

Keynote Address

Establishing Dialogue: Thoughts on Music Education in Africa¹

Mogomme Masoga

Introduction

Finding Ourselves: Context

I must confess that I was rather hesitant about accepting the invitation to deliver the keynote address at such a conference as this. Partly my hesitation was centered on my *naivety* when it comes to the theories and methodologies of music research and science. Even so, I am not completely new to the musical experience and practice. I was born and bred in families and clans with a rich musical background. One of the instances that I can recall was when I was introduced to the basic esoteric knowledge and the skills of handling oracular tablets. With regard to the digging for and the gathering of herbs as well as with the administering of medicines, songs and dances characterized the entire

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process. Novices in the healing and divining training had to use music, i.e. clapping of hands, drumming and dancing to induce ancestral trances on a daily basis. Songs like *khalet'ncanu, khalet'ncanu, nkanu y'baba b'yi buzi nkanu* (I am crying for the healing horn, let my ancestral spirits bring the healing horn to me) were repeatedly sung by the novices led by their seniors in the sangoma lodges (*izindomba*). With drums beating in the background novices danced and evoked their spirits to become active. Then, I was informed by one research informant Koko Magwetja Nkwe ya Thaba that *badimo ba rerwa e bile ba lebogwa ka mekgolokwane* (ancestors are praised and thanked by means of ululations which are characterized by songs and dances). In most cases those around the possessed novice or trainee are expected to respond by clapping hands and beating a drum rhythmically. Usually the spirit in possession begins to sing her or his favoured song and is then joined by those who sit around the possessed person. In one of the spirit possession activities (trance related) I observed the following:

The novice (Mrs X) was sitting on the floor when she began to shiver, become agitated and had uncontrollable hiccups. She moved her feet uncontrollably. Immediately those sitting around her, spoke patiently: *Botse botse, le seke la tla ka bogale, tlang ka lethabo, e kaba mokgekolo goba mokgalabje, re a le amogela* (Wonderful, wonderful, do not come with trouble, come with good tidings, we welcome you). The *ithwasana* (novice) then moved out of the ancestral room towards the trainer's (*gobela*) hut. She was going to *hlehla* (to greet accordingly). She then sang the preferred ancestral song: *Awee... shai... mankarankara* and thereafter greeted the trainer.

Secondly, it also reminded me of my interview of diviner-healer Gogo Nkosi from Majaneng in the North West province of South Africa. She (Gogo Nkosi)² used music to decipher the *ditaola*³. On one specific occasion the client-in-

² She has a strong background in Sepedi divination and healing practices, but her divination technique derives from a Nguni approach. She uses the clapping of hands to accompany her divination process. The audience interject by shouting (affirmatively) *siyavuma* (meaning we agree with the divining bones) to indicate their active participation in this process.

³ *Ditaola* from Sepedi is derived from the verb root *laola* which translates as to divine or, to seek or establish meaning.

consultation (*molwetsi*)⁴ was accompanied by the clapping of hands as he breathed into the bag full of *ditaola* and threw them on the floor. When divining bones (*ditaola*) that lay scattered on the floor, having been thrown by *molwetsi*, Gogo Nkosi began her musical divinatory performance (*go laola*):

1. Gogo: A re yeng le ditaola⁵

Audience *Siyavuma* (clapping hands while shouting in agreement with the oracle)⁶

2. Gogo: Ka mokgwa o dibolelago ka gona⁷

⁴ As Peek (1991:2) rightly asserts, 'A divination is often the primary institutional means of articulating the epistemology of people ... is central to the expression and enactment of his or her cultural truths as they are reviewed in the context of contemporary realities'. In this case, the use of *ditaola* and going through the *laola* process in itself offer and guide the enquirer into the entire context of esoteric knowledge, symbolic power, and performative beauty.

