

ARRULLOS, CHIGUALOS AND ALABAOS: TRADITIONAL AFRO-ESMERALDENIAN MUSIC IN ECUADOR

by

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Abstract: In this article I examine traditional Afro-Esmeraldenian music as manifested in religious and spiritual contexts. I discuss the repertoire's formal musical aspects and its associated factors. I argue that the traditional music of the Afro-Esmeraldenian community is evidence of a performance culture that has taken on the characteristics of first nation Americans and Spanish colonisers, while retaining a distinct African identity mostly in the musical instruments such as the marimba, rattles and drums, in the polyrhythms and in the distinctive responsorial singing. The religious sphere is a fundamental and representative space for understanding the cosmovision and symbolism of the Afro-Esmeraldenians, a population located on Ecuador's northern Pacific coast, originally settled during forced migration of Africans to America between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Here, traditional musical practices have survived through generations and reflects the importance of the spiritual world for this cultural group. In addition, it is likely that the religious sphere has contributed significantly to the validity and durability of the Afro-Esmeraldenian musical repertoire and the instruments making up the traditional ensemble.

Keywords: Traditional music, spirituality, religion, Catholicism, Afro-Esmeraldian syncretism.

Background

This article describes how a musical tradition occupies a central position in religious practices. Music is not static but alive and dynamic, having a strong presence in the religious life of this community.¹ I examine the formal and musical characteristics of musical pieces which comprise the musical repertoire in the religious sphere, and some of the main events in which they are performed, exposing how the fusion of African related music characteristics with indigenous American and Spanish music and belief systems is realised.

This article is part of a larger research project focused on Afro-Esmeraldenian music, conducted in several communities from 2014. I undertook intensive fieldwork in rural and urban areas, attended numerous celebrations forming part of the liturgical calendar to gain a comparative perspective of traditional musical practices in sacred contexts. I conducted interviews and visited Afro-Colombian communities on the border of Ecuador, where the culture is very similar. Using thick description and

¹ Ecuador did not recognise the presence of Afro-Ecuadorians, who constitute at least eight per cent of the population, until 1998. In this community, music, dance, and food are deemed the principal signifiers and markers of cultural difference (Walsh 2018: 86).

ethnography as main methodological approaches I describe the musical practices of the Afro-Esmeraldenians in detail.²

Ecuador, placed on the middle of the equatorial line of South America, is divided in four main geographical areas: the Andean Highlands, the Amazon, the Galápagos Insular region and the Pacific Coast. Each area has a great variety of bio-geographic and environmental characteristics features. Furthermore, several cultural groups inhabit these regions, and their music's are diverse and interesting. Afro-Esmeraldenian music is one of them.

The Afro-Esmeraldenians reside in the northern coastal province of Esmeraldas, in the north littoral of the country. This area is well-known for its tropical climate and landscape, with natural forests near the seaside along the coast. This community emerged from the enslaved Africans who were brought to America from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. The migration specifically occurs on one side with secondary migrations that took place from the main ports on the Atlantic coast of the subcontinent, at Cartagena de Indias, to the gold mines on the North Pacific Coast of Ecuador and Colombia; and, other settlements started by Africans who survived being shipwrecked on this coast.

There exists another group of African descent in Ecuador, placed in the Highlands region of the Chota Valley sector. Their historical process is different to the Esmeraldenian one as here there were Jesuits who brought enslaved people to these regions as labour for the sugar cane farms from the seventeenth century onward. Although many of the ceremonies held in Esmeraldas has similarities with the ones in Chota Valley, as in the Day of the Dead festivity the music is rather different. The Afro-Ecuadorian music in Chota Valley, named *Bomba*, shows many Andean influences in their its structures and also in the instrumentation, as in for example in the use of pentatonic melodies in the singing and with the central role of use of the guitar as one of the main musical instruments. Nevertheless, the rhythm, dance and the drum, collectively named *Bomba*, clearly has African roots, as evidenced in the similarities that relate them with sub-Saharan African musical practices in many sub-Saharan African cultures. A full discussion of *Bomba* is beyond the scope of the present article, but the topic is explored by many sources which describes in detail this cultural group and its musical practices (see Chalá 2013, Lara 2016, López 2015, Peña 2011, Peters 2005, Pico 2014).³

Catholicism and spirituality

Religion and spirituality are important in the lives of Afro-Esmeraldenians, and Catholicism is the prevailing doctrine. In both the rural communities and urban centers that I visited during my fieldwork, attendance at the regular liturgical celebrations is substantial.⁴

² This article was translated from Spanish to English by Kimrey Anna Batts at the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador.

³ Due to the limited space of the article this topic will be discussed in a future publication.

⁴ At present, the evangelical doctrine is growing in popularity in the Afro-Esmeraldenian

In the Afro-Esmeraldenian tradition, religious syncretism is not as evident as in other African-American cultures, where the presence of indigenous religious expression from different African regions remains, in hybrid form, alongside Catholicism. Examples of religious syncretism are found in countries such as Cuba, Colombia, Brazil and Haiti (see Bermúdez 2003, Dauphin 2014, Eli 2009, Gidal 2016, Wade 1995). In Esmeraldas, however, the Catholicism is deeply rooted, although African elements are evident in their music and dance accompanying worship. This is perhaps since the Afro-Esmeraldenian population has their origins in secondary or tertiary migrations of Afro-descendants from other American regions, making it difficult for them to establish a common African origin.

