

## MUSIC AND LOGIC AMONG THE WAGOGO PEOPLE FROM TANZANIA: SOCIAL FUNCTION AND MUSICAL TECHNIQUE\*

### Introduction

Speaking about the title of this presentation, I remember the comment that Simha Arom made me last year taking an interest in the aspects I was going to base my exposition on today. When I answered him “about the natural intelligence in the music of oral tradition”, he interrupted me pointing out “the logic”, immediately establishing equivalence between both expressions “Natural intelligence” and “Logic” and inviting me to better include the second term. I feel reflected myself on it and I rectified.

This event made me remember one of the principles every fieldwork should always be based on, that is, to limit all the information obtained to the most significant one, the essentials, axiom already proposed in the First Century by San Agustín when, talking to his disciple, he mentions: “that is the real challenge for the researcher: distinguish with language what reality differentiates” (S. Agustín). I share with Arom the same criteria: certainly, “logic” is not only an equivalent of “natural intelligence” but also it is a better term for its conciseness.

In this sense, the main objective of my presentation will be to try to describe concisely those points in which music and social context overlap, that is to say, corroborate the way function and systematic appear completely united to such an extent that the absence of one of them would cancel the presence of the other. I will carry it out taking as a starting point a current model in the musical reality of a small Gogo village from Tanzania and I will base my presentation on images, conceptual paintings and auditions that help to understand the obtained results. The content of my presentation is the result of the fieldworks carried out between 1995 and 2002, base material of my doctoral dissertation “Musical Heritage of the wagogo from Tanzania: context and systematic”, presented at the UCM in June 2005, conducted by the Professor Victoria Eli and Prof. Simha Arom monitoring the fieldwork. The meaning that in this case is given to the term “context” is in relation to the place, the social or religious circumstances or the way a certain kind of music is performed; and “systematic” refers to the way the music is done.

I will focus on one of the polyphonic repertoire –*Cipande*- because it represents a paradigmatic example in which both, context and systematic, appear completely merged. To sum up, I propose a new approach that allows us to deduce the way the wagogo conceive their musical world: the cognitive processes and strategies that

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function with the praxis and the mental references, present to the collective memory of the community, that allows the users to recognize and differentiate a kind of music from another.

### **Profile of Gogo People**

The Wagogo live in a vast central land of Tanzania and represent one of the approximately 113 groups that make up an ethno-linguistic map where the cultural diversity corresponds with the same musical variety. It is an agricultural and stockbreeding community whose survival depends on the main corn, wheat, sorghum, millet and peanut harvests, and therefore, on the rain, around which all their material and symbolic life revolves.

Among the characteristics that describe the idiosyncrasy of the gogo community, the ritual of initiation or *Makumbi* represents a special event, which shows the transition from adolescence towards the adult age turning the individual into a part of the group, also celebrating the abundance of a good harvest, and therefore, the survival of the community. In this sense, the repertoires directly related to the time of agriculture (*Ifuku*) are the ones that present a greater musical complexity from the point of view of the structures used, for example the hoquetus as the main polyphonic technique in combination with other multivocal procedures such as counterpoint, canon, drone, etc..

On the other hand, it stands out the moments linked to entertainment where the Wagogo share and moderate their emotions. Between one and the other circumstance, ritual and recreation, music becomes an essential factor for the cohesion of the society and as the main link between earthly and spiritual life. We can state that there is not a moment in the Wagogo's life that does not have a musical support and, as it happens in most of African societies, there are no aesthetic motives but ethical purposes as for the performance of the music, doctrine that contrast with the idea of "art for art's sake" that remains in the west.

The complete interaction between circumstances of performance and musical parameters gives us the possibility of considering the gogo musical universe from a holist perspective, that is to say, a comprehensive vision of the musical corpus approached from a cardinal element: the song, from which we can plan and link up social identity and musical systematic. According to the previous chart, all vocal, instrumental music or dance of the Wagogo, necessarily has to adapt to this systematic classification. Consequently, those types of music that do not follow the characteristics reflected on it, will not exist and logically will tend to transform and or disappear.

