

The Nyanga/Ngororombe panpipe dance (double article)

1. THUNGA LA NGOROROMBE — THE PANPIPE DANCE GROUP OF SAKHA BULAUNDI

by

MOYA ALIYA MALAMUSI

Introduction

I first met Sakha Bulaundi, leader of a *ngororombe* dance group on September 15, 1990 at Jonathani village, T.A. Mulauli, Mwanza District, Malawi, during my field-work in that area. I have been in contact with him and the five members of his group ever since that date and recorded them repeatedly. This work was part of a larger project of field research on music and oral literature which I carried out from July 9 to October 15, 1990, from February 11 to April 11, 1992, and from July 11 to August 11, 1992, with the financial assistance of the Auswärtiges Amt of the Federal Republic of Germany (Ref. 611-600.56). Let me take the opportunity here to express my gratitude to the Auswärtiges Amt, Bonn, the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, Lilongwe, (Malawi) and the Archive for Contemporary African Music (Director Dr. Wolfgang Bender) at the University of Mainz, Germany, for all the assistance and encouragement given to me.

Sakha Bulaundi, 48 years of age during my first recordings with him in 1990, originally comes from the village of Goba in Tete Province, Mozambique, where he began to learn the *ngororombe* panpipes. His first language is Chinyungwe, but he is also fluent in Chichea, the language in which I communicated with him. In the interview which I have transcribed in extenso in this article he tells us about the history of his life and his music, and how he had come to Malawi as a refugee in the 1980s. Fortunately, while staying at the Chifunga Refugee Camp near Mwanza (Malawi) he met compatriots who either had some knowledge of playing panpipes or were willing to learn. In this way he eventually formed his present dance group.

My discussion of his group, its history, organisation, instruments, songs and concepts is based on the following recorded materials:

1. Original tape Nos. 90/34, 90/36 and field notes at Jonathani village, T.A. Mulauli, Mwanza District, Sept 15 and 16, 1990.
2. Original tape Nos. 90/45, 90/46 and field notes at Jonathani village, Nov 30, 1990.
3. Original tape No. 90/46 and field notes at Singano village, T.A. Kuntaja, Blantyre District, Dec 1, 1990.
4. Field notes on previously recorded songs, on Apr 12, 1992, during a renewed visit to Jonathani village.
5. 8mm film shots of a performance at Singano village, Dec 1, 1990.
6. Photographs: Original film 90/8 at Jonathani village, Sept 15 and 15, 1990.

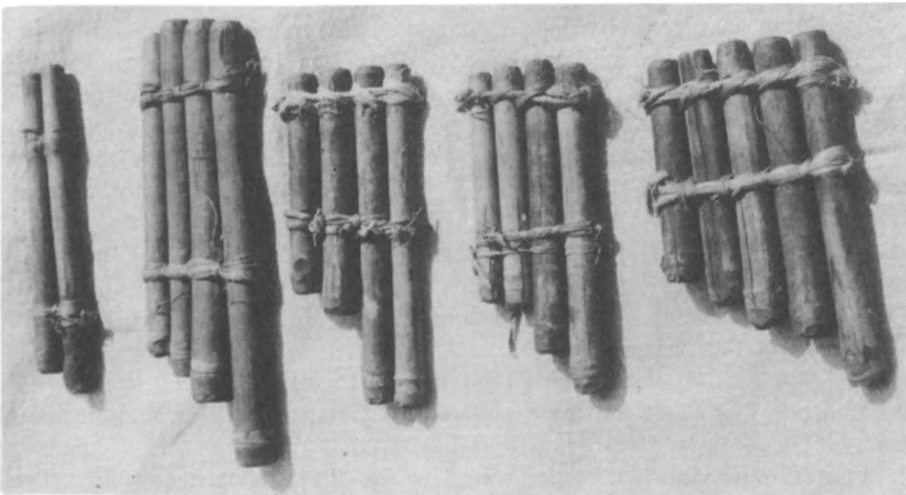
The technical equipment used for this work was a Uher Report IC tape recorder, a Practica MTL 3 camera for still photography and a Chinon Pacific 8mm synch sound movie camera, at 24 frames per second.

Basic field notes

Sakha and the members of his group say about the *ngororombe* dance that it is a dance-game (*chamba cha masewela*), and the ones who dance are always men; however, in some circumstances there are women who stand in the middle of the dance area, and their task is to sing in response to the songs which are performed by the men on the panpipes. The day I was lucky to record *ngororombe* for the first time was the 15th Sept, 1990, and the people recorded are refugees from Mozambique who came to live here with other refugees because of the war in their home. Here in Malawi these people are present in many parts of the country, but those I recorded are now taken care of at Chifunga in the administrative area of Mwanza. Here people from many different ethnic groups are found. All of them brought dances from their home areas; from time to time, when they feel like it, they perform these dances. The very day I began to talk to them, there were many people from ethnic groups such as the Nyungwe who indicated that they could sing or play an instrument. For example, I found that there were players of the *sansi* and the *kalimba* (lamellophones), of the *nyakatangali* (mouth-bow), as well as the *ngororombe* ensemble. Among all the instruments which people from that ethnic group played, those which won everybody's heart were the *ngororombe* panpipes.

a. The instruments and their conceptualisation

Ngororombe is what they call both the dance and the instruments. Each of the instruments also has its name. They also call them *nyanga*. The people play *nyanga* at their mouth by blowing at them with their breath, and those *nyanga* then produce sounds.



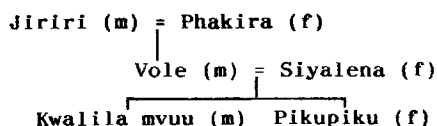
Ex. 1. The *nyanga* set: L to R, *siyalena*, *jiriri*, *kwilila mvuu*, *phakira*, *pikupiku*. Jonathani village, T.A.Mulauli, Mwanza District, Sept 16, 1990. Photo: author, archive no. 90/8:16.

The instruments are made from bamboo (*nsungwi*). Only one node (*nfundo*)¹ of the

1 The English translation 'node' is perhaps not accurate. *Nfundo* refers here to one section of bamboo cut so that one node is left to close the tube at the bottom, and the top is open to be blown at.

jointed stem is used. (Ex. 1) Then, when the player blows it like a flute, it gives a sound. Several small bamboo tubes like that are joined according to the particular *nyanga* which is to be made; for example some have four tubes (*minyanga*), another has five and another two.

Among the *nyanga* there are names which allude to the pitch of a person's speaking voice, whether it is the voice of a child or perhaps of an adult, a woman, or an old person. Such designations for *nyanga* compare with how members of a family are related to each other, from the oldest person down to the child. For instance, they say, there is the grandfather (*anganga*) and the grandmother (*agogo*); there is also their male offspring, he too with his family of two children, a girl and a boy. The names of the *nyanga* used by Sakha's group are: 1. *pikupiku*, 2. *phakila*, 3. *kwalila nvuwu*, 4. *vole*, 5. *siyalena*, and 6. *jiriri*. These names have no special meaning of their own;² they are either names of people or of animals, as for example *kwalila mvuu* (how the hippopotamus roars there). This genealogy shows how they conceptualize the marriage between the males and females among these names:



All the instruments are known generically as *nyanga*, but each sounds different from any other according to how it was made to be different from its companion, similar to the age groups to which people belong, with persons of adult age, children and the age groups between.

b. The dance and its social setting

While some persons in the group explained the character of *ngororombe* as just an entertainment dance (*chamba chamasewela chabe*), there are also certain events which may be associated with it. For instance it can be that there is a funeral somewhere, and then it is possible that the *ngororombe* group is invited to dance there. Perhaps one reason why the group often plays at funerals is because they play *ngororombe* as if crying. At other times, the same *ngororombe* is capable of being played for ancestral spirits (*mizimu*). If someone gets possessed by a spirit (*agwa azimu*), it can happen that through the possessed person the spirit says that he wants a *ngororombe* group to perform; the *ngororombe* people are then called there, in order to make the spirit desist from that person.