⁵ An interesting formula – it functions as both the opening phrase and it also paces the divination process. The diviner-healer uses this formula to call for the attention of the audience present and at the same time authorizes the divining bones to function. It means *let us begin and go along with the divination process*. The audience is supposed to respond affirmatively: *siyavuma* (we agree). In this case it is important for both the diviner-healer and the audience present to find a common space of agreement. This then affirms the divination process. This again shows the intercultural nature of African divination and healing. *Siyavuma* is in this case expressed in a Sepedi context while noting its Nguni derivation. Divination in an African context is both dynamic and intercultural, and it further employs varied devices and patterns. Some of these devices and patterns are borrowed from other African cultural orientations.

⁶ Clapping of hands in a rhythmic way introduces a musical form and content. The diviner-healer provides most of the lyrical basis while the audience supports the entire musical structure. It becomes important for the process not to suffer from boredom but instead offers both meaning and entertainment for both the diviner-healer and the audience. As Finnegan (1970:2) argues, 'Oral literature is by definition dependent on a performer who formulates it in words on a specific occasion – there is no other way in which it can be realized as literary product'.

- Audience: *Siyavuma*
3. Gogo: Ge ke eya ke tsamaya le taola tsa gago
Audience: *Siyavuma*
4. Gogo: Eeh ditaola tsa gago di wele makgolela papa waka
Audience: *Siyavuma*
5. Gogo: Ge eya ke bolela le taola tsa gago
Audience: *Siyavuma*
6. Gogo: Molomo ka basemanyana
Audience: *Siyavuma*

Translation

1. Gogo: Let us go along with the bones
Audience: We agree/confirm or we are with you
2. Gogo: According to your bones
Audience: We are with you
3. Gogo: As I go along with your bones
Audience: We are with you
4. Gogo: This is a critical bone fall
Audience: We are with you
5. Gogo: As I go along with your bones
Audience: We are with you
6. Gogo: Gossip by boys

Lastly, I can also share one of the appealing and rhythmic wedding songs sung in my village:

Dikuku di monate
Lenyalo le boima
Rena re a tsamaya
O tla sala o di bona makoti

⁷ The diviner-healer is able to exhort her audience to go along in the divination process. In this case she builds on the formulary pattern and emphasizes the fact that the divining bones have the capacity to speak the truth. The divining bones are said to be powerful as they reveal the mysteries of life, for life, against life, and on life. Life's binary oppositions are detected and analysed through the process of divining bones. The diviner-healer uses the expression *ka mokgwa wo di bolelago ka gona*. It seeks to keep both the speaker and audience on track.

Wedding cakes are tasty
But marriage is a tough zone
We leave you and you shall see to finish – (cf. referring to both the
bride and groom).

Against this background, I want to share some thoughts and views on the issue of Music Education in Africa. There are many controversies in this field of study, but I shall not engage these, i.e. controversies concerning 'ethnomusicology', and the differences between Euro-centric and Afro-centric approaches to science.

The Right Time for the Periphery to Occupy its Own Space: The Real Challenge

Ntuli (2002:53) points out that:

Africa is neither Europe nor America. Africa's problems are not European or American problems. Africa's solution to her problems cannot be anybody's but Africa's. If we accept these truisms, we then accept that Africa had to find her own indigenous ways to define, identify and address her challenges.

Further Vilakazi (2001:14) addressing the International Conference on Indigenous Knowledge Systems at the University of Venda in 2001 argues that:

The correct history of African people shall be written by people who, through knowledge of African culture and languages, can use both oral sources and written sources. This means that such scholars shall need to be in close, broadly embracing contact and communication with ordinary, un-certificated African men and women in urban and rural areas. Serious methodological issues arise. This should be the great fruitful encounter between African culture and civilization, stored in oral traditions, on one hand and evidence stored in written documents and archaeological finds, on the other hand. Many questions arise here: the identification of sources, the reliability of sources, the critique of sources, oral tradition as a critique, corrective, supplement, or confirmation, of written and archaeological evidence; written and

archaeological evidence as a critique, corrective, supplement, or confirmation of oral tradition.

The above laments, although harsh and over stretched, benchmark challenges faced by critics of 'things not African' in the context of the existing programs and inputs. Music and education are not immune from these challenges. It is not the intension of this presentation to pursue the history behind such a challenge but to merely acknowledge the fact that every discipline finds itself challenged to rethink its African relevance (meaning the contextualization processes of our disciplines in the face of such challenges).