Starting in the sixteenth century, the colonial authorities began to evangelise Afro-descendant populations. In the province of Esmeraldas, a single monotheistic vision—Catholicism—gradually took root as a unifying element among the original diversity of the inhabitants, and as a tool that would allow them to strengthen their cultural expressions.

The liturgical calendar determines the majority of ceremonies at which traditional Afro-Esmeraldenian music is performed. The principal dates are arranged as follows: the saints' feasts, depending on the day established for each in the book of saints; the Day of the Dead in November; Christmas in December; and Holy Week between March and April. Three Kings Day, in January, is now rarely celebrated, although some communities across the region still maintain the tradition.

The traditional Afro-Esmeraldenian grouping used in religious festivals is made up of the singing voices (almost always performed by women), the *bombo* (a membranophone played with two drumsticks), the *cununos* (conical membranophones in pairs, played with the hands), and the *guasá* (a shaken tubular idiophone). The marimba (xylophone, with bamboo-reed resonators) is not included, since this instrument is viewed by the population as belonging to the festive context and secular celebrations. Although in the religious context there is rhythmic bodily movement, a choreography or dance does not occur, as a sign of respect to the cult. Dance, like the use of marimba, are relegated to festive occasions.

Musical instruments have only recently been introduced to church worship. Starting from the middle of the last century, the Comboni fathers⁵ undertook Christian evangelisation in the province of Esmeraldas and introduced instruments in church services. This gave rise to what these priests called the *Afro mass*: characterised, precisely, by the inclusion of the instruments and songs characteristic of an Afro-Esmeraldenian tradition. One of the pioneers in the implementation and development of this type of mass was Father Silvino Mina, who comments: "All this served to value our culture,

population. Evangelical churches do not allow the use of traditional musical instruments or Afro-Esmeraldenian songs in the liturgy.

⁵ This name comes from the order of Daniel Comboni, an Italian missionary who lived in the middle of the 19th century. He was Bishop of the Central African region where he carried out evangelising work.

our people, and our folklore more. And believe me, this has been imbued in me and I will continue to maintain and defend it however many years of life I have left to carry it forward” (Interview 9 September 2015).

Musical forms in the religious sphere

There are two main musical forms in the Afro-Esmeraldenian religious context: the *arrullo* and the *alabao*. The *arrullo* is the primary musical piece performed in the Afro-Esmeraldenian religious context and has a sound structure that is a model for different musical performances.

The *Arullo* is the name applied to the musical piece and, on occasion, the name given to the set of interpretations falling under this category that take place during the determined event. For example, in the celebrations for the saints, reference is made of an *arrullar* to the saint in question, with this being understood as the celebration itself, not the individual component of a piece of music. The physical space where the *arrullos* are sung is determined by the type of event in questions. The event can be in a church, a private home, in the river sailing on rafts, or in the streets.

The origin of the *arrullo* cannot be established with certainty. The term comes from the verb *arrullar*: to lull, reassure or put children to sleep with song. The Afro-Colombian singer-songwriter, Faustina Orobio, says that “the name comes from lulling the child to sleep. Our ancestors used it for that. But later we extended it further, using it for other things. To the same melody, lyrics were added that have to do with other things” (Interview 20 December 2013).

The theme expressed in the *arrullos* deals mainly with the divine, corresponding with the sacred performance context. However, at times the topics concern earthly existence. The lyrical structure is based on *coplas* or stanzas; octosyllabic quatrains generally derived from the *décimas*; a style of poetry of the Spanish renaissance based on ten verse structures (Trapero 2001). Here is an example of the lyrics of one *arrullo* with a theme related to “the divine”, and another with a theme related to “the human being”:

A lo divino

*La virgen me hablaba
y yo no la oía.
Donde está la virgen
allí en la bahía.*

The Divine

The virgin spoke to me
and I did not hear her.
Where is the virgin
there in the bay.
(P. Palma interview 3 March 2015).

A lo humano

*Oio, oio, oio, oio, oio, oio.
Yo canto porque yo sé,
y porque yo he aprendido,
yo canto de mi memoria
porque yo soy favorecida.
(Coba 1980: 233–234)*

The Human

Oio, oio, oio, oio, oio, oio.
I sing because I know,
and because I've learned,
I sing from memory
because I am favoured.

The song is responsorial, the melodic section and the polyphonic result are established by the singing voices, in this case between the main solo voice (*glosadora*), which establishes certain glosses or stanzas, and the chorus (*respondedoras*), which repeats a

certain phrase, verse or word as a refrain. The *glosadora* is the one who decides which *arrullo* is going to be performed. She establishes the first verse and the *respondedoras* answer it. All of the singers recognise the repertoire. Improvisations in the melodic line of the *glosadora* are frequent, giving the soloist more interpretative freedom in her role. The following transcriptions provide examples of the *arrullo* form (Transcription 1).

Allegro Molto ♩ = 160

Glosadora

De Me de llín la Vir gen vie ne lle gan do de Me de

Respondedoras

A rru lla do ra

7

G llín la vir gen vie ne lle gan do y trae pa lo mas

R a rru lla do ra

14

G y trae pa lo mas

R a rru lla do ra a rru lla do ra

Allegro

Glosadora

Es te ni ñoes tá llo ran do por que lo de jan llo ra ar

rit.

