



# **CASTING OUT THE DEVIL IN PLURIMUSICING: DEALING WITH CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL SENSITIVITY, COMPLEXITY AND RESISTANCE**

**Emmanuel Kaghondi\***

Tumaini University Makumira

## **ABSTRACT**

The practice in multicultural music education is focused more on diversity in music, that is to say, utilizing musical content representing diverse cultures. Its target is to provide students with opportunities to explore different types of music, rather than deal with students' emotions regarding or reception of the music they learn. There is limited information on how teachers understand diverse cultural backgrounds, beliefs, political sensitivity, complexity, and resistance on the part of students, that may result from the music they teach. The purpose of this paper is to share two case studies from Tanzania about the experiences of teachers in dealing with issues of cultural, religious or political tensions in incorporating diverse music experiences. Understanding the dynamics of those issues will redefine the purpose of a diverse music curriculum as well as contribute to the rethinking of a post-modern, meaningful *plurimusicing* curriculum.

**Key words:** Indigenous Music Education, Teachers' Education, Curriculum Development, Multiculturalism

## **(De) constructing the meaning**

The word 'plurimusicing' is used in this paper as a combination of two words: 'plural' and 'musicing' in the context of a diverse music education experience. The concept of 'pluri' is explored instead of 'multi' to essentialize the horizontal and multiple relations of

music where each one is equal, contrary to 'multi' that denotes vertical and hierarchical relations between diverse types of music with one regarded as dominant. Hence, the scholarly use of the word 'multiculturalism' in my perspective advocates institutions to expand their music repertoire having at their

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\*Author e-mail  
kagho001@umn.edu

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heart a Eurocentric curriculum in which non-western music is not necessarily designed to acquire an equal position in a canonical music curriculum (Madrid 2017, p. 126). In the 'pluri' concept, as used in this paper, the search is for a theory for a curriculum that is 'homogeneous diverse' or 'heterogeneous unified', where 'chaos- multitude' and not 'supremacy' is the center of the discourse. Whenever used in this paper, these two words reflect the distinction clarified above.

The word 'musicing' is borrowed from Small (1998) to emphasize the dynamics in music practice instead of a 'static-nominal' perception of music. Musicking, with a 'k' according to Small (1998), is "to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing" (p. 9). Therefore, Small speaks of music as the art of doing – a verb instead of a 'thing' or a 'noun' representation of music. However, in this paper, I use the word 'musicing' without a 'k' to denote the 'nature' of a total persona of music as it encounters and interacts with human individuality or collectivity.

In the scholarship, diverse/ multicultural music is not necessarily understood beyond the European perception of classical music, where it is not designed to acquire an equal position in a canonical music curriculum. Classical music, mostly perceived as a 'noun' (in the author's opinion), is somewhat exotic, extrinsic to and detached from humankind. The focus seems to be more on the quality and complexity of sounds that are aesthetically filtered to be perceivable only through the ears, while detached from other parts of the body. In 'musicing,' music is not necessarily from 'outside-in', but is an expression or a reflection of one's self and thus, a full participant of humanity in formation.

In Tanzania (and greater Africa, I believe),

a human is not a human in isolation but a performer and also, a performer and yet a performance of his/her context (read also Calliers 1998, p. 66). Dargie (1996) tells how an understanding of 'human' among the Xhosa tribe in South Africa is attached to other humans and to the land (p. 33) – bound to and sharing fully in the life of the community and nature (p. 35). As Dargie has indicated, music can be perceived beyond sound. In some African cultures, one's 'being' is found in the call of music from ancestors through the power of a supreme being (p. 34).

This understanding shapes the meaning and practice of music within one's self. In this perception, both music and people participate in the making of humanity in a complex way. The search for how one affects the other is, in this understanding, a 'chicken and egg' question. From another perspective, the impact of cultural structures on sonic structures and vice versa might support the idea that music is embedded in culture, not neutral and unfree from its makers. Plurimusicing is therefore an encounter of music and people, where one stands with or against the other, to form each other.

