :1 :s |s :s :s
Wa ka - nda nwa - ku di - ni? Wa
d' :d' :d' |– :t :– |– :1 :1 |1 :– :s |– :– :
Tshi - na - lu - nde, tshi - na - lu - nde.
1 :1 :1 |s :s :r |– :– : | :d :– |m :– :–
ka - nda nwa - ndo - mbo - ni? Lu - nde.
: : | : : | : :d' |d' :d' :– |t :– :–
Tshi - na - lu - nde,
: :1 |– :s :– |– :1 :1 |1 :s :s |r :– :–
Lu - nde. Zwi - no to - de na - nga?
1 :1 :1 |– :s :– |– : : | : : | : :
tshi - na - lu - nde.
: :d |– :m :– |– :1 :1 |1 :1 :s |s :– :–
Lu - nde. Zwi - no to - de na - nga.
d' :d' :d' |– :t :– |– :1 :1 |1 :– :s |– :– :
Tshi - na - lu - nde, tshi - na - lu - nde.


| 1 :– :1 | 1 :s :r |– :– : | :d :– | m :– :–
Nne mwe - ni wa - l'o. Hm hm
| : : | : : | : :d' | d' :d' :– | t :– :–
Tshi - na - lu - nde,
| 1 :1 :1 | 1 :s :– |– : : | : : | : :
Nne mwe - ni wa - l'o.
| 1 :1 :1 |– :s :– |– : : | : : | : :
tshi - na - lu - - nde.



Sophia Nefolovhodwe



Sophia Nefolovhodwe lives at Folovhodwe in the Limpopo valley, close to narrators Matodzi Goma and Tambani Mamavhulo.

Sophia's homestead is next to the Folovhodwe Trading Store. It comprises a sleeping hut, a kitchen with a corrugated roof tied down at the corners to large stones, and a goat pen. There is also a meeting place with a collapsed roof and an informal bar in which dim figures of drinkers can be seen, and whose swearing voices are clearly audible.

Sophia's sleeping hut has a double bed with a frilly bedcover. There are a few modest carpets on the floor. She also has a wardrobe, kitchen unit and dresser. On the kitchen unit is a large glass punch bowl with suspended cups, resting on a purple knitted woollen table cloth. There is a large ceramic strawberry on the dresser and a radio on the bedside table. Candle stubs are placed at various points. There is a black and white photograph of Sophia against the wall, showing her as a young woman sitting on a chair. She has long legs and a strong, attractive face, and she looks confidently at the camera. She exudes the same confidence in speaking to us.

Sophia did not know her age. 'I did not go to school,' she explained. She seemed to be in her late seventies. She was born at Helula ('in the mountains'), a village near Hamabila, where her father was a headman.

Her youth was spent in poverty, and she constantly referred to her suffering during this time. Her family lived off locusts and edible plants. During times of drought people harvested the roots of the *muthobi* tree *(Boscia albitrunca*, the shepherd's tree). They pounded them and made a thin gruel. They also harvested the fruit of the baobab tree.

When Sophia was small, she and her friends gathered around the fireplace where they roasted maize cobs, and old people told stories and taught them games to play. One such game is *khube*, a guessing game in which two or three people extend their arms and put their hands together. They take a small object like a stone, and hide it in one of the hands. The spectators then have to guess in which hand the object is.

There were shops during her youth, but they were far away and belonged to white traders. People had no access to commercially produced maize meal or milling machines, and they processed their own maize crop. But now shops are close by, and people can buy food there.

Sophia also saw a car for the first time when she was a child. She related with much amusement how it frightened her. She thought only robbers drove cars and that they kidnapped people.

Sophia became married by family arrangement. Her bridewealth comprised eight cattle, a blanket and snuff. She said that young people often indicated to their parents that they loved someone and wished to marry them. However, if such a person did not meet parental approval, there was nothing one could do. You had to obey, even if it was painful (see 'The young woman and the zebra').

