

MANTIMBWA AND MTYANGALA: MUSICAL BOWS PLAYED BY GIRLS AND WOMEN IN ZAMBIA

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Abstract

In many cultures, musical instruments are used to convey cultural and spiritual values. In Africa, the drum and other instruments played by men are dominant to a point of relegating those involving women. In an attempt to contribute to the documentation on Zambian musical instruments played by girls and women, this article probes the modern contexts of two musical bows; the Mantimbwa played by the Tonga and the Mtyangala of the Chewa and Tumbuka, found in the Southern and Eastern provinces of Zambia, respectively. Data for the study was collected using interviews and participant observations. The study exposed the lack of documentation on Zambian instruments, especially chordophones and aerophones. Besides documentation, the need to record the music played on these instruments using modern technology such as on video and audio Compact Disks (CDs) was indicated. The greater picture that emerges from this study is that musical traditions in Africa are closely tied to culture. Therefore, as certain cultural traditions disappear, musical traditions that are closely tied to them eventually also disappear. There also arise nuances in the study that point to the neglect of meanings that individuals attach to the process of music making.

Keywords: Bows, Chewa, Matimbwa, Mtyangala, Tonga, Tumbuka, Zambia

Introduction

Musical instruments are among the most complex creations of the human mind. They are vehicles used to produce music and are essential in making musical activities more meaningful (Rault, 2000). Dournon (1981) explains that musical instruments embody a musical heritage that represents the physical, mental, and spiritual elements in the lives of groups and individuals. Music and instruments convey the deepest cultural and spiritual values of a civilisation, transmitting knowledge in many spheres (Nketia, 2005, Okafor & Ng'andu, 2005). For years now, it has been said that the use of certain instruments is dying, and researchers feel compelled to engage in a salvage operation hence, the development of ethnomusicology as a discipline (Nettl, 1964, Kaemmer, 1993). There is a dread that modernisation; Westernisation, the breakdown of rural society and the surge in technologies of mass media, are threatening factors to the existence of indigenous music, dance, and instruments (Titon, 2005, Nketia, 2005).

Jones (1948) observes that African music is predominantly singing, drumming, and dancing. As a result, instruments that accompany these activities such as drums have a soar on scholarship (Mapoma, 1982). In Zambia, Mensah (1971) perceives that the second and third most widespread and indeed well-documented on instruments are the *Silimba* (xylophone) and *Kalimba* (idiophone). Little attention has been paid to instruments such as the musical bows despite their interesting features. In many

instances, they are actually regarded as primitive (Brelsford,1948). Zambia has a wide range of indigenous instruments from across all its 72 tribes. However, there are very few comprehensive studies that have been conducted on instruments. The few available are largely descriptions by early scholars and missionaries such as Brelsford, Barnes, Jones, Turner, and Colson (1948). In many cases, these writers underrepresent the role played by instruments in music performances. Mapoma (1982:1) echoes the same concern as Jones (1948) on the lack of books on musical instruments and says:

There are practically no books published on musical instruments: however, research on them has been undertaken and recorded by Mapoma (1974), Mensah (1971) and Corbeil (1966). Others that have written on Zambian instruments are Kubik, but his work is not available in Zambia. Studies on individual musical instruments are equally few.

The few known scholarly works on music of Zambia with specific interest on instruments include:

- (1) *The Occasional Papers on the Rhodes-Livingstone Museum* (1948) were a volume of 16 separate papers. Ladislav Holy who was the director of the museum then claimed that besides being information guides for museum visitors, the papers were an indispensable source of information about Zambian traditional culture and history in their own right. It should be noted, however, that the papers only discussed few Zambian instruments and dances with a leaning towards rituals and traditional medicines.
- (2) *Music and Dance in Zambia* (1971) written by Mensah is an 18 paged booklet. It briefly describes various instruments under the acoustic classification of idiophones, membranophones, chordophones and aerophones. The appendix of the book comprises 23 pictures of instruments being played, as well as dance performances.
- (3) *The Survey of Zambian Musical Instruments* conducted among the Lala people of Mkushi and Serenje districts, Mapoma (1982: 1).
- (4) *Ceremony: Celebrating Zambia's Cultural Heritage* (2007) published by a telecommunication company Celtel, which is currently called Airtel simply listed and mentioned the instruments. David Venn who was the managing director at the time acknowledged that the book could not include all the aspects of Zambian ceremonies because it was written in just one year. However, he saw the publishing of the book as the first step for future editions.

