

Introductory Note

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Listen to Lorca, writing in 1922 in Andalus:

The essential difference between cante jondo and flamenco is that the origin of the former must be sought in the primitive musical systems of India, that is, in the first manifestations of song, while the latter, a consequence of the first, cannot be said to acquire its definitive form until the eighteenth century....The former is song imbued with the mysterious colour of primordial ages; the latter is relatively modern, its emotional interest eclipsed by that of the other. ...That is to say that, cante jondo, like the primitive musical systems of India, is merely a stammer, an emission, higher or lower in pitch, of the voice, a marvelous buccal undulation, that breaks out of the echoing prison of our tempered scale, will not suffer the cold rigid pentagram of our modern music, and makes the hermetic flowers of semitones open in a thousand petals.

(Federico García Lorca, 1922)

Let us forgive him for his usage of the word primitive. Let us agree that we need to open up all hermetic flowers into a thousand petals of semitones. Let us search for the relationships and resemblances of Deep Songs in India, Ethiopia, Southern Africa and beyond. Our project is designed to do so.

We began this project with the understanding that the movement of music and musicians might provide us with insights about how large parts of the world were interconnected and entangled before European hegemony. We set out that a critique of Eurocentrism was not enough: the objective is to critique the static view of the pre-colonial world and also western aesthetic theory, wherein non-Europe was set out as the primitive, wild and the home of the non-rational and where sociality was about some kind of 'mechanical solidarity'.

We also recognized that there is solid ethnomusicological work, augmented by social and cultural anthropologists that allow us to map music and social formations in the places that were once bracketed as the 'wild', work which has produced dignified accounts of particular musics and their social location. But what was missing in most such works were the connections that become apparent with nuanced listening or which musicians pick up as they negotiate their craft are missing and it is as if they exist somehow on their own terms.

This project began from the music, from the fact that the ear, the voice and the instrument are able to detect similarities or interesting departures as the music is heard in different places that constitute the

‘musical road’ or the ‘musical map’ that we are seeking to discover. We began, for instrumental reasons, from the mythical, but real Shirin and hence in the 7th century.

What the story of Shirin’s life, the migration of her Syriac people to Malabar in Kerala or to Ethiopia, and how her story is told in song and poetry over the centuries, is that these migrations and their cultural manifestations are far more extensive than commonly known networks cover. So, wherever we start, be it Malabar, China, Baghdad, Cordoba, Ctesiphon, Mapungubwe or Makran, the whole period that we are aiming to cover demonstrates intricate connections, agency and dynamism.

Three kinds of transnational formations from antiquity that involve movements of people and goods would need to be linked. We need to interweave the stories of long migrations in the Indian Ocean region, in the Al-Andalus and its relationship to North. West/East Africa and Asia, and the routes of the Turko-Persian-Chinese-Indian- interactions that are seen as separate in existing literature over the longue duree of 700-1500 AD. It has to involve maritime, riverine and overland routes along the spice, silk, incense, gold, metal and mineral routes. And most importantly: people.

The 11th century was a vital turning point, a kind of pivot in world history for, if we are allowed to use short-hand, from the 7th to the 11th century we can trace the ascendance of a number of Theocratic Proxy States, whose elites, each aware of the Other, “över there”, but quite self-absorbed in their earthly missions and the extraction of surplus from their immediate country sides. This was common to the Maya and the Han, as much as it was common to the Mapungubwe and the Mouziris/Kochi epicenters and so on. There is a remarkable co-emergence of urban formations that usher each other into prominence and if size mattered at all we see that most of the 14 with more than 100 000 people are to be found mostly East with only Cordoba in Europe and Cairo and Constantinople in the Eastern Mediterranean. Silk roads, spice routes bring over and above prized goods and taste, but also minor and major notes.

From the 11th to the 15th centuries the dynamism of the world of interactions is still to be located East, with Beijing featuring as the largest city-Genoa, Venice and Paris appear on the scene, but everywhere there seems to be a synergistic growth. In Southern Africa it seems that Zimbabwe takes over the mantle from Mapungubwe and we know from the hard work of archaeologists the implications of the changes from CCP (Central Cattle Patterned societies) to the sedentary agrarian and mining and metalworking societies of the ZP (Zimbabwe Pattern). For reasons that will be discussed later, by the end of the 15th century, Southern Africa’s hinterland disengages from this dynamic and as Shadreck Chirikure here insists, we have to look at agency because the “hinterland” was not just the world trade’s *tabula rasa*. Our task is to work hard to understand the rise and fall of polities and the articulation between the world and Africa beyond the coastlines.