Respondedoras

6

G por u na con chi tae na car

R quees taen el fon do del mar

Transcription 1. Response singing in *arrullos*. Transcription by Author.

Sometimes the texture is enhanced by the *bajonera* part. The *bajonera* sings the *bajón*, a sort of falsetto voice at intervals of a fifth or an octave higher than the note established by the *glosadora*. Transcription 2 provides an example of this technique.

Allegro ♩ = 120

Glosadora
Ahí es tá Ma rí a Ahí es tá Jo sé — yal ní

Bajonera
Ma rí a Jo sé —

Respondedoras
tí lín tí lín tí lín tí lín

G
ñoen el me — dió lo tí nen — que bo ní to es — yal ní

B
lo tí nen —

R
tí lín tí lín

Transcription 2. *Bajonera* in *arrullo*. Transcription by Author.

Rhythmically, most of the *arrullos* are performed in the characteristic 6/8 time signature. An example is provided in Transcription 3. However, there is a kind of *arrullo*

Allegro Molto ♩ = 160

Maracas

Guasa

Cununos
Cununo macho
Cununo hermbra

Bombo
Golpe en la caja
Golpe en el parche

Transcription 3. *Arrullo* rhythmic arrangement in 6/8. Transcription by Author.

that, like the festive musical pieces, *andarele* and *sanjuanito*, is played in a simple binary meter of 2/4. This is the so-called *bunde* or *arrullo bundeado* (R. Wila interview 2 April 2015). The relationship between the *bombo* and *cununos* is illustrated in Transcription 4. As in the festive sphere, the *bombo* marks the rhythmic direction of the ensemble, which is supported by the *cununos*.

The *arrullo bundeado* most likely comes about due to the need to play the *arrullo* during the saint's procession, since the binary meter is more natural for walking than 6/8 time (V. Linberg interview 7 June 2012) In the *arrullos* both the musical pieces and the ensembles take a means toward unity and cultural continuity for the Afro-Esmeraldian community. As the singer Marcia Lastra observes: "The *arrullo* is a great joy left to us by our elders to keep us together, to find one another, to sing and celebrate our traditional festivities or to say goodbye to a little angel who has flown away" (2012: 138, in Juncosa 2012).

As a musical piece, a single *arrullo* can last hours, depending on the performer's energy. Sometimes, the fatigue of the *bomberos* and *cununeros* (the players of these respective instruments) results in the instrumentalists rotating instruments. This practice also occurs with the *glosadoras* and *respondedoras*, because the *arrullo*, as an event, lasts throughout the night and until dawn.⁶ In the past a shot was fired into the air, with a handcrafted object called the *trabuco*. This informed the community where the *arrullo* was being sung so that they could attend the event.⁷

Allegro molto ♩ = 160

The transcription shows five staves of music in 2/4 time. The tempo is marked 'Allegro molto' with a quarter note equal to 160. The parts are: Maracas (quarter notes), Guasa (eighth notes), Cununos (Cununo Macho and Cununo hembra, eighth notes), Golpe en la caja (quarter notes), and Bombo (Golpe en el parche, quarter notes). The music is in 2/4 time and consists of four measures.

Transcription 4. *Arrullo bundeado* rhythmic arrangement in 2/4. Transcription by Author.

⁶ Faustina Orobio says that traditionally: "the *arrullo* singer had to sing three [*arrullos*]. Until three had been sung, the singer could not leave. This was the tradition in the town of Limones [Colombian South Pacific]. This was also the case at wakes, the person singing the *alabao* had to sing three *alabaos*. In the past, there was a lot of order in music, in folkloric things. If the person didn't sing the three, they made them leave the dance." (Interview 21 December 2013).

⁷ As told by the Afro-Esmeraldan singer, Rosa Wila (Interview 3 April 2015).

The *alabao* is a piece of music typical of the traditional Afro-Esmeraldenian religious musical repertoire. Its performance is limited to a few occasions, unlike the *arrullo* which is more common. The *alabao* is a funeral song, whose origin most likely derives from the praises of Christ in the Christian liturgy. The lyrics deal with topics of the divine, for instance when performed at Holy Week and themes of the human when sung at the wake of an adult, a ritual that is sometimes called *alabao*. At this event these songs establish the principal musical context. The following are examples of the lyrics of these songs:

A lo divino

*La Virgen y San José
se fueron a la romería,
tan cansada iba la Virgen
que ni caminar podía.*

The Divine

The Virgin and Saint Joseph
went to the pilgrimage,
So tired was the Virgin
that she could not walk.

A lo humano

*Levanten la tumba
levántenla ya,
que esta alma se ha ido
para jamás volver.*

(O. Arboleda interview 7 January 2014).

The Human

Lift the grave
lift it up now,
that this soul is gone
to never return.

The *alabao* is sung without accompaniment by womens, and it can take various forms: solo voice without chorus, groups making up the *glosadora* and *respondedoras* and all voices in unison with or without a response structure. The characteristic monody is illustrated in Transcription 5:

Lento

Transcription 5. Example of *alabao* monody. Transcription by Author.

This song keeps a slow tempo, in 6/8-time; however, due to the recitative nature and the *a cappella* arrangement, the beat does not remain constant. It therefore acquires an ambiguous character appropriate to the performance context of the wake.

Events in which religious music is played

Traditional Afro-Esmeraldenian music played in the religious sphere takes place at certain events; marked, on the one hand, by the Christian liturgical calendar and, on the other, by the death of both children and adults. Each of these is distinct from the other in terms of organisation and in the musical arrangements. In the following few paragraphs I discuss the formal and musical ways in which these events are carried out.

