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Issues in ethnomusicology as human science

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Abstract

The elements that constitute the topic of this paper are extracted from my newly finished book in Ethnomusicology. Namibia as a country is not only made of geographical boundaries with other countries, located in the African continent map, but perhaps it is made most by what it contains inside forming the National cultural Heritage, from which we get our cultural identity as a nation in diversity, that we should cherish much. These are the languages we speak, the way we dress (Outfit), the way we sing and dance, traditional architecture, manufacturing, ritual on traditional marriage, traditional healings, labour (cultivation and harvest), beverage and dishes. Most of these features in traditional societies are declining because of the contemporary daily life in which we found ourselves. The attitudinal, archetypal, moulding vision and anxiety of the indigenous elderly people in the rural life, is to see continuity being assumed or secured of the above mentioned features, seen by young people in Namibia as things of the past life, archaic, childish and non-sense. These young people have their mind set on foreign horizons. This is also expressed on music, in such way that since Independence almost nobody came up with a creation of contemporary music style based on the Namibian traditional music. All music performed in the country is based on foreign genres such as Kwaito, R&B, Reggae, Kwasa- kwasa, kizomba, etc. Finally the paper also deals with the desire people have developed in promoting arts in its diverse forms within the eco-tourism Industry, to alleviate the living conditions of the indigenous people in the rural areas. There are two sides of the coin to be considered in that: the good and bad aspects in doing the promotion of arts in this environment.

Introduction

Different from Musicology that has its interest only in music study, Ethnomusicology should be understood as music study in culture. It has interest first in the person behind the created work, meaning the creator of music. This interest is based on the understanding of the environment the artist lives in, the social problems around him/her, and the condition under which the song was created, because these elements might have influence on the created work that is studied at later stage (Tsoubaloko 2000, p.3). Ethnomusicology is a science that brings back memories, surfacing the unknown human existence and secrets, a solution to ignorance. The science will also reveal or make people understand not only the meaning of music trends, styles, genres, forms of artistic expression, but also understand the creator of works and the performers, including their uniforms, the entire universe of ideas, believes, gestures and customs, including the situation and environment in which the music is created. The knowledge of the society where the song has been created should be understood, inseparable with the life of the community involved. Thus, African traditional music which is the focus of this paper will remain incomprehensible without the knowledge of the social reality (Marin Marian Balasa 1994, p.4).

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Ethnomusicology offers better scientific understanding of human culture, and traditional music should not be compared to learned arts. It should rather be understood and taught in accordance with its own rules. Comparing learned arts and traditional music leads to one-sided and narrow-minded judgment, because the peasant cannot disassociate himself or herself from music which is in fact part of himself or herself. The music lives in them as part of their identity in uniformity of the way of life.

The traditional people's music does not need innovation. *The concern of the creators is to save, not to replace it.* We should entertain the idea of preservation of traditional music as part of our culture, with all its spiritual universe and value it contains.

Ethnomusicology as science dealing with the study of music in culture should ensure that the song is considered as a document, because the reality and proper nature of the traditional music resides in *the meaning*. The science also deals with the understanding of human presence in the music creation. The paper should also be considered as awareness about serious disappearance of an enormous amount of traditional cultural values in our societies in Africa for lack of cultural heritage preservation and promotion. Today we are part of the global village whereby countries are considered to be individual houses in this village, were families should protect and educate their children not to become something else than what they were supposed to be as family's believe and culture reflection.

Countries that are not strong enough in preserving cultural heritage will start expressing themselves with borrowed cultural ethics that have no connotation with our African background hence, disorder in our societies. Our children have their mind set on foreign horizons, internet and face book creating link with various people or organizations in the world and they learn things grown up people never experienced in their infant and teenage times. Thus, they become unruly, violent and do *unbelievable things*. Most of them consider our African cultural heritage as things of the past, rudimentary, primitive, archaic and childish and no sense.

