

REVIEWS

ANGOLAN TRAITS IN BLACK MUSIC, GAMES AND DANCES OF BRAZIL, A study of African cultural extensions overseas, by Gerhard Kubik, Junta de Investigações Científicas do Ultramar, Centro de Estudos de Antropologia Cultural, No. 10, Lisbon, 1979. pp 55, photographs.

This book represents without doubt one of the most important contributions in the field of Afro-Brazilian music, and this not merely with regard to the rich material and facts it presents, but also to the type of approach which the author makes it convincingly clear is appropriate to the study of Black African cultures transplanted overseas.

Whereas until now many historical studies on aspects of Afro-American cultures have assumed an ahistorical position regarding African cultures, ignoring their constant development and cultural transformation in Africa, Gerhard Kubik points out at the start that for him it is impossible to "perceive African music merely as the 'roots' of something else", and that he considers "African music/dance forms as the products of people living in various African cultures which have changed continuously in history, absorbing and processing elements from inside and outside the continent, creating new styles and fashions all the time. Afro-American music then appears as a consequent and creative extension overseas of African musical cultures that have existed in the period between the 16th and 20th centuries. From this perspective Afro-American music cannot be described adequately in terms of 'retentions' and 'survivals', as if African cultures in the Americas were doomed from the outset and perhaps only by some act of mercy permitted to 'retain' certain elements." (pp.7/8)

Gerhard Kubik already had a deep knowledge of Angolan music and culture when he first arrived in Brazil in 1974. He carried out his field research in Brazil in 1975, the areas he particularly studied being the interior of São Paulo State, Mato Grosso, and Salvador de Bahia. An important factor for localising African elements in Brazil was the direct confrontation between the author's companion, the Malawian musician Donald Kachamba, and the various forms of Brazilian cultural expression.

Concentrating on the central African region of Angola and south-west Zaïre — this from the point of view of cultural "extensions" — the book limits itself merely to mentioning when necessary the second area of Africa which has direct historical and cultural links with Brazil, that is the Yoruba, Fõ and Ewe region of south-west Nigeria and Benin. Traditionally, Afro-Brazilian studies for the most part have given greater weight to these cultures, with the result that the Bantu influence has, in general, been underestimated or barely recognised by scholars. Besides the pantheistic religion of West Africa, which apparently made other African cultures in Brazil seem less sophisticated, and besides the "distorted" view of Africa which was held for a long time in Brazil — and not only in Brazil — Kubik believes that the generally restricted knowledge of Angola in particular, "Brazil's main Bantu-African connection" (p.12), has also contributed to this over-valuing of West Africa.

After an introductory chapter describing the African cultures in Brazil (pp. 9-13), the reader is confronted at once with a discussion on that musical element which, right from the first moment, distinguishes Brazilian music with "Bantu-extensions" from that of West African origin. This is the phenomenon which musicologists call "time-line patterns", rhythmic phrases which are repeated consecutively and whose purpose, in the African musical context, is actually to maintain tempo and to organize structurally. The so-called "time-keepers", therefore, are single-note percussion instruments, generally a bell in Brazil as also in Africa, the *agogô*, or *gã* as it is called in the Afro-Bahian religious cults and the *candomblês* and, especially in urban Brazilian *samba*, the *tamborim*, the small hand drum, struck with a single stick etc.

While a basic "time-line pattern" can be distinguished in West and another in Central Africa, the first with a duration of 12 impulses, the second with 16, it happens in Brazil that not only in

the same city, but even in the same groups of musicians “time-lines” of 12 or again of 16 impulses are very commonly heard, no longer thus depending on the ethnic affiliation of the performers, but on the specific repertoire which is keeping the African musical characteristics alive.

In this context Donald Kachamba’s statement is significant. Having heard the music of a *candomblé* house, where the West African Yoruba cultural element is dominant, he came upon a group of *sambistas* in the streets of Salvador, and exclaimed: “Now Nigeria is finished; we are in Angola”. (p.17).

Regarding Brazil a comment could be added to what Kubik says about the Angolan “time-line pattern” notated on p.17. The graphic form which the author chooses for describing it is simple and clear:

x . x . x . x x . x . x . x x .