To explain further about ancestral spirits, it may happen that a funeral takes place, perhaps of a grown-up person. Then after some time has passed, that dead person wants such and such action taken, so that he/she and his/her ancestral spirits (*mizimu yake*)³

2 See also A. Tracey 1971:76

3 In the plural, because it is believed that a person who has died has "many *mizimu* with him/her" where he or she stays after death. Everyone who dies incorporates several *mizimu* which have different characters and can move about independently. What is it that makes a person good at times and bad at other times? It is believed that it is the different spirits in the same person. After death these spirits, some good, some bad, demand different things from the surviving relatives (Note, Nov 14, 1990.)

should rejoice. Then the spirit of the dead person may arrive at the village to make a certain person sick who appears to be a relative. When the sickness develops that person suddenly speaks any sort of strange things, but in what he/she says there are certain themes which come from the spirit of the dead person, i.e. it is explained what the ancestral spirit wants the living to do for him/her. Other people in the village try to understand and interpret what the sick person is saying, that the spirit of so and so wants such and such things. After some time the people in the village begin to provide what the spirit wants; if it is beer – always millet beer (*mowa wa masese*) – the people begin to brew it so they may drink because, they say, without doing that, the sick person would never recover, and die. But if they hurry to do the spirit's bidding, the sick person quickly gets better.

When a person dies, he or she can have medicines (*mankhwala pakuziteteza muzinthu zina*, medicines to ward off certain things) remaining in the body, which had previously been given to that person by a *sing'anga* (traditional doctor) for protection against witchcraft. Sometimes, however, other substances are mixed by chance or mistake into these protective medicines, and may begin to work after death to transform the person into a wild animal which then stays in the forest. After some time has passed the people begin to realize saying "Our relative who died has risen up to be such and such an animal", because the person afflicted by illness behaves in a way reminiscent of the animal into which the deceased has been transformed. If this is perhaps a lion the sick person acts out things which that lion acts out, or if he had turned into a leopard, he acts accordingly.

The beings into which the deceased can transform include lion, leopard, python and many other creatures that are dangerous. This animal, they say, comes regularly near the house to see how things are going on. When something of this kind happens, many people in the village live in fear because of those spirit-animals, believing that if they do not carry out the spirit's demands they will experience a lot of difficulties. If this happens in the village – somebody afflicted with illness by spirits – then the elders perform a rite, so that the bad spirit should desist from making this person sick. This is when they invite the *ngororombe* players, so that while they drink free millet beer, there should be a performance of the *ngororombe* dance.

As they perform they receive money from the people who have called them to dance, to give their spirits pleasure. The beer and money come from the person who was afflicted with disease.

c. The style of performance

The playing of the *nyanga* panpipes includes two complementary actions, to the mnemonic syllables 'efu': a) singing the syllable 'e', (b) blowing on the rim of any of the pipes on 'fu'. Depending on the kind of song the performance is organized in two to three sections, for example the lead singer (*ntsogoleri* or *muleketeli*) begins a song by mouth followed first by the vocal chorus of the other group members, sometimes with *chingolin-go* (yodel) and eventually by a long instrumental section involving the panpipes.

Everyone sings and plays his own part, dancing simultaneously (Ex. 2). The leader or elder of the group is also the one who sings the leading part of the song; he was Sakha Bulaundi. He sings all the songs, one following the other without any interruption. The performers wear rattles on their legs. Inside the rattles they put pebbles (*miyala ya*

nsangalabwi) and everyone binds a pair of these rattles to his right leg. When dancing they stamp their feet on the ground and the rattles sound: *soko-soko*. So they say that *soko-soko* is the name of these leg rattles.

Regarding the dance style and dance patterns (*kabvinidwe*, *nsambo*) of this *ngororombe* group we can say that they dance in a variety of ways according to the song and its content. The songs which they sing are inspired by events they experienced at the time of composing. For example, there is a song in which they sing about the soldiers in Mozambique and they then dance like those warriors (*asilikali ankhondo*). They lift their hands as if pointing a gun to shoot, and then they demonstrate the goose-step as practised by soldiers, in which each step is taken without bending the knee. When this takes place they form a line all looking in one direction. Such actions are carried out, for example, in the song called "Kambowa" (see below).

In another song called "Futubora" everything they do demonstrates the movements of football, lifting their legs at the same time as if they were all kicking a football. In this song they form a circle of changing size, all of them looking inwards with their panpipes. From time to time they come close to each other and then retreat to make the circle wider. At one point they turn their heads to look back over one shoulder and stamp their right feet on the ground to sound the rattles (*soko-soko*). Then they reduce the diameter of their circle again and stamp with their legs in the middle.

In most of the *ngororombe* songs the performers form a circle, looking inwards towards each other. In this way they can hear each other very well and coordinate their actions. (See 8mm film, Dec 1, 1990 and Ex. 4).

d. The recorded songs/steps

(See text transcriptions at the end of this article of those songs marked with an asterisk, and the dance transcriptions in the following article.) Sakha explained to me that *nsambo* in Chinyungwe corresponds with *nyimbo* in Chichewa. However, *nsambo* refers both to the dance steps and the associated songs.

Tape 90/34, Jonathani village, Sept 15, 1990:

(Side 1) Item 1. "Nyangomba" 2. "Luneya"* 3. "Futubora"* 4. "Maliu makati"* 5. Interview with the musicians. 6. "Nyang'omba"* 7. "Mithwethwe"* 8. "Chitowe". In this last song they state that many people call the instruments they are playing *nyanga*, without realizing that the term also means 'horns carrying witchcraft medicine'. Therefore they propose that its name should be *piyano ya ngororombe*⁴ and not *nyanga*, because that would be associated with medicine. Another song here states that it is not good for women to give birth to children at short intervals, literally: "It is not good that she carries a child on one side (the back) while on the other side (the front) she carries a pregnancy". (Side 2) Item 9. Interview with a member of the group; he says that the name of the group is *Thunga la ngororombe*⁵

10. "Kanzombe". What they often do is to repeat a song which they have already

4 Literally 'the *ngororombe* piano', from Port: 'piano'

5 According to Sakha (interview on tape 90/46, Dec 1, 1990), *thunga* in Chinyungwe is equivalent to *gule* (dance, dance-game) in Chichewa. The phrase then translates as: 'the dance-game of *ngororombe*'.

performed. They say, for instance, the name of this song is “Kanzombe” but in the middle



Ex.2. This is the *ngororombe* group with five musicians as I recorded them on the first day of my visit to Jonathani village, Sept 15, 1990, late in the evening. In the centre is the leader, Sakha Bulaundi, introducing a song to which the others are expected to respond. The performers can be seen in their characteristic attitude, stamping with the right leg, to which pairs of tin rattles are attached. Photo: author, archive no. 90/8:38

of it they turn to other songs. The leader introduces many subjects which he wants to mention, while the others just respond to what he sings. In the middle he ends up saying “Boa noite!” (Port: good night!).

11. “Chitinesa” from Port: *continência* = salute⁶

12. “Kalera” (a type of bus, Port: *carreira*). The dance style of this song imitates how a bus of the *kalera* type moves. And they recite the itinerary of this bus. *Kalera* is a bus with a long body, found in Mozambique. It is the type which used to go from Tete to Vila Coutinho via Malawi.

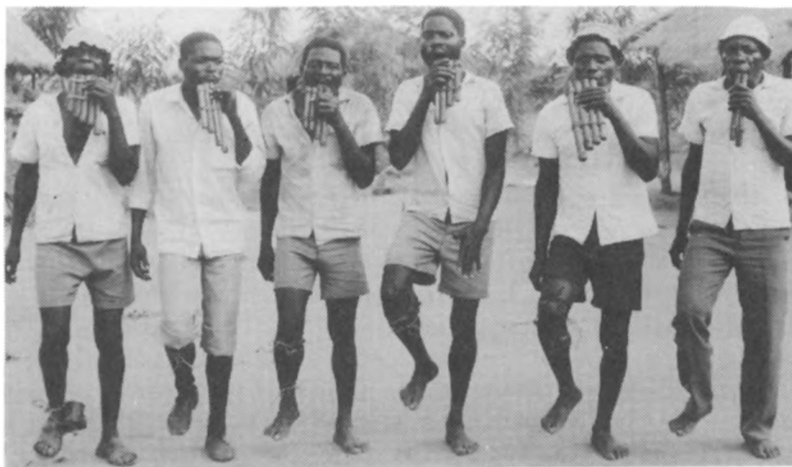
Tape 90/36, Jonathani village, Sept 16, 1990:

In the first recording session (tape 90/34) only five people played *ngololombe*, but in the second they came with a sixth performer playing the panpipe called *jiriri*. They continued in the same manner as the day before, but now with a more complete group. This time they started their performance by introducing the name of the group leader, and thereafter they indicated the title of each song he would begin with.