The role of women in most music performances in Africa is limited to clapping and singing (Taiwo, 2010) with very few instruments assigned to them hence, the rationale of the study. Restricted participation by women in Zambia is pointed out by Mapoma (1982) among the Lala people where women play rattles and other instruments such as drums only in contexts where men are excluded.

Purpose of the Study

In an attempt to contribute to the documentation of Zambian musical instruments, this study probes the modern contexts of two musical bows played by girls and women: the *Mantimbwa* played by the Tonga and the *Mtyangala* of the Chewa and Tumbuka found in the Southern and Eastern provinces of Zambia, respectively. The study set to establish if these instruments still exist and what their present uses are.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

There are many musical bows found in Zambia, but this study is restricted to musical bows played by girls and women. Due to the limited time and resources involved in travelling to collect data, only two musical bows played by girls were studied, namely: the *Mtyangala* played by the Chewa and Tumbuka and the *Mantimbwa* played by the Tonga. Only one woman who had sufficient knowledge of the instrument was interviewed in each case. The practices and occasions in which the two bows were originally played are no longer commonly practiced hence, the study was conducted out of context. Since the study was conducted in a language different from that of the researcher, people that hail from Eastern and Southern provinces were relied on, making sure the spellings in Tumbuka and Tonga were correct and that the right interpretations of the songs were done at the point of data analysis.

The study may not fully represent all the facts on the instruments involved. In case of any discrepancies, it should be understood that information gathered from participants who were relying on memory may not be entirely accurate as people forget over time.

Literature Review

The review of literature drew particular attention to the origin of the musical bow, musical bows played by girls in Zambia, various types of musical bows and examples of them that are found in Zambia. The *Mtyangala* and *Mantimbwa* are further discussed in detail as musical bows played by girls in Zambia.

The Origin of the Musical Bow

The musical bows found in Zambia are similar to those found in South Africa. Kirby outlines some musical bows played by women in South Africa namely: the *Ugubu* among the Zulu, *Uhadi* of the Xhosa played by women and girls when lonely. The Xhosa also have the *Goura*, which is called *Joum-Joum* when played by men (Kirby, 1968). Kirby and Brelsford (1948) see a similarity between the musical bow and the actual hunting bow. From the pinging sound produced on the bow string during shooting, Kirby concludes that the bow could have also served as a musical instrument during hunting. He also mentions that women would play the instruments after the evening meal and rarely in the day time (Kirby, 1968). In as much as musical bows have different materials used to play and make them, they bear quite a similar structure. Reynolds (1967), explains that the musical bows of the Valley Tonga in Zambia consist of a strung wooden bow similar to a simple hunting bow. At a point roughly midway along the bow, however, the string is pulled close to the bow. To the other side of this is fixed a half gourd or a half-shell, creating in effect, two strings.

Musical Bows in Zambia

Musical bows are, according to Nketia (1974), generally divided into the following three types, which depend on the resonator; the earth bow, ground bow and calabash bow. The earth bow consists of a flexible stick stuck in the ground, to whose upper end, a string is attached. This string is stretched down and buried in the earth; a piece of stone may be placed on top of the earth to keep the string in position. An example of the Zambian ground bow is the *Cilimbwi*, found among the Bembas. The mouth bow has section of the bow's string (either close to the tip of the bow or towards the middle) held across the mouth. As the bow is hit at a convenient spot, the shape and size of the mouth cavity is altered to amplify selected partials produced by the string. The mouth cavity acts as a resonator for the mouth bow. The *Mtyangala* of the Chewa and Tumbuka and the Bemba's *Ulumonga* are examples of mouth bows found in Zambia. The calabash or gourd bow, have the resonators placed in the middle of the bow or towards the tip. The string may be in one straight piece or it may be braced half way in the middle of the bow, thus, dividing it into two sections. Some musical bows have as many as three sections. When a bow with a calabash resonator is played, the resonator may be placed on the chest or some part of the body to help change the fundamental pitch. The resonators can either be attached or detached from the bow. Generally, no attempt is made to isolate and amplify specific partials, as in the technique of the mouth bow. The fundamental and overtone sounds are heard simultaneously as a chord. Some bows with gourd resonators found in Zambia are the *Mapanza* of the Choma Tongas, the *Kalumbu* also played by the Tongas, the *Ututanga* of the Bemba people, and the *Akantimbwa* also known as *Ilintimbwa* found among the Lala people.