In this case it is a pattern collected in the Cuito-Cuanavale area of Angola in 1965. One who knows Brazilian urban *samba* will perceive immediately that this is the musical part of the *tamborim*, with one reservation however: in Brazil this pattern is inverted in accordance with the big drum, the *surdo*, and the dance steps:

x . x . x x . x . x . x . x x .

This is how the “time-line” pattern is heard in the urban *samba* of Rio, Salvador, etc. In São Paulo I have observed, albeit more rarely:

x . x . x x . x . x . x x . x .

Bearing in mind that the 16 impulses of the Angolan pattern are the sum of two asymmetrical periods (9 + 7), it can be seen what has happened with our first example from Brazil: instead of 9 + 7 simply its inversion 7 + 9. In another work¹ Kubik states that in Africa itself “the performer’s points of attack in playing one of these time-lines vary from culture to culture....and do not influence its internal structure” (Kubik 1983: 75).

Thus we have another type of African “extension” in Brazil, which refers to musical performance. I do not personally know the Angolan variant given by Kubik but I believe, however, that it could well exist in predominantly Afro-Brazilian culture areas.

The stability of African “time-line patterns” in Brazil leads the author to find his hypothesis reinforced that these patterns also represent an extremely stable element in the history of African music. Recent musical forms (*Juju*, *Highlife* etc.) continue to be based on them, such that they must certainly already have existed in the 16th century when the first Africans were transplanted overseas, and long before. Thus they represent a “diagnostic” element (p.19) in research into the specific cultural connections of Africa with the Americas.

Further than the identification of African “time-line patterns” there are other important aspects whose “historical inertia” (p.20) is useful for the analysis of African “extensions” into Brazil. The author’s listing is based on his experience in Africa during the more than twenty years he has worked in that continent. In the musical field, for example, certain ways of making instruments remain constant, forms of tuning and of musical performance, and also the names given to the different parts of instruments can very well be a simple translation of the African designations. It is evident that African cultural elements which remain stable overseas must also be sought outside the strictly musical field.²

The next five chapters of the book (pp. 22-41) are devoted to individual topics, three concerning Brazilian musical instruments of Angolan origin (*cuíca*, *berimbau* and *marimba*) and two respectively on *capoeira-de-angola*, a war- or fight-dance of Bahia, and on *umbanda*, a religion which grew in Brazil out of a fusion of *congo-angola* cults and others.

As well as situating in Africa the Brazilian instrument under discussion, the author presents etymologies of Brazilian terms, which for the most part represent new facts for the Brazilian socio-ethnographic literature. *Puñia*, for example, the friction drum found in São Paulo State, clearly has an African etymology. According to the author it is an instrument which comes from Angola and southern Zaïre, where it is written *pwita*. The etymology (but not the origin) is less certain for the *cuíca*, the slightly smaller friction drum known in Brazilian urban *samba*. What is

certain is that neither *cuíca* nor *puíta* can be, as some believe, of Iberian origin: their friction stick is inside the cone of the drum and not outside as is the case with instruments of the Portuguese type.

Concerning etymology, the author mentions his deductions regarding *capoeira* (p.27). They are interesting particularly in the face of the controversies about the origin, history and also etymology of this martial dance, widely popular in the country today, and held to be one of the most characteristic expressions of Afro-Brazilian culture. Waldeloir Rego alone, in his exhaustive 1968 work³, has presented a score of current explanations for the term “*capoeira*”. As the public practice of *capoeira* was prohibited from the beginning of this century, Kubik believes that the term could originally have been a “code word” (p.29), possibly of Angolan origin and phonemically identical with the Portuguese by coincidence, a thesis which would be worth linguists’ examining in more depth, in relation to parallel cases of equally identical phonemics.

The musical instrument which exists in the most varied versions among the Bantu cultures and which has become very popular in Brazil is the musical bow. The Brazilian musical bow commonly known as *berimbau* is examined by Kubik on pp. 32-36. It shows practically all the characteristics of the Angolan instrument called *mbulumbumba*. There are two fundamental differences however. Firstly the position in which it is held by the musician: the *berimbau* is played in a vertical position, while the *mbulumbumba* is held horizontally. Secondly the technique of stopping the long string segment: with a metal coin (called *dobrão*) held between the thumb and index of his right hand the Brazilian musician stops the string to obtain a higher note, while the Angolan musician achieves the same result using simply the nail of his left thumb. The use of the small basket rattle, the *caxixi*, is also not known in Africa. *Berimbau* players hold it in their right hand together with the playing stick to differentiate and emphasise the *toques* (*berimbau* patterns).