⁶ Personal communication from Andrew Tracey 23.2.93.

(Side 1) Item 1. "Nsokosoko"*. In all their songs they begin with the panpipe called *phakira*. They never make a break before beginning a new song. When they want to start another song, they just go on with their dance performance; so within it there are many individual songs. There is here also one song they always like to sing, called "Kamwana kang'ono-ng'ono" (a very small child).

3. Maina azoimbazo (the names of the instruments). Here I asked everyone to say his name and identify the instrument which he played. The first in the line of players was Mr Migesani Landi playing *jiriri*, the second was Mr Zyuwawu [João] Francisco, playing *phakira*, followed by Mr Lesho Zyuwawu [João], playing *kwalira mvuu* and Mr Sakha Bulaundi, playing *pikupiku*. He said that the *nyanga* which he played was the one with the "smallest notes" (*mau ochepa*)⁷ among all the *nyanga*; he said it was like a girl with a high voice. There was also Mr Mário Pulazi who played *vole*, a *nyanga* with a very deep tuning (*mau akulu akulu*), and Mr Azyete [Azeite] Timozo playing *siyalena*, a *nyanga* which sounds like the women's whistling style (*muluzu wa azimai*), a special vocal



Ex. 3. Sakha Bulaundi's complete ngororombe group with six performers: from L to R: leader Sakha Bulaundi with *pikupiku*; Migesani Landi with *jiriri*; Zyuwawu Francisco with *phakira*; Lesho (Ernesto) Zyuwawu with *kwalira mvuu*; Mário Pulazi with *vole*; and Azyete Timozo with *siyalena*. At Jonathani village, T.A. Mulauli, Mwanza District, Sept 16, 1990. (Photo: author, archive no.

technique employed by Sena and Nyungwe women when they pound maize in a mortar.⁸

⁷ These Nyungwe musicians have a so-called magnitude concept of pitch, in the words of Hugh Tracey, in which a voice that is called 'high' in English is called 'small' (*mau ochepa*) and a 'low voice' is called 'big' (*mau akulu akulu*). (See also: Hugh Tracey 1958)

⁸ See the example in our double album *Opeka Nyimbo*, MC 15, item B 1, and the picture of the performer and her tongue technique on p.20 of the accompanying notes.



Ex. 4. From time to time the players form a circle, facing in, then move anticlockwise. At Jonathanani village, Sept 16, 1990. (Photo: author, archive no. 90/8: 88)

4. “Kambowa”. The song refers to the war in Mozambique involving the people who stay in the forest with their guns, the *dzigawenga* (guerillas).⁹ The group dances like soldiers who carry their guns on their way to the war (drill). They say those *akambowa* “have driven the Portuguese away, forcing them to go back to their home in Lisbon” and then they began to fight against the *machanga*¹⁰ and their war is not finished until today.

When the group had finished performing *ngororombe*, Mr Azyete Timozo, one of the *nyanga* players, played the *nyakatangali* mouth-bow together with his wife, Asta Bell, 40 years of age. The husband played the bow, while his wife responded with words. Mr Timozo had taken a women’s pounding song and put it on the bow. From this example I learned that members of the *ngororombe*

group could also play other instruments.

Interview with the *ngororombe* musicians

On Dec 1, 1990 I conducted an interview in Chichewa with Sakha Bulaundi and his musicians at my Oral Literature Research Centre, Singano village near Chileka, on the occasion of a visit by Mr Andrew Tracey, International Library of African Music, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa (see the following article). The interview is highly revealing as to the musicians’ own concepts about their music. I have therefore transcribed it in from original tape no. 90/46 with an English translation and annotations. M. = the author; S. = Sakha Bulaundi; E. = Ernesto (Lesho) Zyuwawu; A. = Azyete Timozo; Z. = Zyuwawu Francisco; N. = Ntonyo Sakha (a son of Sakha Bulaundi replacing Migesani Landi on this occasion)

M. *Eya tsopano inu bambo Sakha Bulaundi ndimafuna mundiuze mbiri ya gulu lanuli la ngololombe, m’mene munayambila kuimba dzimenedzidzi?*

Mr Sakha Bulaundi I would like you to tell me about the history of this your group of *ngororombe*, how you started to play these instruments.

S. *Ooo! Iyayi izi, m’mene tinayambila kuti tiyimbe, tinadzapeza makolo ali kuimba. Ndiye pamene ankayimba makolo iwowo nkumayamba kutiphunzitsa kuti oo tiyeni tiyimbe. Kuti tidziwe kuti kayambidwe kake nkotani ndiye osadziwa bwino, koma tingodziwa kuti ngololombe anaziyamba makolo. Kuyamba kudziwanso ife kutiphunzitsa.*

⁹ *Kambowa* (pl. *akambowa*) and *chigawenga* (pl. *dzigawenga*) are synonymous, and refer to the guerilla bush fighters who attack their enemies in small groups unexpectedly.

¹⁰ *Machanga* is a name for the Renamo guerillas. This word might derive from the name of an ethnic group, Hlanganu (‘Shangaan’), or Shanga, a subgroup of the Nda. But it could simply mean ‘people in the bush’, because in Chichea there is a comparable expression: ‘*masanga*’.

Oh! It was simply like this how we got started so that we should play; we just found our elders were playing. As those parents were playing, they also began to teach us, inviting us: "Oh! Let's go and play!" That we should know what was the origin of it all is not possible, we don't know that well, all we know is that *ngororombe* was initiated by our forefathers. We also began to know it was through their teaching.

M. *Kodi tsopano mukundiuzwa kuti inu nonse ndinu wochokela mbali imodzi, mudzi umodzi kapena zinakhala bwanji?*

Now tell me, do you all come from one place, from one village, or what else is the position?

S. *Iyayi, koma tili pake pake. Nyakwawa ndi wake wake, inenso kwa nyakwawa ndinachokela kwa Goba, ndi nzanga mmodzi omwe alipo wa kwa Gobanso. Koma enawa ndiwo sindingawadziwe, komwe iwowo ndiwo akhoza kukuuzani.*

No, but we are from different places. Each big chief is separate;¹¹ myself also, as concerns the chief, I am coming from Goba, and one of my companions who is here also comes from Goba. But about the others I don't know where they come from, they can tell you themselves.

M. *Tsopano kuti zidzipezeka kuti mumayimba pamodzi zimenezi zinakhala mwantundu wanjji?*

Now, regarding the fact that you all play together, what kind of circumstances have contributed to this?

S. *Iyayi, chifukwa malingana tadzadziwana muno mu Chifunga pamene tinachoka kunkhondo kufika ndinayamba ndine kutseteka nyangazo. Pamene ndinatseteka basi ndiye kumayamba kuimba ndi ana angawa ndi akazi anga. Anzanga atadzanva, ali oo koma nzathuyu akutani? Akuimba tikaone, atadzafika kudzandiona ndikuimba ndiye kudzati oo ife timazigwilanso zimenezi. Ndiye kugwilizana manje pamene tinadzagwilizana tati woo basi anzangawa amadziwa. Ndiye kuyamba kuyimba pamodzi. Tinayimba tinayimba ndiye kudzabwelanso wena kuti ifenso tifuna kuphunzila ndiye kuyamba kuwaphunzitsa mpaka anadziwanso iwowo, ndiye kufikila mpaka pakali pano.*

Oh, there was nothing special, it was only because we came to know each other here at Chifunga [refugee camp] after we had fled from the war and arrived here; the one who began to cut those *nyanga* was me. When I had cut them I began to play with my children and my wife. When my companions here heard it, they said: "Oh, but our brother, what is he doing? He is playing, let us go and see!" After they arrived and saw me play they exclaimed: "Oh! We also know how to operate these instruments!" Then we came to an agreement; when we had agreed upon doing something together which those companions also knew, then we began to play as a group. As we went on with our practice, others came saying "We also want to learn", and I began to teach them until they also knew, until we reached the present stage.

M. *Tsopano monga ngati kumeneko ku Chifunga inu mumayimba nthawi ndi nthawi kapenano mumangokhala kudikila anthu ena kuti akufunseni kuti mukaimbe?*

Now, in a place such as there at Chifunga do you play from time to time on your own

11 Chinyungwe: *nyakwawa*, senior chief

initiative, or perhaps you just stay quiet waiting for people to ask you to perform?