We are Namibian

What makes us Namibians? Is it the geographical boundaries? The national cultural identity of a country is *not only seen in the geographical boundaries*, but perhaps more in what the nation contains in terms of:

- Native languages;
- Costumes/outfit;
- Particularities of songs and dance;
- Traditional architecture and technology;
- Beverage and dishes;
- Rituals (weddings, traditional healings, cattle exhibition, ritual before and after hunting and fishing, names given to our children and domestic animals, the way we cry for our lost ones and many more); and
- Labour(Cultivation and harvesting).

As part of the National heritage and identity of the Nation, these enumerated cultural aspects are expressed in the African traditional music, which is a *medium of communication* in daily life and also seen as a mode of education in a broad since in the African traditional societies.

The understanding of traditional music and dance

What should be understood is the fact that traditional music and dance should never be compared to *learned arts*. It should be understood and taught according to its own

rules. Thus, comparing both traditional music and dance and learned arts, leads to an incorrect judgment, because people who are involved in rural areas cannot disassociate themselves from music and dance which is in fact part of them. They live with it as part of their cultural identity, in uniformity with the way of life they live in.

Philosophy and spirituality in performance

In the African traditional society, the human conscience attaches meaning and values, the true reality and proper nature in the traditional music and dance, covering various activities as supernatural power, influencing life condition of the indigenous people. All performances are linked to specific world of ideas, spirit in terms of moral and ethics, beliefs. In this case, African traditional music and dance provides a certain way of life and human structure, only Ethnomusicology can make it easier for our understanding and bring it closer to us, even when they are no longer in practice.

No understanding of human existence will be integrally seized without the understanding of the whole life itself. The understanding of the traditional music and dance will never be achieved if we only limit ourselves to study the trend, styles, genres and forms of artistic expression, but at the same time to study not only arts, but also the author and performers, the entire universe of ideas, gestures, beliefs, through the reflection or condition of which the respective art is created. The study should also deal with geographic, economic and political environment the author lives in.

African traditional music and dance deal with human being's complexity, where songs are created, inseparable with the life of the society. African Traditional music and dance is a total expression in diversity in all walks of life of the indigenous communities.

Characteristics of the Namibian traditional music and dance

The most popular way of producing music in Namibia is vocal. Singing dominates in most traditional and contemporary music performances. In general the Namibian traditional song is in the form of short melody, answered in the form of chorus repeating after the main singer as solo vocal, the style is called "call and response". Traditionally voices may have little variations sometimes, in regard to ethnic groups. Female different voices are observed in different cultural areas, including vibrating and trembling tones especially in North West of the country.

In the universal Western system, there is a notion of scale that consists of 5 tones and 2 half or semitones, however this reality is not seen in most of African traditional music including Namibia, except the Oshiwambo one that was arranged in the western way due to the influence of Christianity. Among the "Khoekhoe" community the scale is based on 4 tones and 5 tones for Setswana and Thimbukushu speaking communities. In traditional music, the melody has to follow the line and pitch of the word not to lose the meaning.

Rhythmic patterns may connect you with various occasions. Traditional drums and other instruments are used in this regard, for the transmission of message related to a wedding, social evening, cattle exhibition, traditional healing, gatherings, and even in times of danger to protect the communities.

The African way of dancing differs from the western way of dancing. The majority of Europeans has a tendency of dancing on the feet balls as individual or couple, this influence came from the classical performance in the communities and theatre practices. Africans dance with their feet flat on the ground. In most cases the clapping of hands takes place during the dance together or without drums.

In Namibia drums are used in traditional music, this popular instrument performs in solo, duo or trio. The players of this instrument have to learn first the drum that accompanies dancers in general before they learn the others. Each of these drums has different pattern when performing together but represent every good unit that provides joy to the dancers. *It is also important to note that the lead drum some time assists the main dancer in his or her movements as he or she improvises.*

The peasant and his arts

This is something that the author has observed that, when conducting a research related to Ethnomusicology in most part of Africa, people in rural areas do not open fast in giving information that the researcher is looking for. They fear the learned person who suggests sometimes things that may be detriment to the performances or in their entire social life. They also fear a learned person because there are some performances linked to the hidden universe or beliefs that they do not want to reveal to anybody who is not part of the family or community.