Yet there are African musical bows which are even more similar to the *berimbau*. In a recent meeting with the author I had the opportunity of seeing part of his field material, obtained in Angola since the publication of the present book. Among other things he showed me photos of a musical bow which was not only of similar make to the *berimbau*, but also nearer to it in performance technique. Instead of stopping the string with the thumbnail, the musician had put on his thumb the neck of a broken bottle, which, as a hard object, carried out the same function as the metal coin on the *berimbau*. And further, he played in a vertical position.

I also recall from the musicological documentation done by Veit Erlmann among the Basotho of Lesotho, that they have a musical bow called *thomo*, whose morphology and playing technique is the same as the *berimbau*, missing only the coin string-stopper and, evidently, the *caxixi*.

Beyond a comparison of the morphology and the playing technique of the berimbau and African musical bows, which in fact seem to be distributed in the most diverse parts of the Bantu world, it would be interesting to have an analytical comparison of the basic berimbau toques with those of the Bantu instruments. Kubik puts this comparison empirically into practice by getting his Brazilian informants to listen to and evaluate a recording of the Angolan mbulumbumba (p.30).

The big difference between the Brazilian musical bow and the African instruments is in their use in context: while in Africa the musical bow is generally used by a soloist for vocal accompaniment, the *berimbau* is associated in Brazil with the musical aspect of the sport of *capoeira*. Two or three of these instruments together comprise the orchestra, combined with various percussion instruments.

It remains uncertain when and how the *berimbau* came to be an integral part of *capoeira*. Writers and travellers of the 19th century always reported the musical bow and the martial dance separately (see Figs. 11 and 12 in the appendix to the book). To Kubik it seems probable that a Yoruba tradition — that of accompanying a fight with music — intersected with the Bantu musical instrument (p. 31).

It is thanks to the travellers and writers of past centuries mentioned above that we know of a variety of African musical instruments which were in use at the time and, for reasons unknown, are not found in Brazil today. The lamellophone *sanza*, for example, seems to be one of these.⁴ The *marimba* of São Paulo, discussed by Kubik on pp 36-41, should also be considered rather as an exception than as a widely used instrument. Kubik refers in this case to an instrument which, according to his informant's statement, is of fairly ancient make. It is played every year on a special date during the *congada*, an Afro-Brazilian tradition apparently of central African origin, in São Sebastião, São Paulo State. I believe that it survives because of its link with this tradition.

The case of the Brazilian *marimba* well exemplifies how cultural goods which are largely extinct can survive inside a larger complex, becoming part of it in one way or another. Were the *congada* to disappear, the use of the *marimba* would certainly stop with it. A cultural context alone, however, does not necessarily guarantee the survival of secondary cultural goods, as happens in other *congadas* which do not know the *marimba*. In our case this could mean that the instrument had attached itself to a local context because of the absence or extinction of its proper function.

The fact that the *berimbau* still exists in Brazil while other instruments from Africa disappeared can be explained, I think, in this way: its integration with the sport of *capoeira* and its subsequent strong popularisation guaranteed its survival. Although not articulated by Kubik, this hypothesis can be considered implicitly suggested in some of his evidence (e.g. on the *marimba*).

After a chapter on some Brazilian sources from the 18th and 19th centuries compared with field material from Angola (pp. 41-47), a very profitable reconsideration, in his style, of historical sources of great importance (Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira: 1783-1792; Jean Baptiste Debret: 1834), Kubik finishes the book with a resumé of the principal propositions on methodology which he offers for research work in Brazil (pp. 47-51):

1. Adoption of methods developed by Ethnohistorians for comparative/historical study between different cultures (Hirschberg, Sturtevant, Vansina and others).
2. Comparison of synchronic material (from Brazil and Africa), as well as analysis and comparison of historically stable cultural elements.
3. Investigation of cultural elements transmitted and maintained unconsciously in Brazil. Application of a "cultural comprehension test" to Brazilian informants.

As an appendix the book has photographs and reproductions of engravings from the works of Johann Moritz Rugendas (1835), Jean Baptiste Debret (1834), Lieutenant Chamberlain (1822), Girolamo Merolla (1692), C.F. von Martius & J.B. von Spix (1817-1822) and Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira (1783-1792). The selection proves once again that Gerhard Kubik sees himself in the first place as a "cultural scientist" in the true sense of the term.

