MASTERARBEIT

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Nkangala Mouth-Bow Tradition in Malaŵi
A Comparative Study of Historiography, Performance Practices, Social Context and Tonal Systems

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Zeynep Sarıkartal

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Dedicated to
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who lost their lives during the police and state-assisted violence towards the protesters, which had started in the Gezi Park in Turkey in the summer of 2013 and still going on up to present day,

to their families and to all people who has been in solidarity.
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1. Introduction

The nkangala mouth-bow is an instrument practiced primarily by women who belong to certain ethnic groups such as Cheŵa, Sena, Mang’anja and Nyanja in Malawi. According to various sources, the instrument has been brought to Malawi by Ngoni people who moved towards North from the South of Africa during the first half of the 19th century (Kubik, 1987: 8, Malamusi: 1996, Nketia: 1991). The history of the instrument and the surviving process of the tradition are not easy to determine, since the “roots” of the nkangala and its potential links to the migration history of the Bantu and Khoisan speaking people from southern Africa, have been studied enough compared other mouth-bows in the same family\(^1\). Regarding Malawi’s location in the south-east of African continent, researches on the subject should not be limited with the present borders but the history of the related Sub-Saharan cultures having idiosyncratic borders other than modern political arrangements should as well be considered in order to in order to find out the very first versions of similar mouth-bows played by women, with a similar technique and a similar conception. Even though the main subject of this field study is nkangala’s performance practices along with its socio-cultural context in Malawi (beginning from the late 19th century), it is still necessary to evaluate much older traditions associated to mouth-bows in southern Africa by examining the preceding studies and available written sources.

When the subject is not only the instrument but also its survival as a heritage, the process of the transformations in the tradition has to be faced. (Kubik, 1987:3). Especially the period after 1940’s, when the transmission of the musical traditions gradually moved from organic medium to the technological, the consistency of the continuity of nkangala playing in Malawi, has been decreased. Nkangala, as a musical custom of women, has many dimensions related to the social life and other oral traditions in Malawi; foremost among these, it has a function as a mediator for the continuity of the matrilineal oral traditions.

Customarily the playing of nkangala has to be learnt from an older woman who is either a member of the nucleus family or an acceptable distant relative. After learning the basic performance practices, the performer is expected to conduct her own compositions. These compositions can also be a kind of arrangement of other songs, which can be chosen by the player from among a variety of oral literature and song repertoires such as fairy tales,

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\(^1\) See Kirby’s classification of mouth-bows in *Musical Instruments of the Native Races of South Africa*, 1934.
wedding or initiation songs; but this does not restricts the performers to compose a new song. Occasionally during the performance of nkangala some players might murmur/hum a melodic line; this is actually a way to “sing” the song that they play with the instrument. This sung line is composed of certain onomatopoeic syllables, words or formulas. When played rightly, these verbal entities can be recognized and understood by the others who are familiar with the song or who can recognize the onomatopoeic connection. With this information at hand it is legit to say that, nkangala, by means of incorporating intangible verbal data, has also a special role regarding the transmission of oral literature and the song repertoire between the generations.

The relation with the audience constitutes another specific aspect of nkangala: basically in the playing of it, the subject/target is not the audience, but rather it is the player herself (in solitude), since the instrument’s acoustical properties require an “inner listening/hearing” in order to acquire the best auditory experience of overtones. Thus it is not possible for an audience to hear the instrument in the same way that is for the player. The mouth cavity and some other body parts including the chin and the skull of the player function as semi-dependent components of a resonator, which constitutes the possibility for the production of the overtones, based on the two fundamental tones derived from the instrument. While analyzing and transcribing nkangala songs, the researcher should keep this differing auditory feature in mind rather seriously. What should be transcribed or analyzed as the scientific data is what the player hears. Neither what is heard by the audience nor the recordings is the result. The auditory system (perception) is also very important during the transmission of this data. The methodology used as "participant observation" combined with reliable sound analysis of the recordings of other players is very crucial to examine nkangala in detail. This is why when one aims to examine nkangala as the subject of a detailed investigation, “participant observation” as methodology, combined with reliable sound analysis of the recordings of other players, becomes the most crucial device of the study. Regarding the analysis, another very important detail, the varying sizes of different instruments of different players should also be mentioned. Nkangala is built in proportion to the length of the arm of the player; this means that each instrument has a nuance in their length. Such a nuance inevitably causes to hear different fundamental tones from different

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2 During my learning sessions with Ellena and Cicilia Kachepa, I was also told several times to try to play “my own song” after some time of imitation-based practice.

3 Participant observation was used as a concept as well as a methodology by various scholars, although Malinowski’s approach has been used as primary source in this study.
mikangala⁴, but the inner relation of the produced sounds are still proportionally consistent. That means one can hear different overtone series derived from different fundamental tones, but the inner interval relationships of these overtone series will remain proportionally the same. This allows the ethnomusicologists to talk about determinable sound sequences and a tone system, or “scales” in western terminology, or even to make classifications of nkangala-like mouth-bows, since they show a common soundscape structure.

There is another point to remark about the result of analyses, since this proportionally consistent soundscape is varied regarding the players; the structural form of this soundscape is more consistent. One can determine a proper range of sound, with similar structural forms, but not the same range of sound from each nkangala, necessarily. These forms actually go together with the “rhythmic” structures. The rhythmic structures or modified time-line patterns⁵ have a crucial role regarding the production of the overtones. There is a common 12 pulse (EP)⁶ in many recordings and some common time structures are detectable, but there is as well a particular usage of various rhythmic sentences, (grund patterns)⁷ or slight modifications of specific time structures. But the players produce the overtones in a common way, with a parallel movement in the mouth cavity to the rhythmic patterns derived from a combination of plectrum and left hand finger movement.

Concerning tonal system examinations, I have compared the Zulu, Ngoni, Venda, Xhosa and Khoisan bows and related singing traditions through the analyses made by David Rycroft, Hugh Tracey, as well as !Kung musical bow (tuning c) analyses of Gerhard Kubik. There are also possible links to Nyasa multipart singing, to Malawian hexatonic and heptatonic systems. But in terms of social context, I have taken nkangala as a single case study, regarding the previous writings of Moya Aliya Malamusi, D.D. Phiri, Molly

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⁴ Plural of nkangala.
⁵ “Time-line Patterns” is a concept of Gerhard Kubik, and its relation to nkangala described by himself in private conversation as “mostly an asymmetric formula or pattern that is struck on an object in order to direct the dancers and the other musicians in an ensemble. In nkangala practice I cannot hear any time-line-pattern. The patterns that are reminiscent of time-line-patterns can be described as ‘transient accent patterns within a 12 cycle, which performer of nkangala associate the words with it, and this association helps her to integrate; so this is not an indication to time-line-pattern. Since the Nkangala playing is a solo performance, we cannot talk about a time-line-pattern in this practice.
⁶ EP: “Elementary Pulsation” is a concept of Gerhard Kubik, which can be understood as the smallest rhythmic unit.
⁷ “Grund Pattern” can be translated as “basic pattern”, which identifies not only a common time-line pattern of a specific genre, but rather modifications of the real time-line patterns. This term is offered by Prof. Elschek as an alternative to “time-line pattern” concept for nkangala songs.
Longwe, Rosemary Joseph, Gerhard Kubik and my interviews with nkangala players in the field and with Dyna Malamusi in Vienna.

During my field research carried out between 16 March and 4 April 2013 under the supervision of Univ. -Prof. Mag. Dr. Regine Allgayer-Kaufmann, Ass. -Prof. Mag. Dr. August Schmidhofer and Mag. Dr. Moya Aliya Malamusi in Malawi, I had chance to meet three nkangala players in Blantyre district. With Ellena Kachepa and her sister Cicilia Kachepa in Chiotha Village, whom I had met several times and made sessions to learn how to play my nkangala that I have built with Moya Malamusi and during our class of performance practices of the African musical instruments in the academic year of 2012/2013. With Elita John in Nkata Village, I had a long conversation about the history of the instrument and social context of playing. Both villages have the same traditional authority, namely Kuntanja8.

This study is the result of a short fieldwork, a short learning process of the instrument and an overview of its historiography, that could be only an introduction to further advanced monographic researches. The second chapter is concentrated on the methodologies and theoretical background of my research, the third is an overview of the history and a discussion on the possible origins of nkangala and the fourth is based on its social context. In the fifth chapter performance practices are comparatively handled, while in the sixth analyses and hypothetical tone-system connections are put forward, and lastly in the seventh chapter concluding remarks are situated.

8 During every interview sessions, Romeo Malamusi made the translation for me. I am grateful for his kind efforts.
2. Theory and Methodology

In terms of the methodology implemented in this study, the lectures given by Prof. Gerhard Kubik on various aspects of African Music during my graduate studies at Musicology Institute of University of Vienna, have constituted an introduction to the advanced studies about the theory of African music, where I had chance to see how such a study inevitably requires an interdisciplinary approach. Especially concerning the history oriented part of the research, it is possible to come across the unpredictable cultural and musical links among the heterogeneous ethnic groups. For example, it was possible to observe a common use of certain time structure among geographically distanced groups or, re-contextualization and transformation of musical traditions in terms of religion, politics, international relationships, gender, and inner migration history of ethnic groups. On the other hand, to be able to comprehend highly advanced concept of music making and extremely complex musical forms, a researcher shall not limit himself/herself only with the methodologies of systematic musicology, but rather expand his/her vision through various disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, politics and other related social sciences.

In order to reach a coherent level of understanding an experience in the field is almost obligatory, since one should calibrate not just his/her methodological approaches but also his/her auditory perception in accordance with the musical concepts of the field. For a musician with a background of classical western music education such calibration might take a considerable amount of time; in my case took more than one year. As a musicology student since 2003, I am familiar with several ethnomusicological research methodologies besides basic information of African music, theoretically. If I would have to make a distinction between the theoretical and practical phases of my research, in terms of their influence on the result of this study, I would state that during the fieldwork in Malaŵi, my prior theoretical knowledge was useful only to a certain extent. In Chiotha and Nkata Villages, I spent 3 days in total and during this time met 3 different nkangala players. This is a very short period to define it as a fieldwork; yet I first got in touch with nkangala a year before the field trip and I spent these three days face to face with the expert players.

As mentioned above, I have practiced the instrument with Moya Aliya Malamusi only on a beginner’s level. I primarily paid attention to how to hold the instrument, where to place the fingers and how to produce the overtones through right positioning of the mouth.
Besides, at the beginning of my practice, my right hand functioned only as an “unaware striker of the plectrum”, until I met the first player in Malawi. When I met the players in Malawi, I was able to produce only some of the overtones, even if I could manage to find the right position of the mouth, I did not have any idea about the rhythmic structures which have to be combined with the tones. In the very first recording in Chiotha Village, I was asked to show my own nkangala and play for them before we start to talk. It was a very worthy experience, since I had the chance to see the differences between our instruments and could start to learn from them. In the second meeting, I was asked to show what I learned from them the day before; fortunately I was able to play a relatively easy pattern, a part of a song that they have played the day before. So I had a chance to have a very long chat with them, asked questions and collected information about the basics of the performance practices of nkangala, as well as private motivation of playing nkangala and its social role. These meetings were in a training atmosphere, in which participant observation was my basic methodology. During our meeting with Elita John in Nkata Village, I was able to see how she builds the instrument from the very beginning to the end and our talk was not only very relevant in terms of the historical background and the social role of the instrument but in terms of gender related social organizations as well, besides her personal migration story as a Sena person which was totally different from those of Angoni people⁹.

Thus, my preference was to conduct this research not only with a morphological approach to the instrument, but rather tracing the joint links in socio-cultural functions, and musical characteristics of nkangala. Also, related genres with various research and analysing methods are comprehended. In the following chapters some comparative analyses about the context of playing, performance practices and tonal systems will be put forward.

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⁹ Said when Romeo Malamusi was translating the conversation, but Moya Malamusi, who knows that player, claimed that she is not a Sena person. Dyna Malamusi told that she might be a Mang’anja person.
2.1. Studying Mouth-bow Traditions: Studying Nkangala

Studying mouth-bow traditions in general and/or nkangala in Malawi, the researcher confronts with an unstable ground as the instrument is subjected to ever-changing socio-cultural events. When I intended to study nkangala I had to deal with distinct but complementary approaches on the subject. These approaches can be classified as three major aspects of my methodology, which obligated me to consider:

1. My field experience has in a way already started when I met the instrument for the first time in Vienna. I consider this situation as my first attempt to use the method of participant observation out of its authentic context and social surrounding.

2. The field experience, on the other hand, has proved the necessity of the consideration of the above mentioned socio-cultural dynamics in their natural environment for this study.

3. The historical links between nkangala and other mouth-bow traditions in southern Africa led me to implement both research techniques of various disciplines as well as specific analysis and comparison tools of systematic musicology.

On the other hand, in terms of research methodologies, one should also consider a wide range of secondary factors, e.g. the transforming dynamics of the tradition, which are not necessarily dependent only upon an instrument’s availability in the society. Such secondary elements require the implementation of an interdisciplinary point of view for a deeper understanding, inevitably. At this point it is reasonable to say that, the historically tangled relationships of diverse musical traditions in Malawi and other surrounding African cultures, which have considerable roles regarding the technical and contextual usage of nkangala and other musical customs, can only be comprehended correctly when a wider and a deeper research methodology is aimed.

In the context of various musical cultures in Malawi, such multi-dimensional approach in methodology has also been suggested by Gerhard Kubik:

“Malawian music may be studied from several possible angles that are in no way mutually exclusive, but rather complementary” (Kubik, 1987:1).
He explains further that “(…) A researcher may at one time or another, focus upon, or move away from any of these areas of study, and change his research methods accordingly”, as one of the results of my experience, I would add that, the researcher not only “may”, but also “should” relocate himself/herself in between various methodologies from “musicology, sociology, anthropology, history, psychology (cognitive dimension of music making and the meaning music has for individuals), linguistics, literature science, choreography, and theatre science” (Kubik, 1987:1).

This is also the case with nkangala and related mouth-bow studies, which requires comparative analysis of previous researches, a viable experience in the field to document the changing process of the traditions and a thorough examination of findings along with their different social context. Since this chapter is based on methodologies and theoretical background of this research, the historical background of the instrument will verify the reason of the interdisciplinary methodological approach for a survey on nkangala. I start with historical origin of the instrument, in order to put clear why a study on nkangala needed to be done with an interdisciplinary methodological approach.

2.2. Research Methods of Fieldwork and Analysis

Within the scope of fieldwork methodologies, participant observation was my primary tool. According to my field experience with nkangala players, I realized that the method of communication with the musicians, i.e. participating to their musical production processes actively and sharing a common interest, has brought the interview process to a more natural and deeper intimate atmosphere. In other words, the musicians tended to be more open and frankly interested in the technical questions. They maintained a patient attitude towards the communication problems and made sure that I understood them correctly. I am convinced that this was the result of a sincere participant observation, and of the learning sessions during which we had an interactive communication through music making.

During other interviews that I had to lead in the course of our fieldwork trip in the other parts of Malawi, where we met several genres and several ethnic groups, I did not have such opportunity of interaction with musicians in terms of communication. Thus it is possible to say that the participant observation had a function in motivating the both sides
for a mutual communication. By this means, many questions that I had prepared in advance for our first meeting with Ellena Kachepa, had already been answered before we started interviewing; thanks to the participant observation process which we conducted one after another. During our second and third meetings this “feedback effect” and mutual interest have evolved into a more abstract and also more concrete multidimensional level. After being able to play some of the rhythmic patterns that I have chosen as analysis subjects for this study, I have gained an advantage in terms of transcription, since I was able to transcribe what I was playing. Beyond that, I also had a better understanding of the other parts of the songs that I was not able to play. I was able to comprehend how it was being played, even though I could not play it correctly. Some of the patterns that I could not play in Malawi, have become clearer when I was back in Vienna and kept on practicing them with the help of the recordings. This way of analysis has functioned also as a verification tool for the transcriptions and consequently has led me to have a better comprehension of the relation between the rhythmic patterns and production of the overtones.

To be able to evaluate the data collected during the fieldwork together with the theoretical research, I have particularly adopted the researches of Percival Kirby, David Rycroft, Gerhard Kubik and Hugh Tracey among many others. In terms of classification, terminology, and verification of the collected data, as well as methods of analysis I have benefited from the early works of above mentioned scholars, especially on Xhosa, Zulu and San musical bows. Kirby’s classification of musical bows and detailed descriptions of performance practices have let me to comprehend other mouth-bows’, (similar to nkangala), performative features among the Zulu and Xhosa. Rycroft’s analyses of Zulu bow songs served as a verification tool for my findings about the similarities of different soundscapes, primarily between ugubhu, umqangala and nkangala. Besides this, I have benefited from Kubik’s analysis system as a model for tonal structural system analyses. In addition to this, his analysis of !Kung bow (tuning c), had a particular role to link the musical and the historical findings together.

By doing this, I aimed to find the resources of the “chromaticism” that arises from the interval between two fundamental tones and I examine the origins of this common soundscape and construction schemas, besides its relative characteristics depended upon performance practices and auditory perception. Because of nkangala’s special acoustic properties arising primarily from the resonation of the sounds in mouth cavity, a spectral
sound analysis with computer software becomes crucial for an accurate detection of the overtones, which have a central role on differing characteristics of tonal scales. But it should be kept in mind that an analysis through listening and using a computer software might provide comparatively different results concerning the principal conception of the selection of the partials from the two fundamental tones, as in the case of this study.

Also, the fifth finger technique of Ellena Kachepa might lead to new debates over the addition of a third fundamental tone, bringing the concept of relativity in between tone systems derived from the two fundamental tones to a point to the point where a special kind of 'transposition of scales' can be mentioned. The gained results and comparison of analysis will be taken into discussion in the related chapters, as well as in the conclusion.

2.3. The Musical and Cultural Interpretation of the Collected Data

Apart from the musical analyses, the cultural data, which is collected essentially through observation sessions and the interviews, have induced me to evaluate a hypothetic-deductive approach in general, as a result of considering the mingled connections among various ethnic groups. Instead of focusing on the instrument’s presence and usage in a limited region and in a limited time period, my main questions turned out to be on the potential connections between nkangala and other similar mouth-bows’ tonal systems, their differing social contexts from one region to another, as well as the content of the songs. Apart from their similar tonal systems, nkangala and other mouth-bows actually do not share a great number of traits. As a result, a tonal analysis has also gained a considerable role relating the historical discoveries and further evidences. On the other hand, I have taken the chinamwali, mainly its connection to nyau, and nkangala playing as separated themes from these complex tonal interrelationships among ethnic groups, and rather preferred to be informed about inner social and musical relations of these genres in Malawi.