S. *Iyayi, tikamafuna masiku ena timayimba, chifukwa chakuti nkucheza basi tili tiyeni tidzicheza chifukwa nanga kuti kuti tizizolowele zimafunika kuimba masiku onse. Tikamaimba mwina tiyimba masiku awiri nkuleka, kutha masiku awiri atatu likafika loweluka nkumaimba choncho basi nthawi ndi nthawi, ndiye momwe timapangila.*

No, it's not like that. If we like to perform we do so any days because of such and such leisure-time practice; we say, "Let's play a bit!" In order to get used to these instruments it is necessary that we play them every day. When we play, sometimes we play for two days and then stop; when two or three days have passed and Saturday arrives we play again, like that, from time to time. This is how we keep at it.

M. *Mwanena kuti monga ngati kwa inu nokha munaphunzila kuchokela kwa makolo anu, anali woyimbanso zimenezi eti?*

You have said something like you alone were learning from your parents. Were they also performers of these instruments?

S. *Eyaa*

Oh yes!

M. *Tsopano mungandifotokozeleko pang'ono kapangidwe mmene mumapangila nyanga ndipo zimakhala bwanji?*

Now please be so kind and explain to me a bit the manufacturing process, how you make the panpipes and how they are shaped?

S. *Iyayi, chifukwa timaona chonchi, timapanga moti tikapeza nsungwi, pamene tapeza nsungwizo, ndiye timadula nkubwela nazo nkutenga nsungwizo kuyamba kutani? Kutseteka tseteka. Manje tikatseteka tseteka kufika timacheza chonchi mwina masana kukhala pa nthunzi ndiye kumatenga mipeni kuyamba kutani? Kutseteka bwino bwino kuti zikhale zolingana. Timayambila phakila kutseteka, tsopano paphakila nkudzabwela nzake ujeni jirire, tikachoka jirire ndiye nkudzabwela ujeni kabombo, nkudzafika ku pikupiku, tsapano ndiye timayambilila zimenezo mpakana kudzafikila zonse tikamatseteka. Zikakwanilana bwino bwino ndiye timayamba kuimba tsapano tikayamba kudziwa kuti o zagwilizana.*

No problem, because as we see it, we make them as soon as we find bamboo (*nsungwi*). After we have found that bamboo, we cut them and bring them home, carrying that bamboo. What do we begin now? Cutting them to size! While we are cutting them to size we are chatting, perhaps during daytime sitting in a shady place, taking knives and doing what? Cutting them to size very nicely, so that they are in proportion. We begin by cutting to size that panpipe called *phakila*, then at the side of *phakila* comes its companion called *jirire*. When we have completed *jirire*, then comes *kabombo*¹² until we arrive at *pikupiku*; then we begin to try these until the cutting of all has been accomplished. If they are sufficient in relation to each other then we begin to perform and in that manner we gradually know whether they are all in tune.

M. *Kodi monga nsungwi zimene mumatsetekazi, zimakhala kuti nyanga imodzi nsungwi yake, kapena nsungwi imodzi yomweyo kugwilitsila ntchito monga kupangila phakila*

¹² There was no *kabombo* in Sakha's six-man group, and I have never seen it. But the musicians say that *ngororombe* groups can have up to thirty performers.

ndipo yokhayokhayo nkupangila nyanga ina?

With regard to the bamboo which you cut to size, do you use one and the same bamboo stem for one panpipe? In other words, is one bamboo stem employed for the work of making, for example, *phakila* alone or can it also be used for another panpipe?

S. *Iyayi timachita chonchi ngati nsungwiyo iri ndi mpako kwambiri, tsopano ikakhala ndi mphako kwambiri ndiye zikakhala zonse ndingozo timakhoza kutseteka mwina zimakwana ziwiri phakila jirire zimakwanilapo.*

No, we proceed like this: if the bamboo in question has many hollow sections, if it has many 'holes' each with its nodes,¹³ then we can even cut two panpipes out of it, *phakila*, *jirire*, if the nodes are enough.

M. *Pansungwi imodzi?*

Out of one bamboo stem?

S. *Eya nsungwi imodzi, ndiye kutenganso ina kutseteka basi malingana zikakhala zoti zakwanilana bwino bwino nzotalikila.*

Yes, out of one bamboo stem. Then taking also another one, and cutting it to size, that's all, until there are enough, each of the length required.

M. *Ndimaganiza kuti mwina mumaona kusiyana kwake kwa mphako ya nkatiyo kuti iyi ndiye yayenela kukhala pa nyanga yakuti yakuti.*

M. I thought that perhaps, as you see the difference in the size of the hollow part¹⁴ inside, you decide that this one might be good for such and such panpipe, etc.

S. *Iyai zimachitikadi, choncho chifukwa ikamakhala ina yaikulu kwene-kwene, ndiye ikakulitsa mphakoyo, ikakhala ngati phakila samafuna zimenezo. Timatenga zazing'ono kuyenda nkaimbidwe kache, tsopano tikamatenga zazikulu zimatsatana ndi zikulu zinzache. Ndiponso tikaona kuti mphako ija yakula tikamauzila mphweya uja ndiye tikanva kuti siikulila bwino timatenganso kansungwi kakang'ono, kapena bango timaikanso kumutu kwakeko kuti kachepe, ndiye dzina lake kachitsekelo kameneko timati phombo.*

This can be the case, indeed, because if, for example, there is a sizable bamboo stem with wide hollow sections, and if someone suggested using it for *phakila*, it would be rejected.¹⁵ We take small ones to go with the way it sings¹⁶ and if we take big ones they also have to conform with the pitch level of the appropriate panpipe. And also, if we see that the hollow part is very big we blow air at it and if we hear that the sound is not good, we can also take a small bamboo tube, even a *bango*-reed and insert it from the head of the bamboo pipe to make the embouchure narrower.¹⁷ The name of this closing-up device is *phombo*.

[Sakha showed me how he applies this tuning device: a thinner bamboo piece or a

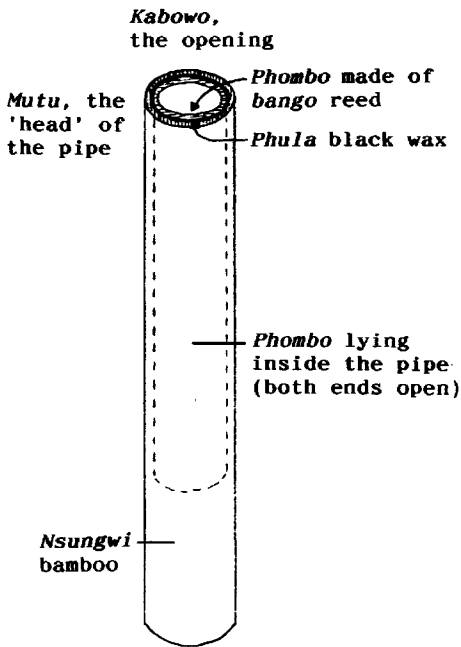
13 'Ndungo' (possibly Chinyungwe), instead of Chichewa: *nfundo*. Some Chichewa speakers also use the pronunciation 'ndungo' with the same meaning.

14 *Mpako*, generally translated as 'hole', refers in this case to the hollow sections between the nodes of the bamboo.

15 Literally "they would not want those" (*samafuna zimenezo*). 'They' are the panpipes, referred to as if they were persons (cf. 'genealogy').

16 *Kaimbidwe kache*, i.e. the character of its voice, or 'pitch level'.

17 *Kuti kachepe*: The prefix *ka-* apparently refers to the noun *kabowo* which denotes a small opening, in this case the embouchure of the pipe.



Ex. 5. Flattening a pipe with a *phombo* tuning plug

bango-reed is inserted into the 'head' (*mutu*), i.e. at the top end of the panpipe. The length of this thinner piece is about two thirds of the larger one, and it is open at both ends. Then the empty space between the two tubes is sealed off with black wax so that air cannot enter between them when blowing. By this device the pitch of the pipe is lowered. Sakha describes it in Chinyungwe as *phombo*, and in Chichewa as *kachi-tsekelo*, a small object for closing up something.]

M. *Kutsekela kuti kabwenje kaja kachepe, mumaika nkati katimo?*

Closing it up so that the tube should be narrower, do you put it (the *phombo*) inside?