These secret performances are even sometimes restricted to some members in the same communities due to ages, gender and behaviour. Therefore, getting information of this nature needs guidance. The attitude of the researcher is observed and analysed, and mind you these are not naïve and they may want to know the purpose of the research before they open up, because there have been false information sometimes in the way of reporting or ill-information in the publications on some native communities or tribes.

The indigenous people do not want to see their culture changed, they wish to see it surviving as inherited from their ancestors and assume continuity. To try have changed the arts and culture of rural communities will be an abomination. It is a way of life, a mirror or reflection of themselves through arts and culture.

Traditional society

It is considered to be not effective in terms of education and conservancy, for the simple reason that it is in the memory of people.

Contemporary society

It is effective in terms of education and conservancy. It has an established mechanism consisting of libraries, computers, e-mail, websites and the system can be controlled. Although traditional society is not structured like the contemporary one, the knowledge it contains is transmitted from generation to generations. There is a very good structure or mechanism in this society with a foundation made by various people who are tasked with duties for education to take place and assume continuity. (M Mans, p.2). Thus, there is a conflict between the two, the contemporary society of learned people trying to ignore or suppress the traditional society in its endeavour of protecting or preserving its cultural heritage that it cherishes so much, considered to be things of no value.

Acquisition of knowledge in traditional society (Music and Dance)

Musicianship

Musicianship should be understood as an overall knowledge about music. Musicians who are limited only to their instruments of specialization lack musicianship, as it deals with music theory in general, from its definition to counter point harmony works, the understanding of others instruments and their use as part of the ensemble. In the African traditional music and dance, musicianship is evaluated differently. A recognized musician should be a good performer *both in instrument, dance and sometimes poetry. A person who went through training, capable of composing new songs for the approbation of the*

entire community of which he/she is a member. A performer in the society has to develop personal qualities as a peacemaker, keeper of the collective memory and cement of the society. It involves acting as a wandering librarian, mediator and news services as well as entertainer (M. Mans, 2002).

Apprenticeship

According to the Oxford dictionary apprenticeship represent the period of being an apprentice who is a young person who has agreed to work for a skilled employer for a fixed period, getting low wages, in return for being taught that person's skill. This also applies in African traditional society, whereby young people are taken to a master to access knowledge in music and dance and related activities or a mentor for advice related to a certain skill. During this period of training they do not only learn the skill of a particular instrument or dance, but also the entire knowledge of what is expected of a musician in the society as mentioned above. This transmission of knowledge can be accessed within the families' home which are also known as musical families. Young people learn from their parents and in return they have to transmit this good reputation in the community, to their children to ensure continuity. Thus, the houses of the master, mentor, family musical house, become sites of performances where music takes place all the times. (M Mans 2006). Apprenticeship can also be extended to a broad spectrum, involving the whole community. During communal performance people dance together (F H Tsoubaloko 2003, p.8). Some learn by observing others, at this stage music and dance become inclusive, even children can dance together with adults. There is a say in Africa that children learn songs and dance from their mothers' womb. The African ladies sing during daily occupations, they are energized when they do so. For a pregnant lady, these songs influence the baby inside including the la-la-bus sang by the mother when they cry as born babies. All this represents the preparedness of the child to adapt himself/herself fast to different rhythmic music patterns of the society.

