

Understanding Ethnomusicology within a South African Context – A discourse of African Musicology and Culture

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Abstract: This research paper discusses the difference between Ethnomusicology and African Musicology with reference to the work of Professor Geoff Mapaya. The importance of culture and identity within music and the cultural differences one explore through music within a South African context with the views shared within a Western Perspective. The objective of this paper is to clearly underpin the two separate entities and to enlighten future researchers how to differentiate between the two, giving rise to a new era for music scholars to explore, research and elaborate. It is a discourse of African Musicology and Culture within a South African Context.

Keywords: Culture, Ethnomusicology, Musicology, Western Perspectives.

I. INTRODUCTION

Over decades the researcher questioned his own abilities to distinguish the true difference between *African Musicology* and *Ethnomusicology*. If one concludes a survey the results will probably reveal that most music students, who studied the scientific study of music was rather puzzled by the concept of *Ethnomusicology*? Being a South African and having studied musicology as part my Bachelors of Music in Education Degree, all students were exposed to this phenomena, which then was defined as the study of African Indigenous Instruments. Here the classification for Membranophones, Aerophones, Chordophones and Idiophones were explained in details with various examples of the associated instruments. There is a misunderstanding of ‘Ethnomusicology’ and ‘African musicology’ as explained by researchers Agawu (1992, 2009), Kidula (2006) and Mapaya (2012, 2013, 2014).

The misunderstanding of whether to truly understand ethnomusicology through a Western Perspective as highlighter by researcher Agawu (2007) with his article entitled “*To cite or not to cite? [:] Confronting the Legacy of (European) Writing on African Music*”, which forms the basis of this article and argument. Agawu (2007: 254) stated:

The current citation [as one would define, understand, comprehend or even] practice in Western scholarship is ideologically loaded, being far more suited to a written economy than a primarily oral culture in which knowledge is preserved in memory and disseminated through repeated performance. The impact of orality on musical scholarship should be more closely investigated; African scholars have all too often become informants rather than theorists of their own traditions. It is therefore proposed that the routine citation of a body of scholarship developed without Africa's historically-specific intellectual needs and ambitions in mind should in fact be discouraged.

Obviously one can argue that when you read something, which has been researched in depth within a ‘*Western Perspective*’ that one has to be extra careful of not being disillusioned or even more confused by what the researchers are trying to portray through their own writings and ideologies representing his/her understanding of what other researchers have written. This forms the core foundation of research and how we perceive things in the real world. Culture preserves a level of identity, whether you are White, Coloured, Indian, Asian or even Black. Has this been problematic and is this an understatement of whether there is a differentiation between ‘African musicology’ and ‘Ethnomusicology’? These two complete entities one can reflect within your own writings. As natural enquiries it is imperative to read several scholars

works and reference correctly leaving us with the unknown notion of whether their work truly represents what they have researched?

The basic aim of research is often to learn to understand phenomena. Karma (2007: 82) noted:

A satisfactory combination of homogeneity on the one hand and real-world validity on the other could be reached by defining musical aptitude as the ability to hear patterns in sets of sounds, that is, auditory structuring ability (Karma, 1973, 1976, 1984, 1985, 1994, see also Boyle, 1992: 249). The word "structuring" is used to stress the idea that the process is active, something the perceiver does. Instead of just receiving "the structure," the listener uses his or her ability, personality and experience as well as cues given by the stimulus to hear one of the numerous structures a reasonably long sequence of sounds allows.

When you listen to different sounds whether played on an African instrument it depends how you interpret the music through auditory structuring and how you distinguish between the various tones being used. The research of Mapaya (2012, 2013, 2014), focused around interpreting these sounds and how you understand these musical melodies within an African context. Karma (2007: 82) hence reintegrates 'that when you listen to a particular piece of music one has to possess a level of music aptitude or understanding'. The researcher hopes to illustrate his own understanding of the conception 'African Music' through the work having researched those writings of prominent researchers including Agawu (2007), Blacking (1967), Pewa (2005), and Ngema (2007).

II. THE AIMS AND SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

- To understand the difference between Ethnomusicology and African Musicology
- Be aware of the cultural differences one explore through music within a South African context and the views of those shared within a Western Perspective.

III. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ETHNOMUSICOLOGY AND AFRICAN MUSICOLOGY

In Western Civilization there is misconception with the understanding of *African Musicology* as highlighted by researchers (Mapaya, 2012, 2014) with his statement:

The concept indigenous African music interchangeable with indigenous music or African music refers to an aggregation of regionally, customary, culturally and ethnically constituted African musical practice. At the centre of this phenomenon are communities and cultural practitioners whose laborious efforts, despite the onslaught of the forces of colonialism and imperialism, have maintained its philosophical, spiritual and intellectual integrity. Encountered through the travels of early explorers and missionaries, indigenous African music had emerged as one of the key mediums through which insight into the culture and religiosity of Africa(ns) was achieved (Mapaya, 2014: 269).