When I was applying for my graduate studies to a graduate school in the States some years ago, I found myself in a dilemma as to whether I should specialize in Music Education or Ethnomusicology. Somehow in my application, I succeeded in squeezing in both degree plans: Music Education/ Ethnomusicology, not because I did not distinguish between the two, but because I felt that I belonged to both. Most of us in Tanzania grow up in traditionally rich cultures, and we go to pursue music degrees after we have mastered advanced 'music' skills from our cultures that we learned from our grandparents. We perform our folk/ traditional music not because of its sonic character, but because of its meaning rooted in our cultures. We are therefore ethnomusicologists by

accident. In Ethnomusicology, I was (and I am still) interested in the ethnographic approach to the embeddedness of music and culture, which music education does not offer, but I wanted to become a better music teacher too, so that necessitated studying music education. After submitting my application, the University contacted me asking what my first choice was. At that point, I had to let go of 'ethnomusicology' and opt to specialize in Music Education instead. However, I still consider myself as an ethnomusicologist by accident and a Music Educator by choice, and I have always enjoyed combining them as they work together very well.

At the University in the States, I was hoping to join a dance ensemble as part of my music degree, but was told dance was not even part of the Music School. I was very disappointed to learn that this part of the planet does not consider dance as music! It is still a strange concept to me. Honestly, how do you detach sounds from body movements? If sounds are just for the ears, what do other parts of the body do? This concept was strange to me.

### Case Study

I went back to Tanzania after my studies to teach at a University, with an interest of developing a music curriculum. Now, consider the following two case studies that triggered my inquiry:

Lingwana was a music student at the College in Tanzania. He came from the Maasai ethnic group - formally trained moran-warriors. Like many other students, he was not just proud of his culture, but he was also conscious and sensitive to his cultural identity, and possessed knowledge of his traditions. His reading for a music degree never made him forget who he was or where he was from. It was clear that he had brought all of that with him to the University. He was Lingwana; a student, Maasai, and a believer.

During an African music/ dance concert,

I realized that Lingwana was not part of an event that was mandatory for all students to participate in. Moreover, this particular dance was from his own Maasai ethnic group. The teacher who taught it was not from the Maasai culture, but he knew enough to teach it. He was, however, a little creative. He had re-arranged two Maasai dances into one dance. One song/ part was from a warriors' dance (which is a male dance) and another part was from a women's prayer song. They all formed a unified production where instead of having two different groups of male and female students performing different songs/ dances separately, they both participated in the same combined dance.

To most of us who were not from the Maasai culture, this was a wonderful fusion, put together artistically and elegantly. But to Lingwana, this was an insult, and he refused to participate in a production that he called a music 'bastard'. "I'm a Moran – I am a man and not a girl...this is a female dance", he said to me. He was not only upset, but also ready to fail the class rather than participate in such kind of music/ dance. For him, this was not a matter of participating in Maasai music, but of representing the Maasai cultural identity in music. It was therefore not an issue of sonic understanding in an intellectual sense, but of 'performing the people (culture)'. In this case, one must also realize the circumstance where the teacher is an outsider, while a student is a cultural-bearer. How many teachers are prepared to handle such situations of resistance? How do teachers prepare class material that go beyond theoretical teaching concepts? How many teachers in *plurimusicing* classrooms even consider the depth of cultural sensitivity in their repertoire?

In the second case study, some years later in my career, I met a girl from Zanzibar who in this paper I will call Jamim. She was going to drop out of one of the music schools because she felt the music they learned was against her

Islamic faith. Despite she being an amazing musician with an elegant voice that cuts the edge of taarab music, the music curriculum could not accommodate her beliefs. "I wish the programme was designed differently but what we are learning is contradicting my faith", she said. "Even my parents won't let me do it", she added. "What are you going to do?" I asked sympathetically. "I will just quit, and probably consider another career", she said. "But you are such a fine musician!", I responded. "Yes, but you don't understand", she said. This conversation poses a question: In what way could the music programme accommodate students such as Jamim without jeopardizing the security of her beliefs? Is music education not intended to be accessible to all students from diverse beliefs?

While pondering on the case of Jamim, I recalled another story of a music student that I will name Jesca. As part of the requirements of her music programme, Jesca was asked to participate in an African traditional music ensemble which she resisted, but had to as the class was mandatory. She however, insisted that "I am a Christian; I am not supposed to shake my hips! This music is against my beliefs...". "Well, you have to forget about that for now, Jesca, because it will affect your grades", she was told. Jesca, knowing that she wanted to acquire a music degree to graduate, was compelled to take the class.

