

A close-up photograph of two men. The man in the foreground is on the right, wearing a green shirt, and is eating a green leafy vegetable. The man in the background is on the left, wearing a grey cap and a light blue shirt, and is holding a yellow fruit. The background is blurred, showing a blue structure.

Edgardo Civallero

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the *banda mocha* of Chota

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Introduction

In Ecuador, the Afro-descendant population is distributed throughout virtually the entire country. For historical reasons, there are two major centers of long-established settlement. One lies in the lowlands, in the coastal province of Esmeraldas; the other is in the Chota River valley, between the provinces of Imbabura and Carchi, in the foothills of the Andes (IDB, 2003; Ponce, 2006).

The slave trade in Ecuador began around 1532. In 1540, enslaved people who survived a shipwreck off the coast of present-day Esmeraldas settled near the town of San Mateo; a second shipwreck in 1553 increased the population further (Medina, 2006). Gradually, large numbers of escaped or freed enslaved people gathered in



palenques (self-organized, independent communities) in what are now the provinces of Manabí and Esmeraldas. By 1599, these communities, which also included nearby Indigenous populations, had formed an autonomous confederation, a veritable "Republic of Zambos." From 1640 onward, they were joined by enslaved people who escaped from the mines of Barbacoas (now in the department of Nariño, Colombia).

The Chota Valley, for its part, was colonized by the Spanish in the early sixteenth century and soon became a region of large estates producing grapes, cotton, and sugarcane (Coronel, 1988; Fernández-Rasines, 2001). A century later, the Jesuits settled there and purchased enslaved Africans in the markets of Cartagena de Indias to work on their plantations. They began by acquiring "Carabalíes" from English traders and, around 1700,

Image 1 [prev. page].

Performer of a *puro* of *banda mocha*.

[Photo: Carmen Burbano (Flickr)].

"Congos" sold by English, French, and Portuguese traders. After the expulsion of the order in 1767, the Spanish Crown took control of the lands — and their occupants — and sold them to landowners who continued the previous system of exploitation.

Slavery was abolished in Ecuador on July 25, 1851, in a process completed between 1854 and 1856. In the Chota Valley, formerly enslaved people remained serfs under a system known as *huasipungo*: they worked for a landowner in exchange for the right to cultivate a small subsistence plot. *Huasipungueros* were bought and sold as part of the estate; this system remained in force until the 1960s (Rapoport, 2009).

Despite the terrible pressures they have endured over the past several centuries — first as enslaved people or maroons living in *palenques*, and later as an ethnic minority — Afro-Ecuadorians have succeeded in maintaining their own cultural expressions and forms of identity across generations. In the lowlands, the Esmeraldas marimba and the singing of *décimas* are clear examples;

in the highlands, their counterparts are the *bomba* and the *banda mocha*.

Natural sounds

The *banda mocha* is a traditional all-male instrumental ensemble originating in the communities of the Chota River valley, a watercourse that marks part of the boundary between the provinces of Imbabura and Carchi. It is a distinctively Afro-Ecuadorian musical expression, with no documented equivalent among Indigenous, mestizo, or Afro-descendant groups elsewhere in Latin America.

It emerged toward the end of the nineteenth century, when musicians in the Chota Valley sought to imitate the instrumentation and sound of the European-style bands — generally military bands — that enlivened festive events in Ecuador during the republican period. Lacking the resources to emulate them, the musicians were forced to replace their woodwind and brass instruments



Image 2.
Puros of banda mocha.
 [Photo: El Universo.com].

with others made from the materials most readily available in a predominantly agricultural environment. The result, which has survived to the present day, includes dried and hollowed gourds of various sizes, known as *puros*, as well as perforated agave stalks, cane, and leaves.