Archetype and moulding

As much as the builder would want to build a house, it starts with moulding the shape and size of the bricks needed for such construction, until it materializes. Similarly young people are also seen as a foundation of the society in continuity. This has to do with education, although informal but it should be seen as effective, because for sure the knowledge has been transmitted through a solid foundation by means of oral transmission and learn by doing it. Adults in African tradition societies will want to educate their children to take over from them to assume continuity. Archetype represents an original model idea on what other people should copy. In African traditional societies, the attitudinal, archetypal and moulding vision of the elders, is to educate young people assume continuity after they have left. Their vision in these young people has to do with a concern of what will happen in case the society they have left turns into something else, therefore moulding them becomes essential.

Elderly people in the African traditional societies fear learned people, who sometimes do not comprehend and recognize the reality in the African traditional societies. Our children born in contemporary society see life in the traditional society as archaic, things of the past, things of no value, rudimentary and childish. They have their mindset on foreign horizons, and the native creation is always suppressed. We should not repudiate all what comes from the West, especially those that elevate our living condition, just for sake of protecting our National heritage, even when these aspects are not relevant, but also we should not give up all our African traditional knowledge that identifies us as Africans, to please the West. There is a decline taking place in Namibia, an enormous amount of cultural values

has vanished and those that are still in existence, if not taken care of, Namibia will remain without anything in terms of cultural identity of the country. There is a need of attitude change in this regard, if not the slogan of "a country without its National heritage is none existing nation", will be in vain.

Vision of the Government of the Republic of Namibia on arts and culture

After independence, the Republic of Namibia has achieved a lot in terms of arts and culture. Officials and leaders of the country believe that the country identity is rooted in its people and culture as stipulated in the constitution. For the fact that conflict and suppression were at the order of the day during colonial era, and the disappearance of such forms of evils from the map of Namibia is a major achievement for the country. The recognition of the individual communities and their culture is the diverse beauty and a symbol of reconciliation in the country. The sense of human dignity for the communities that were excluded has been restored. The promotion of heritage values and cultural awareness is fundamental and requires special knowledge as far as the culture of the majority in the country is concerned. Unlike the colonial period, the Government of the republic of Namibia strongly believes that a nation is one that shares a common heritage.

Thus, after independence an important task was given to the relevant Ministry dealing with arts and culture, to first discover and acknowledge the values and diversities of Namibia and take step to safeguard this non-renewable resource for present and future generations. Cultural revival and promotion have been and are still taking place to enhance unity and National awareness within various communities in the country. The Government of the Republic of Namibia is also aware of many of the citizens who have their minds still colonized and who believe that the Western culture is superior to all other culture on earth. The Western cultural hegemony is still simmering underground in Namibia and people should know that a Nation without own culture is like a dead Nation without identity. Culture makes people to be what they are not other people.

The Namibian culture in diversity is a pride of the Nation. The cultural development in Namibia is at a crossroad. In other words, the country is confronted by the need to have respect for the more traditional ways on the one hand and a desire to succeed in a modern technology advanced society on the other hand; the need to put together the best of the old ways with the best of the new. There is a need to prepare the children for the working world that is dominated by a Western industrial characteristic, while retaining a strong sense of their Namibianness. The success in our modern Namibia needs not to be at the expenses of our African or Namibian identity. This point is very much essential for Namibia, in the struggle to develop the Nation's culture.

To be able to plan an effective direction for the future, we must first know where the country came from, what were the country's strengths and weakness. Namibia must first try by all means to discover its diversities of culture in order to select from the elements only those which are still compatible within the new national shared vision of Namibia: One Nation, Reconciliation, Justice, Fairness, Peace and Hardworking. Offending cultural elements from both African and Western cultures should be modified or reshaped or even dropped for ever in order to unify the country's various communities into one Namibia one Nation.

Namibia should be very careful because culture is a delicate and hyper sensitive issue. All decisions concerning culture in Namibia must go hand in hand with sincere consultations

and negotiations. From the Namibian historical things, the country has to bring forth the new which should go with the development of our time, the development of the Namibian society, the demands, needs, requirements, expectations, and aspirations of the Namibian people.