The *Mantimbwa* and *Mtyangala*: Musical Bows Played by Girls in Zambia

The *Mantimbwa* and *Mtyangala* are stringed bows classified as chordophones. The *Mantimbwa* is commonly found among the Tonga and the Ila who are a subgroup of Tonga while the *Mtyangala* is a Chewa and Tumbuka mouth bow from the Eastern part of Zambia (Mwesa, 2008). As described by Mwesa (2008), the *Mantimbwa* is a musical bow for girls commonly found in the Southern Province and is specially made for girls in puberty isolation. The music of this bow serves as an entertainment to the girls during this period of loneliness. A *Mantimbwa* consists of a basin put upside down or large clay pot covered with animal skin that amplifies the sound. A bow is placed above it with a string tied from one end to another. The player holds the bow with the left hand and the right hand plucks the string while the chin is placed on and off the string to produce different notes.

A similar bow to *Mtyangala*, is the *Ulumonga* also played by girls, and is found among the Bemba of Northern Province. Other musical bows found in Zambia as discussed by Mwesa (2008) are: *Kalumbu* also by the Tongas and usually played by young men in pursuit of a wife. A ground bow *Cilimbwi* found among the Bembas is described as a ground bow fixed in the ground with a hole in the earth as a resonator. Bows have very limited notes and in order to break monotony, several bows are played together (Brelsford, 1948). For instance, Ila girls today still play on two *Mantimbwa* in the reclusion of their initiation huts (Mwesa, 2008). The simplest

form of a resonator is supplied by placing a part of the bow in the mouth. Another simple variation is achieved with an inverted tin. Also found among the Lala of Central Province is a bow with a wire string, which is tied to a bow with a wire. About halfway down the string, a calabash resonator is attached to the bow. The instrument is held by the left hand at the point where the string is tied back, and the string is struck with a straw. The thumb of the left-hand presses on the middle of the string in order to alter the pitch. The sound can also be varied by pressing the calabash on-to the chest (Mapoma, 1982).

The Tonga and Lala seem to have some similar instruments despite the fact that they are not neighbours geographically. One similarity is in the naming of the musical bows among the two tribes. The Tonga musical bow is *Mantimbwa* and the Lala bow is known as *Akantimbwa/Illintimbwa*. The *Akantimbwa* seems to have its origin among the Tonga because according to Mapoma (1982), it is not found among the other Bemba groups but only among the Lala who are linguistically part of the Bemba. Other instruments found only among the Lala subgroup but bearing resemblance with those found in other tribes are, the Lamellaphones, *Kankobele* and *Ndandi*. The names *Kankobele* and *Ndandi* are not found in *Cibemba* (the language spoken by the Bemba people) and this suggests a possible borrowing of these instruments from the Tonga and Kaonde tribes, respectively.

Mensah (1971) describes the Chewa *Mtyangala* bow as consisting of a reed about thirty-five centimeters long carrying a piece of string stretched from one end to another. The player holds the instrument in the left hand with part of the string encased in her open mouth. By plucking the string with the right hand to set the string vibrating, the resultant sounds are amplified in the open mouth. These amplified sounds are varied in their quality by constantly changing the shape of the player's mouth cavity. This alters the upper partials that become more articulate and determine the nature of the sound produced by the vibrating string. The *Mtyangala* is used by Chewa and Tumbuka girls in private lodges where they live before they are married.

