

ON A TRADITIONAL KARANGA SONG

by

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When collecting traditional music among the Karanga¹ tribes of Southern Rhodesia in 1961/62, I recorded three versions of the song: "Vana vapfumo jena." In 1964 I worked on a preliminary survey² of the collected material under the guidance of Dr. Wachsman at UCLA, and I found that this specific piece was recorded by H. Tracey and published in the "Sound of Africa" Series (AMA TR-82 and 173). Through his kindness yet another version that he had recorded on wax-cylinders in 1929 became available. This study is a comparison of these six versions³. It may give some clues on the development and change within this musical culture.

General Non-Musical Data

1. According to the official policy of the Southern Rhodesian Government between 1900 and 1962 the land has been divided mainly into European farmland and so-called Native Reserves. In these reserves and even on European owned farms, the Karanga way of life still is predominant, and only mission stations and mission schools are found all over the area. Mission work started here around 1900 and was intensified after the thirties.

2. Important factors of musical change are found in the far reaching influence of the African broadcasting stations of Salisbury and Lusaka (transistor radios are working almost everywhere) and in the migration of workers who bring back new forms of entertainment. Other factors exist in the official policy of shifting people from one place to another in order to avoid soil exhaustion, in the school education based on the Western concept and in the missionary influence. It must be said however that Catholic and Protestant Missions have made great efforts to save the indigenous musical culture by giving it a place in their services.

3. The traditional way of passing on musical knowledge and skill was and still is the actual taking part in tribal and family feasts, in informal drinking and working parties, and especially in story telling at home. The latter frequently is connected with educational games under the supervision of the elders. There is no initiation school taking up such a function either in the past or in the present. In the case of semi-professionals, such as mbira (sansa) players or drummers, the master-disciple pattern of training is followed. There are no court-musicians left due to the rapid decline in the chief's power.

¹ The Karanga tribes belong to the Shona cluster. Linguistically and culturally they have to be grouped together. The song under discussion was recorded among the Duma (Guta & Bikita reserves), Govera (Chilimanzi & Serima reserves) and the Mari (Chibi reserve) tribes of the Karanga Group.

² J. Lenherr, Preliminary Report on My Field Research Work among some Karanga Tribes in Southern Rhodesia. Paper filed at the University of California, Los Angeles, 1964.

³ The different versions will be marked with Roman numerals as follows: I (Tracey, 1929, No. 496), II (AMA TR-82), III (AMA TR-173), IV (No. 89 of our collection), V (379 *ibid.*), VI (197 *ibid.*).

The Song in its Social setting

The song under discussion belongs to the repertoire of the adult people. It is performed by men only (I, III, IV, VI), or by men and women (II and V). In version II children join in the chorus. In all versions a male voice takes up the leader's part. It may be noted that when men only do the singing, a few women occasionally give a trilling sound. Two groups are thus clearly divergent in their parts, i.e. performers and active auditors. For the meaning of the trilling see below. In the classificatory listing of the I.L.A.M. this song is designated as "historical song" (27.2) in version II, and later as "fighting song" (25.2) in version III. H. Tracey was informed by the Mari people, that this song was in reminiscence of the appearance of the Pioneer column in 1890. Another tradition (Duma) stated that the fighting song was connected with the raiding expeditions of the Shangaan and Ndebele in the middle of the last century (TR-173). The Govera in 1962 expressed their belief that this song was the last prophetic statement of the famous rainmaker and medium of the Chaminuka-spirit, Pasipamire, who was killed by the Ndebele (Cf NADA 1959: 8). It forecast the arrival of the white people's army. This is verified by the song text which says: "The children of the white army (spear) shall come."

In the present-day life of the people we would place this song under "recreational music" as defined in J. H. K. Nketia's book: "African Music in Ghana" (p. 10), i.e. music for entertainment, as well as for festive or social occasions. Originally it may have been a war song somehow connected with the coming of the colonists. The Govera used it as a burial chant (IV), a custom which is common in Shona tradition (Cf Gelfand, 1959, p. 194). The war song seemingly serves an apotropaic purpose. Having lost its original function, it is performed now at informal drinking parties (I and VI).