The first event is the *chigualo* or child's wake. In the Afro-Esmeraldenian tradition, a boy or girl who dies is considered a little angel because they have committed no sins. According to Luis Rodríguez, the *rezandero*⁸ of the parish of Borbón: "a little boy or girl is considered a child until they are ten years old; from then on they are an *anima sola*. Thus, in the case of the death of a boy or girl of ten or older, the burial ritual for adults, or *alabao* will be performed" (Interview 3 November 2014). According to the Afro-Esmeraldenian anthropologist, Juan García, "for adolescents, between 12 and 17 years of age, there will be an *arrullo* the first half of the night and *alabados* (songs without instruments) during the second half. If they have had a (recognised) '*mujer de asiento* [woman responsible for spousal duties]' before age 17, they will be considered adults and will not have the *arrullo*" (1989: 58).

If a boy or girl has not been baptised before their death, these children are given the name *moro*. They are usually Christianised at the moment of the wake, or in the church prior to the funeral (Whitten 1992: 152) a practice that continues up to today. It is believed the child's soul ascends directly to heaven and is received there with songs and joy. Afro-Colombian choreographer, Oliva Arboleda comments that there is another explanation for the child being sent off with music and joyfulness when they die: "during the time of slavery, when a child died the adults sent them away with joy because they would not suffer the yoke of the slavers, as they had." To say farewell, music and cheer also have a key role in the wake, since the child's soul will apparently be glorified upon its arrival in heaven (Interview 7 January 2014).⁹

Although it is difficult to establish precise dates, this ceremony originates from a time when the Afro-Esmeraldenian traditional children's games and rounds were called *chigualos*, and these have been incorporated into the rite (Escobar 1997). The Ecuadorian historians, Alfredo and Piedad Costales attribute a pre-Hispanic origin to the word *chigualo*, saying that the term was present in the vocabulary of the *Tsáchilas*, *Chachis* and *Atacames* cultural groups, and that it was due to the contact with these groups that the word was included in the Afro-Esmeraldenian vocabulary (1995). In the province of Manabí, bordering Esmeraldas, there is also a type of peasant celebration called *chigualo*, performed around Christmas and related to children's play and games, but lacking the funerary manifestation present in the Afro-Esmeraldenian case (Puga 2010).

In the *chigualos*, *arrullos* are sung throughout the night, until the hour of the burial the following day. The songs continue as the body of the child is moved from the church or house where the wake takes place, to the cemetery. During the ceremony, children's games and rounds are played with the attendees, in commemoration of the deceased. The child's godparents are often responsible for celebrating the *arrullo*, since the parents' grief renders them unable to happily celebrate their child's departure (Whitten 1992). The Afro-Esmeraldenian traditional singer, dancer and choreographer, Petita Palma, says that "at 12 midnight they call the godfather, the godmother, the father, the mother;

⁸ *Rezandero*: figure who leads the prayers during ceremonies.

⁹ The infant mortality rate in Afro-Esmeraldenian communities has, fortunately, decreased in recent decades, from 21.8 in 1990 to 9.7 in 2017 (INEC 2017). Consequently, *chigualos* are less frequent.

they tend a white sheet and they lay the child there, and each one takes a corner and they sing the child off” (Interview 5 March 2015).

The themes dealt with in the *arrullos* played at the ceremony are ‘the divine’ and ‘the human’, although many of them are related to the deceased child. Sometimes, the *glosadoras* allude to the saints, in search of protection for the soul of the deceased in their transition to the spiritual world. Here is an example:

*Angelito ándate al cielo,
buen viaje, buen viaje,
anda a limpiar el camino,
buen viaje, buen viaje.
Para cuando vayan allá,
buen viaje, buen viaje,
tus papás y tus padrinos.*

(P. Palma interview 5 March 2015).

Little angel, go to heaven,
safe journey, safe journey,
go to clear the way,
safe journey, safe journey.
For when they go there,
safe journey, safe journey,
your parents and your godparents.

In my view, the *chigualo* ceremony demonstrates traditional music’s mediating role in the symbolic sphere, as conceived in the Afro-Esmeraldenian culture, of the transition between life and death. This is borne out by the interviewees who explained that the musical instruments which accompany the singing throughout the celebration—the *bombo*, the *cununos*, the *guasá* and the *maracas*—maintain a supporting rhythm that both establishes the platform for the songs and keeps harmful evil spirits away from the soul of the deceased child. This view highlights a part of the Afro-Esmeraldenian culture’s unique way to interpret the world.

Adult wakes, similarly, weave together music and spirituality. When an adult dies, the Afro-Esmeraldenian tradition considers that their soul, depending on the behaviour of the deceased in life, can go to purgatory, to hell, or ascend to heaven. In adults’ wakes (*alabao*) the intention is to accompany the soul of the deceased through prayers and songs, shining a light to help him or her find the way to purification. During the ceremony, the *alabaos* are played. As with the *chigualos*, these are a *cappella*, and are sad and sorrowful in nature. The *alabaos* alternate with the prayers led by the *rezandero*, who oversees the rite. According to Luis Rodríguez, prayers help to atone for the sins committed by the deceased during their lifetime (L. Rodríguez interview 3 November 2014). The prayers are arranged antiphonically, with the help of the singers, who answer the officiant’s prayers in recited responses. During the wake, the men play cards, while the women sing; the doors and windows of the house are left open so that the soul of the deceased will not be trapped inside, and the assistants drink *aguardiente* (cane liquor) and coffee so that they are not affected by the so-called “ice of the dead”: the presumed charge of negative energy given off by the body.