Methodology

The research was undertaken among those who play the instruments and not necessarily in areas where the instruments originate. This was done to trace women that used to or still play these instruments. The researcher regarded herself as a student willing to learn how the instruments were played and what they were used for. Participant observation, under ethnography research methodology technique of immersion, is considered more appropriate than when a researcher assumes the role of a collector solely. As advocated by Nettl (1980: 4) 'it is more productive, satisfying and perhaps, ethically more defensible to approach another culture as a student, to be taken in hand by a master who will teach him as he/her teaches students in his own culture.'

Sample

Although *Matimbwa* and *Mtyangala* were originally played by girls, no girls were found to participate in the study. Instead, two elderly women were involved; Eunice Kumwenda who is a *Mtyangala* player from the Eastern Province but based in Livingstone in the Southern Province at the time of the study, and Beatrice Mwiinga

from Kaleya, in Mazabuka, in the Southern Province. Other participants including Elina Mulohzi and Sabata Mwiinga also participated by the convenience of presence and interest in music. For instance, Sabata Mwiinga plays a musical bow called *Kalumbu*.

Data Collection

Data for the study was collected using interviews and observation. An interview guide and observation protocol was prepared beforehand. The formulation of the interview questions was guided by the field-work protocol as discussed below.

Field-work Protocols for the Collection of Data on Instruments

Dournon (1981:17-18) proposes field-work protocols for the collection of information on musical instruments. He explains that protocols are devised as a manual aimed at ensuring that essential questions do not escape the field workers and collectors. Only the protocols relevant to the study were adopted to formulate questions. An attempt was made to simplify the questions as much as possible to ensure clarity in the process of collecting data on the *Mantimbwa* and *Mtyangala*. Questions asked to the interviewees included the following: Origin of the instrument, material used to make the body of the instrument, methods of playing the instrument, and the context and occasions when the instrument is performed. Other questions were directed to the musicians on the changes and views why the instruments should be preserved.

Data Findings and Analysis

This study involved qualitative methods of data analysis. Data was collected through interviews and observation of the participants' actions during the interview process. The interviews were recorded on an audio and video recorder. Descriptions of the instruments and short biographies of the women respondents that participated in the interviews are discussed below along with any other information that was collected during the process.

Interview with Eunice Kumwenda on the *Mtyangala*

Data collected is described under the headings; description of instruments, how to hold and play the instruments, when were the instruments played, examples of songs played on the instruments, and the biography of the instrument players.

Description of the *Mtyangala*

Eunice Kumwenda explained that she did not exactly know the origin of the instrument. She learnt of its existence from her mother when she was a young girl. She described the *Mtyangala* as having a wooden part known as *Thete*, which is made from a reed. *Thete* is the other name by which the *Mtyangala* is called. The *Thete* is hollow and is cut when still fresh from swampy areas and left to dry before it is made into a bow. The string, *Uliwa* (twine) is the next most important part of the bow. It is tied on both ends of the bow. The size of the bow is measured by placing one part of the reed on the side of the mouth and placing it against the arms length of the player.

This is to ensure that the length of the bow is custom made to the player. Usually, a tall person is likely to play a much longer bow compared to a short person. The wooden bow assumes a curved shape and the string is tied to allow a space between the stick and the string for easy strumming of the string (see Figure 1 below).



Figure 1: A Picture of a *Mtyangala* (Photo by, Moses Simukonda, Lusaka, 2010)

Once a bow has been made, then one is free to decorate it according to individual taste by either making markings on it using a hot knife or by tying *Zizi* (fibre) round the bow leaving small spaces between the reed, then placing it on fire. The fiber is removed after placing it on fire and this results in a pattern of black burnt parts where the fiber did not cover the reed while the parts covered with the fiber maintain the original colour of the reed.

How is the *Mtyangala* Held and Played?