Sophia was the second of three wives. Her husband divided his time between his wives, allowing each wife three days in turn. She loved him, even though he occasionally beat her just to keep her 'in line.' Her husband, who is now deceased, was a headman. He died when Sophia was already eligible for old-age pension, so his death did not lead to poverty for her.

Sophia has become used to living without a husband and children (she is childless). She is quite happy on her own. She supports two boys of schoolgoing age: one is the child of a brother and the other the child of a sister.

Sophia enjoys cooking and eating eggs laid by her hens. She is happy when she is able to buy bread and cooldrink. She becomes troubled when she is treated badly, when someone steals from her and refuses to confess.

What a woman!

Salungano! Salungano! Here comes a story!

Look, there was famine.

'We must make a plan,' the baboons said. 'Let us skin someone. Then she can go to the king's home. She will become his wife and bring us food.'[1]

And so the baboons skinned one of their own. Hey! She became a beautiful girl and entered the royal homestead.

'Wow!' the king said, 'what a woman!'

He bought her a decorated dress and other things to wear. She was beautiful and worked for him.

Then they showed her the place where the maize cobs were kept.[2]

'There is food here,' they said. 'Take the cobs out and pound the kernels.'

'I have a plan,' the girl said to herself.

As she pounded the maize, she threw some kernels in a clay pot. She carried the pot to the river and sat down. She threw the kernels on the ground. The baboons came and ate them. And so they survived a while longer.

When the young woman pounded again, the same happened. She carried the maize in that clay pot. When she arrived at the river, she threw the kernels on the ground. And they were all picked up.

'See, we made a plan,' those baboons said. 'Now we will not starve.'

One day the young woman said, 'Now look man, I have to stop for a while. These people will suspect me when there is no more maize. And they will wonder what kind of person pounds day after day.'

And so, when the baboons came to the river they found nothing.

'Hey!' they complained, 'she did not bring us food today. Do you see her? This person is stuffing herself. She does not give us anything. It is better that we return this skin to her. Yes, we will take it to her!'

All the baboons gathered. They said, 'Let us go to the king's deputy first.'

And so they sang:

Nyamuleli o sia nguvho yawe asiyi!	Nyamuleli left her blanket behind!
Nyamuleli o sia nguvho yawe ya pfene!	Nyamuleli left her blanket of baboon skin behind!
Nyamuleli o sia nguvho yawe ngeno!	Nyamuleli left her blanket behind.

Now! Those baboons arrived at the king's deputy.

‘Hey! Hey!’ he said, ‘the song of the baboons is beautiful. We must take them to the king’s homestead.’

Yes, the king’s deputy lead them there.

Nyamuleli o sia nguvho yawe asiyi!
Nyamuleli o sia nguvho yawe ya pfene! …

And now they arrived at the royal homestead.

‘Look! Look!’ the king said, ‘the baboons have come with a song! Go to the door, my wives. Sit down and see what the baboons are doing over there.’

‘Well, I am not going,’ that owner of the skin said.

‘You have to go and see what is happening!’ the others insisted.

‘I am still a young bride,’ the girl replied. ‘According to our custom you must pay me to go out.’[3]

Well, the king took out money and told that girl, ‘Now go there!’

When the girl arrived there, she knelt. Then the baboons came with the skin.

Nyamuleli o sia nguvho yawe asiyi!
Nyamuleli o sia nguvho yawe ya pfene! …

Then that girl got up with a grunt, *‘ho! ho!’*

The baboons put the skin around her, and left.

The king was sitting on his chair. ‘Look!’ he said amazed, ‘my new wife has left! By the ancestors, I was married to a baboon!’

Ha mbo ḓi vha u fhela ha lungano. This is the end of the story.