In all this bustle and crisscrossing, slavery had a significant role to play- indeed servitude in AfroAsia was different from its trans-Atlantic counterpart, but it was a serious endeavor. The forced movement of people through the coastal towns of East Africa and their distribution in the Gulf, the Abbasid lands and India and then of people from India and the Malay archipelago to other destinations has been researched but rarely synthesized. Women from Africa and the Caucasus were more prized than men

and they were to be carted off into servitude in domestic, entertainment and sex-work; by contrast it seems men were shipped off to plantations and armies. These transactions reached China where remarkable and racially discomfiting accounts are beginning to be researched. In Muslim lands, slave conversion presented a problem which escalated pressures towards manumission and attempts to exempt converted slaves from freedom. In 1505 a judicial fatwa in what is now Iran/Iraq decreed that converts who were slaves need not be freed.

So yes, deep histories of maritime and overland movements are important and vital for this project, but we are doing so to trace the movement of musical and poetic form through women and men of a remarkable period- to explore what was sung, composed and played in order to fathom the kind of music that constituted Africa's very own Deep Song. The very form itself, its compositional form, as al Farabi and later Ibn Sina remind us, was also about poetry which needs to be collected and transcribed. There is Blench's research as well that shows how wind-instruments and strings moved out and in and how tightly linked our stories as Zimbabweans, Mozambicans, South Africans and people from Madagascar are and how we all were part of an unfolding world before colonialism.

For example, Indian Ocean connections between large parts of Asia and Africa, stretching across several centuries have been researched. The monsoon, with its seasonal reversal of winds and long periods between one direction and the other, meant long times spent by maritime travelers in ports of destination. The monsoon also created varied environments in areas that it covered, with great potential for exchange of resources and commodities. With the mediterranean to the far west and china to the far east, land and maritime routes overlapped, aided by the arteries of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. It is undisputed that despite all the changes following the European intervention in the Indian Ocean, and the incorporation of large parts of it in the capitalist world economy, it still retains a number of its *longue duree* social and cultural characteristics and music, myth and ritual are important ways of uncovering the connections.

If Ctesiphon and Baghdad were the major centres in the beginning of our period, by the end it was Beijing. Across the whole period, a multitude of 'cosmopolitan' centres proliferated and several translocal communities came into existence, including traders, voluntary and forced migrants and slaves. The Hadramis of the South Arabian coast, the Swahili of the East African coast and the Mappilas from the South West coast of India, the Abyssinians, the Syriacs, the Jews, the Chinese, moved across crisscrossing routes, interacting with local societies in complex ways. The insertion of 'foreigners' into local societies took place in ways that have not been recorded for the connections and this complicates the concept of 'diaspora' greatly.

In South Asia, for example, people of Ethiopian descent are found to have continuous presence across the centuries, referred to as Kaffirs, Habshis, Sidis, with different histories. AfroIndians of mixed heritage live in the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, Bengal, Bihar, Goa, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal. Various aspects that identify typical diaspora communities might not be seen for the African diaspora in the Indian Ocean because of the length of time of migrations, the different kinds of migrations, the vast differences of host societies and

how migrations got reflected. Music is found to be one way in which such communities might be identified.

Similarly, one group of people involved in the trade from North Africa to Malabar in India (as also to Aden and Fusat) was Jewish traders from Tunisia and Andalusia, as also Jews from Yemen and Oman. Over time, distinctions emerged between Black and White Jews in Kerala, which reflected not only the different kinds of migrations but also the kinds of insertion into local caste and class hierarchies. However, when the history of Jewish communities in India is studied or when music is collected by ethnomusicologists, it is largely in liturgical terms and masks either the extent of connections and its variability.

One interesting mode of teasing out connections is through the people that created music and whose accounts are there, but need to be interpreted differently. We know about Ziryab who was a famed Andalus and Cordoba aesthete and musical genius. Although his musical genius has been put under closer scrutiny by contemporary musicologists, no one has disputed his importance. Most historical accounts celebrate the Schools of music he inaugurated and the innovations in instrumentation he facilitated. He lived from 789 to 857 AD and he was a protégé of the famed Ishaq Al-Mawsili of Baghdad who died in 850AD.