I happened to meet Jesca some years later, at her graduation. With excitement, I approached her and asked how she was planning to use the degree. She looked at me with emotion and replied, "I will never ever perform that s\*\*\* again. It was a 'Devil' practice... they forced me to shake my back against my will – I did it to finish my degree... that is it, I will pretend it never happened". What a disappointment and wastage of a student's time! Now let us ask ourselves, if Jesca (and many other students who never

speak out) was not considering to utilize her musical knowledge, what was the point of all that music education? Or if 'music' becomes a "devil" in the way of a student's learning, what is the purpose of music programmes?

### **Plurimusicing as a meaningful practice**

Analyzing these case studies, it is clear that none is about music skills, but of matters relating to norms or students' spirituality. They are not complaints about the quality of the music they learn, but about the spiritual 'function' and 'meaning' of what they learn. While the current trend in the music curriculum reflects what Lundquist (2010) sees as ethnomusicology-music education intersection, it should actually be the search for meaning. Campbell (1992) informs how "music teachers are finding new musical pathways to the development of their students' musical understanding, skills and values" (p.33). This, according to Campbell, requires delving into a broader and deeper meaning of music in its culture as well as "paying more attention to how [the music they teach] can be made more meaningful to students" (p.33). This argument supports an increased call for a music curriculum that allows creativity, diversity, and integration that requires pedagogic approach(es) "that are borrowed from musical cultures outside the realms of Western art music" (Sarath, Myers and Campbell 2017, p. 57; also Mapana, Campbell, Roberts and Mena 2016). Writing such curriculum depends on a multitude of chaotic choices of diverse music.

Currently, music from different cultures are adopted through a Eurocentric "aesthetic imperative" lens that focuses on the sonorous quality of the music than its meaning (Bradley 2012, p. 193). Although many institutions try to expand their music repertoire, the European canon is still at the heart of their programmes, while the inclusion of 'other' music traditions is more of a "tokenism" practice (Madrid 2017, p. 126). In order to achieve what Campbell

(1992) defines as the development of a “multiethnic consciousness”, teachers have to engage in the “study of the music traditions of as many cultures as they can manage” (p.41). By doing so, teachers will not ignore the role of such music among students. There is still a gap between the music we teach and students’ holistic learning.

While outside Africa the discourse on teaching ventures beyond a historically established Western music art, in Tanzania, it is an inquiry into the disconnect between a cultural music experience and collegiate/ formal music education, and the meaningfulness of the music practices to students (Mapana 2007). The intersection between ethnomusicology (where the function and meaning of music can be observed in its context) and music education (where the pedagogical material can be adopted, analyzed, and transmitted) is already present in Tanzanian traditional music. The concept of *ngoma* (dance/ music practice) as discussed by Campbell (1992) explains the musical embodiment and syncretism not only of its people, but also of itself (p. 20).

*Ngoma* is not ‘music’ in the Western knowledge, but a socio-cultural construction of the meaning embedded in music practice as it encounters its people in the context. It is rather a musical expression revealed in the ‘doing’ of the musical event where people, music, and social life are glued together in a complex way. Everything in the ‘doing’-musicing of *ngoma* – is part of ‘performing the culture’ and it is important in its minimal role. Whether it is the smell of cow dung, dust, a forest wind, babies’ cries, women sweating in the kitchen, men’s cough spit, etc., none can be edited out in the *ngoma* event. This is an authentic expression of people’s real life in such a musical event. To understand *ngoma* as an integrated-interdisciplinary practice requires more than musical skills. It requires deep ethnographic and cultural knowledge to

decode its function and meaning. *Ngoma* is an example of how music plays both a pragmatic as well as a cognitive function while shaping musical skills, mental processing, and cultural beliefs. If music in this view is fully ingrained in students’ culture, how could one teach it in class without considering its political or religious implications? Programmes at universities produce teachers, but:

- What knowledge do teachers have of cultural, religious, and political diversity among students in the intercultural music classroom they teach?
- Through what ways do teachers advance that knowledge and understanding to provide a meaningful intercultural music experience?
- What cultural resources are available to teachers and in what ways do teachers make use of such resources, including students as ‘cultural bearers’, to investigate a better approach to meaningful intercultural music teaching?
- How do teacher training programmes prepare teachers to be adaptive to the music-cultural experiences of students?