Folovhodwe, 30/09/92

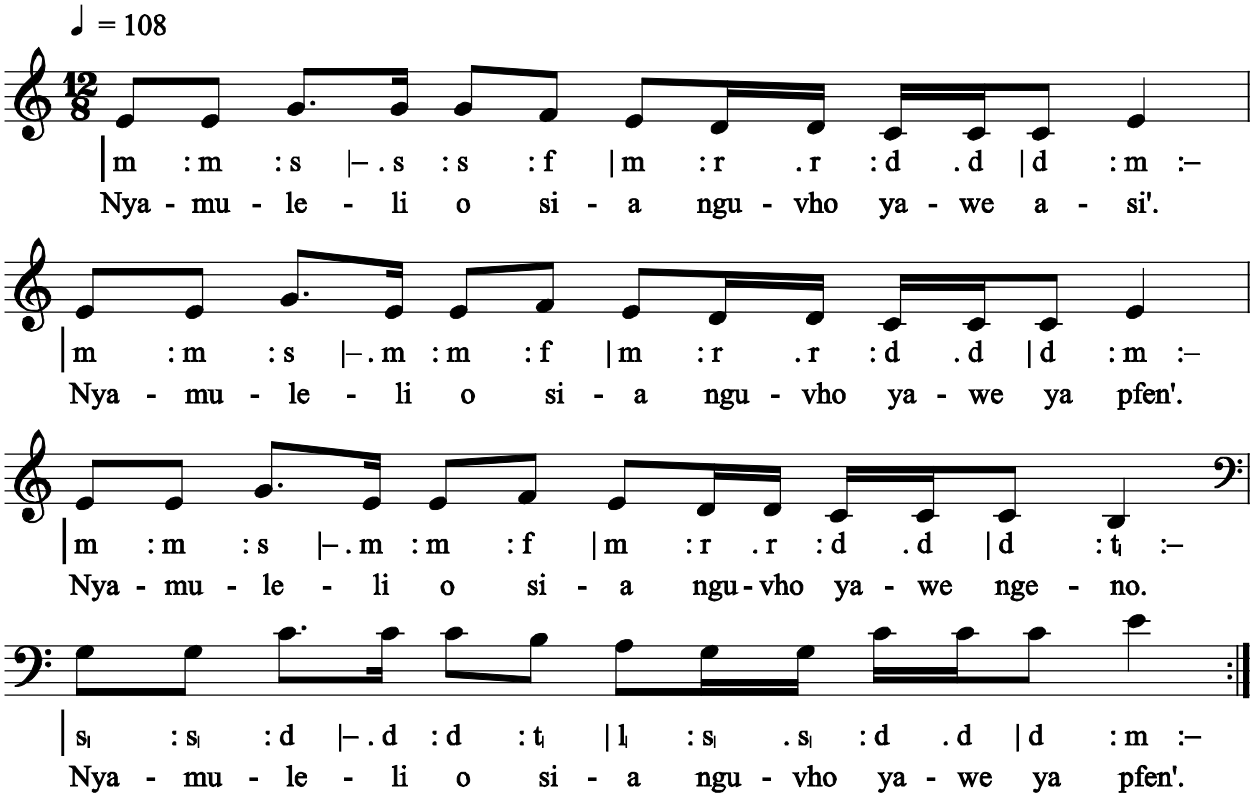
Famine often forces people to take desperate measures. Parents may decide to take their children to others who are better able to care for them. It is a familiar strategy to send a girl to work for others, or marry, in order that she unobtrusively may set aside food for her family. This is not regarded as common theft, nor is this kind of marriage regarded as conventional.

The story also points to the habitual exploitation, albeit under extreme conditions, of the weak, particularly women. In addition, the story reminds listeners not to aspire beyond their social status, nor to forsake their family ties.

1 Narratives with a similar theme appear in various other *ngano* collections. As in other African oral cultures, baboons feature often in narratives because of their hominid characteristics and because they compete with humans for food resources. In particular, they are fond of raiding cultivated fields.

2 Maize cobs are stored in a small elevated hut. The legs of the hut are smeared with cattle dung to fend off insects.

3 A newly-married woman spends a period of seclusion in the house of the senior wife. This allows her to become familiar with her domestic duties and her in-laws (see ‘Crow-woman,’ note 3).