The smallest gourds, the *altos*, imitate clarinets and play the principal melody; the medium-sized *segunderos* provide harmonic fills and flourishes in the manner of saxophones and trombones; and the largest, the *bajos*, perform the role of tubas and euphoniums. Hollowed *penco* cornets — the *penco* is the flower stalk of the *cabuya*, genus *Agave* — and fresh leaves from orange, capulí, or mandarin trees are used to imitate trumpets, clarinets, and melodic saxophones. Flutes and piccolos, meanwhile, are replaced by cane *pífanos* or *pinkillos* similar to those of the neighboring Quechua-speaking Andean peoples (Coba Andrade, 1981: 100–101; Mullo Sandoval, 2009: 191–193).

Contrary to what their appearance might suggest, the gourds and agave stalks do not function as trumpets but as horns or amplifiers for the human voice. When the player of one of these resonators deliberately alters his voice — for example, to imitate the sound of a trombone — the result is similar to what he would produce with a mirliton.



The ensemble is completed by a bass drum, either commercially manufactured or locally made; a pair of snare drums; a commercial metal *güiro* or a *calanguana* (a traditional *güiro* made from a grooved gourd and played with a comb or fork); cymbals, either commercial or made from two pot lids; and, occasionally, a donkey jawbone.

The name of this rural ensemble may be related to the fact that the ends of the *puros* are *mochados* — cut off in order to make each instrument — or it may refer to the ensemble itself as *mocha*, that is, as lacking something. It might also derive from *mocho*, a colloquial term meaning "poor person."

The ensemble performs one of the best-known Afro-Ecuadorian musical genres, the *bomba*, as well as *sanjuanitos*, *albazos*, *tonadas*, *pasacalles*, *huaynos*, *fox*

Image 3 [prev. page].

Performer of *puro* of *banda mocha*.

[Photo: <http://www.bandamocha.com/>].



Image 4.

Pinkillo and *puros* of *banda mocha*.

[Photo: <http://afroecuadorianculture.blogspot.com/>].

incaicos, *pasillos*, *cumbias*, and other popular genres. It takes part in the *pregones* that announce patron-saint festivals, plays at rural community celebrations such as *mingas* and road openings, and appears at various public and private events. During Holy Week, it also performs marches known as "*marchas frunes*," or funeral



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marches, that evoke the Passion of Christ (Mullo Sandoval, 2009).

In the province of Imbabura, communities such as El Juncal, San Francisco de Paragachi, San Martín de Porres, and La Victoria have their own *banda mocha*. The best known, however — probably because it has received the greatest media attention — is the "San Miguel" ensemble from the community of Chalguyacu, in Pimampiro Canton. It consists of a dozen musicians, most of them over sixty years old, whose memories have enabled researchers to trace the origins of this musical tradition to the late nineteenth or early twentieth century.

Also more than a century old, the "Luz del Carchi" *banda mocha* survives in the hamlet of Huaquer, in Mira Canton, Carchi Province.

Image 5 [prev. page].

Banda mocha.

[Photo: <http://www.bandamocha.com/>].

Seeking connections

By the time *bandas mochas* began to appear, instruments made from gourds, agave stalks, cane, and leaves had probably long been in use among Afro-descendant communities. Although no historical sources directly confirm this, it would make little sense to assume that the elements that came to constitute the *banda mocha* were invented *ad hoc* solely to imitate or replace instruments of European origin. Their use before the ensemble emerged may have been occasional or informal, but most were undoubtedly part of the intangible heritage of societies of African descent.

The use of leaves from different plants as free aerophones has been documented around the world. Many Indigenous peoples in Ecuador have used them — the



Image 6.

Banda mocha of Mira.

[Photo: <http://www.mira.ec/>].

nuka of the Shuar, for example — so it is hardly surprising to hear them played by Afro-Ecuadorians. Vertical and transverse cane flutes were also present, and remain in use, in the Ecuadorian Andes (Coba Andrade, 1981; Mullo Sandoval, 2009); their use may have been adopted by the inhabitants of the Chota Valley.