The researcher agrees with the above statement as the main objective of any cultural heritage is to preserve the customs and traditions. Your cultural background contributes to the person you are. Your upbringing and believes, what you morally have been exposed predetermines your outcomes whether spiritually, religiously or even culturally! What your belief system emancipate is correct and right according to your overall traditions. For example, in Hinduism there are just around 330 million different Gods associated. As a child you taught to pray and respect as mentioned by the Vedic scriptures which lists that there are 33 types of deities, which is outlined by Lord Krishna in Bhagavad Gita (www.quora.com). The transition from 33 to 330 million came to surface after the Upanishadic Age. The count went to millions in an attempt to poetically express the infinitude of the universe and how that was being interpreted (www.quoro.com).

The following diagrams (figure 1) below explains the analogy of African Musicology as highlighted by Professor Geoff Mapaya with his article entitled: "*African Musicology: Towards Defining and Setting Parameters of the Study of the*

Indigenous African Music” (Mapaya, 2014:620).

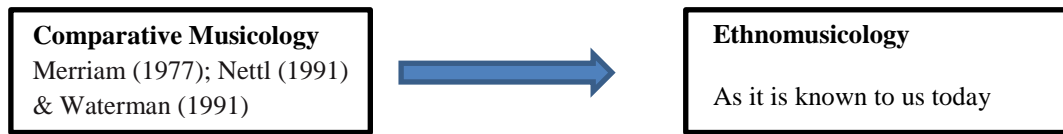


Figure 1: The Analogy of Comparative and Ethnomusicology

Musicology, which emphasize that the Western Civilization negates away from popular or even folk music (Connery, 2007; Mapaya, 2014). Furthermore; that Indigenous African music develops into Comparative Musicology, which was highlighted by prominent researchers including Merriam (1977); Nettl (1991) & Waterman (1991). These evolved into ethnomusicology based on the foundations of anthropology (Connery, 2007; Mapaya, 2014).

Anthropology played a pivotal role with the existence of African musicology. Despite positive criticism referring to ethnomusicology “as a second class discipline in comparison to musicology” by Kingbury (1997:281) and Mapaya (2014:620).

According to Mapaya (2014:620) who noted:

Amidst the criticisms, ethnomusicology continues to breed new generations of ethnomusicologists; professors continue to graduate younger ethnomusicologists who go on to perpetuate its ideals. It is, therefore, on this account that it is deemed a thriving discipline; not based on its service to African music or its practitioners. But insofar as the study of indigenous African music is concerned, what good is ethnomusicology if it cannot; for instance, contribute to the growth of the indigenous African music repertoire?

The researcher feels this is the beginning to the rise of new scholars exploring new innovative ideas around the concept and understanding of ethnomusicology and the difference between African musicology. This is the beginning of a new era, where people actually appreciates, conserve and preserve their cultural heritage and maintain a high level of identity. One should be proud of your cultural backgrounds, despite traditions people's' perceptions and ideologies. Palmberg & Kirkeraad (2002:8) confirms this with their view that “After the Second World War with the beginning of a new scientific and scholarly paradigm, the study of music also changed dramatically”. We can conclude this was the rise of new writings within academia with reference to African Musicology.

IV. THE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES ONE EXPLORE THROUGH MUSIC WITHIN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Currently there are eleven official languages spoken in South Africa. You have people coming from the North and South, the West and East where each culture represents a level of individuality. The eleven main languages spoken in the several towns around South Africa is:

- English
- Afrikaans
- Zulu
- Xhosa
- Southern Sotho
- Tswana
- Northern Sotho
- Venda
- Tsonga
- Swati
- Ndebele

Traditionally when you greet someone (see Table 1) in one of the eleven official languages you will hear the difference in dialect and musical tones being used.

Table 1: To greet in one of the eleven official languages in South Africa

Language:	Greetings:
English	“Hello”
Afrikaans	“Hallo”
Zulu	“Sanibonani”
Xhosa	“Molo”
Southern Sotho	“Thobela”
Tswana	“Dumela”
Northern Sotho	“Dumela”
Venda	“Afuwani”
Tsonga	“Abusheni”
Swati	“Dumela”
Ndebele	“Salibonani”

Music plays an imminent role through the traditions of various religious customs where your culture depends the mood and scenes where families gathers and celebrate the following:

- Religious Festivals
- Weddings
- Christenings
- Funerals
- Wakes
- Revealing of the Tomb Stones
- Rite of Passage (Reaching adulthood within an African Culture)
- Birthdays
- Anniversary or any opportunity to celebrate something worthwhile.