Mr Elephant sweats

Salungano! Salungano! This is where the story starts!

A boy was picking wild figs. Then Mr Elephant appeared. He thought that the boy would be a tasty morsel.

‘How are you my little prince?’

‘Hello!’ that boy said.

‘Hey, come here!’ Mr Elephant commanded.

‘Not now! Can I pick you some figs?’

‘All right then, pick some for me.’

Mr Elephant chewed the figs. He thought of a plan to get the boy down.

‘I have eaten enough,’ he said. ‘Get down.’

‘Not yet!’ the boy answered. ‘Can I sing you a song instead? And will you sing the chorus part?’

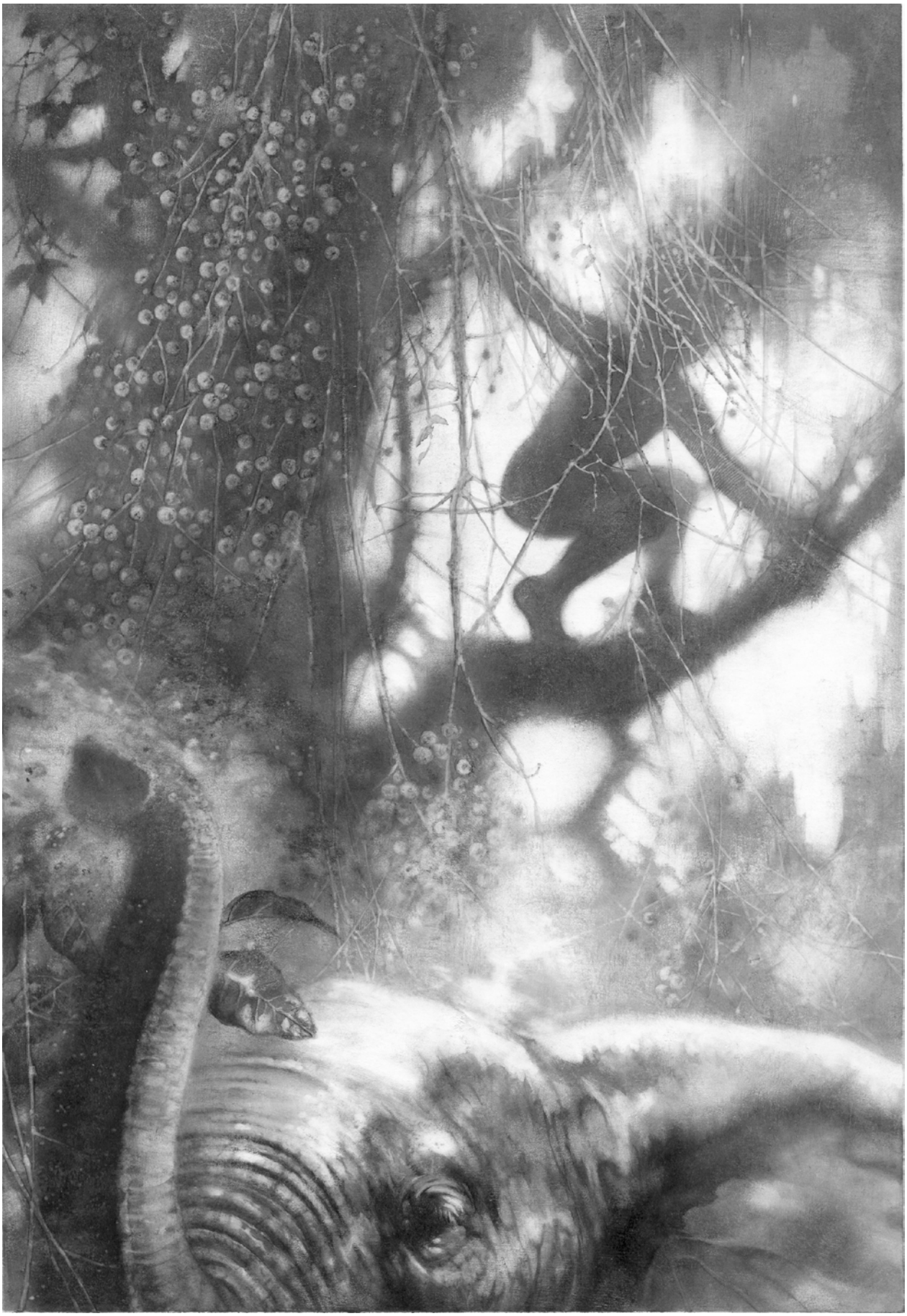
‘All right, let us sing.’