On one end of the bow, the tip is partly placed in the right side of the mouth, while the other end of the bow presses on the index finger (on the left hand) for support. The left-hand thumb helps to hold the *Mtyangala* in position while the middle or little finger presses on the string to vary the pitch. Usually, the ring finger remains curled and idle. The picture of how the *Mtyangala* is held is illustrated in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2: Eunice Shows How the Left Hand Supports and Places the Fingers on the Bow
(Photo by author, Livingstone, 2010)



Figure 3: Eunice Shows How the Tip is Placed in the Mouth When Playing
(Photo by author, Livingstone, 2010)



Figure 4: Eunice Demonstrates How the *Mtyangala* is Held When Playing
(Photo by author, Livingstone, 2010)

When playing the *Mtyangala*, four fingers are usually used on the left hand, the index finger on the right hand and the mouth. On the right hand, the index finger strums the string consistently, a method similar to the one used when playing a guitar. The mouth acts as a resonator and according to Eunice, she mouths the tunes within the mouth cavity to amplify the sound. The variations in the mouth cavity can either be deep to create a bass (low voice) sound or light to produce soprano (high voice). Sound variation is achieved by pressing the string against the bow with the little or middle finger. The *Mtyangala* can be played while seated or standing. It is tuned by either tightening or loosening the string. When the string is tightened correctly, it gives a clear, sharp, and definite sound unlike when it is too loose or too tight.

Occasions When the *Mtyangala* Was/is Played

The *Mtyangala* was played by young girls called *Mbeta* who were considered ready for marriage. Whilst awaiting marriage, they would be kept in seclusion huts called *Mnthanganeni*. The girls would play the *Mtyangala* individually or as group thereby calling for different sizes of the instrument. When played together, this resulted into some kind of harmony. There were several contexts in which the *Mtyangala* was played. For example, a girl who was not being approached for marriage by a man would play the instrument to express her desire for marriage. In such instances, others would even cry as they played. In other cases, when a man asks for a girl's hand in marriage, she would play after the man is gone calling his name to show submission and acceptance for marriage.

Married women were only allowed to play the *Mtyangala* in special circumstances; for example, when the husband is away, and the wife gets lonely, she would ask to go to her parent's home to get a *Mtyangala*. If her mother in-law allowed her to get it, then she would play in the evening after supper singing songs of longing to be with her husband.

Since married women were not allowed to play the *Mtyangala* in normal situations, doing so without permission from the in-laws was considered a taboo. A married woman who defied this rule, was sent back to her mother's home and was only allowed back in the husband's home if she was brought back by elderly women to plead on her behalf and a chicken to be paid as penalty. The playing of a bow by a married woman was considered as serious as committing adultery.

Examples of Songs Played on the *Mtyangala*

The following are some examples of the songs played on the *Mtyangala*. All the songs are sung in Tumbuka, with the English translations written besides:

Darling

Woman sings

Amama darling wane, darling,
Mwamungona vilinga vilimika

Translation

My darling
How long are you going to be away

Male voice responds

Nagona cimoza pela ine darling
Aeya darling

I will stay for a year
Oh darling

Woman sings

Chimoza chakula neo
Nakana darling

One year is too much
Darling I refuse

Interpretation of the Song

This song would be played by a married woman whose husband was away. It is a complaint song and the woman pleads with her husband to come back soon because a year away from each other is too much. As she plays the instrument, she acts both as the man and the woman and the voice parts vary between male and female.

Amulamu mungonenge makola

*Amulamu mugonenge makola
Pakuuka mungani dyaka lundi
Amulamu mugonenge makola*

Translation

Brother in-law sleep the right way
Don't step on my feet
Brother in-law sleep the right way

Interpretation of the Song

A married woman whose husband is away sings to urge the brother in-law to keep away from her. The expression 'don't step on my feet' symbolises the journey undertaken to look for a wife. The woman tells the brother in-law to undertake his own journey in finding a wife. The playing of the instrument was a woman's commitment to her husband. It may be taken that the brother's wife is not comfortable with the brother-in-law because he was making advances towards her, hence, the advice.