Tanzania is a conflicted country in a music-cultural sense. First, it is a multicultural country of more than 120 ethnic groups, each speaking their own dialect and having different social structures. Music is hence diverse and to a certain extent, inaccessible. As a nation, though, Tanzania has no musical identity, and so representation of and access to all kinds of musical traditions can be limited and challenging. In terms of religious background, there are two Abrahamic religions: Christianity and Islam, both rooted in the soil of a traditional religion, which still has a significant number of followers in the country. Second, Tanzanians are unified by two main heritages: The colonial legacy that somewhat ‘nationalizes’ the cultures in terms of political-economy and ‘formal’ education, and the Swahili language that unifies and

extends communication and social interaction across all dialects.

Due to the above dualism, Tanzanians identify themselves by the internal principles of their cultures, while from the outside, they tend to adopt the contemporary way of interaction, acquiring knowledge, religious beliefs, and political experience. This duality forms a cultural-religious syncretism and parallelism that can be looked at as a privilege and a challenge for a '*glocal*', or diverse, music curriculum.

### **What can go wrong?**

Blacking (1973) in his *How Music is Man*, writes that music can be understood by "the prepared and receptive ears of people who have shared, or can share in some way, the cultural and individual experiences of its creators" (p. 54). This is because of the nature of music, which "confirms what is already present in society and culture" and therefore, positions students in an inseparable music-culture encounter (ibid). This music-culture-student belongingness is a cognitive phenomenon which according to Merriam (1964), is a matter of "a synthesis of cognitive processes which are present in culture and in the human body...[and] it expresses aspects of the experience of individuals in society" (p. 89). Teachers need proper knowledge of "what happens to the human beings who make [such] music" (p. 54).

Teachers must acknowledge that music does not belong to culture, but rather is culture itself. Our soundscapes shape our sonic perceptions, which forms a psychoacoustic loop of sonic generation at the same time. This is because people not only form their culture, but also are the products of the same culture (Cilliers 1998, p. 66).

It is impossible to separate the meaningfulness of music from its makers (at least in Tanzanian culture), as it is the embodied practice complexed in the 'being' of students.

To students who are "learners-cultural-bearers" (Feld 1987), music is not something that happens to them, but is something that contributes to who they are. It is a part of their 'cultural being,' part of their 'religiosity' and part of their 'political system'. They come to class not just to learn music (as a noun), but to bring in their full participation in the exercise. This is holistic participation; everything that makes them who they are.

Music teachers in multicultural music education have benefited from musical material collected by ethnomusicologists that are more of an ethnographic rather than pedagogic nature. Therefore, they have to re-orchestrate the tunes to fit the needs of the class. The curricular practice tends to capture the sounds and transcribe audio recordings, or re-arrange scores to fit their music curriculum. In this process, folk melodies face the danger of distortion as they are ripped off their soil. As Lundquist (2010) points out, this rendition is scary and inauthentic. The above practice has therefore led to a type of music that is similar to what Campbell once called a Chinese music unrecognizable by Chinese community (1992).

### **A 'dialogic curriculum' proposal**

By acknowledging the organic nature of a *plurimusicing* classroom, music-cultural bearers, adopters, and learners must ponder on a curriculum that resolves the tension in a meaningful and yet less compromised way. The ideal approach might begin with what Feld (1987) once phrased as "dialogic editing", suggesting the process of re-constructing ethnographic material after being performed (or perceived by students), in order to refine any misconceptions of communication or perceptions (p. 191). In this approach, a teacher approaches the cultural music as "an ethnographer-educator" to learn about the culture of that music. During this learning process, students are 'learners-cultural-bearers' because of the knowledge they

have about the cultural music they learn. The informants/ communities participate in the process as the 'participant-cultural-bearers' or (informants/ educators).

Students will work with each other to learn music of a certain area or culture, depending on the aspect of the class or the particular topic. During this collaborative process, both sets of students – cultural insiders and outsiders – will negotiate their meeting point with the help of a teacher who also invites negotiation and dialogue, starting with him/herself (Campbell 2005). Berger (2008) is of the opinion that the primary role of a teacher is to “understand how music works from the perspective of those who make it and listen to it” (p. 64). Wink (2001) has also convinced that “it is absolutely impossible to teach without learning and to learn without teaching” (p. 103; read also Shor & Freire 1987, p. 33). This is what Bell Hooks (1994) calls a liberating pedagogy when citing Freire's view, that “knowledge [is] a field in which we all are labor” (p. 14). These statements make both teachers and students aware that they are all in a collaborative learning journey, without necessarily one being above the other.