Outside the *banda mocha*, however, the use of gourds and sections of *cabuya* stalk as voice amplifiers has not been documented in Ecuador or neighboring countries, much less as part of such complex musical ensembles. Short and long natural trumpets are certainly used in the region — among them the Andean *quipas* made from gourd, horn, or *huarumo* wood, genus *Cecropia* — but these aerophones differ considerably from the *puros* and cornets of the Chota.

The closest parallels to these instruments — and specifically to the gourd horn or amplifier, the predominant element within a *banda mocha* — are found in Africa. Gourd resonators are not merely used there; in some regions, their musical use is similar, or even identical, to their use in Ecuador.

African winds

The various species of African gourds have long been, and continue to be, used to make aerophones. Trumpets are probably the most common. In addition to being played alone, they also feature in striking ensemble performances.

Countless examples remain in use. The Anioma, a subgroup of the Igbo of southwestern Nigeria, play long, slender trumpets called *akpaele* or *akpele*, which are capable of reproducing the tones of the Igbo language (Mokwunyei, 2008; Ebighgbo, 2009). Such instruments are also found among the Aniocha Igbo of Delta State (Osakwe-Mokwunyei, 1999), while the Chamba of Nigeria use cylindrical or spherical trumpets, particularly to perform vom music in many of their rituals (Fardon,



1991; Blench, 2001). The Yoruba of Nigeria's Ondo State, meanwhile, use *upe*, long aerophones sounded during ceremonies of the Ogun cult (Akinmade, 2005).

Uganda has numerous end-blown trumpets, such as the *akawunde* — probably a Ganda imitation of European horns; see Waschmann (1953) — as well as many side-blown trumpets played in large ensembles (Montagu, 2014). Among the latter are the well-known *amakondere* of the Ganda, Nyoro, and Tooro, which form a veritable orchestra (British Library, n.d.; Musinguzi, 2013).

There are also the *abu* of the Luo of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania; the *kanga* of the Daju, Lotuko, and Bur peoples of Chad and South Sudan (Teffera, 2006); and the enormous *waza* of the Berta of Ethiopia and Sudan, made from several pieces of gourd joined together and played

Images 7 and 8.

Performers of *amakondere* in Uganda.

[Photos: British Library Sounds and UNESCO.org].



Image 9.
Trumpets *waza* of the Berta people (Ethiopia).
[Photo: Finfinne Tribune.com].

in large ensembles (Teffera, 2007; Kubik, 2010). Gourd trumpets are also traditional instruments in the "possession cults" of the Mundang and the Musey or Mosi peo-

ples of southern Chad and northern Cameroon (Rouget, 1985).

Although similar to trumpets in shape and structure — a resemblance that often causes confusion — gourd horns employ markedly different playing techniques and produce noticeably different results. Musicians use them to amplify the voice and generally to alter it, with or without the aid of a mirliton, in an attempt to imitate the sound of other instruments. These devices are also widespread in Africa.

Amplifiers and bands

Among the best-known examples of African gourd horns are the *engwara* of the Soga people of southern Uganda. These are cylindrical sections of the elongated necks of bottle gourds, between twenty and thirty centimeters long, with a lateral opening. Women use them while singing in certain ceremonies of the Enswenzi cult (Cooke, 2000; Isabirye, 2012).

As with the Ecuadorian *puros*, some of these aerophones were—and still are—used to imitate Western musical bands, a tradition paralleled in Asia by certain bamboo horns; see Flaes (2000) and Reily and Brucker (2013). Drawing on examples from Uganda and Kenya, Cooke (2000) provides some historical background to the phenomenon:



Image 10.
Trumpets *eggwara* of Uganda.
[Photo: Peter Hoelsing].

In British East Africa, Indigenous recruits readily learned to play European band instruments. The Kabaka of Uganda [regent of the kingdom of Buganda] established a military band within his private army, and several police regiments formed similar bands, playing European melodies from written scores. Immediately after

independence, these same musicians began to compose their own music and arrange traditional melodies for their bands.