S. *Eyaa, zikatero pouzila mphweya uja zimakhoza kubvomela bwino. Kameneka ndi bango lina lapadela, koma sikadafike pansi iyayi. Kadangofika pompa, malile ndi yapapa apa, ndiye saizi yake. Koma dzina lake timacha phombo kamenekakako kamodzi. Tikakhala kuti ndi tambiri timeneti timacha kuti maphombo.*

Yes, that's how it is done. When one blows air at it, it can respond well. That thing is a certain *bango*-reed found in the area, but its length does not reach the bottom. It only reaches about here [showing it, see Ex. 5], the limit is just about here, that is its size. But the name we give it is *phombo* in the singular. If these reeds are many we refer to them as *maphombo*.

M. *Ndiye paja nyanga iyi dzina lake ndichiyani?*

The pan-pipe you have shown, what is its name?

S. *Vole.*

Vole.

M. *Tsopano mutandiuza kuti ngololombe, ngololombeyo maka maka ndichiyani?*

Now you should tell me about *ngororombe*; this (name) *ngororombe* what is it specifically?

S. *Ngololombe, ngololombe choyamba iyi timati nsungwi tikakadula kuchile kuja. Timayicha nsungwi dzina lake tsopano tikabwela nayo kumudzi kuja tikatseteka tseteka tikatha, ndiye ikakhala chonchi ndiye timadzaicha kuti ngololombe tsopano. Monga ngati dzina la chinthu chinachache kapena kuti munthu, akabadwa timati ndi munthu chifukwa chakuti wabadwa bwino bwino chifukwa chakuti ziwalo zonse alinazo. Koma amadzachedwa dzina lake leni leni kunchula kuti oo mwana uyu ndi uje, chifukwa chache tinachula gule yense momwe adakhalila ndiye timati ngololombe.*

Ngororombe, ngororombe... At first we just call them 'bamboo stems' (*nsungwi*), when we are cutting them there in the bush. We call them by the name of *nsungwi*. Then, when

we have brought them to the village and cut them to size, from the moment we have completed that, when they are in shape, we now call them *ngororombe*. It is like the proper names of anything; perhaps we can say, even a person when it is born we just call it 'a person', because of such and such, it was born well and because it has all its limbs. But people will not delay addressing it soon with a proper name, saying: "Oh, this child is so-and-so!" For this reason we also gave a proper name to the whole dance-game as it was performed, saying *ngororombe*.

M. *Kodi ngololombeyi ndi chinenelo chanji?*

What language is the word *ngororombe*?

S. *Ngololombeyi? Chinenelo chake ndi Chinyungwe.*

That word *ngororombe*? Its language is Chinyungwe.

M. *Tsopano pali mau ena ake, nthawi ijayi imene ndinabwela kuChifunga ija, munan-diuzza kuti thunga la ngololombe kumeneku ndikutanthauzila kuti chiyani?*



Ex. 6. Azyete pours water into the panpipes which Lesho Zyuwawu (centre) and the other musicians hold for him. This has to be done before the start of the performance in order to 'soften' those panpipes (*nyangazo zikhale zofewa*) so that their sound should be heard well. At Jonathani village, Sept 16, 1990. (Photo: author, archive no. 90/8: 14)

Now there are some other issues. At the time when I came to Chifunga you told me the name *thunga la ngororombe*. What does it mean?

S. *Thunga la ngololombe, ndiye kuthandauzila ngati mmene mumachitila kuti gule.*

Thunga la ngororombe, its explanation is as you would say: *gule* (dance-game).

M. *Gule wangololombe?*

Gule (dance-game) of *ngororombe*?

S. *Eyaa.*

Yes.

M. *Thunga ndi gule?*

Thunga is *gule* (in Chichewa)?

S. *Thunga ndi gule, ndi mmene timachitila pa Chinyungwe.*

Thunga is *gule*, this is what we call it in Chinyungwe.

M. *Tsopano monga munanenanso nthawi imene ija kunena kuti phakila ali ndi mau ang'ono ang'ono ngati awana atsikana choncho.*

At that time you also said that *phakila* has a 'small' voice [high] like children, girls so to say...?

S. *Ooo, pikupiku.*

Oh no! I said *pikupiku*.

M. *Pikupiku eti? Tsopano mau amenewa muchinenelo chanu mumati chiyani? Kuti iri ndi mau ang'ono ang'ono?*

Was it *pikupiku*? Sorry! Now, how do you express that in your language, that it has a 'small' voice?

S. *Ooo, nanga siimachita chonchi, atsikana waja mmene amakhala ngati ali ndi amphongo akuimba ujeni gule wawo chonchi, nanga siamuna amaimba*

mau awo achimuna ndiye apo akazi amaimba achikazi ndiye timapanga choncho kuti pikupiku uja ngwakuti athandize zazikulu zikulu zija pang'ono. Ndiye timatelo kuti mafara ache ndi ang'ono akhala ngati atsikana.

S. Oh! Is it not so that when girls and boys sing together in their dance-games the males sing with their male voices and the females sing with their female voices? We then keep it like that, the *pikupiku* should support those big ones [among the panpipes] a bit, and we say that its sounds are 'small' (*mafara ache ndi ang'ono*) like the voices of girls.

M. *Tsopano muChinyungwe mau ang'ono mumati chiyani?*

Now in Chinyungwe what do you say for 'mau ang'ono' (small voices, sounds)?

S. *Mafara mang'ono mang'ono.*

*Mafara mang'ono mang'ono.*¹⁸

M. *Tsopano monga uyu voleyu amene ali ndi mau akulu akuluyu mumati chiyani?*

And now a panpipe like the one called *vole* which has a 'big' voice, how do you term that?

S. *Mafara makulu makulu.*

Mafara makulu makulu.

M. *Tsopano mundiuze amene mwanena kuti mumachokela nawo mbali imodzi aja monga kumene munachokelako. Ndi ati?*

Now please tell me, the person you said you came with from the same place where you come from, who is he?

S. *Mário Pulazi.*

Mário Pulazi.

M. *Monga amenewo munaphunzila nawo pamodzi kapena.*

M. Did you learn together with him or...?

S. *Iyayi, iwo anaphunzila kwa okha inenso ndinaphunzilanso kwandekha.*

No, he learned by himself and I too learned by myself alone.

M. *Tsopano mbali yeni yeni kumene munachokela ndiye kuti?*

[Turning to Ernesto Zyuwawu] Now what is the exact place where you come from?

E. *Ine mbali yimene ndinachokela ndi mwa mfumu Lego dela la Nyamphangala.*

Myself, the exact place where I come from is Chief Rego in the area of Nyamphangala.

M. *Tsopano kuimba ngololombeku komweko kapena mwayambila konkuno ku Chifungaku?*

Did you already play *ngororombe* there at your home or did you perhaps start here at Chifunga?

E. *Ine ndinayamba komweko 1966, ndiye ndinayamba kuphunzila ngololombe.*

I began there at my home in 1966, that is when I began to learn *ngororombe*.

M. *Tsopano kuimba ngololombe kumeneku anakuphunzitsani ndani?*

When you were playing *ngororombe* at your home, who was teaching you?

E. *Koma kuimba ngololombe kumeneku, malingana kwakuti mmudzimo munali anzathu ena adapitanso moyenda yenda choncho ndiye adakazipeza kwina kwake. Basi nkutengala luso kumeneko nkubwela kudzatseteka iseteka. Dzinala lawo timacha aManuel Zyuwawu, ndamene adatiphunzitsa.*

¹⁸ *Mafara: ma-* (cumulative plural prefix) and stem *fara*, from Port: *falar* (to speak), or its imperative 'fala!'.

In my home village I had the opportunity of becoming acquainted with some friends who had travelled extensively some time ago and encountered those *ngororombe* instruments in another place. They then made use of their experience from there, and, coming home, cut them in our village. The exact name of the person who taught us is Manuel Zyuwawu.

M. *Ndiye paja inuyo dzina lanu leni leni ndi ndani?*

And what about you, what is your real name?

E. *Ine ndine Erenesto Zyuwawu.*

I am Ernesto Zyuwawu.

M. *Tsopano nthawi imene munaphunzila chonchoyo munali ndi gulu lanu kapena zinakhala bwanji?*

Now at the time when you learned it that way did you have your own group, or how was it?

E. *Mwini wake wa gulu anali iyeyo, amene adapeza nsungwi ndatsetekayo, ndamene anali mwini wagulu ameneyo. Ifeyo ndife amene tinali wophunzila wawo amane amatiphunzitsa. Ndiye mmene tidadzayamba kudziwa basino nkumadzayamba kubvina nawo limodzi.* The owner of the group was the one mentioned, he was the one who found the bamboo, cut it to size, he was the owner of that group. We were his disciples, he was the one who taught us. As soon as we began to know well, however, we began to perform together with him.