### **Music as Language**

From a linguistic point of view, it is important to point out a peculiarity characteristic of the African oral cultures: the absence of terms in vernacular languages meaning "music" ( though it does exist in a *lingua franca* called *kiswahili*, "Muziki", as a direct influence of the Arabic), and certainly not concepts such as

“rhythm, melody, scale, form, polyphony, etc.”, which make a reference to parameters constituting the musical language, formal structures or procedures that create the sonorous material.

Obviously, the fact of not verbalizing those musical notions does not mean that they do not know them, but that they do not need to clearly state it with the oral or written language, because the theoretical basics underlie the praxis implicitly.

However, it is convenient to know that the Gogo does set lexical differences between what it is simple considered “to sing” -*kwimba*- (whether it is one, two or more voices whose rhythmical articulation is identical) and “polyphony” -*cilumi*- (distribute), that is to say, placing vocal lines rhythmically independent on top using syllables with no semantic meaning. This previous fact makes us establish a starting dichotomy between those procedures to be considered as polyphonic (counterpoint, canon, hoquetus, ostinati superimposition) against the ones that are not (parallelism, homophony, heterophony, drone base, “overlapping”).

### **Music as System**

Let us take a particular case into consideration: we are going to observe the polyphonic section linked to the characteristic dance of the repertoire *Cipande*, whose phonetic material is constructed from syllables and non significant vowels and that, in practice, it always appears inserted between homophone parts where legible texts are sung. This is about one of the versions equivalent to a group of possible variations that can be found into practice from a polyphonic model whose minimal entity- empirical formula- can be found in the mental reference of the Gogo society as a whole. Above all, and in the case of the polyphonic singing, we take a hypothesis as a starting point: if each line constituent of polyphony is in itself a coherent entity, then the whole and the interaction of the different parts also has to be coherent and vice versa.

This example will give us an idea to verify how musical parameters and techniques of polyphonic elaboration are at service to the function that music has to achieve. The precise and profound sense that the term “function” receives among the Wagogo, refers to when the own action creates the music. In general, every kind of music refers to a function and reciprocally, every circumstance requires a specific musical support.

### **Transcription and Technical Equipment**

From the angle of perception, the difficulty to differentiate and recognize the structures of certain Gogo music is an inherent characteristic of the field work. In the case of a polyphonic piece of work, whose information rate is bigger, the work is even more complicated due to the fact that the elements that come into play in the polyphonic framework are in permanent interaction, being necessary to establish the exact moments where they overlap.

For this reason, the only possibility that the researcher has to decode and explain the phenomenon is to base his work on the written support, that is to say, the transcription. According to Arom, “it is extremely difficult to proceed to make a detailed analysis of the

musical phenomenon if we are not provided with a graphic reduction of it, even more when we are dealing with polyphonies where the melodic-rhythmic lines appear to be overlapped” (Arom, 1985:175); Mantle Hood considers that “every rigorous determination of something musically meaningful will depend, in short, on the transcription” (Hood, 1963:190) and A.M. Jones goes into detail saying “the transcription is the key for the complete comprehension of the African musical systems” (Jones, 1958).

In any case, the transcription represents the first level of musical analysis and the main methodological base of the experimental work, which will not be completely consistent if it is not supervised and corroborated in all the stages by the real users. From the transcription, we proceed to a first attempt to identify and describe the parameters and the principles which constitute the music: pitch (melodic and harmonic intervals, scale typology, tuning criteria), organization of the rhythm (pulse and its subdivision, period, rhythmic patterns), formal structure, variation procedures and techniques of multivocal elaboration, polyphonic or not polyphonic.

It is then when the researcher, shaped by a cultural, technical and aesthetic criterion that is in contrast with the way the music he pretends to recognize and study has been conceived, see himself obliged to use strategies that make the identification work of the musical material easier, by using of all kind of theoretical and technical equipment accessible.

In our case and in order to proceed to recognize the voices separately, we use a procedure called “*re-recording*”, conceived and applied to the field of ethnomusicology by Simha Arom during his research works carried out among the pygmies Aka from 1973 and readapted by those who have been following the same line of investigation, though adapting ourselves to the technological innovations of present times. This method allows us to isolate the different parts of a polyphonic work and, at the same time, to have at our disposal the connection points that exists, at least, between a voice and the immediately adjoining one, and so on up to complete the polyphonic group.