Unlike the official ensembles, these bands were small, independent organizations. They first appeared among the Swahili in the ports of the East African coast. Wherever musicians could not obtain European trumpets and horns — or Scottish bagpipes — kazoos or gourd horns and locally made drums were sufficient.

Throughout much of sub-Saharan, or "Black," Africa, European band music was highly valued by local societies, whose musicians soon imitated it and adapted it to their own cultures and available resources. One clear example is the *adaha* music of the Fanti people of Ghana, which emerged around 1880 (Collins, 2004). In East Africa, this music was known as *beni*, a corruption of the English word "band," and was inspired by the marches and parades of the British army in the late nineteenth century. In Zanzibar and along the Kenyan coast, it was imitated by Muslim Swahili, who copied the

marching steps, the sound of the brass instruments, and even the clothing and hierarchy of the band members. It was later adopted by the *askaris* — local soldiers who filled the ranks of the colonial forces — in German Tanganyika, now Tanzania (Ranger, 1975).

After the First World War, *beni* music moved inland toward the Great Lakes region and the Congo. By 1930, its process of indigenization was well advanced. Although the foreign clothing and organization were retained, European wind instruments were abandoned, while local drums and traditional gourd horns assumed a more prominent role. In southern Tanzania and neighboring areas, for example, the Nyakyusa or Nkonde perform the *ing'oma* dance, which imitates German military bands from the colonial period (Edmondson, 2007). The musicians wear uniforms and play gourd horns called *itinala*, with which they imitate trumpets, French horns, tubas, and clarinets (Ellison, 2002).

Derivatives of *beni* include genres such as the *mbeni* of the Bemba (Jones, 1945) and the *kalela* of Bisa miners in

Zambia (Mitchell, 1956). In southern Malawi, the *beni* dance is performed especially among the Yao of the Mangochi, Salima, and Dedza districts (Kalinga, 2012; Malawi SDNP, n.d.); the performers also wear imitations of military uniforms. In central Malawi — the districts of Kasungu, Nkhota Kota, Salima, Ntchisi, Dowa, and Lilongwe — a genre and dance similar to *beni*, known as *mganda*, is performed (Malawi SDNP, n.d.). It is very popular among the Chewa, the country's dominant ethnic group (Tembo, 2013), and among the neighboring Ngoni (Kalinga, 2012). Nthala (2013) describes Chewa *mganda* as follows:

...a military mime dance created as a result of the Indigenous population's fascination with British band music during the colonial era. During the First World War, a group of local young men were recruited as soldiers for the British King's African Rifles (KAR); after the war, they imitated British military parade bands. They used local instruments made from gourds, placing a spiderweb over the distal opening to produce a kazoo or gourd trumpet: a type of mirliton known locally as badza.

Tracey (2000) adds: "They reproduced the sound of the military band using the simple technique of singing into a kazoo made from the neck, or from the neck and body, of an African gourd."

The *mganda* dance spread through much of Central Africa and reinforced the practice of replacing European wind instruments with others made from local materials, including "gourds... which make a sound remarkably like real trumpets" (Jones, 1945). The spread of *mganda* helped popularize this instrumental ensemble across an area extending from Kenya to Mozambique and from the Indian Ocean coast to the heart of the Congo. This region is home to numerous peoples whose bands "attempt to imitate the sound of European military music" (Kubik, 1964).

They include the Tonga and Tumbuka of the Nkhata Bay, Karonga, and Chitipa districts in northern Malawi, who perform *malipenga* music and dance, a variant of *mganda* (Malawi SDNP, n.d.). The ensemble that performs *malipenga*, known as a *boma*, uses *chigubu* gourd



Image 11.
Horns *badza* for *mganda*, Malawi.
[Photo: Wikimedia].

horns in place of commercially manufactured trumpets (Koma-Koma, 1965).