As mentioned above, the analysis methods are indicated with various techniques in this study. Participant observation has also a specific role on the analysis, since I played the parts of the songs that I was analyzing with my nkangala, before transcribing them. The results gained from software analysis are excerpted directly from the software file as screenshot images, together with explanations and comparisons. The detection and the
construction of tone scales are made through Kubik’s system of skipping process, which can be applied in order to set up tone systems derived from the two fundamental tones; and in addition to this, his time-line pattern notation is used to identify evident rhythmic patterns that are reminiscent of certain time-line patterns. Lastly, I have attempted to write certain parallel harmonic-melodic movements of overtones and fundamental tones with western staff notation.

Since the selection of partials has a crucial role on the construction of the tone scales, which leads the researcher to consider other interactions among various genres and some specific musical tendencies of different ethnic groups, after the analysis, I had to consider the results also within the context of historical and cultural links among above-mentioned ethnic families. Consequently, the historical background of nkangala has necessarily been overviewed, before explaining its tonal and social properties.
3. Historical Background

The historical events occurred throughout the 19th century in southern Africa can be seen as one of the most influential factors regarding the presence of nkangala mouth-bow in present-day Malawi. Considering the decisive roles of social transformations, triggered by various incidents, especially on musical genres in respect to their context and performance practices, it would be misleading not to mention milestone historical events such as mfecane and resulting Ngoni migration towards the north in this section of the study.

The history of the Ngoni, who nowadays are living in Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Tanzania, might start with a forced migration resulting from the intertribal wars of the Nguni tribes of Kwa-Zulu Natal and the surrounding areas. This does not mean that the Ngoni appeared all of a sudden by the medium of migration; instead, it suggests that this movement towards north has opened a new era, which is inevitably a continuation of the previous one. A full explanation of what happened during this period as the trigger of the Ngoni migration requires a chapter, yet more a whole book. For this reason, I will be concentrated especially on the context of the distribution and the usage of nkangala among certain ethnic groups as well as similarity of their tone systems in southern Africa. When approached from this perspective it becomes possible to trace the origin of nkangala or any other mouth-bow practiced throughout the south-east Africa in much earlier times of history. At this very point a researcher who aims to determine the origin of nkangala has two options:

1. Considering the Zulu (or Swazi) mouth-bow umqangala as the archetype of nkangala in terms of their common features such as shape, similar nomenclature and the way to fasten the string.

2. Going back farther in time, until the first half of the 17th century, when, according to Percival Kirby, the Khoikhoi invented the musical-bow gorə out of regular hunting bow as the ancestor of various mouth-bows used in south-eastern Africa. (Kirby 1953: 186). In addition to this some studies show that the invention of the musical bows took place in much earlier times as shown below (Vogels 2009):
Each foregoing option leads to a different period in history. Even though within this study the first option will be settled as the starting point of today’s nkangala, in order to acquire a comprehensive understanding, prior historical events, directly or indirectly related to distribution of nkangala will also be briefly described.

The historical evidence(s) provided by various scholars (P. Kirby, H. Belfour etc.) and travelers suggest that the origin of nkangala can be traced back to the socio-cultural exchanges of three primary groups settled in South Africa at different times. For Kirby, Nurse, the Khoikhoi are regarded as the first people who transformed a hunting-bow into a musical instrument. According to the sources this transformation occurred most likely sometime between 1598 and 1668 (Kirby 1953: 186; Nurse 1972: 27). Regarding the origin of nkangala such approach may lead a researcher to a very complicated chain of relations, from which many different forms of stringed instruments arise. For the sake of a wide-ranging study; if this route is to be taken, then the researcher is obligated to take all existent bow traditions into consideration; but from the perspective of this particular study not all the bow traditions scattered throughout the Sub-Saharan Africa have a relation to the usage of nkangala practiced in today’s Malawi.
Figure 2: An example about the usage of both hunting and musical bows. (From: Vogels 2009:92)
This is why, instead of referring all bow practices, in order to acquire a credible framework, certain bows that have remarkable resemblance to nkangala tradition will be highlighted. These bows are: gora, umqangala, ugubhu and lugube (songs) and a !Kung (tuning c) mouth-bow.

There might be some other mouth-bows apart from the ones mentioned above; but based upon the lack of recordings and useful data, these are excluded from this study.

Before setting the Ngoni migration as the starting point for Malawian nkangala, the contacts occurred prior to migration should also be mentioned; since the widespread population movements that might have relation to the distribution of the early versions of nkangala have already begun before the Ngoni Trek. According to Max Gluckman (1969: 25) Nguni people migrated from the north and west into South Africa around the 15th century; but considering the pace of migration it seems likely that it might be earlier than this date. At around 16th century the Zulu section of Nguni complex was observable along the coast of present day Natal and some parts of Transkei. Thus it is highly possible that during these movements certain Bantu-Nguni groups had contacts with regional San and Khoikhoi ethnic groups and so shared certain traditions, including the practice of musical bows.

On the other hand, the fact that by the time of the arrival of Europeans, the San and Khoikhoi remained only in the south-western tip of the continent supports the conclusion that they had been displaced and/or absorbed by the Bantu-speaking groups. The interaction between the Khoikhoi and Xhosa groups which ended up with the assimilation of Khoisan speaking people and adoption of certain Khoisan linguistic features by the Xhosa, can be seen as one of the results of pre-Ngoni migration population movements. Beyond these contacts that took place close to coastline there were as well similar interactions between different groups in central and northern regions of South Africa. Such encounters among various groups in great numbers inevitably blur the process of setting nkangala’s South African origin; since these interactions were occurred in different periods and regions. In addition to this, during each encounter the exchanged/adopted traditions showed particular contextual differences from their authentic utilization platform. Some certain features might be kept and remained intact because of constant characteristics; but basically here we are dealing with an ever-changing context,
nomenclature and scope of adopted traditions, which prominently expands the study area of the researcher.

However, such exhaustive attempt seems like the best option to reveal nkangala’s origin(s), which will be deployed thoroughly in the following chapters, concerning the tonal and manufacturing features of musical bows; but before going into details of musical relations, some basic historical data should be provided.

Among the three main groups of South Africa seemingly the Bantu are the ones who are responsible for the distribution of mouth-bow tradition towards north and consequently the presence of nkangala in Malawi. The other two groups, namely San and Khoikhoi, basically provided the instrument, or at least its manufacturing method for Bantu groups; particularly for Nguni and its sub-clans. According to Wallace G. Mills and A.T. Bryant the Nguni are divided into three major groups:

- The northern Nguni: Bantu-speaking peoples in modern Natal and now almost all called Zulu. (According to Guthrie/ Maho Bantu language classification: Zone S; S42)

- The southern Nguni: All the members of this group are in Transkei and Cape, and all now grouped together as Xhosa. (Zone S [Southern Bantu]; S41)

- Swazi

For some other scholars the Nguni language contains two distinct groups: Tekela (or Tugela) and Zonda (or Zunda). This distinction is made based on some phonological differences between corresponding coronal consonants. (Doke 1954; Ownby 1985; Donnelly 1999) With this classification it is possible to see a more detailed picture of the relations of Nguni sub-groups; but it should be kept in mind that there are as well different interpretations of this classification:

**Tugela**: Swazi, Phuthi

**Zonda**: Zulu, Xhosa, Southern Ndebele

**Zonda 2nd generation**: Northern Ndebele, Ngoni
or,

**Tekela:** Swazi, Phuthi, Bhaca, Hlubi, Lala, Southern Ndebele

**Zunda:** Zulu, Xhosa, Northern Ndebele

In the above divisions it appears that Zulu and Xhosa languages are linguistically close to each other, however the Xhosa have adopted the click sounds from the Khoikhoi around the 18th century; highly probably from their neighboring Khoikhoi of Gonaqua. (see Figure 1) In addition to this, according to above divisions the main concern of this part of the study, namely the Ngoni language, is considered to be related to Zulu, Xhosa and also to Ndebele languages, which provides a substantial data concerning the linguistic background of the carriers of nkangala’s ancestors into Malawi. In other words, this information strengthens the hypothesis of nkangala’s South African origin and validates an attempt to pursue nkangala’s certain performance practices not only among the Xhosa and the Zulu ethnic groups, but also among the Khoikhoi. At this point it is crucial to bear in mind that the Nguni (and its subsequent version Ngoni) as a combination of both similar and diverse groups as well as various sub-clans. There is no tangible evidence to what number and extent these sub-clans were incorporated under the Nguni term. Today various scholars offer different explanations, for instance Thompson suggests that “prior to migration, it is possible to see that some Swazi elements were incorporated by heterogeneous Nguni clans through Swazi warriors against Shaka, mainly Ndwandwe, Qwabe, Ntungwa etc.” (Thompson 1981: 10). Thus one should think of the Nguni not as a homogenous group showing certain characteristics; but rather as a community that incorporates distinct linguistic and socio-cultural features acquired from different groups. In addition to this, apart from the groups mentioned above who form the Nguni superset, a researcher should also be aware of the presence and so the influence of other distinct groupings such as Sotho/Tswana, Venda, Pedi, Chwana, Pondo etc. in the given region.

### 3.1. *Mfecane* and the Ngoni Migration

The main approach regarding the historical background of nkangala practice in Malawi is to examine cultural contacts that took place in present South Africa. Generally such cultural interrelations are occurring as one of the results of politic and economic involvements of different cultures. Therefore a researcher, who pursues reasonable answers concerning common use of particular musical traits by geographically separate societies,
should take political and economic indicators into consideration. From this perspective, when we aim to determine historical background of nkangala practice, we should refer some events conducive to presence of nkangala in Malawi.

The turbulent situation in South Africa during the early decades of the 19th century can be partly explained through investigating the reasons that led to mfecane and several results of it. Among these consequences one can find traces of the origin(s) and differing implementations of diverse mouth-bow traditions throughout southeastern Africa. Various sources label the term mfecane as a Zulu (isiZulu) word, meaning “scattering, squashing, crushing” etc., while some others also include the Xhosa and Sotho languages as possible sources, in which the term stands for great migration or hammering. Mfecane in general refers to a period of political disruption and population migration, characterized by widespread warfare between chiefdoms in today’s South Africa region. It took place during the 1820s, 1830s and 1840s; but its effects overreached these periods and as well the political borders of today’s South Africa. “The mfecane reshaped the political and cultural map of southern Africa, as new kingdoms and chiefdoms were formed while others were engulfed or shattered”. The determinants of mfecane can be looked upon as the consequences of some prior population movements that took place in and around South African soil. General opinion on the subject suggests that mfecane happened mainly because of the unrest and conflicts between different Zulu groups and consequently the expansionist policy of Zulu Chief Shaka ka Senzangakhona (c. 1787 – c. 1828), which is valid only to a certain extent. Recently, however, some historians have contended that the emphasis on Zulu expansion has obscured the role that European colonialism may have played in triggering the violence. “While the causes of the mfecane are still being debated, most historians agree that the expansion of some chiefdoms in southeastern Africa and the centralization of others brought emerging states into conflict”. An extended examination put a variety of reasons, apart from the “extreme aggressiveness of the Zulu”, that might have important roles on the occurrence of mfecane into the light.

“There are very few written accounts of the mfecane, which makes it very difficult to determine the reasons for the movement, or its course. The people who migrated used oral

11 ibid.
history to continue their beliefs, traditions and history. When a group was destroyed or scattered its oral traditions were lost. When it merged with another group new oral traditions were born to suit the changing make-up of society. Europeans also did not really interpret or understand the stories and lessons and so a lot of information on the mfecane is unconfirmed in writing. Most of the literature from the time came from white missionaries, travelers and government officials. The records are distorted as a result of misunderstandings and preconceived ideas about societies that were completely different from their own.”

Besides the “savage” conflicts between the Zulu chiefdoms and the negative state of South Africa, the reasons of such migrations in great numbers, among them the most prominent Ngoni Trek, can also be explained partly through considering the arrival of Europeans and their settlement through the shores of South African Cape. When the map (Figure 4) is examined it is possible to see that from the foundation of Cape Town in 1652 to the coming of English to Grahamstown in 1820, and to the gradual Boer expansions up to north that lasted about 200 years, Europeans had a noticeable role regarding the subsequent migrations. But restraining the reasons only with Zulu and Europeans would not be enough to reveal some facts; therefore, in addition to these, some other cases that were potentially effective on the resulting population movements should be referred. These can be sum up as follows:

- Global slave and ivory trade conducted by British colonialists of Cape Town and Portuguese of southeastern coast of Africa.

- Drought and environmental degradation that might lead to increased competition for land and water and introduction of maize plantation which requires considerable amount of water during cultivation.

- Merging of local tribes and as a result the increasing power and influence of big chiefdoms such as Zulu with a population of ~250,000 people.

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Among all the causes that led to mfecane and to Ngoni migration, the involvement of famous Zulu Chief Shaka from about 1816 onwards (until his assassination in 1828) is regarded as the primary factor; but Thompson suggests the opposite when he writes the following: “Shaka did not produce the Mfecane, the Mfecane produced Shaka, and had already begun before he became prominent” (Thompson 1981: 9-10). Here, Thompson’s proposal also highlights the importance of pre-migration events and population movements; but the question of what triggered mfecane in detail does not concern this study, since with this study it is not aimed to prove the origin of nkangala, but to indicate potential work areas for the future investigations.

Figure 3: Ngoni Migrations and the start of the Great Trek (From Wiedner 1962: 142)
Leaving behind the reasons of *mfecane*, the Ngoni migration was no doubt one of the consequences of it. For whatever the reason is, Ngoni migration can be seen as another phase/stream of the primordial Bantu expansion that began around 1000 BC, in West Africa and scattered through Sub-Saharan Africa. According to sources, the Ngoni migration started in the present Natal province of South Africa. When the prominent Nguni Chief Zwangendaba was defeated by Shaka in c. 1819, he had to flee from the region with followers. As there were various Nguni clans, not all of them have followed Zwangendaba after his defeat and consequently these departing clans took different routes, especially towards south and east direction. Unlike the others Zwangendaba and his followers, which form the largest migrating group, struck northwards and through deploying Zulu war tactics they managed to move up to north Malawi and north banks of Lake Nyasa.

Along with its socio-political and economic influence, this migration has also considerable transformative effects on cultural productions of various societies. Because of its distance, duration and nature the Ngoni migration not only changed the encountered groups, but it might as well alter the migrants themselves. As Zwangendaba’s Ngoni was not a unity that shows common characteristics, they separated into smaller groups in the course of the migration. While some members decided to stay and settle on certain spots, the others continued their trek towards the north. Beginning from 1820s up to 1860s Zwangendaba’s group covered a long distance, around 1830’s they crossed firstly the Limpopo River and following to that the Zambezi River. By the end of the 1830s the same group settled down the southern banks of Lake Nyasa. It is most likely this period that their name has transformed from Nguni to Ngoni. Historical sources suggest that with the death of Zwangendaba in c. 1848 his followers that form the Nguni/Ngoni split into four or five major groups. Among them some moved back into present day Malawi and Zambia, and the others, namely the Tuta Ngoni and the Gwangwara Ngoni remained in the eastern side of Lake Nyasa. In this respect Thompson writes that “Ngoni interaction with indigenous society in northern Malawi took place in the years between 1855-1880.” (Thompson 1981: 19).

At this point one can reveal important data regarding the settled Ngoni groups in Malawi through analyzing mouth-bow traditions such as *nkangala* and *nyakatangali*. A deep analysis on these two instruments can as well help re-constructing the history with reliable evidences. Through evaluating musical associations, discrepancies and similarities of
mouth-bows found in Malawi and South Africa, a researcher might be able to connect not just mouth-bow practices, but also seemingly unrelated traditions.

In the following chapters the above mentioned historical data will be evaluated in terms of related ethnic groups’ musical features specific to mouth-bows and thus a reversible historical reading will be constructed.

3.2. On the Possible Origins of Nkangala

![Figure 4: General distribution of the local ethnic groups and the mouth-bows of South Africa. (From Kirby 1953, Plate 0)](image)

The mouth-bow traditions in Africa are addressed to South-African ethnic groups such as Zulu and Khoisan speaking people, which have different cultural and “genetic” properties (Nketia, 1991: 131). Zulu people are the largest Bantu group in South Africa, since Khoisan speaking people are widely scattered in southern and western Africa, even partly in central parts of West Africa. The relationship between the language families and musical traditions is one of the most important point which should not be disregarded. The mouth-bow tradition has been a frequently found musical tradition among these people and in geographies where these people had contact with other ethnic groups, or small sub-groups of a “cosmopolite” ethnic group. The most postulated theory about the origin of the
nkangala mouth-bow tradition in Malawi is that it came to Malawi with both northern and southern Ngoni people:

“(…) In fact the nkangala is a mid-nineteenth century introduction which came to Malawi with the invasion of Angoni warriors from South–Africa. The Angoni moved north to Malawi during an era when South-Africa was in a state of turmoil, caused partly by pressure from Dutch (Boer) populations from the south, and partly by other factors. (…) Two main groups of Angoni eventually settled in Malawi: The northern, or Jere, Ngoni who were led by paramount chief Zwangendaba, and the southern, or Maseko, Ngoni led by Mputa. Ngoni-orientated settlements in south-western Tanzania and northern Mozambique were also established” (Kubik 1987:7).

Although it is clear that this kind of mouth-bow tradition settled in Malawi with the coming of Ngoni people, the origin of the instrument links to Zulu mouth-bow umqangala. The similarity in nomenclature of the instrument does not originate from the similarity between the languages of Zulu people in South-Africa and Cheŵa people in Malawi, instead it has its source in the Khoisan language spoken by Khoikhoi and San people in South-Africa, with which hunting bows and other musical bows would be associated, rather than this kind of mouth-bows.

“(…) One of the surviving traditions which they introduced and which has spread to, specifically the womenfolk, even at the periphery of Ngoni contact, is the nkangala mouth-bow. (…) The name reveals its origin because the word is derived from the umqangala, a designation for an identical instrument among the -Zulu of South Africa, as studied by David Rycroft (personal communication June 24, 1974). /q/ represents a palato-alveolar click sound which is difficult to pronounce by Chichewa speakers and, therefore changed into (ŋk) in Malawi. Further, the presence of a click sound is like a signal suggesting Khoisan connections. In southern Africa it was especially Khoisan speakers – often referred to in literature as “Bushmen” and “Hottentots” – who promoted the manufacture and the extensive use of the musical bows, although I do not know of any Khoisan people who, presently, would use precisely this kind of musical bows” (Kubik, 1987:8).

