

Bozo Music Research Report

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Description of the Visit

From 11-14th January 2010, I carried out ethnomusicological research amongst the Bozo people. My principle informants were musicians / fisherman in the village of Barikedaga (near Diabarabé) and two singers in the town of Dia. Other sources of information included Thomas Blecke, who already had some Bozo recordings, Mamadou (my assistant/translator) and Idrissa Diènta, a Bozo man who lives in Sevaré. Whilst these contacts are relatively few and time was limited, I was nevertheless able to carry out significant research into Bozo music.

Purpose of the Visit

- (i) *Organological research*: What musical instruments do the Bozo have? What are they made of, who plays them etc.
- (ii) *Song genre research*: What kind of songs exist and for what purposes? Which ones are sung in the Bozo language (rather than in Bambara)? Which song genres (if any) would be best suited for educational / literacy song composition?
- (iii) *Attitudes towards music*: How are musicians viewed in Bozo society? What are the attitudes towards listening to music/playing music? Is music therefore a valid and appropriate vehicle for communication amongst the Bozo?

Research methods

Most of the research took place by asking questions on the above topics. Also taking photographs and making audio recordings. One particularly useful tool was recordings made a number of years ago by Thomas Blecke: these I played to informants asking them to comment on the genre / meaning / language used etc. This provided an excellent starting point for research and discussions.

Ethnographic Background information

A significant proportion of the Bozo people are fishermen, although this is not the only profession they carry out, as there are also Bozo farmers, merchants and *marabous*. Yet, whilst not all Bozos are fishermen, virtually all fishermen in the region are Bozo.

The Bozo ethnicity is divided up into *four* smaller groups, each with its own dialect. They are as follows:

Bozo Nungaxo (Tiéyaxo)

Numbering 100,000 or more. Found from Koa to Miérou on the Niger River and from Diafarabié to Sendédaga on Diaka River¹. From the Mopti region. Only do fishing and are considered as the most authentic Bozos.

Bozo, Tiemacèwè

Numbering only a few thousand, found in the Mopti / Tenenkou/ Youwarou regions. They are also considered as *vrais Bozos*, though maybe to a lesser extent than the Nungaxo. They fish and are known for singing a lot. They also tend to intermarry with the *Peulh* and sing in both languages.

Bozo Jenaama

Numbering around 200,000 in Mali, in the Djenné, Mopti, Youwarou, Tenenkou and Bandiagara regions. The Jenaama are not only fishermen, but arable farmers. They are not considered as *vrais Bozos* by others and even intermarry with the Dogon people – a practice strictly avoided by most Bozos.

Bozo Jangaxo (Xanyaxo)

Numbering 100,000 or more. Found from Miérou (near Ke-Maacina) to Tamani on Niger River. They do more farming and commerce than fishing. Also includes *marabous*.

Bozo Organology

As the population is mainly made up of fishermen, large drums or other cumbersome musical instruments are less common. Here are the main instruments described/shown to me:

- The ***Foon***: a cone-shaped wooden drum, approximately 2' in height and open at the (smaller) bottom end, carried by a cord over the shoulder, the drum hangs between the player's legs. It is played with one hand and one stick, usually in a group of around 3-5 players. One drummer, the *foona*, plays a lead rhythm and his drum has a tighter skin. The other drummers, the *tendebakoria*, play an accompanying rhythm.
- The ***Gangamu***, a double-headed cylindrical drum played with a curved stick and one hand. Approximately 2' in height.

¹ Some information from ethnologue.com

- The **Jidundu**, half an overturned gourd (calebasse) floating in water and hit with two wooden sticks. Up to three of these are played at once. The gangamu and jidundu are often played together, but the foon does not play with them.
- The **ƙƙɔɔxaanɔ**, also half a gourd with cauri shells or seeds attached around the rim. Held with the open end upwards and thrown in the air with a twisting motion. Played by ladies.
- The **Gidɛxaanɔ**, the same overturned gourd as the ƙƙɔɔxaanɔ (or jidundu) but placed on a blanket or sheet and hid with the hands, maybe with a ring on one finger for added percussiveness.
- **Whistle**. The usage of a whistle to accompany the music was also mentioned, although I have no further information on this instrument for the time being.