Wakes for adults are usually part of a *novena* celebration. While the structure depends on the ceremony, it generally consists of the recitation of the rosary to the deceased for nine nights; with the prayers and the *alabao* songs being alternated each night in periods of approximately one hour. The *novena* is the period necessary for the deceased’s soul to bid farewell to the body and find a path of light after death.

In the *alabao* songs, the human theme of relating death to the deceased's life and reflecting on the pain of absence is established. Here is one example:

*Oigan como suena
y como retumba!
son golpes del alma,
allá en la tumba.*
(Minda 2014: 84).

Listen to how it sounds
and how it thunders!
they are blows of the soul,
there in the tomb.

Songs are an essential part of funeral rituals for both adults and children, as they assisted deceased in their journey of spiritual transition.

Saints' days

The celebration dates for the Catholic saints are determined by the Christian liturgical calendar. Depending on individual devotions, and the expressions of a specific community, celebrations are carried out for one or other saint. *Arrullos* play an important part in the ceremonies. These musical pieces are played throughout the celebration, which can last up to an entire day. The theme is usually the divine.

In the Afro-Esmeraldian tradition, saints take on the role of mediators between the people and the divine. *Arrullos* are sung to make the saint happy and to win him over, so that he will watch over the interests of the town and people's personal, socio-affective and professional needs.

The celebration may be the responsibility of, on the one hand, a person or an individual family, who keeps a promise or makes a specific request to the saint, or from one or several communities that profess devotion to a particular saint (for example, if it is the town's patron saint). In any case, the *arrullo* to the saints always has a collective dimension, since the entire community participates in the celebrations, regardless of the origin of the organisation of the event.

During the ceremony, there is a figure of the saint: a sculpture made of wood, carved in stone or plaster, on an altar suitable for presiding over the ceremony. The physical space for the celebration can be either the church or a private home or open space. Sometimes there is a procession with the saint through the streets of the community or floating along the river. Although traditionally, out of respect for the saint, there is no dancing during the ceremony; sometimes, when the *arrullo* is nearing its end, the holy figure is covered with a white sheet so as to perform a small dance without offending the honoree (Pezzi 1996, Minda 2014). The Afro-Esmeraldian marimbist, Lindberg Valencia comments that at this time songs related to earthly life can be sung in the *arrullos* (Interview 7 June 2015).

In the saints' *arrullo*, the instrumentalists, *bomberos* and *cununeros*, can freely join the ceremony on their instruments. On occasion there are many instrumentalists at a single *arrullo*. Norman Whitten asserts that: "It is the presence of more than one drum that most clearly distinguishes the music of this event [saint's festivities] from the music of the *chigualo*" (1992: 155). The same goes for the *cantadoras* (singers). The choir of respondents can comprise a multitude of voices; however, the role of the *glosadora* is always performed by a single voice, with this role alternating among the *cantadoras*. The

song occasionally ceases to give way to the *decimero*, who recites a few ten-line stanzas to the divine, which is related to the holy object of devotion. Usually, the *glosadora* sings three *arrullos*, where once she intones the first verse, the group recognises and follows it. Then another woman assumes the role of *glosadora* and sings three more *arrullos*.

The ceremony carried out in San Martín de Porres, on the northern coast of Esmeraldas provides a good example of the celebration of a saint's feast day. Saint Martin de Porres was the first African descended saint of the Americas. Born in Lima, Peru, he died on 3 November, 1639. On this day each year, a mass is celebrated in his honour in the community of Canchimalero, located on the northern coast of the Esmeraldas province and accessible only by water. Over the years, more and more believers attended the ceremony, and, as I noticed during my fieldwork, today it is one of the largest in the province. Throughout the celebration to the saint, the music of *arrullos* plays a fundamental role.¹⁰

The saint's numerous devotees throughout the region gather, sailing along the river from their communities to the church located in Canchimalero. Rafts and canoes are adapted and profusely decorated for this purpose, to carry the devotees as they celebrate the *arrullo*. Each raft carries an image of the saint, which is venerated and to which the *arrullo* is dedicated. The river turns into a processional route, along which the faithful from the different Afro-Esmeraldenian communities located upstream are welcomed. Each of the vessels has a set of *arrullos*: with *bomberos*, *cununeros* and *cantadoras*, as well as devotees from the community where the vessel sets out. The music continues throughout the day. During the trip there and back, and throughout the stay in the community of Canchimalero, where the mass is performed, the *arrullos* fill the surrounding space with sound.

When the Bishop of Esmeraldas arrives, together with the religious procession, accompanied by the devotees in a processional group singing *arrullos*, the mass begins. The mass takes place in the area surrounding the church and, here too, Afro-Esmeraldenian music, played with traditional instruments plays a central role. The music accompanying the liturgy is overseen by an *arrullo* group, with *cantadoras*, *bomberos* and *cununeros* performing traditional songs as well as sung versions of prayers like the Lord's Prayer, or the Hail Mary.