According to Jones (1945), the use of plant resonators to imitate European bands exemplifies "what Africans can



Images 12 to 15.

Instrument for *malipenga* dance of the Tumbuka people.
[Photo: Laird Scott (Flickr)].

do when they take over something they have seen and truly make it their own." This capacity for adaptation and emulation crossed the Atlantic with the enslaved people brought to the Americas. In North America, "voice modifiers" such as kazoos and combs, as well as improvised amplifiers such as cupped hands, were very common among African Americans, who, according to contemporary observers, possessed an almost innate ability to imitate musical instruments using everyday objects. The practice was widely documented, first in folk music (cf. Evans, 1978) and later in the genres that preceded jazz. Referring to the Mills Brothers, a Black musical group

active from 1928 onward, Birnbaum (2013) writes:

During one show, Harry lost his kazoo and, cupping his hands over his mouth, imitated it so that it sounded like a trumpet. The other brothers also learned to imitate instruments, with John Jr. taking the bass role and Herbert and Donald imitating saxophones, trumpets, or trombones.

The Mills Brothers were not the first group of singers to reproduce instrumental sounds. In 1887, a vocal performance of "General Grant's Funeral March" by a group of African American convicts in Norfolk, Virginia, was described as "absolutely startling in its likeness to a full brass band."

Certainties and uncertainties

Many of the enslaved people brought to Ecuador from 1700 onward were "Congos": men and women originating in a region, the Congo, that at the time encompassed much of Central Africa. The traders, especially the English and Portuguese, purchased them from Arab or African dealers in the Atlantic ports of Luanda (Angola) and Benguela (Democratic Republic of the Congo), as well as the Indian Ocean ports of Zanzibar (Kenya) and Quelimane (Mozambique).

The "Congos" were captives from different Indigenous societies of Central and East Africa, including those inhabiting the present-day territories of Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, and Tanzania. The principal trade routes — including slave-trading routes — between the



Image 16.
Performers of *malipenga* in northern Malawi.
[Photo: Laird Scott (Flickr)].

ports mentioned above crossed the continent through these countries. Indeed, Nkhotakota market was located in Malawi and Tete market in Mozambique, both infamous for the enormous numbers of local prisoners sold there.

Bands of gourd horns imitating European ensembles did not appear until the late nineteenth century, by which time the Atlantic trade in enslaved "Congos" had already disappeared. Something similar occurred with the Ecuadorian *banda mocha*, which emerged after slavery had been abolished in the Andean country. In this sense, therefore, one cannot speak of the direct transfer of a musical expression from Africa to the Americas.

The evidence nevertheless reveals a striking correspondence between the two shores. It makes it possible to posit a similar response — the use of ensembles of gourd resonators to imitate a particular kind of musical band — to a similar stimulus, the European band, among populations that more than likely shared a common ethnic origin.

Futures

Unlike the various African ensembles, which retain an enviable vitality, the *bandas mochas* of the Chota are finding it very difficult to renew their membership. Music from elsewhere and new technologies, embarrassment at being associated with an expression regarded as something "for old people," and the fact that their services go unpaid all discourage young people from taking part.

Nevertheless, the visibility that these ensembles have recently gained through television programs and short documentaries, together with the participation of two of them — Chalguayacu and Mira — in the recording of widely circulated CDs, has given them new opportunities for survival.

Their prospects would be strengthened if *banda mocha* musicians established contact with their counterparts in Central and East Africa, as so many other performers in Colombia, Cuba, and Brazil have already done. Such (re)connections often produce learning, discoveries, and encounters that bring renewed life and vigor to particular cultural expressions.

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Image02

<http://www.eluniverso.com/> (26/07/2015)

Imagen 03

<http://www.bandamocha.com/>

Image 04

<http://afroecuadorianculture.blogspot.com/>

Image 05

<http://www.bandamocha.com/>

Image 06

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Image 09

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Image 10

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