We make use of technical equipment consistent of a digital recorder (DAT Sony) where the original versions are registered, and an analogical multitrack machine (Tascam, *Portaone*) that allows us the separation and storage of the voices in independent channels. The mechanism consists of making a conventional recording with the DAT of the repertoire to be transcribed and analyzed, and in order to do that, the interpreters have to perform a version in the same way they normally do it so that any of them can recognize the piece in all its stages. The fact that it is the real performers the ones that supervised at all times the state of the recording, validate in an anthropological and musical way the results obtained.

### **Application of the Method**

According to Arom, the technique of *Re-recording* consists of the “diachronic reconstruction of a collection of sonorous events that are presented in reality in their synchronic way” (Arom, 1985:190). Once the original version is recorded, we proceed

to record the collection of voices that integrate the polyphonic work through the different channels, observing the results obtained:

In the first channel we record the voice of *izi ikali* (I), which is the one that improvise, shows the changes from a section to another o marks the end of it, and is recognized as the reference from the rest of voices. A second voice of *izi ikali* (II), generally turns to the canonical imitation- rigorous or partial- and also to distance parts of the motifs presented by *izi ikali* I.

Once registered the voice of *izi ikali* I, the 2nd interpreter (*Nhunyi* I) listens to this version through individual headphones, while he simultaneously sings his part to be recorded in the second channel. *Nhunyi* I plays a very important role as an harmonic complement of *izi ikali* I, becoming articulated in the same way from the rhythmic point of view but in a different way from the melodic one.

And so on, the same procedure is carried out linked with the rest of the voices. The third track corresponds to *Nhunyi* II, which is characterized by the use of yodel (*cimeloughali*, in *cigogo*), that is to say, the quick alternation of sounds sung whose resounding elements are the chest and the head respectively.

We take this last example into consideration to show a criterion common to traditional music from Black Africa: in the process of formal development, the musical material undergoes repetition and permanent variation where improvisation places an essential role as the impulse of the variations. In this sense, we have been able to state that the Wagogo never sing a song, or a musical piece, in the very same way; they understand that vary the melody while the text is maintained does not alter the singing and that the words are the elements that show if we are dealing with one or another song; the improvisation implies above all the appearance of new texts.

In the case of the polyphonies, where non significant syllables are used, due to the constant exchange of the same material, combined and overlapped with the rest of the voices, such variations give the deceptive impression of believing that there is one different voice for each participant. There is also an unspoken agreement that leads each individual not to sing the same that the people situated next to him are singing, and therefore, a reluctance to unison.

The way the improvisation has a bearing on the musical system affects not only to temporary aspects (rhythmic phase lags, anticipations and delay of notes, introduction of silences), melodic aspects (elements inserted between two sounds, substitutions of some pitches for others, or equivalent melodic turns, changes of tessitura and the resulting use of yodel), harmonics (substitution of the main pitches in the deep voice), formals ( juxtaposition between the precedent and the consecutive of the antiphonal and responsorial forms).

Voice *Nhunyi* II: polyphonic model of the collection of variations culturally accepted by society. In the polyphonic songs where the melodic- rhythmic cells are based on non significant vowels and syllables, the margin for variation will depend a great deal on the ability of each interpreter to invent, but in any case, it will have to fit immutable principles such as: the period, the typology of scales with their melodic and harmonic intervals, and the formal structure.

The voice of *Nhungu* obviously reflects the base and the rhythmic reference of the collection; however and as far as possible, it will carry out at the same time all kinds of melodic-rhythmic variations.

The crucial moment reached by this method takes place when, once the piece has been broken down to the different constituent parts, the multitrack machine offers us the possibility to combine the voices *ad libitum*, that is to say, creating groups in each of its modes to check and contrast the interrelation that exists between ones and the others with the different polyphonic layers.

As we previously mentioned, in the musical tradition of the Wagogo, the procedures of variation of the same musical material are regulated according to a common model represented by simplified formulas that underlie unalterably in each interpretation, but that in the praxis are revealed in a modified or developed way. The main objective of this work is the search and deduction of those models.