M. *Tsopano mutafika kuChifunga mutaona kuti akuimba inunso nkulowa nawo.*

Now after you had arrived at Chifunga and discovered that he [Sakha] could play as you did, you then entered his group?

E. *Eee, mmene adadzafika bambowa inenso ndidadzafikanso mmomo, sindimadziwa kuti abambowa ali nazo ngololombe iyai, koma tinadzanva nthawi ina akumaimba, tsopano pakuti gule ameneyo amandikondweletsa ndamenenso ndidamuzindikilanso kuti ndi gule ndithu wandikondweletsela ku mtima kwanga ndipamene ndidadzangochoka kunyumbako kupita kumeneko kukati nditayesa nawo, kapena ngati tithane. Basi mpamene ndidadzayamba kuyimba nkubvomelana nawo nkuyamba kuphunzitsananso kuti tonse tikhale mwendo umodzi.*

Yes, when this man arrived I had also just arrived, but I did not know that he had *ngororombe* with him, I heard him play at a certain time. Now because that group pleased me very much, I indicated to him that it was really the group at which I rejoiced in my heart, and at this stage I just left my house and went there to try to perform with him; perhaps I would be able to do so. It was from this moment on that I began to perform with him in cooperation and also to learn that we should all act as if we had one and the same foot (*mwendo umodzi*).¹⁹

M. *Tsopano nyimbo zimene mumayimba ndiye kuti munaphunzila kuchoke ku-Chifungako kapena munazidziwa kale kuchokela mbali yakwanuko?*

Now the songs which you perform, have you learned them since Chifunga, or you knew them already when you left your home?

E. *Áaà, nyimbo zimene timayimbazi mnzomwe tidachoka nazo mbali ya kwathu.*

19 i.e. the coordination of foot-steps in the dance.

Aaa! The songs which we perform are the ones which we brought with us from our home.

M. *Ndiye kuti nyimbo za ngololombe zimayenderana?*

Do the various songs of *ngororombe* conform with each other?

E. *Eee zilipo zina zosiyana siyana, koma zina zimayendelana, zina ngati mwakumana chonchi mumaphunzitsana. Amene anachoka kwao ali ndi nyimbo yake amanena kuti ife kwathu timabvina chonchi nyimbo imeneyi basi anzake aja nkuphunzilanso. Winanso anenanso nyimbo yakwao basi gulu likuyenda mntsofelo.*

It is true that there are some songs that differ a great deal, but there are others that go together, and still others which we have to teach each other, if we find them too difficult. Everyone brings songs from his home, telling us that at home we dance in this or that manner to a certain song. Then his companions learn it. Another one then also explains a song from his home, and in this way the group goes ahead.

M. *Bambo paja ndi ndani dzina lija?*

[Turning to the next musician] Who is this person by name?

A. *Ndine Azyete Timozo.*

I am Azyete Timozo.

M. *Tsopano ine ndimafuna mundiuze mbali imene munachokela inu, ndipo mmene munayambila kuphunzila ngololombe?*

Please, I would like you to tell me which place you come from, and how you started to learn *ngororombe*?

A. *Ndine wa Mwachimphanda, mwa Chimphanda ponti Mazoe mbali ya Changala, ndiko ndimbakhala.*

I am from Chimphanda village, Chimphanda, Mazoe bridge, in the area of Changara, that is where I stay.

M. *Tsopano kuti muyambe kuimba ngololombe?*

Now, where did you begin to play *ngororombe*?

A. *Tidaphunzila komwe kwathuko. Kuli nkulu winango amachemelela Malaita ndiye tingamaphunzila naye masenzeka naye kwao gule yemweyu. Basi pomwe ndadzafika mmwemu nchifungamu kupeza abambo wale ali kumbayimbambo tadzafika pompo ndati a ndimbayesetsambo pang'ono ndipo kumbayenda kumbakasewela. Ndati chifukwa chakumudzi tadzolowela timbasewela basi taona chosewela nacho. Ndiye nkudzamanga kagulu tsopano.*

We learned there at our home. There is a certain elder whom they call Malaita; we used to learn from him these games (*masenzeka*);²⁰ we used to play with him at his place in his group. And then when I arrived at Chifunga I found the gentleman [Sakha] here who also performed these instruments, and so I said I should try to play with him and I went there. It is because we were already used to play in the village that we have taken it up again so easily. And we have strengthened our small group.

M. *Tsopano inuyo bambo?*

20 Azyete mixes Chinyungwe with Chichewa, e.g. his use of the infix *-mba-* instead of Chichewa *-ma-*. *Masenzeka* apparently corresponds to Chichewa *masewera* (plays, games), according to Adoni, one of my employees in my compound, who is from Mozambique. The Chinyungwe verb is *kusenzeka*, he says. (Jan 6, 1991)

M. [turning to Zyuwawu] And what about you now?

Z. *Ine ndine Zyuwawu Francisco, kwathu kuli gulu lakuimba ngolombe, koma sindinali kuphunzila iyayi. Ndabwela muChifungamu ndaphunzila tsapano yapà, ndi bambowa sikuti kumudziku ndinali kuimba iyayi.*

Myself I am Zyuwawu Francisco; at our home there is a group which plays *ngororombe*, but I did not learn there. I came to Chifunga and learned it now with this gentleman, it was not so that I was perhaps playing in the village before, no!

M. *Kodi tsapano mukakhala kwanuko amene amakonda kuimba kweni kweni ndi anthu antundu wanji?*

When you are staying at your home, those people there who like to play these instruments, what ethnic group are they?

Z. *Ndi a Chinyungwe basi.*

They are Nyungwe people, that's it.

M. *Tsapano inu mutatifotokozela dzina lanu.*

[Turning to the next musician] Now please, would you also tell me your name?

N. *Ine ndine Ntonyo Sakha. Nyangazi anandiphunzitsa ndithu ndi madalawa.*

Myself, I am Ntonyo²¹ Sakha. The one who taught me the panpipes is my father here (pointing to Sakha Bulaundi).

M. *Nthawi imeneyo inali nthawi iti?*

When was that?

N. *Imeneyo inali nthawi ya 1977 ndipamene anayamba kundiphunzitsa nyanga zimenezi, mpakana kudziwa nkudzafika mu Nkonedzi ndiye nkudzayamba kuimbanso zimenezi. Ndiye pamene tachoka uko kudzafika muno mu Malawi ndikuziyambilanso kuimba.*

That was in 1977; in that year he began to teach me those panpipes until I knew, and when we arrived at the Nkonedzi²² river we started again to play these instruments. And when we left there and arrived here in Malawi we started once again to play.

M. *Kodi ndiye kuti nyanga zonsezi amapanga ndi bambo anuwa?*

Are all these panpipes made by your father?

N. *Eee, ndi madalawa basi ndamene amakonza.*

Yes, it is my father here, he is the one who arranges everything.

M. *Tsapano zinkhocho zimene mumamanga mmiyendo zija zimene zija ndi momwe mumachitilanso kumudziko, kapena munapanga zimenezi mmalo mosowa zimene mumagwilitsila ntchito?*

[Turning back to Sakha] What about the rattles (*zinkhocho*) which you bind on your legs, does this conform with the way you perform in your village, or did you make them [of tins] only here because of lacking the original rattles [made of *maseche*]?²³

S. *Iyayi ndikumudzi komwe timapanga dzimenedzi. Chifukwa timatsata kuti matiniwa ndiwolila kwambiri, akamati wawawawa kulila ndiye zimagwilizana ndi gule wathuyu,*

21 Most of the names of Mozambicans are derived from Portuguese first names. Zyuwawu comes from Portuguese 'Joao', and Ntonyo is the local pronunciation of 'Antonio'

22 Name of a river in Mozambique. Apparently the war had caused them to move from their home to that river, closer to Malawi.

23 *Maseche*, bot. *Oncoba spinosa*.

palibe zina zake iyayi.

No, it is in the village where we are making those rattles. The reason why we prefer those tins is that they are very loud when they 'say' *wawawawa*, crying out, and they go together with our group; there is no other reason.

M. *Tsopano pomanga ngololombe simumamanga ndi zina zake zimenezi ndi chiyani?*

For binding the pan-pipes together, what is the material you use for that purpose?