Your culture predetermines your overall look at life in general, the way you view things in a different perspective. Your religious standing and the way you accept people within your community. Culture has relevance within music as it presents people to create music that they familiar with, have grown to love and create endless memories that you always cherish. Challenges arises when people try to maintain their own identities and protect their own culture. This is why it is important to understand cultural awareness. Pewa (2005) refers to music as a form of communication with the following statement from Bebey (1987:6):

.... a lullaby, like almost all. African music, conveys a number of ideas simultaneously. Outwardly, it is intended to soothe the baby and lull him to sleep but at the same time, it expresses his mother's gratitude toward Nature or God for having given her a child, a privilege denied to so many other women.

A phenomenal feature within music used to communicate within Zulu cultural activities, the practice observed even between animals and human beings. In tradition the herd-boy used the technique of whistling to communicate with his animals. Through using several tones to induce and encourage the animal to co-operate when milking the cow (Pewa, 2005:129).

V. CULTURAL IDENTITY WITHIN MUSIC

Focussing on *cultural identity* one can reflect on the work of the researcher works Madalene (2011:171) who states in her Abstract in a Journal for proceedings used in IASPM conference with her paper entitled: “The interplay of ethnic and other identities in Tsonga popular music” who states:

Studies in Black South African popular music have often invoked the idea of identity performance: certain music

genres are associated with particular ethnic identities, for example Maskanda with Zuluness. This work shows various South African popular music construct ethnic identities. Although ethnic identities continue to be performed in contemporary black South African popular music, there is also, I argue in this paper, a performance of a discourse on identities that exceed ethnicity. In this paper I focus on the relationships between ethnic identity and other identities that elide the national South African identity as manifested in the stories and music of two Tsonga musicians from different generations (Ibid).

It is important to preserve your cultural identity and reaffirm what you believe and have been exposed to all your life. Music plays an imminent role in the development of your Cultural Identity. There is a distinct difference between popular and rock music? People in general have a different preference to music ranging from genres ranging from Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Modern, Jazz, Pop and Fusion. Just because one enjoys Modern music does not mean that everyone you familiar with share the same like or dislikes for Bartok, Berlioz or even Mahler?

One can then argue that music allows a level of identity and belonging. Trehub (2003:670) proposed that “It is reasonable to conclude, then, that the rudiments of music listening are gifts of nature rather than products of culture”. A connection co-exists between music and language which has historically aroused much interest and speculation (Gilleece, 2005:13). Hauser and McDermott (2003:667) conclude that “Some aspects of rhythm perception for music may be tapping domain general auditory mechanisms”.

Assimilations between language and music are closely related to culture (Gilleece, 2005:15). Rousseau (1998:321) highlights the difficulty in appreciating music, which is unfamiliar in a particular culture, and states that “the most beautiful songs to our taste will always only indifferently touch an ear that is not at all accustomed to them.” Some theorists agree with the view that musical meaning is widely determined by cultural convention (Blacking, 1973; Walker, 1996). The empirical study of Balkwill and Thompson (1999) reveals that emotions in music are communicated through an amalgamation of universal and cultural cues.

Karma (2007) noted that definitions of musical aptitude are criticized for low ecological validity, as are definitions of musical aptitude and consequently musical aptitude tests. According to Choksy (2003: 6), with reference to the criticism, tests often have very low validity or do not measure musical aptitude at all. Psychological tests are devised to measure psychological constructs such as intelligence, personality or musical aptitude. Gembris (1997) discussed three phases in the definition of musicality. The first phase was the phenomenological approach, the main trend in the 20th century, although traces of it are present in the 21st century. There is a close relationship between music and the aesthetics of its time; understanding of musical beauty is the most important ingredient in the concept of musicality (Karma, 2007:80). The second phase of the psychometric approach was most dominant during the 20th century. The main interests were objective definitions of musicality and standardized tests to measure it. According to Gembris, the third phase refers to the musical meaning approach, this being the most important one today. According to Karma (2007:80) success in music studies is obviously affected by several variables (Harrison, Asmus & Serpe, 1994). Every teacher knows the overall importance of motivation, with motor abilities and intelligence playing pivotal roles. It is also not uncommon to find that academic abilities explain success in music studies better than musical abilities (Harrison 1990; Hedden 1982; Klinedinst 1991). If this is true, even a comprehensive measure of musical aptitude will not reach complete correlation with success in music studies (Karma, 1982).

VI. CONCLUSION

There is a distinct difference between African Musicology and Ethnomusicology as this paper addressed the foundations and fundamental of each within music. It is important to give rise to new ideas and perceptions around African musicology and create opportunities for music scholars to preserve, entertain and face challenges within musicology. To create opportunities and a platform for musicians to engage with each other and share ideas and ideologies, giving importance to their own culture and foremost individuality. For music scholars out there, this is ample opportunity to create blogs and websites where students from any background within Africa can share music, interpretations for African musicology.

Your cultural heritage is always of importance as it defines who we are, to which culture we belong and what is important for future musicologists and researchers to document, research and appreciate. This is the time where your cultural

background will allow scholars to becoming forerunners in something new for the future academic in our country. Your cultural background plays an important role, which allows and promotes individuality to conquer and get the best of us! Does it matter who we are or where we come from?

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