Nthengwa yaniziya

*Nthengwa ni nthengwa,
ni nthenga yaniziya
Apongozi lekani kuchita nthana
nilimwana wamunyinu ine
Ayo ayo niwomboleni
Abenge mubali munyane
Ngatimbana somba apongozi
Ayo ayo niomboleni*

Translation

Marriage has brought me problems
Mother in-law stop what you are doing
I am someone's daughter
Please save me
Were you not my mother in-law
We would have fought
Please save me

Interpretation

A married woman laments about the ill-treatment she is receiving from her mother in-law. Asking her to make her life easier because she is also someone's daughter. She goes on to say that if her mother in-law was someone else, she would fight her. In essence, a married woman sends a message she would not ordinarily have the courage to say with words to her mother-in-law.

Kankhali bila bila**Girls sing**

*Kankhali bila bila
Tibanole ba mumphala*

Translation

Pot boil boil
So that we cook quickly and not give
the men that don't want to marry

Male voice responds

*Asungwana lekani kuchita nthana
Kubanola ba mumphala*

Girls don't do that
Do not refuse to give us food

Interpretation of the Song

This is a teasing song where girls sing saying they will not give food to any man who does not want to marry. The men respond back pleading with the girls not to refuse to give them food. The song may imply that girls are socialised to perform certain roles

just as wives. In a sense, the relationship of boyfriend and girlfriend does not come with certain benefits such as being cooked for.

Imwe amama

Woman sings

*Imwe amama enye we
Munyumba mpambe mwana we
Nimtumeko kachande nja delele*

Translation

My mother
My house is childless,
No one to send a calabash for okra

Male voice responds

Nimfwile mpala ndine

Will I just die like the unmarried

Interpretation of the Song

This song was composed by Eunice Kumwenda. It is a song that expresses sorrow for her childlessness. Having no one to send in a home is a misfortune and as her reality of having had no child at all was, it made her sing the song. The song may be understood as an emotional outlet of sorrow in return, gaining comfort.

Biography of Eunice Kumwenda - A *Mtyangala* Player

Eunice Kumwenda was born on 3 October in 1958 in Lundazi District, Chief Magodi's village in Echilumbeni. She calls herself '*Nyasuzgo*', which means problems. At the time of the interview, she was based in Livingstone, a tourist town where she was part of the National dance troupe that entertains visiting tourists. Eunice was taught how to play the *Mtyangala* at the age of ten by her mother who noticed the daughter's interest in learning the instrument. She recalled how in times of sorrow, she would play the instrument in the night to help take her sorrows away and it would always make her feel better afterwards.

Apart from her mother, there were also other elderly women who would teach young girls how to play the *Mtyangala* although most of them are now dead. One of her surviving aunties is too old and no longer plays the instrument. Asked why she thinks the instrument went out of fashion, she explained that parents no longer teach their daughters how to play it and she would advocate for girls to continue playing the instruments because girls today are exposed to many dangers and the *Mtyangala* could be used as an instrument for constructive use of leisure.

On the changes that have occurred in the use of the *Mtyangala*, Eunice explained that the instrument was no longer played in seclusion as before. She played it in public and sometimes, colleagues joined in to dance unlike in the olden days when no dancing accompanied the songs. The instrument has now changed its role to become mainly for entertainment and there are no restrictions on who should or should not play the instrument. She felt that the instrument was completely being phased out; this was evidenced by her visit to her village. She was saddened to find that no girl played the instrument anymore and even when she offered to teach some of them, they did not show any interest in learning how to play the instrument.

Eunice had been invited to many countries to play the *Mtyangala*. In 1990, she travelled to Tokyo, Japan. Everyone was mesmerised at how such a simple instrument could produce sound. They made her play over and over again until she got sores in her mouth due to friction. She has also visited Germany several times, South Africa, Libya, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. She was an accomplished singer and had released two albums *Napokela Nkalata* and *Tujilijili*, which was waiting to be launched. Her other musical involvements included performing at local pubs and clubs, *Vimbuza* singer and teaching young women entering marriage through kitchen parties.