S. *Iyayi timamangila luzi la mlambe, mwina timatola mlaza kumamangila basi.*

For binding we use the bark strings of the *mulambe* (baobab), alternatively we pick up *mulaza*²⁴ for binding.

M. *Tsopano ndikuona kuti poyimba paja mumachita efu efu efu efu monga palibe kaimbidwe kena komwe mungathe kuimba kusiyana ndi efu efuyo?*

I have noticed that when you play you also make the [vocal] sounds *efu efu efu efu*. Is there any other style of performance you could use that would be different from the *efu efu*?

S. *Iyayi palibe, koma mokhamo basi, tonse kuimba kwake nkumeneko.*

No, there is no other style except this one; we all sing that way.

M. *Kodi nyimbo zimene mumaimbazi amapeka ndi ndani?*

Who composes the songs which you perform?

S. *Nyimbozi ndimapeka ndine basi, komanso zambiri ndizochokela kumakolo.*

Those songs, I am the one who composes them; but there are also many which come from our forefathers.

E. *Nthawi zina munthu amatha kupanga kabvinidwe kena, ndipo akaika pa kati pa gule paja ndikukhalanso bwino.*

Sometimes a person can invent a new dance movement and he integrates it into the existing dance, and that is also very good.

M. *Kodi nyimbo iriyonse zimene mumayimba zija nyiye kuti zili ndi kabvinidwe kake, kapena pali zinanso zofananafanana?*

Do all the songs which you perform have their specific dance movements, or perhaps there are certain songs which resemble one another?

S. *Iyayi pali nkabvinidwe kake.*

No, they all have specific movements.

M. *Nyimbo iriyonse?*

All the songs?

S. *Nyimbo iriyonse iri ndi kabvinidwe kake, nyimbo timabvina mabvinidwe ake, sikuti zimafanana iyayi.*

Each song has its own dance movement; we dance specific movements to each song, it is not that the songs are similar to one another.

The song texts

Most of the song texts of Sakha Bulaundi and his group are in a mixture of Chinyungwe and Chichewa. Since I had problems in transcribing and interpreting them on my own I revisited the musicians at Chifunga Refugee Camp on April 12, 1992 to discuss the songs

²⁴ Fan palm (Scott and Hetherwick 1929:209).

which I had previously recorded, while playing them back to Sakha. Below are the texts and explanatory translations of each song.

“Luneya” (tape 90/34, side 1, no. 2)

*Ndamodali*²⁵ *nsambo pa “Luneya”, o “Luneya” kugombe mwabzibva alumbwana?*

O “Luneya” ndipo nkulu pomwe mpaka ku gombe...

*O muteweze mwendo alumbwana o muteweze mwendo*²⁶ *mwabzibva alumbwana?*

Tenepo ndipo ngororombe mudzalewa nyanga, nyanga njamankhwala!

*Kunamai ndipo ngororombe, mangwana nigula batha ndiphere masocha.*²⁷

I have now changed the step to “Luneya”, that woman Luneya at the river bank, have you understood friends?

This “Luneya”, my elder! up there at the river bank...

And now, you boys should coordinate your legs when you dance, so that you should not be out of step, have you understood friends?

This is *ngororombe*, don't call it *nyanga*, because *nyanga* is for carrying evil medicine!

You mother, it is *ngororombe*, tomorrow I will buy a duck to kill for the soldiers to express my thanks to them.

“Futubora” (tape 90/34, side 1, no. 3)

Ndimbatere ndipo m'mpira omweyo, o ndimbamenya mpira ku Tete.

O'tenepo ndipo alumbwana n'dachoka nkali mwana nasengwe alumbwana.

*O'piyano*²⁸ *sengwe*²⁹ *“Futubola” o timalize bola mwabzibva apiyano!*

Tamaliza bola timodali, ndikhafuna pomwe “Maliu makati”.

I act like this when there is a football match [kicking], oh, we kick the ball at Tete.

It is like that, boys, I left my home when I was a child, but I am still dancing *sengwe*.

This piano, this *sengwe* dance style, “Futubora” – let us conclude football, have you understood? This piano!

We have finished football, let us change, I want to sing another, “Maliu makati”.

“Maliu makati” (tape 90/34, side 1, no.4)

*Pamaliu ndipo pomwe o'nsambo wangu “Maliu makati”.*³⁰

25 -moda prob. from Port: mudar, v., to change.

26 If someone makes a wrong step in the dance, one can say: *waphonya sitepe ya anzake* (you have missed the step of your partners).

27 *masocha* (pl.) prob. from English: soldier.

28 *Piyano*, from Port: piano, is another name which Sakha and his musicians like to give their panpipes tuned to a scale, comparing it to a piano. See also footnote 4.

29 I have only been able to collect conflicting information about the meaning of the word *sengwe*. Mrs Gadaga, a Nyungwe from Tete who now lives near my home, stated that *sengwe* was a women's dance (*chamba cha azimai*). On the other hand Mr Beula Zyuwaki, a Nyungwe now living at Thanganyika village, T.A. Kuntaja, Blantyre District, enumerated all the Nyungwe dances known to him and said there was no such thing as a *sengwe* dance. According to him it just means *kuleketela* (Chinyungwe: to make a comment, a commentary). *Muleketeli* also means 'lead singer', e.g. of a *nyanga* group. However, since Sakha used the phrase, in our conversations on April 12, 1992, “*ikuvina sengwe*” (we dance *sengwe*) I have come to the conclusion that it must refer to a way of dancing, a type of movement or dance style.

30 According to the musicians *maliu makati* translates into Chichewa as: *kudikula pakati* (to dance with pelvic thrusts), and has strong sexual connotations.

Pamaliu ndipo nsambo wangu o' "Maliu makati"

Kunamai sengwe kokoliko chaona dzuwa lachati nsolo uniwawa.

O'piyano ndipo ngororombe masuku nchifanikizo ndovololo pa nyansi.

Mwabziona ndipo nkulu wangu kupitiwa na kankhonye kudziwa kunemba.

Kuli kwathu ndipo tenepoyu mangwana nim'bala mwenye³¹ ndibwire³² asuka.

And now you all dance with the pelvis to my step, "Maliu makati".

With the pelvis, to my step "Maliu makati".

You, mother, this *sengwe* dance-style! The cock is crowing *kokoliko*! What he has experienced! The sun has set, my head is hurting.

(Expl: If a man does not feel any sexual need, then as soon as he sees that the sun is setting, he begins to pretend that his body is hurting all over, so that at bedtime his wife should not ask him to have sexual intercourse with her).

This piano is *ngororombe*! The breasts are something to play with, but the real thing is further down.

How come you should fail to read and write, when even an earthworm knows it?

(Expl: With these words the singer blames people who cannot write.)

If it were in my place (and not here) I could give birth to an Indian child tomorrow, so that I throw sugar into my mouth.

(Expl: The singer states in a humorous way that if he had an Indian daughter he would surely marry her to one of the Indian shopkeepers in his home area, and thereby have an uninterrupted supply of sugar.)

"Nyang'omba" (tape 90/34, side 1, no. 6)

Dalusensa³³ ndipo wakulumwe ndikhafana pa "Nyang'omba"³⁴ kudya nkhoona pomwe. O pa "Nyang'omba" ndipo tewezeni o mumbabvine namphanvumbo!

Ni "Nyang'omba" iyeyo tewezeni munyang'ane mwendo wangu mwabzibva alumbwana.

Basopombo³⁵ mwendo pomwe mungaphonye ni'ntukana pano.

Kunamai ndipo kokoliko zapangana kudya ng'ombe mphondolo chidodo.

Udaibva mbiri kumatema anyakwawa anapsya ndebvu nakupula thapa.³⁶

O ntenepo ndipo nkulu wangu mangwana ni nchoma choma kulikha madende.

Kunamai ndipo nililila, ndi nilila thumwa³⁷ langu adatenga Nchape.³⁸

Kunamai ndipo kokoliko kokoliko ni n'gone kuponi?

Gweselani ndipo o' "Nyang'omba" omweyo, gweselani piyano!

31 A person of Indian descent.

32 *Kubwira*: to put sugar into one hand and throw it into one's mouth.

33 Port: da licen'a ('with permission', 'excuse me').

34 *Nyang'omba* (Chichewa: *nang'omba*) is a large bird with feathers between brown and black and a red neck. People say its appearance is frightening (*maonekedwe ake oopsy*). Some believe it is a bad omen; if it comes near a village someone might die.