Ziryab was the child of a manumitted African slave and made his mark during a remarkable period in Baghdadi history. Music then enjoyed a remarkable status and upper class protection in a climate that considered the world of music, its composers and performers as an affront and had to work hard to protect them and the life of performance itself which was under attack by purists. Ziryab's exile from Baghdad was a major event as he had feigned an equality of talent with the Al-Mawsili clan. He was dispatched to Cordoba to the court of the Umayyad ruler um-Rahmann whose support for musical work was extensive. His mentor Al Mawsili was the living model of musical virtuosity and Al Farabi, the philosophical master of the time used him as the exemplar of excellence in his masterpiece the *Grand Book of Music* that our friend here Karen Press has started translating for the project.

Baghdad in the 9th to the 11th centuries was the world's most populous city and an epicentre for the silk road, the spice trade and where trade and high culture intermingled. If we map our AfroAsian region into the Baghdad story and perhaps with that of Ziryab, we would be weaving a world that includes Mapungubwe and Madagascar, Kilwa, Zanzibar and Axum, Gujarat and Kochi/Mouziris. In the words of Dimitri Sawa, the scholar of Arabian music during the Abbasids, "into the bazaars of the city came porcelain, silk and musk from China, spices, minerals and dyes from India and the Malay archipelago; rubies, lapis lazuli, fabrics and slaves from the lands of the Turks in Central Asia; honey, wax, firs and white slaves from Scandinavia and Russia; ivory, gold dust and black slaves from East Africa,...rice, grain and linen from Egypt; glass, metal ware and fruits from Syria; brocade, pearls and weapons from Arabia; silks, perfumes and vegetables from Persia" (89:3). It was a core city in the material and symbolic interactions in a world before European hegemony.

The city took over from the Persian world that Ctesipon commandeered, 70kms further to the North West and its elites worked hard to supplant it as a hub of wisdom: Greek, Persian and Syriac works were

being translated into Arabic, the study of maths, science and philosophy was seriously encouraged. Al Farabi's work was a product of it and so was the work of the Banu Musa brothers, *The Book of Ingenious Devices*. Here too, the poetry and narratives of Shirin and Khusrow were being turned to music. Baghdad managed to also withstand one of the most enduring African slave rebellions which lasted from 869-883 where tens of thousands of them found common cause against tyrannical masters (the Zanj rebellion). Starting from strikes around overwork in the effort to dam the Tigris River, it climaxed into a bloody conflagration and war.

So Zyriab, groomed and trained in Baghdad migrated to Cordoba where he was to emerge as an aesthetic catalyst, partly because of his very own energy, partly too due to the dexterity of his own by now women composer and performer slaves- there are a few amusing anecdotes about his reliance on them. The expulsion of the "Moors" from Southern Spain found the creativity and music of the Andalus Schools diffusing into the Maghreb and further south, all the way to Mali and, here further research is needed before the polities around the Niger are penned in.

The hard work starts here because there is enough research to draw a broad canvas, the struggle will be in the detail: yes, the Swahili coastland was a peculiar space for music and people to arrive and leave; yes, the Zanj slaves came through Zanzibar and tarab is a reminder of syncretic pasts; Ethiopian tonalities travelled since ancient times all the way to Kerala's coastlines and to the worlds of the Sassanid Persians and the other way around; Shirin's Syrians moved overland to find Dravidian hues and Amir Khusrau the founder of a serious turn in Hindustani music and poetry brought from Persia the hues of the ancient Shirin and Khusrow story. Here in the South we have our bows and polyphonies, the wind ensembles and the vocal work of the Nguni, Sotho and Khoisan echoed in India and especially as concerns voice, Madagascar.

What can the archaeologist tell us about the undocumented remnants? What are the various sources that carry musical memory? What of the movement of symbolic goods do we need to bring into sharp focus and reconstruct this history? How many myths and mythical characters can we unearth and bring into conversation with each other and how do these relate to contemporary musical work? Which of the oral poems and songs already collected in Africa and India speak to the depth of the song or songs we are looking for?

This workshop brings together some of the work that has started around these questions.