Bozo Song Genres

As in most African cultures, Bozo song genres were traditionally associated with given events or functions. Whilst this distinction has tended to become blurred with time, there are still significant associations with the different genres which need to be taken into account if they are ever to be used for literacy/SU work.

The main issue with these genres is that many of them tend to be sung in Bambara rather than Bozo, which is of little use for promoting the Bozo language. Other factors to consider include the usage of Peuhl rhythms, the fact that there are four dialects of Bozo and the negative association of some of the genres (eg tɛngɛrɛ, a criticising song). Here is a list of the genres based upon my research:

Song Genre	Language(s) used	Details
Dososele	Bamanan /some Bozo	Sung by two people, after ƙɛjɛmɛ. Gives people courage to say a magic word to call a spirit.
Ƙɛsemɛ / Ƙɛjɛmɛ	Bozo Jangaxo	Hunting songs for men, to encourage each other. There is also a ƙɛjɛmɛ for women.
Koni kele	Bamanan	For fêtes, sung to praise people. Mostly sung by men.
Korodogo yemaamasire	Bamanan	For any fête/rejoicing. Men or women sing.
Maamanabo iramayala	Bamanan	Means “a man who will bring you out of your human setting.” Sung by men or women.
Naanayankoya	Bamanan	Originally from Ségou. Also sung at circumcisions.
Naani naani	Bozo Jangaxo mixed with other languages (Peuhl / Bamanan)	Sung by young women, for rejoicing / having fun. Often incorporates the names of relatives. There are several naani naani rhythms, it is the lyrics and purpose of the song which define it.

Nungalamawasu	Bozo / Bamanan	For a woman / girl who is glorifying herself. For example, because her nose is nice and pointy (a sign of beauty in the culture).
Sanamba	Bozo Jangaxo	Sung by (young) women. The words often say : “Do you know X? They are my family members.” Sung in Diondionri, where some new Sanamba songs have recently been composed.
Tengeren	Bozo Nungaxo/Jangaxo. Some Bamanan.	A criticising song sung by women. The woman speaks of her own values and then criticises those of another woman. Often directed towards a <i>co-épouse</i> . For example: “If she calls you a prostitute, tell her she is the daughter of a prostitute.” Can also be used to criticize and enemy.
Yeeri maama	Bozo / Bamanan	For any fête/rejoicing. Men or women sing.
Bailolo	Jangaxo	Rejoicing, greeting song.

Suggested Genres for literacy work

- Naani naani is a good choice as it is well-known and in the Bozo language. Men can also sing it these days. In years past, a young woman called Nɔmɔ Tunkara (from Kera) was recorded singing naani naani songs. These were broadcast on the radio and loved by many. She purportedly received 250,000 cfa for doing so.
- Sanamba is also a good choice for the same reasons (and men could also sing it).
- Bailolo could also work.
- Kεsemε.
- Yeeri Maama.

Attitudes Towards Music

Can music be played / sung by adults?

In the culture, and largely due to religious beliefs, making music is not favoured for those over the age of 15, or anyone already married. It is seen as something which is *not serious* and therefore associated with childhood. However, listening to music is fine for all, and a professional musician (eg Salif Keita) and / or griot is fine to sing/make music. Professional musicians would therefore normally lead the singing, but it is acceptable for others present to sing the responses to this.

Music versus the spoken word

It was felt that a song would attract people more than somebody speaking. Also, songs in Bozo were preferred to those in Bamanan.

Music and Islam

Calls to prayer from the minaret are not considered ‘music’. Songs can be sung outside of a mosque but never inside. Songs which say ‘God is good’ or ‘God is Powerful’ are fine, but not in a mosque.

Could music be used to teach literacy?

Musicians / literacy workers in Barikedaga thought this was a very good idea. The genres *Naani naani* and *Sanamba* in particular were mentioned for this, as they are still known and are sung in Bozo. *Sanamba* is also sung by children, which is good for literacy.