The piece apparently belongs to the big collection of pure vocal music, sung traditionally without any accompaniment by instruments, even when they are available as it happened with versions V and VI. Two drums are used in version II, performed at a chief's court. This may be explained through the symbolic connection of chieftainship and drum rather than through a breakdown of tradition which frequently occurs in school performances.

The trilling (pururu) of the women has not primarily a musical function. It is often heard as sign of joy, of respect in rituals and official meetings, of applause for an achievement or a skillful performance. Made by a fast movement of the tongue with or without the use of the hands, it produces a high, ear-piercing sound, with frequent interruptions as in a beating reed instrument. Similarly the wailing cry of the women (IV) serves as sign of sorrow and as a signal to announce a death. Its sound is much more hollow, made, according to our observation, by lengthening the mouth part. The frequency of the beat is lower than in the other cry. This "shrilling" may point to a connection of the Karanga tribes to the Mediterranean area (Cf the "ololuge" cry of the Greek women in classical times and female shrilling in Islamic cultural areas. There are no Mohammedans among the Karanga although early trading contacts were recorded).

The versions of the piece that were recorded in 1962 (IV — VI) were performed by well-known singers according to the critical judgement of the people, and we would assume the same for H. Tracey's recordings. Some of the younger men and women who took part in Nos IV — VI were educated in elementary schools at mission stations and almost all performers were Christians. All these recordings were made within so-called "Native Reserves" with the exception of No. IV which was recorded on a European ranch but within the traditional setting. The following transcription intends to show only the more significant features of the song to the exclusion of those little finesses in which the leader improvises due to his individual style.

fifth to a major sixth; from a major sixth to an octave (I) and from a fifth (V) or minor seventh (II, IV, VI) to a major ninth. The augmentation takes place as an upward movement on the part of the leader and just the opposite for the chorus. The solo part ranges in ambitus between a third (I), a fourth (III, V partly) to a minor sixth in the other versions. The tonal organization in the piece can be seen in the following "scales" (Hornbostel's System). For the Chorus:

(I) $3\frac{1}{2}$ $1\frac{1}{2}$ 3 3 5 2 $3\frac{1}{2}$ $1\frac{1}{2}$ 4 2 5 2
 version I, III - VI. version II.

(I) 3 1 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ $\frac{1}{2}$ 1 (II) 2 2 2 1 3 2
 section 1 (same ratio); section 2. section 3.

The minor chord seems to be predominant, but the lower G, being the final note, has to be included into the structural system. The structure of the solo parts is as follows:

$\frac{1}{3}$ $1\frac{1}{3}$ $1\frac{1}{3}$ $\frac{2}{3}$ 1 $1\frac{1}{2}$ $\frac{2}{3}$ $\frac{1}{2}$ $1\frac{1}{3}$ $\frac{1}{2}$ $1\frac{1}{3}$ $1\frac{1}{3}$ $2\frac{2}{3}$ $1\frac{1}{3}$ $1\frac{1}{3}$
 version I (ratio as in chorus). version II, IV - VI (average) version III.

The tonal structure of the chorus part, as we see, is ambivalent, lying between minor and major. If we now compare the three types of tonal organization found in the solo part in their relationship to the chorus structure, we recognize that the solo part defines the tonal character of the chorus. Thus, chorus section 1 may take on the character of the Dorian mode and section 2 that of G major (I). In most versions (II, IV to VI) the first chorus section becomes Aeolian and the second Lydian, whereas in version III the whole phrase remains in the Aeolian mode.

The melodic structure of the chorus shows a conjunct downward movement in three steps (e-c, c(e) -a, a-g). In relation to it the solo part of all versions is rather disjunct. In addition to this it moves up in version I forming a tonal sequence. A real sequence in connection with upward movement occurs in versions II, IV - VI, whereas in version III the melodic line of the leader remains stationary. The third is the main melodic interval of the solo for the earliest example (I), all others use the fourth. Of special interest are the "modulatory" changes within this part (II, IV, VI). It seems that they have to be interpreted rather as colouring devices than as true modulations since their duration is very short in comparison to the length of the chorus. It further appears that the later versions display a smoother line in the solo melody than version I, covering up the tensions existing between leader and chorus, whereas they are open in version I and as sharp as to raise the pitch level by more than one tone during twenty repetitions. The rhythmical form of the song shows two variants, either 2/4 (solo) + 6/4 (chorus) — 6/4 (ch.) — 2/4 (s.) + 6/4 (ch.) in versions I and III or: 3/4 (s.) + 6/4 (ch.) in the other examples. The melodic contrast between solo and chorus is stressed by the use of triplet patterns in the leader's part against the divided beats of the chorus (I, III, VI). Mixed forms appear in the solo part of II, IV and V. But it must be understood that various improvisations are made around the basic solo patterns, depending on the ability of the soloist and the socio-musical atmosphere at the moment of recording. It may be noted that the chorus at times comes in on an off beat and is sped up to meet the basic beat (I and VI).