The Namibian Nation should be encouraged to be objective and fair in dealing with cultural issues. The country should not negate all essential Western cultures for the sake of *glorifying the African culture or Africans must not give up all of their African culture for the sake of trying to become Westerners.*

Young people in Namibia must be encouraged to learn from and make use of all the relevant outstanding and advanced cultural, artistic, technological and other achievements of the Western and other Nations of the world. *Over many centuries the Western Nations and others have gained glorious achievements and accumulated valuable artistic, cultural and technological experiences from which the Namibian, as a young Nation, can learn many things.*

It is a pity that many of the Namibian people do connect culture to only dancing and clapping of hands and stamping of feet. The mentioned activities are elements of culture but culture as such includes many others elements like morals, ethics, values systems, languages, songs, place names, names of people, names of domestic animals, traditional oral history, traditional ritual ceremonies at birth, marriage, funeral and harvest, technology, education, architecture, medicine, laws, traditional religion, etc. This is the mission assigned to the Directorate of National heritage and culture in the Ministry dealing with arts and culture, as part of the manifesto of the ruling party SWAPO.

The Directorate will investigate and research all the mentioned cultural elements in order to be able as a Nation to carry on with those elements which are relevant to the National shared vision of one Namibia one Nation, reconciliation, justice, fairness, peace and stability. H N Diaz (1998, p.2).

Interest of ethnomuskology in eco-tourism industry

The recent declaration of the Ministry dealing with tourism, to introduce arts performances in all the tourism destinations in order to improve the living condition of our indigenous people is recommendable. However there are good and bad aspects that we should be aware of and they are as follow:

Good aspects

Foreign currencies for Namibia

- Poverty alleviation through arts performances
- Good infrastructure (Building, transport, roads clinics etc.)

When tourism destination becomes vibrant, the government and companies involved bring development closer to the people in terms of health facilities, school in the vicinity, transport etc. as the venue generates money. People in the country and foreigners who visit the venue, do not come on hazardous tour, they have been preparing this visit for sometimes, and money has been saved for the purpose. So, the more you propose different services to the visitors the more you gain money at the venue, there will be no remorse of getting the money from them because tourism is all about spending money on a trip of such nature.

Performing and visual arts are part of the services proposed and provided by the venue. *The indigenous people might be remunerated by the management of the venue or they*

can generate funds for themselves by means of entrance fees charged or donations by visitors, after they have watched a performance or by selling visual arts at the venue.

Bad aspects

- Language erosion
- Performances are no longer real
- Environment degradation
- Diseases
- Prostitution.

The first notorious aspect on bad aspects is seen on the erosion of the indigenous languages adopting or incorporating foreign languages words on the detriment of the *original ones*. *This phenomenon occurs due to unavoidable permanent contact between the host and visitors' contact.*

Secondly is the lucrative aspect behind the exercise of ritual performances that are no longer real. They become simple, vague and meaningless.

The third aspect is attached to prostitution. Visitors may have different ambitions and with foreign currencies that they possess, converted to the local one, they have enough money to entertain any desire they may think of. Some of these visitors might have been diagnosed with the transmittable diseases such as gonorrhea, syphilis and AIDS etc. If the indigenous population are not informed and educated on these issues, they might find themselves in a situation whereby the little money they made will serve for treatment which sometimes will not be enough and the situation becomes a burden for the family, the government, NGOs' and the community at large.

Conclusion

Although informal, the African educational system is effective and has produced positive results in societies. It does not use libraries and computers to store the information, no text books and exercise books or inspectors. Therefore, undermining the African traditional society leads to a narrow, one sided judgment. *Many African leaders who have managed to blind both contemporary and African traditional knowledge have governed very well in their time of office, and became good model and legends and serve as archetype of their time and the future.*

There are people in the traditional societies who remind people about important events to take place and those that have manifested, even when they become things of past. Thus, the knowledge in the African societies is transmitted from generation to generations up to know. It represents a very good foundation, a structure that is now being challenged in terms of conflict between contemporary and traditional societies.

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