35 Prob. from Afrikaans: *pasop!* (pay attention!).

36 *Thapa*, a type of relish (*ndiwo*) prepared with groundnuts, tomatoes and salt.

37 *Thumwa* is a medicine bag carried in the pocket or attached to one's arm, waist or other body part. It can contain offensive or defensive medicines which are sewn into a piece of cloth.

38 *Nchape* is the symbolic title, deriving from the verb *kuchapa* (to clean, clean up), of a certain *sing'anga* (traditional doctor) who was active in the 1930s and is still remembered. He used to 'clean up' an area by discovering and destroying the evil medicines of wizards and witches.

Kugwesela koko pa "Nyang'omba", o'timalize ndipo "Nyang'omba"!

Excuse me, gentlemen, I now want "Nyang'omba", as it eats snails at that place.

(Expl: The singer calls for a change of step to "Nyang'omba".)

In this "Nyang'omba" let us coordinate our movements and dance with strength!

This is indeed "Nyang'omba", let us coordinate our movements. You all look at my leg
(to imitate my movement), have you understood friends?

Pay attention to the leg, if you miss the step I will insult you right away!

(Expl: The singer warns a dancer who was out of step, which he could hear from the leg rattle.)

You mother, this is how the cock crows. (Let us thank our mother for waking us and warning us about) a meeting of lions nearby planning to attack and eat a cow.

Have you heard the sensational news from Matema village? The senior chief burned his beard while taking *thapa* relish off the fire.

(Expl: The singer is making fun of a certain chief with a very long beard.)

It is like that, you my elder, tomorrow I will work the whole day 'playing' with the newly initiated girls.

You mother, the cock is crowing, *kokoliko*, where shall I sleep? (since you refuse to give me a place)

Start again with the same "Nyang'omba", start again with the piano!

Start there with "Nyang'omba", let us now finish with "Nyang'omba"!

"Mithwethwe"³⁹ (tape 90/34, side 1, no. 7)

O'ntenepo ndipo sengwe nandi alumbwana bzimachita kukomezwa ninga kudya komwe.

Kunamai ndipo kokoliko o tekateka sanilobdza ndakhuya matako.

O kunamai sengwe kokoliko kamuti kankwira ngomwa kana khambi kutsonga.

O'ntenepo ndipo nkulu wangu nyaphudzi⁴⁰ wamoga ntanda makaka nkhumwera.

Walilanjji sengwe kokoliko o'ndadya dende nakachala kugopa milandu.

O'ntenepo ndipo alumbwana nyasa ngati mwezi mwabzibva alumbwana.

It is like that, you friends, we are dancing in the style of *sengwe* to make it all blissful as if we were eating real food.

You mother, the cock is crowing *kokoliko*; a person who travels a lot never lacks anything, he can even meet the buttocks of a woman at any time (because of his travels).

Oh, you mother, this *sengwe* dance style, the cock is crowing *kokoliko*; a person who has no 'work' to do with women, as soon as he sees one it is as if he had seized a bitter tree, a tree without fruits.

(Expl: The singer refers to men who are impotent.)

³⁹ A creeper which climbs up other trees (*ntengo wopota pa ntengo unzache*). The way these plants seem to embrace each other suggests how people embrace during sexual intercourse, and characterises the subject matter of this song.

⁴⁰ A person with an enlarged scrotum, a common consequence of infection with *Wuchereria bancrofti*, a type of filariasis endemic in the Lower Shire/Zambezi area.

It is like that, you my elder, if a person with an enlarged scrotum walks in his fields where he has planted cucumber and jumps over the base of one of the plants, then it will develop big cucumbers like his scrotum.

What do you want, *sengwe, kokoliko*, I have 'eaten' a young initiated girl with my little finger for fear of a legal case.

(Expl: In Chinyungwe custom it is not permitted for a girl to have sexual relations before marriage. But it happened that a certain girl found a man to sleep with her. For fear of pregnancy he had intercourse with her only using his finger.)

It is like that my friends, look at the beauty of this woman, she is like the moon, have you understood friends?

"Nsokosoko" (tape 90/36, side 1, no. 1)

Dalusensa ndipo nkulu wangu.

Ndikhafuna "sokosoko"⁴¹ sokola madende.

Tenepoyo ndipo nsambo wangu "Nsokosoko" piyano ntenepo.

Wabziona ndipo nkulu wangu, mwaona mwaona bzomwe tikuchita bzino.

Ndaimbila aNgwazi⁴² m'Malawi alumbwana!

Ntenepo naku Tete ndimaimba tenepo.

Taimbila aNgwazi atifuwa ife muno m'Malawi.

O'ntenepo ndipo nkulu wangu, munsolo mwa positole munga kang'oma kagule.

Ndadedema nandi ndipo mai kamwana kang'onong'ono kumulutsa ndege.

Dalusensa ndipo nkulu wangu nikaimba kachiwiri timodali nsambo.

I beg your pardon, my elder!

I want "Nsokosoko" ('shake-shake'), shaking those initiated girls.

(Expl: The singer expresses his thanks to the women who assist a *ngororombe* performance.)

It is like that, my step "Nsokosoko" is like a piano.

Have you seen these things, my elder, have you seen, have you seen what we are doing here?

I am singing for the Ngwazi here in Malawi, friends!

It is like this, even in Tete we sing like that.

We are singing for the Ngwazi who is taking care of us here in Malawi.

It is like that, my elder, the head of a member of the Apostolic Church looks like the skin of a drum, because of their way of hair-dressing (they shave off all their hair).

You, mother, I am amazed; look at this very small child who is flying an aeroplane!

(Expl: It is something very surprising to see a child flying an aeroplane by witchcraft during the night. A very popular line)

Excuse me, my elder, when I sing for the second time, then let us change the step.

* * *

My first impression when recording Sakha Bulaundi's songs was that they have little coherent meaning. It is true that to the musicians the most important area of attention

41 *Nsokosoko* is a noun derived from the ideophone *soko-soko*, expressing the sound of the leg rattles.

42 *Ngwazi* (hero) is an honorific title of the Life President of the Republic of Malawi, Dr Kamuzu Banda.

is the dance movements, and each song goes with a different movement profile, e.g. in one song they imitate the movements of the *nyang'omba* bird, in another they use pelvis thrusts (*maliu makati*), etc. But the songs have a variety of meanings, often expressed symbolically which I only discovered after discussing them in detail with Sakha.

First each song has an overall theme, expressed in the title. But then the lead singer is free to improvise and fill in the most diverse observations in the form of sentences, metaphors and aphorisms only loosely connected with one another. In between he gives instructions to his partners to change step, or about how they should dance, he relates news from the villages, or a facet of his personal history. There are also 'text fillers', certain standard words and phrases which he uses in many of his songs, such as '*kokoliko*', '*kunamai*', '*dalusensa*', '*ntenepo ndipo nkulu wangu*', '*mwabzibva alumbwana*', etc. Here he seems to act like a cook putting a standard mixture of groundnuts, tomatoes, pepper and salt into any relish he prepares.

Conclusion

The *ngororombe* or *nyanga* pan-pipe dance has been recorded by Andrew Tracey in Mozambique among the Nyungwe (see his article, A. Tracey 1971) and by Maurice Djenda and Gerhard Kubik in Malawi among the Mang'anja (original field notes, recordings and 16 mm film G. Kubik, Museum für Völkerkunde, Musikethnologische Abteilung, Berlin). These researchers have often recorded large groups involving 20 to 30 performers. Due to the circumstances, Sakha's group only included six members. But for me it was an advantage to work even with a small group, because of excellent personal relations with the leader and each individual performer.

References

- Duarte, Maria da Luz Teixeira (ed). 1980. *Catálogo de instrumentos musicais de Moçambique*, Ministerio da Educação e Cultura, Mozambique
- Kubik, Gerhard and Malamusi, Moya Aliya. 1989. *Opeka nyimbo: Musician-composers from Southern Malawi*. Double album with notes, Museum Collection Berlin (West) MC 15, Berlin: Museum für Völkerkunde
- Scott, David Clement & Hetherwick, Alexander. 1929. *Dictionary of the Chichewa Language*, Blantyre: C.L.A.I.M.
- Tracey, Andrew. 1971. "The nyanga panpipe dance", *African Music*, Vol. 5, No.1.
- Tracey, Hugh. 1958. "Towards an assessment of African scales", *African Music*, Vol. 2, No.1.