The harmonic features of the piece are only slight indications that mark it as belong-

ing rather to the group of "chante fables" or songs of the young people. The yodelling choirs, dance, ritual and work songs (especially threshing choirs) show much more harmonic richness with contrary movement in the bass voice or simultaneous display of diminution and augmentation in polyphonic lines. While the male chorus of version I runs merely in octaves, the other versions use parallel movement in 8-5-4 intervals, either in its pure form (VI) or mostly in "tonally bound parallels" (Schneider's classification: type II_n). The secondary role that harmony plays in our song is indicated by the fact that it is mostly the soloist who is responsible for occurring polyphonic parts (IV), or otherwise a single voice in the chorus (II, III, VI). The sixth, found in version II, the thirds in version III and the minor seventh in V are encountered in other songs as well and have the form of anticipation or passing notes only.

The style of performance is characterized by a fast movement connected with a generally high pitch level.

I and VI: ca 12 seconds for the whole phrase; pitch level as found in transcription.

II: ca 12 seconds " " " " ; " " lower by a major third.

IV: ca 13 seconds " " " " ; " " lower by one tone.

III: ca 11 seconds " " " " ; " " higher by one tone.

V: ca 11 seconds " " " " ; " " higher by one semitone.

Version I and II are sped up greatly in connection with a rise of pitch in I. Taking into account that higher speed and higher pitch seem correlated here, and that recording and playback speed may be divergent, the tempo as well as the pitch level of the piece are rather fixed. The high pitch may find its explanation in the solo part's connection with yodelling, which is traditionally high (Cf use of yodelling syllables).

Dynamically all examples possess a rather loud sound quality, but it does not reach the very strong sound level of slow choirs nor the "shrill" quality of ritualistic chants (a very controlled voice production is found with some professional mbira (sansa) players and the skilled story tellers). In the performance the soloist functions as the great activator throughout the piece: musically by using the over-lapping technique, "modulation" with coloristic effect and contrast rhythm, socially by addressing the audience (II, IV), and by repeating important "key words" and uttering exclamations (II, IV, V). Version VI shows a special kind of performance since the leader tells a story while the chorus goes on (not indicated in the transcription). He uses rhythmical speech interspersed with imitative sounds such as, "gwi, gwi", "bum, bum" always keeping in time with the basic rhythm (such rhythmical speech combined with a tonal curve is very common in various dance, and other choir forms, and it has always a motorlike function in the musical process).

Unfortunately it was not possible to have the texts verified but it appears that more changes are found here than in the music. The "key phrase" "ishumba inoruma" (the lion that bites) however is encountered in all versions.

Conclusion

In summing up it can be said that all divergencies in the versions of the song under study may be explained by internal factors of change, i.e. variation characteristic with oral tradition⁵. Despite the fact that during the period between 1929 and 1962 the actual impact of Western culture on tribal tradition took place, no Western influence can be found in the six versions of our song. This may be due to the rather unchanged living conditions within the reserves, and even more to the fact that the traditional means of musical education are still readily accessible. (Just the opposite can be seen in the case of the professional sansa players where training became very difficult because the boys are living in boarding schools). Thus the big clash between town and tribe (Westernized and traditional music) lies still ahead being a part of the whole social process of a cultural shake-up (Cf Holleman, Town and Tribe)⁶.

⁵ Thus, thirteen tunes recorded by H. TRACEY in 1929-33 have been encountered in 1963 with slight variations. In addition nine songs were found in 1962 which partly used the same melodic material.

⁶ J. F. Holleman, *Town and Tribe*. *Litium*. London, 1956, p. 451-453.

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