Thus, possible hypothesis on the origin of the first nkangala-like mouth-bow are possible to be speculated. Departing from this statement of Kubik, we could suggest that, there is a possible adaptation of different traditions of musical bows, a kind of “acculturation” process in between ethnic groups. It is possible that Zulu people have adopted the mouth-bows of San and Khoikhoi, transformed it to a mouth-bow similar to nkangala and they
kept the click sound in the beginning of the instrument which they called umqangala. Then people in Malawi adopted it as nkangala and transformed its cultural usage as well as its morphological properties. Even though, there are interesting connections in between Zulu and !Kung bow’s (tuning c) tonal qualities and nkangala songs that I have recorded in Malawi. When Kubik refers to Khosian connections, he probably does not mean a special !Kung connection, but rather he refers to San and Khoikhoi’s hunting bows in general, as an origin of musical bows. But the similarities between my recordings (especially with 5th finger technique of Ellena Kachepe) and Kubik’s !Kung tonal system analyses let me put this data as an hypothetic tonal system connection. The reason of this similarity does not have to arise from an unknown cultural contact directly between !Kung and Nguni people of southern Africa, but also could have a simple monographic basis. On the other hand, it can also be kept in mind for the further studies as an historical link to follow.

Interestingly, the adoption of San hunting bow as mouth-bow is not found in Kalahari desert for example, where !Kung are partly living, but rather in other lands like Swaziland or Malawi, were mostly Bantu people live.

(…) Both Kirby and Kubik make the point that musical bows among the San seem to have been derived from the musical use of the hunting bow. This is patently not the case with xabaa, since the stick of which the body is made is not flexible, and there is nothing on a hunting-bow resembling a tuning-peg. On the other hand, the mouth-bow, which does seem to have developed from a hunting-bow, could have spread either from the San to the Bantu-speaking Negro, or in the opposite direction. Its presence in Malawi is entirely ascribable to Ngoni influence, and this does suggest that it originated south of Zambesi. (Nurse, 1972:27).

To make the distinction in between these ethnic families and their cultural or musical traditions, one should beware of that only one name of ethnic group such as Zulu represent many sub-groups with respectable cultural differences, they also represent a group of people, classified under another bigger ethnic family, such as in Zulu case being the northern Ngoni and for Xhosa, being the southern Ngoni. Thus when one mentions such a concept of “Ngoni music”, it can either be a musical property that is possible to find in any of these sub-families, or a fundamental generalization mistake. What Rosemary Joseph claims about the definition of “Zulu women’s music” is a typical case study and put the Ngoni migration with Zulu connections in light:
“Culturally, the people who are today termed the Zulu, are generally held to be broadly homogeneous. Sporadic evidence of customs and practices from one area to another. The presence of such variation would seem to be largely explained in terms of the composition of the present-day Zulu people. The original Zulu nation (fragmented after so-called Zulu war of 1879), from the present-day Zulu are descended, was forged by Shaka in the period following his accession to the Zulu throne in 1816 till his assassination in 1828, from a considerable mixture of the diverse Nguni clans who had first migrated to Natal in the 16th century. While these clans shared a common language (with certain dialectal variations), and common social and political systems, it is generally accepted that there were differences in the details of custom between individual clans. Present-day variation in the details of cultural and musical practices may therefore be explained in two ways, both rooted in clan preferences. On the one hand, variations may result from the fact that individual clans have maintained the idiosyncratic elements of their traditions (in spite of Shaka’s attempts to standardize language and custom while in power). On the other hand, variations may be the result of regional innovations and adaptations, essentially clan-based, which have taken place since the fall of the Zulu nation in 1879. While it may, therefore, be possible at higher levels of abstraction, to take for granted the presence of cultural homogeneity, and refer to ‘Zulu’ culture or music, there is clearly a danger in generalizing about the details of cultural and musical practices on the basis of specific evidence. Thus it is important to indicate in any discussion of ‘Zulu’ culture and music the areas in which fieldwork was conducted, and the principal clans from which one’s informants were drawn”. (Joseph, 1983:53-54).

Therefore, I preferred to use a distinctive terminology rather than generalizations. When comparing mouth-bows and related genres from these above mentioned ethnic groups, I tried to define the results as similarities in between different and very specifically differentiated musical traditions, although it is possible to link them with each other, especially in terms of tonal systems. But to be able to talk about such a common tonal system requires more advanced studies in order to be defined and renamed with a common concept. This is why I would discuss the historical study of these instruments in terms of musical properties and other different possible approaches.

3.3. How to Handle the Musical Historiography of Nkangala

Thus, the historical study of the instrument requires leastways a basic knowledge about these different ethnic group’s musical traditions, in order to see and follow the links to its “tonal” and “rhythmical” characteristics; since there are common concepts and forms that should be borne in mind, in many different cultural contexts, in a larger cultural scope than
one could have thought of. Means, for example the tonal system deriving from nkangala can also be linked to another genre of homophonic vocal singing among Ngoni, or a common chromatic progress can be related to !Kung because of this tangled relationship-map between different ethnic groups and musical cultures. Another example to that would be chingolingo, a kind of solo singing with a special technique of yodeling, performed by women, when they pound maize, found both in Malawi and Mozambique. Just departing from that example of cultural relationships between musical traditions, one can start to think about

- gender roles in music making in these different regions,
- their common characteristics as well as differences,
- an overtone based musical system,
- their effects on other musical tradition’s soundscapes and rhythmical organizations

and vice versa. That encompasses already systematical musicology methods together with anthropological, sociological and ethnological approaches, which is one of the most discussed issues, concerning definitions and methodologies of ethnomusicology.

In case of nkangala, besides these multi-directional relationships between different musical cultures, one should also beware of the changing process of the traditions during their local interpretations.

“‘Musical traditions in Malawi are changing’. This is something that often heard, and occasionally lamented, today. It is a statement, however, that could have been pronounced forty years ago, a hundred years ago, or at any time in history. It is important that the musical traditions in Malawi are not merely changing now, but like all traditions, by inherent necessity they are, and have always been, in a process of change” (Kubik, 1987:2).

As Kubik puts forward, this change does not happen only “now”, this is a process of changing and surviving, that does not occur only because of external or western “threats” over the continuity of musical traditions, but it can cause emerging genres, or modification of some practices within the tradition, it is also in the very inner dynamics of the culture

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13 The “Nyasa harmonic progression” detected by Kubik is another example for this plural common stylistic properties. Chewa women’s multipart singing can for example be taken as a similar tonal system to that of nkangala, because of the use of common harmonics. But theoretically it does not fit to the “tonal systems derived from two fundamental tones”, since harmonic structure of singing in Africa, comes mostly from a single fundamental.
itself. This non-linear, multi-dimensional changing process is actually a common phenomenon in the cultural studies in general, but it is especially remarkable after the beginning of the globalization, which I would put its beginning for musical researches as the arrival of radio in local villages along with other technological findings, because of its direct effect on the circulation of musical traditions within cultures. I was told many times during our recording sessions of different genres in different areas in Malawi, that young people have lost interest to keep on learning from the elders, instead many of them who has interest on music making, prefers to build a banjo band, or a reggae band (in which I did not see a female musician participant, but as far as I know this is not a “rule”; in Zambia there are also females). The kwela music combined with guitar band concept of Donald and Daniel Kachamba and apart from that the home-made banjo tradition are the most common ones in Malawi. The social dynamics in nkangala’s surviving process is also related to this general changes in culture and circulation of musical traditions.

“We can see from the graphic representation that the nkangala mouth-bow tradition for example, which first appeared some time in the 1850’s, gradually rose in popularity and reaches stability in the period from the end of the 19th century until about 1945. From this time a gradual down-slope began, caused by the massive introduction of the media generated music trough, for example gramophone, broadcastings, etc. The downward trend continues until the 1960’s, when a new consciousness of musical traditions in post independent Malawi somehow stabilizes what has remained of this tradition. The nkangala ends up so, as a ‘passive tradition’ in Atta Mensah terminology” (Kubik, 1987:2).
3.3.1. The Concept of “Plural Historiography”

When we like to handle the researches in nkangala and instruments or/and genres related to it, we have to speak about a plural conception of historiography, rather than a conceptualization such as “history of nkangala”. To reorganize the history in such a conceptualization, one should beware of a certain expansion of the time and space, as a common phenomenon, where the chronological history spreads in a non-linear way, when we handle any of these instruments or genres, along with their origin, surviving process and social role. That means our findings can connect different genres and instruments from different periods of time in a large geographical region. Another reason of this might be that, there is not a chronological literature of researches made on nkangala, but there is a respectable literature on South African mouth-bow traditions, which makes possible to reach information about nkangala mouth-bow tradition’s potential origin and its social context, despite this lack on the linear historical process. Thus the results and findings in this research imply not only my short field work process, means nkangala’s current
historical position as a musical tradition in Malaŵi, but also other musical-bow traditions’ historical and social changing, transforming and re-contextualization process.

That brings us once again to a point where we have to re-define the ethnomusicological field’s description. If the field research’s beginning postulated as the first connection with the subject of the research, then it would be in my position in Vienna, where I started to learn to make and play the instrument with Moya Aliya Malamusı. That was also a decisive factor on my methodologies on the field and during my first contact with the Malaŵi players I was asked to play it. Then I had to transform all the knowledge that I have gained in the field, together with previous researches. Even though I read about the performance practices of mouth-bows, the theoretical results of previous researches came clear only after my return from the field. This is why I would not discuss the definition of the field as a place, but rather I would consider it as an application area, where the researcher uses different methodological approaches in order to acquire, interpret and transmit the information.

3.4. Interaction between Bantu and Khoisan Speaking People in the Context of Mouth-Bows and Hunting-Bows

*Nkangala*, or any other musical bow is mostly thought to be originated from the hunting bow. The African hunters were using their hunting bows as a musical instrument, when they go hunting and have to wait for the animal to show up. It is also possible that they played it when they had to travel long distances. It is not clear by which function they started to play it, it could be used as a communication tool with the necessary spiritual guides during hunting, maybe with animals, or animal spirits as well. It is also known that some of the Khoisan tribes use a different language during hunting, a special one that protects them from the animal that they are tracing. This use of the language as a protection tool is not a mystical belief; it is invented to change the soundscape of the language, with more additional click sounds that make difficult for the animals to recognize it as a human hunter voice. So for hunter-gatherer clans the use of language and hunting bow has a different conceptualization than Bantu.
The so called “Khoisan” or aboriginal races who were not Bantu were mostly hunters, Bantu people are mostly not. This is why it is thought that mouth-bows and musical bows came to Bantu people from “Khoisan”, such as Khoikhoi and San. We have to consider that these two different groups of people (“other races” and Bantu) was (partly still is) containing a huge variety of ethnic groups from both side as well as a complex geographical migration history. This is why I will try to concentrate on Malawi and nkangala-like bows from other geographies in this context. Another reason that I concentrate on these mouth-bows is that there is no enough material about the other musical bows in the same family, at least there is no sound records or analyses to compare with my recordings.

Historically, in Malawi, there were “pygmies” before Bantu people.

“Archaeological diggings have shown that up to about 8000 and 10000 years ago there were people in the lands we now call Malawi. Stone Age implements have been unearthed at Mount Hora in Mzimba and Mlikolongwe in Thyolo. These people were not Bantu in race. (...) The Bantu
eventually defeated the pygmies or aboriginal races and drove them out of their lands (Malawi)”. (Phiri, 2004:14-15).

Percival Kirby’s findings about the origin of the “Hottentot” (Khoikhoi) mouth-bow called gor a, is interestingly informant about the possible connections and modifications between different ethnic groups’ different mouth-bows. His research about gor a and umqangala was my basic interest among his writings, since gor a is similar in many ways to nkangala, as well as to nyakatangali. Gora has also another version with a resonator, which is similar to nyakatangali and umqangala is basically the same as nkangala. Gora is a Khoikhoi instrument, and umqangala is a Zulu one. This already shows that people from different races and ethnic groups have been culturally in contact and they influenced each other musically. Thus, instrument making and playing techniques are for a long time in an exchange process and this situation makes difficult to determine one’s origin. Kirby’s research about the origin of the instruments, opens up other discussions as well, such as on research and documentation history.

An instrument group such as musical bows, are actually thought to be as old as the first hunting bow in the human history. On the other hand, the classification of Kirby for musical bows makes easier to see which kind of mouth-bows are connected to each other and when were they first studied or reported by Europeans. Maybe, this, the history of the researches made by now, is more important than the history of the origin of the instrument, since it is a determinant factor on information transport about any question that we have as ethnomusicologists in our minds nowadays. The already-made researches on musical bows are in this point are like a big exposition, where we could differentiate a specific instrument or an instrument group, and go further to the field with a semi-clear image of what we are up to find out. There is also a polygenesis possibility when it comes to musical bows that take the historical origin of the instrument again in the second level of interest for this study. As putted above, it is also not possible to talk about a single history of a single musical bow in a single geographical region. But finding out musical, social and morphological similarities, allows us to talk about a common natural historical origin and transforming process and this way the historical map could be partly completed. This is also what Kirby suggests by making his classifications of musical bows; to be able to see the historical links, firstly, he brings different instruments from different ethnic groups together with respect to their technical and morphological properties. Here it is important
to mention that, I will consider *gora* as a probable origin of *nkangala*-like mouth-bows neither musically nor in terms of performance practices or tonal systems derived from instrument; but rather only morphologically.

![Figure 7: Gora mouth-bow of Korana Khoikhoi. (Kirby 1953: Plate 51)](image)

“*The earliest reference to the *gora* that I have so far discovered occurs in Dapper (1668). Since this work was published just over fifty years before that of Kolbe, whose account of the instrument has generally been regarded at the first, it is worth quoting in full. ‘There is yet another instrument in use among them, (the Hottentots) with a string, after the manner of a bow, with a split quill at one end, upon which they blow, and which gives a sound without (the use of) a violin bow: though not a harsh sound, notwithstanding that they blow with their breath strongly, and inhale again in the same way’.

Dapper, as I have pointed out (vide p.14), was never himself in South Africa, but in his preface he distinctly stated that all the information which he gave about the Hottentots had been drawn from a manuscript which has been sent to him by an observer at the Cape. I must emphasize the fact that Dapper attributed the *gora* to the Hottentots. Unfortunately he did not obtain the name of the instrument.
Shreyer (1669-77) actually saw the *gora* in the hands of the Hottentots, and described it thus: ‘They have a wooden bow, spanned by a string, below which a small piece of a feather is fixed; this they take between their lips, and by means of inspirations and expirations of the breath, they produce a powerful and buzzing sound’. Here again we have an unmistakable reference to the instrument, though the name is not given.

Kolbe (1704) was responsible for the next account of the *gora*, which he named the *gom-gom*. He too found it played by the Hottentots, though he was by no means sure that they have not derived it from the ‘slaves’, who also played upon it. His description was quite good, though he complicated matters by adding to it the description of what he called a ‘full-sounding’ *gom-gom*, to which half a coco-nut shell had been added. He gave an illustration of the latter instrument, which I fear was purely imaginary. I have elsewhere dealt fully with the curious problem thus originated” (Kirby, 1953:172-73).

From these statements we can see that the *gora* is a Khoikhoi (Hottentot) instrument and has actually two versions, with and without external resonator. But in both cases mouth cavity and breath techniques are used as performative features. When Kolbe named it *gom-gom* and “full-sounding *gom-gom*”, he means that the second has an external resonator. This is another interesting point, open to discuss in the context of the difference between
the mouth-bows and musical bows. If we like to determine this difference by the use of the
mouth cavity and an external resonator, in gom-gom’s case we have two at the same time,
since the “full sounding gom-gom” is played with the help of the mouth, as well as with
and external buzzing resonator, like nyakatangali’s. This “buzzing” is also postulated in
Shreyer’s statement, which identify that this external resonator do not function as a
calabash resonator for example, from where the overtones are coming out. This resonator
functions only as a part of the overtone production-place, together with the mouth and
breath techniques. On the other hand Dapper points out that it does not have a “harsh
sound”, rather the breath is used to produce a softer sound. This is another critical point
about performance techniques. If we like to compare it with nkangala, the first big
difference comes on breath technique. Inspiration and expiration does not have a role on
sound producing in nkangala, like it has in gora, but to change the mouth cavity while
breathing demands a certain awareness of breathing circles together with time-line patterns
or rhythmic structures. But breathing does not function as the producer of the sound in the
case of nkangala. On the other hand from Kirby’s photo of !gabus we can see that the
holding position and finger technique is also different from nkangala. The finger is not at
the bottom of the bow, rather somewhere near and the string is stopped by touching the
string from the inner side. Also the distance between the left hand and the bottom of the
instrument is another clue about the distance in between two fundamental tones. This is
apparently a bigger interval than a semi-tone or a whole tone, but we should also consider
the curvature of the bow, which changes the proportional ratio. There is also a difference
between the strings, since !gabus has a thicker string, it should have a lower pitch range
than nkangala. But both belong to the third group of bow according to Kirby’s
classification.

“The third group of stringed instruments consists of those in which certain harmonics of the string
are resonated and used for the execution of a ‘bass’ part. Four different types of instrument fall into
this group.

The first of these consists of a bow, usually a hollow river-reed (less frequently of wood), fitted with
a string of twisted sinew, hair, or fiber. The string is plucked by a finger or a plectrum, and the
mouth is used as a resonator.

This type is very widely distributed. In its simplest form it is found among the korana Hottentots,
who all it !gabus; their use of it is, however, rather more restricted than that of the Bantu. Among
the latter it is found among the Venda, Chwana, Sotho, Swazi, Zulu, Pondo and Xhosa. The Venda
call it lugubhe, the Thonga umqangala, the Chwana lengope, the Sotho of the Transvaal lekope, the Swazi umqangala, the Zulu umqangala or umqangele, the Pondo inkinge, and the Khosa inkinge. The instrument is the so-called ‘simple’ musical bow, and like other bow-forms it was doubtless derived from the hunting- or war-bow. But it has departed considerably from its prototype in becoming a musical instrument. The stave of the instrument is generally hollow and the string very thin and light in weight. Moreover, the technique of performance is far in advance of that commonly found in cases where a hunting-bow is temporarily converted into a musical instrument. Many writers have in the past confused this type with the gorâ, with which however, it has no connection save that both acknowledge a common ancestor, the bow of the hunter” (Kirby, 1953:220).