The mass is conducted in the following way: the bishop stands before the altar, outside the church. There he receives the offerings given to him by the traditional dancers from the different communities. These offerings are symbolic objects that represent the traditional Afro-Esmeraldenian culture and range from fishing and agricultural gear to traditional musical instruments. The playing of *arrullos* continues throughout this presentation. Following the offering, the mass continues. The group's songs are now interspersed with the community's prayers and the sermon.

¹⁰ Apparently, this celebration's origin lies in the promise that a devotee professed, some time ago, to the saint, in return for helping him resolve a personal problem. The promise was to build a church in the believer's home community and to make an annual pilgrimage with *arrullo* celebrations on 3 November.

The small community thus vibrates to the rhythm of the *bombos* and *cununos* throughout the day. The *arrullo* groups from the different communities play the music not only in the church, but throughout the town of Canchimalero. After the ceremony, the groups of devotees return to their rafts and navigate upriver to their place of origin, a journey that also takes place to the sound of the *arrullos*.

The Saint Martín de Porres celebration is unique, for the socialisation that it provides for Afro-Esmeraldenians from different communities, and the opportunity for these communities to interact with their bio-geographical environment; and for the music that, through the *arrullos*, played by hundreds of groups from different origins, establishes a sound environment that unites and integrates the entire audience in the communal act of devotion.

The Day of the Dead

Another event is the Day of the Dead which commemorates the deceased. It starts on 2 November at 12:00 a.m. The Afro-Esmeraldenian tradition has several manifestations for the Day of the Dead, depending on the community where the ceremony takes place. In this paper, I discuss the ritual process held in the parish of Telembí, located on the banks of the Cayapas River in the north of the province of Esmeraldas. This Afro-descended community maintains the Christian liturgical rituals, and the musical traditions in particular.

In Telembí,¹¹ there are two types of celebrations for the Day of the Dead: the first consists of a festive marimba dance, during the night of 31 October to 1 November; and the second, the religious ritual of the deceased held in the Catholic church, on the night of 1 to 2 November. The second celebration consists exclusively of prayers and liturgical songs. I will comment on the first type, since it displays the characteristic festive and religious union of this date. On the night of 31 October, the evening mass of vespers for the dead, or all saints' vespers, as it is also called, takes place at dusk. In the mass the rosary is prayed in alternation to the mysteries, which is sung by the congregation, along with the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary, now recited. The person who directs the songs and the prayers is the *rezandero mayor* (head prayer leader). No instruments are played in this section; rather, the songs are arranged responsorially, as in Transcription 6.

After the rosary, the prayer of litanies begins in a responsorial arrangement. To end the ceremony, the entire community performs songs with the *bombo* and *cununos*. The church bells contribute to the instrumental accompaniment, a feature to which I turn presently. Curiously, in these music sections played in 6/8 and 2/4, times are alternated, with the first and second time signatures interspersed for singing and reciting.

Following the mass, the musical instruments are moved to the house of marimba beside the church, where the dancing will carry on until dawn. The musical instruments are arranged as follows: the marimba, which is hung from the ceiling, is placed in the rear next to the wall; in front of it is the row of *cununos*, four instruments with a player for each; and, in front of these there are two *bombos*, also hung from the ceiling. The

¹¹ As observed during my field work from 2014 until 2017.

Lento $\text{♩} = 30$

Soloist

Rubato

Chorus

S

C

Transcription 6. Songs of Vespers of the Dead. Transcription by Author.

singers form a semicircle around the instruments and, shaking the maracas and the *guasás*, they direct their songs towards the *marimberos* (marimba players).

The music continues throughout the day and the instrumentalists alternate when they are tired. As I could observe during my fieldwork, almost the entire community, from children to adults, participate in the celebration. This demonstrates the social nature of music in the community, as well as the importance of participating in community celebrations. During the performance, couples, handkerchief in hand, dance to the pieces performed by the instrumental ensemble. This consists of the traditional festive repertoire: *bambuco*, *caderona*, *andarele*, *caramba*, *agua larga*, and *patacoré*.

In the early hours of the morning on the first day of November, an altar symbolizing all of the deceased, which is called the “tomb”, is constructed in the town church. It consists of a coffin-shaped structure, covered with black and white sheets, surrounded by candles and arranged beneath the images of Christ on the cross and the Virgin Mary. This altar remains in the church until the next morning. The bells are tolled throughout the day, approximately twice per minute. The town’s young people and the adults take turns ringing the bells. The rest of the community remains silent, without any kind of music.

The night begins with the recitation of the rosary at the church, without singing, after which the ritual of the souls begins. Each inhabitant goes to their house, where they must stay until dawn, when the ritual ends. All the lights of the town are turned off and absolute silence is maintained. The *animeros*—figures dressed all in white, chosen by family tradition and responsible for guiding the souls of the deceased—go to the cemetery. The senior *animero* (representative figure among the *animeros*) pounds the earth three times with his scepter and turns around. It is said he awakens the resting souls and summons them with this gesture (Antón 2014, Peters 2005).

In a procession through the dark streets of the town, each *animero* will guide the souls that follow behind him, without turning his gaze. It is a popular belief that the person who looks directly at the souls will be under an irreversible curse. The *animeros*

pass through the doors of each house in the community, with the souls apparently behind them, until they return to the cemetery, where they will rest until the following year. The entire community recognises the special place on their lives, which continues to be occupied by the souls.