(Narrator)
Tseke-tseke, hee! (Meaning unknown)[1]

(Chorus)
Tsinga ndi tshali-tshali-tsha.’ (Meaning unclear)[2]

Mr Elephant sang and danced. A huge cloud of dust rose up and covered the tree.

‘There is so much dust that I can now escape,’ the boy said to himself.



Tseke-tseke, hee!
Tsinga ndi tshali-tshali-tshali.

Mr Elephant sang happily. His big feet made a lot of dust! And so the boy ran away.

Dust was still hanging over the tree.

'Your song makes me very happy little prince,' Mr Elephant said. 'But I am sweating, let me sit down.'

Mr Elephant rested and then peered into the tree. 'Hey boy, get down!'

Then the dust settled and Mr Elephant saw that the boy had run away.

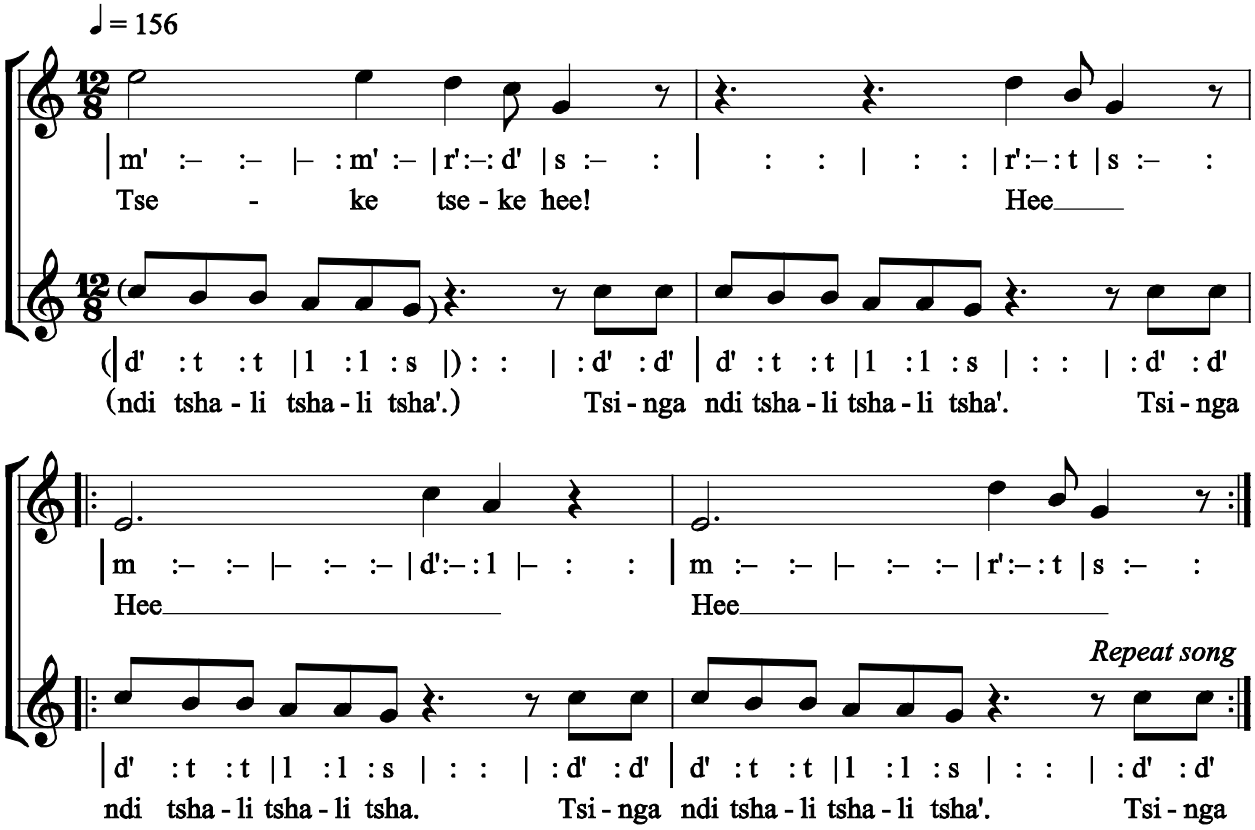
'Look!' he exclaimed, 'I let him escape! Ah, he is gone!'