So we can say that gorâ has only an original connection to nkangala in the context of Bantu and hunter-gatherer’s interactions. Its variations among the Zulu, Xhosa or Venda show differences concerning pitch range and performance techniques but in a general sense they have a common morphological and functional background. The umqangala and nkangala on the other hand have more in common in this sense, as well as its social context. It is not easy to say from which bow the Zulu adopted their umqangala, but it is clear that umqangala is nkangala’s ancestor in this group of instruments, and came to Malawi with Ngoni.

It should also be kept in mind that each umqangala and nkangala has differences because of their proportional building with the length of the arm of the player, or because of the thickness of the stick or the string. Anyhow, umqangala has the same interval ratio in between its fundamental tones with nkangala.
The *lugube* description and song analysis of Kirby is very informant about performance techniques. It seems that “fingering” technique is adopted from the Xhosa *gomgom*. On the other hand there are here three fundamental tones, since the left hand uses two finger to stop the string. The buccal cavity is used to produce overtones. These three fundamental tones’ interval values is similar to *nkangala*’s, but only when it is played with an additional 5th finger technique such as Ellena Kachepa’s. I quote the whole passage to show how complex interrelationships can be found in terms of performance practices, tonal qualities or social context, with only one of the instruments in the same family with *nkangala*. 

*Figure 9: A photo showing the proportional difference between my nkangala and Ellena Kachepa’s. The bigger one is hers and has a whole ton upper range.*
The lugube (of Venda) is generally held to the left of the player, although the left-handed performers may reverse the usual procedure. The performer, taking the instrument in her left hand, pushes the notched (and knotted) end into the right-hand corner of her mouth, the tip resting in the junction of the upper and lower lips, and pushing them somewhat out of place towards the right. The string is towards the front, and the stave is kept clear of the teeth. The left hand holds the instrument firmly in position, the hand being held palm uppermost, with the forefinger engaging the hollow tip of the reed, and the thumb being laid along it.

The string is ‘fingered’ with the backs of the second, third, and fourth fingers of the left hand. Three sounds are generally produced from the string by such fingering, the right forefinger plucking the string in a downward or upward direction, as required by the accent of the music. But these three sounds, fingered as shown in the musical examples below, do not represent all that is heard or intended to be heard by the performer. The buccal cavity, varied in size at will, is used for the purpose of resonating certain harmonics of the three sounds produced by the stretched string, and it is this fainter series of sounds that constitutes the real melody played upon the instrument. Should a listener be asked to sing the tune just played by a performer upon this instrument, he would naturally
sing the melody produced by the resonance of the string in this manner, and not the tune heard directly from the fingered and plucked string.

Consequently the tuning of the string, achieved by tightening it upon the stave, would appear to be regulated by the fact that the buccal cavity is required to resonate certain partials only of the three fundamental notes used. Further, the fact that performances upon this instrument consist of melodies based on mouth-resonated harmonics together with a bass supplied by the fundamentals which generate them, shows that this apparently simple instrument is of a polyphonic nature, and its use gives a clear indication of some of the governing principles of Bantu harmony, since the intervals employed and the part progressions that result from their succession are readily perceived. The following are typical examples of lugube tunes:” (Kirby 1953: 222-223).

Example 1: Kirby’s lugube song transcription and fingering. (Kirby 1953: 223)

Example 2: Kirby’s transcription of three fundamentals and harmonics of lugube. (Kirby 1953: 224)
Thus the Ngoni contained both Xhosa and Zulu in South Africa before the Ngoni migration to Malawi, it is more consistent to assume that this group of mouth-bow might be originated to this previous family of Ngoni, but after the migration it has become a continuous tradition separately among the Zulu, Xhosa and Venda in South Africa and among the Chewa, Sena and Mang’anja people in Malawi. To be more precise about the tradition’s adaptation and re-contextualization process, insider information is needed.
These interrelationships in terms of performance practices, tonal qualities and social context, goes further and wider if we take the ugubhu case, regarding the studies of Rycroft. Ugubhu is a musical bow among the Zulu played by women with singing accompaniment. These ughubu songs recorded and analyzed by Tracey and Rycroft shows similar tonal properties to nkangala, but not ughubu’s tonal range as instrument. Another interesting point is about ughubu’s origin: David Rycroft writes about the bow songs of Princess Magogo, concentrating on her ughubu songs. He mentions her songs with umakhweyana, but says that “she does not have as high a regard for it as for the ughubu. She maintains that it is not truly a Zulu instrument, but was borrowed from the Tsonga of Mozambique.” (Rycroft 1975: 58) – both Xhosa and Zulu belongs to the southern Ngoni group.

Another unnamed mouth-bow found among G/wi in the Kalahari Desert and in Botswana. Kirby’s description shows that this mouth-bow has also a lot of similarities to nkangala and its ancestors, but differs by its social context, since it is also played by men:

“(…) A carved wooden bow using the mouth as resonator, with the single hide or gut string divided unequally and held tense by a thong near, but not at, the mid-point, and played by rapid tapping either a twig or grass-stalk, was seen among the G/wi. It was not nearly as long (about 30-40 cm in length) or as study as the similarly played bows described by Kubik and Kirby, and in fact closely resembled the nqangala found among the Zulu and Swazi the mqangala of the Ngoni of Malawi). The nqangala is, of course, played only by women and girls; the mouth bow of the G/wi is played even by adult men. The note made of its name has unfortunately been mislaid”. (Nurse 1964:25).

Departing from all these statements we can assume that nkangala’s origin is a layered origin in the history, in terms of three principle aspects, namely tonal qualities, performance practices and social context. Regarding to that, I would discuss these bow’s similarities concerning these three aspects. My first discussion would be about social context. I would put nkangala’s social context in particular, since this aspect requires insider knowledge apart from the literature research. I will attempt to describe Malawian nkangala’s social context in Malawi, before I compare it to some Zulu and Venda traditions.
4. Social Context

In each ethnic group the context of making music and playing certain instruments along with mouth-bows show a variety of characteristics. Among these characteristics, gender is quite definitive in each culture. When we look at the origin of mouth-bow musical traditions we see that each bow originally referred to one of the genders, but there can be collaboration in music making between genders in terms of bow songs, singing and playing, as in the case of nyakatangali. The content of Bantu bow songs are mostly about gender roles-related subjects. That can contain love relationships, women’s position in daily life, sexuality, social problems concerning sickness or hunger and their relations to gender roles in society.

The Bantu bow songs can also contain tales from traditional religions, other folk tales from local oral traditions or can be independently created. Concerning all mentioned ethnic groups in this study, an inclusive approach to this theme requires further advanced studies. But from the interviews and my basic readings on Cheŵa belief systems and girl’s initiation, certain links with nkangala playing are possible to follow. Gender roles and its relation to mouth-bow music is also to be found among the Zulu very clearly, but its connection with belief systems or initiation ceremonies requires insider information which I do not have. Regarding that, I will only discuss the Zulu bow playing identifications about gender, besides, Cheŵa belief system, girl’s initiation ceremony and nkangala playing in Malaŵi in the context of “performative construction of gender” concept of Judith Butler.

4.1. “Performative construction of gender” concept and its appearance

Judith Butler propound that the “gender” is a concept of acts, built by determinations, not a mystical identity that comes with birth. It is a whole system of behavior which can be observed in any kind of society, naturally with immense differences. But its formulation in a philosophical and psychological manner, makes possible to notice some inclusionary and common social facts, which can be useful in ethnomusicological researches as well as in any social science discipline: The argument that the gender has not a metaphysical substance that comes with birth, but it is something configured by expressions, manifestations, behaviors and repetitions, variations and manipulations of these, has a
conducive function in understanding any performative genres and their gender-related social role, which allows for example to examine a drag queen stage performance and an African initiation ceremony with the same approach. That is a similar clarification to the expansion of ethnomusicological methods and ethnological field definition in a larger *milieu*, such as new ethnomusicological approaches to popular music. But that is certainly not a generalization, an overlapping of cultural identities and definitely not the exclusion of the insider knowledge which comes only with fieldwork in many cases. This is neither aimed to be used to justify nor to judge the cultural tradition’s gender settings. However, it served me as a kind of awareness rather than a methodological basis to be used in the field.

This conceptualization caused the emergence of new concepts like “undoing” (Butler 2004, Deutsch 2007) or “redoing” (Connell 2010) the gender, which goes back to Zimmerman and West’s concept of “doing gender”. “Doing gender” (1977), in many ways, was an obstacle for the gender possibilities other than man and woman, and “doing difference” concept (West & Zimmerman 1987), was a consideration that social gender identities are based on race and class, beyond biological sex, an almost discriminative way of determination. In between these times Butler’s book *Gender Trouble* was published in 1990 and brought the discussion in another level by re-describing the content of these concepts, that were being discussed in European academic society from the late 80’s until today, and offering a new conceptualization of “performativity of gender”. By doing this, she opened up a research area for many disciplines, concerning sexual identities’ construction from childhood until very old ages in different cultures; and so she offered a more proper academic approach to research subjects with different sexual identities such as “transgender” or “queer”, yet a better understanding of homosexuality of both sexes. But what is very important for ethnomusicological or cultural studies, is the conceptualization of this “performative act of building gender”, which continues a life-time, a much complex chain of actions than one can be aware of in daily routine, which requires a basic knowledge of psychology science as well. With this conceptualization, many musical traditions or dance genres can be examined concerning their role on the construction of gender identities and their roles in the given society.

In contrast to what is often thought, the performative construction of gender is not a chain of behavioral manifestation of gender roles of oppressed genders, rather a general concept that could be used to explain any kind of performativity, related to gender roles. This can
concern children games, tales, and daily life activities, beside music and art making. It is an active process which could be examined through psychological, socio-cultural or musical analysis, in every culture or individual from any age. Regarding to that, I will first address the *chinamwali* girl’s initiation ceremony in Malawi, but not within a direct connection to *nkangala* playing, rather as an example of this approach.

*Chinamwali* and *nkangala* are separated traditions and have no common roles on the process of performative construction of gender roles of young girls. In addition to this, there is a time collapse between the continuity of this two traditions, which makes even more difficult to build such a connection. *Chinamwali* was more actively practiced before *nkangala* tradition became popular in Malawi but that does not mean that *chinamwali* was replaced by playing *nkangala*. The only connection between those traditions is that the songs of *chinamwali* can be played by *nkangala*, and the learning process of *nkangala* by an older women can also contain some advices about gender roles, such as the given advices during *chinamwali*. Besides that, there is no structural or functional mutuality between those two genres. However, I would like to give a basic information about the structure of *chinamwali* and content of the songs, as a basic knowledge which is important to imagine the young girl’s and women’s life in Malawi. *Chinamwali* use to be the turning point for a young girl to become a women in the times that it was popular, but now the transforming point is rarely shared within the society. But in this terms, the first menstruation is (or used to be) also a sign to be able to start playing *nkangala* by learning from an older women. I am not sure if being menstruated is strictly related to start to play, but *nkangala* is always referred as “young girl’s” or “women” instrument, and is not aimed to be learned during childhood. This is why I consider the structure of *chinamwali* as an important data, since it was a common turning point of many *nkangala* players before they started to play the instrument.
4.2. Chinamwali

In Malawi, like in many other African countries, there are formal and/or informal institutions for children’s education. Children who reach puberty are isolated from the others with an initiation ceremony and start a further education concerning their gender roles, apart from the other sex. This is a common fact in many Sub-Saharan cultures for both sexes, with differences on cultural applications. As specified by Dyna Malamusu, the best way to understand this educational links within the concept of “performative construction of gender” is to be initiated with a chinamwali ceremony, to learn the language and then becoming a long-term nkangala student. But as Kubik puts forward, there is a certain performative element in this way of education, related to the gender, also possible to observe as an “outsider”, even though it is not to be entirely “understood”.

“We shall look at the form and content of the girls’ puberty initiation, a multi-media event that links music and oral literature with other areas of the performing arts, for instance, dance and theatre, in a spectacular show that requires, among other things, financing and great community support. Such an event is part of an institution of extreme importance during the life-span of a female individual in Chichewa/Chinyanja/Chimang’anja speaking areas.

Formal education for females begins at a dramatic moment in the experience of a young girl: The first menstruation. When this happens, the girl is immediately isolated and must not be seen, nor allowed to walk with anyone. This is the beginning of an educational process which we may call “formal”, because a) there is a clear distinction between a teaching unit and the students (learners or initiates in seclusion-whatever word one may prefer between the two is structured with a well-defined curriculum of lessons and b) the educational process is institutionalized” (Kubik, 1993:49).

Malawi today has a plurality in terms of religions, namely traditional religion, Christianity and Islam. But a re-contextualization of traditional religion within the Christianity is another important phenomenon, which redefines many aspects of cultural traditions of converted local groups. The girl’s initiation ceremony chinamwali is a special example of this situation with its “new Christianized version”. On the other hand chinamwali has its own changing process, especially by the end of the 19th Century and particularly from the second half of the 20th Century. This changing process can be observed within two aspects concerning both periods: a) chinamwali’s inner changing process within the society, b) another changing process that took place mainly because of the external reasons.
*Chinawali* as a Cheŵa tradition has a long history in Malaŵi, as well as in many other Bantu societies with its different versions and nomenclature. The main function of it is to give the new menstruated girls a new social gender identity, as in almost all initiation ceremonies.

“(…) While initiation rites (*chinamwali*), for boys and girls, are the means by which one becomes an adult member of Cheŵa society, *chinamwali* for girls, who are ‘sacred vessels of life’ is also the means by which the fertility for the girls is established for replenishing the race” (Longwe, 2006: 24).

Thus the young woman re-discovers her identity and duties in the society, by being able to give birth; but it is not the only purpose of *chinamwali*. To be able to do her new duties, the girl has to prove that she had learned all the knowledge which is passed to her by the elder women during her initiation process. This “examination” part contains mostly saying of some proverbs, singing and dancing, which makes it “performative” in a multi-media form. The involvement of elder women by hand-clapping and drumming makes it even more “interactive” in terms of “performative construction of gender”, since those women performing a specific gender-related instrument playing, singing, hand-clapping and dancing act as well, which can also be seen as some kind of “reconstruction” or “reproduction” of their gender roles by this way of teaching.

*Chinamwali* used to have a long form and structure before, and used to be repeated several times, when something remarkable (such as being pregnant or being married) took place. The first *chinamwali* for the first menstruation used to be longer as well, with several steps or “parts” of the ceremony, which could take some months, where the young girl was being isolated from the village in a special house on the field, and celebrated by the whole village with a final ceremony, when she returns back. In this form of *chinamwali* one can certainly speak of a kind of education and a kind of “performative construction of the gender identity” of the young woman, but in its new version which does not take more than some hours, it is not so easy to mark these special steps which are being followed in order to “reform” the young girl; it is also not found “proper” to let “outsiders” watch it. Dyna Malamusi during our interview told me that the best way to be informed about the structure and the content of the *chinamwali* would be being initiated.
I personally did not take part in a chinamwali ceremony, but did recorded some of the chinamwali songs in Mdiza Village, which has the same traditional authority (Kundaja) as the Chiotha Village, where I recorded two of the nkangala players. Foliya Zakunwa in Mdiza Village has demonstrated us with a group of women some of the songs in form of a three part (call and response included) vocal polyphony with hand clapping, which are sung in the beginning of the ceremony. Then I had a chance to conduct a short interview about the content of the songs, but could only get some general information, since our translator Alik Mlendo warned me that some contents might not be proper to talk in public. When I asked simply the content of the songs, Foliya answered that “these are some advices about menstruation, cooking, house cleaning and men-women relationships”. When I wanted to go deeper by asking which kind of advices are being given in terms of relationships, this question was interrupted by our translator Alik Mlendo, who were claiming that Foliya was not feeling comfortable to talk in front of the young girls. On the other hand I did not feel any uncomfortable or shy behavior by her attitude, since she was keeping on talking and explaining the lyrics, but I did not insist to go further, even though some of her answers were not being translated. This experience also showed me the importance of the language learning before the fieldwork, since such a situation would not happen if I could speak Chicheŵa, or at least I could be certain about Foliya’s feelings, whether she really did not want to answer. Without being able to speak and understand the language, I was not able to know if the interrupted one was our translator or Foliya. I was only able to sense that Alik had an uncomfortable feeling by talking about this, but this does not count as scientific information. In both cases, there are different situations to think about the reason of this uncomfortable feeling, which I do not prefer to give to any of our translators, nor to the “research subjects”. But if this was a feeling which would not occur if I could have a private conversation with Foliya, that means it was because of the involvement of the third person from the opposite sex, not because of the questions or my appearance itself. As an useful information, I learned that those songs that she had demonstrated were to be sung inside of a house, in order to give some advices to young girls, which concerns sexual issues, along with the practical knowledge about cooking, cleaning etc.
4.2.1. Chinamwali songs and their connection to nkangala

When it comes to the composition process of the chinamwali songs, it is also described as a semi-mystical action. In order to compose a new song for chinamwali, the “musician” or the “composer” supposed to reproduce a “text” or a “song” that occurred to him/her during a dream. That also can be a “song” or a “sentence” sung or spoken by a mizimu in the dream. As content, it should be a useful information concerning social relations, order, or education, a new information to be taught, it has to be a social function, so to speak. The relation with nkangala songs comes in this point into light: With the arrangements of some of the chinamwali songs with nkangala, this educational information is sometimes transmitted to other families and other ethnic groups, as well as from elders to younger. For example, Ellena Kachepa sung and played a chinamwali song from Cheŵa as an aged Mang’anja woman, and this song was recognized by Dyna Malamusi, a young Cheŵa woman. Only this example shows a multidirectional transmission process of oral traditions and songs concerning girl’s education, via this contact in between chinamwali and nkangala traditions. On the other hand it should be kept in mind that this “educational content” is not always something strict or concrete, rather to be transmitted within poetic and artistic ways.

“The initial spark of a new song or new composition always come from one brain. The composer, sometimes referred to as the “owner” of a song begins the process by conveying a basic musical idea or text to his potential helpers, an idea or text may have occurred to him in a dream. Like a political leader, he then needs to response of others and, thus, invites friends or relatives to learn from him what they should do and how they should respond. This helpers may collaborate passively, or in cases may develop or modify the original idea further by themselves, thus, the ideas come from individuals, while the response is collective” (Longwe, 2006:49).