After this procession, at around 2a.m. or 3a.m., the community gathers at the church for the recitation of the rosary, following which they will play the song of the souls, or songs of the dead, until dawn. Silvino Mina comments that staying in the church until dawn demonstrates the community's commitment to the divine: "They have the commitment to sing until dawn; and you say: 'But, these people, how do they feel staying there singing until dawn?' It is the faith that they have, to be able to express what they feel to those celebrating" (Interview 9 September 2015).

They sing *alabaos*, which are based on themes from the community's ancestral traditions. The head *rezandero* has written down the song lyrics in a small notebook that is passed down among the *rezanderos*, from generation to generation. In Silvino Mina's opinion: "They are basically songs of passion, which have to do with the human being's death ritual" (Interview 9 September 2015). On this day, no instruments are played. The bells continue to toll and the soloist's unison songs alternate with the community, on the one hand, and the responsorial arrangement between *glosadora* and the *respondedoras*, on the other.

At dawn, on 2 November, the ceremony comes to a close with a serving of hot chocolate and bread. The *animeros* will go around town during the morning, asking for alms for the saints, as resources that will be used for the liturgical expenses of the church. At night, the final ceremony of the festival of the dead, the *Luminaria*, takes place. All the lights in the town are turned off again. The faithful, singing *alabaos* and carrying lit candles, make a pilgrimage from the church to the cemetery. Upon arrival at the cemetery, they enter through one of the borders to walk through the graves and, after leaving a lit candle in a predetermined spot, exit on the opposite side. The area is thus filled by an unusual illumination, as an offering to the souls of the deceased who rest in this place. With this, the celebration of the dead comes to a close. Next will be the eve and the night of the dead, with songs and prayers.

Arrullos are also performed in Christmas services, but as Holy Week constitutes a more significant festival, I focus on the events leading up to and including Easter.

Among the Afro-Esmeraldian population The Holy Week is one of the most important and vibrant dates on the Catholic liturgical calendar. As with the other religious events, the nature of the celebrations depends, to a large extent, on each community's traditional customs and religious fervour. I will once again turn to the community of Telembí, due to the uniquely representative musical and social characteristics that it displays during this celebration (see Antón 2014, Minda 2014, Yopez 2015).

Here, the Passion of Christ is represented in a theatrical manner, with members of the community taking on the role of the different characters. The events take place from Palm Sunday until the Sabbath and Easter Sunday and are performed without music. I discuss these events, focusing on Holy Saturday and Holy Sunday.

On Holy Monday, the authority of the community is transferred from the figure of the political lieutenant, who officially represents the governmental authority in the community, to the denominated head of the *troupe*. The *troupe* is a group of young people who, carrying rifles, accompany the processions of the Virgin and maintain order throughout the week. On Holy Wednesday, the Hour of Darkness begins. The Hour of Darkness is observed for an hour every night. On Good Friday the brotherhood of the Holy Men, a group of elderly *rezanderos*, must lower the body of Christ from the cross. Finally, the figure of the body of Christ is laid in the *Ark of the Covenant*, an urn designed for this purpose, and a procession is held which passes through the town before returning to the church.¹²

On Holy Saturday, at dusk, the so-called *Media Gloria* is carried out, a prelude to the celebration of the Resurrection that will take place the following day.¹³ Prior to going to the church, the community gathers around a fire which is lit at its doors. There, a song is performed in unison chorus, in which female voices predominate. The melody does not fall within the range described for *alabos* or *arrullos*; rather, it has the musical and formal characteristics typical of contemporary western tradition of the type of popular Christian church songs approved by the Holy See, starting with the Second Vatican Council (Wilson-Dickson 1992).

The celebrant begins the ceremony with the symbolic character of the fire presiding in a candle. The *Paschal Candle*¹⁴ is lit, and the officiant of the ceremony and the main *rezandero* of the community alternate in reciting the prayers. The songs are then repeated, accompanied by the sounds of *bombos*, *cununos* and the church bells, while the celebrants and the community move into the church. There the women sing, and the entire community celebrates with clapping and joyful movements to accompany the Christ's approach. The song, in antiphonal form, is established by the women. Grouped in two choirs, they recite these melodies. In Transcription 7, it can be seen that the first choir sets the verses, and the second invariably responds with the same refrain. Note that the second chorus rests the d-flat note in *stretto* with the first chorus. This gives the antiphonal response a rhythmic and melodic uniqueness that enriches the arrangement with a characteristic colour. These songs are not regular, traditional *arrullos* but more recently introduced Christian songs.

¹² According to Yépez: "This complex ritual is a legacy of the Catholic rituals of some Spanish towns, where it is also customary to represent, almost theatrically, each moment of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. The rituals were mixed with a consciousness of the African religion, where music and dance are mediators of sacredness. The mysteries of the white people and the black people are joined in the interpretation of the sacred, forming one of black culture's most complex rituals. A ritual with a symbolism which is, frankly, impressive" (Jeanneth Yépez pers.comm. 5 April 2015).

¹³ Heberto Ortiz Nazareno, head *rezandero* of community, explains that: "traditionally, *Media Glory* was performed at 00:00 a.m. Sunday, however, due to the people's fatigue at that hour, it was moved to 20:00 pm on Saturday so that attendance could be larger" (Interview 15 March 2015).

¹⁴ This is a large candle which is held by someone at the beginning of the procession. Later it is positioned over the church altar.