I am often amazed of the contestation that exists between scholars in favour of *Indigenous Knowledge Systems* as opposed to those who stand their ground in support of *Endogenous Knowledge Systems* (Crossman & Devisch 2002). The former relegate *Endogenous Knowledge Systems* to being inborn generic systems born out of a need for survival while *Indigenous Knowledge* is said to be local. Further, one can mention the debates that are taking place in the Music and Ethnomusicology debates. All these contestations point to one direction: *knowledge is a contested terrain*. As Crossman and Devisch (2002:96) say, they base their investigations and approaches on the calls made by Ali Mazrui, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Paulin Houtondji, and Jean-Marc Ela for the adaptation of education to the African context with the objective of looking for new schools of thought reflecting this objective on the continent. However, they (Crossman & Devisch 2002:97) discovered that,

apart from the efforts of a few individuals scattered here and there in universities, Africanisation, or endogenisation, was instead generally a moot issue for most academics and university administrations, at least in the human sciences.

1 The Problem of Education

The problem of 'Africanised' Education is always met with criticism. Byamungu (2002:15) asks the following key questions:

When you are an African child and you go to school, what do you learn after the initial alphabet? When you have come to know how to read and write, which books are you given to read? What is the final aim of the fascinating stories you are made to summarize for the exam? Put

differently, what is the aim of the initial project of education? Is there any correlation between what is learnt at school and what life demands? As it were, is the thematic choice, thrust and goal of the African academy relevant to the conditions of the Africans?

Byamungu (2002:16), concludes, that the overall answer to the above questions is a big NO. Obviously the challenge is on Education and worse for that matter when one juxtaposes Education to Music issues. Undeniably, this challenges Music Education researchers and teachers to revisit and reorganize. It requires a change in pattern (Byamungu 2002:17). Byamungu (2002:17) challenges:

If the dictionary tells us that the word 'home' means both 'a place of origin' and a goal, a 'destination,' then the African Music Academy needs to find a home.

1.1 Relevant Education

This serious challenge reminds one of past academic exchanges at the University of Cape Town over the curriculum debate on teaching (Teaching Africa: 1998). Mamdani in his presentation at a seminar at the Gallery, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town contested the African Studies programme curriculum as follows,

I have carefully studied the substitute syllabus and find it seriously wanting on intellectual grounds: I intend to spell these out in detail in a more suitable context. I should like to underline two facts before this Faculty. One, the syllabus reproduces the notion that Africa lies between the Sahara and Limpopo. The idea that Africa is spatially synonymous with equatorial Africa, and socially with Bantu Africa, is an idea produced and spread in the context of colonialism and apartheid. It is a poisonous introduction for students entering a post-apartheid university.

What seems to be the bone of contention in Mamdani's submission is that it is not only the quality of the content of what is prescribed in education, but also the perceptions that go with the teaching of content. In education, one does not only need a relevant education but also the right perceptions. One mistaken perception, for example, or we may call it a mistaken framework, is that people

in South Africa do not see them part of the African continent. When they use the designation 'Africa', they refer to a space north of the Limpopo. He regards this as 'poisonous' for prospective African intellectuals and academics.

Be that as it may. The great need is for relevance in education. Questions which relate this concern are: Does the present Music education curriculum reflect the needs of the African communities? Does the curriculum help to unleash the inherent potential of the people to think and solve their problems? Does it help the pupil to develop his/her observational and analytic capacities? There is need for this forum to find a correlation between what is learnt at school and its ability to be useful in society, and also to transform society into a better place. Otherwise the time spent at school will not deliver what is expected of it. As Kyeyune (2002:46) argues,

there needs to be a review of the curricula of our schools and colleges to ascertain their relevance and the gaps that must be filled for the institutions to answer the call for suiting education to current times and needs.

African Music Education debates should be accountable to African communities in terms of their locus operandi and not to the ivory towers considered to be centres of excellence while they remain irrelevant as to the context-content relationship in which people live. This challenges the conference to grapple with the concept of the local critical mind. Creative minds must make their contribution to African societies. This is a social obligation. Creative energy must be translated into social advancement, and be engaged and located with the people.