Here I would like to remark once again that the chinamwali songs is only a part of the nkangala repertoire and not all nkangala songs have an educational purpose on girl’s social or personal life. About this special connection between chinamwali songs and nkangala, we have exchanged some ideas with Dyana Malamusi, where I have found some interesting information about the relation between the nkangala teacher and her student, as well as the educational and symbolic content of chinamwali songs. We basically putted the question of education in both traditions in a comparative manner and as a result agreed that chinamwali and nkangala traditions do not share a common social educational purpose.
However, regarding that, I find it necessary to highlight some of the most important parts of my conversations with Dyana Malamusi.

When I questioned her about the content and educational purpose of nkangala songs, she said that “I talk of this instrument, but I am not sure if it has an educational purpose, I know only that the initiation songs can be played with nkangala. I have never heard that it is used to teach how to behave, it should not be like that, because you yourself supposed to sing your song”. With this statement she explained some elements of the nature of nkangala learning process, being not a kind of educational tool, rather a process to follow in order to become more creative as a musician. On the other hand the transmission of the behavioral knowledge is sometimes a part of this process, but not in terms of a strict education, rather a kind of “helping out” when it is necessary. When I asked her about the song repertoire that has to be learned before one starts to compose her own songs, and if this song repertoire has a role on the transmission of the behavioral knowledge, she answered: “It can be. But nowadays the young girls do not go to the elders to ask questions or to learn an instrument. It depends on the person’s interest, when a young girl wants to learn to play nkangala, then she will have a close relationship with her teacher. And maybe the young one could ask some questions about social things and the teacher might explain them to her. Or she could say that ‘we play nkangala because we want to forget our problems, or we want to make our husbands happy’, or anything… It is helping out. Or maybe she just has interest; a musical interest. Or she might think that if she plays nkangala people would appreciate it and she would have fame inside the society”. She also emphasized that the musical interest has to come first in order to learn the instrument: “I think that the musical interest comes always first in learning process. But it would be different during composing. And in your (mentioning me) case, they taught you because you had this interest. Otherwise you could not go and just say ‘hello, I want to listen to you playing nkangala’; you have to have an interest on playing. And within the family members, that can also be the case that one player in the family take the position to teach the young girls with educational purposes as well. I mean, so that they could remember them, and pass the tradition to the next generations”. So that way she made clear that the educational purposes within the context of playing nkangala has many different aspects than chinamwali’s educational purposes and in the case of learning to play nkangala, a musical interest has to be shown before one starts to learn it.
On the other hand, *chinamwali* does have an educational role, apart from the musical talents or interests of the girls to be initiated. Dyna Malamusi describes the *chinamwali*’s educational content as follows: “The *chinamwali* is basically about everything that you have to know as a young girl. One song is about how to take care of your health, another song could teach you how to respect parents, another one how to be with a man, how to take care of your menstrual cycle, or birth control if you have a boyfriend… It concerns everything about how girls live”. Concerning “girl’s life”, private life’s dynamics is something that changes together with the social traditions over time. *Chinamwali* and its changing process are also taking part on this re-contextualization. Dyna Malamusi explains that: “Nowadays it (*chinamwali*) is not like that. Before it was different, when girls reached puberty they were feeling ready to have boyfriends and try something or marry. But nowadays nobody knows it, if a girl has reached the puberty or not. It became a secret. In the past everybody has to know it because you had to be initiated. Now they only tell their mothers”. And when I asked if this changing process has a role on one’s private life, she said “Some people might think that she is shy, or the opposite, when everybody knows it, some people may think that she reached the puberty too early etc. I do not know what they really think”.

I also asked her to describe shortly her feelings and duties during her own initiation ceremony, which she summed up as follows: “I did not find really anything special to feel, because they were just singing songs and dancing, and after all they asked me to dance along and I danced, it was something simple. And they told me proverbs, which have behind deeper meanings, containing symbolic words. And in the end you have to tell one or two proverbs without mistake, you should not fail this. And you have to tell the meaning behind. And if you are rude they beat you a little bit, but not that painful, in the past it was horrible, they were beating until you cry and promise that you will never be rude again. If you were rude to your parents you have to go and say ‘I will never do this again, I am sorry’. And this proverb was about… It had a meaning like ‘every month you have the period, it closes and opens up again, you open the door and close it’.”

On the other hand, the adaptation of Christianity had also affected the content of the *chinamwali* as well as *nkangala* songs. This is actually a common phenomenon in any other musical traditions in Malaŵi. In many of my recordings of different singing genres in Malaŵi, there are some parts sung in English, with religious content. I also came across
during my nkangala recordings that “Jesus” was being mentioned. This is of course not the case when we listen to the solo nkangala songs, but when I asked the players to sing the song that they were playing with nkangala.

“In summary therefore, the religiosity of the African people in Malawi, coming from a primal religious framework, coupled by the translation of the Scriptures into the local languages, produced vigorous independence and originality which characterized the indigenous people’s response to the Christian message. The indigenous people then become the agents with responsibility to pass on to others their found faith” (Longwe, 2006:29).

Thus the Cheŵa is basically a matrilineal society; the adaptation of Christianity had also brought some patriarchal aspects, especially in terms of the role of the women in society. The “missionary wives” have settled some “gatherings” in order to reorganize the women duties according to Christian patriarchal traditions.

“Women Ministries, missionary wives “women were first to be good wives and mothers and second to support their husbands in the ministry” (Longwe, 2006:35).

“Malawi women’s group did not develop any girls’ programs except periodic camp meeting for all the youth. The missionaries assisted in the arrangement of and the teaching at the women’s annual meetings where leadership training, instruction in homemaking skills, and other activities were carried out” (Longwe, 2006:36).

That was in the second half of the 20th Century, where Kubik refers by his schema (see Figure 6) the gradually decrease of the usage of nkangala playing in Malawi. Maybe this was not directly because of the adaptation of Christianity, but could also be seen as an indirect effect to the matrilineal traditions.

“Southern Baptists arrived in Nyasaland, still a British Protectorate, in 1960, when politically it was a period of the growth of African nations on the continent. Malawi was in a transition period gaining its independence from the colonial power in 1964. It was a time when leadership was working toward unifying the different tribes in the country, as well as attempting the fight against poverty, disease and ignorance”. (Longwe, 2006:28).

To sum up shortly, it can be said that the influence of Christianity appears both in chinamwali and in the content of nkangala songs. Along with these tradition’s inner changing dynamics, which occur independent from each other, the musical and socio-
cultural interaction between these two traditions is not clear except the adaptation of *chinamwali* songs to *nkangala*.

### 4.3. The Zulu bow songs and their connection to social gender

The Zulu, originally different from the Cheŵa is a patriarchal society. Although those concepts such as “patrilineal” or “patriarchal” have different kinds of interpretations in the society, and different ways of combinations, especially as a result of the plurality of religions as well as combinations of matrilineal and patrilineal traditions, today it is not easy to determine one certain musical tradition’s original social function. But as a difference in between the Cheŵa and Zulu (as the owner of the *nkangala*’s ancestor *umqangala*) we can put forward that the Zulu built a clearer image of a patriarchal society, in terms of political and social organizations. On the other hand among the Cheŵa “village head women” or similar “director” positions is more often given to the women.

“At the center of Zulu political and social organization is the individual family unit which consists of a man, his wives, and children, and his married sons and their wives and children. It is the bonds of kinship which serve to bring people together as a group. The father, as head of the homestead stands very much at the center of this unit. He is respected and feared, and his commands are obeyed. The sib or clan is similarly a kinship group, consisting of people who claim descent from a common ancestor. Within the clan are a number of lineages whose members have a common grandfather in the male line. The lineage and clan are therefore patrilineal, and are, next to the homestead, the most intimate social group, and principal ritual group within the society” (Joseph, 1983:58).

Since the lineage is patrilineal, a “bride” has more relation to her husband’s family than her own. That means a bride from a different clan among the Zulu, has to know the codes of social behavior of her husband’s clan, in order to be accepted by the family. These codes of behavior are generalized within a common concept of “*ukuhlonipha*”, in order to have a common tradition among different clans that belong to the Zulu.

“A woman’s behavior, in the early years of marriage, is largely determined by the custom of *ukuhlonipha*, a code of respectful behavior to which women, in particular are subject” (ibid.)

Another way of organization related to gender roles, is made on the basis of age and sex, on all social occasions which concern music making as well.
“A further important factor in the social organization is social division on the basis of age. Girls and boys of the same age are joined together into parallel age-sets. These age-sets, or izintanga, plays an important part at all the principal stages in the life of an individual. On all social occasions, people group themselves automatically into units on the basis of sex and age” (ibid)

When it comes to the bow songs, there are similarities with nkangala tradition, especially in terms of playing manner in solitude, since they represent a single person’s musical expression.

The Zulu have different kinds of bows for men and women, for solo playing or to be played with vocal accompaniment, but among them the umqangala is the one that is today still actively played. Different from nkangala, the umqangala is to be played from the early adolescence up to the time of marriage, not a life-time like in the case of nkangala. The married women then have to play other bows such as ugubhu with vocal accompaniment. The unmarried women can also play umakhweyana, or izintombi, two other musical bows to be performed with vocal accompaniment. Apparently, the bow playing among women has a deep connection with the social role of the women in Zulu society.

“I came across only one variety of bow being actively played, the umqangala mouth bow, an unbraced single-string bow played by girls from early adolescence up to the time of marriage. I also found in Princess Magogo an active player of the ughubu, umakhweyana and isiithontolo (descriptions of these instruments fallow shortly). It was nevertheless apparent from conversation with informants that most women over the age of around forty had played the umakhweyana as young unmarried women, and, in the case of older women (above the age of around sixty), the ughubu as well. Having eventually persuaded one of my informants to make an umakhweyana and an ughubu for me, many of my informants were able to perform competently on the umakhweyana and a very few on the ughubu. Hence even though the tradition of playing the bows had ceased to be active, the techniques of constructing, tuning and playing the bows were clearly remembered, as was, particularly in the case of the umakhweyana, the repertory of songs performed to their accompaniment. The performance of the repertory of songs traditionally associated with the umakhweyana and ughubu by middle-aged women is, however, something of a travesty, as there are the instruments of the izintombi (unmarried girls), and the repertory consists largely love songs. When a girl marries and goes to live in her husband’s homestead she no longer plays the bows as part of her observance ukuhlonipa code of conduct. Married women who played the bows for me during the fieldwork would often attempt to simulate the vocal quality characteristic of unmarried girls, a narrow, pinched timbre in contrast to that of the married women which is open and
resonated. Present day izintombi in the areas of my fieldwork showed little or no interest in the instruments” (Joseph, 1983:81).

Similar to nkangala, the social role of the umqangala is more individual and more concentrated on music making in solitude, rather than a manifestation of a certain social position. The playing technique and the song arrangement are very similar in both mouth-bow traditions. The player can choose a song to be played with umqangala, from another song repertoire that is external to bow music. But concerning initiation songs or other gender related musical genres there is no concrete information about the arrangements of the umqangala songs among the Zulu.

“The umqangala musical bow differs from the three musical bows described above in that it is not used to accompany sung performance. The bow, a simple mouth-resonated bow, generally fitted with plastic string and plucked with a plectrum, appears at first to be used for the performance of a purely instrumental music. The music, however, in fact represents instrumental realizations of short song-forms. Even though the texts of the songs are not verbalized, they are conceptualized by the performer as she plays. The music provides an interesting example of the way in which a basic theme (provided by the song form) can be developed and subjected to variation in the instrumental realization” (ibid 84).

4.4. Context of Playing Nkangala

In my third meeting with Ellena Kachepa and Cicilia Kachepa in Chiotha village on 25.03.2013, I asked them about the context of the nkangala pieces and if they could sing the patterns that they have played the other days. The answer was very informant: first they told me the names of some of the pieces and their meaning, then Cicilia Kachepa sung a sentence to show how it builds the pattern. It is also interesting to see that the content of the lyrics is mostly about the men in the family, women’s struggles and sometimes about mizimu or Jesus. The list below contains the names and meanings of some of the pieces, unfortunately it is not possible to make a complete song list with these names, since some of them are not played and there are pieces from previous recordings, which I cannot tell the name since I do not hear the onomatopoeic relation. During the interview I did not want to interrupt the process by asking for such a comparison with earlier recordings, since they were talking about the content of the pieces, which requires an intimate conversation. That was the problematic that I faced in the first meeting as well, since they wanted to see
my knowledge about the instrument and we did not talk about the content. I was in a student position rather than a researcher who could ask questions.

The stories of the pieces are actually their private experiences as women in their social environment; additionally they were telling them to our translator Romeo Malamusi, who is a young man from the Chileka Village, the older son of Moya Malamusi. So in order to respect their earnestness, I did not find it right to bring the conversation in an analytic level, by asking them to show me the patterns with song names one by one. Even though they did it so for some examples (see “Patseni kupakupa”), since they knew what I was trying to understand. I tried to make a time-code for the related interview videos …. , that way one can reach some parts of these songs and their explanations in English.

1. Alipompano ambuye yesu – “Jesus is here” (video 6_01.05, singing)
2. Njawanja- “Orphan” (video 6_02.15)
3. Patseni kupakupa – “give me kupakupa, give me what I need/ Asking it to mother’s graveyard” (video_6: 04.10)

There is also an example of drum beating kachowe on video_8 with singing and hand-clapping. The name of this song is (ku)mangodya which means “he just eats”. They told me that it is one of the chinamwali songs, sung during the girl’s menstruation ceremony. When I asked them if they also played this song with nkangala, Cicilia Kachepa told me that an arrangement to nkangala is possible for any chinamwali song.

There is here another interesting experience yet to be stated from my position that I did not feel like I was making a kind of music that belongs to women, that I play a kind of music that is somehow related to my gender role, since I am not an “insider” of this tradition’s society. Maybe it is because that I did not spend enough time to be in the position of a young “student” of Ellena Kachepa, which could lead me further to a better understanding of nkangala playing and its relation to gender-related “education”, if there is any.

I was told in one of the interviews with Ellena and Cicilia Kachepa, that the teaching of nkangala is actually a part of young women’s social education. By learning nkangala, they learn to express themselves in a special manner, one could even say “intimate” for this kind of expression, since the text or the concept of the songs is unsung and unspoken, they
are only understandable to other nkangala players or to ones who are familiar with the instrument in their environment, or with the songs, mostly if they have a family relative playing it.

The content of these unsung lyrics is mostly about the position of woman and their experiences in the family or in the society. The young nkangala players are expected to learn from these experiences transported by elders as well. Playing nkangala in solitude is also an image of woman who behaves properly, who expresses her feelings or her experiences as a woman in a sophisticated and intimate way, even in a self-therapeutic way, which is thought as something of a proper behavior for woman. Kubik was the first scholar that suggested this self-therapeutic function, since he found out that nkangala is mostly played when women is in a slight depression process. In addition to this, I was also told that women do not play it only because of this therapeutic function, but also to have fun, or when they had argued with a man, mostly the husband or a relative. But in any case it is a manifestation of cultural intimacy, either within self-reflections or within the women community.

The women that play nkangala are respected by the other members of the community. Ellena Kachepa, who is the village head-woman of Chiotha Village, is the most respected person in her village and an expert of nkangala. She and her sister used to be the last ones practicing nkangala, but I was told by Moya Malamusi, who visited the village once more three weeks after the time that I left, there were many young woman started to learn from Ellena Kachepa. That is another interesting point in the context of surviving of the tradition, but I cannot tell what function exactly had my presence in the village, in terms of attracting people to the instrument. That also requires certainly a further fieldwork to see the role of nkangala in social and private life of the girls in present day.

On the other hand I was also told by Elita John in Nketa Village that she plays many of chinamwali songs with nkangala that nkangala has an “ethical” function in girls’ education, and that is have to be learned after the first menstruation. On video recording … 10.00 she sings and plays a song called “hand is a slave you have to shake it nicely” (unfortunately the language was not Chichewa and Romeo Malamusi could not write the original name down, although he understands it), a chinamwali song as she reported. She also said that the ethical part of the nkangala education concerns how to wear, how to
behave and tips about daily life duties; a whole image of a proper woman, so to speak. But this information is rejected by Moya Malamusi, since he was not certain, whether we understood her correctly or she was talking unconsciously.

Here are some lyrics of the songs played with nkangala by Ellena and Cicilia Kachepa in Chichewa. I am still not able to found the onomatopoeic connection in the first example, but concerning the second, thanks to Cicilia Kachepa’s demonstration, I have followed some rhythmic patterns which match her singing.

**To be an Orphan is Poverty**

To be an orphan is poverty, hee!
Is poverty to be an orphan?
Is poverty to be an orphan?
Is poverty without a mother, hee!

**Kupanda amako ndi umphawi**

Maine ndi uphawi umenewa
Maine ndi uphawi umenewa
Kukhala wa massive ndiumphawi umenewu
Kumpandu amako ndi umphawi umenewu
Maine ndi umphawi

**Patseni Khupakupa**

Give me Khupakupa mother
Give me Khupakupa mother
Give me Khupakupa mother
This woman, ah!
She was applying cooking oil to my lips
So that people should see that
I have eaten something
While I have not Khupakupa mother!
Khupkupa mother, give me khupakupa!