'*Nyasuzgo*' briefly narrated the challenges in her life but smiles because she had *Mtyangala*, which she considered her companion. She played the instrument when she was lonely and it always brought back old memories, she felt the instrument has healing powers. Each time she played, it felt like sharing her problems with a friend.

Interview with Beatrice Mwiinga on the *Mantimbwa*

Beatrice Mwiinga was the main respondent but other family members including Elina Mulohzi, Naboi and Mr Sabata Mwiinga also participated in answering questions. The respondents expressed that they had no particular knowledge on the origin of the instrument. They said they knew of the instrument as they were growing up and their parents and other elderly people never explained the origin of the instrument to them.

What is Used to Make the *Mantimbwa*?

The *Mantimbwa* is very similar in appearance to a hunting bow. It was usually made using indigenous trees that are not easily found like *mwiingili* (*grewia monticola*) in Tonga. In place, is a mulberry tree with an interwoven nylon string, which is tied on both ends of the bow. A bow is usually about three quarters of a meter in length.

The *Mantimbwa* has a detached resonator as most other African musical bows except for the mouth bow. Originally, the resonator was made of a clay pot covered with animal skin. The size of the pot would depend on how loud and deep one wanted the sound to be. A big pot would produce a deeper and louder sound while a smaller pot would give a lighter and high sound. Today, an inverted tin is used as a resonator instead of a clay pot. The wooden bow is decorated using a hot knife to make patterns according to individual taste.



Figure 5: A Photo of Mantimbwa-without the Resonator
(Photo by Moses Simukonda, Lusaka, 2010)

How is the Instrument Held and Played?

Mantimbwa is usually played while seated with the resonator placed between the knees. One end of the bow is placed below the left jaw for support. The middle part of the bow is placed on the resonator supported by the left hand in the middle of the bow as illustrated in the photo below.



Figure 6: Beatrice Demonstrates How to Hold the *Mantimbwa* (Photo by author, Mazabuka, 2010)

When playing the *Mantimbwa*, the chin is placed on and off the string while the right hand strums the string using the index finger. The left hand also taps on the resonator while acting as support. The instrument is tuned by tightening and loosening the string.



Figure 7: Elina Playing the *Mantimbwa* while Beatrice and Other Villagers Look on (Photo by author, Mazabuka, 2010)

In What Context or Occasion was the *Mantimbwa* Played?

Mantimbwa was played by girls between the age of 16 and 20 in huts where they were kept awaiting marriage from the rest. This was probably a time when teachings about marriage were given. The instrument was played to escape boredom and loneliness. The *Mantimbwa* was only played by girls. Married women were only allowed to play when teaching the young girls how to play the instrument.

Examples of Songs Played on the *Mantimbwa*

The themes of the songs played on the *Mantimbwa* would be centered on calling for help while in the seclusion huts, entertainment and self-encouragement. Unfortunately, the women that took part in the interview could not remember most of the songs. However, one example of the songs played on the *Mantimbwa* is illustrated below:

Shimulendema

Lubanje ndomufweba shimulendema

Ndendemu ndedemu shimulendema

Translation

The ‘dagga’ you are taking

Is to make you eat a lot shimulendem

Interpretation

Girls in seclusion huts were forced to smoke ‘dagga’ to make them eat too much. This was done to fatten them before marriage. This song was sung to encourage the girls to eat a lot.

Biography of Beatrice Mwiinga - A *Mantimbwa* Player

Beatrice is from Kaleya, Mazabuka district in the Southern Province of Zambia. She remembers having started playing the bow when she was about 17 years old. Her grandmother taught her to play. Together with other girls in the seclusion huts, they would compose songs and take turns to play the *Mantimbwa*. Asked why she thinks the instrument went out of fashion, she says that marriage initiation ceremonies called *nkolola* are no longer practiced. She, however, feels that this tradition should continue because very important teachings were taught to girls in preparation for marriage unlike today.