Moderato ♩ = 90

Chorus 1

Chorus 2

Transcription 7. Responsorial song for Holy Saturday. Transcription by Author.

Church bells are incorporated into the music and significantly contribute to the event. The bells are characteristically tuned to an imprecise minor third interval, whose notes are, approximately, *la* and *do*; and they mark the beat and maintain and complement the musical ensemble's rhythm as would another instrument.¹⁵ The characteristic arrangement is as follows in Transcription 8:

Allegro ♩ = 120

Bells

Transcription 8. Melodic and rhythmic arrangements of the church bells. Transcription by Author.

Once the song is completed, the *cununos* and *bombos* are slowly silenced, thus ending the *Media Gloria* (Half Glory): the prelude to the Lord's coming.

Starting early morning on Easter Sunday, called the day of *Gloria Entera* (Whole Glory), preparations are made to celebrate the arrival of the Lord. The musical instruments are placed in the church where they are played during the celebration. The ceremony begins with the children singing: they sing the same type of non-traditional Christian song described above, but this time accompanied by the traditional instrumental arrangement, played by the children themselves.

Next is the children's procession, visiting each of the homes in the community, greeting their residents, and celebrating the Lord's Resurrection Day. During this procession there are two rows, one for boys and the other for girls. The first is headed by one of the community *rezanderos*, and the second by the community teacher. The delegation is accompanied by a young *bombero* who keeps the rhythm of the songs. The steady rhythm with an occasional variation is illustrated in Transcription 9:

Allegro ♩ = 120

Bombo

Base

Variant

Transcription 9. Rhythmic drum arrangement in the procession. Transcription by Author.

¹⁵ Miguel Delibes makes a pertinent observation: "The language of the bells is expressive and changing; their vibration is capable of accents that can be deep and serious and light and acute and somber. The bells never say the same thing. And they never say what they say in the same way" (1998: 210).

The children alternate greetings to the residents with modern church songs of the type described above. When the children complete their rounds, they return to the church and the singing stops. The bells then ring, signaling the liturgy. Meanwhile, the procession of the Virgin takes place, now guided by the adults. They display the Virgin's image on an altar that they parade through the town streets to the sound of the rattle,¹⁶ calling the faithful to gather at the church. This retinue is also accompanied by the *troupe*.

The musicians, now the community youth and adults, prepare themselves to begin the celebration of the *Gloria*. The *bombos*, *cununos* and *guasá* are accompanied by the beat maintained by the church bells. The marimba is also present, playing festive pieces; although, it cannot be clearly heard above the volume of the other instruments.¹⁷ During this part of the ritual there is no singing. The timing is invariably in 6/8, with the basic rhythmic figuration described previously.

When the Virgin's procession returns to the church, the instruments fall silent for a moment. The community then prays a Hail Mary and the head *rezandero* establishes the prayer to be recited, after which the instruments resume and the faithful make the figure of the Virgin dance on her throne, both at the church door and inside.¹⁸ In procession, the Virgin is taken to the altar where, together with a cross and a second, smaller image, she is symbolically presented to heaven three times before being placed next to the figure of Christ on the cross.

Women, armed with shotguns¹⁹, go through the church hall and alter stand in alternate rows with the children during the *Gloria*. There are two rows: one for children and one for women. They surround the entire area of the church: going behind the altar, towards the main door and back again, with one row crossing in front of the other. There is no singing during this process; the rhythms established by the instruments dominate. To conclude the ceremony, the music ceases and the community goes outside the church, where a group of young women fire the shotguns into the sky, as a sign of celebration; thus ending the *Gloria* and, with it, Holy Week.

The Afro-Esmeraldian population in Telembí parish keeps alive and defends the religious traditions of Holy Week. Music plays a vital, integrative role in this festivity; it constitutes the communicative channel both of grief for the death of Christ, through the *alabaos*, as well as of joy for his Resurrection, with the songs of rejoicing. Telembí is one of the parishes and communities of the Cayapas River that is most concerned with preserving the musical-religious traditions among its inhabitants. The elders in particular are very committed to keeping the annual traditions alive among the new

¹⁶ A shaken instrument that was traditionally used during Holy Week in Spain.

¹⁷ The playing of the marimba inside the church is an exceptional occurrence, which happens explicitly in this parish; since, as reiterated on several occasions, in the Afro-Esmeraldian religious tradition the marimba is played neither inside the church nor in the religious musical context.

¹⁸ Thus showing that the Afro-Esmeraldian people's traditional music includes respect for the liturgy. Here, the dances and singing are forms of visibly sharing the community's joy at Jesus Christ's resurrection.

¹⁹ The women are part of the *troupe*.

generation. These traditions unite the community through ritual that is sustained by music, and which strengthens the representative bonds.

Conclusion

The religious sphere is a representative space that is fundamental for understanding the Afro-Esmeraldian population's cosmology and symbolism in both villages and urban areas. In it, traditional musical practices have survived through generations, reflecting the importance that this cultural group places on the spiritual world. This article has argued that the religious sphere has provided a context for both the Afro-Esmeraldian music repertoire and the musical instruments that make up the traditional ensemble. It has thus significantly contributed to their relevance and durability.

In addition, music infuses the annual festivals, and creates strong ties between the lay calendar and the liturgical one, thus constituting an existential symbiosis that must be understood as a whole. But this cultural group's spiritual character is expressed not only through institutionalised religion aspects, as the regular activities of the service, but with their traditional music and musical instruments.

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