**Patseni Khupakupa**

Patseni khupakupa amai
Amai amenewa ndi mitiya
Kundi paka mafuta Pakamawa
Kuti adziti ndadya ndi mtiya
Patseni khupakupa amai
Patseni khupakupa amai
Patseni khupakupa

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The song list that they played during our meetings, which took place three times, unfortunately is not in a chronological manner that I can put in order with a time-code concerning video recordings. Our meetings had three different natures, which led me for example not to ask questions about the content and names of the songs in the first meeting, instead I had to show my musical interest for playing the instrument. Then I came to understand that, even in our first meeting they were showing me some patterns of the songs to practice, but after the last meeting where I had chance to speak about the content, I find it too “technical” to ask questions about our first meeting by showing them the videos and asking for names and content of the songs one by one. Rather, I let them say all the song names that they were playing from the beginning of the first meeting, and ask them to show some patterns which I could recognize by lyrics or by the way they sing. In these terms, Patseni Kupakupa is a unique example where we can observe the clear arrangement of lyrics as basic patterns to nkangala with a certain 12 pulse elementary pulsation and with a tiny modification of a 8 strike time-line pattern. Following Kubik’s recommendation, it can be described as “transient accent pattern within a 12 cycle”. Other analyses that will be put forward in the next chapters, contain different parts from different songs, which I cannot identify with the song names, but it is possible to find similar variations of some patterns. Before I go deeper on musical analyses, I find it necessary to make a list of the song names, with the translation of Romeo Malamusi, in order to show their content, in terms of the links to follow with chinamwali, Christianity, and other themes that women like to put into nkangala music in general.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Njawanja</th>
<th>Orphan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nintani mula mwanga</td>
<td>What can I do with my wife’s brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chisesele</td>
<td>Lazy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kumweta udzi</td>
<td>Cut down grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwitandita</td>
<td>A name in Chiyao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kukhala wa masiye ndi umphawi</td>
<td>To be an orphan is poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doli wagwa</td>
<td>Doli fall down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uku ku masala</td>
<td>There is masala, there is garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nditanine</td>
<td>What can I do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alipompano ambuye yesu</td>
<td>Jesus is here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patseni khupakupa</td>
<td>Give me khupakupa (asking to mother’s graveyard)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the above shown translations there are some certain terms that cannot be translated properly into another language. For example, *khukakupa* is a concept for interaction with the soul of an ancestor which takes place through visiting the grave and also is a sign of spiritual feature of *nyau*\(^\text{14}\) belief system. But in some other songs some known and familiar themes such as relationship within a family, position of women in society and Christian religion.

\(^{14}\) *Nyau* is a secret society of the Cheŵa, which consists only initiated members and constitutes a peculiar belief system for the initiates.
5. Performance Practices

The performance practice of nkangala and some other mouth-bows belonging to the same family group, in other words, the bows used along with the mouth as the resonator, have a widespread usage among different ethnic groups of South Africa. Bruno Nettle describes the common usage and differentiations of mouth-bows in terms of performance techniques among the Venda, Chwana, vSotho-PedSi, Swazi, Zulu, Pondo, Xhosa, Shangan-Tonga and !Kung as follows:

“The following groups of peoples use the third variant of this type; a one-piece stave of very slightly curved hollow river reed; the Venda, Chwana, and in vSotho-PedSi, Swazi, Zulu, Pondo, Xhosa, Basuto, Shangan-Tonga, Nyasaland, presumably the Nyasa Ngoni; the latter is probably closely related to that of the Zulu. Evidence for the relationship exists in the similarity of the instrument and the fact that within historical times various Zulu peoples migrated to the Lake Nyasa region. The Zulu term for this instrument is umqangala and the Nyasa name is mkangala. Furthermore, among both the Nyasa people and the Zulu only women play the instrument. Now here between South Africa and Nyasaland were references to this particular instrument found” (Camp and Nettle 1955:67).

The bows using mouth as resonators are played in ways like the types described above, with some interesting additions. In instruments which have a stave of two pieces, a hollow river reed with rod insertion, a new method of sound production that of friction, is involved. The bow string is rubbed or “bowed” by a thin piece of mealie (corn) stalk. The instrument is held diagonally to vertically and the first finger of one hand stops the string. Elsewhere the stave of the bow, not the string, is rubbed with a stick in the following manner. The bow is held in a horizontal position on a level with the face; a short stick is rubbed over notches cut in the bow state, causing the string to vibrate. Among the Venda and Shangaan Thonga, the rubbing stick forms the handle or a rattle. The Qung Bushmen, the Zulu, the Tchokwe, and the Ovimbundu of Angola do not have rattles on the rubbing stick. Fingers stop the string, alerting the pitch, and the mouth cavity ‘selects’ certain notes”.

Along with Nettle’s descriptions, I would certainly add the 5th finger technique of Ellena Kachepa, which led me to re-consider the tonal system construction in comparison with !Kung bow tuning c). In addition to this, such a consideration links itself also to the lugube
bow of Venda, which has indeed three fundamental tones and played with a very similar 
technique to Ellena Kachepa’s 5th finger technique.

Due to mouth-bows’ constructional properties there are a limited number of postures and 
usage techniques to be mentioned; but it can be said that such postures might be in some 
ways influenced by other instruments’ playing techniques or vice versa. For this reason, 
before I introduce my tonal and rhythmic analyses, together with previous analysis 
examples from various scholars, I find it necessary to state one interesting suggestion of 
Gerhard Kubik regarding nkangala’s holding position, which offers an interesting relation 
in terms of associations between different instruments, such as a similarity between the 
kwela flute, an instrument played by young men in Malawi, and nkangala.

“In a sense, the kwela embouchure may well be compared to that of the nkangala for woman. In the 
kwela embouchure, as in the nkangala mouth-bow technique, the cavity of the mouth functions as a 
resonator, accounting for the full and carrying sound produced by the kwela players of that period. 
There are of course important differences too. For example, the flute sticks at one and against the 
right corner of the mouth, while the mouth-bow is inserted pointing towards the right cheek” (Kubik 
1993:19).

A corresponding approach can also be internalized considering Veenstra’s description of 
“Begu Zulu vertical flute”, together with its tonal resemblances arising from the 
implementation two fundamental tones.

“The flute is held vertically by either hand with the lower lip resting either of the notches. The free 
hand is used to convert the open pipe to a stopped pipe and so two notes are obtained. Only two are 
used though with skilled blowing a substantial number of the harmonics can be sounded” (Veenstra 
1958:42).

Returning back to Nettle’s descriptions of nkangala and umqangala, by using his approach 
as starting point, certain interesting links between ethnic groups are possible to follow. For 
instance, the suggestion of the presence of umqangala practice among the Xhosa supports 
my previous hypothesis that umqangala is not essentially a Zulu instrument; since it has a 
name with a click sound adopted by the Xhosa from Khoisan speaking people. Apart from 
this, beyond the linguistic features and nomenclature of instruments there are as well 
musical data to evaluate the potential associations between various ethnic groups and the 
circulation of instruments among them; but one important drawback is that we are mostly
not able to examine such relations and their consequences within the codes of the inspected culture. For example, within this context Nettle’s “tonal” findings are open to discuss, since they are represented in terms of western conceptualizations such as “major chords”. His conceptualization includes also a critical general approach that led him to use other concepts like “Xhosa scale”. Such generalization constitutes an example of what I mentioned with the necessity of a conceptualization of a certain kind of “plural history” in previous related chapters. Considering these remarks, I will nonetheless quote his description of performance practices of umqangala among different ethnic groups, which he fundamentally does not differentiate from nkangala.

“The umqangala is a mouth bow played by percussion. It is still found among the Xhosa, where it used to be called umqangi (umqangala = little umqangi) Umqangala is made like Xhosa umrhube, with a short curved bow and unbraced string. The player beats it with a light reed, following the melody by resonating the overtones with the mouth. The string is touched with the thumb or a finger in order to obtain the higher fundamental.

The Xhosa system of playing bows is always to use the interval of a whole tone between the two (one open and one stopped) fundamentals. This was the system used by young woman I recorded playing umqangala in 1981, except that she omitted the fourth scale degree of the Xhosa scale. This meant she used the “classic” pentatonic scale, and the harmony shift she used was major chord – open fifth, not major chord – major chord, as always found in Xhosa music. It is very likely that umqangala, and also the friction mouth-bow umrhube, represent cultural links between Zulu and Xhosa, area, towards the Zulu region). The bow player first sang the song, and then rendered it on the bow. As is often the case in playing mouth-bows, the bow overtone melody is a parallel version of the sung melody, at pitch levels suited to the bow overtones. Once again the pentatonic scale is derived from bow overtone patterns, but using a different method from the Tsonga”.

“Kirby posited the origin of certain South-African vocal scales from harmonics of a single fundamental note, but he stopped short on the subject of possible derivation from two fundamentals and their overtones” (Wachsmann 1971:219).

In addition to Nettle, Rycroft also describes the nkangala performance practice again with a general conceptualization such as “Zulu technique”, a similar technique to what I have learned from Ellena Kachepa; but he also puts the question of interval between the two fundamental tones in light with relation to its Xhosa variation. He suggests that the Xhosa use a larger interval, which is approximately a whole tone, corresponds with Nettle’s description of “Xhosa interval”. This causes the emerging of new questions concerning the
Khoisan (or specifically the !Kung) connections in terms of tonal systems, since they do not use a smaller interval than a whole tone between the (first) two fundamentals. On the other hand, his description about “Zulu and Swazi interval” corresponds with the (first) interval in between the fundamental tones on nkangala.

“A second note is produced by finger-stopping, or to be more precise about Zulu technique, by pinching the string near its lower end, between the left thumbnail and index finger. Among the Zulu and Swazi this stopped note is generally roughly a semitone (90 to 150 cents) higher than the open note. Among the Xhosa a larger interval, loosely approximating a whole tone, is usually preferred”.

“Vocal styles in bow-songs tend to be very quiet and relaxed, probably to avoid drowning scarcely audible to anyone but the player. Previous writers, and also those taking sound recordings, have, I think, overlooked the importance attached to this aspect of bow playing, (though with respect to other, mouth-resonated instruments, Kirby’s description is excellent)” (Rycroft 1967: 98).

As Rycroft stands out, besides the fundamental tones, the use of partials as well as vocal accompaniment should be considered as a part of the tonal systems. A comparison between the Zulu bow songs’ vocal accompaniment and harmonic melodies arising from nkangala would be also viable, but not totally feasible and reliable, since it is not possible to be sure of the real sound experience of the performer’s inner hearing. With my own playing experience it would be even shallower due to my novice position in learning. I do not hear continuous melodies of partials during playing, rather some kind of parallel movement simultaneously following the main rhythmic pattern. According to the informants, these patterns might contain words or phrases, which are not easy to recognize for a foreign ear. Unlike the other bow song traditions with vocal accompaniment, such implementation of meaningful verbal data can be seen as a very important component of nkangala practice and even perhaps as the most distinguishing property of it. Unfortunately, I could not find any related information about umqangala or lugube playing with respect to the usage of a similar “un-sung melody concept”. This might also be a unique Cheŵa interpretation; a conceptualization specific to Chicheŵa speaking people in Malaŵi, thus it requires a comprehensive target oriented study.

There is no singing during the performance of the nkangala, but the melodies constituted by the partials may suggest words or phrases. These melodies may be varied, suggesting different meanings. Variation in sound thus correspond to variation of an unsung text, or word associations with linger behind. This is not surprising since, in Chicheŵa, we do not speak of “playing” an instrument, but of “singing” an instrument” (Kubik, 1993:8).
On the other hand, such a comparison would be more reliable when performed regarding the *nyakatangali* songs and the Zulu bow songs’ vocal accompaniment. Here we can mention a common usage of descending melodies with “fourths”; but it is not easy to say that, whether it is a cultural adaptation of the tone scales or the vocal style; or if it is a natural result of the similar instrument’s identical harmonic scales and the natural selection of the more hearable ones by the singer.

“Nyakatangele, chizambi and chipandani are played by men, their music is differing in many ways from the umqangala tradition of the Zulu woman of South Africa, played in Malawi by women of Ngoni ancestral background. (…) However because of its very soft sound, it is more frequently used as an instrument for meditation, providing musical sounds for the performer’s own inner pleasure” (Strumpf 1999:111).

Strumpf suggested that both *nkangala* and *nyakatangali* share the same ancestor as *umqangala* and played by every ethnic group in Malawi which has Ngoni ancestral background. This is another critical approach where we lose the chance to follow inner relationships of these ethnic groups, in terms of their different interpretations of playing techniques, content and social function or individual motivation. A complementary designation of these complex musical relations requires more insider information from each bow tradition.

Furthermore, Kirby’s morphological classification is also not coherent in terms of similarities of scales or social function of the instruments in the same group; it rather contains more consistent information about the performance practices, since bows with similar morphological properties are played with similar techniques. Classifying the instruments with regard to their host ethnic groups in a specific time period, does not map the cultural and musical interrelationships, even though such approach might be very useful to understand the basic information about bow traditions.
John Blacking on the other side suggested that a kind of anthropological approach makes more sense than analytical sound analyses.

“\[\textit{I am convinced that an anthropological approach to the study of all musical systems makes more sense of them than analyses of the patterns of sound as things in them-selves}\]” (Blacking 1973:8).

He goes even further by saying that this anthropological approach is more crucial when we aimed to handle a musical tradition, which does not possess any kind of notation system as the transmitter of the musical data. He emphasizes that the circulation and the creation of music in such societies is formed of “perception of sonic order” and a “cultural agreement” of the common usage of these “orders”.

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**Figure 14:** Kirby’s classification of mouth-bows in three types.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type I. Bows with separate resonators</th>
<th>Type II. Resonators Attached with Bows</th>
<th>Type III. Bows using the human mouth as resonator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single bow</td>
<td>Unbraced</td>
<td>Unbraced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berg-Dama: igamakua</td>
<td>Basuto: thono</td>
<td>Hard wood stave:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chwana: mokshwe</td>
<td>Chwana: segana (calabash)</td>
<td>Korana: Hottentot: !gabus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hottentot: !ka (word for hunting bow)</td>
<td>Karanga: ndimbga</td>
<td>Flat cane stave:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nyasaland: kaliramwe</td>
<td>Ovimbundu: sholowa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shangaan-Thonga: tshitsalde or dende</td>
<td>Stave of hollow river reed:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sotho: sekgapa (calabash)</td>
<td>Basuto: lekope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Swazi: liguba (hollow)</td>
<td>Chwana: iengape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Xhosa: uhadli (deep pit)</td>
<td>Nyasaland: mwanga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zulu: siguba (hollow)</td>
<td>Shangaan-Thonga: umangula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braced</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sotho-Pedi: lekopa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balubedu: sekgapa</td>
<td></td>
<td>Swazi: umangula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chopi: tshitsalde</td>
<td></td>
<td>Venda: Lugube</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ila: kaumbusha, kalumbo, ka-lumha</td>
<td></td>
<td>Xhosa Pondo: xinge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karanga: wedza</td>
<td></td>
<td>Zulu: umangula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamba: umunkoto, abanaboto</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ovimbundu: ombudumude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shangaan-Thonga: n'akhu, n'akhu, n'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>denda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sotho-Pedi: sekgapa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swazi: temahwe, yana</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* !- click sound in Khoisan languages.
“If we consider social situations in musical traditions that have no notation, it is clear that the creation and the performance of most music is generated first and foremost by the human capacity to discover patterns of sound and to identify them on subsequent occasions. Without biological processes of aural perception, and without cultural agreement among at least some human beings on what is perceived, there can be neither music, nor musical communication”.

“I am suggesting that a perception of sonic orders, whether it be innate or learned, or both, must be in the mind before it emerges as music” (Blacking 1973: 9-11).

Being agreed with the fact of aural perception and its function on music making, I cannot see any reason to esteem this phenomenon as a special characteristic found only among “cultures without musical notation system”. The suggestion of the presence of a “sonic order” conceptualization “in the mind before it emerges as music” is also logical and consistent with many other scholars’ statements, but it does not embrace different interpretations of the collective response of a single musical idea that came out of a single individual. By his statement, it is possible to understand that one individual musical idea is mostly understood and interpreted the same way by a group of people, thanks to “sonic order” perception. By my experience of learning, I can say that before I started to learn the instrument, I did not have any kind of “sonic order” conceptualization in my mind about nkangala music. Thus I was not able to play with the lack of such perception. It came only after a certain time that I spent with imitation, in order to be able to hear this special “order” in nkangala music. Such a perception would not be gained by me if I did not start to play the instrument, and only hearing the other people playing would also be not helpful.

5.1. Learning to play specific patterns with nkangala

Before I start to explain my learning process of certain rhythmic patterns on nkangala, in order to acquire a better understanding a proper definition of Kubik’s concept of elementary pulsation becomes essential:

I can tell that by my own experience of learning and playing nkangala, to perceive the elementary pulsation has a very strong effect on the consciousness and psychology, since it requires a total concentration. In addition to this, hearing the sound scape of overtones inside of one’s own resonating skull keeps the performer away from any kind of daily thoughts. Through playing or practicing it over an hour, one can find herself in a world of abstract thinking; a kind of consciousness or sub-consciousness’ evacuation. Due to the fact that it does not bring the player in any kind of trance-like situation, the creative and analytical parts of the brain are quite active. So it is not something like dreaming; instead it is like being very awake but free from thoughts and aware of emotions.

I am not sure if the elementary pulsation or repetition of some onomatopoeic formulas have a special role on coming to this special state of mind, but the cyclic structure has for sure an effect on deep concentration and abstract thinking. Besides, the rhythmic organization and the production of overtones have another inner relation (mentioned above) that creates inherent structures or patterns. These inherent patterns are not so clearly audible like any other inherent pattern lines (like for example in ennanga harp music from Uganda), but they have a role on performer’s state of mind. Thus being eventually better explained by Kubik as follows:

“Playing the nkangala has a psycho-cathartic, or even a psycho-therapeutic effect on the performer, that is generated by the amplification experience inside the skull. The effect is also, perhaps, strengthened by the specific rhythmic pattern being performed: most nkangala compositions are in 12-pulse cycles, with occasionally asymmetric patterns. The experience is of a contrasting duple movement produced by the plectrum against on internal conception of triplets”. (Kubik 1987:9)
In this pattern that I find out in the nkangala recording 0.1. in Chiotha Village, what Kubik refers as triplets is clear to see, but it becomes clearer when one hears it, or better, plays it with the instrument. The plectrum at right hand and the use of the middle finger of left hand to stop and release the string creates this perception of triplets altogether. The first strike is the higher tone (~ d) with stopped string by middle finger, in the second group of three strikes the first two are the lower tone (~ db - in the above example these three-strike represented by two notes; but in a second variation down below it is represented with three notes) with free string, then comes one strike again with the lower tone. Considering these tone changes and overtones arising from these, one cannot be able to find the right transcription only by hearing, but it would be easier, if it is played by one-self, to see the inner production structure of this time-line pattern and overtone partial melodies. There is also another clue about internal triplet conception if we think through “western” perception: The beginning of the pattern is a dot indicating that “1” is silent and the actual strike occurs on “2”, which is something similar to western syncopation concept. This also has a similar effect on auditory perception as if the syncopated notes are written as triplets. So we can talk about at least two different layers of perception, means production of the internal triplets.

Example 4: Another melodic variation of the same rhythmic pattern.

