

Summary of thesis :

Abstract

A voice-filled solitude : song, memories and conflict among the Amhara of Goğgam (Ethiopia)

This thesis focuses on the practice of music in solitude in a peasant society of Northern Ethiopia. In this solitude, precise memories come to mind and intrigues of social life, made of affection, conflicts and violence, take their shape: songs « for oneself » are always filled with the presence of others.

The thesis questions the relationship between music and autobiographical memory and draws on research in cognitive anthropology which considers memory both in terms of cognitive constraints and cultural meanings.

First, an intimate form of ethnography and the detailed study of the interactions at the source of these memories show the crucial role of sung poetry in interpersonal relationships: as a powerful means of communication, it allows oneself to tell « right », provokes irresistible emotional effects and pushes for action. The analysis of audience reaction during the course of a limit case then exposes the implicit expectancies underlying the act of listening and suggests the existence of cognitive and cultural schemas each corresponding to a different musical genre. The use of a questionnaire highlights the bundles of inferences that influence sound perception, but also the interpretation of the singers' intentions.

Finally, an analysis of the temporal scales mobilized in the course of performances shows how these musical memories fit into the system of autobiographical memory, are organized as narratives and greatly influence the singers' own point of views on their personal stories, their choices and their actions.

Keywords

Anthropology – Ethnomusicology – Autobiographical Memory – Song – Poetry – Cognition