It is because of all this that apart from being a contribution of fundamental importance to Brazilian musicology, "Angolan traits in Black music, games and dances of Brazil" has the merit of being a work equally recommendable to all scholars and people interested in the field of human sciences who may be engaged in research or investigation into Afro-Brazilian culture in its most varied aspects. Finally, it is not only musicology with which the book deals, as Donald Kachamba's discovery well illustrates: "He was able to establish a convincing identity between the distilled alcohol called *cachaça* in Brazil and the stuff known in Malawi and northern Mozambique as *kachasu*. The term *cachaça* had long been on the list of Afro-Brazilian words of 'unknown origin' in the Brazilian socio-ethnographic literature" (pp. 12/13).

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(English translation by Andrew Tracey)

Notes:

1. Gerhard Kubik: "Emica del ritmo musicale africano", in *Culture Musicali - quaderni di*

- etnomusicologia*, Anno II, No.3, 1983, 47-92.
2. See Gerhard Kubik: "Extensionen afrikanischer Kulturen in Brasilien", in *Wiener Ethnohistorische Blätter*, 21/22, 1981.
 3. Waldeloir Rego: *Capoeira Angola — Ensaio sócio-etnográfico*, Editora Itapua, Salvador, 1968.
 4. See Gerhard Kubik: "Die 'brasilianische Sanza' im Museum für Völkerkunde, Wien", in *Archiv für Völkerkunde*, 1980.

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THE MANDINKA BALAFON: An introduction with notation for teaching, by Lynne Jessup, illustrated by Mary McConnell, Xylo Publications, La Mesa, California, 1983. Including two cassettes. pp 191, photographs, music.

Tape 1 provides an aural guideline to learning the music with right and left hand parts presented separately, then together with voice, whilst Tape 2 offers a representative sample of Mandinka repertoire for listening.

This book, conceived as the result of Lynne Jessup's work as an ethnomusicologist for the Oral History and Antiquities Division of the Vice President's Office of the Government of the Gambia, is intended to serve as a practical guide for those wishing to learn and teach the *balafon* and, according to the author, the project enlisted the help and cooperation of virtually every *balo jali* in the Gambia.

Ch.1 defines the instrument, discusses its origin and associated legends, then takes a look at its construction and tuning, the latter in some detail, with the conclusion that it is indeed equidistant heptatonic, while "not as incredibly accurate as some have stated". Ch.2 describes aspects of the notation used, of rhythm, and of elements such as *kumbengo* (basic pattern), *birimintingo* (variation), *donkilo* (vocal parts) etc, based on the core repertoire, similar to that of the *kora*, which became apparent from the fifty two tapes made by the author during her obviously extensive research. Ch.3 discusses teaching approaches and methods, and, in tone with the author's apparent overall aim, is pitched towards the Western classroom, and the difficulties to be expected there with the African basics.

Ch.4, which is nearly half the book, presents thirteen songs, the last, "Sunjata", in six versions, all with notation for each hand separately and combined, words, description, teaching ideas, and the history attached to each song. This chapter certainly represents a large contribution towards making an African musical style accessible to all. The book ends with some forty pages of very useful appendices, which would be indispensable to anyone wishing to further his knowledge of the *balafon*, e.g. performers in the Gambia, the known *balafon* repertoire, recordings held in the Gambia government archive, how to make a xylophone for the classroom (using American materials and the author's design, not Gambian), a glossary of Mandinka terms relating to the instrument, bibliography, discography and index.

The book has a whole-hearted practical approach, and I would like to see many more such grace the shelves of Afro-musicology. The notation bothers me, however. Not that it looks inaccurate, or is impossible to puzzle out into practical playing, especially with the back-up tapes, but that I find it hard to know why the author decided not to go the whole way and adopt one of the existing and very adequate African pulse-based systems, as used for instance by Roderic Knight for the same area, and by several others elsewhere. She attempts to justify this on p.54: "Ethnomusicologists often wrestle with a variety of notation systems usually discarding Western notation as being, at best, misleading... Yet it is just as misleading to invent a new system when an old system, adapted, can be more clearly understood by more people." More, in my opinion, is not necessarily better, and misleading remains misleading. Perhaps she thought a pulse-based system would not be comprehensible to school teachers. This seems a pity, as I