This route of practicing relevant intellectuality with regard to music means that there must be an openness to learn from and with the people. Many scholarly institutions are not open to what learn from the people as to what their needs are. What are the needs of the people with regard to a more scholarly engagement of music education? The answer is not an easy one, and will take much research. It is however central, because it opens educational institutions to the people for their benefit and empowerment.

From this follows that there must be a willingness and actual action of the music educators to be present with the people. With this, I mean face-to-face contact. Much education and training in Africa takes place without any empathy and understanding of the actual situation in which people find themselves, and their actual needs and experiences. It is therefore only by being

actively present with the people, that the educator can hope to make a positive contribution.

Another central feature of education is the critical attitude. This should also be so for music education. There must be a critical awareness of the possibilities and potential of African music. However, as with all cultures and cultural phenomena, such awareness also needs to lead to the identification of the enrichment of music and music education that comes about through influences from other cultures. It is true that intercultural influences do not take place in a vacuum, and that such interchanges and interactions bring about new hybrid forms of both the kinds of music people produce and develop, and the strategies for education they develop.

Lastly, in essence, relevant music education is all about engaging communal life and co-operativeness. People participate in and perform African music in communal contexts. It is also central to health and healing practices. It plays healing roles in terms of bodily illness but also socially. As performance and also as participation, it connects the disconnected, and opens up better understanding, communication, and integration into the environment. This is central to the dignity and integrity of the local people. African Music education should be about life, and for the continuous improvement of the quality of life, and health.

2 The Question of Language

The second key challenge is language. Due to its colonial legacies, Africa can be divided into anglophone, lusophone and franchophone parts (Prah 2002:103, Ntuli 2002:53). Prah explains the problem by stating that African people have been subjected to

British, French and Portuguese approaches to colonial education in Africa in general, and the use of language in education in particular. The British, in principle wanted to create African cadres who would serve as interlocutors between colonial administration and mass society, but who were sufficiently educationally anglicized, and who would be able to play complementary roles in the establishment of the pax Britannica in Africa. They made greater use of the indigenous languages, than the French who preferred to make Frenchmen out of

Africans and therefore applied a policy of, more or less, zero tolerance to African languages in education.

These divisions cause problems facing African indigenous languages on the continent. The subject of language has generated passionate responses from African writers such as Ngungi wa Thiong'o, Ama Ata Aidoo, Chinua Achebe, Gabriel Okara, Es'kia Mphahlele, and Wole Soyinka, among others. The issue has been one of the most contested questions in postcolonial discourse. As Owomoyela (1996:3) asks:

What is the connection between language and cultural identity? What danger does the continued ascendancy of European languages pose for the vitality of African languages?

More (1999:343) also observes that one finds in most cases, Europe

[h]as infiltrated Africa's secret corners: homes, meetings, social gatherings, literature, family and interpersonal relations. Europe becomes the mediator in the lives of Africans ... whether domesticated or not - as a medium of communication.

There is a need for Music Education researchers and teachers to take seriously the question of language in their work. They need to make a contribution to the 'conscious reaffirmation of the dignity of African languages' and also to contribute to the 'liberation or decolonization of the African mind' with regard to Africa's languages (Masoga 2002:313). Significant in this instance, is that much of the uniqueness of African identities, is found in the languages. Ntuli (2002:54) for instance points out that '[t]here are words and concepts that elude translation' The challenge goes as far as making sure that the music education debates and researches should engage, theorise, analyse, systematize, develop, support, market, innovate by making use of indigenous languages. This is well articulated by Prah's (2002:116) conclusion and agitation that,

I have over the years been arguing that indeed the missing link in efforts at African development is the question of language. Without the use of African languages, Africa is not going to be able to develop and would be for long remain condemned to stagnation, inferiority and lack of cultural self-confidence.

3 Indigenous Knowledge and Music Education

Indigenous Knowledge challenges are another key area. How indigenous is the African Music teaching and research? Should one simply equate ethnomusicology to indigenous knowledge concerns? Further, has any relevant and 'non-offending' terminology been formulated to capture the issues of African indigenous knowledge as they pertain to music?