In the second variation of this pattern the second strike is made by the left hand, not by the plectrum on the right hand. The third finger of the left hand that holds the string pulls it with a subtle gesture that shows the performer’s virtuosity. This is also a practical way to play this pattern concerning its fast tempo. When the first two strikes are shared by two hands, it is easier to feel the elementary pulsation; at least it was my experience while I was practicing it.
Perhaps the reason is my difficulty on perceiving the time-line patterns and the elementary pulsation with the right beat, right tones and even right mouth positioning, which has a relation with left hand on producing overtones. Such a complex performance practice can only be accomplished in a cathartic way of imitating or playing. This is certainly not something that one should learn and succeed by thinking, because it concerns motor brain activities divided into four interdependently working body parts. Seemingly it is a much more complex activity-chain comparing to piano playing, which also concerns multipart motor brain activity. While learning to play a western instrument, one can practice a passage at the beginning slowly in order to comprehend its rhythmic and tonal structure; but in the case of nkangala playing when I tried to understand the pattern by playing it slow, I have always failed. From this perspective it is understood that these patterns should be learned as a whole with its different parameters of rhythm and various dynamics of sound, since the rhythm and tone build the soundscape jointly. This is something that one should understand and learn by doing and keep on playing without trying to understand it simultaneously, just because it is impossible to understand its structure before one succeeded it.

The second pattern that I have found has an elementary pulsation of 8, with a tiny variation of 6 strikes of its original 5 strikes:

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Example 5: A 6 strike variation of 8/5 time-line pattern.
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or
Example 6: Original version of 8/5 time-line pattern.

This is relatively a difficult pattern, since the first two strikes are in different tones and both of them are played by the plectrum on right hand. It is also very fast as tempo and the left hand movement occurring only on 1 and 4 is a sign of asymmetrical division of EP as 3+5: XX.X.XXX or with a slight variation as 3+5: XX.X.XX.

5.2. Learning by Doing and Imitation as the Transporter of the Information

Apart from the theories of various scholars mentioned above, there are as well some other reports and explanations to take into account. David Dargie’s statement regarding the learning process of music among the Xhosa can be seen as one of the most problematic approach on African music in general and thus provide a platform to discuss:

“(…) Xhosa traditional musicians do not think or speak about music in European ways. Terminology is concrete and people-orientated, not abstract and by definitions. ‘Music’ in English must be expressed by ‘iingoma’ – songs – in Xhosa. Music is an abstract idea, songs are something done by the people. A would-be bow player must learn by observation and imitation. There is a little or no detailed teaching as in western music pedagogy. People learn to grasp things as Gestalt – an experiential whole” (Dargie, 2007: 64).

Dargie’s argument is agreeable to a certain extent; but from my point of view that is determined by my own learning experience conditions, it inevitably requires some further thoughts to be added in order to acquire a better understanding. What Dargie here describes as ‘imitation’ or ‘not detailed teaching’ is actually a controversial suggestion, since imitating concerns a very detailed observation of the student and that of the teacher in order to notice the pupil’s mistakes and to indicate the problematic points in another way, a way that the pupil should be able not only to understand, but also to perceive/internalize. There is a recognizable difference between understanding and
perception. To make the student perceive in the same way, is the benefit of imitation. This concerns a very intense and mutual concentration along with a trans-linguistic communication; which means even though the student is not able to speak the language of the teacher, as it was in my case, another level of communication must be built. An education based on the mutual interaction of human beings is high likely what differentiates this kind of music making from the western style of education based primarily on written sources and notation; but it should be kept in mind that this does not mean one way is more or less detailed than another. In my opinion, this kind of comparison is also not crucial, since it does not help a western student to understand another way of music making. As I mentioned above, the orientation of the audible perception of a western ear is one of the biggest obstacles that makes the learning process far more difficult than an African student. What Dargie observed may be a learning process in between two Xhosa people, and because of the genuineness/simplicity of communication in between those people, he might have found the learning process as a very easy-going and abstract one. But still, I do not think that an African student would have a less detailed learning process than mine, but it is highly possible that they do it faster and easier than me, than a western student so to speak. But the communication level between the teacher and the student, is not so easy to determine for an “outsider”, thus one can only be able to speak about one’s own process and maybe compare it to the others via conversations.

I would discuss this example even further, pointing that I was taught by two players, one teacher and a student of her, two sisters at the same time. The older one (Ellena Kachepa) was the teacher and the younger one (Cicilia Kachepa) was her student. They are both very good players but the Ellena Kachepa’s experience gained through time was possible to observe. When the Ellena Kachepa was teaching me, Cicilia Kachepa was observing, in addition, she was helping me, when I have a difficulty to understand the pattern or finger combination, by simply playing that part slowly or showing me a trick about the finger movement, that creates the right beat, which I would not be able to discover by myself. Occasionally Ellena Kachepa was not letting her to help me, since she wanted me to perceive it by myself. If I fail for a certain time, then she was letting Cicilia Kachepa to help me. By doing so, she actually helped me to improve my audible perception, thus I could be able to understand the music as a whole, when I hear it. That means, a very important ability for the musicologist, since the biggest obscure lies most of the times on performance practices and rhythmic organizations, when we here an audio file and do not
see the musician. Learning by imitation can be seen as the absolute cure for this problematic. Once I understood how to combine the plectrum with my left hand, I discovered that the rhythmical organization is not only dependent on the plectrum strikes, but also on a very advanced combination of the both hands and even the changing time of the mouth cavity. I still find it very difficult to explain and analyze, but I can now demonstrate it. So another researcher can be able to find further important movements and connections between the technique and tonal-rhythmic structures by observing me. I find this kind of learning process based on imitation very important and interesting; since there occurs another level of perception by imitation, where one might not be able to explain how he/she plays it, but still can be able to play it. This is a very important transformation point of the information. After my lessons with those players, I was able to imitate most of the recordings alone, because I was able to visualize it, so I had chance to confirm everything I learned by doing. During verification process, this advantage let me to analyze and transcribe the recordings not only by hearing, but also by playing them.

5.3. The onomatopoeic background

Like in many other cultures, Malawian musicians also implement a practical way to learn rhythmic patterns. As a common fact, rhythmic patterns might contain unsung lyrics and recognizable information in many musical styles. In addition to that, there are also simple meaningful sentences reminiscent of sayings or words, which are in fact an onomatopoeic version of certain time-line patterns, such as “wa-nkwa-ngw’ali-ko-se” for *mangolongondo*, a 5 strike time-line pattern on a 8 EP. With this information at hand, I have inclined to reveal the potential onomatopoeic background of *nkangala* practice, if any, and consequently discussed it with Moya Aliya Malamusi. When I showed the recordings I made in Malawi to him, he told me that the onomatopoeic translation of my two suggestions of the 12 EP with 8 (or with slight modification 7) strikes time-line patterns is recognizable, which can be verbalized as *Kwakwadzimweta udzu*. According to Malamusi it means “go and cut grass, which is also very similar to the title of the song *Kumweta udzi* translated by Romeo Malamusi as “cut down grass”. When I was trying to verify my 12/8 time-line pattern finding with Moya Malamusi, he immediately recognized it by this onomatopoeic translation, without counting the strikes and said that many people in Malawi would recognize this time-line pattern in the same way. This is beyond the

16 “My husband is a rat” in Chiyao language
“sonic order perception” or any other musical conception that we as “outsiders” try to figure to comprehend the “tonal” and “rhythmic” structures. This onomatopoeic translation has a significant role for the “insiders” regarding the transmission of musical traditions. Actually it is not clear if this onomatopoeic element is essential for composing process, or if it is a “translation” of what is being played; but, since there is a conceptualization of poetry, text or other songs in mouth-bow playing, the idea that the onomatopoeic element occurs both in the composing and as a result of it in playing process is more reliable. Apart from the local Malawian societies, this phenomenon of onomatopoeia and its usage in bow music can also be found among the Zulu and the Xhosa, especially in terms of bow-songs and praise-poetry.

“My teacher, the late Dr.B.W. Vilazaki, left us with a long-standing riddle when he made the statement that ‘it lyric poetry was originally intended to be sung, then this quality of poetry still exists in Zulu. The poet has to tune his voice to some melody when he recites his imaginative descriptions’. He added the observation that tone in Zulu is ‘semantic’ and that this ‘semanticism of tone, though wide in the spoken language is more apparent in the recitation of verse’. From the last statement, one gathers firstly, that the ‘melody’ in izibongo recitation does not violate the speech-tones. This certainly turns out to be true. There is no single, constant melodic sequence – pitch movement is conditioned by the words” (Rycroft, 1962:79).

Vilazaki’s above statement indicates a kind of semantic perception described by him as “semanticism of tone”, which can be accepted as a general concept of song traditions among various Bantu groups. This is also one of Dargie’s findings among the Thembu Xhosa, a more detailed conceptualization of “semanticism of tone”, which subcategorizations of other concepts that Dargie attempt to translate with western musical terms such as “melody” or “parallel harmony”.

“(…) At the time, centuries ago, when Southern Nguni peoples moved down to the south-eastern corner of Africa, they surely had much in common musically. However, there are some western musicological concepts which are very difficult or impossible to express directly in traditional Xhosa, ideas such as intervals and scale, rhythm, and many others.

Furthermore, some traditional terms imply style elements. For example, the Thembu Xhosa term izicabo refers to the sung text lines of a song. The bow taking part in a song is described as taking the part of a person in the song, leading the song or following it. The bow performs the izicabo, which means that it is singing texts of the song, faithfully following the speech tones and accents of
the texts. But in fact the bow plays the melody, and from the melody alone people know which text lines the bow is singing. Therefore the term izicabo implies the concept melody. The term iintlobo (variations) describes the technique of singing the same text line at different pitch levels, according to whether a singer has a “big” (=deep) or “small” (=high) voice. Because these lines use the same text and a simultaneous rhythm pattern, they move in parallel, because all must follow the same speech-tone pattern. Therefore the term iintlobo implies the idea of parallel harmony” (Darige, 2007: 64).

As can be seen in the above explanations, a great number of mouth-bow traditions and their performance practices are strictly connected to linguistic features along with different ways of learning, the structure of instruments as well as many other extra-musical and socio-cultural values of their host societies. In addition to these, one another crucial characteristic of nkangala and similar mouth-bows, namely the construction of tone scales derived from two fundamental tones, should also be thoroughly mentioned.
6. The Construction of Tonal Systems Derived from Two Fundamental Tones

Even though nkangala and the mouth-bows belonging to the same family appear to be “simple” instruments as image, their tonal qualities dissociate from western tonal configurations and therefore have a capacity to produce much more complex soundscapes. Concerning the mouth-bows, these soundscapes are essentially composed of the implementation of two fundamental tones which are produced with a “simple” technique of intervention by stopping and letting the string free. Such a way of playing can be seen or heard as a kind of monotonous way of music making in the first place, but it is actually a very advanced form of music making dependent on partial selection of these fundamental tones that are produced by various specific embouchures. In other words, the performer makes a kind of music which he/she has to be able to configure and interpret this complex organization in order to build the right soundscape. This contrasts with the western way of thinking about the sound, and perhaps explains the fact of the common use of “tone” concept instead of “sound”. The western composition or notation is based on tonal scales, where the “tones” are referred only as pitch values, with different accentuations or other dynamics; but, what the “tone” contains physically and naturally are not considered as a part of musical organization, except in some of early and new music composition techniques. This form of musical conceptualization in Africa was detected by various scholars such as Tracey, Kirby and Rycroft, and systematized by Kubik.

In each example, taken as analysis subject for this study, the basic tonal system is constructed with a special system, namely by skipping process, of partial selection from two (or more) fundamental tones derived from nkangala and similar mouth-bows. As a general characteristic, these mouth-bows contain two fundamental tones which are approximately 200 Cents apart from each other, but this cent value is not constantly the same for each instrument and so shows variations up to 400 Cents related to the instruments’ construction and usage ways. In addition to this, the interval between the fundamental tones can also differ from pattern to pattern or from one performance to another; since the second fundamental tone that is obtained by pressing the string changes slightly in almost each press. Even though there is a special technique and holding position to stop the string, minimal changes can occur inevitably between each stopping, because the finger shows minimal position changing when stopping the string.
“Acoustically, there are two fundamentals. To obtain the second, the performer stops the string at predetermined points of time with the side of her left middle finger pressing against the end. The two fundamentals are approximately a whole tone (+200 cents) apart.

(…) The range of harmonics reinforced by changing the cavity of mouth is, at most, up to the 5th partial for the lower fundamental, and usually up to the 4th for the higher one, with the result a tiny pentatonic melody will be heard. This melody can be verbalized by the player, i.e., conceptualized as a song pattern rather than an abstract melody. Perceiving the sounds as song patterns is probably why the nkangala songs have titles” (Kubik, 1993:9).

Together with the overtone production and complexity of the time-line patterns, this interval of ~200 Cents gains a relatively more volatile character in terms of auditory perception. Concerning some examples, this phenomenon of relativity in auditory perception becomes more apparent: In spite of the consistency of cent values, I was able to hear the intervals that are much smaller than their settled values. That was during the analysis of the example where Ellena Kachepa produces a third tone with nkangala through implementing her 5th, namely the little finger. I have realized that such phenomenon occurs because of the smaller interval in between the second and third tones; the interval between the first and second appears to be larger, but only in terms of perception. That might also be the case related to the above putted analyses of time-line patterns and their melodic outline of fundamental tones. Consequently, the interval between the two tones appears to be smaller when a pattern begins with the second fundamental and larger when it begins with the first fundamental, which causes a relative perception in hearing. The same situation takes place even in a small part of a time-line pattern and changes the second fundamental tone’s overtone scale in each pluck.

Example 7: Addition of the third fundamental by Ellena Kachepa with the fifth finger technique.
Example 8: The same pattern played on my nkangala which has lower tone range.

This is why, instead of setting the distance of 200 Cent as the basis, I preferred to make my transcriptions with a consideration of two possible intervals that might occur between the fundamental tones, and so examined the case of the addition of the third fundamental tone separately. Then I tried to make an outline of melodies derived from the combination of overtone scales, fundamental tones and time-line patterns. By doing so, I have observed a parallel movement in between grund melodies and overtone melodies. Due to this relativity phenomenon of interval values and their conditional perception, the mentioned parallel movement may occur as if grund and overtone melodies built a “chromatic progression”.

In the both examples above, there is a common parallel movement in between the fundamental tones and overtone partials. One can assume that there are actually two “parts”, one arising from the instrument, that is to say from the movements of the left and the right hand; and the other part is produced inside the mouth cavity, parallel to the movements of the hands, especially to the left hand. Even though there is not a precise and steady simultaneity in between the mouth cavity’s activity and the left hand (third finger) movement, one can still clearly observe a common movement changing of the soundscape. I was also told during my lessons with Ellena Kachepa that I should be aware of this kind of parallel thinking when I try to produce overtones. The result of a proper performance is a movement of parallel fourths, but in this case, it is more like a major triplet, which is larger than a perfect major and smaller than a perfect fourth.

The outline of this parallel movement can be demonstrated in western notation system as follows:
Example 9: Transposition of Example 4 with melodic outline of overtones played on my nkangala.

or

Example 10: The same transposition with a slight variation of the time-line pattern and with the assumption of smaller interval between the fundamental tones.

This melody outline contains the scale derived from two fundamental tones. Before I demonstrate the construction of the tonal system through implementing the skipping process, the demonstration of the selection of partials from these two fundamentals must be shown. The construction of the tone scale is made by the selection of the 3., 4., and 5th partials of the lower fundamental tone and the 3. and 4th partials of the higher fundamental tone.

Example 11: Selection of partials from the lower fundamental tone C.
Example 12: Selection of partials from the higher fundamental tone D.

The application of skipping process to these selected partials from these two fundamental tones would result as:

Example 13: Application of skipping process.

And if we assume the interval between the fundamental tones as “semi-tone”, then the selected partials would change accordingly:

Example 14: Selection of the partials from the lower fundamental tone Db.
Example 15: Selection of the partials from the higher fundamental tone D.

Figure 15: Spectrum analysis of Ellena Kachepa’s nkangala’s fundamental tones.

This spectrum analysis shows Ellena Kachepa’s nkangala’s fundamental tones as D and Db, and detected A and Bb as higher overtone partials, which are the 6th partials of both fundamental tones. As a scientific data to be evaluated, this detection is meaningful; however, it is not hearable, because of their high pitch; they are hardly hearable to any human ear. Regarding that, I did not add the 6th partials as tones in the derived scale. The purple texture eventually represents all the hearable sounds with Hertz values, which supports my demonstrated scale’s tone range. When I adopt the same method for these
fundamental tones of my nkangala I produce a pentatonic scale (with some additional 6th tone in some patterns) which has a semi-chromatic character in horizontal line and a parallel fourth harmonic progress in vertical movement. Except the theoretical major third interval which would arise from C and E, the parallel fourth movement is also consistent with the above demonstrated melodic outline of this parallel movement.

Example 16: Demonstration of the pentatonic scale derived from my nkangala and harmonic parallel movement.

But why is the interval between the two fundamental tones is uncertain and why is it variable according to auditory perception, intonation, and the tone range? Is this a natural phenomenon related to instrument’s and human auditory perception’s physiological properties or is it a cultural musical perception difference causing these relative results? When we look for the physical reasons, the relativity of intervals is also an existing fact on a piano keyboard. This is why D-Db and E-F have a slightly different ratio value, even though they both represent the interval of semi-tone. This is not hearable for many people, but, nevertheless, it might function as a trigger to manipulate the auditory perception when some specific intervals are used repetitively. This is the most remarkable specialty concerning the triton interval and its transpositions, which was the basis of the late 19th Century’s chromatic harmony in Europe, with its characteristic of being “endless”. So the effect of the chromaticism, which uses-semi tones and tritons with different combinations of parallel or multi directional movement is something that we can recall to think about the chromaticism effect on auditory perception in general. Besides this harmonic effect, the repetition has the most important role on modifying the auditory perception. For example, when this late European 19th Century chromaticism developed into serialism, some composers concentrated on “inherent” intervals derived from repetitions, such was the case in György Ligeti’s composition Continuum (1968) for harpsichord. Many of these concepts in new music scene was adopted from new ethnomusicological findings, but their use or misuse for new composition techniques is not the main issue that I would like to discuss within the frame of this study. Continuum is an example where we can demonstrate some
auditory phenomenon that we find in various African music, such as inherent patterns and loss of a certain tonic center. Also the name of the piece introduced a new-found physical phenomenon for these times. Continuum as an auditory phenomenon as well exists in nkangala pieces. With the sonic continuum and the chromatic effect, nkangala pieces have a common characteristic of showing various results when it comes to the question of “how they are heard” and more similar results about “how they are played”.