Then, once the collection of variations obtained from the same song has been subjected to the process of elimination of those elements considered ornamental or simply non significant, we manage to get an irreducible, polished version, which becomes the reference of the collection of variations culturally accepted by society and whose users are responsible for its transmission:

At first sight, we realize that another factor that shows the presence of a polyphonic thinking is that the cycles are out of phase with the resulting opposition of accents, fact that shows the logic (“natural intelligence”) that leads to get, from obvious economized means, the most results. In the case of the polyphonies *Cipande* this phenomenon gives us the impression of a harmonic field in constant movement and transformation where all reference to pitch, rhythm and harmony changes constantly while the formal structure remains intact; a similar image to the one we can observe through a visual kaleidoscope, but in our case with sounds.

When it comes to transcribing it, the multitrack machine makes it easier to recognize those capital aspects of music related with the rhythmic notes, its proportions, organization, and ways of grouping within the cycle. If we concentrate in the first two tracks the main four voices (track 1 *Izi ikali I* + *Nhunyi I*; track 2 *Nhunyi II* + *Nhungu*), we can keep the remaining two (3 and 4) for the beat (organic element organising the rhythm and which synchronizes the rest of the parts), and to the accompanied rhythmic formula, respectively.

The version listened at the beginning, whose transcription is the object of this analysis, belongs to an experimental recording carried out with the prior knowledge and the voluntary participation of the musicians. In the next example we will deal with a version of the repertoire *Cipande* recorded in its original context and its later validation.

In this version, once the polyphonic section sung by men is established, a warning signal, (feminine wail) will show the beginning of another section where women overlap the fragment that started the song of the repertoire (parallel singing) to the masculine song, giving all rise to a closely-woven polyphonic texture where the vocal lines interweave and generate a moment of great polyphonic complexity.

### **Conclusion**

We reach the cardinal point of this exposition. From the musical point of view, *Cipande* represents the example with the most polyphonic density of the Wagogo: we find different techniques combined such as canon, imitation, parallelism, ostinati superimposition, together with a part that is played as *quodlibet*, that is to say, a melody that has been previously listened to by women, reappears and is placed on top of the polyphonic section.

Etymologically, *Cipande* means “piece”, “fragment”, and it refers to the portion of skin that is cut off during the male circumcision, which is represented with a fragment of the *kanga* (traditional gogo fabric) carried by the future initiated *mnyamluzi*. This object, which is given to the woman by the future initiated in a figurative sense, allows her to choose a husband. At the same time the songs *Cipande* tell about the beginning of the *Makumbi* (initiation ritual) and are listened to during all the ritual. They are played a capella, with the only accompaniment of a cowbell *ndodolo* or a *kayamba* (maraca).

Socially, it is executed because of 3 reasons: 1) It commemorates fertility in general and it is used as a warning each night before a circumcision; 2) it is practiced as entertainment where the election of husband by women is being parodied; and 3) it is also used as a way to relieve the pain of the future initiated in the precise moment when the cut in the skin is being done. In order to achieve this last purpose, the men surround the boy that is going to be circumcised and, at the warning signal of the *hono ndulele* (antelope horn) they project their voices towards him while they sing the polyphonic section of the *Cipande*; at the same time and close to the exterior of the *ikumbi* (ritual space), women simultaneously sing in tune the parallel singing from the beginning of the song.

Just a moment before the “final cut”, men perform a vocal “cluster” in a estimated second minor interval. Because of the polyphonic texture generated and the consequently information saturation, the boy is not able to process such a complexity perceptively, strategy that is therapeutically used as natural anesthetic and whose main purpose is to ease the physical pain.

Going back to the holist chart of the beginning, and taking all the data obtained into consideration, we can observe and understand the polyphonic fragment of the repertoire *Cipande* from a global point of view. This aspect shows us the unitary thinking that the wagogo have about existence and how they represent life, thinking, craftwork, ritual etc.. from a same spirit, attitude that is also present at the moment of conceiving their musical and symbolic world.

In the repertoire *Cipande*, music, semantic or non significant language, and social circumstance, reaches their highest point of interaction giving rise to the biggest symbiosis between musical technique and social function. Here lies the reflection that I mentioned at the introduction of this presentation and that it can also be used as my final point: among the wagogo, something ethically significant must be musically effective.

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### **Discography**

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