These questions raise the issue of the improving of the status of African Music Education and research on the continent. In this regard, there is a need for Music Educationists to understand the past indigenous knowledge systems located in different regions of Africa. The challenge is to critically study these systems and see how they had transformed the past into challenging knowledge forms. One also needs to ask how they could currently be used for addressing present African problems and challenges. Alternatively, one also needs to ask how they could be criticized because they have failed to assist African inspirations in the face of colonial and neo-colonial hegemonies (Masoga 2002:309). This requires the stimulation of critically-based research initiatives that are carried out with the participation of the communities in which they originate and are practiced. It is by linking Africa Music education initiative(s) with their roots, that it may become dynamic, based on accumulated traditional-indigenous-cultural knowledge practices, holistic and situated within a cultural element (Masoga 2002:314).

African Music education and research, then, cannot avoid the pressure of local realities. The danger of freezing out local realities for long, may result in the following: 1) the compromising of the reclamation of African dignity and pride; 2) the loosing of valuable knowledge(s) which are vital to the quality of African life and culture, now and in the future; and, 3) even worse, the posing of a threat to the activities of community development and the alleviation of poverty. If this happens - which to a large extent is still the case in education in South Africa - academia's absence of presence with the people and their knowledge(s), will not deliver on their aspirations and needs (Masoga 2002:314).

4 Taking Music Science and Knowledge to Science

The articulation of music science with other fields of science constitute another challenge. Having looked at one of the South African Universities' Masters degree programs and its curriculum, I was taken aback to see that research

methodology and theoretical and conceptual studies of music only surfaced late in the course. One of the Music Department's staff who explained the reason behind this state of affairs, said that the problem is that many music teachers focus more on practical issues and are reluctant to engage the scientific enterprise. If this is the case then one is forced to question the scientific basis of music as well as the scientific quality of the course. As discipline, music needs to be studied with the same scientific rigour as the other sciences. On the one hand, music scholars must become more open to other scientific theories, paradigms and approaches. On the other hand, scholars must not hesitate to experiment in the same way that other sciences experiment. Music research and science need to be mutually open, and engage other scientific disciplines in order to remain part of the developments in science.

One question one may ask, concerns the different ways in which music may develop as it articulates with the HIV/AIDS pandemic. What kinds of musical developments can one engage? What kinds of musical analyses, musical interpretations, musical conceptual formulations, musical compositions, musical curriculum formulations, and teaching strategies and devices may music researchers and educationists come up with? This is a real challenge.

Another perspective comes from Visvanathan (2002:39-40) who challenges that science should always be a pilgrimage, a journey. He says: 'Pilgrimages usually begin in wonder, submission and faith, but modern science is the first journey that began in doubt'. The typical scientific discourse one then needs to engage, differs from the modern science paradigm. Visvanathan (2002:43) calls this a movement from the glossary of restraint to a language of celebration. He also says:

If science eventually is to be a spiritual exercise, it needs to be playful. A pilgrimage always needs the carnival and its *communitas* ... One needs laughter, the playful inversions of the clown, the surrealism of Dali to enter science, because at present it is too pompous and too burdensome: it is over-serious. Only laughter can break the brittle authoritarian of science, dissolve the methodological pomposities ... the tragedy of science is that it has lost its sense of play ... possibly because science sees nature as dead, science too becomes deadening, incapable of infusing life-giving metaphors into itself I think it is time science goes public, like the old lectures that Faraday or Raman

gave. Then science will begin again in wonder and not in doubt (Visvanathan 2002:47).

In conclusion, I have not aimed to provide answers in this presentation. Rather, I have tried to ask a few questions. I think that these are questions music researchers and educators need to grapple with in a more concerted way than before. The debate and dialogues we engage are important ones, and I hope that this conference will provide incentives for further developments. Key to the presentation is that Africans need to take responsibility for things African, that they are relevant in their education and research, that they address the issue of the question of language in music education and research, and that they articulate their work with indigenous knowledge as well as the scientific enterprise. I thank you.

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