Ha mbo ḓi vha ndi u fa ha lungano. This is the end of the story.

Folovhodwe, 30/09/92

This story portrays the fate of orphans who are too young or weak to defend themselves against adult relatives, here represented by the intimidating elephant (also see 'Hippopotamus throws his weight around'). These relatives exploit the vulnerability of the young to appropriate their inheritance. The clouds of dust caused by the elephant's feet represent the arguments that ensue over a deceased's possessions. As in the case of 'Hate,' children who are unable to defend themselves properly often have no option but to flee.

1 The song is mostly meaningless because the boy is too nervous to remember the correct words.
2 The term *tsinga* may refer to dancing.



Hippopotamus throws his weight around

Salungano! Salungano! Here comes a story!

Now, there were two little orphans, a brother and sister. The brother was the eldest. He always went out to look for food. He left his little sister behind. He locked her in the house. When he returned, he sang:

(Narrator)
Kha mmvulele Luti! Open Luti!
Ndi nn̂e, khaladzi yau! It is me, your brother!

(Chorus)
Matshelo ndi ya mbalelo. (Meaning unclear)[1]

She opened the door and he went in. Then the children ate together.

So, the brother got up the next morning. He went away again to look for food. When he came back, he sang once more:

Kha mmvulele Luti!
Ndi nn̂e …

Then she opened the door. He went in and they ate.

But a huge hippopotamus heard that boy singing. He came there. He wanted to eat that small child who was in the house.

'Open Luti!' he said with a gruff voice.

(Narrator sings with a gruff voice)[2]
Kha mmvulele Luti!
Ndi nn̂e …

The girl remained silent.

'This small child does not open the door,' the hippopotamus complained.

He went away. Then the brother came back.

Kha mmvulele Luti!
Ndi nn̂e …

The sister opened the door and her brother went in. They ate and ate and ate. The brother got up and left again.

'Ah!' that hippopotamus said, 'my voice is too gruff.'

And so he sang like the little brother:

(Narrator and chorus sing with a normal voice)
Kha mmvulele Luti!
Ndi nn̂e …

The child opened the door immediately, *vuli!*

That hippopotamus went inside. He sat down.

'Who does this plate belong to?' he asked.

‘My mother!’ the little sister replied.
The hippopotamus swallowed it, *kwiti!*
‘And whose pot is this?’
Kwiti!
And so that hippopotamus swallowed all those things of the mother.
Then he said, ‘Whose child are you?’
‘My mother’s.’
So he swallowed her too![3] Then he went back to the river, that hippopotamus, one of the water.
Hah! Then the brother returned.
‘Open Luti!’
Silence.
‘Open Luti, it is me, your brother!’
Nothing.
‘Hey, my mother’s child has been eaten,’ he said worriedly.
And so the brother made a musical bow.[4] Then he went to the river. He got there and sat on his heels.