Another reason of this “uncertain” interval between the two fundamental tones can also be the Chichewa tone language itself, where people might use two intonations for a single vowel. This kind of variable interpretations of one vowel causes a tonal interval configuration; one of them could be this interval that is in between a half-tone and a whole-tone. The intonations in tone languages and their relation to tonal systems is also another important theme, which is mainly discussed in certain disciplines such as linguistics and semantics. It is said that the interval between the two intonations of a single vowel remains not the same as cent value; it is manipulated from word to word or person to person or just change randomly. Although, we can speculate about this phenomenon as one of the aspects of the configuration of tonal systems derived from fundamental tones, we also see the absence of such a relation in other cultures with tone languages, which built their system over a single fundamental tone, such as the Mongolian overtone singing.

The Zulu bow songs have also some chromatic-like lines. Tones are only a semitone apart, but with the effect of the calabash resonator a scale different than that of nkangala comes out. It could be another clue to follow the “chromaticism” on mouth-bows coming from South Africa. In vertical line the fifths are dominating between the fundamental tone and its harmonics, but in horizontal line, that causes a parallel fifth movement in seconds-sometimes a whole tone, sometimes a semi-tone. That is also what I remarked on my analysis of nkangala, additionally, they have the same fundamental tones with the ugubhu of Princess Magogo recorded between 1962 and 1972. In Rycroft’s transcriptions of her singing of Zulu songs accompanied by ugubhu, we cannot observe the parallel movement between the fundamental tones and the harmonics, but instead we see a melodic line in voice part, which indicates this parallel movement partly:
Example 17: Ugubhu song transcription of Princess Magogo by David Rycroft. (Rycroft 1975/76: 89).
This chromaticism arises from *ugubhu* totally naturally, since it is reported that its fundamental tones are exactly a semi-tone apart. In the case of *nkangala* the chromaticism occurs because of the intonation differences in each pluck, and also because of the fundamentals that are not exactly a whole tone apart. That means, one can hear a C-D line as fundamental tone for the first 3 seconds of a recording, then he/she may feel like it is actually a smaller interval, sometimes it can be heard as a perfect semi-tone. It was my experience to hear it that way from the beginning. I still hear the fundamental tones of all the recordings as semi-tone apart, though I know that this is my west-oriented perception that recognizes an interval that it is familiar with. The important point is that, when the interval between the fundamental tones gets smaller, for any reason, it produces also a chromatic-like line on overtones. The whole scale coming out from the selection of the overtones of those fundamentals happen to have a chromatic effect in a linear sense and parallel fifths, or some interval in between the fourth and fifth as vertical intervals. This is what we can define as something common between *ugubhu* and *nkangala*. On the other hand, in terms of a verification of a tone scale, this should not be mixed-up with the characteristic construction of scales, since the selection and the use of the overtones are practically different. The sense of chromaticism is the result of the similar interval between...
the two fundamental tones of two instruments, but producing process of the overtone series and audible partials are not the same. In overtone melody a certain kind of descending seconds is common, but since *ughubu* has a vocal accompaniment and *nkangala* is a mouth-bow without an external resonator, beyond this “chromatic feeling” in common, it would be too hypothetic to compare these two instruments in terms of tone scales and performance practices. However, the scalar skipping process is used in both cases.

“African tonal systems are not uniform. There are several very different systems in use within the broad framework of tetra-, penta-, hexa-, and heptatonic resources (…) The system behind them can be cracked, if we link them to the scalar patterns from which they derive. All of them display the unmistakable fingerprint of the scalar skipping process” (Kubik 1999:114).

Thus we see that the tonal systems derived from fundamental tone(s) concern not only a special genre or instrument, rather it is a conceptualized system which can be applied to any form of music making in Africa. That means at the same time, that the musicians, especially those who perform solo singing genres or polyphonic singing, have some concept of tone center or something similar in the mind, most probably the fundamental tones (or one of them) to be reminded and reused for “tuning” themselves with the help of such an inner (or inherent) pitch hearing. Although I do not know if this pitch corresponds to one of the fundamental tones or to one of their overtones, when it comes to the bow songs, it seems to be that the vocal melody of a bow-accompanied song has more common pitches with the overtone partials than fundamentals, especially in South Africa along with *nyakatangali* songs of Sena people in Malawi. By all means, there is such a fundamental tone conceptualization used in systematization of tonal systems, and its widespread usage actually has also “extra-musical” reasons in western terms, such as tone language and proportioning of instruments. This forces us to think about the concept of music making once again in African terms, likewise most of the African languages do not have any word for “music” or “singing” or “playing” but other verbs, means for example “singing an instrument” or verbs with multiple meanings, in fact concepts that contains any related act to music making.

Another interesting point is the similarity of fundamental tones used among various ethnic groups such as the Nkubi/Handa and Mpyemo and those of my *nkangala* and the recorded ones in Malawi.
“Nor are the Nkumbi/Handa (fig.10c) and Mpyemo (fig.10e) harmonic patterns any riddle, if one realizes that they derive from two fundamentals that are, in the 1st case, a whole tone apart (C-D), in the second a semi tone (C-Db). Above these fundamentals, Mpyemo vocalists in particular sometimes build lush “major sevenths”. But the unifying factor is there different harmonic schemes is structural: the simultaneous sounds are always created by the scalar skipping process to different tonal materials” (Kubik 1999:117).

Even though I cannot suggest that C-D or C-Db fundamentals can be named as the Cheŵa or Sena fundamentals, it is clear to see that the whole tone or semi-tone apart fundamentals and tonal systems derived from such intervals has a tangled connection with Khoisan as well as with the Zulu and other Bantu ethnic groups in South Africa. The Nguni people who moved from south towards north, up to Malaŵi, had probably an already mixed conception of those different groups’ fundamental tonal systems. We can observe this mixed use of musical conceptions not only in tonal systems, but also in any constituent of musical traditions. Actually the tonal systems derived from fundamental tones stay in the middle as a central concept which does not change to a great degree, but nevertheless always open to modification, since it is linked to the language and natural ratios of intervals which are derived with common proportional divisions of instruments, while musical traditions in general are totally mixed with each other, especially in Malaŵi, as a cosmopolite country.

The reason might be that the harmonic series are already natural, accordingly they are stabile in terms of interval relationships, and the selection of the fundamental tones and of partials has also “extra-musical” reasons related to the language and singing. The common use of the 2.,3.,4. and 5. partials for overtone and singing melodies, is probably related to their suitable range for human voice and ear, being easily sung and perceived. The bow-songs have therefore a special importance to detect such connections. Another example for the common use of fundamentals would be the tone systems derived from bigger musical bows containing external resonators with bigger intervals in between the fundamentals (a minor or major third apart) such as gora of South Africa, some of Fô and !Kung bows.
The tonal system of !Kung is basically tetratonic, it may manifest itself, however, in three different phenotypes with different intervals; in one case even with semitone, depending on the width of the basic interval. The natural harmonic series of each fundamental is not used beyond the fourth partial. This is why fourths constitute the characteristic simultaneous sound, besides the octaves and unisons in !Kung polyphony (Kubik 2010:218). Since in !Kung bows the selection of partial is only up to the 4th partial from any fundamental tone, the scale derived from the hypothetic together usage of these three fundamentals come up to be pentatonic, interestingly a very similar scale to those of the umqangala and nkangala. The only difference is the ending interval, which is circa a major third in !Kung system, and circa a whole tone in umqangala and nkangala. But it should not be disregarded that the minor, major or neutral third as interval change place also depending to the consideration of the octave range of the 3th partial from both fundamental, which determine the beginning interval of the scale.
On the other hand, when we build a scale with the assumption of three fundamental tones with nkangala through implementing the fifth finger, we would acquire the same scale with lugube. The scale in Kirby’s transcription is not written in a descending manner, but rather in a way that shows the relation between the fundamental and overtones. Nevertheless, we can here observe a “chromatic-like” heptatonic scale, which can also be a clue to follow for a relation to “equi-heptatonic” tonal systems.

![Example 21](image)

Example 21: (Same with Example 2)

At this point, it is also important to remember the usage of equi-heptatonic tonal systems in Malawi:

“Kubik (1968) reports: The equi-heptatonic tuning with its standard interval of 171 cents gives an unmistakable sound to the Asena bangwe. The same scale is used for tuning of the large ulimba xylophones”. (Wim van Zanten, 1980:1).

Regarding all this data we can say that tonal system of nkangala is similar to other bow’s tonal system outside Malawi, and with the addition of a third fundamental, it shows even deeper associations with lugube and !Kung bows tonal scales, maybe also with other instruments in Malawi, concerning heptatonic scales. Thus a further study in the field is necessary to examine these connections.
6.1. Additional Transcriptions

In order to follow the concept of “triplets” among the nkangala songs played by Ellena Kachepe, I have transcribed a recording session that lasts approximately two minutes, regarding the patterns that she repeats without any special “order”. The patterns shown below are played generally one after another, but she repeats them several times without following this order, means, after playing the sixth pattern for example, she plays once again the second pattern, repeats it several times more than that she did at first play, then go further on the seventh. Sometimes she gives short breaks, high likely waits for the next idea to come, then plays the next variation. This is why I did not consider them as different patterns or different songs, rather as variations of a basic rhythmic pattern (or a musical/melodic idea that arises from a text that she has in mind) with 12 EP cycle on which she builds her composition. When I wrote the patterns within the “conception of triplets”, most remarks made by Rycroft, Kubik and Malamusi become consistent, basically in terms of “parallel movement of fifths and fourths”, together with “chromaticism”, when the interval is taken as semi-tone. To make it simple visually, I have taken the interval between the two fundamental tones as a whole tone. But the sound range below should be thought regarding the spectrum analysis made in previous chapters. These transcriptions represent only approximate time values and an overview of vertical and horizontal movements of intervals. Additionally, it can be said that the range of overtones, or the “octave” changings seems to be related to the movement of mouth cavity, and the duration values of overtones determined by the plectrum movement. That means, when she positions her mouth to produce front vowels-like overtones (-e, -i, -ü, -ö), the duration of overtones can be shortened by the strike of the plectrum; when she produces back vowels-like overtones (-a, -ı, -u, -ö), the overtones can be heard with longer time values, despite the fast strikes of the plectrum.
Example 22: Ellena Kachepa’s improvised nkangala composition and 9 variations of a basic rhythmic pattern with approximate overtones.
7. Conclusion

Throughout this study it is aimed to reveal certain contextual and performative features of nkangala mouth-bow, along with its associations to particular mouth-bows practiced in different regions. In order to achieve a comprehensive understanding a comparative approach has been targeted, thus some themes, especially social context, performance practices and tonal system of mouth-bow traditions in general, has been specifically highlighted. For this reason, firstly a fieldwork study has been completed and following to this, the gained data from this fieldwork has been compared with the theoretical written sources.

In terms of historical background, I have suggested that the concept of “plural historiography” would be the proper tool to understand the possible origins of the instrument. This way a multi-directional map could be constructed through uncompleted linear history of the instrument, different connections between different times in history could be linked with musical data, in order to examine the differences and similarities on performance practices, social context and tonal systems of similar mouth-bows and nkangala.

Under the title of social context, primarily the relation between chinamwali songs and nkangala compositions with respect to “performative construction of gender” concept has been investigated. Secondly, nkangala’s role on the transmission of the musical and matrilineal oral traditions along with some Zulu bow practices of women has been examined.

Regarding performance practices, initially nkangala’s peculiar usage in solitude and an auditory experience acquired by inner listening has been studied; following to this, the learning process of nkangala which influences the performative aspects deeply has been examined and experienced through participant observation method. The usage of this method led me to understand the complex relationship between the rhythmic patterns and the overtone production that can be seen as the most crucial aspect of nkangala playing. With the advantage of self-experiencing the musical notion, namely playing the instrument, I have gained a chance to reveal some facts related to the construction of tonal
systems derived from nkangala and so observe a relativity of soundscape of various mouth-bows subjected in this study.

Concerning the subject of tonal systems, I have primarily compared the findings and the theories about the Zulu, Xhosa and !Kung mouth-bow traditions of Rycroft (1975, 1962, 1967), Kirby (1953), Kubik (2010, 1987) and Wachsmann (1971) along with many others with the results that I collected from the fieldwork in Malawi. As one of the many consequences, I have found out that the addition of a third fundamental tone that is observable in lugube mouth-bow tradition among the Venda (Kirby 1953), was also the case in Ellena Kachepa’s nkangala practice in Malawi, which is, as far as is known, reported for the first time with this study.

Apart from the data mentioned above, before the realization of this study I had as well certain questions in mind to be answered. These questions can be sum up as follows:

1. What are the possible origins of nkangala?
2. Does the tradition show differences in terms of social function in different ethnic groups?
3. Is there a special relation with the girl’s initiation songs?
4. By which personal motivation is the instrument played?
5. What is the relation with languages?
6. What are the possible origins/reasons of the interval between two fundamental tones?
7. Is it possible to complete the cultural and historical map via study of tonal systems?

While some of these questions remain partly un-answered, this study has also led further and more complex questions.

The information about mouth-bows in Kirby’s classification group 3, contains different data concerning tonal qualities, performance practices and social context in a layered manner rather than complementary. This means, we do not have the comprehensive data regarding this three main aspects of mouth-bow playing; instead we have partial
information on this basic three aspects. According to the results gained through fieldwork and comparative study of written sources, the following remarks has been made:

1. Zulu bow songs have a comparable tonal structure with nkangala songs.

2. Umqangala is the most similar instrument to nkangala concerning these three basic aspects. The difference on social context is minor; however it is compelling, since it shows another layer of the social role of the instrument. Umqangala is essentially played from puberty until the time of marriage, while nkangala can be played from puberty until the end of life. In addition to this, among the Zulu women are expected to play the other bows after the marriage.

3. Concerning Khoikhoi and San connections the social context of playing of similar bows is basically different, but some tonal similarities are possible to speculate, along with the umqangala’s origin as the ancestor of nkangala. By this means, !Kung mouth-bow tuning-c) has been considered only by its soundscape and tonal qualities. Regarding that a similarity between the pentatonic scales of umqangala and nkangala has been detected.

4. The addition of the third fundamental by Ellena Kachepa’s fifth finger technique, remarkable similarities with Venda mouth-bow lugube, along with other potential roots of migration; possible connections between the Zulu, Venda and Ngoni have been highlighted in terms of adaptation of this kind of mouth-bows. Concerning lugube’s tonal system and addition of a third fundamental on nkangala, a heptatonic scale is detected, which can constitute a clue about the “equi-distanced heptatonic scales” in Malawi and southern Africa.

5. According to historical links which are built through tonal qualities, the “chromaticism” or “semi/whole tone progression with structural fourths” has been referred not only to Nguni groups but also to Khoikhoi or San related peoples and their harmonic structures.

6. With the additional third fundamental tone on nkangala and other links to “equi-distanced heptatonic and hexatonic scales of Nyasa” has been followed with a conceptualization of “transposition of scales”, and some hypothetical remarks has been made to be examined in further advanced studies.
Abstract

This study is a result of a short field work made on nkangala mouth-bow tradition in Malawi Chiotha Village. Since the field research was short, the information about the historical origins of the instrument is taken mostly from a theoretical research. Beyond its historiography, the main aspects of the study are performance techniques, morphological features in comparison to other similar mouth-bows in southern Africa, the tradition’s social context and the tonal systems derived from the instrument. In order to acquire an inclusive approach, several methods have been implemented in the field and during the theoretical research. The main method used in the field was principally “participant observation” and for the interpretation of all of the gained data in the field as well as following theoretical research, “hypothetic deductive” approach has been chosen.

Keywords: nkangala, mouth-bow, Malawi, Chewa, Khoisan, !Kung, Venda, tonal systems derived from two fundamental tones.
Abstract


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CURRICULUM VITAE

Education

Universtaet Wien
Masterstudies in “Institut für Musikwissenschaft” 2010-

Istanbul Yildiz Technical University
Art and Design Faculty
Music and Performing Arts Department
Audio Design Programme
Discipline of Musicology

Bilkent University 2001-2004
Faculty of Music and Performing Arts
Highschool of Music Preparation
Department of Piano

Department of Clarinet

Ankara Private Tevfik Fikret Highschool 1996-2000
(French as education language)

Published Works

“Frozen Memory” in collaboration with Zekiye Sarikartal and Nilüfer Ovañoğlu, in: Performance Research, Volume 18, No. 6 (December 2013) ‘On Ice’.


Professional Experiences

Collaboration with Pfusch Baustelle 2014-
Collaboration with 2/5bz (Serhat Köksal) 2013-

* A brief article as a summary of this thesis had been published in 2009, as being part of a book prepared for Marmara University’s master studies in Faculty of Communication.
Film, Theater and Audio/Visual Performance Music:

by Melanie Hollaus
“Hernalser”, Wien, Innsbruck 2014
“Haymon Buchhandlung”, Innsbruck 2013
“Aspern”, Wien, New York 2013
“Tagwerker”, Wien 2012

in collaboration with KJDT:
“Wollakolamsker Chaussée”, by Heiner Müller Moskow, Tyrol, Istanbul 2010-2011

in collaboration with RhizomArt:
“Horror-Cabaret”, Wien, WUK 2010

directed by Cetin Sarikartal
“Yanlis Anlama” (The Missunderstanding) by Albert Camus 2010

Ankara British Council
Ankara Bilkent University
Ahmet Adnan Saygun Concert Hall
Yıldız Teknik University
Yıldız Theatre Hall

Member of the Contemporary Music Ensemble Karınca Kabilesi 2007+
Public Concerts:
Theatre Z
Garage Istanbul

Clavcinist in Istanbul Barok Music Days 2009

Private Piano Teaching: 2001-2009

Borusan Art and Culture Centre (Internal Librarian and Assistance) 2007-2008

Foreign Languages

French (B2)
English (advanced)
German (B2)
Computer Skills

Softwares for Sound Analysis (Adobe Audition, Wavelab, Sonic Visualiser, Sonic Charge)
Softwares for Music Making, Mapping and Producing (Reason, Cubase, Logic-Pro, Pure Data)
Score Setting Programmes (Finale, Sibelius, Muse Score)
Microsoft Office Programmes (World, Excel, Power-point)
Internet Tools

Personal Interests

Literature, Philosophy, Visual Arts.