This dialogic music editing process puts a teacher in a vulnerable position because s/he is not an insider of the knowledge anymore. In a class where the teacher might not be the primary source of knowledge (a knowledgeable-outsider) or where students are the insiders and a teacher is the outsider, what role will the teacher play? As a teacher, acknowledging students' prior knowledge of cultural music will not only empower the students, but also lead to questions such as; whose interpretation? whose values? whose world? whose meaning? In Freire's view, knowing the subject is “not the sole possession of the teacher who gives knowledge to students in a gracious gesture. Instead, the object mediates the two cognitive subjects. “The object to be known is put on the

table between the two subjects of knowing” (1987, p. 99). In the 'dialogic music editing' model suggested by this paper, 'the object to be known' is put between three subjects – the teacher (ethnographer-educator), students (learners-cultural-bearers), and informants/ community (participant-cultural-bearers). During a negotiation, the question of whether music should be brought into class or whether the class should follow the music where it happens, must also be addressed.

One way of this model that somehow works in Tanzania is:

- A student who in this case is a 'learner-cultural-bearer' teaches a dance/ music to the peers.
- Over the course of learning, the teacher (and students) find a way to invite a community group to partner in the 'teachers-participants-observers' role. The role of the group will be towards an opportunity to match up their skills with cultural insiders.
- If possible, students (and the teacher) should visit community groups to participate-observe music in the context.
- Any misconception will continually be edited out until the music is meaningfully learned.
- The class may prepare a performance where members of the community are invited and they provide feedback afterwards.
- After the performance, rehearsals can continue to be adjusted because these dialogues continue until any possible misconceptions are cleared. This process is also known as phenomenological reduction, which is “the process of returning to the essence of the experience to derive the inner structure or meaning in and of itself” (Merriam and Tisdell 2016, p. 27).
- A teacher is entitled to set up a space where all students (including those who are

not from this particular culture) can discuss their beliefs or norms about participation. This includes providing learning alternatives/flexibility such as playing a certain instrument instead of another, or one role instead of another where there is no damage to one's beliefs or views.

In this model, a teacher is not only concerned about 'music', but also about how the interdisciplinary knowledge, skills, and music studied will impact students in the long term. On the other hand, the process gives students a hands-on and autonomous learning environment, while music is approached in a meaningful way in its context.

Another variant of the 'dialogic-curriculum' approach is where the teacher is a music insider (knowledgeable-culture-bearer) and students are the music-outsiders. In this context, students are learning music from a culture which is not their own. It is uncommon for multicultural classrooms, given the diversity of music traditions and students, to collect authentic material from all cultures. The reality is, music educators adopt their own material and arrangements that lack cultural integrity and authenticity (Lundquist 2010, p. 36). This second dialogic approach tested by the researcher is aimed at negotiating with the practical learning-teaching context for the search of a meeting point between authenticity and compromise. Since in this case a teacher (as an insider-cultural-bearer) is the authority (at least I hope so) of that particular music, the achievement depends on the time spent, and the editing and learning environment that will be facilitated.

- The teacher will arrange the song in a less compromised way to adapt to the nature of students and resources. The instruments used will be closely related to original instruments and comfortable to the teacher. For example, marimba with xylophones, fiddle with violin, or bamboo flute with or flute, etc.

- The pedagogic approach must be carefully negotiated. For example, in music such as Tanzanian (African), the learning approach might not necessarily be of 'participating in order to learn music' but of 'learning the participatory music,' where 'interactive' skills might be more important than individual skills.

- A teacher will observe students' skill levels to accommodate all in a communized learning setting. Depending on the diverse skill levels and experiences, each rehearsal will give the teacher an opportunity to re-think the teaching-learning process, re-score material, etc. in order to accommodate the contextual reality. For example, in a piece where a pentatonic Marimba is originally played in octaves, a teacher might decide that it should be played by two separate xylophones, a good example being between equal temperament and unequal temperament instruments where the playing techniques must also change to acquire the proper sounds or pitch.

As long as diverse music is shared in intercultural-multicultural classrooms, it becomes vulnerable and fragile. The remaining question is: to what extent should a compromise be made, and who should be the authority for the adjustments so that the music is meaningfully shared? In these two suggested models, whether one has the authority or not, the negotiations are between all parties involved. While the cultural-bearers (including the teacher) provide the authentic music material, it is the students who offer the learning reality and/ or the teacher who merges/ facilitates the process. The dialogic model is not concerned solely with teaching diverse music with consciousness (Campbell, 1992), but is concerned with teaching for meaningfulness and investing in students' music-cultural experience.

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