(Narrator)

Tsho ḽa nyaṅwali wanga, nga tshi ḓe!	The one who ate my sister, let it come!
Nga tshi ḓe tshi ḓo nndya-vho, nga tshi ḓe!	Let him eat me too. Let it come!
Tsho ḽa khomba musidzana ndo lela.	He ate the girl I raised.

(Chorus)

Nga tshi ḓe!	Let it come!

The boy sat there on his heels. He saw the water. It rippled. The hippopotamus started to come out.

Tsho ḽa nyaṅwali wanga, nga tshi ḓe!
Nga tshi ḓe tshi ḓo nndya-vho, nga tshi ḓe! …

The hippopotamus did as that boy wanted. He came out and sat there.
‘Can I sing for you with my musical bow?’ the boy said.
‘Do it!’ the hippopotamus replied.

Tsho ḽa nyaṅwali wanga, nga tshi ḓe!
Nga tshi ḓe tshi ḓo nndya-vho, nga tshi ḓe! …

The stomach of that hippopotamus bulged. The boy had his musical bow which was like a spear. Then he stabbed that stomach.[5] His sister escaped and dashed away, *nzuṱu!* Those children ran home.
That thing was left behind. He was finished, *kwashaa!*

Ha mbo ḓi vha ndi u fa ha lungano.	This is the end of the story.

Folovhodwe, 30/09/92

This story shares a theme with ‘Mr Elephant sweats.’ Orphans often are at the mercy of unscrupulous relatives. Inherited property or any other form of financial support for young children (such as welfare grants) is managed on their behalf by their adult relatives, but in practice such children rarely receive any significant benefit.

1 Perhaps ‘tomorrow I will cut/tie switches.’ *Mbalelo* refers to switches tied to a roof structure over which thatch grass is placed.
2 Because Luti does not reply to the hippopotamus’s gruff voice, there is no chorus response here.
3 The hippopotamus appears to be the deceased mother’s brother. He not only takes his sister’s possessions, but also her daughter as his wife. Narratives in which monsters swallow people who subsequently are rescued by a boy hero are commonly found in Africa.
4 *Tshihwana*, a braced mouth-resonated bow originally played by boys, and later also by girls (see fig. 4; Kirby, 1968).
5 The use of the musical bow to stab the hippopotamus should not be taken literally. Like certain other instruments (see ‘The king and the musician’), this musical bow is used here to criticise the culprit publically in song and thus to shame him into submission.

Fig. 4. Nngwedzeni Tshamano of Phiphidi playing the *tshihwana*

♩. = 86

| s :– :m | m :– :r | d :t, :– | : :
Kha mmvu - le - le Lu - ti!

| d :d :s, | s, :s, : | : : | s, :d :d
(ndi ya mba - le - lo.) Ma - tshe - lo

| : : | : :r |– :t, :– | : :
Lu - ti!

| d :d :s, | s, :s, : | : : | s, :d :d
ndi ya mba - le - lo. Ma - tshe - lo

| s :m :m | m :m :m |– :d :– | : :
Ndi nne kha - la - dzi ya - u!

| d :d :s, | s, :s, : | : : | s, :d :d
ndi ya mba - le - lo. Ma - tshe - lo

| : : | : :r |– :t, :– | : :
Lu - ti!

| d :d :s, | s, :s, : | : : | s, :d :d
ndi ya mba - le - lo. Ma - tshe - lo

♩ = 136-140

16/8

| r : r | r : t, | r : r |– : d | t, : l, | s, :– | : | :

Tsho la ṅya - nwa - li wa - nga, nga tshi de!

16/8

| : | : | : | : | : | : |r : r |– : t,

Nga tshi de!

| r : r | r : r | r :– . r |– : d | t, : l, | s, :– | : | :

Nga tshi de tshi do nndya - vho, nga tshi de!

| : | : | : | : | : | : |r : r |– : t,

Nga tshi de!

| r : r | r : r | t, : r | r :– | d : t, | l, : s, | : | :

Tsho la kho - mba mu - si - dza - na ndo le - la.

| : | : | : | : | : | : |r : r |– : t,

Nga tshi de!

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