Beatrice and Mr Mwiinga explained that many changes have occurred in the construction of the *Mantimbwa*. In the olden days, the bow string was made from the bark of the tree of *piliostigma thonningii*, *Bauhinia* locally known as *Moobazuba* or *Musekese* in Tonga. Nowadays, the string is made of a nylon string. The resonator which was initially made from a clay pot covered with animal skin is now replaced with a tin, which is placed upside down. Beatrice’s elder sister who also played the instrument and other elderly women in her family are all dead. She says whenever she plays the ‘i’, she recalls childhood memories and feels happy.

Conclusion

The greater picture that emerges from this study is that musical traditions in Africa are closely tied to culture. As clearly argued by Herndon and McLeon (1990), music exists as culture rather than in culture. Therefore, as certain cultural traditions disappear, then even musical traditions that are closely tied to them eventually, also

disappear. The occasions and contexts in which most of the musical activities were performed no longer exist and this possesses a greater risk on the survival of such instruments. This is particularly true for the *Mantimbwa* and *Mtyangala*. Girls are no longer put in seclusion huts and automatically, the instruments linked to this practice ceases to exist.

Musical traditions that are carried forward through family generations have a greater chance of survival than those that are learnt for the sake of tradition. In the case of Eunice Kumwenda, the tradition of playing the *Mtyangala* was carried on from her great grandmother, mother and finally, to her. Her ten-year-old niece who lives with her is learning to play the *Mtyangala* and often sings along as she plays. Although this study was only limited to two instruments, the importance of recording music was to some extent realised as it is a fact that the writings, descriptions and illustrations on these instruments can only be understood, let alone appeal to a few. It is not always easy for a reader to visualise how the instruments looked and imagine the sound they produced. Greater appreciation lies in listening to their sound.

The role that the musical bows plays in personal expression and communication places it just as highly as other instruments for cultural transmission. There arise nuances in the study that point to the neglect of meanings that individuals attach to the process of music making. Biographies of musicians are perhaps not just a highlight of personality but an attempt to acknowledge the particular motivation and source of inspiration in music making.

Recommendations

To ensure the preservation and appreciation of indigenous musical instruments, there is need to:

- i. Encourage the preservation of indigenous musical instruments through various means such as documentation, recording, and educational programmes. It is essential to recognise that these instruments are not just artifacts but integral components of cultural heritage.
- ii. Promote cultural education in schools and communities to ensure that younger generations learn about the significance of these instruments and the cultural practices associated with them. This can be achieved through workshops, seminars, and educational initiatives.
- iii. Facilitate the inter-generational transfer of musical traditions within families and communities. Encourage grandparents, parents, and older generations to pass down their knowledge and skills related to these instruments to the younger generation.
- iv. Support research and innovation aimed at finding modern ways to incorporate indigenous instruments into contemporary music and artistic expressions. This can help keep the traditions alive and relevant in today's society.
- v. Continue documenting and recording indigenous music and instruments. This includes audio and video recordings, as well as written descriptions and illustrations. This documentation serves as a valuable resource for future generations and researchers.

- vi. Raise public awareness about the cultural significance of indigenous instruments and the role they play in preserving cultural identity. Public campaigns, exhibitions, and cultural festivals can help achieve this goal.
- vii. Zambian scholars and researchers at whatever level should take a keen interest in conducting studies aimed at preserving indigenous instruments in modern ways. Only then can a true reflection of these instruments be portrayed.
- viii. Challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about indigenous instruments. Educate the public about the complexity and cultural richness of these instruments, dispelling notions of primitiveness or inferiority. For instance, the musical bow was termed 'primitive' perhaps because of its basic appearance. However, the intricacy of playing the bows and the subsequent sound they produce does not qualify them to be primitive at all.
- ix. Explore the personal stories and biographies of musicians who play these instruments. Understanding the motivations and inspirations of musicians can provide deeper insights into the cultural and emotional significance of the music.
- x. Provide funding and support for scholars and researchers interested in studying indigenous instruments and their cultural contexts. Encourage academic institutions to include courses and research opportunities related to indigenous music.
- xi. Foster international collaboration and exchange of knowledge regarding indigenous musical traditions. This can promote a global appreciation for the diversity and beauty of these traditions.

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